# Florida's First Magnitude Springs

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Bay, Citrus, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Jackson, Lafayette, Leon, Levy, Madison, Marion, Suwannee, Wakulla, Walton and Washington Counties

Year Added to Priority List	1991
Project Acres	18,206
Acquired Acres	11,103
Cost of Acquired Acres	\$91,794,252
Remaining Project Acres	7,103
2021 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres	\$36,975,873

## **Purpose for State Acquisition**

The Florida's First Magnitude Springs project will protect large springs of clear, continuously flowing water that are among Florida's most famous and important natural and recreational resources. The cavernous, water-filled rock of the Floridan Aquifer supplies the largest springs. By preserving land around the springs, this project will aid in the protection of springs, karst windows and the Floridan Aquifer from the effects of commercial, residential and agricultural runoff; clearcutting and mining; and unsupervised recreation. This project will ensure that Floridians and visitors from all over the world will be able to enjoy Florida springs for years to come.

### **General Description**

The thick, water-filled limestone underlying Florida has created more large springs (including river rises and karst windows) than any other state or country. Those discharging an average of 100 cubic feet of water per second are called first-magnitude springs. The 33 recognized first-magnitude springs in Florida are scattered in the northern peninsula and the eastern panhandle, where the limestone of the Floridan Aquifer arches close to the surface. Each day, these 33 springs send out much more water than is used for drinking water by all the people in the state. The springs, with generally clear, continuously flowing waters, are among Florida's most important natural resources and are famous tourist attractions. The tracts harbor at least seven Florida Natural Areas Inventory-listed plants and 18 Florida Natural Areas Inventory-listed animals. The Weeki Wachee tract includes one of the best remaining scrubs on Florida's West Coast. Several archaeological or historic sites are also known from these springs, with some remains dating to over 2,000 years ago. All these springs are vulnerable to development and unsupervised use.



### **FNAI Element Occurrence Summary**

FNAI Elements	<u>Score</u>
Reticulated flatwoods salamander	G2/S1
Florida manatee	G2G3T2/S2S3
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida mouse	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Suwannee moccasinshell	G1/S1
Withlacoochee tiny sand-loving scarab	G1/S1
Woodville karst cave crayfish	G1/S1
ciliate-leaf tickseed	G1G2/S1
Jackson County cave amphipod	G1G2/S1
Dougherty plain cave amphipod	G1G2/S1
Gulf moccasinshell	G2/S1

### **Public Use**

The project sites are designated for use as state parks, geological sites and wildlife and environmental areas with high recreational potential for swimming, canoeing, camping and nature appreciation.

### **Acquisition Planning**

### 1990

On December 7, 1990, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council added the Florida's First Magnitude Springs – Phase I project to the Conservation and Recreational Lands Priority List. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by the Department of Environmental Regulation, consisted of approximately 2,907 acres, 36 landowners, 136 parcels and a taxable value of \$5,718,493.

In 1990, five springs made up the project: Falmouth Spring (Suwannee County, 75 acres, one parcel, one landowner, \$45,000 taxable value); Fanning Springs (Levy County, 525 acres, 98 parcels, 17 landowners, \$1,187,610 taxable value); Gainer Springs (Bay County, 1,258 acres, 19 parcels, seven landowners, \$3,256,739 taxable value); River Sink Spring (Wakulla County, 105 acres, four parcels, four landowners, \$64,956 taxable value); and St. Marks Springs (Leon County, 890 acres, 19 parcels, six landowners, \$1,164,188 taxable value).

According to the 1990 Project Design document, the Division of Recreation and Parks will manage St. Marks Springs. The U.S. Forest Service will manage River Sink Spring. DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails, the Division of Recreation and Parks and Suwannee River Water Management District will manage Fanning Springs. A lead manager has not been determined for Falmouth Springs. The lead manager is still unclear for Gainer Springs; however, the Northwest Florida Water Management District and Bay County both expressed an interest. A portion of the Fanning Springs sites have been acquired. The Northwest Florida Water Management District has acquired 214 acres of the Gainer Springs sites.

### 1991

On June 28, 1991, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 218-acre addition to the Falmouth Springs site, located in Suwannee County, within the project boundary. It was sponsored by the





landowner, Nemours Foundation, who already has acreage within the current boundary and is not willing to sell only a portion of the tract. The taxable value of the addition is \$129,600. The Suwannee River Water Management District will manage if acquired.

### 1992

On December 10, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved Phase II that added three springs, 1,880 acres with a taxable value of \$5,180,452. This addition consisted of Jackson Blue Springs (Jackson County, 348 acres, three parcels, two landowners, \$256,556 taxable value); Troy Spring (Lafayette County, 265 acres, six parcels, two landowners, \$261,897 taxable value); and Weeki Wachee Springs (Hernando County, 1,267 acres, 59 parcels, 24 landowners, \$4,661,999 taxable value). The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will manage the Weeki Wachee Springs sites. The Division of Recreation and Parks will manage the Troy Spring site. Jackson County will manage the Jackson Blue Springs sites. Portions of Troy Spring, Weeki Wachee Springs and Jackson Blue Springs sites have been acquired.

On December 10, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council also approved a fee-simple, 1,635-acre addition (Gainer Springs Expansion) and combined it with the Gainer Springs site. Most of the addition is owned by Hunt Petroleum/Rosewood Timber Co. and St. Joe Paper. There are also several small ownerships. The estimated taxable value is \$3,000,000. Phase I was combined with the new Florida's First Magnitude Springs Phase II. The springs are in Bay and Washington counties. The Northwest Florida Water Management District will manage the 214-acre Harder tract that it acquired.

### 1995

On October 30, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a fee-simple, 20-acre addition (Jackson Blue Springs) to the project boundary in Jackson County. It was sponsored by the two landowners, Carolyn D. Huff and Wayne Mixon, located along Spring Run of Merritt's Mill Pond in Jackson County, and has a taxable value of \$258,790. Jackson County will manage the addition. Both properties were acquired in 1997.

### 1998

On December 3, 1998, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council transferred the St. Marks Springs, River Sink Spring, Fanning Springs and Gainer Springs sites to the Negotiation Impasse group.

### 1999

On July 29, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council approved a fee-simple, 65-acre addition (Madison Blue Springs) in Madison County to the project, sponsored by the landowners' representative. It contains 45 parcels, 22 landowners and a taxable value of \$604,000. The addition was designated essential and added to the Priority portion of the project. Madison County will manage the addition, of which approximately 44 acres have been acquired.

On December 9, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council removed land owned by The St. Joe Company (740 acres) from the project and placed it in the St. Joe Timberland Conservation and Recreational Lands project.





### 2000

On August 22, 2000, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 40-acre addition (Cypress Spring) in Washington County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by Conservation Properties for the landowner, Harold Vickers, and had a taxable value of \$131,400. Mr. Vickers was willing to manage it if acquired; however, the property was sold to a third party in 2002.

### 2003

On April 18, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 200-acre addition (Morrison Springs) in Walton County to the project boundary with a taxable value of \$63,880. The addition was sponsored by Conservation Properties, Inc. and Walton County will manage the site. Also on April 18, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 4,552-acre addition (Silver Springs Addition) north of Silver Springs in Marion County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by the Silver Springs Basin Working Group, consisting of one landowner, Avatar Properties Inc., and had a taxable value of \$3,406,945. The Florida Forest Service will manage this if acquired.

On August 15, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 172-acre addition (Lafayette Blue Springs) in Lafayette County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by Conservation Properties, consisting of one landowner, Union Land and Timber Corp., nine parcels and a taxable value of \$97,000. Lafayette County will manage it if acquired.

On October 17, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 365-acre addition (Silver Springs Addition No. 2) in Marion County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by the Silver Springs Basin Working Group and the Marion County Audubon, Inc., consisted of one landowner, Seldin, two parcels and a taxable value of \$2,889,223. Marion County will manage the site. In 2005, 330 acres were acquired.

On December 5, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 1,717-acre addition (Jackson Blue Springs) in Jackson County to the project boundary. The addition, sponsored by Conservation Properties, consisted of 11 parcels, five landowners (Edinburgh Investment Corp; AJ Green; Howard Muncaster Partnership; LH Alford Farms Inc.; and Doyle Green), and a taxable value of \$303,367. Jackson County will manage it if acquired.

### 2004

On October 15, 2004, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 5-acre addition (Church Sink) in Leon County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by the landowner, J. Lee Vause Trust, and consisted of one parcel, and a taxable value of \$47,700. Leon County will manage if acquired.

### 2006

On April 17, 2006, the Northwest Florida Water Management District established the Patronis conservation easement (882 acres), of which approximately 27.5 acres are within the project boundary.

On October 13, 2006, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple 305-acre addition (Hardee Spring) to the boundary in Hamilton County. The addition was sponsored by Harold Hardee and





involved one parcel with a taxable value of \$57,001. The Florida Forest Service would manage the site as part of the Twin Rivers State Forest if acquired. In July 2007, the BOT acquired 4,471 acres of the Avatar property in Marion County.

### 2009

On February 25, 2009, the BOT acquired 54.74 acres from the Rakestraw family in the St. Marks Site.

### 2010

On January 6, 2010, the Florida Forest Service purchased approximately 1 acre for \$16,065 from Kaiser/The Nature Conservancy in the Indian Lake State Forest. The Florida Forest Service will manage the purchase.

On May 11, 2010, the Florida Forest Service purchased 0.12 acres for \$2,550. The Florida Forest Service will manage the purchase.

In July 2010, the Florida Forest Service purchased two parcels (0.23 acres for \$5,100 and 0.12 acres for \$2,800) and will manage both.

On November 15, 2011, the Florida Forest Service purchased 0.23 acres in Indian Lake State Forest (Potter - \$5,100) and will manage the purchase.

In October 2010, the Florida Forest Service purchased five parcels (Silver Spring Addition - Bloom, Dinkins, Dupras, Hanson and Szymialis ownerships) making 0.5 acres for a combined \$10,200 and will manage all.

In November 2010, the Florida Forest Service purchased two parcels (Silver Spring Addition - Stovall, Landry) or 0.29 acres for \$6,375 and will manage these.

### 2011

On May 2, 2011, the Florida Forest Service purchased and will manage 0.23 acres (Jean and Giselle Raymond - \$12,000).

On August 3, 2011, the Felburn Foundation donated 2.42 acres in Silver Springs (valued at \$100,000) for the Florida Forest Service to manage.

On September 16, 2011, the Division of Recreation and Parks purchased to manage 55.73 acres (Gerrell Plantation, Inc. - \$457,000), as an addition to Natural Bridge Historic State Park.

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

### 2012

On April 20, 2012, the Acquisition and Restoration Council added 63.4 acres to the project that had been authorized for sale from the U.S. Forest Service.

### 2013

On February 15, 2013, the Acquisition and Restoration Council changed the design of the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project in Madison County to add the 608-acre Damascus Peanut Tract, then found that conveying the tract to the Suwannee River Water Management District in exchange for the 670-acre





Ellaville tract would make a greater conservation value and that the Damascus Peanut Tract was no longer needed for conservation by the BOT.

### 2014

In April 2014, the Acquisition and Restoration Council agreed to add the 360-acre Brunson Landing Tract on Holmes Creek, north of Vernon, to the project boundary to protect water resources from development. It provides over 2,200 feet of frontage along Homes Creek and is adjacent to Northwest Florida Water Management District land. It would also be managed by the Northwest Florida Water Management District if acquired.

### 2015

On June 19, 2015, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the 405-acre Blue Springs Park on the Santa Fe River in Gilchrist County to the Florida's First Magnitude Springs. The park has a just value of \$1,361,547 and has a second-magnitude spring and two smaller springs. Blue Springs was then added by the Acquisition and Restoration Council to the boundary of the existing Florida's First Magnitude Springs project. The 470-acre Silver Springs Sandhill on the edge of the city of Ocala was approved by the Acquisition and Restoration Council for fee-simple acquisition and combined with the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project.

### 2017

On October 2, 2017, the state purchased 465 acres of the Sandhill tract to be managed by Marion County as part of the Coehadjoe Park.

On October 6, 2017, DEP closed on 399 acres of Blue Springs Park in Gilchrist County.

On October 20, 2017, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the Springs Coast Research Station as a Florida Forever project. The project had an estimated tax value of \$643,154. This 28-acre parcel in southwest Citrus County is north of the town of Chassahowitzka. It shares northern and western boundaries with the Chassahowitzka River and Coastal Swamps (managed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District). The parcel is at the edge of Crab Creek, which is the site of Crab Spring, part of the Chassahowitzka first magnitude spring group. The facilities on the property have been well maintained, and the campus layout and functions of the residence and satellite buildings would make it suitable as a research center for springs systems and habitats. The project was proposed by Wildlands Conservation, a nonprofit conservation group based in Tampa, who would manage the property as a springs research campus in coordination with several educational institutions, as well as protecting the surrounding public lands and underwater acreage.

On December 14, 2017, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the 28-acre Springs Coast Research Station Florida Forever project boundary to that of the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project.

In 2017, a total of 863.45 acres in this project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.





### 2018

On May 23, 2018, the Northwest Florida Water Management District established the Hodson conservation easement (228.9 acres), of which approximately 171.9 acres are within the project boundary.

On June 15, 2018, Acquisition and Restoration Council members voted to add 556 acres, the Santa Fe Springs Tract that is on the north side of the Santa Fe River in Columbia County, to the project. The Florida Forest Service will manage this site through the Florida Forest Service's Suwannee Forestry Center if acquired; however, it may be managed as a standalone forest property. The Florida Forest Service estimates the budget needs for the one year of interim management to require a total of \$284,348 from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (one full-time employee at \$44,439, expenses of \$71,935 and Operating Capital Outlay of \$167,974).

### 2020

On October 9, 2020, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the addition of 37.6 acres that includes Mud Spring in Hernando County to the project boundary.

### 2022

On April 8, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the addition of five parcels totaling approximately 486 acres in Levy County with a tax assessed value of \$1,745,229 (Manatee Springs Addition).

On October 14, 2022, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the addition of 742 acres to the project boundary. This addition was located along the Suwannee River in Suwannee and Lafayette counties, contained multiple springs and had a combined tax assessed value of \$1,987,808.

### Coordination

Hernando County has limited acquisition funds but is very supportive of state acquisition efforts. The Northwest Florida Water Management District has acquired the 214-acre Harder tract in Gainer Springs.

### Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the project are to preserve land around springs, karst windows and springs to aid in the protection of the Floridan Aquifer from the effects of commercial, residential and agricultural runoff; clearcutting and mining; and unsupervised recreation.

### Manager(s)

Mud Spring (Hernando County); Jackson Blue Springs (Jackson County); Church Sink (Leon County); Silver Springs Sandhill (Marion County); Morrison Spring (Walton County); Blue Springs Park, St. Marks Springs, Madison Blue Springs, Troy Spring, Lafayette Blue Springs, Weeki Wachee Springs and Horn Spring (Division of Recreation and Parks); Hardee Spring (Florida Forest Service); River Sink Spring (U.S. Forest Service); Brunson Landing and Cypress Spring (leased from owner, managed by the Northwest Florida Water Management District); Damascus Peanut Tract and Falmouth Spring (Northwest Florida Water Management District); Gainer Springs, Fanning Springs (Division of Recreation and Parks/Northwest Florida Water Management District); and Springs Coast Research (Wildlands Conservation).





### **Management Prospectus**

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

Blue Spring has the diversity of resources and recreational opportunities to qualify as a state park. The location of the Weeki Wachee project adjacent to the Chassahowitzka Wildlife and Environmental Area, as well as its sensitive natural resources, qualifies it as a wildlife and environmental area. River Sink Spring is a first-magnitude karst window. This qualified it as a state geological site. St. Marks, Fanning, Troy, Falmouth and Gainer Springs have the diversity of resources and recreational opportunities to qualify as a state park.

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

River Sink and Blue Spring are moderate-need tracts, requiring more than basic resource management and protection. Gainer Springs is a high-need management area including public recreational use and development compatible with resource management. The Florida Forest Service would manage the Santa Fe Spring parcel for Operation Outdoor Freedom Hunts.

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

Jackson County Blue Springs is now being used by the public and Jackson County has no plans to curtail activities. The county would continue to open the swim area in season and maintain year-round access for boating, fishing and nature appreciation. The smaller second spring may need restrictions to ensure public safety and preservation of the limestone bluffs. A lifeguard will be on duty while the swimming area is open. Access will be controlled primarily by fences. River Sink Spring would immediately fall under the National Forests in Florida's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Within the first few years after acquisition, management activities would focus on site security, resource inventory, removal of existing trash and any necessary prescribed fire management. In the first year after Gainer Springs is acquired, the Division of Recreation and Parks will concentrate on site security, natural and cultural resource protection, and the development of a plan for long-term public use and resource management.

### **Revenue-generating Potential**

The Blue Springs swim area generated \$21,946 in revenue in fiscal year 1992-93 and \$13,045 in fiscal year 1993-94. The Division of Recreation and Parks expects Gainer Springs to generate no significant revenue initially. The amount of any revenue generated would depend on the nature and extent of public use and facilities. As facilities are developed, River Sink Spring may become a national recreational fee area. Fees collected from use of this area would be activities of the Federal Government. It is estimated that the area will receive more than 5,000 visits annually once it is developed.

### **Cooperators in Management Activities**

Jackson County expects the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to cooperate in managing wildlife on the Blue Spring project area. Other appropriate agencies may wish to become involved in the project. As funds become available and subject to public approval, the U.S. Forest Service may enter into a cooperative agreement to manage the property.





# **Management Cost Summary**

DRP Startup Recurring Startup Recurring

Source of FundsFederal Federal CARL CARL

Salary \$0 \$5,000 \$22,167 \$22,167

OPS \$0 \$0 \$7,280 \$7,280

Expense \$3,000 \$5,000 \$5,424 \$5,424

OCO \$0 \$0 \$6,978 \$6,978

FCO \$0 \$0 \$0 \$0

TOTAL \$3,000 \$10,000 \$41,849 \$41,849

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



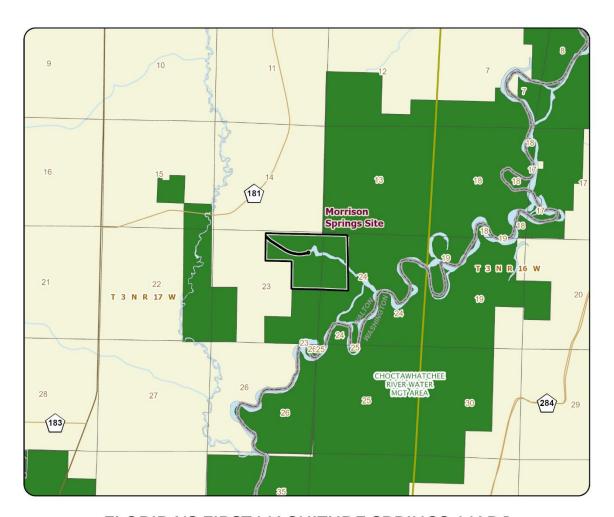
### FLORIDA'S FIRST MAGNITUDE SPRINGS: OVERVIEW

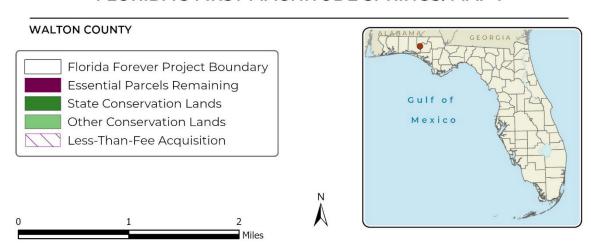
BAY, CITRUS, COLUMBIA, GILCHRIST, HAMILTON, HERNANDO, JACKSON, LAFAYETTE, LAKE, LEON, LEVY, MADISON, MARION, SUWANNEE, WAKULLA, WALTON, AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES

- ☐ Map 1 Morrison Springs Site ☐ Map 2 Brunson Landing Tract Site
- ☐ Map 2 Cypress Spring Site ☐ Map 3 Gainer Springs Site
- ☐ Map 4 Jackson Blue Springs Site
- ☐ Map 5 River Sink Spring Site
- Map 6 Church Sink Site
  Map 7 St. Marks Springs Site
- ☐ Map 8 Hardee Spring Site ☐ Map 9 Madison Blue Springs Site
- ☐ Map 10 Damascus Peanut Tract Site ☐ Map 10 Falmouth Spring Site
- ☐ Map 11 Lafayette Blue Springs Site ☐ Map 12 Suwannee Springs Site
- ☐ Map 13 Troy Spring Site ☐ Map 14 Blue Springs Park Site
- ☐ Map 14 Santa Fe Springs Site ☐ Map 15 Fanning Springs Site
- ☐ Map 15 Manatee Springs Site ☐ Map 16 Silver Springs Site
- ☐ Map 17 Bugg Spring Site
- ☐ Map 18 Springs Coast Research Station Site ☐ Map 19 Mud Spring Site ☐ Map 19 Weekiwachee Springs Site

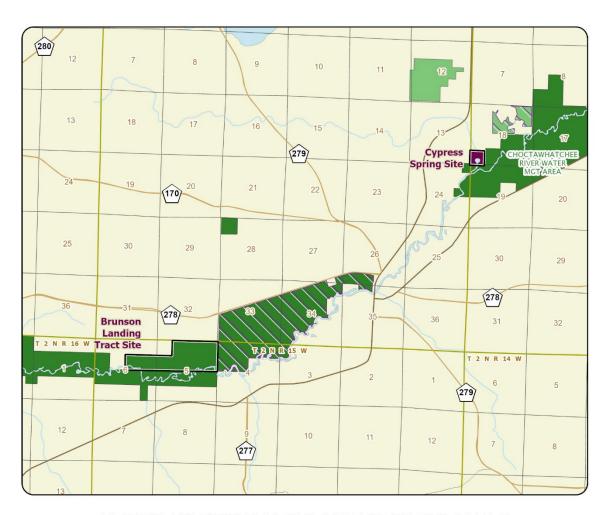


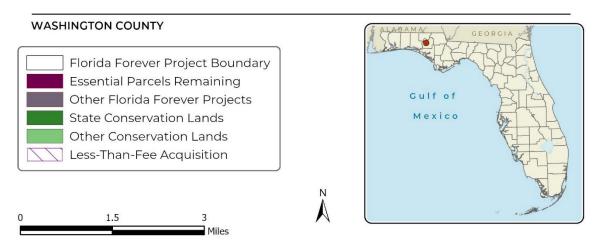


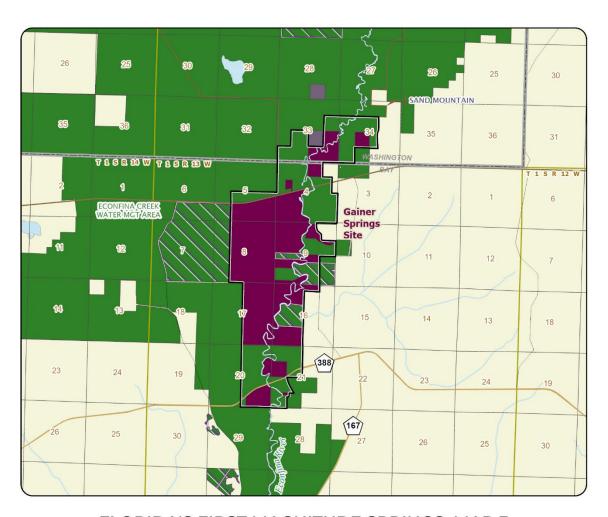


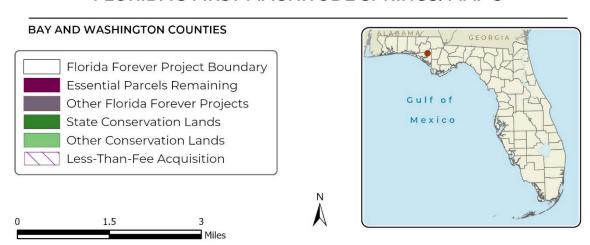


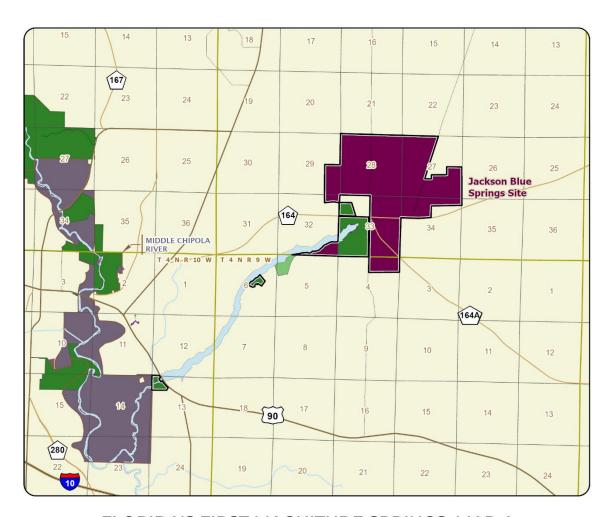


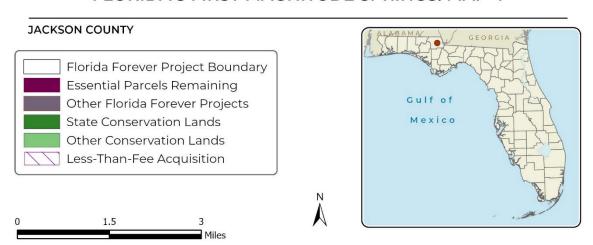


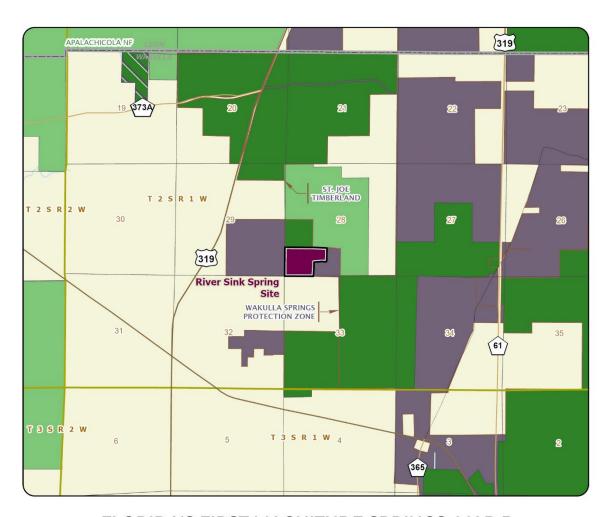






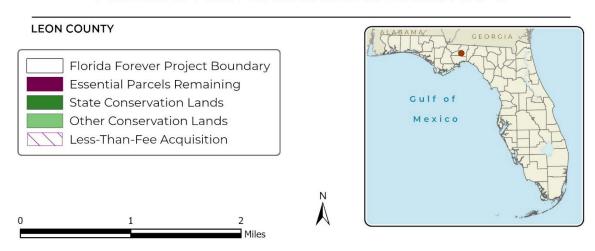






# WAKULLA COUNTY Florida Forever Project Boundary Essential Parcels Remaining Other Florida Forever Projects State Conservation Lands Other Conservation Lands Less-Than-Fee Acquisition

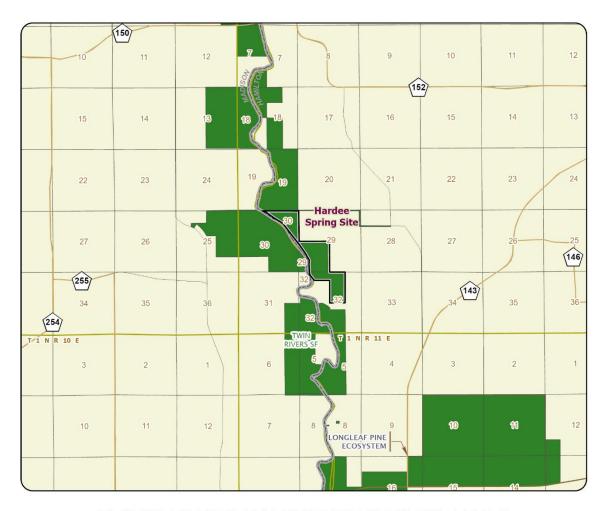


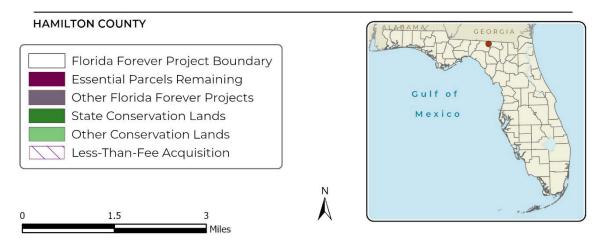




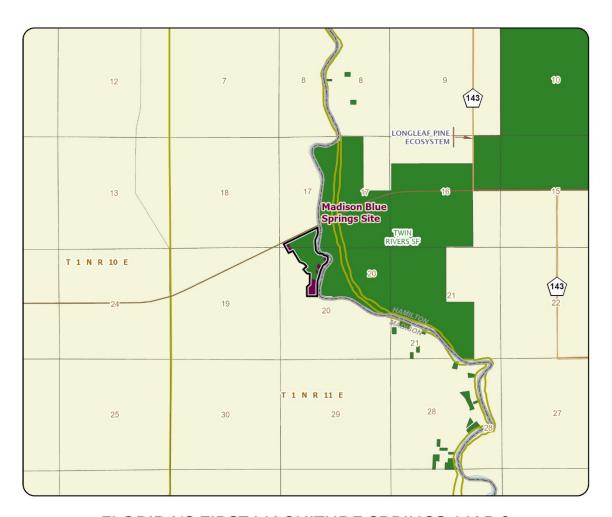
# Florida Forever Project Boundary Essential Parcels Remaining Other Florida Forever Projects State Conservation Lands Other Conservation Lands Less-Than-Fee Acquisition State Aquatic Preserve

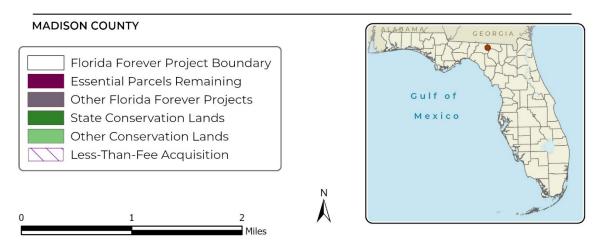




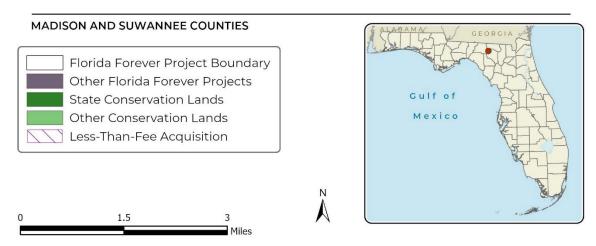


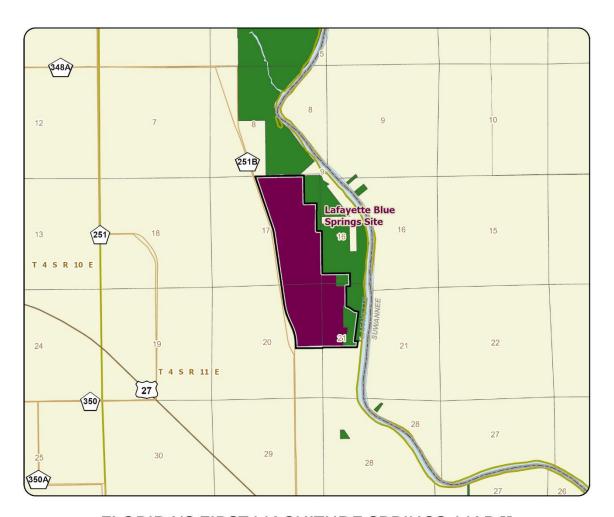
Page 18 of 29

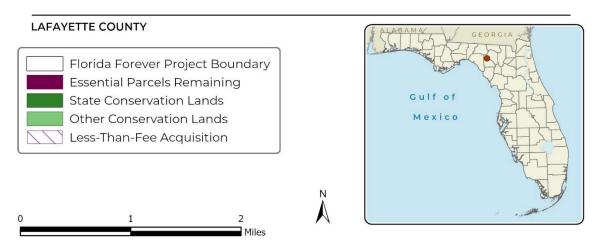


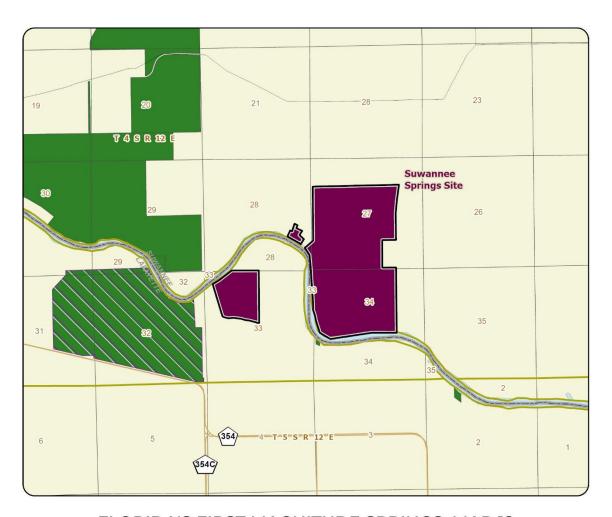




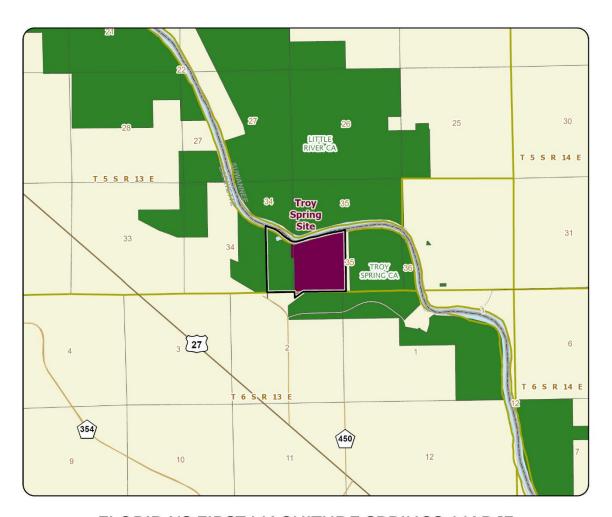


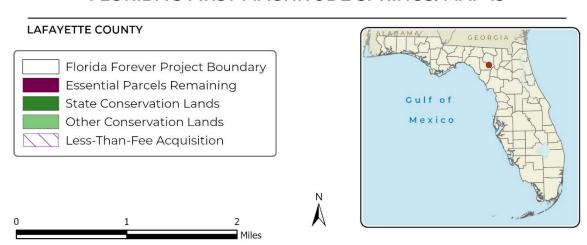


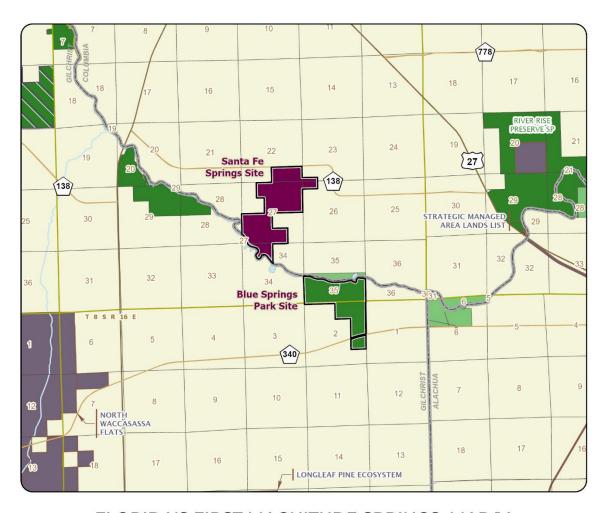




# LAFAYETTE AND SUWANNEE COUNTIES Florida Forever Project Boundary Essential Parcels Remaining State Conservation Lands Other Conservation Lands Less-Than-Fee Acquisition







# COLUMBIA AND GILCHRIST COUNTIES Florida Forever Project Boundary Essential Parcels Remaining Other Florida Forever Projects State Conservation Lands Other Conservation Lands Less-Than-Fee Acquisition

