

# Welannee Watershed Forest

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Okaloosa County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2020
<i>Project Acres</i>	9,207
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	9,207
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$11,159,080

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Welannee Watershed Forest project will protect upper stretches of the Yellow River and provide connectivity to adjacent conservation lands such as the Yellow River Water Management Area, Blackwater River State Forest, Conecuh National Forest and Eglin Air Force Base. The project will also preserve habitat critical to native species such as the Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*).

## General Description

The Welannee Watershed Forest project consists of floodplain and adjacent upland habitat along the Yellow River, from the Florida-Alabama state line extending downstream for approximately 11.5 straight-line miles (estimated 15-16 river miles). The project contains two large timber tracts: the first is owned by H.T.L. Family Limited Partnership that stretches along both sides of the Yellow River from the north boundary of the Yellow River Water Management Area to the Alabama state line; the second tract is owned by U.I.L. Family Limited Partnership and is located on the east side of the Yellow River (which it borders for 3.6 miles). There is a small discontinuity within the northern tract at State Road 2. Blackwater River State Forest lies generally 0.5 to 2 miles west of the northern tract, which encompasses both banks of the Yellow River, although the forest and project share a small common border. The Yellow River Water Management Area lies immediately downstream of the northern tract (sharing a short common border) and directly across the Yellow River from the southern tract, which itself is restricted to the eastern side of the river.

The project is comprised of approximately 30 percent floodplain forest and wetlands and 70 percent uplands, most of which is planted pine plantation that has been historically planted with loblolly pine. The project contains more than 500 acres of longleaf pine and, as loblolly pine is harvested, the owners are transitioning suitable uplands to longleaf pine. The project is managed under a very active prescribed fire regime, with the longleaf burned on a two-year rotation and other upland areas burned on a three-year rotation. The facilities and equipment for the management of the project's forest resources are located on-site. The project is managed not only for its timber resources, but also with the purpose of restoring longleaf pine habitat (particularly groundcover for wildlife). The property is





managed to promote healthy populations of game species such as white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*).

Welannee Watershed Forest includes the same properties as the original Upper Yellow River Florida Forever project, which was removed from the priority list in 2011 when the land was no longer available for acquisition.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gulf sturgeon	G3T2T3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Narrow pigtoe	G1G2/S1
Choctaw bean	G2G3/S1S2
Escambia map turtle	G2/S2
Alligator snapping turtle	G3/S3
Pine barrens treefrog	G4/S3
<i>little brown jug</i>	G5/S3
Eastern river cooter	G5T5/S3
Eastern chipmunk	G5/S3

Public Use

As the project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition, public access is not available. However, upon coordination with the landowner, the Florida Forest Service could provide Operation Outdoor Freedom events and/or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission could organize youth hunting opportunities.

Acquisition Planning

**2020**

On October 9, 2020, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Welannee Watershed Forest project to the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category of the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List. This less-than-fee project was proposed by Conservation Florida and consists of 11 parcels among two ownerships.

**2023**

In December of 2023, ARC approved the addition of two parcels totaling approximately 830.41 acres in Okaloosa County.

Coordination

Additional funding to assist with acquisition has been secured through federal grants from the Forest Legacy Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The program requires a non-federal match of 25 percent which could be met with Florida Forever funds.





### **Management Policy Statement**

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Welannee Watershed Forest project would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

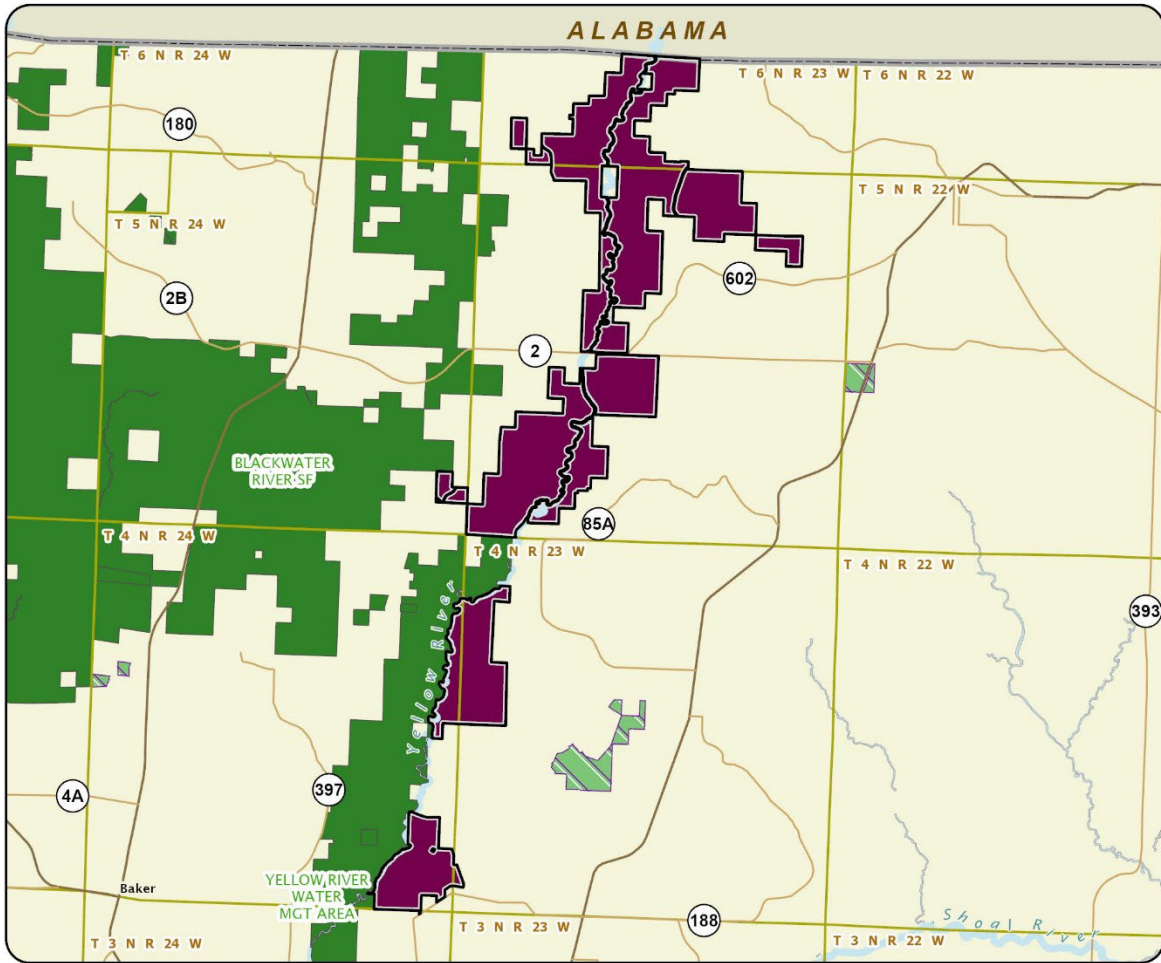
### **Manager(s)**

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of Welannee Watershed Forest would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated with the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of State Lands.

### **Management Prospectus**

DEP's Division of State Lands will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while the primary management will be conducted by the property owner.





### WELANEE WATERSHED FOREST

#### OKALOOSA COUNTY

