

Eastern Scarp Ranchlands

Less-Than-Fee

Highlands County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2013
<i>Project Acres</i>	2,214
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	2,214
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$14,336,091

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Eastern Scarp Ranchlands project will protect the Avon Park Air Force Range against encroachment and changing land uses. The project will also support state water quality and quantity by preserving floodplains and strategic areas for the Kissimmee River and Lake Istokpoga.

General Description

The Eastern Scarp Ranchlands project, proposed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), is in Highlands County. The project has three parcels that can be accessed from Scrubpens Road, part of which is a county-maintained road. The project's name is taken from its unique geology as it spans a slope that descends 50 feet in elevation over the course of two miles. The western side of the property occupies part of the southern tip of Bombing Range Ridge, a narrow sand ridge of Pleistocene origin. On this ridge, which reaches an elevation of about 95 feet above sea level, soils are moderately well-drained. A broad slope (about 300 meters wide going from west to east) descends from the ridge. From this point eastward, the plain begins a very gradual descent, eventually dropping to an elevation of about 50 feet along the edge of the Kissimmee floodplain.

The project is also adjacent to the Avon Park Air Force Range which forms the northern boundary of the site. Floodplain lands adjacent to the east side of the proposal are managed by the South Florida Water Management District. Northeast of the property on the other side of the Kissimmee River is Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. The project area is a working ranch, with almost 80 percent converted to improved Bahia grass-dominated pasture. Most of the pasture occupies former dry prairie that once stretched unbroken from the cutthroat seep located in the western portion of the property to the Kissimmee River floodplain that forms the eastern boundary of the site. The pasture is dotted with numerous depression marshes, many of which have been dug to form watering holes for cattle or drained via a network of ditches. The largest remaining natural community is a zone of wet prairie-cutthroat grass seep (164 acres) on the eastern slope of the Bombing Range Ridge.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
White ibis	G5/S4

Public Use

The Eastern Scarp Ranchlands project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. The project could act as a military buffer area and would create a corridor between other conservation lands within the Kissimmee River watershed.

Acquisition Planning

2013

On December 13, 2013, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to add the Eastern Scarp Ranchlands project to Florida Forever’s Less-than-Fee category. The project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$938,262.

Coordination

TNC has been working with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and Highlands County and has secured 1,382 acres in this region contiguous with the Avon Park Air Force Range. TNC confirmed in late 2013 that an application has been submitted for additional DOD Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration funding to match Florida Forever funding to acquire this project.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Eastern Scarp Ranchlands project would be managed for conservation by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

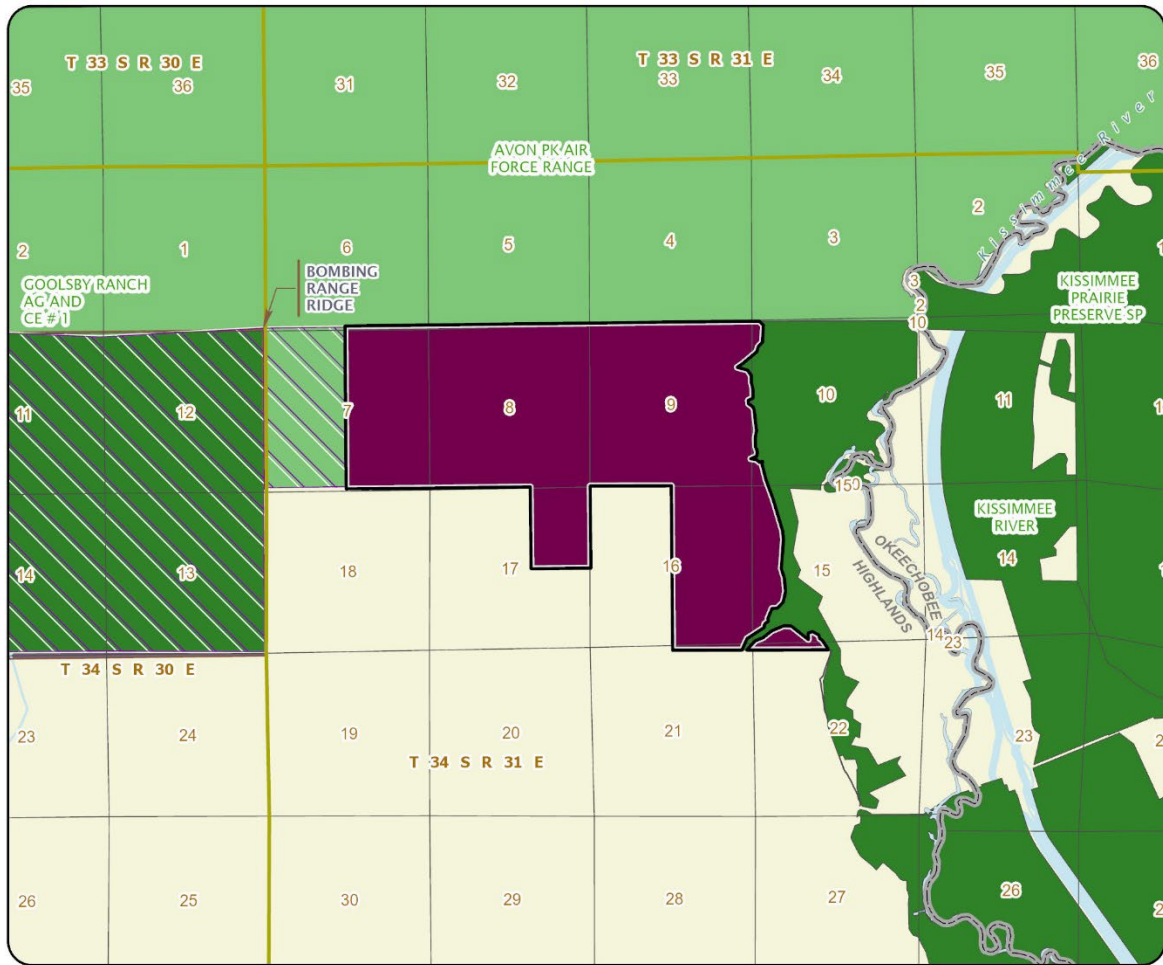
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of Eastern Scarp Ranchlands would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site’s management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated with the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Division of State Lands.

Management Prospectus

DEP’s Division of State Lands will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while management will be conducted by the property owner.





EASTERN SCARP RANCHLANDS

HIGHLANDS COUNTY

