

Lake Hatchineha Watershed

Critical Natural Lands

Osceola and Polk Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2002
<i>Project Acres</i>	6,764
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	3,382
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	3,382
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$56,277,999

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Lake Hatchineha Watershed project will preserve a rare continuum of natural communities from the high scrub on the edge of the Central Ridge to marsh, floodplain, lakeshore and blackwater streams in the lowlands. Project acquisition would protect thousands of acres essential to the state’s surface and groundwater supply and provide outdoor resource-based recreation.

General Description

The Lake Hatchineha Watershed project is in Osceola and Polk Counties, east of Haines City. The project area consists of three separate parcels of land on the Osceola-Polk County line, north and northwest of Lake Hatchineha, and west of Reedy Creek Swamp in Osceola County. The eastern boundary of the southeastern parcel adjoins the Disney Wilderness Preserve in Osceola County.

The northernmost parcel, named the Beagle Tract, is 3,350 acres of mesic flatwoods, dome swamps and pasture that straddles State Road 580. The southeastern parcel (1,970 acres) is dominated by a 260-acre dome swamp surrounded by former mesic flatwoods that have been cut and then used for rangeland. The southwest parcel (1,132 acres) is about three miles south of the Beagle parcel and includes a high scrubby ridge with sudden changes in elevation throughout. Approximately 4,778 acres in the project area would protect surface waters of the state. Approximately 777 acres of the project are designated groundwater recharge areas.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Florida scrub lizard	G2G3/S2S3
<i>celestial lily</i>	G3/S3
<i>cutthroatgrass</i>	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Osprey	G5/S3S4

Public Use

The project has the resource diversity to qualify as a wildlife management area and could provide the public with many different recreational activities including hunting, hiking, horseback riding, camping and cultural resource interpretation. Other land uses that may be compatible with site management include cattle grazing and apiaries. Acquisition would also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites. The trail is a congressionally designated national scenic trail.

Acquisition Planning

2002

The Lake Hatchineha Watershed project was added to the 2002 Florida Forever project list at the June 6, 2002, meeting of the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) as a Group A project. This project is proposed for fee-simple ownership. The essential parcel has been identified as the Parker Poinciana ownership.

2003

On December 5, 2003, ARC moved the project to the Group B list.

2010

On October 15, 2010, ARC approved a 994-acre boundary reduction (valued at \$158,208,631) to the project boundary due to residential/commercial/infrastructure developments.

2011

On December 9, 2011, this project was placed in the Critical Natural Lands category.

2015

On November 9, 2015, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) established the Lake Hatchineha conservation easement (2,997.55 acres).

2023





On April 14, 2023, ARC approved adding 1,295-acre Creek Ranch project in Polk County to the 2024 Florida Forever Priority List. Creek Ranch was proposed as a fee simple acquisition and had a tax-assessed value of \$3,839,967. After its approval, ARC added it to the existing Lake Hatchineha Watershed project.

2024

On August 16, 2024, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) acquired, in fee, 1,341.96 acres in Polk County from Creek Legacy Ranch, LLC.

Coordination

The Nature Conservancy is considered an acquisition partner on this project. No alternative funding resources have been identified.

Management Policy Statement

Priority will be given to the conservation and protection of environmentally unique native habitats and threatened and endangered species. Management programs will be designed to conserve, protect, manage and/or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, forests and water resources. The tract will also be managed to provide natural resource opportunities like hunting, camping, hiking, environmental and cultural resource education. Because one of the principal purposes of the proposal is water conservation, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will cooperate with SFWMD and other conservation agencies to achieve that purpose.

Manager(s)

FWC will manage the Lake Hatchineha Watershed Florida Forever project, in cooperation with other state and local agencies.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

This project has the resource diversity to qualify as a wildlife management area and would provide the public with a large tract for activities such as hunting, hiking, bicycle trails, horseback riding, camping and wildlife observation.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The primary management need of the Lake Hatchineha Watershed project to perpetuate the less- disturbed natural communities is to re-establish prescribed fires and control human access. Some relatively small areas of xeric and mesic uplands have been converted to pasture or otherwise disturbed. Significant restoration is contemplated for some of these areas.

Development of facilities, as on all wildlife management areas, would be kept to the minimum





necessary to assure a high-quality recreation experience, and any such development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance.

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

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis will be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory, control of exotic species and removal of refuse. A conceptual management plan will be developed by FWC describing management goals and specific objectives necessary to implement future resource management.

Revenue-generating Potential

If appropriate, some revenue might be generated from grazing leases in flatwoods or pasture areas not restored. Additional revenue could be generated from the sale of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area stamps and other special hunting stamps. Some revenues in the future might also be realized from ecotourism activities.

Cooperators in Management Activities

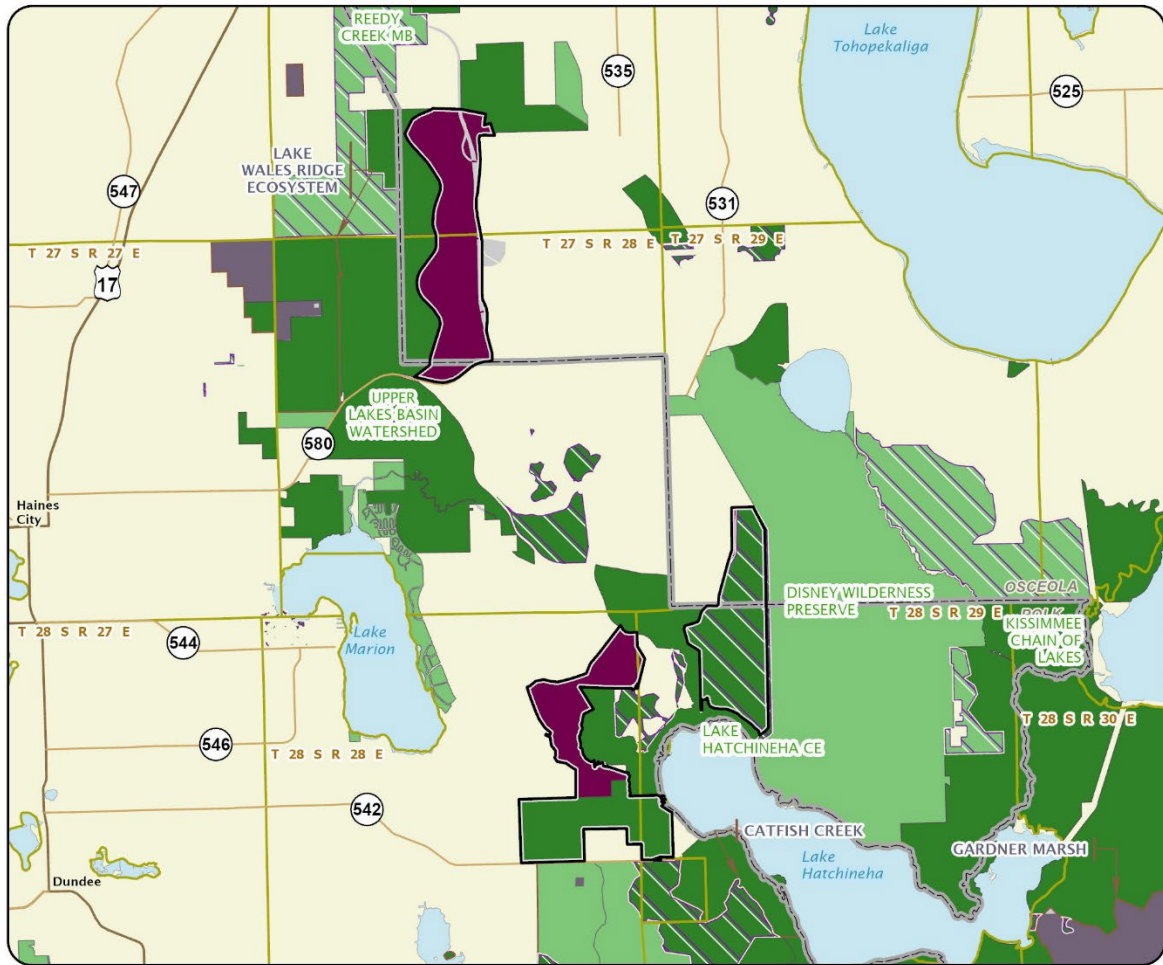
The cooperators in management activities on this project include DEP’s Division of Recreation and Parks and SFWMD.

Management Cost Summary

FWC	Startup	Recurring
Source	not provided	not provided
Salary	not provided	not provided
OPS	not provided	not provided
Expense	\$0	\$47,481
OCO	\$249,373	\$169,303
FCO	\$582,765	\$11,986
TOTAL	\$832,138	\$228,770

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





LAKE HATCHINEHA WATERSHED

OSCEOLA AND POLK COUNTIES

