

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

CNC Ranch Okeechobee County



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee
Acres: 3,557
Just Value: \$19,221,993
Application Date: April 30, 2022
Project Sponsor: Claudio Alvarez (Landowner)

Prepared By:
Division of State Lands
Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council
October 14, 2022

Executive Summary

The proposed CNC Ranch Florida Forever project is a working cattle ranch owned and managed by CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC. The project is located on County Road 724 (NW 240th St) in central Okeechobee County, 15 miles north of the City of Okeechobee and abuts the southwestern corner of the existing Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector Florida Forever project. By property appraiser measurements, the project contains 13 parcels totaling approximately 3,557 acres with a total Itax assessed value of \$19,221,993. The property is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition.

CNC Ranch is situated at the southern end of the Kissimmee Valley; a broad, low region of river swamps and prairies that extends from the central lakes region south to the prairies at the head of Lake Okeechobee. The project lies on a slight ridge above the east slope of the Kissimmee River, and is situated along Fish Slough which originates in marshes north of the property and flows south through the ranch. The property is close to a continuous network of protected lands associated with the Kissimmee River, including the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. CNC Ranch is located within the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape and the associated Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI) Partnership Opportunity Area.

The property is largely characterized by improved pasture. The most common natural community is depression marsh that occurs as isolated wetlands throughout the pasture. A few patches of remnant mesic hammock occur near the north end of the property. Rare species observed on or near the site include gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and crested caracara (*Caracara cheriway*). Additional rare and listed species are also documented in close proximity to CNC Ranch and could occur within the project area. The property is located within Priority 5 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN). Developed areas on the ranch include two residences, livestock pens, cross fencing and equipment barns.

If approved for addition to the 2023 Florida Forever Priority List, the project should be considered as an amendment to the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector Florida Forever project boundary in the Less-Than-Fee category. All 3,557 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit to the project site on June 28, 2022. Information included in this project evaluation report is a result of this site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

Acquisition of the CNC Ranch project would protect a portion of Florida's rural agricultural landscape, protect the water quality and quantity of the Kissimmee and St. Johns rivers and increase the amount of protected area and connectivity between established conservation lands in the greater region.

Acquisition of this project would serve to:

- increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels
- conserve and protect a portion of Florida's rural landscape in order to provide and enhance wildlife corridors for rare and imperiled species
- provide surface and groundwater protection and protect natural floodplain functions

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The CNC Ranch Florida Forever proposal is 3,602 acres (calculated through GIS; 3,556.5 as reported in application) in north-central Okeechobee County, approximately 15 miles north of Okeechobee.

The proposal abuts the Kissimmee-St. John's River Connector Florida Forever BOT project to the east and is 0.6 miles south of the NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement #305, which connects in turn to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park (1.6 miles north of the proposal area). Extending south from Kissimmee Prairie, within 4 to 7 miles from the proposal area, is a continuous network of protected lands associated with the Kissimmee River, including the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge, and the Corona Ranch Agricultural and Conservation Easement. A small tract of the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) Kissimmee River Save our Rivers project lies just southeast of the project. The southern edge of the property fronts NW 240th St (County Road 724) for about 2.25 miles. It is crossed by Fish Slough (also known as Fraser Creek), a channelized Kissimmee River tributary that flows about 3 miles across the property from north to south. Acquisition of the proposal would contribute to protection of water quality and water supply of the Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee, and the Everglades, as well as enhance connectivity for wildlife between Lake Okeechobee and managed areas further north in the Kissimmee River and St. Johns River basins.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)

This evaluation is based on information gathered from the proposal, aerial photography, US Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, FNAI Florida Cooperative Landcover data (version 3.5), information in the FNAI database, and data collected during a June 28, 2022 field survey by FNAI biologists Amy Jenkins and Geoff Parks, along with the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) liaison staff.

The proposal property is situated at the lower end of the Kissimmee Valley (Brooks 1981), a broad, low province of river swamps and prairies that extends from the central lakes region south to the prairies at the head of Lake Okeechobee. The project lies on a slight ridge above the east slope of the river, and is situated along Fish Slough (which originates in marshes north of the property and flows south through the ranch), eventually meeting Cypress Slough (which flows into the Kissimmee about 10 miles downstream of the property). The CNC Ranch slopes very gently from north to south, with elevations ranging from about 70 feet above mean sea level (msl) on a rise in the northern block of the property to 63 feet above msl at the outflow of Fish Slough. Soils over most of the property are poorly-drained sands, mainly from the Myakka and Valkaria series, with smaller areas of very-poorly-drained sands and muck in scattered depressions and drainages.

The overwhelming majority (88%) of the CNC Ranch is improved pasture with most of the rest (10%) being natural cover. The most abundant natural community is depression marsh, which occurs as numerous isolated wetlands scattered throughout the pasture. Those examined during the site visit showed some impacts of cattle grazing, and consisted of a mix of native and non-native herbs such as spadeleaf (*Centella asiatica*), sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*), poor joe (*Diodia teres*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), swamp rosemallow (*Hibiscus grandiflorus*), turkey tangle fogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*), pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), and Wright's nutrush (*Scleria lacustris*, FISC-I). Woody vegetation is mostly lacking, with the exception of occasional common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*).

A few patches of mesic hammock, making up 1% of the proposal area, occur near the north end of the property. Typical canopy species are live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*). The midstory is mainly cabbage palm, with smaller shrubs such as mata-pasto (*Sida planicaulis*), Caesar's weed (*Urena lobata*; FISC-I), American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), and saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). The groundcover consists of devil's horsewhip (*Achyranthes aspera*), Baldwin's flatsedge (*Cyperus croceus*), witchgrass (*Dichantherium sp.*), fireweed (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*), limpograss (*Hemarthria altissima*; FISC-II), woodsgrass (*Oplismenus hirtellus*), rougeplant (*Rivina humilis*), and Browne's savory (*Ruellia blechum*). Vines (climbing hempvine [*Mikania scandens*] and

muscadine [*Vitis rotundifolia*] are occasional. Epiphytes on live oaks include resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis michauxiana*), southern needleleaf (*Tillandsia setacea*), and golden polypody (*Phlebodium aureum*) occurs on trunks of cabbage palms. The hammocks show evidence of grazing and hog rooting but have a relatively low cover of invasive plants.

A basin marsh occupies most of the northwestern block of the property. Vegetation in this marsh is in distinct concentric zones with sawgrass and common buttonbush in the deeper central zone, and torpedograss (*Panicum repens*; FISC-1) and maidencane (*Panicum hemitomon*) at the outer edge. Other species include giant leather fern (*Acrostichum danaeifolium*), bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), lemon bacopa (*Bacopa caroliniana*), spadeleaf, pickerelweed, shortbristle horned beaksedge (*Rhynchospora corniculata*), and bulltongue arrowhead (*Sagittaria lancifolia*).

A low wet area surrounding Fish Slough is dominated by blue maidencane (*Amphicarpum muehlenbergianum*) and other native herbs such as largeflower rosegentian (*Sabatia grandiflora*). Although this area has likely been altered by modification of Fish Slough, it can probably still be considered wet prairie.

The dominant land use of the CNC Ranch is improved pasture. Pastures on the site are planted with bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) or limpograss. Other herbaceous plants include licoriceweed (*Scoparia dulcis*), dogfennel, turkey tangle fogfruit, blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), flatsedge (*Cyperus* sp.), smutgrass (*Sporobolus indicus*), pitted stripeseed (*Piriqueta cistoides* ssp. *caroliniana*), big carpetgrass (*Axonopus furcatus*), foxtail (*Setaria* sp.), beaksedge (*Rhynchospora* sp.), Everglades Key false buttonweed (*Spermacoce neoterminalis*), and vaseygrass (*Paspalum urvillei*), with the specific species varying between wetter and drier sites. Isolated patches of saw palmetto are occasional but not common. The owner noted that fertilization and liming is part of the management of the improved pasture.

A few areas of pasture have more remnant native species interspersed with pasture grasses, and would be considered semi-improved pasture. These sometimes had live oak. Of particular interest were small areas above Fish Slough near the south end of the property, where dense patches of saw palmetto with winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum*), American beautyberry, earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*), muscadine, and southern balsampear (*Momordica balsamina*), also contained a variety of native shrubs and herbs not seen elsewhere. These included wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*), pinebarren goldenrod (*Solidago fistulosa*), slender flattop goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*), dwarf live oak (*Quercus minima*), netted pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*), shiny blueberry (*Vaccinium myrsinites*), tread softly (*Cnidioscolus stimulosus*), tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), sensitive briar (*Mimosa quadrivalvis*), and blackroot (*Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*).

A developed area on the ranch includes a residence, shop/equipment barn, and a pole barn. The area surrounding the developed compound is vegetated with American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), live oak, cabbage palm, and a groundcover of bahiagrass interspersed with weedy plants such as largeflower Mexican clover (*Richardia grandiflora*).

Fish Slough has been altered by ditching, is bordered by spoil berms, and currently is best classified as a canal/ditch. The shore and berms were generally vegetated with many of the weedy non-native and native species present in the improved pastures, such as limpograss, bahiagrass, dogfennel, Everglades Key false buttonweed, as well as horseweed (*Coryza* sp.), Peruvian primrosewillow (*Ludwigia peruviana*; FISC-1), and old world climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*; FISC-1). Some patches of dense cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) occur on the ditch banks. Notably, an active gopher tortoise burrow was seen on the berm at one location during the site visit.

Invasive exotic plants are found at varying densities in all of the natural communities onsite. Of most concern is cogongrass, noted in some large patches along Fish Slough. Additional species including

torpedograss, Wright’s nutrush, tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*), and old world climbing fern also occur and would be expected to negatively impact the remaining natural communities if not controlled.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
depression marsh	175	5
basin marsh	94	3
mesic hammock	54	1
wet prairie	40	1
improved pasture	3156	88
road	31	1
pasture-unimproved	25	1
ditch/canal	17	<1
developed	6	<1
artificial pond	5	<1
Totals	3603	100%

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

CNC Ranch includes a mixture of natural and altered community types; however, most of the property is improved pasture. The largest natural communities on the property are depression marsh and basin marsh. The remaining acreage is comprised of unimproved pasture, canals, mesic hammock, wet prairie, artificial pond, and developed areas. CNC Ranch also includes a few structures on the property including one house, pole barns, pens, two bridges, and cross fencing (17.5 miles of fence) across the property for cattle and horses. CNC Ranch primarily focuses on their cow/calf operation and uses cattle grazing as a habitat management tool on the property,. Fire-dependent natural communities observed include mesic hammock, depression marsh, basin marsh, and wet prairie. The landowner representative mentioned that the property was acquired in 1997 and the landowner did not conduct any prescribed fire on the property; however, there may have been historical wildfires that occurred throughout the area. Despite the history of fire suppression and cattle grazing on the property, the a few natural communities on CNC Ranch appear to be in decent condition.

The landowner added fertilizer to help with plant growth in certain pasture areas of the property over six years ago and laid sod on parts of the pasture over 15 years ago. The landowner still mows the property as needed for aesthetic purposes and to control certain non-native plants. The landowner also conducts herbicide treatments on a variety of non-native species and on the native dogfennel throughout the area as appropriate. Some mechanical treatments have been conducted within certain marshes where sawgrass was dying due to low water levels and much of that area is now dominated by a native hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus*); some evidence of sawgrass regeneration was observed.

Non-native plants such as Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*), Caesar weed, tropical soda apple, cogongrass, and Wright’s nutrush were observed during the field visit. Pasture habitat appeared to be in good condition and was dominated by the native chalky bluestem (*Andropogon capillipes*), dogfennel, Nuttall’s thistle (*Cirsium nuttallii*), as well as the non-native limpograss and bahiagrass. Marsh habitats were in mixed states of condition, but not massively degraded by cattle use and also varied in plant species composition. Most marshes were dominated by either sawgrass, Carolina willow (*Salix caroliniana*), Wright’s nutrush, torpedograss, and wild hibiscus, or a combination of these species. The mesic hammocks were in moderate condition and occupied by tall cabbage palms, slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), some saw palmetto, and other hardwoods. The overstory was very dense, shading out most of the midstory and understory. The midstory was relatively open and in some mesic hammocks the understory was composed of leaf litter; however, some hammocks had a thick understory of the non-native *Sida planicaulis*.

Wildlife species observed during the tour included white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*), red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), swallow-tailed kites (*Elanoides forficatus*), eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), great egret (*Ardea alba*), white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), crested caracara (adults and juveniles), red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), northern bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*), mottled duck (*Anas fulvigula*), and a garter or ribbon snake (*Thamnophis sp.*) entering an armadillo burrow. There were multiple active gopher tortoise burrows observed during the site visit. One FWC representative mentioned that she thought she saw a burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) perched on a fence but could not confirm. Other notable sightings made by the landowner representative in the last ten years were Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), feral hog (*Sus scrofa*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), and striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*). The landowner's family hunts hogs and occasionally turkey on the property. The habitat conditions on CNC Ranch will favor listed species (e.g., crested caracara and sandhill cranes) that have adapted to thrive in pasture habitat.

The FWC GIS analysis of the Cooperative Land Cover v3.5 indicates that CNC Ranch comprises a mixture of many different community types including improved pasture, prairies and bogs, isolated freshwater marsh, rural, transportation, marshes, mesic hammock, hydric hammock, cultural-lacustrine. Approximately 10% of the property is classified as wetland based on the National Wetlands Inventory.

A high percentage of this proposal contributes to priority 2 Landscape Category, priority 1 in terrestrial category for the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project, and priority 2 in FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCA) 2021. The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model (FLAM) is a GIS model that determines the landscape value based on natural resources and fish and wildlife habitat. The FLAM ranks habitat from a 0-10 with a rank of 10 being the greatest value. CNC Ranch is at a value of 4.2 within the FLAM ranking system.

Approximately 75% of the property shows as species rich for 5-9 imperiled species. FNAI identified 82% of the property as potential habitat for crested caracaras. 77% of the property was also identified as SHCA for Florida burrowing owl, short-tailed hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*), and Florida snail kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*).

The conversion of the altered communities (e.g., pasture) on this property back to historical natural communities would be a massive task; however, the acquisition of a conservation easement under the Florida Forever program and subsequent management of the current natural and altered communities (i.e., no restoration to historical state) would benefit the overall conservation of Florida's wildlife, plants, and habitats, especially by providing connectivity between established conservation lands nearby. The acquisition would help protect the area from future development and especially assist many imperiled species that have adapted to using these altered communities.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, 3,557 acres would contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The total acreage of the project (3,557 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

Measure A3:

The number of shared acquisition projects among Florida Forever funding partners and partners with other funding sources, including local governments and the federal government.

No funding partners have been identified for this project.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA’S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCA).

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 33 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measure Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 3,546 acres (99% of site) of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas. This is primarily within Priority 2 (94% of site) with the remainder in Priority 1 (5%) and Priority 3 (<1%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 633 of Florida’s rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 3,555 acres (99% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is primarily divided between Priority 5 (80% of site) and Priority 4 (19%) with the remainder in Priority 6 (< 1%).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Caracara cheriway</i>	crested caracara	G5	3,537
<i>Mustela frenata peninsulæ</i>	Florida long-tailed weasel	G5T3?	316

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages

The FFME reports approximately 3,594 acres (100%) of the proposed project contributes to protection of ecological greenways with 100% of the acreage falling within Priority 5. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network, and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The Florida Forever Measures table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the CNC Ranch proposal does not contain any under-represented natural communities.

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The CNC Ranch proposal would not contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of >50,000 acres. Several larger conservation lands, such as Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, are in the general vicinity but disjunct from the proposal.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

This site provides habitat for one species of concern. During the site visit, at least 2 active gopher tortoise burrows were seen. A crested caracara (G5, S2, T, FT) was observed just off the property during the site visit and most likely uses the property as well. In addition, several other rare or listed species are documented in close proximity to the site and could occur on the proposed project area.

Table 3 lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, as well as species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision. Rarity rankings are in the following order: FNAI global (G, T) and state (S) ranks, federal status, state status. Species ranks and conservation status are described in Appendix D.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
none					
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	C	ST
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
none					

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property is intended to be utilized in a manner consistent with existing uses. The 363 acres of natural communities on CNC Ranch are in moderate ecological condition. The roughly 3,181 acres of pasture would require an extensive long-term commitment to restore to native species and is an unrealistic expectation for a working cattle ranch.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 1,342 acres (37%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is primarily located in Priority 5 (24% of site), with the remainder in Priority 4 (7%) and Priority 6 (6%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 3,557 acres (99%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is primarily located in Priority 4 (82% of site), with the remainder in Priority 6 (12%) and Priority 2 (6%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat, or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 486 acres (14%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 5 (9% of site) and Priority 4 (4%), with the remainder in Priority 6 (< 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Invasive exotic plant control needs of the property are moderate. The acreage of natural communities onsite is relatively small and infestations were not generally dense, so control of infestations in these areas would likely not be difficult. Of most concern is cogongrass, which was noted in some large patches along Fish Slough and Wright's nutrush observed in a depression marsh. These species should be treated aggressively to halt further increases. Additional species including torpedograss, tropical soda apple, and old world climbing fern also occur and would negatively impact the remaining natural communities if not controlled. As the entire site was not viewed during the site visit, a baseline assessment to determine the full extent of invasive plant species is warranted if acquisition of the easement occurs.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

The property contains approximately 308 acres of wetland plant communities that provide hydrologic benefits through surface water storage and retention and groundwater recharge.

Measure D2:

The quantity of water made available through the water resource development component of a district water supply plan for which a water management district is responsible.

The property is located within SFWMD's Lower Kissimmee Basin Water Supply Planning Area. The property is not specifically included in any water resource development project listed in the water supply plan. However, open green space and water retention helps to recharge the surficial aquifer system.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The property is in a restoration plan area (Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan [BMAP]) and would provide surface and ground water protection.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of CNC Ranch

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
DEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	0
DEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	12
DEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	7
DEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	9
DEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	0
DEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	0
DEP BMAPs	10	10
DEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	0
Total Possible	101	38

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high).

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 3 - Medium water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measures E1-E3

The CNC Ranch project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with no public access.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The CNC Ranch Florida Forever project would not meet Measure F1 as the project contains no archaeological sites recorded or known to exist.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

The CNC Ranch Florida Forever project would not meet Measure F2 as the project contains no archaeological sites recorded or known to exist.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

No cultural resources recorded or known to exist within the project proposal. To date, only a portion of this property has been professionally surveyed for archaeological and/or historical sites. It is therefore possible that undocumented cultural resources exist on the property, but this cannot be determined without formal survey of the entire property.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

No staff from the Division of Historical Resources participated in the field evaluation of the CNC Ranch Florida Forever Project.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

The FFME reports that the proposed project does not contribute to Sustainable Forest Resources.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

The project contains no areas of forestland managed for economic return.

Measure G3:

The number of acres of forestland acquired that will serve to maintain natural groundwater recharge functions.

The FFME reports that the proposed project does not contribute to protection of Forestland for Recharge Resources.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration actually restored by reforestation.

Okeechobee County is laden with dry and wet prairies; ecosystem features where pine forests are not naturally present and there are no areas on-site appropriate for reforestation.

FLORIDA FOREVER CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- the project the project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues; the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights; or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.

The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:

- projects where the state's land conservation plans overlap with the military's need to protect lands, water, and habitat to ensure the sustainability of military missions.

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of State Lands (DSL), Office of Environmental Services (OES).

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever would be the funding source. CNC Ranch is also within the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape and the associated REPI Partnership Opportunity Area.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal Issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title insurance commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be reviewed if the policy is available. The easements and encumbrances would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

DEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the CNC Ranch Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs

Moderate: The subject property contains wetlands (15% of the site), bottomland forest and mesic hammocks. The natural habitats on the property could be used for hiking, biking, bird watching and fishing. The project would provide a buffer to the Kissimmee River and the St. Johns River from the suburban uses to the west of the property.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

The subject property contains wetlands (15% of the site), bottomland forest and mesic hammocks. Frasier Creek runs through the center of the proposed property and appears to be hydrologically connected to the Kissimmee River. Urban and suburban development adjacent to the creek could have a deleterious effect on the water quality and quantity of the Kissimmee River.

Potential for Being Subdivided

The subject property has a moderate potential for being subdivided because it is in proximity to existing suburban type uses. The Future Land Use designation has a maximum residential density of one dwelling unit per ten acres and Okeechobee County has a relatively low rate of population growth. The subject property is surrounded predominantly by the Agriculture Future Land Use designation and the Rural Activity Center (Southern Colonization Subdivision).

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: The existing land use on the subject property is agricultural. There is a large, platted subdivision (Southern Colonization) just west of the subject property.

Future Land Uses: The subject property is designated as "Agriculture" on the Okeechobee County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map. The Agriculture Future Land Use category allows the following: agricultural processing and other agriculturally related activities, limited commercial uses that

allow for recreational activities or use of public lands are permissible, as well as educational, institutional, and other public uses.

Development Potential

Based on the Okeechobee County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Designation (Agriculture), the subject property has a development potential of 355 residential dwellings units.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed project falls within FDOT District 1. FDOT finds no adverse impacts from the proposed project.

REFERENCES CITED

Brooks. 1981. *Guide to the physiographic divisions of Florida*. Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences, University of Florida).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in the DEP's DSL and FNAI determined the final project recommendations. Sine Murray and Hannah Turbiville in DSL's OES were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Florida Natural Areas Inventory – Geoffrey Parks & Amy Jenkins
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission – Jacqueline Bucheck & Eric Suarez
- Florida Forest Service – Catherine Ingram & Calin Ionita
- Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources – Jason O'Donoghue & Brandon Ackermann
- South Florida Water Management District – Justin Nolte & Steven Coughlin
- Florida Department of Transportation – Ben Naselius
- Florida Department of Economic Opportunity – Barbara Powell
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration – Kevin Coyne
- DEP DSL, Bureau of Appraisal

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by FNAI

CNC Ranch: Florida Forever Measure Evaluation 202200803

GIS ACRES = 3,602

MEASURES	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	170	5%
Priority 2	3,362	94%
Priority 3	15	< 1%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	3,546	99%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	666	19%
Priority 5	2,878	80%
Priority 6	12	< 1%
Total Acres	3,555	99%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	3,594	100%
Total Acres	3,594	100%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	0	0%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	1	
G4	0	
G5	0	
Total	1	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	258	7%
Priority 5	874	24%
Priority 6	210	6%
Total Acres	1,342	37%

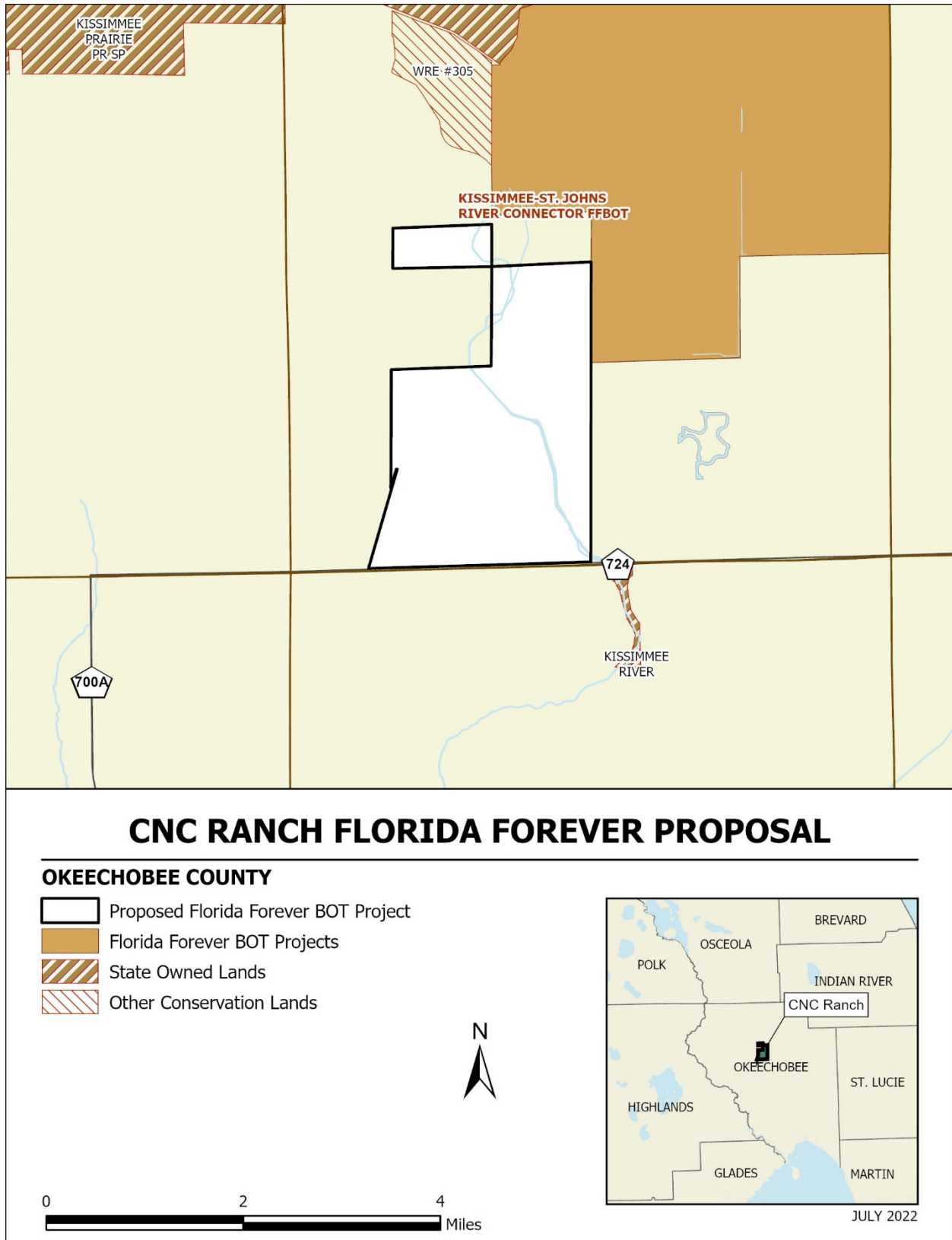
MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	202	6%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	2,936	82%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	418	12%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	3,557	99%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	147	4%
Priority 5	338	9%
Priority 6	0	< 1%
Total Acres	486	14%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	1,480	41%
Priority 4	1,573	44%
Priority 5	394	11%
Priority 6	148	4%
Total Acres	3,594	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
<small>(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)</small>		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	0	0 sites
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	0	0%

^aAcres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by FNAI

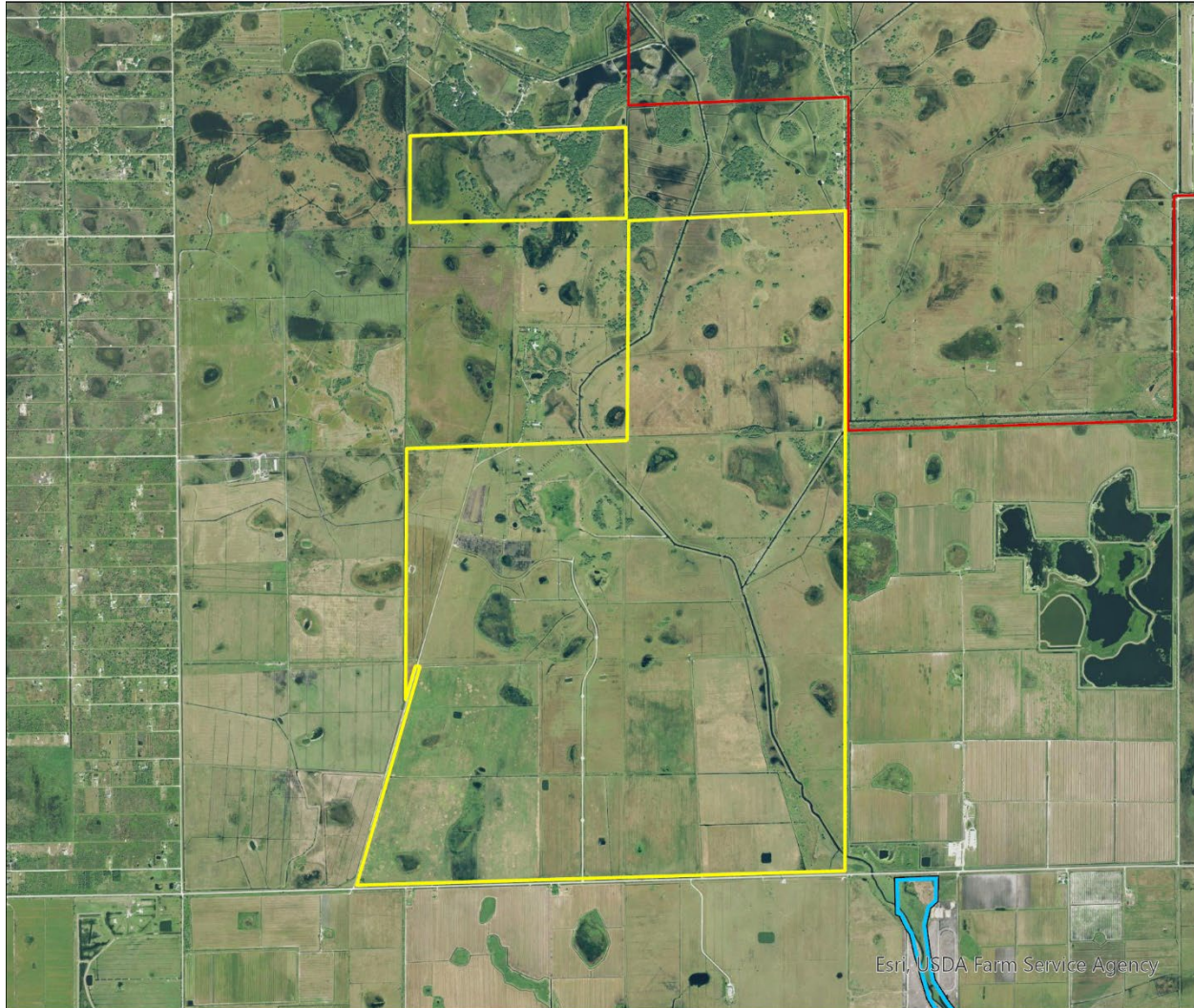
B1: Florida Forever map



B2: Aerial map

CNC Ranch Florida Forever Proposal

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF JULY 2022

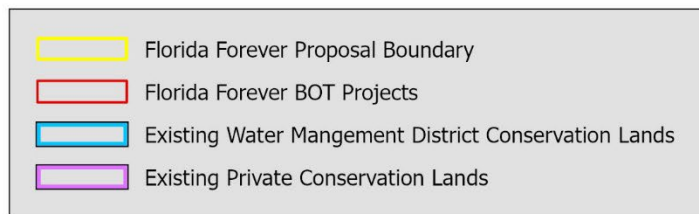


Map Produced by: N. Pasco, July 2022

Background: USA NAIP Imagery Resolution = 1.0 meter



1018 Thomasville Road
 Suite 200-C
 Tallahassee, Florida 32303
 850-224-8207
 fax 850-681-9364
 www.fnai.org



Appendix C:**PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY**

COUNTY	PARCEL ID	OWNER	ACRES PER TAX CARD	JUST VALUE	ASSESSMENT VALUE	PARCEL DESIGNATION
Okeechobee	1-17-34-34-0A00-00002-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	268.22	\$1,058,306	\$36,179	Essential
Okeechobee	1-21-34-34-0A00-00001-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	659.23	\$3,649,823	\$150,611	Essential
Okeechobee	1-28-34-34-0A00-00001-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	640	\$3,377,996	\$147,819	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0A00-00001-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	505.23	\$2,719,191	\$152,272	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0A00-00001-A000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	133.47	\$787,048	\$33,536	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0A00-00002-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	5.69	\$17,070	\$17,070	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0A00-00002-A000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	1.34	\$7,963	\$402	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0010-00000-00R0	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	10.09	\$0	\$0	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0010-00000-0010	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	130.12	\$766,854	\$32,827	Essential
Okeechobee	1-29-34-34-0010-00000-0740	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	121.1	\$708,401	\$30,297	Essential
Okeechobee	1-31-34-34-0A00-00002-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	56.35	\$327,366	\$13,843	Essential
Okeechobee	1-32-34-34-0A00-00001-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	396.66	\$2,219,827	\$93,267	Essential
Okeechobee	1-33-34-34-0A00-00001-0000	CNC Ranch Holdings, LLC.	629	\$3,582,148	\$148,677	Essential
			3,556.5	\$19,221,993	\$856,800	

Appendix D:**Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions**

FNAI
Definitions of imperiled species ranks and conservation status

Using a ranking system developed by NatureServe and the Natural Heritage Program Network, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory assigns two ranks for each element. The global rank is based on an element's worldwide status; the state rank is based on the status of the element in Florida. Element ranks are based on many factors, the most important ones being estimated number of Element Occurrences (EOs), estimated abundance (number of individuals for species; area for natural communities), geographic range, estimated number of adequately protected EOs, relative threat of destruction, and ecological fragility.

FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTNR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

FEDERAL LEGAL STATUS

Legal status information provided by FNAI for information only. For official definitions and lists of protected species, consult the relevant federal agency.

Definitions derived from U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973, Sec. 3. Note that the federal status given by FNAI refers only to Florida

2019-04-19

Page 2

FNAI
Definitions of imperiled species ranks and conservation status

populations and that federal status may differ elsewhere.

- C = Candidate species for which federal listing agencies have sufficient information on biological vulnerability and threats to support proposing to list the species as Endangered or Threatened.
- E = Endangered: species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.
- E, T = Species currently listed endangered in a portion of its range but only listed as threatened in other areas
- E, PDL = Species currently listed endangered but has been proposed for delisting.
- E, PT = Species currently listed endangered but has been proposed for listing as threatened.
- E, XN = Species currently listed endangered but tracked population is a non-essential experimental population.
- T = Threatened: species likely to become Endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.
- PE = Species proposed for listing as endangered
- PS = Partial status: some but not all of the species' infraspecific taxa have federal
- PT = Species proposed for listing as threatened
- SAT = Treated as threatened due to similarity of appearance to a species which is federally listed such that enforcement personnel have difficulty in attempting to differentiate between the listed and unlisted species.
- SC = Not currently listed, but considered a "species of concern" to USFWS.

STATE LEGAL STATUS

Provided by FNAI for information only. For official definitions and lists of protected species, consult the relevant state agency.

Animals: Definitions derived from "Florida's Endangered Species and Species of Special Concern, Official Lists" published by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 1 August 1997, and subsequent updates.

- C = Candidate for listing at the Federal level by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- FE = Listed as Endangered Species at the Federal level by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- FT = Listed as Threatened Species at the Federal level by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- FXN = Federal listed as an experimental population in Florida
- FT(S/A) = Federal Threatened due to similarity of appearance
- ST = State population listed as Threatened by the FFWCC. Defined as a species, subspecies, or isolated population which is acutely vulnerable to environmental alteration, declining in number at a rapid rate, or whose range or habitat is decreasing in area at a rapid rate and as a consequence is destined or very likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future.
- SSC = Listed as Species of Special Concern by the FFWCC. Defined as a population which warrants special protection, recognition, or consideration because it has an inherent significant vulnerability to habitat modification, environmental alteration, human disturbance, or substantial human exploitation which, in the foreseeable future, may result in its becoming a threatened species. (SSC* for *Pandion haliaetus* (Osprey) indicates that this status applies in Monroe county only.)
- N = Not currently listed, nor currently being considered for listing.

Plants: Definitions derived from Sections 581.011 and 581.185(2), Florida Statutes, and the Preservation of Native Flora of Florida Act, 5B-40.001. FNAI does not track all state-regulated plant species; for a complete list of state-regulated plant species, call Florida Division of Plant Industry, 352-372-3505 or see: <<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/>>.

- E = Endangered: species of plants native to Florida that are in imminent danger of extinction within the state, the survival of which is unlikely if the causes of a decline in the number of plants continue; includes all species determined to be endangered or threatened pursuant to the U.S. Endangered Species Act.
- T = Threatened: species native to the state that are in rapid decline in the number of plants within the state, but which have not so decreased in number as to cause them to be Endangered.
- N = Not currently listed, nor currently being considered for listing.

Appendix F:

Site Visit Photos



1. Improved pasture with cross-fencing



2. Gopher tortoise burrow

October 14, 2022



3. Mesic hammock and semi improved pasture.



4. Mesic hammock with palm canopy



5. Depression marsh within semi-improved pasture



6. Fraser Creek (Fish Slough)