

ITEM 6:

Consider the October 14, 2022, meeting summary.

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

None

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the meeting summary.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

- APPROVE
- APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____
- DEFER
- WITHDRAW
- NOT APPROVE
- OTHER: _____

Acquisition and Restoration Council Meeting Summary

Date: October 14, 2022

Time: 9 a.m.

Location: Department of Environmental Protection
Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building
Conference Room 137
3900 Commonwealth Blvd
Tallahassee, FL 32399

And via Webinar

Members in Attendance:

Ms. Alissa Lotane, DHR
Mr. Erin Albury, FFS
Ms. Lynetta Griner, Citizen Member
Dr. Thomas Eason, FWC
Dr. Bill Palmer, Citizen Member
Ms. Elva Peppers, Citizen Member
Ms. Mara Gambineri, ARC Chair, DEP

ARC Staff Director: Ms. Shauna Allen, DEP

Item 1: Call to Order at 9 a.m.

DEP Deputy Secretary of Land and Recreation, Mara Gambineri, called the meeting to order and asked Dr. Eason to lead the pledge of allegiance. ARC Staff Director, Shauna Allen, conducted the roll call and established the quorum with seven members in attendance. Chair Gambineri acknowledged the efforts of the many agency staff and partners working rescue and recovery operations and efforts to reopen managed areas impacted by Hurricane Ian in southwest, central and northeast Florida. State Lands Division Director, Callie DeHaven, announced the Office of Environmental Services Program Administrator, Deb Burr, was on the 2022 Apalachicola River Trek team paddling 107 miles of the river. Since 1964, the state has acquired over 328,000 acres including a 22,000-acre donation from TNC to protect the water quality of the Apalachicola River and Bay and provide recreational opportunities. Acquisition of key parcels is still underway with multiple partners, state, federal and non-profit partners. Ms. Allen provided housekeeping announcements.

Item 2: Consider the August and September 2022 meeting and regional hearing summaries.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the meeting summaries.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: Dr. Palmer made the motion to approve the meeting summary with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

ARC STAFF REPORTS

Item 3: Items approved by the Division of State Lands via the online negative response process since the August 2022 ARC meeting.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen stated two items were submitted and approved via the negative response process including one management plan amendment for Fort Mose Historic State Park and the Cross Seminole Trail Management Plan.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 4: 2022 Annual update on the Division of State Lands conservation easement monitoring program.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen stated during the 2021-22 Fiscal Year, four new easements were acquired in Hardee, Indian River, Okeechobee and Highlands counties totaling 8,695 acres and bringing the total easements under Office of Environmental Services oversight to 140.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 5: Annual Land Management Review Team findings and the Land Management Uniform Accounting Council 2022 Annual and Biennial Reports.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen stated 28 land management reviews were conducted during the previous fiscal year and all were found consistent with their adopted management plans. The review team made special mention of Twin Rivers State Forest, Oscar Sherer State Park, Suwannee Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area, St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve and Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve. The Land Management Uniform Accounting Council annual and biennial reports were also provided for information.

Discussion: Dr. Eason commented on the massive amount of work the reports detail and noted that we trust and verify that state lands are well managed. Dr. Palmer commented on the improvement in the level and quality of management thanks to the dedication of managing staffs. He also commented on the improvement in frequency of prescribed fire and asked if we could boost the 3% currently spent on prescribed burning to 5% of the budget. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 6: Consider the proposed 2023 Acquisition and Restoration Council calendar.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the 2023 calendar.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen stated the 2023 calendar is being submitted for approval so submittal deadlines prior to the December meeting are approved and plans to submit the calendar in October moving forward.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: Dr. Palmer made the motion to approve the meeting calendar with Ms. Griner seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 7: Consider a request to approve an additional activity for the Interim Management Guidelines.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the revision to the interim management guidelines.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen stated an agency working group developed an additional activity to facilitate the new statutory requirement for land managing agencies to assess state lands for use as gopher tortoise recipient sites. The proposed change for management plan amendments addresses ground disturbing activities for gopher tortoise relocation or release at recipient sites.

Discussion: Dr. Eason commented he was supportive overall with the proposal and appreciated the effort and thought for the interim before a full management plan is approved. He questioned if “activities related to” was specific to gopher tortoise relocations or other activities at the recipient site. It was not clear if it was for any activities on sites that have been designated for gopher tortoises. Mr. Keith Singleton, DEP Office of Environmental Services, responded it was specific for recipient sites where those management plans require amendment related to ground disturbing activities greater than six inches for gopher tortoise relocation or release. Fencing may be up to eight inches.

Ms. Peppers stated the intent is not clear to her and should be revised to clear that up. Dr. Eason stated he wants to understand the intent as well and whether the activities could be covered under other categories. Mr. Singleton stated the intent is to ensure transparency under the new statute for activities related to establishing recipient sites. Dr. Eason asked if we could defer to a later ARC meeting to ensure clarity of intent. Ms. Allen confirmed the motion on the floor would either need to be voted on or amended to defer. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Eason made the motion to approve the activity with Ms. Peppers seconding. Following discussion, Dr. Eason amended his motion to defer requesting revision of the language with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC approved the motion to defer.

LAND ADMINISTRATION

Item 8: Consider whether an approximately 1.55-acre private utility easement to Lee County Electric Cooperative, Inc., within the Fred C. Babcock-Cecil M. Webb WMA (aka Yucca Pens) is consistent with the Board of Trustees’ Linear Facilities Policy.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the proposed easement.

Discussion: Ms. Karen Reecy, DEP Bureau of Public Land Administration, presented the proposed 1.5-acre private utility easement from Lee County Electric Cooperative to create a loop system providing greater reliability for their customers. The state threatened Florida beargrass is documented on the parcel within the Fred C. Babcock/Cecil M. Webb WMA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provided conservation recommendations for Britton's beargrass. The FWC consented to the easement and DHR also provided a letter of unlikely to affect historic properties. The applicant coordinated with the FWC on the proposed route to reduce impacts to conservation land. The applicant will pay an easement fee based on the appraised market value and will seek replacement lands equal to 1.5 times the size of the easement area. If replacement lands are not available, they will be required to pay compensation at two times the appraised value.

Dr. Eason asked to push as hard as possible for replacement lands. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Ms. Peppers made the motion to approve the easement with Ms. Griner seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

FLORIDA FOREVER

Item 9: Take Public Testimony on the Florida Forever 2022 Cycle 2 Proposals.

Discussion: Mr. Jimmy Bullock spoke in favor of the Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest project. He thanked the Council for their support of the project and said RMS was focusing efforts in Florida along the east and west sides of the Escambia River. This area is important for species conservation along the river and several tributaries and the property touches the river. It is part of the wildlife corridor and Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) and has historical significance with the Keyser Trading post.

Mr. Dean Saunders, Saunders Real Estate, spoke in favor of the Avalon proposal and the Gardner Marsh proposal on behalf of the Bronson Family. The 6,000-acre Gardner Marsh property along the east side of the Kissimmee River is surrounded by conservation land. The property scores high on the FNAI indicators and is mostly native land with some improved pasture. The family would like to keep it in conservation. The Avalon project added a few more acres with the interest of the Turner family to get the property into conservation quickly. In learning about the natural and cultural resources of the property they discovered historical resources with the Magnolia Hill piece and possible relationship to DeSoto.

Mr. Shane Wellendorf, Tall Timbers, spoke in favor of the Avalon proposal encompassing 13,272 acres in Jefferson County. The Rosewood-Avalon proposal was revised during the evaluation to include the Turner-Avalon Amendment. Ecological resources over the working forest includes both natural longleaf and even-aged loblolly stands managed with prescribed fire. The properties include gopher tortoise relocation and Red-cockaded woodpecker reintroduction sites. It also includes a large diversity of wetlands that features large diameter hardwoods in the bottomlands and springs and seeps common to the Wacissa Springshed. Historic and cultural

resources are also documented with 33 master site file records. The property has potential for development due to the proximity of state and federal highways.

Mr. Rick Dantzler, Keith Fountain Law, spoke in favor of the Heartland Wildlife Corridor proposal encompassing 9,561 acres with 13 property owners. In consultation with DSL Staff and the owner, one property with significant amounts of intensive agriculture was removed from the proposal. The proposal runs from Highland Hammock State Park to the north to a complex of conservation properties to the south with 96% in the FEGN. Including the headwaters of Fisheating Creek, the proposal area would expand the existing wildlife corridor west of Lake Wales Ridge to 73,000 acres of contiguous property. There is moderate growth projected in the future which increases the urgency to protect it now.

Mr. Keith Fountain, Keith Fountain Law, co-sponsor for the Heartland Wildlife Corridor and sponsor for the Goodno Ranch. Mr. Fountain shared an image of a panther crossing one of the properties in the Heartland Wildlife Corridor as he spoke of the importance of this proposal as the largest remaining gap along the west side of Hwy 27. The Goodno Ranch property owner has several properties that form the north end of the corridor. This property is one that is not on the list or otherwise protected. Mr. Fountain supports the recommendation to add it to the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape project. It has a large amount of forested area that can provide cover for panthers crossing the river. The owner has expressed a preference to work with DEP on another property that is no longer a candidate for Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) funding.

Ms. Julie Morris, Florida Conservation Group, spoke in favor of the Natural Bridge Timberlands and Keen Ranch proposals. The 5,400-acre Natural Bridge Timberlands proposal in Leon and Jefferson counties was changed to fee simple during the evaluation period. Located adjacent to the Plank Road State Forest and Natural Bridge Battlefield Historic State Park the proposal builds on existing conservation lands. The new owner as of February 2022 is thinning the timber and developing a management plan to restore Longleaf pine to the property along with prescribed fire. The property provides protection for the St. Marks River floodplain and wetlands. The Keen Ranch proposal encompasses 1,000 acres on Horse Creek, an important tributary of the Peace River. This ranch along with many others in the Peace River region were severely affected by flooding with Hurricane Ian underscoring the important role they play in providing temporary storage for flood waters.

Mr. Adam Bass, Conservation Florida, spoke in favor of the Gilchrist Club proposal encompassing over 23,000 acres in Gilchrist County. The property is a mosaic of working and wildlands focused on wildlife benefits and impacts three watersheds. The property contributes to the rural character of the county.

Mr. Doug Hattaway, Trust for Public Land, spoke in favor of the Wolfe Creek Forest Addition II proposal and complemented the staff on both the project evaluation report and efforts to seek public input during the process. Mr. Hattaway spoke to the maps in the project evaluation report noting since 2016, over 12,000 acres have been acquired and added to the Wolfe Creek Forest with funding from REPI, Santa Rosa County, Forest Legacy and Florida Forever funding. He noted that not showing on the map was another 9,000 acres acquired. Proposed for fee simple

acquisition, the partners have funding in hand to acquire both the Ellis Creek tract and the Paddle Trail tract.

Mr. Kent Wimmer, Defenders of Wildlife and Coordinator for the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape (NFSL), spoke in favor of all ten proposals and their contributions to the Florida Wildlife Corridor and FEGN. Mr. Wimmer made special mention of the Wolfe Creek, Natural Bridge and Avalon properties that contribute to three goals of the NFSL; retain working lands and forest lands as compatible land uses, resiliency and sustainability of natural systems, and climate resiliency of landscapes that overlap mission footprints. Mr. Wimmer also called out several projects important to functional wildlife corridors for the 2023 ranking including: Apalachicola River, Bear Creek Forest, Forest and Lakes Ecosystem, Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks, Wolfe Creek Forest, Coastal Headwaters Longleaf Forest, Clear Creek/Whiting Field, Florida's First Magnitude Springs – Gainer Springs, Sand Mountain, Dickerson Bay/Bald Point, and St. Joe Timberland.

Ms. Allen noted Mr. Wimmer submitted a letter that was provided to the Council. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 10: Consider project evaluation reports for the CNC Ranch, Double G Legacy, Gardner Marsh, Gilchrist Club, Goodno Ranch, Heartland Wildlife Corridor, Keen Ranch, Natural Bridge Timberlands, Avalon and Wolfe Creek Forest Addition II 2022 Cycle 2 Florida Forever proposals.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the project evaluation reports.

Discussion: Ms. Allen noted the FFS will receive \$9.55 million in 2023 for acquisition in the Wolfe Creek Forest project and they have submitted portions of the Avalon proposal for Forest Legacy program funding in 2024. There were no comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Eason made the motion to approve the item with Ms. Lotane seconding. ARC unanimously approved the project evaluation reports.

Item 11: Vote on whether to add ten 2022 Cycle 2 Florida Forever proposals to the 2023 Florida Forever Priority List.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote on the proposals to be added as projects to the 2023 priority list. If approved, consider amending, the Kissimmee-St Johns River Connector Florida Forever project boundary to add the CNC Ranch project, the Battle of Wahoo Swamp Florida Forever project boundary to add the Double G Legacy project, the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever project boundary to add the Goodno Ranch project, the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project boundary to add the Keen Ranch project, and the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project boundary to add the Wolfe Creek Forest Addition II project.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: ARC voted unanimously by seven members to add CNC Ranch, Double G Legacy, Gardner Marsh, Gilchrist Club, Goodno Ranch, Heartland Wildlife Corridor, Keen Ranch, Natural Bridge Timberlands, and Wolfe Creek Forest Addition II proposals to the 2022 Florida Forever Priority List. Dr. Palmer recused himself from the vote for Avalon and ARC voted by six members to add the Avalon proposal to the list.

ARC voted unanimously by seven members to amend the Kissimmee-St Johns River Connector Florida Forever project boundary to add the CNC Ranch project.

ARC voted unanimously by seven members to amend the Battle of Wahoo Swamp Florida Forever project boundary to add the Double G Legacy project.

ARC voted unanimously by seven members to amend the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever project boundary to add the Goodno Ranch project.

ARC voted unanimously by seven members to amend the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project boundary to add the Keen Ranch project.

ARC voted unanimously by seven members to amend the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project boundary to add the Wolfe Creek Forest Addition II project.

Item 12: Consider a staff recommendation to remove Corrigan Ranch and Hardee Flatwoods from the 2023 Florida Forever Priority List.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote to remove the Corrigan Ranch project as considered complete and the Hardee Flatwoods as greater than 90% complete.

Discussion: Ms. Sine Murray, DEP Office of Environmental Services, presented the proposal to remove the two projects and highlighted program accomplishments. Rule and statute allow the Council to remove a project from the list when it is at least 90% complete and allows for remaining property to be acquired. Corrigan Ranch was added to the list in 2019 and with DEP and FWS funding, 100% of the property was acquired. Portions were added to the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park and the remainder was added to the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge. The Hardee Flatwoods project was added to the list in 2017. With the acquisition of 1,671 acres in 2022, the less-than-fee project is 91% complete.

Dr. Eason asked if there is a tracking system or mechanism for the remaining properties removed from the list. Ms. Murray responded that we do track project histories when they reach this point, however, some of the older projects are not in electronic files. Florida Natural Areas Inventory is working closely with OES and has a fairly complete record. She encouraged contacting staff when there are questions as they work on creating electronic records for the older projects. Dr. Eason encouraged staff to create a mechanism for sharing this information and ensuring that these records are preserved. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Ms. Peppers made the motion to approve the item with Dr. Eason seconding. ARC voted unanimously by seven members to remove both projects.

Item 13: Vote on whether to amend the Florida's First Magnitude Springs Florida Forever Project Boundary to add 13 parcels totaling approximately 742 acres in Suwannee and Lafayette counties with a combined tax assessed market value of \$1,987,808.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote on the proposed amendment.

Discussion: Ms. Joanna Reilly-Brown, Alachua Conservation Trust, presented the proposed 742-acre property along the Middle Suwannee River in Suwannee and Lafayette counties. The proposed less-than-fee property protects surface and ground water quality in the region and preserves habitat for rare and endemic species including the Gulf sturgeon, alligator snapping turtle and Suwannee moccasin shell. Portions of the Drew and Shitama properties are within the Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park optimum boundary. All three properties are within the Suwannee BMAP and contribute to maintaining low intensity uses that reduce water quality impacts. The properties contain the second magnitude Running springs (1&2) and the third magnitude Hidden Spring. The properties contain large areas of high quality sandhills utilized by a large population of gopher tortoises and has potential for more sandhill restoration. Owned by the family of Governor George Franklin Drew, the property contains the historic Drew Railroad Bridge.

Ms. Allen noted a letter received from Judy Orcutt in support of the proposal was provided to the Council.

Ms. Georgina Drew, landowner, spoke in favor of the property which has been in her family for 170 years. She described the historic Drew Railroad Bridge constructed by Governor Drew and his son which has been in the open position since the 1970's as one of the oldest of its kind still in existence. Ms. Drew also described the extensive spring system underneath the property that connects Hidden Spring and Running springs. The property is within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and hosts 431 mapped gopher tortoise burrows providing habitat to numerous commensals within the largest privately held sandhill community in the state. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Ms. Lotane made the motion to approve the item with Ms. Griner seconding. ARC voted unanimously by seven members to approve the amendment.

Item 14: Vote on whether to amend the Pinhook Swamp Florida Forever Project Boundary to add three parcels totaling approximately 950.5 acres in Columbia County with a tax assessed market value of \$889,668.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote on the proposed amendment.

Discussion: Ms. Susan Carr, Alachua Conservation Trust, presented the proposed 950-acre property in Columbia County adjacent to the Pinhook Swamp project boundary. The Greene Addition connects existing conservation lands from the Pinhook Swamp project to the east to the Benton Conservation area along the Suwannee River. The family is in the process of conserving 400 acres under an easement with the USDA. The property includes a matrix of pinelands and forested wetlands including 80 acres of longleaf pine with plans to restore longleaf to the uplands currently managed as a working forest. The property is within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and

protects the Suwannee River watershed. The owners are conservation minded and have a history of working with the state on conservation.

Ms. Audrey Green, landowner, spoke in favor of the property they have owned since the late 1920s. Ms. Green shared some of the history of the property from turpentine to leasing it to Rayonier and hunting with her grandfather. Their goal is to conserve the land under a conservation easement and continue restoration efforts along with the adjacent property that is being placed under an NRCS easement with the healthy forest reserve program. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Palmer made the motion to approve the item with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC voted unanimously by seven members to approve the amendment.

Recess: Council approved recess following Item 14 at 10:24 a.m. with Chair Gambineri making the motion and Ms. Griner seconding. The meeting resumed at 10:37 a.m. and the quorum was established by roll call with seven members present.

LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Item 15: Consider an amendment to the T. H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 3533).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan amendment.

Discussion: Mr. James Gaddis, Division of Recreation and Parks, presented the management plan amendment for the William J. “Billy Joe” Rish Recreation Area at the T. H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park. The area was acquired in 1978 as a recreation area for persons with disabilities and was managed from 1978-2021 by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. Following closure in 2018 due to impacts from Hurricane Michael, the park was leased to the Division of Recreation and Parks and reopened to the public in January 2022. The park provides critical habitat for the St. Andrew beach mouse confined to the undeveloped areas of the peninsula as delineated by FWS. Recreational activities include beach recreation, trails, fishing and overnight accommodations along with visitor amenities. Proposed improvements include a new 30 site campground, renovation and replacement of existing cabins and additional cabins, parking lot improvements and bayfront amenities including trails and a new dock. Maintenance and administrative facilities are planned along with other resource management activities to restore dune habitat and protect the critical habitat from incompatible uses.

Chair Gambineri commented on the new asset to the Park Service and commended the attention to inclusive opportunities in the plans and management of the area. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Eason made the motion to approve the management plan amendment with Ms. Lotane seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 16: Consider the 10-year McKissack Beach and Marsh Management Plan (Lease No. 4579).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Ms. Keisha Messer, City of Carrabelle, presented the management plan for the Franklin County property. Acquired in 2008 and leased to the City of Carrabelle, McKissack Beach and Marsh is located south of Hwy 98. Improvements include a parking area and barriers to exclude vehicles from driving on the beach. Management activities since acquisition include beach dune protection and monitoring. The land uses include 42 acres of beach and 219 acres of salt marsh and salt flats. The dunes are slowly recovering after being impacted by Hurricane Michael. Imperiled species include sea turtles and Godfrey's blazing star. Proposed activities include parking lot improvements, dune walkover, invasive species control and partnering with the Florida Forest Service for management. Resource based recreation will continue along with additional trails and signage.

Dr. Eason commented on the number of critical fish and wildlife resources and offered assistance from the FWC as needed. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Palmer made the motion to approve the management plan with Ms. Peppers seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 17: Consider a 10-year update to the Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve Management Plan (Lease No. 4195).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Mr. Nick Dunnam, Volusia County, presented the management plan update for the preserve located between US 1 and I-95 and surrounded by the cities of Port Orange and New Smyrna Beach. The state owns 1,932 acres of the 2,500 acres preserve. Acquisition began in the mid-1980s and continues with the Volusia Forever Program. The preserve is comprised of 18 natural communities including maritime hammock, scrub and scrubby flatwoods. Thirty-five recorded sites are on the property which features the Spruce Creek Mound complex. Recreational uses include biking, horseback riding, camping, hiking and canoeing with several water and land-based access points. Resource management includes scrub restoration, invasive species management and mechanical treatment to reintroduce prescribed fire. Infrastructure improvements and visitor facility improvements are proposed along with outreach to include educational signs and kiosks, citizen science and educational partnerships for outdoor classrooms. Comments from DHR and FNAI will be included in the final plan. There were no comments.

ARC Action: Ms. Lotane made the motion to approve the management plan update with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 18: Consider a 10-year update to the Little Gator Creek Wildlife and Environmental Area Management Plan (Lease No. 4723).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Ms. Hannah Klein, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, presented the management plan for the 566-acre area in Pasco County. Ms. Klein mentioned the Area

Manager Shawn Kelly was attending via the webinar should there be any questions following her presentation. Acquired in 1982, Little Gator Creek WEA is surrounded by other conservation lands including Colt Creek State Park and Green Swamp. The single-use property acquired for wood stork colony nesting and other compatible recreational opportunities is predominantly comprised of mesic flatwoods (44.5%) and basin swamp (33.9%). There are seven known cultural resources on the property. Limited recreation is allowed between September 1 and January 31 with a carrying capacity of 20 visitors per day. Facilities include roads and trails along with administrative facilities. Resource management objectives include use of prescribed fire, habitat restoration, hydrologic restoration and management of invasive species. Improvements include establishing electrical capabilities at the shop and developing recreational facilities to increase the carrying capacity to 33 visitors per day. There were no comments.

ARC Action: Ms. Peppers made the motion to approve the management plan update with Dr. Palmer seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 19: Consider a 10-year update to the Hontoon Island State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 2468).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Ms. Yasmine Armaghani, DEP Division of Recreation and Parks, presented the management plan for the 1,600-acre park in Volusia County. Ms. Armaghani mentioned Park Manager Devin Whitney and Area Biologist Jason DePue were available to respond to questions. The property was initially acquired in 1970 with P2000 funding and provides recreational opportunities for fishing, hiking and camping. In FY 2020/21, the park hosted 38,264 visitors. There are 13 natural communities including scrubby flatwoods, shell mound and dome swamp and 12 imperiled species. Resource management objectives include maintain natural communities, restore floodplain marsh and mesic flatwoods, imperiled species monitoring and invasive species control. There are 13 recorded cultural resources. Proposed improvements include new volunteer site, renovations to administrative facilities and infrastructure at the day use area, new primitive cabins and new trail connections. There were no comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Palmer made the motion to approve the management plan update with Dr. Eason seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 20: Consider a 10-year update to the Blue Spring State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 2622).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Ms. Yasmine Armaghani, DEP Division of Recreation and Parks, presented the management plan for the 2,643-acre park in Volusia County. Ms. Armaghani mentioned Park Manager Dustin Allen and Area Biologist Jason DePue were available to respond to questions. The property was acquired in 1972 using P2000 funding and provides recreational opportunities for camping, hiking and paddling. In FY 2020/21, the park hosted 559,835 visitors. There are 26 natural communities including sandhill, hydric hammock and wet flatwoods and three imperiled species. Resource management objectives include improve hydrological conditions to freshwater marsh, restore scrub and floodplain marsh, maintain prescribed fire interval and invasive species

control. There are 20 recorded cultural sites. Proposed improvements include relocate the park entrance, administrative and infrastructure improvements, new campsites and upgraded utilities, new boardwalks and docks, concession area renovations and French Landing master plan and area improvements.

Dr. Eason asked to continue collaboration with the FWC on the imperiled species aspects of the plan.

Ms. Jennifer Brown, owner of Epic Paddle adventures and resident, expressed concerns about the improvements to French Landing and changes to the access. She mentioned that there was a petition against improvements to French Landing and restricting free public access to the area.

Ms. Rebecca Maish, resident, commented on protecting the natural undeveloped character of the area. She stated French Landing provides access to multiple waterways and natural areas and her concerns about limiting the 24/7 access. She asked to not expand human improvements outside of the current developed areas and to not limit access to French Landing based on time of day or park capacity.

Mr. David Lamott, resident and kayak river guide, stated the park is often at capacity and that French Landing is a local gathering place that provides easy access to the river for kayaking, fishing and swimming. He recalled the agreement between Volusia County and the state for maintenance of the road and improvements. He also asked about proposed improvements that included glamping and camping that may restrict use of the boat ramp. He expressed concern for the concession contract that provided exclusive rights to provide services in the park.

Ms. Astrid Jackson, owner of Venture Outdoors and resident, stated she has been doing tours out of French Landing and the convenience of the site for young paddlers because other launches are four to five miles away. She noted the landing has been a popular hangout spot for decades and the petition that is circulating. She stated the park fills up quickly and French Landing is the only other option, but this has been taken away from the local outfitters.

Ms. Griner asked if there was an agency response to the concerns.

DEP Division of Recreation and Parks Assistant Director Parks Small stated the challenges mentioned are not unlike other places. The capacity issue is real and often the park is full before the gates open causing operational issues outside of the park. The increased use is causing erosion to the road. The plan to restructure the entrance is to increase stacking capacity in the park and will require gating the access to French Landing. He also noted the administrative code requires a concession agreement for businesses operating in the park. Several vendors have used French Landing for some time without a concession agreement which is a violation of the administrative code. The current concession agreement does provide exclusive rights to the vendor for different activities within the park. The management plan does not address day-to-day operations, so the concession is not included within the plan.

Chair Gambineri added concessions agreements are a competitive procurement outside of the management plan process. Mr. Small noted the concession was advertised for bid and there are several companies across the state that have these agreements. Ms. Peppers asked if there is only one vendor agreement in the park and if the folks would have to compete for this. Mr. Small

confirmed that there is only one vendor agreement.

Dr. Eason asked if there was outreach and engagement with stakeholders and affected public and if there was ample opportunity to comment. Mr. Small confirmed that outreach did take place and the public and advisory group meetings were held as required by statute. He reiterated; the concessions process is separate from the management plan.

Ms. Peppers asked if someone had access to the landing from the water and if they would have to pay admission. Mr. Small confirmed that they could access the park from the water and get out at French Landing. Ms. Peppers asked if someone could stop at French Landing if they were taking a group down the river. Mr. Small stated he would have to bring an answer back regarding the business operational side.

Chair Gambineri asked staff to respond on the details of the public meeting and noted the vendor services and unit management plan are two separate processes.

Mr. Small stated the management plan does not prescribe the outcome of the concession and vendor issue at French Landing. Ms. Peppers asked if it would address alternative access to the park. Mr. Small responded that access to French Landing would continue but the challenge is the business operation in the park without an agreement. Ms. Peppers confirmed her understanding of how the state operates and that access to the water will be open to the public.

Dr. Eason asked the Council's role versus the Park Service's role and if there is anything in the plan relevant to that issue. He also noted he did not see anything on glamping sites near French Landing. Mr. Small stated glamping exists today at the campground and is not being proposed for French Landing.

Ms. Jackson stated the public was not involved in the plan and that she came today because of the petition. Chair Gambineri reminded Ms. Jackson that public comment was over and asked Ms. Armaghani to respond regarding the public involvement.

Ms. Armaghani confirmed the public meeting was held on June 21, 2022, and was widely advertised on social media, the website and newspapers. There was a two-week public comment period following the meeting. Chair Gambineri asked how many people attended. Ms. Armaghani responded that there were 20 public and advisory committee members in addition to six park staff.

Dr. Eason asked if there was anything in the plan regarding a gate, that there would be glamping at French Landing, or the loss of access. Ms. Armaghani responded that there would be up to ten new sites in the existing campground and there was no mention of camping at French Landing. Improvements at French Landing were for existing activities and included fishing pier, boat ramp.

Dr. Eason noted the key issue about the commercial access at French Landing. Chair Gambineri stated business operations are separate from the management plan and that public access to French Landing is not going away as stipulated in the deed from Volusia County to the state.

Ms. Maish stated it is not clear from the executive summary if the glamping was at French

Landing or in the park. Chair Gambineri noted the uses are identified in the conceptual land use map. She further asked the Council if they would like to revisit the plan in the interest of moving the item forward.

Dr. Eason commented he had no issues with the plan but wanted to err on the side of caution and delay the vote to clarify what ARC is approving. Ms. Griner stated her agreement with delaying the vote noting that it may be difficult to accomplish the goals of the plan without the support of the local community. She said it is worth the effort to make sure there is consensus to protect the resources.

Ms. Allen reminded the Council there was a motion to approve on the floor and it would need to be amended if they wished to defer.

Chair Gambineri asked if there was a motion and reminded the Council the concession agreement is an operations issue done through a separate call for business proposals process and cautioned that the two issues not be conflated.

Ms. Peppers expressed appreciation to the staff and encouraged them to make it clear about the concession agreements, so the community is better informed.

Dr. Eason stated he is looking for engagement with the affected people and clarity when reporting back to ARC on what is being approved or not. He said he is not indicating he would say no but did want clarity on the further engagement.

Ms. Allen asked for clear direction for what the agency is being asked to bring back to the Council in the motion to defer. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Mr. Albury made the motion to approve the management plan update with Dr. Palmer seconding. Following discussion, Dr. Eason made the motion to defer with a request for (1) further engagement with the public, (2) clarity on the French Landing concerns and (3) ARC's authority regarding the concession. Ms. Griner seconded the motion. ARC approved the motion to defer.

Item 21: Consider a Management Plan for Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, which includes Rookery Bay Aquatic Preserve and Cape Romano-Ten Thousand Islands Aquatic Preserve.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Mr. Keith Laakkonen, DEP Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, presented the management plan and described the partnership between DEP and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to implement the strategies of the Coastal Zone Management Act and Florida Coastal Zone Management Program. The reserve is one in a system of 30 managed national protected areas that conduct long term research, education and stewardship. The management plan is guided by a strategic plan with four cornerstones - ecosystems, human connections, resilience and outreach. Acquisition of the area began with a grassroots effort led by Collier County Conservancy, Florida Audubon and The Nature Conservancy with designation of the area in 1978. The reserve was the third site designated in the National Estuarine Sanctuary

Program. At 110,000 acres the reserve includes 40% of the Collier County shoreline. Management objectives include long term monitoring for ecological trends and drivers of these trends, habitat enhancement for species, protect cultural resources and protect natural resources by facilitating communication between scientists and stakeholders, understand the watershed and coastal changes and outreach to residents, visitors, students, stakeholders and partners.

Dr. Eason asked if resources were significantly affected by Hurricane Ian. Mr. Laakkonen responded that the reserve did its job. Some of the barrier island changes helped protect the communities behind it. Storms are an ecosystem driver and resiliency ensures the area will bounce back. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Eason made the motion to approve the management plan update with Dr. Palmer seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 22: Consider a 10-year update to the Tiger Bay State Forest Management Plan (Lease Nos. 3902, 4086, and 4326).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the management plan.

Discussion: Mr. Samuel Kergel, Florida Forest Service, presented the management plan for the 27,295-acre area in Volusia County. Acquired in 1979 with the Environmentally Endangered Lands program, the forest is named for the largest physiographic feature Tiger Bay, located between two historic dunes the Deland Ridge and the Daytona Ridge. Wetlands comprise 60% of the forest with significant portions classified as Outstanding Florida Waters. The Board of Trustees and St. Johns River Water Management District own 50/50 title interest. The forest is managed with sustainable forest management objectives that include updating the silvicultural management plan, stand inventory and GIS database, prescribed fire to improve wildlife habitat and enhance native groundcover and reduce threats of wildfire in the urban interface. Recreational facilities include trailheads, 14 miles of trails and two campgrounds. Recreation activities include hiking, horseback riding, fishing, camping and canoeing. There are two wildlife management areas cooperatively managed with FWC. Other objectives include protection of 13 archaeological sites and maintaining Archaeological Resource Monitors on staff. There were no comments.

ARC Action: Dr. Palmer made the motion to approve the management plan update with Ms. Griner seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

PRESENTATIONS

Item 23: Connecting the Habitat Dots for Florida Panther Recovery

Discussion: Dr. Eason provided introductory comments prior to the presentation noting Goodno Ranch is one of several parcels in an area critical to panther conservation located within the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever Project. Mr. Ron Mezich, FWC Imperiled Species Management Section, presented a history of panther conservation in Florida dating from 1958 when panthers were offered full protection in Florida to the possibilities for future range expansion and acceptance. The panther program is based in Naples where most of the population is located. Funding for the program comes from the Florida panther license plate sales and

occasional grants. In 2020, the agency compiled a Species Status Assessment describing the viability of the species based on the best available scientific data. The assessment is a living document that will inform decision-making. The panther story begins with early exploitation followed by recovery efforts beginning in the 1980s to increase genetic diversity by introducing female panthers from Texas into the population. Historically, the range of the panther extended across the southeastern states. Currently, the breeding population is limited to southwest Florida and documented at 120-230 adult Florida panthers. The male panthers have a home range of 200 square miles and have been documented as far north as Georgia. Female panthers have a much smaller home range at 80 square miles and are primarily located south of the Caloosahatchee River. Since 2017 only two females have been documented north of the river. Range expansion of the breeding population is limited by the availability of suitable habitat and corridors connecting this habitat across the Caloosahatchee River and the I-4 corridor. Conservation efforts through acquisition, easements, crossings and working with private landowners is critical to the future of the population. Pilot projects compensating for depredation and payment for ecosystem services incentivizes landowners to maintain habitat.

Ms. Griner asked if the panthers cross the river by swimming and when the depredation payments would begin. Mr. Mezich responded there are no observations of this, but the assumption is they would cross by swimming, using roadways and bridges. They are bringing in staff in November and drafting the process with hopes to begin the depredation program around the first of the year. Ms. Griner noted it is important for the cattle business because of the issues with the federal program and asked that the Cattleman's Association be included in the discussion.

Dr. Palmer asked about relocating females to the panhandle. Mr. Mezich responded that it is not on the table right now, the natural range expansion is more acceptable to the managers, research staff and the public. Dr. Eason added in the mid 1980's several cats were released in north central Florida and there were unanticipated issues, it was a good lesson learned. There were no further comments.

ARC Action: No action required.

CLOSING COMMENTS

ARC Announcements: Chair Gambineri announced the deadline for new Florida Forever Project applications is October 31, 2022, and the upcoming ARC two-day meeting for December 8-9, 2022, followed by the FCT Governing Board meeting on December 14, 2022. Dr. Eason asked if she could share about the PLAM conference. Chair Gambineri responded the PLAM, scheduled for November in Punta Gorda, was cancelled out of respect for the recovery efforts from Hurricane Ian and concern for housing needs for first and second responders in the area. She expressed appreciation to everyone who worked on the agenda and stated they would revisit in the new year. Dr. Eason said he applauded the decision. He also asked if there was any news about the vacant seats on the Council. Ms. DeHaven responded we don't have any information but will follow-up. There were no further comments.

Dr. Palmer made the motion to adjourn with Dr. Eason seconding. The meeting was adjourned at 12:23 p.m.