

ITEM 10:

Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project boundary to add six parcels totaling approximately 913.2 acres in Polk County with a prorated tax assessed market value of \$407,695.

LOCATION:

Polk County

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

The Armington Ranch amendment proposed by the National Wildlife Refuge Association, Florida Conservation Group, and Common Ground Ecology, adds six parcels in Polk County totaling approximately 913.2 acres to the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project. The six parcels have a combined prorated tax assessed market value of \$407,695.

The six parcels are proposed for less-than-fee acquisition. The landowner, Albert J Morhard, has been contacted and is a willing seller. The Armington Ranch property would nearly complete the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem corridor by extending conservation lands to within a quarter mile of Catfish Creek, Hatchineha, and other conservation lands to the north. The parcels contain pasture, flatwoods, forested wetlands and scrub. According to the applicant, rare plant and animal species including the Florida scrub-jay, the Florida sand skink, and Briton's beargrass have been documented on the site. Additionally, a large rookery that supports breeding populations of wading birds including woods storks, snowy egrets, and great egrets is located within the project along the shore of Lake Rosalie.

The proposal meets the Florida Forever criteria to be submitted as a boundary amendment. The parcels total less than 1,000 acres, have a tax assessed value of less than \$2 million, and are less than 10% of the size of the overall project to which it is being proposed for addition. The proposal area should be designated as essential.

Project History:

The Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem project in Highlands, Lake, Osceola, and Polk counties was approved by the Land Acquisition Advisory Council in 1991 and added to the CARL priority list. The project aims to conserve Florida's ancient scrub ecosystem, pine flatwoods, seepage slopes, hammocks, and sandhills. The project protects habitat for many rare and endemic species that live exclusively in the Florida scrub ecosystem and provides opportunities for public resource-based recreation.

The Lakes Wales Ridge Ecosystem project includes 67,167 acres with 29,567 acres remaining and is ranked second in the Critical Natural Lands category on the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List. The tax assessed value of the remaining acres to be acquired in this project per property appraiser information (2019) is \$83,602,401.

FNAI Review:

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), 100% of the Armington Ranch property contributes to Ecological Greenways, and the property makes a significant contribution to FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities (95%), Surface Water Protection (96%), and Aquifer Recharge (98%).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

Project	DHR	FFS	Lynetta Griner	FWC	Bill Palmer	Elva Peppers	DEP	Selected
Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem: Armington Ranch								



To: Deborah Burr, DEP/OES
From: Geoffrey R. Parks, FNAI
Date: May 26, 2021
Subject: Proposed boundary modification (addition) to Florida Forever BOT Project:–
Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem: Armington Ranch, Polk County

The major goal of the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Project is to protect the best remaining tracts of the mosaic of scrub, flatwoods, wetlands, and lakes that once covered the Lake Wales Ridge, which extends from near Orlando almost to Lake Okeechobee. In particular, the unique scrub is inhabited by many species found nowhere else, many of which are threatened from habitat loss and fragmentation. Protection of the Armington Ranch is intended to meet these goals.

The proposed addition is a 913-acre property on the Lake Wales Ridge in Polk County that is under a single ownership, and proposed for less-than-fee acquisition. The property spans a remarkable range of elevation, dropping over 40 feet from the west to its eastern boundary. Along that gradient are a several natural communities and altered land cover types. Pasture and other altered conditions cover the majority of the site, but several intact or nearly-intact natural communities are present. Most notable are three patches of scrub. Mesic and possibly wet flatwoods occur in two patches; although these do not appear to be managed with frequent fire, aerial photos indicate that fire is at least occasional.

The property drains from west to east, to Lake Rosalie. Forested wetlands surround a small drainage in the north of the site, border the lake, and fringe Walk-In-Water Creek for about a half mile. The property's 1.4 miles of shoreline represents approximately a third of the Lake Rosalie's remaining unprotected shore. Several depression marshes and a dome swamp, most altered by ditching, are surrounded by pasture.

The property abuts Lake Wales Ridge State Forest and Walk-in-Water Creek North to the south, and the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem BOT Project to the southwest. The Catfish Creek Florida Forever BOT project is a quarter mile to the north. This property has the potential to be part of a corridor of protected scrub and other habitats connecting existing conservation areas to the north and south.

The FNAI database documents two rare species on site – wood stork (*Mycteria americana*, G4S2, T, FT; rookery active for more than 10 years, with 5 nests in 2010) and bald eagle (*Haliaeetus erythrocephalus*, G5S3, N, N). FNAI also considers Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*, G5T4/S4, N, N) to be documented, as the property is within a zone where the species is mapped by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as "common". The applicant lists additional

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rare species: Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma caerulescens* G2S2, T, FT), Florida sand skink (*Plestiodon reynoldsi* G3S3, T, FT), Britton's beargrass (*Nolina brittoniana*, G3S3, E, E), and cutthroatgrass (*Coleataenia abscissa*; G3S3, N, E).

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) at the end of this memo is based on the Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment developed by FNAI. The data used in that analysis represent a standardized, statewide perspective of natural community distributions based primarily on data from the Cooperative Land Cover Map. The proposed addition contributes substantially to protection of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities, Ecological Greenways, Surface Water Protection, Natural Floodplain Function, Aquifer Recharge, and Sustainable Forestry.

Tracking Florida's Biodiversity

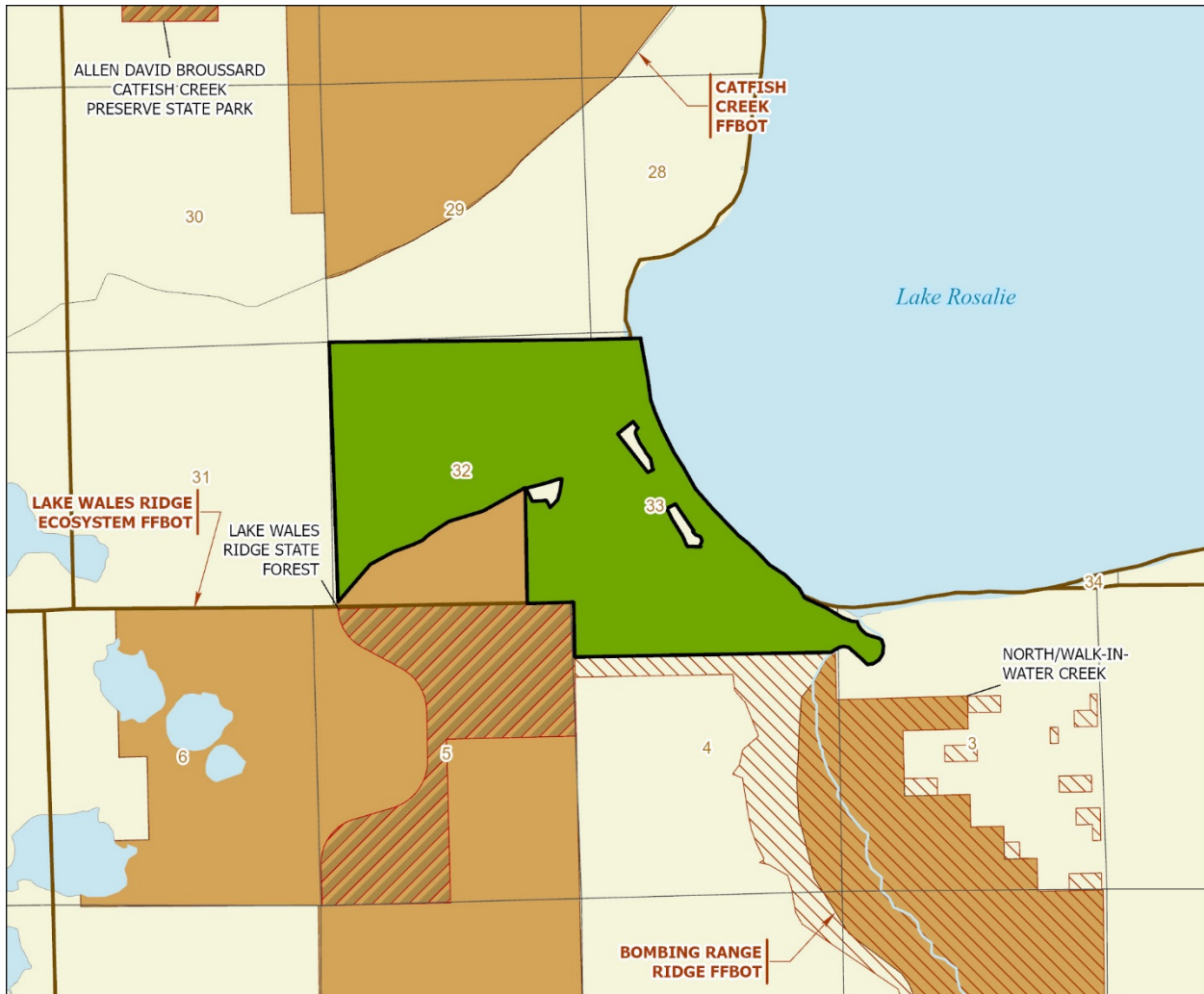
Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Addition (Armington Ranch): Florida Forever Measure Evaluation 20210506

GIS ACRES = 913

MEASURES	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	506	55%
Priority 3	10	1%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	96	10%
Total Acres	612	67%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	17	2%
Priority 2	30	3%
Priority 3	29	3%
Priority 4	608	67%
Priority 5	187	20%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	871	95%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	914	100%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	914	100%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	46	5%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	96	10%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	142	16%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	1	
G5	1	
Total	2	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	7	< 1%
Priority 2	9	< 1%
Priority 3	26	3%
Priority 4	243	27%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	284	31%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	263	29%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	606	66%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	5	< 1%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	874	96%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	7	< 1%
Priority 2	11	1%
Priority 3	27	3%
Priority 4	57	6%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	102	11%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	60	7%
Priority 3	489	53%
Priority 4	267	29%
Priority 5	69	8%
Priority 6	11	1%
Total Acres	896	98%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
<small>(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)</small>		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	0 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	45	5%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands	670	73%
Total Acres	715	78%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	23	3%

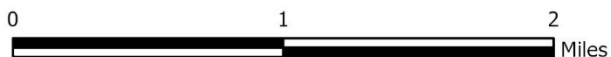
^aAcres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.



LAKE WALES RIDGE ECOSYSTEM PROPOSED ADDITION (ARMINGTON RANCH)

POLK COUNTY

- Proposed Florida Forever BOT Project Addition
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- State Owned Lands
- Other Conservation Lands



MAY 2021

Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Proposed Addition (Armington Ranch)

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSED ADDITION AS OF MAY 2021



Map Produced by: N. Pasco, May 2021

Background: World Imagery Resolution = 0.3 meter



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	Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
	Florida Forever BOT Projects
	Existing State Conservation Lands
	Existing Local Conservation Lands

