

Triple Diamond

Critical Natural Lands

Okeechobee County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2009
<i>Project Acres</i>	7,998
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	5,308
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$4,200,000
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	2,690
<i>2021 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$11,374,666

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Triple Diamond project will preserve significant areas of endemic dry prairie and potential habitat for the endangered Florida grasshopper sparrow. Preserving this intact landscape would protect and maintain thousands of acres of high-quality habitat and provide recreational and research opportunities in an area of Florida known for its rare wildlife, imperiled natural communities and significant hydrological values.

General Description

Triple Diamond is a working ranch and is exemplary in its retention of Florida's native prairie. Natural communities comprise 80 percent of the property and include basin marsh, depression marsh, dome swamp, dry and wet prairie, mesic hammock and swales or sloughs. Dry prairie, endemic to this region of the state, is the most prevalent natural community within the project. A smaller acreage of wet prairie occurs as open, herbaceous areas occupying lower spots in the dry prairie and in ecotones between wetlands and the dry prairie. The dry prairie provides habitat for state and federally listed species such as gopher tortoise, Florida grasshopper sparrow and crested caracara. Dry and wet prairies make up approximately 42 percent of the property's acreage and comprise one of the largest blocks of native prairie remaining on private lands. Much of the Triple Diamond prairie has been burned frequently and is in excellent condition. Interconnected swale/slough and depression marsh wetlands form a branching network that spreads over the length and breadth of the property. There are also isolated depression/basin marshes scattered over the property. One small dome swamp is in the northeastern portion of the project. The canopy is dominated by mature pond cypress surrounding a small, disturbed pond. A two-story home is in the southwestern part of the site as part of a complex of management facilities that also includes an equipment barn and horse stables.

This project is bordered on the north by the Kissimmee River Prairie Preserve State Park. Other public lands nearby include Avon Park Air Force Range, Bombing Range Ridge and the Kissimmee River to the west and Fort Drum Marsh Conservation Area and Blue Cypress Conservation Area to the east. The Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector Florida Forever project is also located within seven miles to the east



of the property. Triple Diamond would contribute to a large, contiguous landscape-sized protection area of more than 200,000 acres.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Crested caracara	G5/S2

Public Use

The Triple Diamond project has the potential of providing a diverse recreational experience. There is already a well-maintained road system occurring throughout the property and all the existing facilities can greatly enhance the recreational and research potential of the property. There is a potential for a full range of trail activities including nature trails, long distance hiking trails, bicycle trails and equestrian trails. Nature appreciation and wildlife observation and both primitive and facility camping could be supported. The infrastructure already on the property is in excellent shape and the existing residence could be converted to a spacious visitor/educational center. The barn and corrals could be used as part of an equestrian center for trail rides.

Acquisition Planning

2009

On June 12, 2009, the Acquisition and Restoration Council recommended that the Triple Diamond project be added to the Florida Forever list as an A list project. In 2009, the project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$23,007,107.

2010

On June 11, 2010, the Acquisition and Restoration Council placed this project into the Critical Natural Lands category.

2019

In 2019, DEP purchased 1,992 acres fee simple from the Open Space Institute Land Trust, Inc. The property is now managed as Kissimmee Bend State Forest.

In 2019, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired 2,003 acres to be managed as part of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

2021

In 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquired 1,315 acres to be managed as part of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

Coordination

The Nature Conservancy is considered an acquisition partner on this project.





Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of managing the Triple Diamond property are to protect and manage thousands of acres of high-quality habitats.

Manager(s)

The Division of Recreation and Parks is the recommended manager of this site; it would be managed as a part of the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

This intact and well-managed landscape would allow protection and management of thousands of acres of high-quality habitats in an area of Florida known for its rare and imperiled wildlife, natural communities, and significant hydrological value. This project also has the potential for providing a diverse resource-based recreation experience.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The property should not require intense management in the short term; however, the buildings on the property will need to be maintained. Over the long term, the intensity of management and related costs will increase as management emphasis shifts to a broader public use area with more use of the substantial infrastructure already on the property.

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

Once the property is acquired and assigned to the Division of Recreation and Parks, short term management efforts will concentrate on site security, control of vehicle access and management planning. Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park will serve initially as a point of access for low intensity resource-based recreation (such as hiking). Consideration will be given in the management planning process for the provision of access from other locations to accommodate recreation development. The magnitude and diversity of future resource-based recreation opportunities offered will in great part depend on establishment of a management plan for the property, funding for positions and using established infrastructure.

Revenue-generating Potential

The future revenue will depend on the nature and extent of public use and the use of the facilities already on the property. Vendors for future operation of the equestrian facility and two-story house will be considered.

Cooperators in Management Activities

The Division of Recreation and Parks will cooperate with and seek the advice of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate.



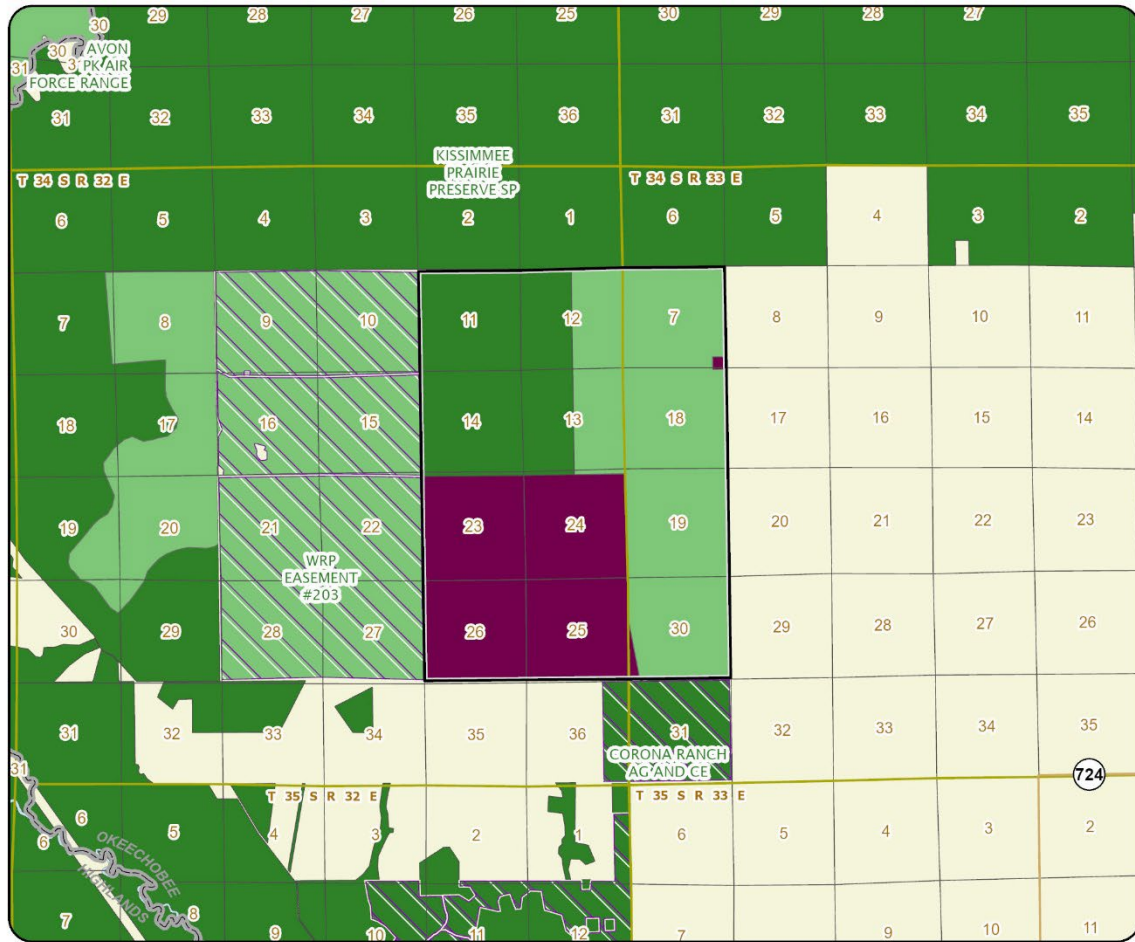


Management Cost Summary

<i>DRP</i>	<i>Startup</i>
<i>Salary (1 FTE, 1 OPS)</i>	<i>\$52,000</i>
<i>Expense</i>	<i>\$50,000</i>
<i>OCO</i>	<i>\$150,000</i>
<i>Outsourcing</i>	<i>\$20,000</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>\$272,000</i>

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





TRIPLE DIAMOND

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

-  Florida Forever Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcels Remaining
-  State Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Less-Than-Fee Acquisition

