

Arbuckle Creek Watershed

Less-Than-Fee

Highlands

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2014
<i>Project Acres</i>	11,989
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	8,561
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	3,428
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$1,755,688

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Arbuckle Creek Watershed project will preserve agricultural lands under threat of conversion to residential use and provide resource protection for Lake Istokpoga and the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. Arbuckle Creek is a major tributary into Lake Istokpoga, which is part of the watershed of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. The proposed Arbuckle Creek Florida Forever project consists of multiple large tracts of land that are mostly complete and contiguous, border Arbuckle Creek and act as a wildlife and eco-corridor. The properties included in the project boundary are either adjacent to or contiguous with the southwestern boundary of Avon Park Air Force Range and, therefore, create an open space protection buffer to the military base.

General Description

The Arbuckle Creek Watershed is on the eastern edge of the ancient Lake Wales Ridge, and almost entirely in the Kissimmee Valley of the Eastern Flatwoods District. It is characterized by seasonally flooded lowlands and grassland prairies. The westernmost portion of the Rafter T Ranch and Long R Ranch fall into the Lake Wales Ridge of the Central Lake District, the topographic crest of central Florida, formed from relic dunes with deep sand deposits. An eastern arm of the Lake Wales Ridge juts out and terminates in the northeastern part of Arbuckle Creek Ranch.

The majority of the land in Arbuckle Creek Watershed is working cattle ranches and improved pasture with small areas of ruderal or agricultural lands. There are a few offices or homes, barns and equipment sheds associated with cattle operations, mainly on Rafter T and SY Hartt ranches. Arbuckle Creek Road (CR 700A) runs through SY Hartt Ranch and unimproved roads are present on all the properties. Most of the uplands, historically dominated by mesic, wet, and scrubby flatwoods, dry prairie, mesic and xeric hammock, and scrub, have been converted to improved pasture with relatively small remnants of intact natural uplands remaining (about 17 percent), the majority of which occur on Rafter T and Long R Ranches. Wetland natural communities make up an additional 18 percent of the proposal and include baygall/hydric hammock, floodplain marsh, floodplain swamp and small, mostly disturbed, depression

marshes and dome swamps. Species such as the gopher tortoise, the Florida scrub jay, the bald eagle and the Sherman's fox squirrel have been documented on this site.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Highlands goldenaster</i>	G2/S2
<i>short-leaved rosemary</i>	G2Q/S2
<i>cutthroatgrass</i>	G3/S3
<i>Florida jointweed</i>	G3/S3
Sand skink	G3/S3
Wood stork	G4/S2
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2

Public Use

Arbuckle Creek Watershed is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. The project is not within a "land trail opportunity corridor" but is adjacent to the Arbuckle Creek Run "paddling trail opportunity corridor."

Acquisition Planning

2014

The project sponsor is TNC. On August 15, 2014, the ARC voted to allow this proposal to be evaluated. On December 12, 2014, the ARC voted to add this project to the Florida Forever list as a Less-than-Fee project. At that time, the project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$4,133,966.00.

2021

TNC, DoD and NRCS partnered to purchase a conservation easement over 1,069 acres known as Ravensworth Farms.

Coordination

There are no specific acquisition partners at the time this project was added. However, the landowners and TNC are in contact with the Federal Department of Agriculture and may explore less-than-fee acquisition opportunities there and elsewhere. Some of the lands within the ranches are not included in the proposal boundary because conservation easements have been acquired on them already. Rafter T had one Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement and the second Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) easement in place at the time the project was approved. At the time of approval for Florida Forever, some of the Rafter T property and the SY Hartt property in this project boundary also had been awarded Tier 1 status in DACS Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. In 2016, they acquired an easement on 3,229 acres of SY Hartt.



Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Arbuckle Creek Watershed would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement. Furthermore, all these owners are continuing to pursue other avenues to establish easements on the remainder of their lands, with assistance from TNC, the DOD, and other programs as they become available for applications.

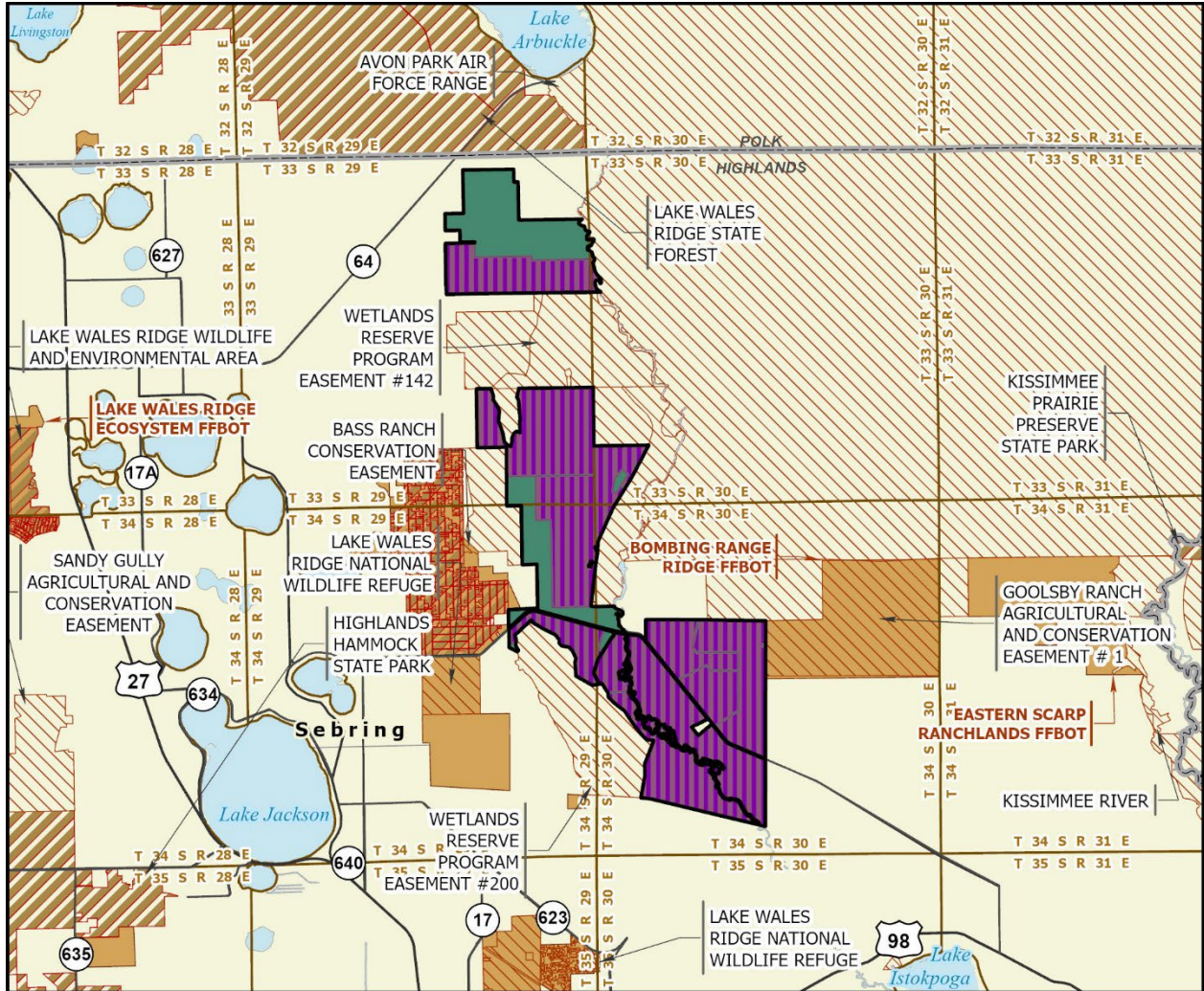
Manager(s)

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

Management Prospectus

OES will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while the management will be conducted by the property owner.

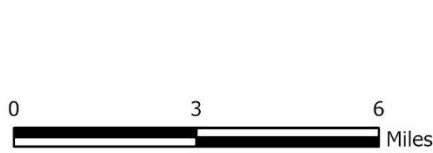




ARBUCKLE CREEK WATERSHED

HIGHLANDS COUNTY

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



FEBRUARY 2022

Map 1: FNAI, February 2022