

Hardee Flatwoods

Less-Than-Fee

Hardee

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2017
<i>Project Acres</i>	1,836
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	1,836
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$6,422,385

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Hardee Flatwoods project will enhance the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects and increase the amount of forest land available for suitable management of natural resources. The project will support state water quality and quantity by protecting, restoring, and maintaining the natural functions of the land, water, and wetland systems contained within the proposal site. Preservation of Hardee Flatwoods will increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels.

General Description

The Hardee Flatwoods project is located about 11 miles northeast of the town of Zolfo Springs in eastern Hardee County and borders the Highlands County line. It is held by a single owner and is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition. This land includes most of the headwaters of Bee Branch, a tributary of Charlie Creek, which itself is a principal headwater of the Peace River.

Hardee Flatwoods is the only land along Bee Branch that remains in a natural state and provides a continuous link to conservation lands to the east. In contrast to the surrounding agricultural lands, most of the tract has had low to moderate disturbance. About 91 percent of Hardee Flatwoods is in varying degrees of natural condition. Although there are no major structural additions, the property is fenced and cross-fenced. About 100 head of cattle graze the improved pasture in the western third of the property under a lease. A few small cattle ponds are scattered over the property.

Mesic flatwoods cover most of the eastern half and are generally in good condition. Scrubby flatwoods mixed with xeric hammock, about one percent of the project, occur on small, elevated mounds and ridges of white sand at the west end of the site. High quality hydric hammock covers 22 percent of the site along the Bee Branch blackwater stream corridors. Mature laurel oak, live oak, and cabbage palm dominate the closed canopy.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5/S3

Public Use

Hardee Flatwoods is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access.

Acquisition Planning

2017

On June 16, 2017, the Hardee Flatwoods proposal was considered by the ARC as a possible conservation land project and advanced for in-depth review.

On October 20, 2017, the ARC voted to add this as a Florida Forever project. The project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$106,126.

2020

On December 11, 2020, the ARC approved an addition of 160-acres in Hardee County to the project boundary.

Coordination

This project abuts Highlands County's Sun`N Lake Preserve, is within three miles of the Old Town Creek Watershed project and parts of the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project. As a less-than-fee acquisition, there would be no direct governmental management of the site.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Hardee Flatwoods project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

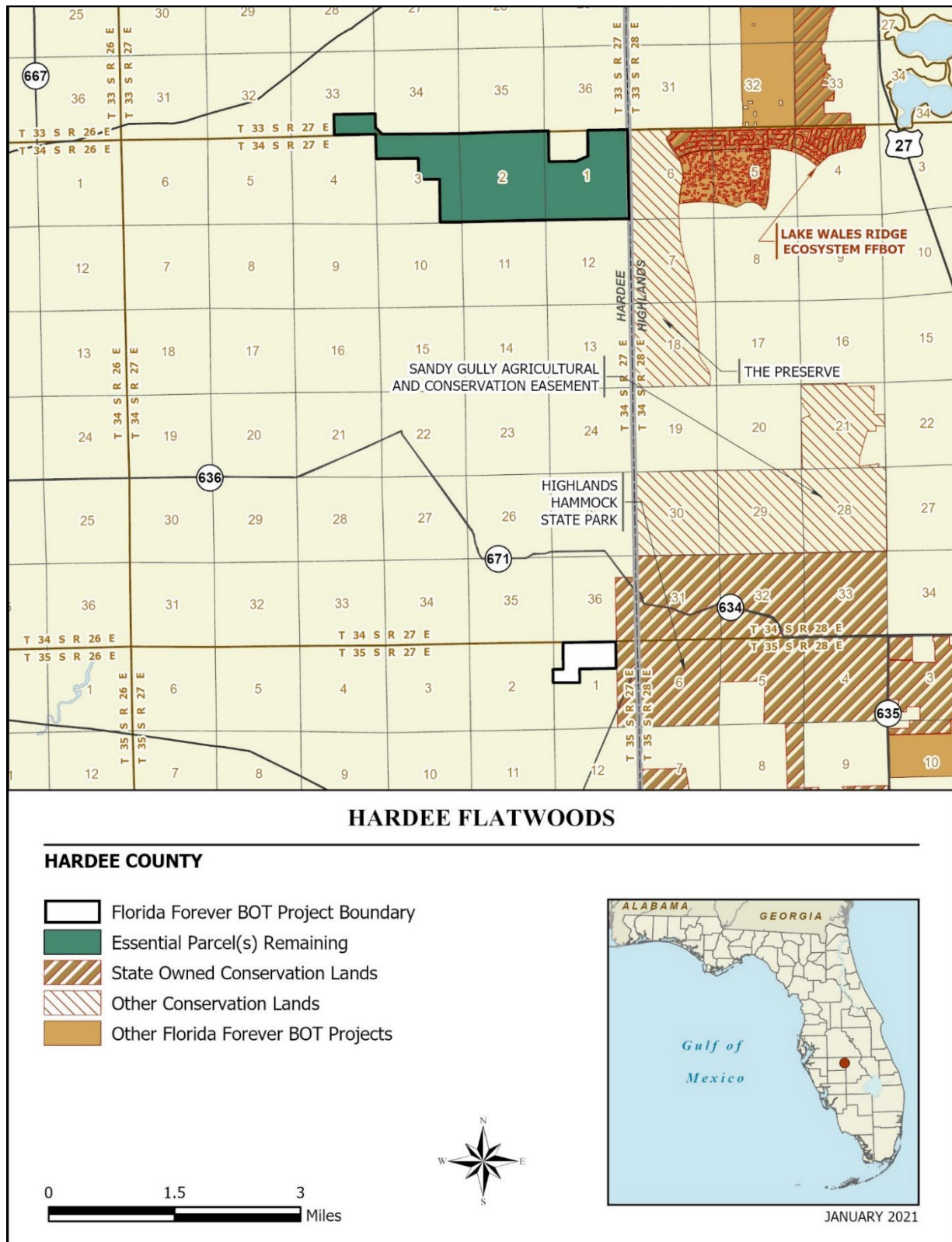
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of Hardee Flatwoods 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.





Map 1: FNAI, January 2021