

## **The Florida Wildlife Corridor**

### **Legislation**

Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Legislature created the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act in 2021. This law directs the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to encourage and promote investments in areas that protect and enhance the Florida Wildlife Corridor. It specifies that the Florida Wildlife Corridor is an existing physical, geographically defined area comprised of over 18 million acres, of which 10 million acres are protected conservation lands.

In 2025, The Focus on Fiscal Responsibility budget dedicated \$18 million specifically to support these efforts through Florida Forever, the State's premier land conservation program. This funding can be used for the acquisition of Florida Wildlife Corridor lands, in fee simple or conservation easements. In 2023, a non-recurring sum of \$850 million was appropriated from the state's General Revenue Fund for the acquisition of land within the Florida Wildlife Corridor in two specific regions of the state. This appropriation dedicated \$426 million to the Caloosahatchee Big Cypress Land Acquisition Project; created by the Florida Legislature to acquire lands or development rights from interested landowners in Collier and Hendry counties for the benefit of the Florida panther. The remaining \$424 million of the appropriation was dedicated to the acquisition of fee lands or conservation easements on the [Florida Forever Priority List](#) that are partially or wholly within the Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Wildlife Corridor; a 100 mile long, 1.6-million-acre corridor stretching from the Ocala National Forest to the Osceola National Forest.

### **The Science Behind the Wildlife Corridor**

The ability to migrate plays an important role in supporting biodiversity by enabling animals to safely travel to find mates, food and shelter. Animal migration results in increased genetic diversity within the species population and ensures a species' resistance to issues such as disease, genetic mutations from inbreeding, and potential extinction.

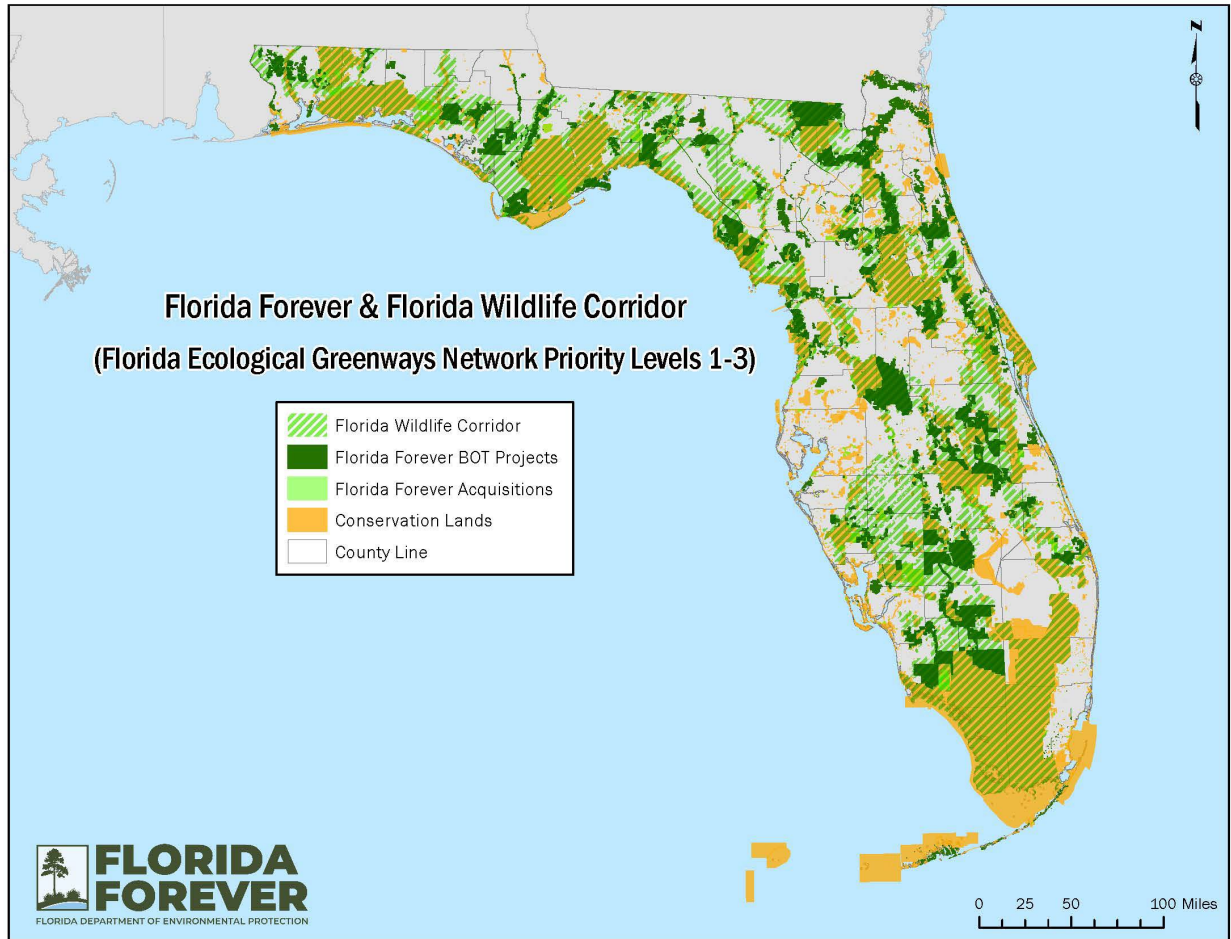
Many wildlife habitats have become fragmented and isolated by human development such as residential areas, commercial centers, industrial activity and transportation infrastructure. Wildlife corridors are sections of land that can connect two or more areas of wildlife habitat and allow animals to migrate and avoid roads and other development.

The Florida Wildlife Corridor refers to the conserved lands and opportunity areas defined as Priority 1, 2 and 3 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN). The FEGN is a statewide database that identifies and prioritizes a functionally connected statewide ecological network of public and private conservation lands. The FEGN is used to inform Florida Forever and other state, federal, and regional land acquisition programs regarding the most important ecological corridors and intact landscapes across the state for protection of Florida's native wildlife, ecosystem services, and ecological resiliency. ([Florida Ecological Greenways Network Florida Forever Projects](#)). It identifies "opportunity areas," which are lands and waters within the wildlife corridor that are not conserved lands, and green spaces within the corridor which lack conservation status and/or are contiguous or between conserved lands.

### **Vision for the Florida Wildlife Corridor**

There are 648,709 acres within the Florida Wildlife Corridor opportunity area that are a high priority for conservation through the state's Florida Forever program. Utilizing the most current scientific analysis of Florida's natural resources, DEP's Division of State Lands triages properties in the same manner as Florida Forever potential acquisitions. Priority is given to lands that preserve, protect or enhance wildlife habitats and corridors and linkages to existing private and public conservation lands.

The Florida Wildlife Corridor is a strategic priority for the Florida Forever program. Its purpose is to build upon the network of public and private lands for safe passage and dispersal routes to maintain healthy populations of plants and animals.



### **Florida Wildlife Corridor Acquisition Successes as of June 30, 2025**

*Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest* – This 5,827-acre conservation easement located in Santa Rosa County abuts the Escambia River. It also borders the Lower Escambia River Water Management Area and will expand protection of the Escambia River. This conservation easement helps to protect habitat for a variety of rare and imperiled species such as the reticulated flatwoods salamander, red cockaded woodpecker, and Florida black bear.

*Bear Creek Forest* – Located in Bay County, this 12,262-acre purchase will create the new Sandy Creek State Forest. This acquisition will also help to protect the St. Andrews Bay Watershed by offering flood protection, aquifer recharge, and safeguarding water quality. This property also lies within the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape and aligns with the military’s need to protect lands, water, and habitat to ensure the sustainability of military missions.

*Volusia Conservation Corridor* – Located in Volusia County, this 1,339-acre acquisition will expand Volusia County’s Deep Creek Preserve. The property, known as Carter Quail Ranch, contributes to a corridor of conservation lands stretching from the Ocala National Forest south to Fort Drum Marsh. Carter Quail Ranch contains two significant basin swamps that provide habitat for rare and imperiled species such as the wood stork. These swamps drain into Lake Ashby and Spruce Creek Swamp, with acquisition helping to protect the water quality of these water bodies.

*Heartland Wildlife Corridor* – The acquisition of a 1,987-acre conservation easement in Highlands County will help to protect habitat for a variety of listed species including the Florida black bear, Florida sandhill crane, Florida panther, and crested caracara, among others. This property also includes the headwaters of Fisheating Creek, the only undammed tributary of Lake Okeechobee.

*Green Swamp* – Located in Polk County, this 763-acre conservation easement acts as a buffer to surrounding conservation lands such as the Osprey Unit Hilochee Wildlife Management Area and to public infrastructure such as Interstate 4. This property also lies within the Palatlkaha River watershed and helps to recharge the Floridan Aquifer.

*Wolfe Creek Forest* – This 101-acre fee simple acquisition in Santa Rosa County completed the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project. This property lies along Big Coldwater Creek and will be managed as a part of the Blackwater River State Forest. This acquisition helps to protect habitat for a variety of listed species including the Florida black bear and southeastern weasel.

*St. Joseph Bay Buffer* – Located in Gulf County, this 607-acre property links two tracts of the St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve. This fee simple acquisition lies along the Gulf of Mexico and will therefore provide a buffer for development and conserve our fragile coastline.

*Yarborough Ranch* – This 1,361-acre property, approved for fee acquisition in 2024, is located within Seminole County. It is surrounded on three sides by the Little Big Econ State Forest and within a critical linkage for the Florida Wildlife Corridor. This property is within the Big Econlockhatchee Drainage Basin and protects the Geneva Freshwater Lens, which provides drinking water to residents of Seminole County. The property will be managed as part of the Little Big Econ State Forest.

*Deer Creek Ranch* – Located in DeSoto County, this 5,700-acre conservation easement will help protect a section of Tiger Bay Slough and Myrtle Slough. These tributaries help to provide drinking water for the City of Punta Gorda and protect the water quality of the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor. The upland areas within the property provide habitat for a variety of imperiled species such as the Florida scrub jay and Florida burrowing owl.

*Myakka Ranchlands* – Located in southwest Hardee County, Quail Creek Ranch is a 2,650-acre property nestled between the Myakka and Peace River watersheds. The property contains the headwaters of Owen Creek, an important tributary of the Myakka River. This property will provide surface water protection as well as protect habitat for imperiled species such as the Florida sandhill crane, fox squirrel and gopher tortoise.

*Lake Hatchineha Watershed* – Located in eastern Polk County, Creek Ranch is a 1,342-acre property under imminent threat of development and includes frontage on Lake Hatchineha, a critical part of the headwaters of the Kissimmee River-Lake Okeechobee-Everglades system. The property will be managed by FWC as Creek Ranch Wildlife Management Area, adding recreational opportunities to the region, protecting water quality, and buffering Lake Hatchineha from encroaching commercial and residential development.