

# Old Town Creek Watershed

Less-Than-Fee

Hardee and Polk Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2001
<i>Project Acres</i>	8,837
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	6,546
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$9,790,000
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	2,291
<i>2021 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$9,019,734

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Old Town Creek Watershed project will support the conservation of the natural habitats and improved/working landscapes that constitute the Old Town Watershed. A portion of the project also includes a portion of Lake Wales Ridge, a physiographic region of the state that is rich in rare and imperiled species.

## General Description

The project is in south-central Florida and is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition. However, the Crews Ranch owner has indicated a willingness to consider a fee sale of scrub habitat in the north part of the project. This area is adjacent to The Nature Conservancy's Saddle Blanket Lake Preserve, which allows public visitation. If this area was managed as an extension of that preserve, recreational opportunities could be made more readily available.

The site supports many natural communities which are characteristic of the region, including scrub. Although a large percentage of the former flatwoods have been converted to improved pasture, they remain important for several species in the region.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>hartwrightia</i>	G2/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>pygmy fringe tree</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Florida scrub lizard	G2G3/S2S3
<i>cutthroatgrass</i>	G3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Roseate spoonbill	G5/S2
Southeastern American kestrel	G5T4/S3

**Public Use**

Old Town Creek Watershed is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access.

**Acquisition Planning**

**2001**

On April 6, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council placed this project on the Florida Forever Priority List. The essential parcels are contained within Crews Ranch. Mallory Ranch (two noncontiguous tracts) is the other ownership within this project boundary. The estimated tax value was \$788,200.

**2011**

On December 9, 2011, the Acquisition and Restoration Council placed this project in the Less-than-Fee category of projects.

**2017**

On December 19, 2017, the BOT closed on the over 6,000-acre Crews Ranch conservation easement within the project.

**2022**

On April 8, 2022, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the 1,547-acre Charlie Creek project proposal and combined it with the Old Town Creek Watershed project.

**Coordination**

This project has been submitted to the Southwest Florida Water Management District for a Save Our Rivers proposal. The Southwest Florida Water Management District is a potential acquisition partner.

**Management Policy Statement**

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Old Town Creek Watershed would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.





### **Manager(s)**

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Old Town Creek Watershed would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated by the Division of State Lands.

### **Management Prospectus**

The Division of State Lands will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while the management will be conducted by the property owner.

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

This project consists of a matrix of wetland and upland habitats, including a globally-imperiled natural community that supports a variety of common and rare plant and animal species and is of a size to qualify as a wildlife management area.

Protecting the watershed and natural habitats surrounding Old Town Creek (which feeds into Charlie Creek and, eventually, the Peace River) from conversion to more intensive uses will help protect the region's water quality.

The ranches in this region contain large areas of natural lands that should be protected if an ecological connection between the Big Cypress and the Osceola National Forest/Okefenokee Swamp is to be achieved.

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

This less-than-fee project includes lands requiring monitoring only. Crews Ranch is a working cattle ranch that is and will continue to be managed by the private landowner. The Nature Conservancy and other land management agencies will provide management advice and guidance to the landowner as necessary to maintain and enhance resource management.

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

During the first year after acquisition, management activities will focus on securing and posting the property and developing a management plan. Existing management activities will continue throughout the management planning process. The property owner will develop a management plan which will include fire management, exotic control and restoration components. The tract's natural resources, threatened/endangered plants and animals, and any archaeological and cultural sites will be inventoried and mapped to provide the basis for the management plan. Protection and security of infrastructure and the property will be the responsibility of the private landowner.

### **Revenue-generating Potential**

No revenue will be generated from this easement.

### **Cooperators in Management Activities**

No cooperators are recommended for this site. However, consultation with the Southwest Florida Water Management District, The Nature Conservancy and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission could be helpful to the landowner.



