

Horse Creek Ranch

Less-Than-Fee

DeSoto and Hardee Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2010
<i>Project Acres</i>	16,316
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	16,316
<i>2021 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$45,587,924

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Horse Creek Ranch project will provide a buffer for Horse Creek, a high water-quality tributary of the Peace River. The project will also support additional resource protection for the Peace River watershed, Gasparilla Sound-Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve, and the Charlotte Harbor Estuary and Peace River Refuge Florida Forever projects. The project will provide enhancement of imperiled natural communities and habitat protection for numerous rare species.

General Description

The Horse Creek Ranch project is in southwestern Hardee County and northwestern DeSoto County. The county line divides the ranch about midway north-south. County Roads 663 and 661 partially form the eastern boundary, and County Road 665 traverses the northern third of the property east-west.

The site's natural communities include mesic and wet flatwoods, bottomland forest, depression and basin marshes, mesic hammock, scrubby flatwoods, baygall and blackwater streams. The natural uplands are mainly longleaf pine-dominated mesic flatwoods with pockets of scrubby flatwoods on the highest elevations. More hydric wet flatwoods occur in the ecotone between the uplands and the Horse Creek floodplain.

A large block of high-quality mesic flatwoods extends from the eastern floodplain of Horse Creek to the eastern boundary of the property. The ground cover in these flatwoods is in excellent condition and is well-managed with prescribed fire. Extensive stands of old-growth longleaf pines occur in the southern portions of the property. Smaller patches of flatwoods that support a mix of South Florida slash pine and longleaf pine can be found in the northeastern portion of the project.

The remainder of the property is improved pastures and old agricultural fields. The property is a working cattle ranch with some small areas of row crops and sod fields. Horse Creek and Limestone Creek are blackwater streams, as is typical of most creeks in the area. A small tributary to Horse Creek on the western side of the property, called "Sand Gully" by the property owner, appears to be a seepage stream.



Limestone Creek has been channelized throughout its length on the property. Horse Creek appears to be in good, relatively-unaltered condition.

The surrounding area is largely pastureland and citrus groves. An approximately 243-acre inholding (citrus grove) straddles County Road 665 in the northern portion of the project. Apart from the 520-acre Altman Tract Conservation Easement at the headwaters of Horse Creek in Manatee County, no other conservation lands are along this important tributary.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
Little blue heron	G5/S4
White ibis	G5/S4

Public Use

Horse Creek Ranch is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, upon coordination with the landowner, limited public access could be negotiated for research or environmental education.

Acquisition Planning

2010

On December 10, 2010, the Acquisition and Restoration Council recommended that this less-than-fee project be added to the Florida Forever Priority List. The project had a tax-assessed value of \$9,893,163.

2011

On December 9, 2011, this project was placed in the Less-than-Fee category.

Coordination

The Nature Conservancy is a partner on this project. However, they do not have funding available for assistance with acquisition. Because this project buffers Horse Creek and ensures better water quality for Horse Creek and the Peace River, the Southwest Florida Water Management District would be supportive of the state's acquisition of this parcel.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, Horse Creek Ranch would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.





Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of Horse Creek Ranch would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated with the Division of State Lands.

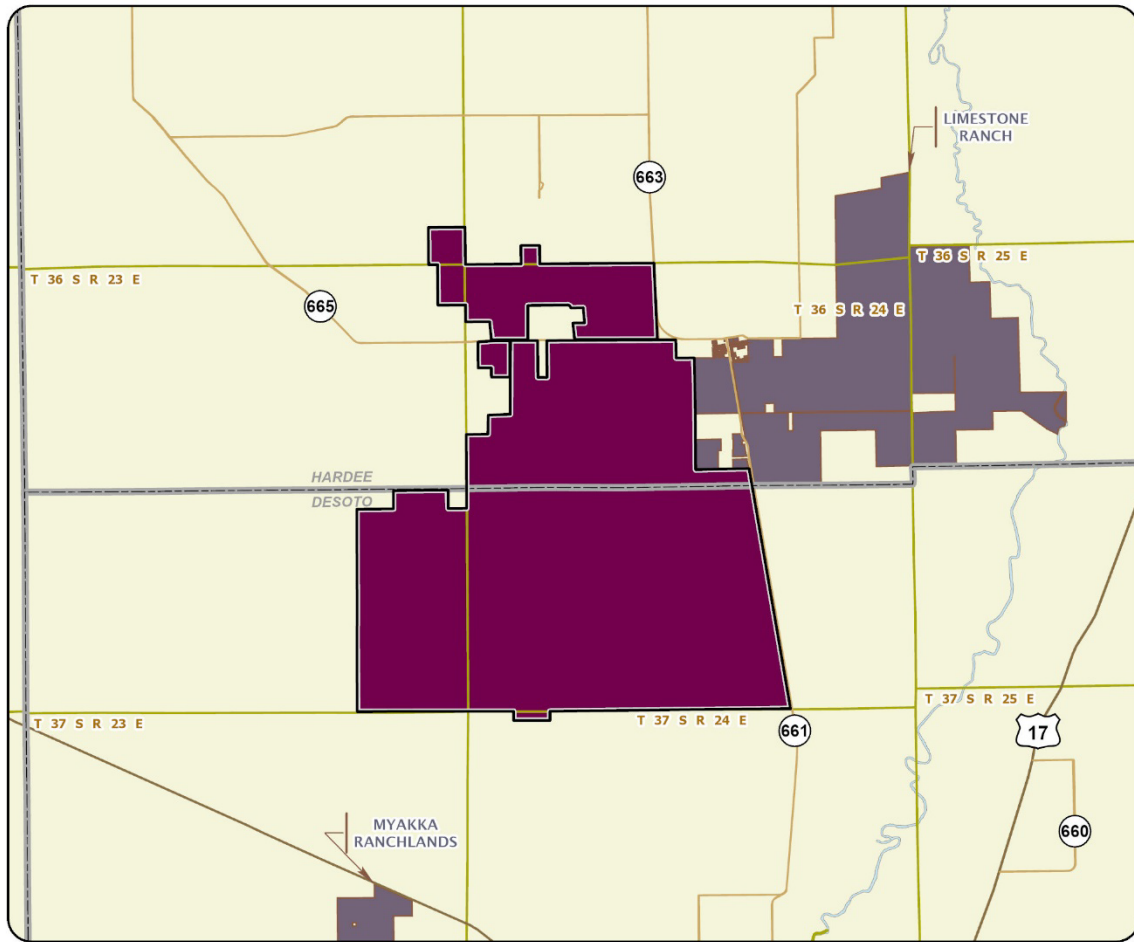
Management Prospectus

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

Qualifications for State Designation

This project meets multiple Florida Forever goals. If acquired, the project would help to protect Florida's biodiversity, water quality and quantity, and historical and cultural resources. Acquisition would also increase landscape connections between other conservation lands and would provide the opportunity for public recreation.





HORSE CREEK RANCH

DESOTO AND HARDEE COUNTIES

