

Withlacoochee River Corridor

Less-Than-Fee

Citrus and Hernando Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2020
<i>Project Acres</i>	3,286
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	804
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	2,482
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$8,419,841

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Withlacoochee River Corridor project will create a conservation corridor along the Withlacoochee River between existing conservation lands. The project will conserve unique habitat for species including the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and rare ferns. Preservation of sandy upland oak hammocks, lowland cypress swamps and willow marshes will contribute to the connectivity and maintenance of natural lands. The project will also support state water quality and quantity by protecting the Withlacoochee River floodplain and associated wetlands.

General Description

The Withlacoochee River Corridor is in Citrus and Hernando counties and is owned by multiple landowners. The project is characterized by dry and sandy uplands with pine forest and oak hammocks, as well as lowlands with mature cypress swamps, willow marshes and basin swamps. This district is referred to as the Lime Sink Region, attributable to its low-rolling limestone plains overlain by thin sands supporting the natural maze of swamps, marshes, flatwoods and lakes.

The project's most outstanding natural features are the limestone caves and canyons (often referred to as "fern grottos"). There are several terrestrial cave entrances as well as a portion of the Pineola Fern Grotto Cave Complex. Rich upland hardwood forests are found in the immediate vicinity of these unique karst features; together, they provide valuable habitat for rare species, including various rare ferns and two rare species of bat. The sandy upland area provides habitat for a large population of gopher tortoise. The striking assemblage of hardwood forests, sandy uplands and rare geological formations has been the subject of interest for botanists for over 100 years. Significant cultural sites from Florida's prehistoric and historic periods are documented throughout the project.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
<i>modest spleenwort</i>	G1/S1
<i>Curtiss' spleenwort</i>	G1/S1
<i>creeping star-hair fern</i>	G5/S2
<i>plume polypody</i>	G5/S2
<i>widespread polypody</i>	G5/S2
<i>brittle maidenhair fern</i>	G5/S3
Southeastern myotis	G4/S3
Snowy egret	G5/S3
Osprey	G5/S3S4
Little blue heron	G5/S4

Public Use

The project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, the project will protect the scenic resources of the Withlacoochee State Trail located on the westernmost boundary of the project. The project will provide additional public benefit through the protection of imperiled species, unique geological formations, rural landscape conservation and continuation of a wildlife corridor.

Acquisition Planning

2020

In June 2020, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the 1,714-acre Withlacoochee River Corridor project to the Less-Than-Fee category of the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List. This less-than-fee project was proposed by Conservation Florida and consists of multiple parcels among two ownerships.

In October 2020, a 1,645-acre addition was approved by ARC and added to the project boundary. It comprised of an additional five ownerships containing acres along the west shoreline of the Withlacoochee River.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Withlacoochee River Corridor project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Withlacoochee River Corridor project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site’s management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated by the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Division of State Lands.

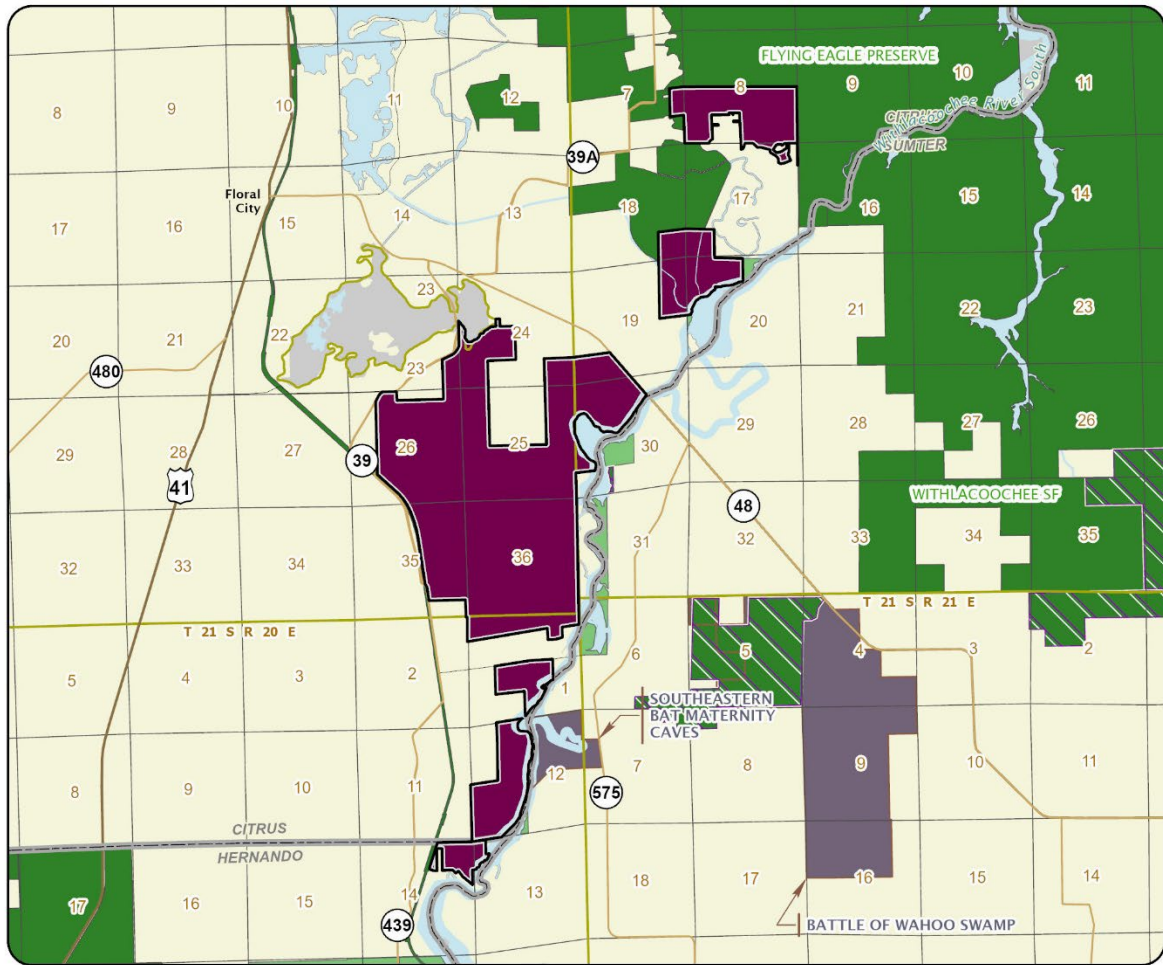




Management Prospectus

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





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