

# Pine Island Slough Ecosystem

Critical Natural Lands

Indian River and Osceola Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2004
<i>Project Acres</i>	48,976
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	27,089
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	21,887
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$90,428,079

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project will increase protection of Florida's biodiversity through the preservation of habitat for several rare species including the Florida grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum floridanus*) and Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*). The project will preserve a unique and intact endemic Florida ecosystem and provide landscape connectivity to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. The project will also provide the public with resource-based recreation and educational opportunities such as hiking, camping, bird watching and equestrian trails.

## General Description

The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project is located within Indian River and Osceola counties. This landscape of intact ecological upland and wetland habitat is reminiscent of the landscape that once dominated Central Florida. The project's acquisition would allow for the protection and management of additional high-quality habitats that have an abundance of biodiversity. It is also contiguous with the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park.

## FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Florida grasshopper sparrow	G5T1/S1
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
<i>Florida ladies'-tresses</i>	G1/S1
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Berry's skipper	G2/S3
<i>large-flowered rosemary</i>	G3/S3
<i>nodding pinweed</i>	G3/S3
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
Southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5/S3



## Public Use

The size, resource values and location of the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project provides a potential for a diverse recreational experience. The size, location and high resource quality of Pine Island Slough offers potential for nature-based recreational activities typical of state-owned conservation land. Programs would be oriented towards conservation and protection of wildlife species, with careful control of public uses. Development of facilities should be minimal and confined to areas of previous disturbance. 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

### **2004**

On August 20, 2004, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project to Group A of the 2004 Florida Forever Priority List. This fee-simple acquisition, proposed by The Nature Conservancy, consisted of approximately 49,583 acres, a single owner and had an estimated tax assessed value of \$13,144,221.

### **2005**

On June 5, 2005, ARC moved Pine Island Slough Ecosystem to Group B of the Florida Forever Priority List.

### **2011**

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

### **2020**

On November 28, 2020, the DeLuca Preserve was gifted to the University of Florida Foundation, with a conservation easement belonging to Ducks Unlimited. The DeLuca Preserve is approximately 27,000 acres and preserves over half of the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project.

## Coordination

The Department of Environmental Protection's Division of State Lands is pursuing partnerships with the South Florida Water Management District and local governments. The Nature Conservancy is considered a partner on this project.

## Management Policy Statement

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) proposes to manage the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project for protection and management of high-quality habitats. This area should be restored to the greatest extent possible. The placement of facilities will be restricted to existing disturbed areas, and land uses that are incompatible with the site shall be prohibited.

## Manager(s)

FWC has been designated as the lead manager.





## Management Prospectus

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project would protect and provide additional habitat for many focal species. The list of species documented or reported to occur within the project area shows that several focal species may occur on the property. Many conservation lands have become increasingly isolated and no longer support viable populations of certain species. The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project would contribute to landscape connectivity by linking existing managed areas as well as nearby Florida Forever projects including the Bombing Range Ridge project, Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector project and the Ranch Reserve project.

### **Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

For low-need tracts, resource management methods such as prescribed fire may be appropriate. Because approximately 50 percent of the project area has been disturbed for silviculture or other purposes, additional methods would be necessary for some management units to accomplish objectives for ecological restoration. FWC would conduct historic vegetation analysis to determine appropriate desired future conditions, objectives and restoration methods. This is especially important for conservation of habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. The primary methods for perpetuation of the less disturbed natural communities might involve the reintroduction of prescribed fire and control of human uses in certain management units. Although exotic plants have not yet posed an imminent threat to the ecological integrity of the project, there will be surveillance for and removal of such infestations of exotic invasive species.

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

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis would be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory and removal of refuse. A conceptual management plan would be developed by FWC describing the management goals and specific objectives necessary to implement future resource management. Long-range goals would emphasize ecosystem management and the conservation of fish and wildlife. After the inventory of the plant community and historic vegetation is finished, quantified vegetation management objectives would be developed using FWC's vegetation management process. Essential roads would be stabilized to provide all-weather public access and management operations. Programs providing multiple recreational uses would also be implemented. An all-season prescribed burning management plan would be developed and implemented using conventional and biologically acceptable methods. Natural plant communities would be managed to benefit native wildlife resources. Prescribed burning would be used where appropriate to best achieve management objectives. These resources would be managed using acceptable silvicultural practices where appropriate, practical and in pursuit of wildlife habitat objectives. Archaeological and historic sites would be managed in coordination with the Department of State's Division of Historical Resources. Potential for these sites to occur in the project area is moderate.





### Revenue-generating Potential

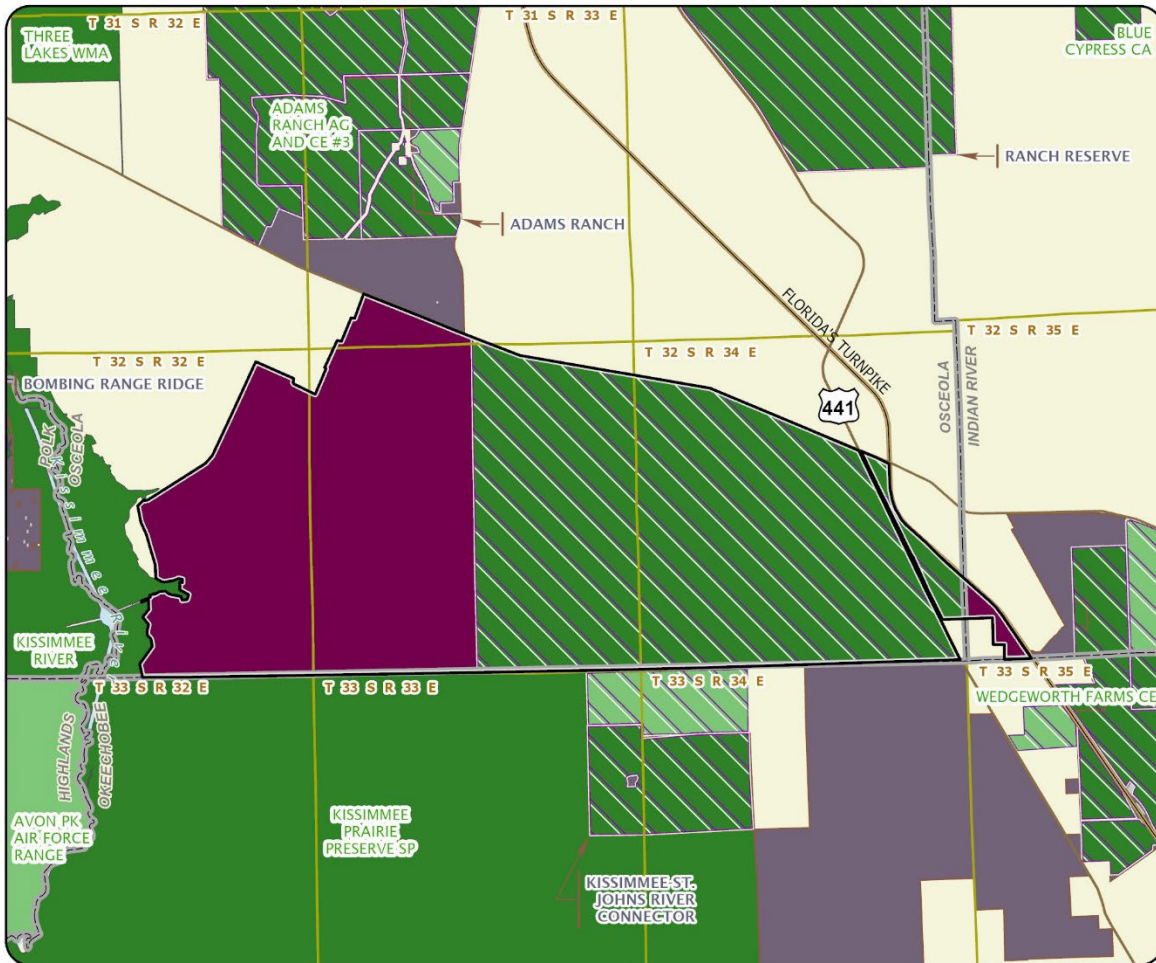
Management would seek to improve the revenue-generating potential of areas currently in forest product production by improving wildlife diversity and resource-based recreation. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area stamps and other special hunting stamps. Some revenues may also come from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities.

#### Management Cost Summary

<u>FWC</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	not provided	not provided
OPS	not provided	not provided
Expense	\$1,091,187	\$137,415
OCO	\$859,873	\$882,012
TOTAL	\$1,951,060	\$1,019,427

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





### PINE ISLAND SLOUGH ECOSYSTEM

#### INDIAN RIVER AND OSCEOLA COUNTIES

