

Taylor Sweetwater Creek

Climate Change Lands

Taylor County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2017
<i>Project Acres</i>	4,079
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	4,079
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$27,129,109

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Taylor Sweetwater Creek project will protect a large swath of undeveloped coastline located between two units of the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. The project conserves a variety of habitat types common in the Big Bend region of Florida, including quality examples of salt marsh and increasingly rare sandhill. The project contains significant wildlife habitat and will contribute to the protection of rare and imperiled species including the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*). The project will also provide surface and groundwater protection for Sweetwater Creek and expand existing opportunities for resource-based public outdoor recreation.

General Description

The project encompasses 3,742 acres in coastal Taylor County near Dekle Beach, about 20 miles south of Perry. It is a mostly contiguous tract of many parcels, split by County Road 361 (Keaton Beach Road), with about two-thirds of the acreage west of the highway. Straight-line Gulf frontage is about 2.3 miles.

The project contains mostly undeveloped coastline, with limestone at or near the surface overlain by sandy flats and rolling hills. The dominant natural communities are hydric hammock, saltmarsh, sandhill, wet flatwoods and mesic flatwoods. Hydric hammock, with a dense canopy and sub-canopy, is the most extensive natural community in the proposal. Salt marsh, dominated by needle rush and salt meadow cordgrass, lies along the many tidal creeks within the project. Sandhill is the most extensive upland natural community. Wet flatwoods, mesic flatwoods and small areas of xeric hammock, depression marshes, successional hardwood forest, improved pasture and sandhill planted with pine are the other natural communities found within the project.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Florida willow</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3

Public Use

The scenic qualities of this project could be excellent. Areas of previous disturbance such as former pasture might support the development of camping opportunities. Considering these factors, the recreational potential of the proposal is considered medium to high. The property may be ideal for recreational scenic hiking trails, equestrian trails on the upland sandhill areas, primitive camping and water-based activities. Acquiring the property strengthens a coastal wildlife corridor linkage and improves opportunities for wildlife appreciation with low-intensity recreation such as bird watching, hiking, boating, snorkeling and managed hunting.

Acquisition Planning

2017

On June 16, 2017, the Taylor Sweetwater Creek project was accepted by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) for in-depth review.

On October 20, 2017, ARC voted to add this proposal as a Florida Forever project.

2024

In September 2024, ARC approved the addition of three parcels totaling approximately 336.97 acres in Taylor County.

Coordination

The proposed property is located between the Spring Creek Unit and Tide Swamp Unit of Big Bend Wildlife Management Area, which lies three miles to the north and two miles to the south, respectively. The small (5-acre) Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) Spring Warrior Creek Conservation Area is nestled within the general perimeter of the proposal. The Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve lies just offshore of the entire site.

Management Policy Statement

Primary management goals for Taylor Sweetwater Creek are to increase the protection of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, acquire landscapes that link conservation corridors, protect water resources of the state, provide public resource-based recreation and increase the amount of forestland for sustainable natural-resource management.

Manager(s)

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is the designated manager.





Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

The Taylor Sweetwater Creek project adds an extremely valuable link along the west coast of Florida between two very large wildlife management areas that have Gulf of America frontage. If acquired, this would conserve, protect, manage and restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests, as well as protect significant surface-water coastal, recreation, timber and fish and wildlife resources. It would provide opportunities for fishing and wildlife-based public recreation.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Some areas may require ecological restoration of ground cover, control of invasive species and either thinning or reforestation. Such resource management projects may be necessary to accomplish restoration objectives and attain the desired future conditions for communities on the area. This is especially important for the conservation of habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. Landscape ecology is also important, as land use changes in the area, such as intensive residential, commercial, and industrial developments and the roads that often accompany them, may also affect the attainment of resource conservation goals for the area and the effectiveness of necessary resource management projects.

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

If acquired and leased to FWC for management, a management plan will be developed by FWC describing the management goals and objectives necessary to implement future resource management programs on the area. The management plan will also establish the current and future roles of cooperating entities including governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. Long-range plans would stress ecosystem management and the protection and management of focal, rare and imperiled species. Historic analysis of natural communities and vegetation types may be conducted on the area if deemed necessary and quantified vegetation management objectives will be developed. FWC would assess the condition of wildlife resources and provide planning support to enhance the management of focal species and recovery of imperiled species. Prescribed fire and other essential resource management activities will be implemented to maintain and restore natural communities and vegetation types to benefit native wildlife resources.

Programs providing multiple fish and wildlife-based outdoor recreational uses will be considered for implementation. These recreational uses will enhance public understanding of the region while providing ample opportunities for public outdoor recreational enjoyment. Essential roads will be maintained to provide all-weather public access and management operations. Unnecessary roads, fire lanes and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical. Infrastructure development will be limited to only that which is necessary to allow public access and to provide for the necessary facilities, security, and management of the property. Archaeological and historical sites will be managed in coordination with the Division of Historical Resources.





Revenue-generating Potential

Revenue can include the sale of various permits, recreational user fees and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed. Area regulations would be developed to identify the necessary and required permits, fees and regulations. Timber sales from thinning operations or restoration of offsite plantations may also yield additional revenue. Apiary leases will be considered as a revenue source depending on whether the area meets FWC’s Apiary Policy criteria. The long-term value of ecosystem services to local and regional land and water resources, and human health, are expected to be significant. The initial first-year startup cost is estimated to be \$604,480, including public access and infrastructure and fixed capital outlays necessary for management of the area. Below is an estimate of the recurring annual operating costs to operate and manage the Taylor Sweetwater Creek project. Optimal management of the area would require one full-time equivalent position. Salary requirements for this position, as well as those of other needed FWC staff and costs to operate and manage the Taylor Sweetwater Creek project, are reflected in the cost estimate below. All land management funding is dependent upon annual legislative appropriations.

Cooperators in Management Activities

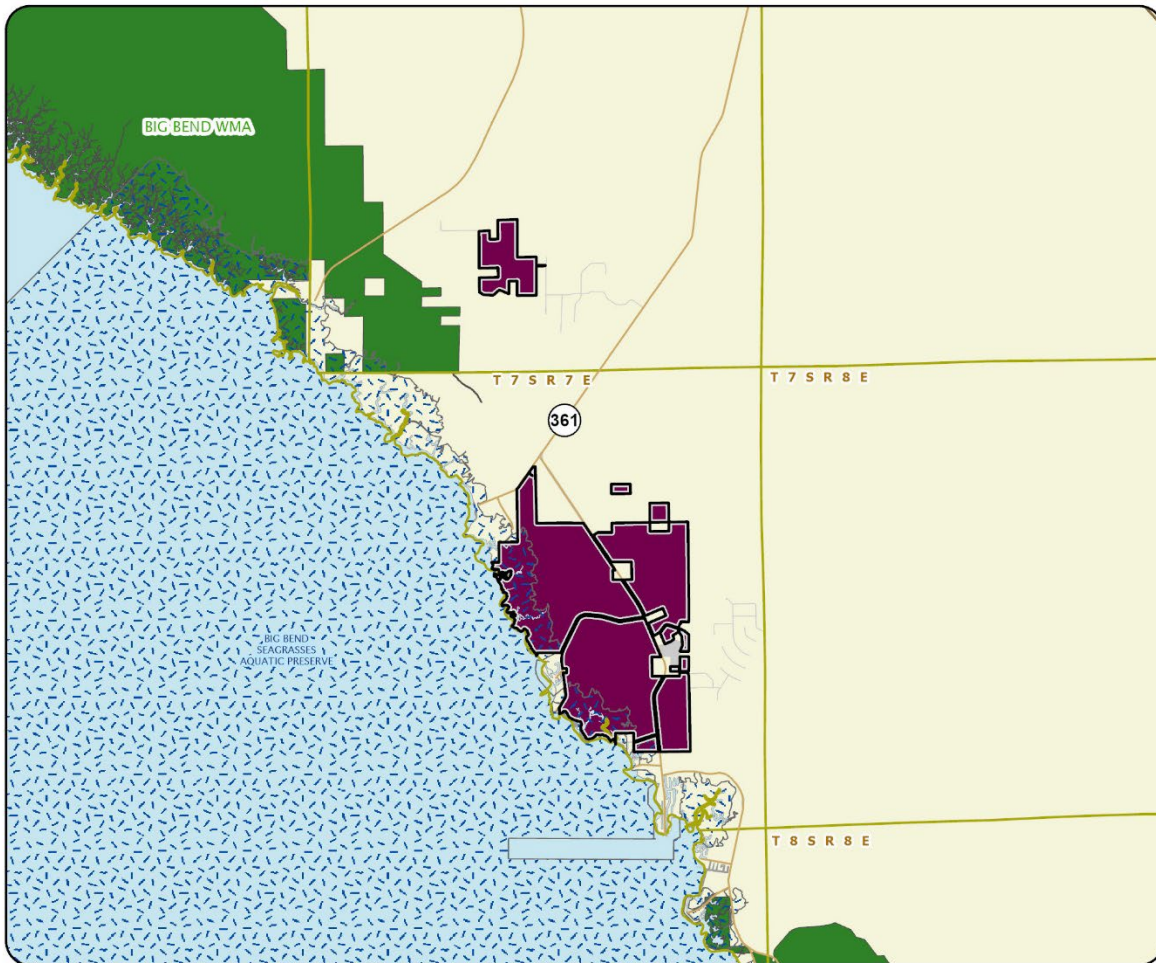
If the project is acquired and leased to FWC for management, FWC will cooperate with other federal, state and local governmental agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Florida Forest Service, Department of Environmental Protection, SRWMD and Taylor County, among others, in the management of the property.

Management Cost Summary

FWC	Startup
Source	not provided
Salary	not provided
OPS	not provided
Expense	\$60,675
OCO	\$150,252
FCO	\$15,754
TOTAL	\$226,681

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





TAYLOR SWEETWATER CREEK

TAYLOR COUNTY

