

ITEM 12:

Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Forever Project Boundary to add three parcels totaling approximately 79.63 acres in Polk County with a tax assessed market value of \$61,310.

LOCATION:

Polk County

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

The Stephens' Property amendment proposed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC), adds three parcels in Polk County totaling approximately 79.63 acres to the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project. The property is owned by the Stephens family. The three parcels have a combined tax assessed value of \$61,310.

The Stephens property includes eight parcels, five of which are within the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project boundary. The proposed amendment would add the remaining parcels outside of the boundary into the project. The proposed amendment contains pastures with embedded marshes and would increase protection of the Crooked Lake WEA which provides habitat for rare plants and diverse wildlife including the Florida panther and nesting swallowtail kites. The property is within the optimal conservation planning boundary for the Crooked Lake WEA and would increase connectivity between conservation lands, expand recreational opportunities and help protect water quality and quantity. The property is proposed for fee simple acquisition and would be managed by FWC as an addition to Crooked Lake WEA. If acquired as less-than-fee, FWC is the proposed monitoring agency.

The proposal meets the criteria to be submitted as a boundary amendment. The parcels total less than 1,000 acres, have a tax assessed value of less than \$2 million, and are less than 10% of the size of the overall project to which it is being added. The proposal area should be designated as essential.

Project History:

The Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem in Highlands, Lake, Osceola and Polk Counties was approved on the CARL list in 1992. Stretching from Orlando to Lake Okeechobee, much of the Lake Wales Ridge historic mosaic of scrub, flatwoods, wetlands, and lakes has been converted to citrus groves and housing developments. The Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem project is designed to protect the best remaining tracts of the Central Florida Ridge scrub and the ecosystems associated with it, thereby preserving numerous endangered species and allowing the public to see examples of the unique original landscape of the ridge. The congressionally designated Florida National Scenic Trail crosses this project.

The Lake Wales Ecosystem project includes over 58,651 acres with 21,967 acres remaining and is ranked number 2 in the Critical Natural Lands category on the 2020 Florida Forever Priority List. The tax assessed value for the remaining acres to be acquired in this project per property appraiser information (2018) is \$ \$70,717,098.

FNAI Review:

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), most of the proposed addition contributes to Surface Water Protection and Aquifer Recharge, with substantial contributions to

Natural Floodplain Protection and Functional Wetlands. Based on habitat for the Florida black bear, the site also scores 100% for FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

Project	DHR	FFS	Lynetta Griner	FWC	Bill Palmer	Elva Peppers	DEP	Selected
Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem: Stephens' Property								



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[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)

To: Deborah Burr, DEP/OES
From: Dale R. Jackson, FNAI
Date: September 8, 2020
Subject: Proposed Boundary Modification to Florida Forever BOT Project: **Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem** – Stephens property, Polk County

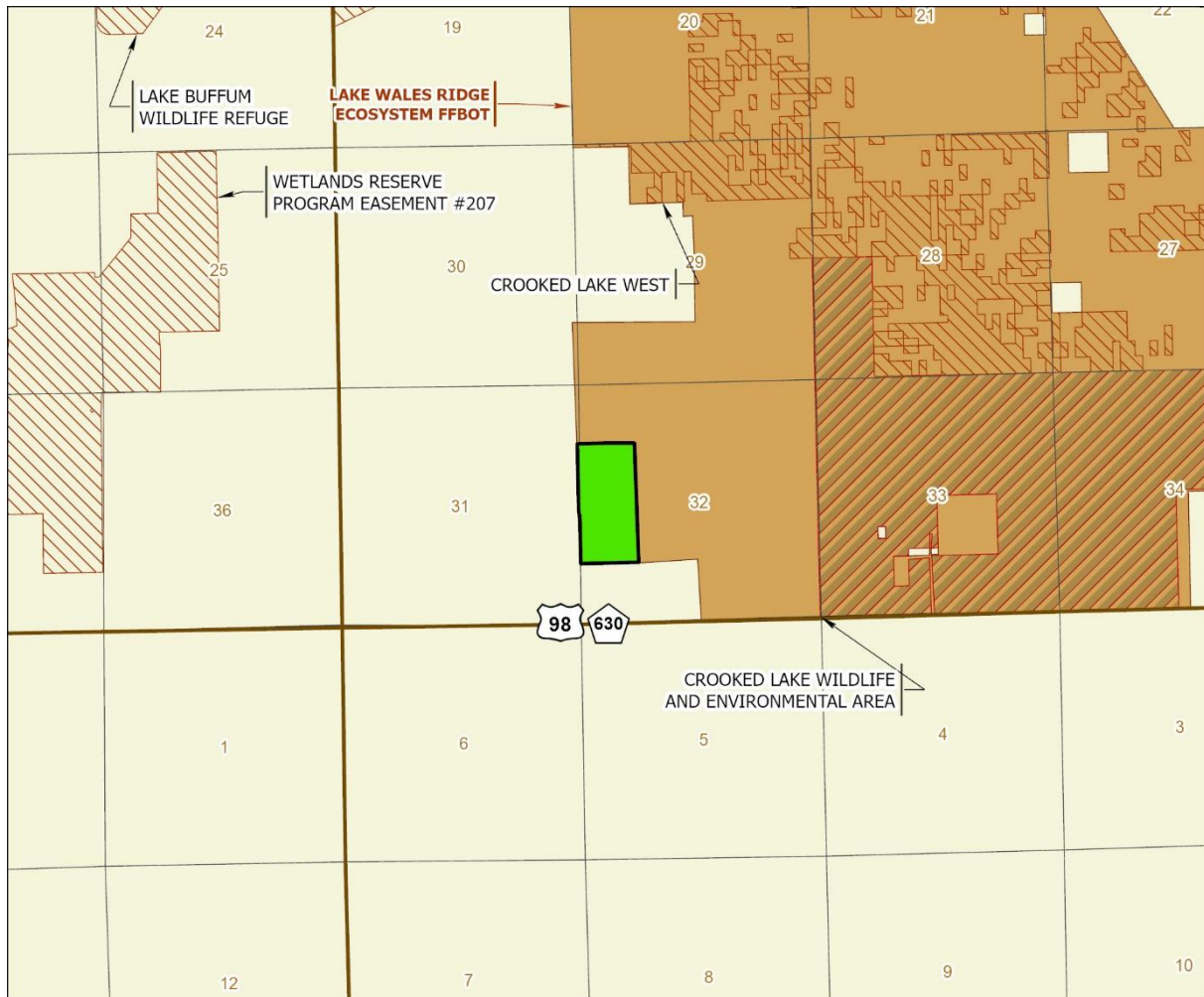
The major goal of the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem (LWRE) Florida Forever Project is to protect the best remaining tracts of the mosaic of scrub, flatwoods, wetlands, and lakes that once covered the high, sandy Lake Wales Ridge, the backbone of Florida that stretches south from near Orlando almost to Lake Okeechobee. In particular, the unique scrub is inhabited by many plants and animals found nowhere else; many are now highly threatened from habitat loss and fragmentation that followed conversion to citrus groves and housing developments.

The proposed addition includes 79.6 acres (77.34 GIS acres) in southern Polk County. The property is offered for fee-simple or less-than-fee protection. The northern and eastern borders of the rectangular tract are contiguous with the southwestern corner of the LWRE project, 0.75 mile west of Crooked Lake Wildlife and Environmental Area, and ca. 1 mile southwest of Crooked Lake West (county-owned/managed).

Except for some forested growth along the headwater of a small drain (leading to Boggy Branch) bisecting the site from east to west, former natural habitat (mostly scrub suspected) within the site has been converted to improved pasture; a couple of depression marshes remain along the drain. Virtually all lands to the west and south of the site are in agriculture or pasture. Although the site has little remaining natural value, its protection may help to solidify future managed area boundaries and buffer against eventual encroaching development.

The FNAI database contains no records of rare species on site, which is not surprising given the level of habitat conversion. Most of the potential species noted in the application are unlikely to occur in such a disturbed landscape.

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) at the end of this memo is based on the Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment developed by FNAI. The data used in that analysis represent a standardized, statewide perspective of natural community distributions based primarily on data from the Cooperative Land Cover Map. The majority of the proposed addition contributes to Surface Water Protection and Aquifer Recharge, with a potential to support Sustainable Forestry.



**LAKE WALES RIDGE ECOSYSTEM PROPOSED ADDITION
(STEPHENS PROPERTY)**

POLK COUNTY

-  Proposed Florida Forever BOT Project Addition
-  Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Owned Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands



SEPTEMBER 2020

Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Proposed Addition (Stephens Property)

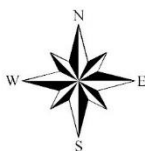
FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSED ADDITION AS OF SEPTEMBER 2020




Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Map Produced by: N. Pasco, September 2020

Background: World Imagery Resolution = 0.3 meter



	Florida Forever Proposed Addition
	Florida Forever BOT Projects

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Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Addition (Stephens Property): Florida Forever Measure Evaluation 20200903

GIS ACRES = 77.34

MEASURES	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	68.39	88%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.22	< 1%
Total Acres	68.61	89%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	0.00	0%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	30.25	39%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	30.25	39%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0.00	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0.00	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0.00	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0.00	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0.00	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0.00	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0.00	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0.00	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0.00	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	0.00	0%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0.00	0%
Total Acres	0.00	0%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	0	
G5	0	
Total	0	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	6.95	9%
Priority 6	3.61	5%
Total Acres	10.56	14%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	33.75	44%
Priority 5	42.92	55%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Priority 7	0.00	0%
Total Acres	76.67	99%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0.00	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0.00	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0.00	0%
Total Acres	0.00	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.06	< 1%
Priority 5	2.89	4%
Priority 6	1.72	2%
Total Acres	4.67	6%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	67.77	88%
Priority 4	9.56	12%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	77.34	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 sites		
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands	71.94	93%
Total Acres	71.94	93%
G3: Forestland for Recharge 0.00 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 greatest on small sites.