

# Wolfe Creek Forest

Critical Natural Lands

Santa Rosa County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2010
<i>Project Acres</i>	14,072
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	10,576
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$16,706,478
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	3,496
<i>2021 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$4,914,853

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Wolfe Creek Forest project will protect numerous seepages and blackwater stream systems that are contiguous with the Blackwater River State Forest and other conservation lands. The project will conserve habitat for wildlife species such as the Florida black bear, little blue heron and southeastern weasel. The stream systems within this project support numerous rare aquatic species and are considered a focal habitat for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The project will provide the public with resource-based recreational opportunities and support the continuation of sustainably managed silviculture practices. Twelve archaeological sites, two of which are historic and 10 of which are prehistoric, are within the project.

## General Description

Wolfe Creek Forest is a fee simple project in central Santa Rosa County, between Blackwater River State Forest to the east and Whiting Field Naval Air Station to the southwest. This project shares 5.7 miles of its southern boundary with two disjunct tracts of the state forest, forming a connection between all three tracts. Within it runs 35 miles of streams that feed into Big Coldwater Creek and Big Juniper Creek, two major tributaries of the Blackwater River.

Most of the site (82 percent) is intensively managed pine plantation within areas that historically supported upland pine forest and sandhills. The remainder of the site can be readily classified as natural communities. The most prominent and in the best condition are wetlands that include seepage and blackwater streams, associated bottomland forest, floodplain swamp and baygall. A few dome swamps occur with the plantations. Upland natural communities include a few small areas of mesic flatwoods and mesic hammock. The highest elevations (220 feet above mean sea level) occur in the northernmost and easternmost portions of the project. The lowest elevations (around 30 feet above sea level) are in the Coldwater Creek floodplain in the western part of the proposal. From County Road 191, the terrain generally slopes downward toward Big Juniper Creek. West of the road, the terrain slopes downward in a southwesterly direction toward Coldwater Creek.



The project is within a large gap in conservation lands between Whiting Field, outparcels of Blackwater River State Forest and the main tract of the state forest. According to the Florida Master Site File, the Wolfe Creek Forest tract holds 12 archaeological sites (two are historic and 10 are prehistoric); one of those sites is Wolfe Creek Mill.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Westfall's clubtail	G2/S2
<i>small-flowered meadowbeauty</i>	G2G3/S2
<i>West Florida cowlily</i>	G5T2T3/S2
<i>hairy-peduncled beaksedge</i>	G3/S3
<i>Panhandle lily</i>	G3/S3
Alligator snapping turtle	G3/S3
Southeastern weasel	G5T4/S3?
Spiny softshell	G5/S3
Little blue heron	G5/S4

**Public Use**

The project has potential for a variety of forest-related recreational activities including canoeing, bird watching, hunting, hiking, horseback riding, biking, environmental education and photography. Once the project area is acquired and assigned to the Florida Forest Service, public access will be immediately provided for low-intensity recreation activities such as hiking, hunting and fishing.

**Acquisition Planning**

**2010**

On June 11, 2010, the Acquisition and Restoration Council added the Wolfe Creek Forest project to the Critical Natural Lands category. After a boundary change in 2010, the project had a combined estimated tax value of \$14,080,729.

**2016**

On November 3, 2016, DEP purchased a 626-acre restrictive easement to protect flight operations at nearby Whiting Field. The Florida Forest Service will manage the easement to restore and maintain native ecosystems.

**2021**

In 2021, DEP purchased 1,789.77 acres fee simple from The Trust for Public Land to be managed by the Florida Forest Service as an addition to Blackwater River State Forest.

In 2021, DEP also acquired 1,699.57 acres fee simple via donation.

On December 10, 2021, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved an addition of 757 acres in Santa Rosa County to the project boundary.





## **2022**

On October 14, 2022, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a boundary amendment proposed by The Trust for Public Land which added 3,173 acres to the project.

DEP completed two fee acquisitions totaling 4,352.68 acres that will be managed as part of Blackwater River State Forest.

### **Coordination**

The Florida Forest Service is partnering with The Trust for Public Land and the U.S. Forest Service to acquire portions of this project through the U.S. Forest Legacy Program. The U.S. Department of Defense has been interested in partnering with the state for nearby lands.

### **Management Policy Statement**

The primary land management goals are restoration, maintenance and protection in perpetuity of all native ecosystems; integration of compatible human uses; and insurance of long-term viability of populations and species considered rare or imperiled.

### **Manager(s)**

The Florida Forest Service is recommended as manager of the project.

### **Management Prospectus**

#### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The tract is dominated by silviculture, but many of the plantations have retained some of the understory including wiregrass, bluestem grass, and gallberry and yaupon holly. With thinning, prescribed fire and sustainable forestry management practices, the project could be quickly transformed from an area managed for silviculture to an area managed for its ecological and recreational benefits. With the removal of off-site pine species, replanting of longleaf pines, introduction of prescribed fire and sustainable forestry management practices, this project could be restored to a more natural state. The project's size and diversity make it desirable for use and management as a state forest.

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

Much of the project's upland pine and sandhill areas have been altered by silvicultural operations and will require restoration efforts. Areas where timber species are off-site species will necessitate removal as well as the restoration of native ground covers and canopy. Biotic surveys would be important to accomplish during the early part of plan development and implementation due to rare or imperiled species expected to occur in the project. Development of facilities would be kept to a level necessary to assure a high-quality experience and would be confined to areas of previous disturbance. Restoration efforts will focus on introduction of prescribed fire, removal of off-site pine species, exotic species treatment, restoration of native groundcovers and possibly wetland restoration. The level of management intensity and related management costs is expected to be moderate to high initially as the necessary information and resources to restore and manage this system as a state forest are obtained. Once this





information is obtained and resources are available, long-term management costs are expected to be moderate to maintain the project as a state forest.

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

Once the project area is acquired and assigned to the Florida Forest Service, public access will be immediately provided for low intensity outdoor resource-based recreation activities such as hiking, hunting and fishing. The Florida Forest Service proposes to manage the site as a state forest and will carry out management activities and coordinate public access and use. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on resource inventory, restoration of harvested areas, providing site security and assessing public and fire management access. Inventories of the site's natural resources and listed species will be conducted to provide a basis for the formulation of a management plan.

The roads throughout the property necessitate the development of a road plan to identify those roads that are to be utilized for access by the public and for administrative use; roads that are determined to be unnecessary for management or access should be closed. Steps will be taken to ensure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously affording protection of sensitive resources.

Prior to collection of resource information, management proposals for this project are conceptual in nature. Long-range plans for this property will be directed toward the restoration of disturbed areas, maintenance of natural communities, and responsible public access. Disturbed sites will be restored to conditions that would be expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems. Off-site species will eventually be replaced with species that would be expected to occur naturally on those sites.

Very little of this project area has been burned by prescribed fire in recent years. Burning goals for this project will be to eventually establish an all-season prescribed burning program on all the fire dependent community types. Whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks will be utilized to contain and control fires.

Timber management activities will primarily consist of re-introducing longleaf pines, restoration harvests and improvement cuts aimed at restoring and perpetuating native ground covers. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age but will be managed to maintain a broad diversity of age classes. This will provide habitat for various native species and will enhance and maintain biodiversity.

The resource inventory will be used to identify areas that need special attention, protection or management and areas that are appropriate for recreational or administrative facilities. Development will be primarily located in disturbed areas and will be at a minimum required for management and public access and use. The Florida Forest Service will promote recreation and environmental education in the natural environment. It is anticipated that interpretive and user services recreation facilities will be developed and the use of low impact, rustic facilities will be stressed. High impact organized recreation areas are not planned due to possible adverse effects on the natural environment. Unnecessary roads, fire lines and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned and/or restored to the greatest extent practical.





Capital project expenditures are needed on this tract for prescribed fire, vegetative and hydrologic restoration, improved public access/use and facilities, both public and administrative. It is anticipated that some of the existing roads and trails may be used as multi-use trails for hiking, horseback riding and biking. This Management Prospectus is not intended to be an application for capital project funding; however, as more information is gathered, and an analysis of the site is completed, the Florida Forest Service intends to apply for capital project funds.

**Revenue-generating Potential**

Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in planted pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition and volume of the timber resources on the property, revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be moderately high.

**Cooperators in Management Activities**

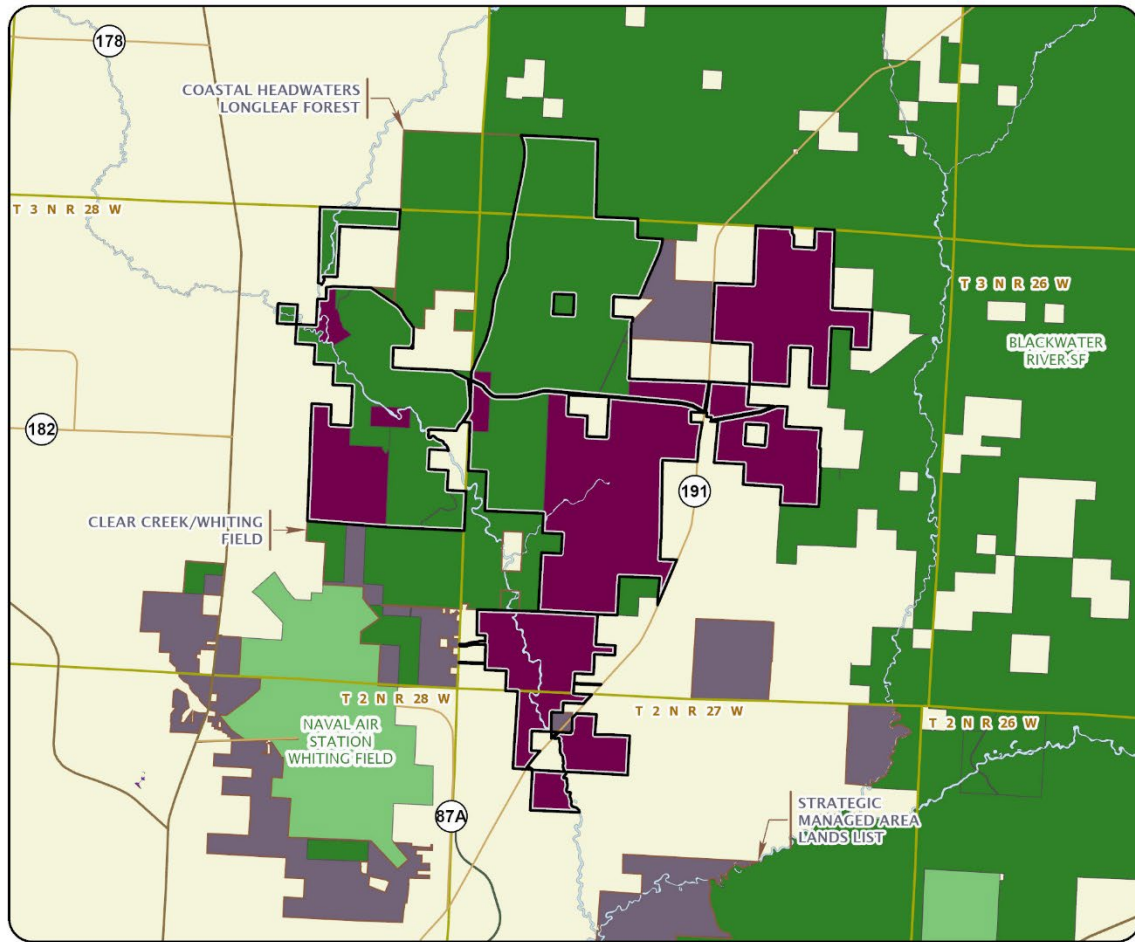
The Florida Forest Service will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	not provided
Salary (4 FTE)	\$132,141	not provided
Expense	\$315,000	not provided
OCO	\$188,600	not provided
TOTAL	\$635,741	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





### WOLFE CREEK FOREST

#### SANTA ROSA COUNTY

