

Clear Creek/Whiting Field

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Santa Rosa County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2004
<i>Project Acres</i>	5,045
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	2,571
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	2,474
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$20,691,355

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Clear Creek/Whiting Field project will support conservation and regional protection through the creation of a significant wildlife corridor between conservation lands. The project will provide open space in an urbanizing area and protect habitat for native and imperiled species. The project will also stabilize the land use around the Whiting Field Naval Air Station to forestall encroachment that could be incompatible with the continued function of this military installation.

General Description

The project is three miles north of the Blackwater River Wildlife Management Area, 12 miles east of the Lower Escambia River Wildlife Management Area and 8 miles north of the Yellow River Wildlife Management Area. The project is close to the city of Milton. It adjoins Whiting Field Naval Air Station, used to train Navy pilots on T-34 aircraft and helicopters. Most of the project is upland pine forests, sandhills, mature and young pine plantations, recent clear-cuts and agricultural lands. The upland pine forests and sandhills are in various stages of selective harvest. Narrow bands of upland hardwood forest occur on the slopes of the two creeks. Approximately 5 percent of the site is in a Strategic Habitat Conservation Area.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>hairy-peduncled beaksedge</i>	G3/S3
<i>Panhandle lily</i>	G3/S3
<i>trailing arbutus</i>	G5/S2

Public Use

Potential recreational uses include canoeing, camping, hiking, biking, wildlife observation, environmental education, nature photography and scientific research. Hunting may also be done in some areas. The site is particularly appropriate for extending the Blackwater River Heritage State Trail to expand the growing recreational trail network in this region.

Acquisition Planning

2004

On June 4, 2004, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Clear Creek/Whiting Field project to Group B of the 2004 Florida Forever Interim Priority List. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), consisted of approximately 5,026 acres, 45 landowners and a taxable value of \$1,648,733.

2005

On December 9, 2005, ARC approved a project design change to allow acquisition phasing. Phase I was added to Group A, consisting of seven landowners, approximately 2,029 acres and a taxable value of \$665,593. The ownership acreage is as follows: International Paper Company (1,154 acres); Phillips (121 acres); Leonard (160 acres); Florimor Inc. (320 acres); Blue Sky (120 acres); Lowery (74 acres); and Jernigan (80 acres).

Phase II remained in Group B, consisting of 38 landowners and about 2,996 acres with a taxable value of \$982,808.

2006

On June 9, 2006, ARC moved the Group B portion of this project to Group A.

2008

On December 12, 2008, ARC voted to amend the boundary by adding Coldwater Creek Addition, consisting of two parcels totaling 265 acres owned by TNC, with a tax-assessed value of \$28,167. The acquisition is proposed fee-simple, and the parcels were approved as essential.

2009

On March 10, 2009, 210.48 acres were purchased from TNC for \$1,158,258 (with the help of the U.S. Navy).





On September 30, 2009, 1,401 acres were purchased from TNC by Florida Forever (\$2,625,000), Florida Forest Service(FFS)/Incidental Trust Fund (\$1,200,000), a.k.a. off-highway vehicle funds, and the U.S. Navy and U.S. Department of Justice (\$1,275,000).

2011

On June 30, 2011, the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Division of State Lands purchased 172.59 acres to be managed by FFS.

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category.

2012

On August 17, 2012, ARC removed 163 acres from the project because staff analysis found these lands were either developed or not contiguous to the project.

Coordination

Acquisition partners are the U.S. Navy, Santa Rosa County, DEP’s Office of Greenways and Trails and FFS. Developing the management plan will be conducted among the project partners (Whiting Field, FFS and Santa Rosa County).

Management Policy Statement

DEP’s Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) proposes to manage the project with FFS, Whiting Field and Santa Rosa County to: protect habitat for native and imperiled species; protect water quality in wetlands and surface waters, notably Clear Creek and Coldwater Creek; provide interpretive and recreation activities consistent with resource protection, including development of a multi-use loop trail surrounding Whiting Field and connecting to the northern terminus of the existing Blackwater Heritage State Trail; and protect archaeological and historical sites. In general, the project area will be managed to protect its environmental and natural resource values, drawing upon its natural characteristics to provide appropriate recreation opportunities, and enhancing other adjacent managed lands, such as Whiting Field and the Blackwater River State Forest. The project will be managed consistent with the appropriate goals and objectives of Florida Forever, as well as consistent with other projects that are part of the statewide system of greenways and trails.

Manager(s)

DRP will accept management responsibility for the Clear Creek project.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

The project will protect a conservation landscape adjacent to a vital military training facility, Whiting Field. More than half of the project area lies within an identified Priority Ecological Greenway and a portion lies within a High Priority Segment of the Florida Recreational Trails Network Opportunities (the Blackwater Multi-Use Trail). This project will help enhance the resource and recreation value of the adjacent Blackwater River State Forest, Blackwater Heritage State Trail and State Designated Coldwater





Creek Canoe Trail. Coldwater Creek and Clear Creek are also tributaries to the Blackwater River which ultimately flows into Blackwater Bay, an Outstanding Florida Water.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

In general, the property does not appear to require intense management beyond that typically associated with a managed greenway or trail project. But the intensity of long-term management will depend on the ability to acquire as intact an area surrounding Whiting Field as possible. Areas with adjacent residential properties will require more management.

The intensity of management will increase as recreation facilities and trails are developed and public usage increases. Other issues that will determine intensity of management include exotic plant removal, with particular attention to areas where imperiled species exist; water quality protection and enhancement, particularly related to Clear Creek; and protecting archaeological sites and historical structures.

Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security and Protection of Infrastructure

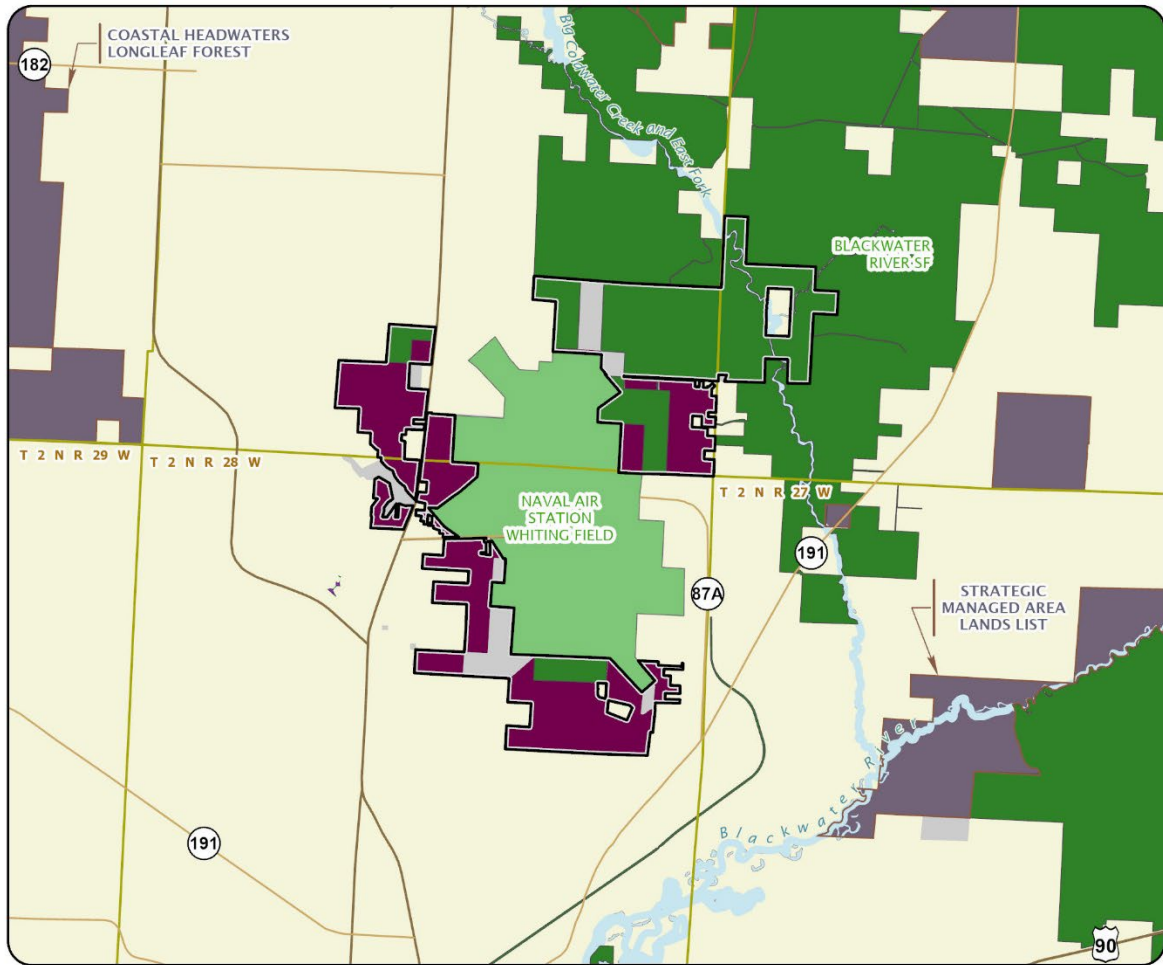
Following acquisition, issues to be addressed in the first year would include site security, posting boundaries and fencing, and conducting assessments/inventories to better determine resource management needs. Those needs include invasive plant removal, water quality enhancement and protection, protection of archaeological sites and historic structures, and prescribed burn needs.

Intermediate and long-term management will address the broader issue of managing the area for resource protection and recreation opportunities as described in the “General Scope of Management” above. Development of the management plan will be conducted in coordination with the project partners (Whiting Field, FFS and Santa Rosa County).

Revenue-generating Potential

No significant revenue is expected to be generated initially. However, as public use is increased, modest revenue may be generated for camping and use of other recreational facilities. Some areas may be managed by FFS for timber production.





CLEAR CREEK/WHITING FIELD

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

