

# Wakulla Springs Protection Zone

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Leon and Wakulla Counties

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i>            | <i>1997</i>         |
| <i>Project Acres</i>                          | <i>8,890</i>        |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i>                         | <i>5,594</i>        |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i>                | <i>3,296</i>        |
| <i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | <i>\$75,531,457</i> |

## Purpose for State Acquisition

Wakulla Springs - one of the largest and deepest artesian springs in the world - is now protected by a state park, but the enormous caverns that feed the spring spread far to the north and west of the park. The Wakulla Springs Protection Zone project will protect Wakulla Springs by conserving the land that is above the conduits that feed it, connecting the state park with the Apalachicola National Forest, and providing public areas for camping, hiking and hunting.

## General Description

Most of the project is in intensive silviculture or pasture. The Upper Lake Lafayette portion of the project is mixed pines and hardwoods on hills sloping down to Lake Lafayette. Remnant natural areas include floodplain swamps and forests, and unique features like sinkholes, aquatic caves and spring-run streams.

The project is important to protecting the subterranean headwaters of Wakulla Springs – the state’s largest first magnitude spring – and source of the Wakulla River, which is one of the largest and deepest artesian springs in the world, and an Outstanding Florida Water. At least five rare animals, including three crustaceans in aquatic caves, have been found here. Eight archaeological sites, including four mounds, are known on the site, and more can be expected. There is also a historic cemetery in the project. The sinkholes in the project are vulnerable to trash dumping and development, which may degrade the quality of water flowing into Wakulla Spring. Endangerment of the area is moderate.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

| <b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>     | <b><u>Score</u></b> |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Gopher tortoise                 | G3/S3               |
| Florida black bear              | G5T4/S4             |
| Woodville karst cave crayfish   | G1/S1               |
| Florida Big Bend cave amphipod  | G1G2/S1S2           |
| Sparkleberry hairstreak         | G5T1T2/S1S2         |
| <i>incised groove-bur</i>       | G3/S2               |
| Florida cave amphipod           | G2G3/S2S3           |
| Eastern diamondback rattlesnake | G3/S3               |
| Pine snake                      | G4/S3               |
| Southeastern fox squirrel       | G5T5/S3             |

**Public Use**

Portions of the project qualify as state park, state forest and wildlife management area. Hiking or bicycling trails could link the park through this area with the Apalachicola National Forest, and the project could also be suitable for camping, horseback riding and perhaps hunting. The Upper Lake Lafayette land could be linked to such areas as the Lafayette Heritage Trail Park, Fallschase Greenway and L. Kirk Edwards Wildlife and Environmental Area.

**Acquisition Planning**

**1996**

On December 5, 1996, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council added the Wakulla Springs Protection Zone project to the 1997 Conservation and Recreational Lands Priority List. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP), consisted of approximately 10,243 acres and multiple owners. The essential parcels are the Ferrell tract, McBrides Slough tract and smaller tracts between the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park and Ferrell Tract. The McBrides Slough tract has been mapped as a DRP Inholdings and Additions project.

**1998**

On October 15, 1998, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council designated approximately 1,004 acres that would connect the Ferrell tract with the Apalachicola National Forest as essential.

**1999**

On December 9, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council removed 3,883 acres owned by the St. Joe Paper Company and placed them into the St. Joe Timberland CARL project.

**2001**

On October 25, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) approved the addition of 59 acres to the project.



**2006**

On June 9, 2006, ARC approved a fee-simple, 152-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by DEP's Florida Springs Initiative, consisted of seven owners and a 2005 taxable value of \$94,268. One owner, Linderand, Inc., already holds title to property within the current project boundary. These parcels were designated as essential since they are important to the future water quality of Wakulla Springs.

**2007**

On December 14, 2007, ARC approved the addition of 700 acres to the project.

**2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the new Partnerships and Regional Incentives category.

**2014**

In 2014, a Tallahassee citizens' group – the Buck Lake Alliance – proposed making the 373-acre Upper Lake Lafayette Aquifer Protection Proposal a Florida Forever project. The project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$3,599,447.

On December 12, 2014, ARC voted to add this area to the Florida Forever list and then incorporated its boundary into the boundary of this Wakulla Springs Protection Zone project.

**2018**

On February 16, 2018, ARC approved the addition of Revell Sinks (228 acres) to the project.

**2019**

On December 12, 2019, ARC approved the addition of 801 acres in Wakulla County to the Wakulla Springs Protection Zone Florida Forever project boundary for fee simple acquisition. The proposal had a 2019 tax assessed value of \$1,925,754. The Florida Forest Service (FFS) is the recommended manager and the lands would be managed as part of Wakulla State Forest. The addition would contribute to landscape linkage between existing public lands, provide aquifer protection for Wakulla Springs and enhance wildlife habitat as well as public recreation. The land within the approved boundary was designated essential. It would be managed by FFS if acquired.

**2020**

On August 19, 2020, the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWMD) established the Revell conservation easement (124.74 acres).

**2022**

DEP acquired 405.79 acres fee-simple from six property owners that will be managed as part of Wakulla State Forest.

**Coordination**

Considering this project's linkages and connections above and below ground, coordination would be among the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), DRP, FFS, Florida Wildlife Federation, Florida Geological Survey, U.S. Forest Service, local governments and nonprofit conservation groups.





## Management Policy Statement

The primary objective of management of the Wakulla Springs Protection Zone project is to preserve the water quality of Wakulla Springs by protecting the land above the underground conduits that supply the spring. Achieving this objective will provide a refuge for extremely rare cave-dwelling crustaceans, preserve wildlife habitat in this developing region, and provide various recreational opportunities, such as camping and hiking, to the public. Management activities should be directed toward the protection of surface-water and groundwater quality. Managers should control public access to the project; limit public motor vehicles to one or a few major roads and route them away from sinkholes; inventory resources; and monitor management activities to ensure that they are preserving the quality of the groundwater. Managers should limit the number and size of recreational facilities, such as hiking trails, ensure that they avoid the most sensitive resources, particularly sinkholes and spring runs, and site them in already disturbed areas when possible.

If less-than-fee purchases are made within the project, activities such as silviculture, road improvements, or any development should be strictly monitored to ensure that surface water and groundwater quality in the project area is maintained or improved. In areas managed by FFS, the primary land management goal is to restore, maintain and protect in perpetuity all native ecosystems; to integrate compatible human use; and to ensure long-term viability of populations and species considered rare. This ecosystem approach will guide FFS management activities on this project. For areas managed by FWC, priority will be given to the conservation and protection of environmentally unique native habitats and threatened and endangered species. Under FWC management, the tract will also provide opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, hiking and other natural resource-based recreational activities.

## Manager(s)

Managers include DRP, FFS and FWC. The Upper Lake Lafayette Aquifer Protection Area site added to the project in 2014 may also be managed with the help of the Florida Wildlife Federation.

## Management Prospectus

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The unique subterranean resources connected with Wakulla Springs, one of Florida's most significant artesian springs and already managed as a state park, qualify this project as a unit of the state park system. The project's size and diversity of resources makes portions of it also desirable for use and management as a state forest and a wildlife management area. Management as a state forest is contingent upon the state acquiring fee-simple title to the core parcels.

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

#### **Division of Recreation and Parks**

Under fee title acquisition, the Wakulla Springs Protection Zone will be a high-need management area. Resource restoration, public recreation, environmental education and development compatible with





long-term resource protection will be an integral aspect of management. The areas around karst windows, springs and associated sloughs are often, and in some cases currently are being, subjected to inappropriate uses and levels of use that degrade the resource. The lands between the park and the national forest, west of State Road 61, contain a significant number of hydrological features which will require intensive management of people to ensure against resource degradation by users and allow for restoration where needed. Springs, karst windows and sinks are popular recreation sites. Hence, there will be a demand for their use. Close monitoring and study will be needed to decide which are suitable for public use and at what levels, followed with appropriate management measures. This concept also applies to other areas of the project managed by DRP where the natural regime has been disturbed by silviculture and other land uses.

#### **Florida Forest Service**

Many areas of the project will require considerable restoration efforts. Until these efforts are completed, the level of management intensity and related management costs is expected to be somewhat higher than what would be expected on a typical state forest.

#### **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

The proposal generally includes lands that are low-need tracts requiring basic resource management, including the frequent use of prescribed fire. The Ferrell Property represents a relatively intact long-leaf pine/wire grass community. Land use in the general area has severely impacted this community type. Close attention will need to be paid to ensure the perpetuation of this community through appropriate burning and other management practices, if acquired in fee title. The primary management needed for perpetuation of the natural communities on the area is the introduction of all-season prescribed fire and control of human access. On portions of existing disturbed areas such as the agricultural fields, native and non-native agronomic plantings will be used to benefit both game and non-game wildlife on the area and to promote special hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities for the public. Development of facilities, as on all wildlife management areas, would be kept to the minimum level to assure a high-quality recreational experience for those members of the public interested in less infrastructure and other disturbance factors.

#### **Florida Wildlife Federation**

This property is adjacent to commercial and residential development on the urban fringe. There is a platform mound on the property, which is incompletely fenced, and completed fencing will be needed. There are invasive plant species on the property, which will have to be managed. Managing the site for soil protection and for vegetative cover will offer the best protection for Upper Lake Lafayette.

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

##### **Division of Recreation and Parks**

Upon fee title acquisition, public access will be provided for low-intensity, non-facility-related outdoor recreation. As part of Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park, hunting would not be permitted.





Vehicular access by the public will be confined to designated points and routes. Emphasis will be given to the protection of springs and associated sloughs, sinks and karst windows. Resource management activities in the first year of each fee title acquisition will concentrate on site security (including posting boundaries) and development of a resource inventory in conjunction with the development of a comprehensive management plan. Long-term management may include a wide range of resource-based recreation and associated facilities. The integration of appropriate public uses will create wildlife and recreational linkages between the state park and the national forest.

#### Florida Forest Service

Once the core area is acquired and assigned to FFS, public access will be provided for non-facilities-related, low-intensity outdoor recreation. Until specific positions are provided for the project, public access will be coordinated through FFS Tallahassee District Headquarters and management activities will be conducted with district personnel.

Initial or intermediate management efforts will concentrate on site security, public and fire management access, resource inventory, and removal of existing trash. Steps will be taken to ensure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously affording protection of sensitive resources. Vehicular use by the public will be confined to designated roads. Any unnecessary access points will be closed. An inventory of the site's natural resources and threatened and endangered flora and fauna will be conducted to provide the basis for formulation of a management plan.

Prior to collection of necessary resource information, management proposals for this project can only be conceptual in nature. Long-range plans for this property will generally be directed toward the restoration of disturbed areas and maintenance of natural communities. Management activities will also stress enhancement of the abundance and spatial distribution of threatened and endangered species. To the greatest extent practical, disturbed sites will be restored to conditions that would be expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems. Pine plantations will be thinned to achieve a more natural appearance. Off-site species will eventually be replaced with species that would be expected to occur naturally on the site. An all-season burning program will be established, utilizing practices that incorporate recent research findings.

Whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks will be utilized to contain and control prescribed and natural fires. Timber management activities will primarily consist of improvement thinning and regeneration harvests aimed at maintaining and perpetuating forest ecosystems. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age but will be managed to maintain a broad diversity of age classes ranging from young stands to areas with old growth characteristics. This will provide habitat for the full spectrum of species that would be found in the natural environment. The resource inventory will be used to identify sensitive areas that need special attention, protection or management, and to locate areas that are appropriate for any recreational or administrative facilities.





Infrastructure development will primarily be located in already disturbed areas and will be the absolute minimum required to allow public access for the uses mentioned above, to provide facilities to accommodate public use, and to administer and manage the property.

Recreation and environmental education in the natural environment by FFS, though no recreational facilities are planned. However, if it is later determined that facilities are needed, the use of low impact, rustic facilities will be stressed. High impact, organized recreation areas will be discouraged because of possible adverse effects on the natural environment. Unnecessary roads, fire lines and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned and/or restored to the greatest extent practical.

#### **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis will be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory and removal of existing refuse. A conceptual management plan will be developed by FWC, describing the goals and objectives of future resource management. Long-range plans will stress ecosystem management, the protection and management of threatened and endangered species and the management of small game hunting opportunities. Essential roads will be stabilized to provide all weather public access and manage operations. Programs providing multiple recreational uses will also be implemented. An all-season prescribed burning management plan will be developed and implemented using conventional and biologically acceptable guidelines. Management activities will strive to manage natural plant communities to benefit native wildlife resources.

Where appropriate and practical, timber resources will be managed using acceptable silvicultural practices as recommended by FFS. These practices will include reforestation of cleared pinelands and natural regeneration of pine plantations.

#### **Florida Wildlife Federation**

It will take a minimum of one year to develop a management plan for the Upper Lake Lafayette acreage after this area is acquired. Fencing the east and west boundaries will be necessary to create limited access points. Cultural resource sites will have to be identified and fenced off from general access.

#### **Revenue-generating potential**

##### **Division of Recreation and Parks**

DRP expects no significant revenue from this property immediately after fee title acquisition, and the amount of any future revenue will depend on the nature and extent of public use and facilities developed.

##### **Florida Forest Service**

FFS will sell timber as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in upland pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue, but the revenue-generating potential of this project is expected to be moderate.





**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

FWC may also sell timber to help offset operational costs. Future revenue from timber resources will depend on successful reforestation and management of cleared pinelands. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area stamps and other special hunting stamps or permits.

**Florida Wildlife Federation**

The Florida Wildlife Federation does not expect the Upper Lake Lafayette property to generate revenue from admissions, but it will contribute to the local economy by spurring sales of outdoor goods and services.

**Cooperators in management activities**

**Division of Recreation and Parks**

DRP will, as appropriate, cooperate with local governments, other state agencies and NFWFMD to further resource management, recreational and educational opportunities, and the development of the lands for state park purposes.

**Florida Forest Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

FFS and FWC will also cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies in managing the area.

**Florida Wildlife Federation**

The Florida Wildlife Federation developed a Management Prospectus for the Upper Lake Lafayette portion of the Wakulla Springs Protection Zone and suggests that its volunteers can help see that trails are properly maintained.

Management Cost Summary

| <u>DRP</u>      | <u>Startup</u> | <u>Recurring</u> |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Source of Funds | CARL           | CARL             |
| Salary          | \$48,840       | \$48,840         |
| OPS             | \$10,000       | \$10,000         |
| Expense         | \$86,342       | \$6,342          |
| OCO             | \$58,956       | \$0              |
| FCO             | \$0            | \$0              |
| TOTAL           | \$204,138      | \$65,182         |

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted







Management Cost Summary

| <u>FFS</u>      | <u>Startup</u> | <u>Recurring</u> |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Source of Funds | CARL           | not provided     |
| Salary          | \$65,343       | not provided     |
| OPS             | \$0            | not provided     |
| Expense         | \$90,000       | not provided     |
| OCO             | \$129,000      | not provided     |
| FCO             | \$0            | not provided     |
| TOTAL           | \$284,343      | not provided     |

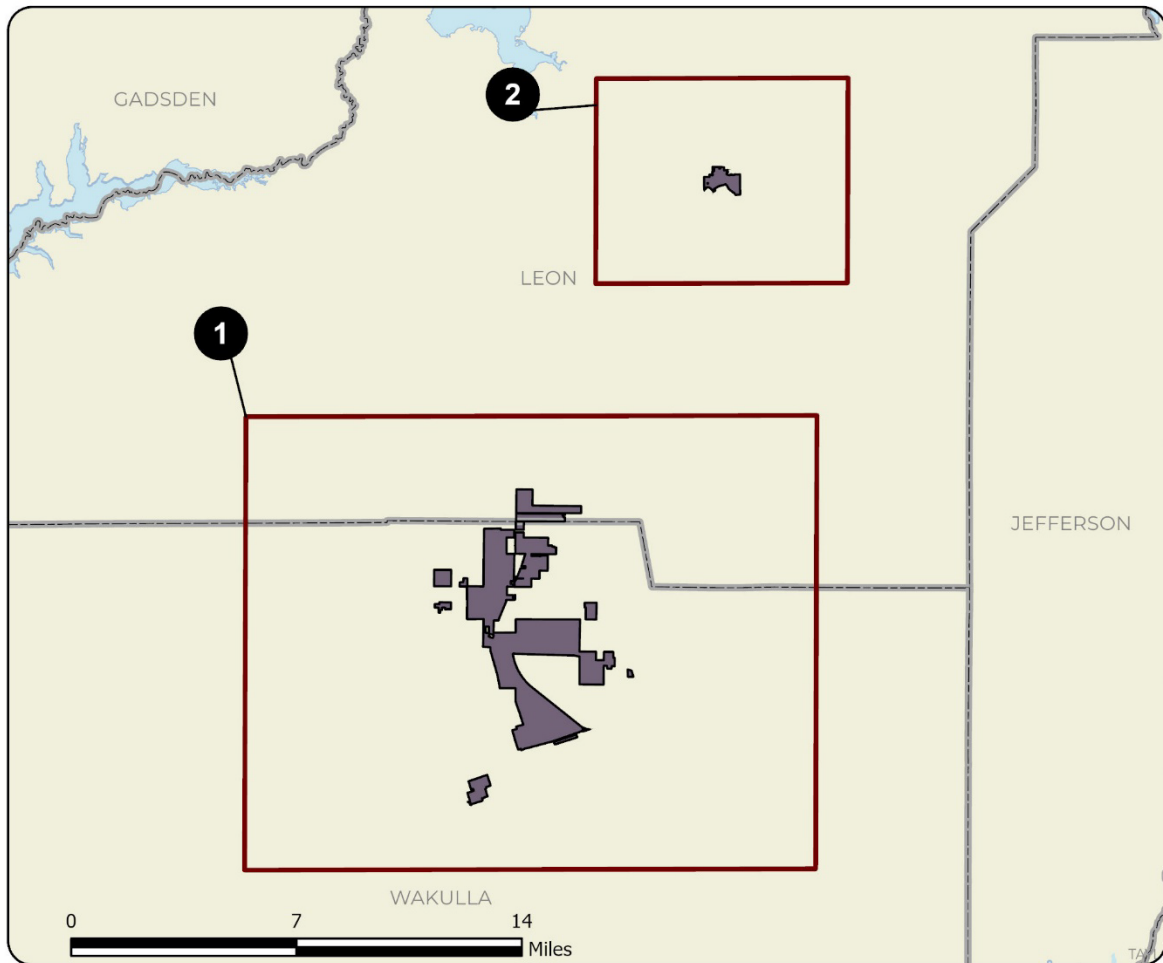
Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

Management Cost Summary

| <u>FWC</u>      | <u>Startup</u> | <u>Recurring</u> |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Source of Funds | CARL           | CARL             |
| Salary          | \$37,170       | \$74,340         |
| OPS             | \$7,000        | \$7,000          |
| Expense         | \$45,000       | \$60,000         |
| OCO             | \$38,500       | \$38,500         |
| FCO             | \$75,000       | \$0              |
| TOTAL           | \$202,670      | \$179,840        |

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

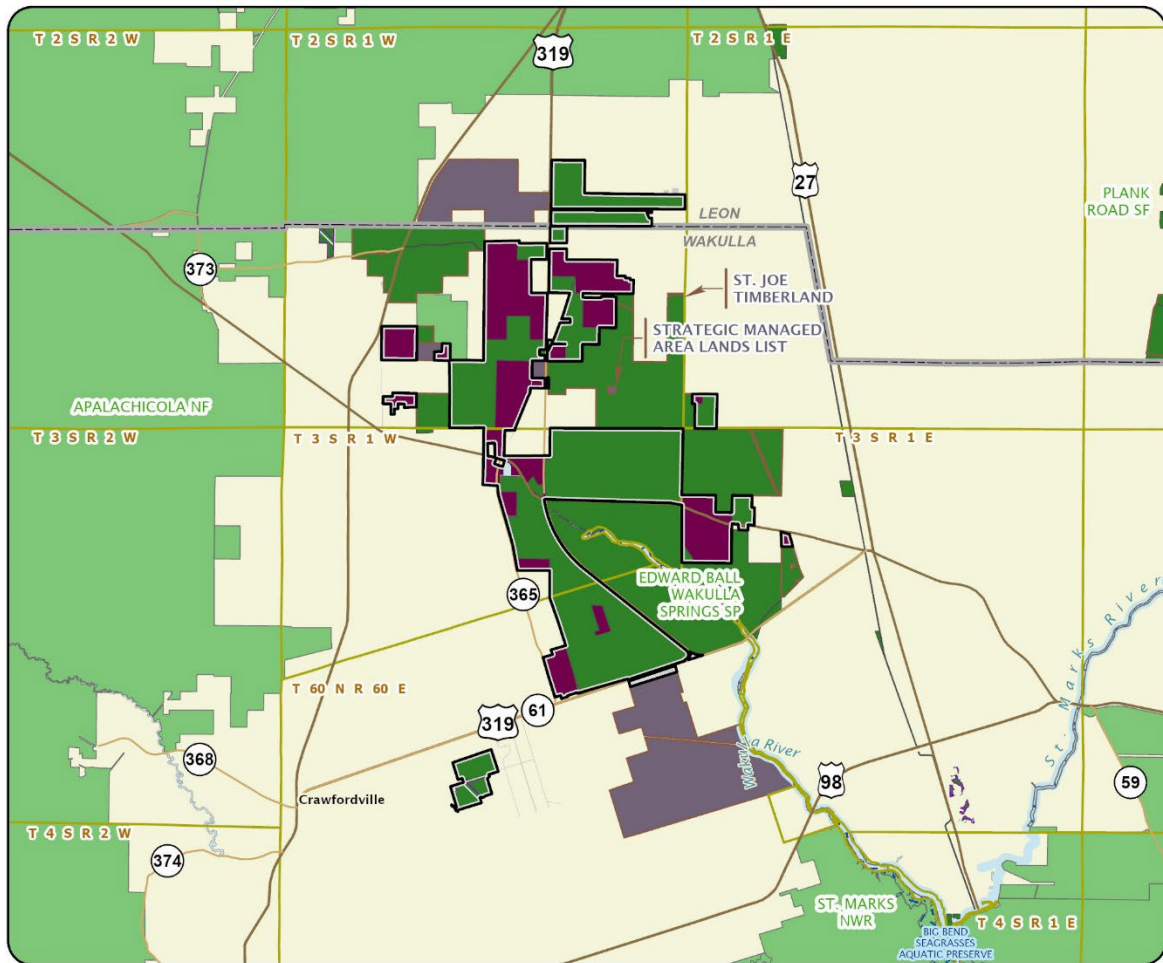




### WAKULLA SPRINGS PROTECTION ZONE: OVERVIEW

#### LEON AND WAKULLA COUNTIES

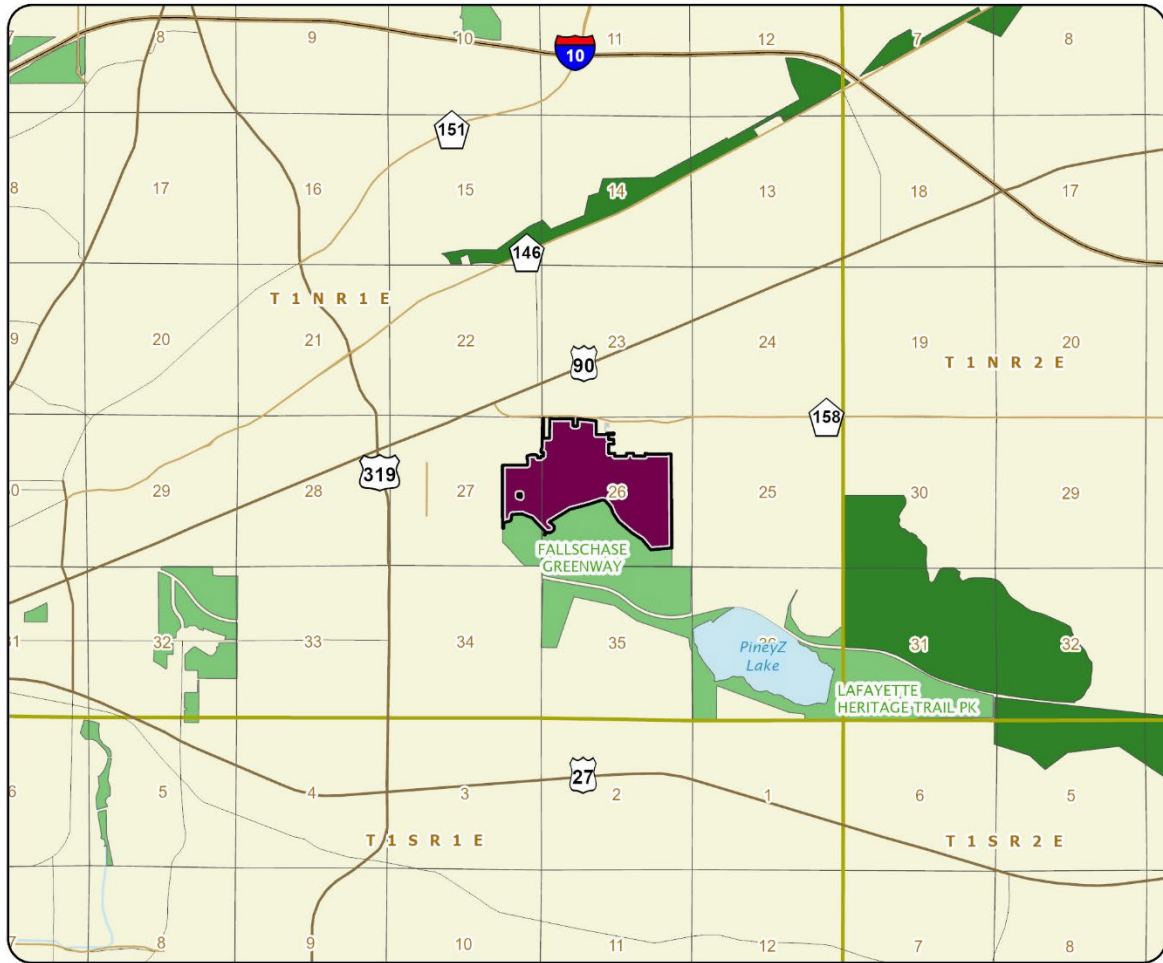




WAKULLA SPRINGS PROTECTION ZONE: MAP 1

LEON AND WAKULLA COUNTIES





**WAKULLA SPRINGS PROTECTION ZONE: MAP 2**

**LEON COUNTY**

-  Florida Forever Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcels Remaining
-  State Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Public Lands

