

Charlotte Harbor Estuary

Substantially Complete

Charlotte, Lee and Sarasota Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1972
<i>Project Acres</i>	47,197
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	41,819
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$35,040,125
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	5,378
<i>2021 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$73,685,160

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Charlotte Harbor Estuary is one of the largest and most productive estuaries in Florida and supports a vital recreational and commercial fishery. The project aims to protect the remaining natural areas around Charlotte Harbor, which protect the water quality of the estuary, provide habitat for the Florida manatee and other rare wildlife and provide residents and visitors with opportunities for outdoor recreation.

General Description

The project includes the ecotone of flatwoods and dry prairies, estuarine tidal marshes and mangrove swamps along Charlotte Harbor and Placida Harbor. Less than 10 percent of the area is disturbed. The area influences important manatee habitat offshore and provides habitat for rare animals such as the bald eagle, scrub jay, indigo snake and gopher tortoise.

The project protects the water quality of the Charlotte Harbor estuary, which is designated as a series of Outstanding Florida Waters, and its recreational and commercial fisheries. There are two shell midden archaeological sites known in the project and the Coral Creek Mound is a possibly significant archaeological site. The area is vulnerable to development pressures including dredging and filling, invasive exotic plants and damage caused by off-road vehicles.

This project provides an essential addition to lands previously acquired through the Environmentally Endangered Lands program. Most of the lands are wetlands, including mangrove, salt marsh and salt flats, but there are some mesic flatwoods.

The nearly intact uplands of the Myakka Estuary are primarily mesic flatwoods like those in the Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods project, 15 miles to the south, but different in that they include scrub and the Florida scrub jay. The project provides habitat for nesting bald eagles and sandhill cranes and buffers the tidal marsh and waters of the Myakka River and Sam Knight Creek. Manatees use the adjacent waters heavily all year. The Myakka River estuary and the coastal wetlands associated with this project will support



valuable commercial and recreational fisheries. The Florida Master Site File records five archaeological sites in this project. The project is surrounded by development and its uplands will inevitably be developed if not purchased.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida manatee	G2G3T2/S2S3
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>aboriginal prickly apple</i>	G1/S1
Smalltooth sawfish	G1G3/S1S2
<i>beautiful pawpaw</i>	G2/S2
American mink, southern Florida population	G5T2Q/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>iguana hackberry</i>	G5/S1
<i>lowland loosestrife</i>	G3/S3
Wood stork	G4/S2

Public Use

This project qualifies as a forest and preserve. Wetlands will limit outdoor recreation to activities such as fishing, canoeing, picnicking, hiking and natural resource education. The Myakka Estuary area has the potential for such public uses as hiking, picnicking, camping and nature appreciation.

Acquisition Planning

1908

On September 15, 1908, Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge (608.48 acres) was established, of which 36.69 acres would be in the project boundary when it was created.

1980

In 1980, the Charlotte Harbor project was added to the Conservation and Recreational Lands Priority List. The project, which was started in 1972 under the Environmentally Endangered Lands program, consisted of approximately 17,854 acres of which 15,582 acres had been acquired under the Environmentally Endangered Lands program. The remaining 2,272 acres had a taxable value of \$1,931,820. Essential tracts include Atlantic Gulf Communities (acquired in 1995) and Mariner Properties (unwilling seller but for wetlands).

1986

In September 1986, the Land Acquisition Selection Committee approved adding 840 acres (Alligator Creek) to the project. Sponsored by Charlotte County, the addition had four landowners (Starnes, City of Punta Gorda, Lowe and Punta Gorda Isles) that owned most of the addition.





1988

In June 1988, the Land Acquisition Selection Committee approved the modification of the project design that retained 16 to 17 parcels from the original project (2,215 acres) and added 10 parcels in nine ownerships (3,141 acres) for a total of 5,356 acres with a taxable value of \$2,302,000. To date, 17,141 acres have been acquired for \$8,070,838.

1992

On November 20, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved adding three parcels, totaling 188 acres with an estimated tax value of \$66,086, to the project boundary. The Southwest Florida Aquatic Preserve (60 acres) and The Trust for Public Land (128 acres) sponsored the addition.

1994

On March 9, 1994, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved the addition of 892 acres located in Lee County to the project boundary. The landowners, Burnt Store Company, Inc, sponsored the amendment with an estimated taxable value of \$2,119,000.

1995

On July 14, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 750-acre addition with a taxable value of \$953,918; the Southwest Florida Water Management District sponsored the addition.

On October 13, 1995, the Southwest Florida Water Management District established the Myakka conservation easement (15.57 acres).

On October 30, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 230-acre addition to the project.

1998

On October 15, 1998, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council designated additional acreage of Cape Haze/Charlotte Harbor as essential – approximately 174 acres consisting of the Rotonda Properties out-parcels, and the Cole and Lemon Bay Partners parcels. The Land Acquisition Advisory Council also designated an additional 1,390 acres of the Myakka Estuary as essential. Previously, essential parcels had included all acreage acquired up to January 26, 1995, and the Cayo Pelau, Lowe, Ansin and Freeland ownerships. The essential acreage also includes approximately 100 acres adjacent to the Amberjack Scrub site, a Florida Communities Trust project that has been acquired.

1999

On December 9, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council transferred this project to the Substantially Complete group.

2001

On April 6, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council combined the Cape Haze/Charlotte Harbor project with the Charlotte Harbor project. The total project acreage became 32,909. To date, 28,133 acres have been acquired for \$29,337,199. The updated acreage and cost includes Environmentally Endangered Lands, Conservation and Recreational Lands and Donations.





On December 5, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council combined the Cape Haze/Charlotte Harbor project with the Myakka Estuary project and renamed the project Charlotte Harbor Estuary. The total project acreage became 46,709 acres. To date, 32,736 acres have been acquired for \$35,461,055. The updated acreage and cost includes Environmentally Endangered Lands, Conservation and Recreational Lands and Donations.

2004

On March 5, 2004, Sarasota County acquired 61.3 acres in Ainger Creek Trails.

2006

On February 3, 2006, Sarasota County acquired 78.2 acres in Ainger Creek Trails.

On October 4, 2006, Sarasota County acquired Myakka Islands Point (100 acres).

2009

On June 12, 2009, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a 79-acre addition owned by Burnt Store Land Group, LLC.

2010

On February 19, 2010, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the removal of 13 sites with 466 individual parcels totaling 2,260 acres containing residential/commercial structures or infrastructure.

2011

On December 9, 2011, the Acquisition and Restoration Council placed this project in the Substantially Complete category.

2015

On October 16, 2015, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the 5-acre Lemon Bay Midden parcel (\$48,322 tax assessed value) to the project to protect an archeological site the site of a historic Indian encampment and very large pre-Columbian midden. The site straddles two adjacent waterfront parcels with more than 800 feet of frontage on Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserve.

2017

In 2017, a total of 0.27 acres in this project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.

2019

On June 14, 2019, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved an addition of 8 acres known as the Don Pedro parcel to the Charlotte Harbor Estuary. The proposal, which is in Charlotte County, had a 2019 tax-assessed value of \$825,590. This amendment will add to the main portion of Don Pedro Island State Park and would be managed as part of the state park if acquired. It will provide additional habitat for wading birds and gopher tortoise and enhance the protection of the Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserve. The land within the approved boundary was designated essential. It would be managed by the Division of Recreation and Parks if acquired.





Coordination

The Southwest Florida Water Management District was an acquisition partner in the purchase of the Rotonda ownership (Cape Haze). The Trust for Public Land has been an intermediary in the state's acquisition of two large tracts within the Charlotte Harbor project.

In 1995, the Southwest Florida Water Management District negotiated the purchase (the Conservation and Recreational Lands program reimbursed half) of the Atlantic Gulf Communities Corporation's ownership land within the Charlotte Harbor (704 acres) and Myakka Estuary (9,264 acres) projects.

Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Charlotte Estuary project are to conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and threatened species; to conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests, in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect; to provide areas, including recreational trails, for natural-resource-based recreation; and to preserve significant archaeological or historical sites.

Achieving this objective will help to protect the water quality of Charlotte Harbor, its important nursery areas for fish and shellfish, its important recreational and commercial fisheries and its manatee habitat. It will also provide the public with an additional area for natural resource-based recreation.

The project should be managed under the single-use language change made in October 1999. Managers should control access to the project; limit public motor vehicles to one or a few main roads; thoroughly inventory resources; restore hydrological disturbances; burn the fire-dependent pine flatwoods in a pattern mimicking natural lightning-season fires, using natural firebreaks or existing roads for control; strictly limit timbering in old-growth stands; and monitor management activities to ensure that they are preserving resources.

Manager(s)

The Division of Recreation and Parks will manage most of the project west of State Road 775. The Florida Forest Service will manage the western portion of the Myakka Estuary portion of the project, with the Division of Recreation and Parks managing the east side. DEP's Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection would manage the Lemon Bay Midden added in 2015 as part of the aquatic preserve.

Management Prospectus

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The project is surrounded by rapidly developing areas. Development in the area may alter the flow of water and nutrients by dredging, filling and shoreline armoring. Urbanization of surrounding lands is also increasing, thereby justifying the need for an increased patrol and law enforcement presence.

Initially, the project lands will be high need, requiring management to control exotic plants and animals and reduce illegal activities such as poaching and trash dumping. Thereafter, routine management





activities will be at the moderate need level. Lands to be used and developed as a land base to provide access to Don Pedro Island State Park will be high-need areas. West of the Myakka River, there are no known major disturbances, and the level of management is expected to be typical for that of a state forest.

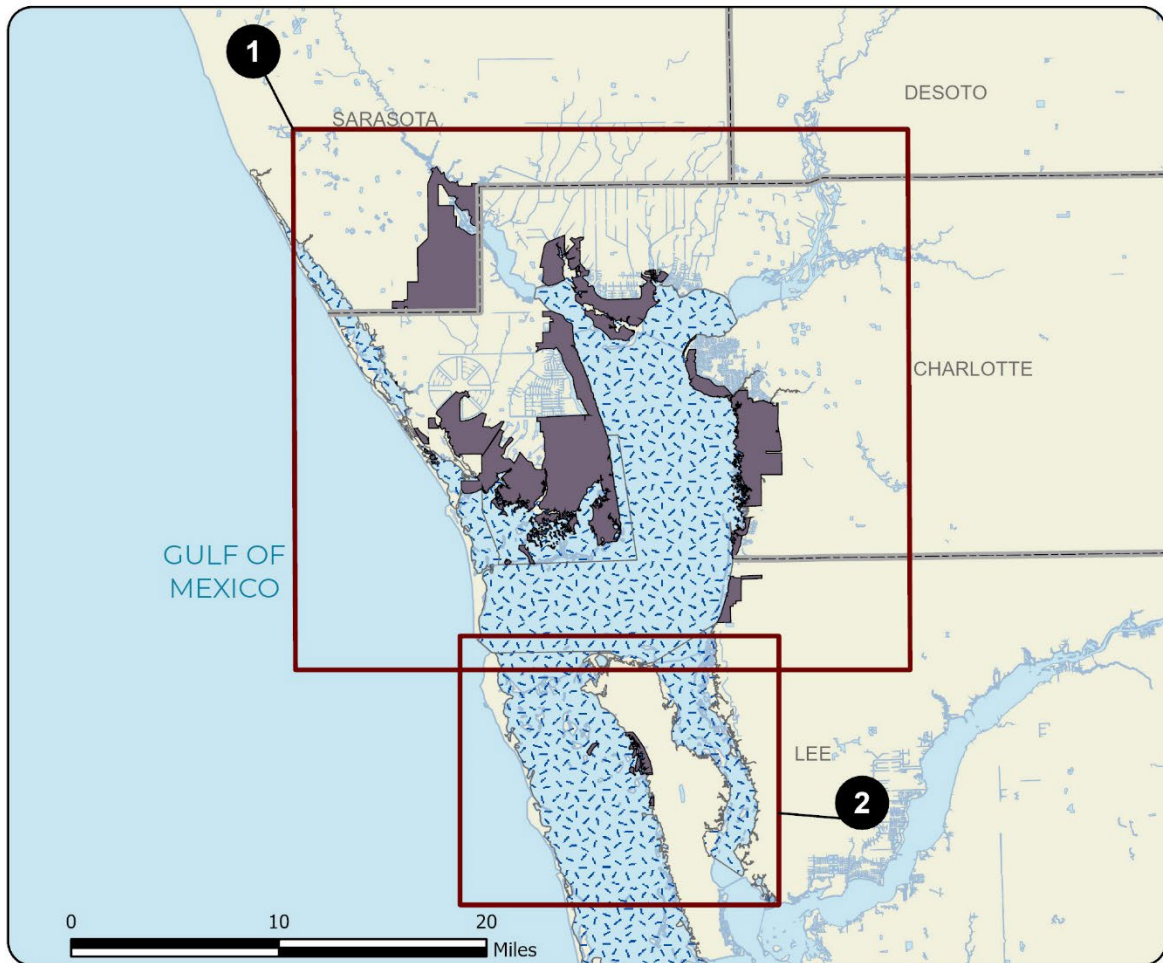
Management Goals and Implementation

Within the first year of appropriate funding, management activities will concentrate on property security, including fencing, posting and patrols; public access; staff access for management activities such as prescribed fire and restoration projects; trash removal; and exotic plant and animal eradication. The Division of Recreation and Parks will provide appropriate resource-based public access while protecting critical resources. The site will be biologically inventoried, and a management plan will be written within one year. Long-range goals will be established by the management plan and will provide for ecological restoration and habitat maintenance. Prescribed and natural fires will be used to maintain the appropriate communities and associated wildlife populations. The resource inventory will be used to identify appropriate uses for the property, including management activities and public use. Areas disturbed by man and exotic plants will be restored to an “as natural as possible” condition. Infrastructure will be kept to a minimum and include only enough structures to provide for management facilities, public access and resource interpretation. After the core of the Myakka River forests are acquired, the Florida Forest Service and Division of Recreation and Parks will provide public access for low-intensity, non-facilities-related outdoor recreation. The Florida Forest Service’s long-range plan is generally to restore disturbed areas to their original conditions, as far as possible, as well as protect threatened and endangered species. An all-season burning program will use, whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks to contain fires. Timber management will mostly involve improvement thinning and regeneration harvests.

Revenue-generating Potential

The forest land in the Myakka River estuary portion of the project has the potential for a variable source of revenue from timber sales, but the revenue-generating potential for this project is expected to be low to moderate. The part of the project east of the river will provide indirect financial benefits to the state, including enhanced water quality, fisheries and public recreation opportunities. Limited revenue may be available through small timber sales to initially thin some stands and through some entrance and user permit fees in the future. Elsewhere, the project will benefit the state indirectly by enhancing water quality, fisheries and public recreation activities, and preserving natural and historical resources. Future user fees may also contribute to limited revenue.

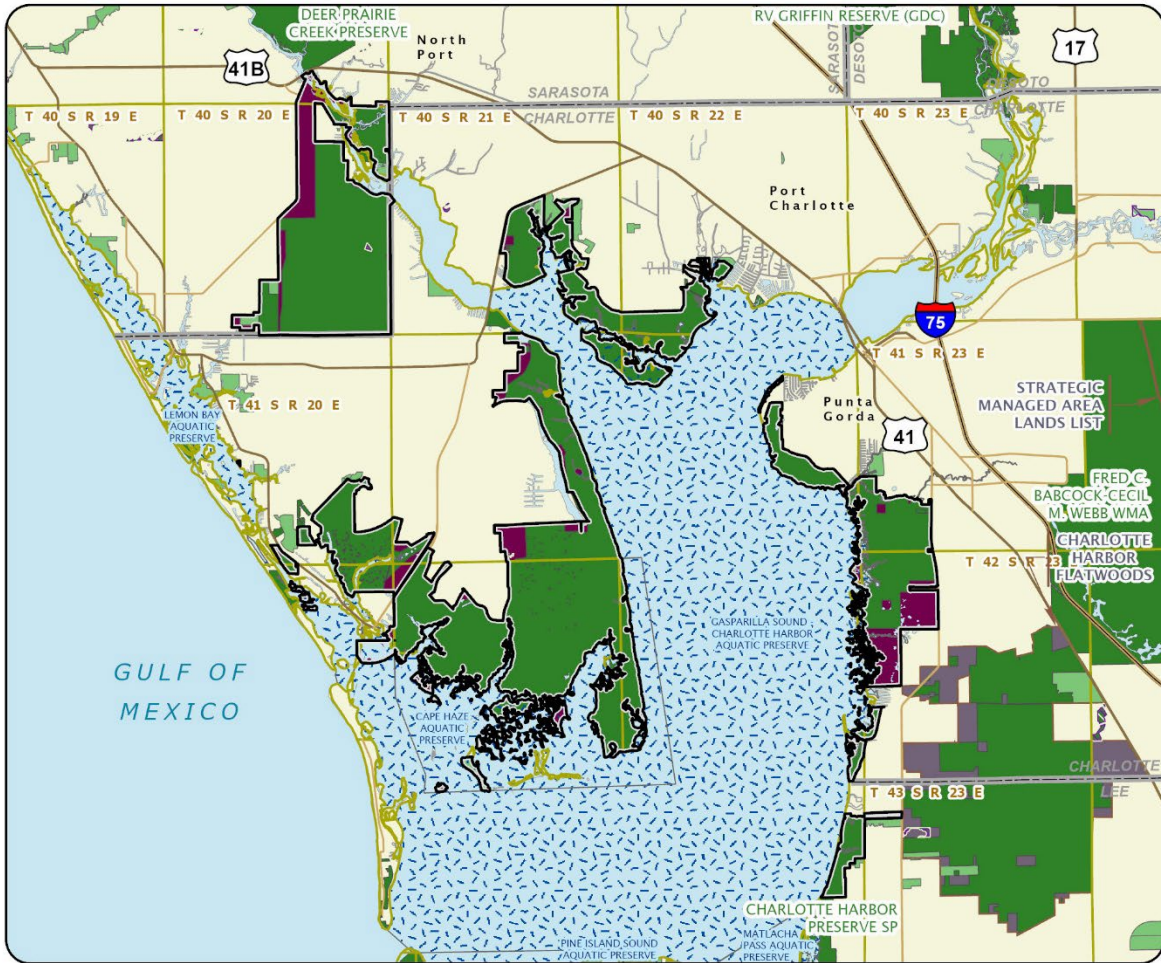




CHARLOTTE HARBOR ESTUARY: OVERVIEW

CHARLOTTE, LEE, AND SARASOTA COUNTIES

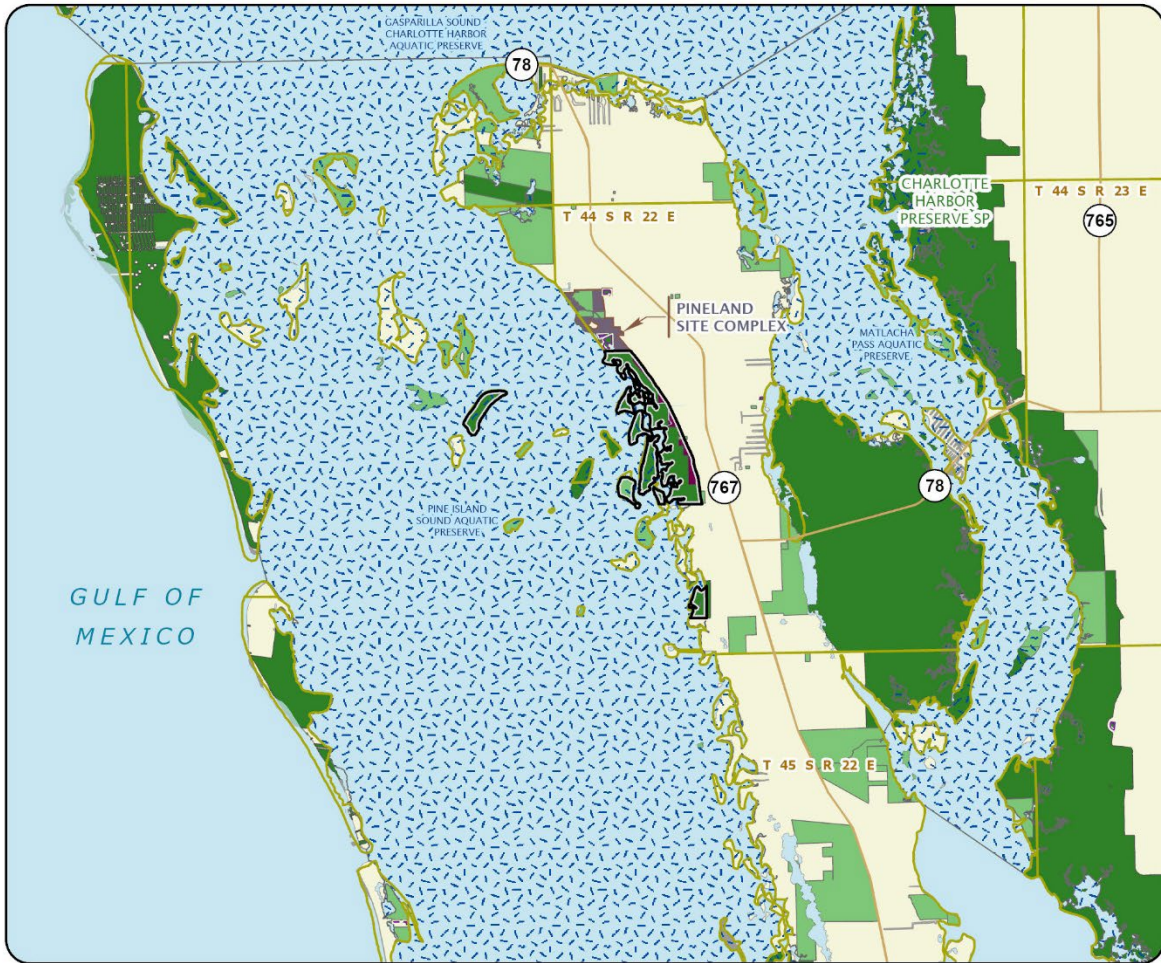




CHARLOTTE HARBOR ESTUARY: MAP 1

CHARLOTTE AND SARASOTA COUNTIES





CHARLOTTE HARBOR ESTUARY: MAP 2

CHARLOTTE AND LEE COUNTIES

