

# *Amtel Farms*

Fee Simple

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Glades and Hendry Counties

prepared by

Division of State Lands Staff

Acquisition and Restoration Council Liaison Staff

and

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

*DRAFT for June 12, 2020 ARC meeting*



Proposed Land Manager  
Acres  
Just Value  
Application Date  
Sponsor

FWC  
2,207  
\$12,517,471  
October 28, 2019  
Amtel Farms, Incorporated



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## ***Executive Summary***

Amtel Farms is a fee simple proposal located in Glades and Hendry Counties. It is 2,207 acres GIS (2,213.95 acres according to the county property cards) and has a just value of \$12.5 million. It was submitted by Mr. Lane Boy, representing the landowner, Amtel Farms, Incorporated.

Acquisition of Amtel Farms would create a strategic northern extension of wildlife corridor to facilitate Florida panther movement across the Caloosahatchee.

The Florida Forest Service is proposing to manage this site for Operation Outdoor Freedom events and recreation activities, in coordination with the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's nearby wildlife management area. It is currently leased for cattle grazing. There is no hunting lease.

Amtel Farms has 3.75 miles of frontage on the north shore of the Caloosahatchee River and is accessed by Marshall Field Road, east of the town of Labelle. The proposed project is adjacent to conservation easements managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) including Cypress Creek Grove and Lone Ranger Ranch along with other conservation easements southward.

Amtel Farms is within FWC's Dispersal Zone for the Florida panther. An abundant Florida black bear population uses this area and crested caracaras frequent the pastures.

The majority of the acreage is improved pasture and woodland pasture. The most extensive natural community on the site is mesic hammock, distributed in a series of large patches of property.

Amtel Farms has 35 acres of under-represented natural community - 20 acres of mesic flatwoods and 15 acres of dry prairie in relatively good condition. About 9% of the property is wetlands, with a few small depression marshes. One basin swamp dominated by pond cypress was observed from a distance. The entire site would provide for surface water protection and groundwater recharge and increase the number of acres available for natural resource based public recreation or education.

Altered areas include ditches/canals, artificial ponds, the berm along the river, a sparse network of roads, and a few unoccupied structures in the eastern portion of the woodland pasture. Invasive exotic plants are common throughout the property.

If approved for addition to the 2021 Priority List, this project could be added to the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape project boundary. The land would be designated as essential.



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### ***Purpose for Acquisition***

Amtel Farms is proposed for the following public purposes:

- (a) enhance the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects;
- (b) increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels;
- (c) protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state;
- (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; and,
- (e) increase natural resource-based public recreation or educational opportunities.

### ***Location and Proximity to Other Managed Areas***

The Amtel Farms Florida Forever proposal is 2,214 acres (property appraiser), or 2,207 (GIS acres) in southeastern Glades County along the north side of the Caloosahatchee River, approximately 1.2 miles east of LaBelle. The property is proposed for fee simple acquisition. The proposal includes 3.75 miles of river frontage. Cypress Creek Grove Conservation Easement is approximately 0.25 miles east, also on the north side of the river, and adjacent to the southern boundary of the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever project. To the south, the Lone Ranger Ranch Conservation Easement (TNC) lies across the river from the westernmost mile of river frontage. A series of conservation easements connects with the Lone Ranger Ranch southward and together these comprise 2,804 contiguous acres within the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever Project, designed primarily to facilitate Florida panther movement. This acquisition would help create a northern extension of this corridor.

### ***Resource Description (by FNAI and FWC)***

#### **Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)**

This evaluation is based on information gathered from the proposal, high resolution aerial imagery, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map (version 3.3), and information in the Florida Natural Areas Inventory database. A field survey was conducted on February 20, 2020, by FNAI biologists Katy NeSmith and Dan Hipes, along with the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) liaison staff.

The property is an active ranch with 500 cattle. There are no hunting leases on the property.

The site is within the Caloosahatchee Valley province of the Southwestern Flatwoods physiographic district. The province is characterized by wet prairies and flatwoods on late Pleistocene sand terraces



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that are underlain by older limestone (Brooks 1981). As is the case for much of its length, the stretch of the Caloosahatchee River adjacent to Amtel Farms is channelized.

Elevations on the proposal property range from 20 feet above mean sea level (msl) at the northern boundary to 5 feet above msl along the Caloosahatchee River, with the property about evenly split lengthwise by the 10 ft contour. Soils series north of the 10 ft contour are mostly poorly drained Pople and Malabar fine sands and Oldsmar sands. Below the 10 ft contour is mostly very poorly drained Chobee loamy fine sand, except along a narrow band of spoil sands at the river edge, which is well-drained Arens fine sand.

The majority of the property acres (85%) is improved pasture and woodland pasture. The better drained soils are dominated by bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) and smutgrass (*Sporobolus indicus*). Where soils are very poorly drained, primarily south of the 10 ft contour line, there are large patches of wet pasture dominated by limpgrass (*Hemarthria altissima*; FLEPPC Category II). The woodland pastures are characterized by widely scattered cabbage palms (*Sabal palmetto*) and live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) over bahia and smutgrasses. Shrubs observed in the pastures and woodland pastures include American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) and several non-native species including John Charles (*Condea verticillata*), lion's ear (*Leonotis nepetifolia*) and the invasive exotic plants Caesar's weed (*Urena lobata*; FLEPPC Category I) and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*; FLEPPC Category I). In one location in a woodland pasture in the central part of the property, the non-native scarlet milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) was in bloom and observed being visited by Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) and soldier (*Danaus eresimas*) butterflies.

The most extensive natural community on Amtel Farms is mesic hammock, distributed in a series of large patches in the central and southwestern portion of the property. The mesic hammocks have mature canopies of live oaks and laurel oak (*Q. hemisphaerica*) with cabbage palms in the canopy and subcanopy. An occasional citrus tree (*Citrus* sp.) was also observed. Resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis michauxiana*) and the bromeliads, common wild-pine (*Tillandsia fasciculata*), southern needleleaf (*Tillandsia setacea*), Bartram's air-plant (*Tillandsia bartramii*), and Balbis' airplant (*Tillandsia balbisiana*) are common on the oak branches. Understory shrubs include American beautyberry, lantana (*Lantana strigocamara*), pawpaw (*Asimina* sp.) and Caesar's weed. The woody vines, muscadine (*Vitis rotundifolia*), earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), and rosary pea (*Abrus precatorius*; FLEPPC Category I) are abundant in patches. Herbs observed include clustered bushmint (*Hyptis alata*), eastern milkpea (*Galactia regularis*), common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), and whitemouth dayflower (*Commelina erecta*). Grasses include woodsgrass (*Oplismenus* sp.), broomsedge bluestem (*Andropogon virginicus*), crowngrass (*Paspalum distichum*), bahiagrass, and carpetgrass (*Axonopus* sp.). Maiden fern (*Thelypteris* sp.) was also seen.



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Four patches of hydric hammock are widely scattered on the property, two patches in the west and two in the east, associated with the poorly drained Pople soil series. The field team observed a hydric hammock in the eastern-central part of the property and observed a canopy of cabbage palm, swamp laurel oak (*Q. laurifolia*) and live oak with Old World climbing fern in the groundcover and midstory.

A patch of dry prairie, a natural community considered under-represented on conservation lands, occurs at the north boundary; this prairie was not seen during the site visit but on aerial photography appears to be in relatively good condition, and contiguous with dry prairie to the north outside of the proposal, on property that is owned by the Lykes family according to the land manager. The proposal reports a few small structures used for agricultural equipment, but no residences.

There are a few small depression marshes widely scattered in the pastures. One visited had been deepened, presumably for watering cattle, and was dominated by bahiagrass with some iris (*Iris* sp.) in the upper slopes, and alligator flag (*Thalia geniculata*) in the deepest areas. Others observed were primarily dominated with pasture grasses.

Two patches of remnant mesic flatwoods are in the northern portion of the proposal and both have a canopy of South Florida slash pine (*Pinus elliottii* var. *densa*); one area along the border has an understory of cabbage palm, saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), and bahiagrass; the second patch has an understory dominated by very tall (approx. 6 ft), dense saw palmetto and Brazilian pepper.

The single basin swamp dominated by pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) occurs on the property; was observed from distance during the site visit. This swamp is adjacent to the easternmost patch of mesic flatwoods described previously.

Vegetation associated with the ditches/canals is largely a mix of native shrubs such as southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*), willow (*Salix caroliniana*), and viburnum (*Viburnum* sp) with Brazilian pepper. Guinea grass (*Urochloa maxima*; FLEPPC Category II) was also observed at a ditch edge in one location.

Non-natural areas include ditches/canals, artificial ponds, the berm along the Caloosahatchee River, and a sparse network of roads. There is one small area with a few small buildings and mobile homes, unoccupied, in the eastern portion of the woodland pasture.

Invasive exotic plants are common on the property. Limpograss (*Hemarthria altissima*; FLEPPC Category II) dominates the wettest areas of the pasturelands, below the 10 ft contour line; this species was often planted as a pasture grass in South Florida in the past, and this is possibly the source of its occurrence here. Other invasive species observed in the pasture and woodland pastures include tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*; FLEPPC Category I) and torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*; FLEPPC



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Category I). Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*; FLEPPC Category I) was observed along a road at the property's northern boundary near the entrance. Old world climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*; FLEPPC Category I) is prolific in large patches within the hydric hammocks and another invasive exotic vine, rosary pea is widespread around the property. Brazilian pepper is common in the hydric hammocks, ditches and in wet depressions.

The following table lists, in approximate order of estimated areal extent, natural communities and other land cover types within the site's boundaries.

**Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal**

<u>Community or Landcover</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Proposal</u>
Mesic Hammock	162	7
Hydric Hammock	61	3
Depression Marsh	39	2
Dry Prairie	15	1
Mesic Flatwoods	20	1
Basin Swamp	5	<1
Pasture-Improved	1,639	74
Pasture-Improved-Woodland	245	11
Artificial Pond	23	1
Ditch/Canal	3	<1
Total	2,207	100

Source: Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)**

Amtel Farms is proposed for fee simple acquisition, with Florida Forest Service as the manager if acquired. The proposal includes six parcels in Glades County and one parcel in Hendry County.

The FWC GIS analysis of the Cooperative Land Cover v3.3 indicates that Amtel Farms is mostly comprised of Improved Pasture (70%). Other community types observed include Oak- Cabbage Palm Forest (14%), Live Oak (6%). Approximately 9% of the proposal is classified as wetland based on the National Wetlands Inventory.



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## ***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.*

Acquisition of the Amtel Farms project under the Florida Forever program would benefit the conservation of Florida's native habitats. Amtel Farms is adjacent (across the Caloosahatchee River) to the existing Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever Project and less than two miles from the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever 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.*

This project will provide a total of 13 acres (1%) of Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA), as noted in the FFME table provided by FNAI (see appendix for more detail).

#### **Measure B2:**

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

The eastern quarter of Amtel Farms is within the dispersal zone identified for Florida panther. This zone is considered critical for movement of panthers across the Caloosahatchee River, potentially to an extensive network of conservation lands in central Florida. The site is also within a zone where Florida black bear activity is considered common by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. No other rare plants or animals are documented on site, although it has the potential for some use by several species' characteristic of the open rangelands of central Florida.

An FNAI-provided analysis of priority conservation areas based on Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment data may be found in the Florida Forever Measures table. Habitat conservation priorities for 281 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The Florida Forever Measures table shows the acres for each priority class found on the Amtel Farms proposal. Overall, the site contains approximately 1,507 acres (68% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 4 (31% of site) and Priority 3 (19% of site), with the remainder in Priorities 5 and 6 (12% and 6%, respectively).



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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.

**Habitat Acres for Florida’s Species of Greatest Conservation Need based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities**

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Global Rank</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Caracara cheriway	crested caracara	G5	1,222
Drymarchon couperi	eastern indigo snake	G3	413
Puma concolor coryi	Florida panther	G5T1	1,112
Ursus americanus floridanus	Florida black bear	G5T2	1,288

Source: Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)

**Measure B3:**

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

Approximately 2,207 acres (100%) of the proposal contributes to the acquisition of significant landscapes, linkages, and corridors, as noted in the FFME table provided by FNAI (see appendix for more detail).

**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 Amtel Farm proposal contains 20 acres of mesic flatwoods (1% of site) and 15 acres of dry prairie (1% of site).

**Measure B6:**

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

One crested caracara was observed during the 2020 site visit in a hydric hammock in the eastern portion of the property. Crested caracaras are increasingly threatened by residential development and conversion to intensive agricultural uses.

The easternmost mile of the proposal’s river frontage and the adjacent eastern acreage of the proposal are within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) dispersal zone for panther. A team of experts assembled by the USFWS used a combination of radio telemetry records and land use/land cover data to delineate primary and secondary zones that support the current Florida panther population, and the





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dispersal zone was identified to accommodate panther dispersal northward. The site is also within a general region where the Florida black bear is considered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to be abundant.

The Florida Forever Measures table 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 lack sufficient data to justify addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, and species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision.

**Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the Florida Forever proposed project**

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
<i>Ursus Americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	ZN
<i>Puma concolor coryi</i>	Florida panther	G5T1	S1	E	FE
<i>Caracara cheriway</i>	Crested Caracara	G5	S2	T	FT

Source: Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)

**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 majority of the property (85%) is in pasture and woodland pasture; restoration to historic vegetation would require extensive time and effort. Approximately 10% of the property supports natural mesic and hydric hammocks with mature canopy trees but with extensive invasive exotic plant infestations in the understory, particularly Old world climbing fern. Restoration of these hammocks will require persistent aggressive invasive exotic plant treatments. The two small remnant mesic flatwoods have been long unburned; these small areas would likely respond well to prescribed fire; these flatwoods make up only 1% of the property acreage.



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**Measure C4:**

*The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.*

Approximately 1,147 acres (52%) provides for the protection of natural floodplain functions, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI (see appendix for more detail).

**Measure C5:**

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

Approximately 2,207 acres (100%) provides for the protection of surface waters, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI (see appendix for more detail).

**Measure C8:**

*The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.*

Approximately 82 acres (4%) provides for the protection of functional wetlands, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI (see appendix for more detail).

**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 D3:**

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

Approximately 2,207 acres (100%) provides protection for groundwater recharge areas, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI (See appendix for more detail).

Amtel Farms is near the City of LaBelle and is located within the January 2020 Caloosahatchee BMAP area. The property would provide surface water protection and some development protection if the area around LaBelle were to grow.

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 3 (Medium Water Quality Protection Benefits)

**Goal E:**

*Increase natural resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities*

**Measure E1:**

*The number of acres acquired that are available for natural resource-based public recreation or education.*

Approximately 2,207 acres (100%) of the proposal would be available for natural resource-based public recreation or education if acquired. The Florida Forest Service (FFS) is the proposed manager for this proposal, if acquired the FFS would coordinate state forest and any potential Wildlife Management Area (WMA) boundaries with the FWC (See management prospectus for more detail).



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**Goal F:**

*Preserve significant archaeological or historic sites*

**DHR Analysis**

Cultural Resources:

This tract holds no sites currently listed in the Florida Master Site File. The applicant stated that he is not aware of any archaeological sites on the property; however, the property has not been professionally surveyed for archaeological and historical sites. The site file shows 191 historic structures, 34 archaeological sites, and 10 resource groups as being located within a five-mile radius of this property. The tract's location, topography, and proximity to freshwater suggests low–medium probability of holding any potentially significant archaeological or historical sites.

Field Observations:

The portions of the property observed during the field review was either forested or in improved pasture. There is a small shop and storage area for equipment. No substantial ground disturbance was observed during field review of the property. The exception to this would be the significant land alteration that has likely occurred as a result of the construction of levees along the Caloosahatchee River. The manager of the cattle operation was not aware of any archaeological or historical sites located on the property. He has a decades-long history of managing cattle operations at Amtel Farms and noted the previous owner had told him that no archaeological sites were present.

**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.*

Approximately 824 acres (37%) are available for sustainable forest management, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI (see appendix for more detail).



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## **Criteria**

Section 259.105 (9), Florida Statutes

- (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
- (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
- (c) The project enhances or facilitates management of properties already under public ownership.
- (d) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
- (e) The project has a significant portion of its land area in imminent danger of development, in imminent danger of losing its significant natural attributes or recreational open space, or in imminent danger of subdivision which would result in multiple ownership and make acquisition of the project costly or less likely to be accomplished.
- (f) The project implements an element from a plan developed by an ecosystem management team.

## **Management**

The Florida Forest Service is recommended to manage the property if acquired, and FFS has provided a management prospectus (see appendix for more detail).

## **Funding Sources**

Florida Forever

## **Funding for Mapping, Appraisal, Negotiations & Closing**

Florida Forever

## **Ownership Pattern and Acquisition Planning**

Ownership information is based on the information from the property appraisers web sites, the property is currently owned by Amtel Farm Inc. It is a 2,207-acre property located in Hendry and Glades Counties north of the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape providing connectivity to other conservation areas.

## **Title and Legal Access Issues**

DEP's Bureau of Survey and Mapping advised title issues that may be significant in the negotiation process would be determined during the preparation of the appraisal map and title information review. Access to the property is via County Line Road, an improved public road.

## **Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands Issues**

The property is located on the Caloosahatchee River. The extent of sovereignty lands associated with this project would be determined during the appraisal mapping process. The property appears to be mostly in pasture with scattered wooded areas. There may be jurisdictional wetlands located on the property. The limits and area of the jurisdictional wetlands and uplands would be determined during the appraisal mapping.



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### **Known Encumbrances (Easement, Long-Term Leases, Restrictive Covenants, Etc.)**

The potential easements and encumbrances are currently unknown. Easements and encumbrances of record associated with the project would be identified in the title information and reported in the appraisal map accordingly.

### **Description and Location of Hazardous Waste Sites, Dumps, Borrow Pits**

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application and research of the property appraiser's website information.

### **Legal Issues**

There are no legal issues known at this time.

### **Acquisition Phases**

From the information found in the application and obtained during the site assessment, the owner expects the fee simple acquisition would be accomplished in a single transaction.

### ***Government Planning and Development***

#### **Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs**

The proposal has a moderate to high potential for contributing to recreation and open space needs. The proposal is for fee simple acquisition. The property could function as a wildlife corridor. Potential recreational activities could include bicycling, camping, dog walking, environmental education and interpretation, fishing, hiking/jogging, horseback riding, wildlife observation and photography. These recreational uses would likely be compatible with the future land use designation of Agricultural/Open.

#### **Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces**

The application reports that the subject property is large enough to encompass a number of high-value ecosystems, from old-growth oak hammocks to open lands and wetlands, and that the property is likely to be habitat for Florida panthers, bears, crested caracaras and other threatened species. The property has approximately 3.75 miles of frontage on the Caloosahatchee River, and provides an opportunity for an upland wildlife corridor along the river.

The potential for losing significant natural attributes located on the property due to subdividing or urban development is moderate with the relatively low density of residential use (one dwelling unit per twenty acres) that would be allowed.

#### **Potential for Being Subdivided**

The subject property has a moderate to high potential for being subdivided. The future land use designation of Agricultural/Open (one dwelling unit per twenty acres) allows rural-type densities, but these densities might be attractive for large-lot residential development located not that far from existing



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and future planned urban areas in Lee County. The subject property has frontage on the Caloosahatchee River, and this creates an attractive opportunity for residential use.

### **Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries**

The subject property is zoned Open Use Agricultural (OUA) in Glades County and Residential/Low Density (RG1) in Hendry County. The OUA district is intended for agricultural uses and to preserve for agricultural uses those lands with productive agricultural development potential. Open spaces, parklands, watersheds, and water recharge areas are also intended to be protected in this district. The regulations discourage or prohibit nonagricultural oriented residential development and generally prohibit commercial and industrial development. Certain recreational activities that are appropriate to the district are permitted.

Lands classified as RG1 are primarily lands within the rural areas of Hendry County that have been or may utilized for rural residential purposes. Residential-Low Density shall be defined as residential development with the following characteristics: single-family units, low density, sporadic, and generally isolated from the urban zones and in areas not planned for public infrastructure. Uses permitted within this category are conventional single-family residential uses with customary accessory structures.

Mobile home units are not permitted. Institution and recreation facilities are permitted within this category. Agricultural activities in existence at the time of the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment may continue, but may not be enlarged, nor may new agricultural activities occur except in compliance with the Land Development Code.

### **Estimated Cost of Appraisal Mapping**

The project contains 2,207 acres based on the parcel information included with the application. The property lies within parts of 5 land sections.

Estimated costs for appraisal mapping of project could be \$4,000.00. If there were boundary surveys available or other survey information available this cost would be reduced significantly, or the appraisal mapping could be prepared in-house by BSM.

### **Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations**

The proposal is currently being used for cattle ranching and has a month to month annual lease that can be easily terminated by either party. A new agricultural manufacturer is building in the area, as well as another Dollar General store. One rezoning petition and two proposed comprehensive plan future land-use map amendments were considered by Glades County commissioners on February 12, 2019 and were approved. The petition for rezoning part of the property, about a mile northwest of the State Road 78/U.S. 27 intersection, west of Moore Haven. The request is to allow a fertilizer mixing facility on a



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30-acre site. A change from open use agriculture to heavy industrial zoning was approved. This shows that there is potential for changing the zoning of the subject.

Future land use is Agricultural/Open in Glades County and Residential Rural Estates in Hendry County. Agricultural/Open is defined as land areas intended for agricultural uses and to preserve for agricultural uses those lands with productive agricultural potential. Open spaces, park lands, water sheds and water recharge areas are also included in these areas. Densities shall be up to 1 residential unit per 20 acres.

The purpose of the Residential - Rural Estates Future Land Use Category is to define those areas within Hendry County that have been or should be developed at a lower density in order to promote and protect the rural lifestyle through the planning horizon of 2040. Lands classified as Residential - Rural Estates are primarily lands within the rural areas of Hendry County that have been or may become utilized for rural residential purposes. Uses permitted within this category are residential with customary accessory structures. Residential may take the form of single-family dwellings utilizing conventional building techniques, with mobile homes specifically prohibited. Institution and Recreation facilities are permitted within this category. Limited agricultural activities specifically designed to meet the needs of the residents living therein are also permitted, except where prohibited or restricted by the Land Development Code. Areas classified as Residential - Rural Estates are within the agricultural/rural areas of Hendry County and normally remote from urban services and facilities, nor are they intended to receive urban-style infrastructure and services through the planning horizon 2040. Minimum acreage for Development: 160 acres.

### **Development Potential**

The subject property has potential for residential use, which would involve a rezoning and land use amendment. The property's commercial value as a potential residential development is increased by its close proximity to the town of Labelle, the county seat of Hendry County. The subject property is large enough to be developed with about 100 single family homes in the Glades County portion. The Hendry County 20 acres is not large enough to be developed based on current zoning.

### **Transportation Issues**

Florida State Road 80 passes through the center of LaBelle, leading east 31 miles to Clewiston and west 30 miles to Fort Myers. Florida State Road 29 crosses SR 80 in the center of LaBelle and leads northeast 15 miles to Palmdale and south 24 miles to Immokalee. FDOT projects in the area include general maintenance of SR 80 from Dalton Lane to Indian Hills Drive, an expansion of SR 27 in Glades County, and numerous resurfacing projects in LaBelle along most of the primary routes including SR29 and SR80.



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### **Ongoing Governmental Efforts**

To assist in the mission of providing for better water supply, aquifer recharge, storm water management, and other challenges in fresh and saltwater bodies in this area of the state, many strategic properties have been acquired in recent years by various governmental agencies through local, regional, state, and federal land acquisition programs.

### ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

Consensus among the FNAI, ARC Liaison staff, and the staff of the Division of State Lands (DSL) determined the final project recommendations. Paula L. Allen, with assistance from Zachariah Barton, Office of Environmental Services, were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions and participation from the following:

Archaeological and Historical: Division of Historical Resources, Josh Goodwin

Forestry: Florida Forest Service, Cat Ingram and Vitor Aguilar

Government Planning: Department of Economic Opportunity, Dan Evans

Government Planning: DEP Bureau of Survey and Mapping, Steve Kellogg

Government Planning: DEP Bureau of Appraisal, Frances Alford

Government Planning: DEP Division of Recreation and Parks, Justin Baldwin and Diane Martin

Government Planning: DEP Office of Greenways and Trails, Samantha Browne

Biodiversity: Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Beth Morford

Biodiversity: Florida Natural Areas Inventory, Dan Hipes, Katy Nesmith, and Nathan Pasco

Water Resources: DEP Division of Evaluation, Assessment and Restoration, Kevin Koyné

Transportation: Florida Department of Transportation, Jennifer Carver





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**Appendix A:**

Amtel Farms: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20200304

GIS ACRES = 2,208

MEASURES	Resource Acres <sup>a</sup>	% of project
<b>B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas</b>		
Priority 1	12	< 1%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	1	< 1%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	429	19%
Priority 4	681	31%
Priority 5	263	12%
Priority 6	135	6%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>1,507</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>B3: Ecological Greenways</b>		
Priority 1	174	8%
Priority 2	2,034	92%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>2,208</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>B4: Under-represented Natural Communities</b>		
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)	15	1%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	20	1%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species</b>		
G1	1	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	1	
G5	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>C4: Natural Floodplain Function</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	85	4%
Priority 5	801	36%
Priority 6	261	12%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>1,147</b>	<b>52%</b>

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres <sup>a</sup>	% of project
<b>C5: Surface Water Protection</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	104	5%
Priority 5	2,094	95%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	0	0%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>2,198</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>C7: Fragile Coastal Resources</b>		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>C8: Functional Wetlands</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	39	2%
Priority 5	43	2%
Priority 6	0	0%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>D3: Aquifer Recharge</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	194	9%
Priority 4	909	41%
Priority 5	519	24%
Priority 6	585	27%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>2,208</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>E2: Recreational Trails (miles)</b> <small>(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails &amp; Univ. Florida)</small>		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
<b>Total Miles</b>	<b>0.0</b>	
<b>F2: Arch. &amp; Historical Sites (number)</b>		
		0 sites
<b>G1: Sustainable Forestry</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	3	< 1%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands	821	37%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>G3: Forestland for Recharge</b>		
	0	0%

<sup>a</sup>Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. Acres and percentages are based on rasters of the resources and are rounded.

Table 1 Florida Forever Measures Evaluation

Source: Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)

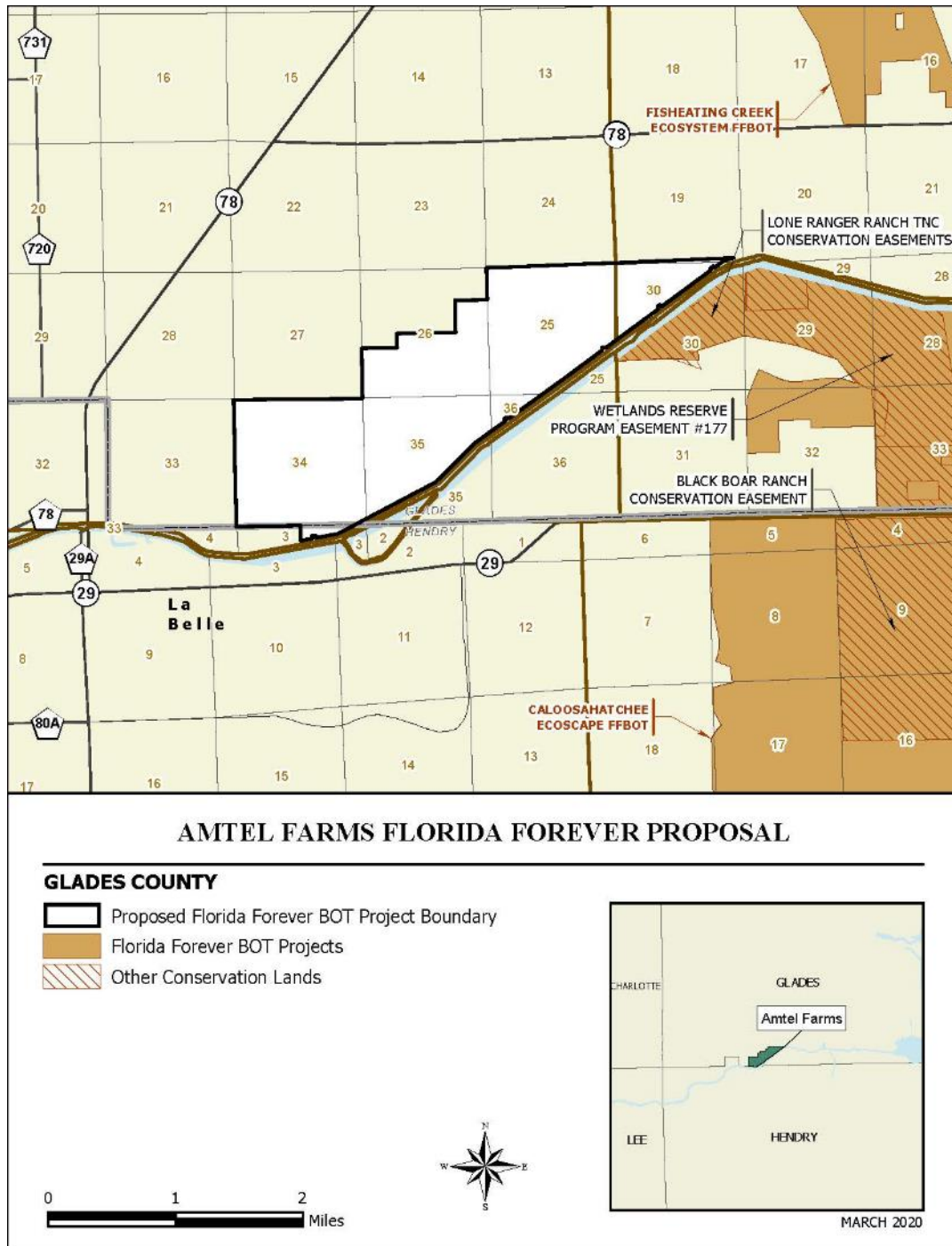


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**Appendix B:**

Florida Forever proposal boundary maps: Florida Natural Areas Inventory

**B1:**



Map 1 Proposal Boundaries

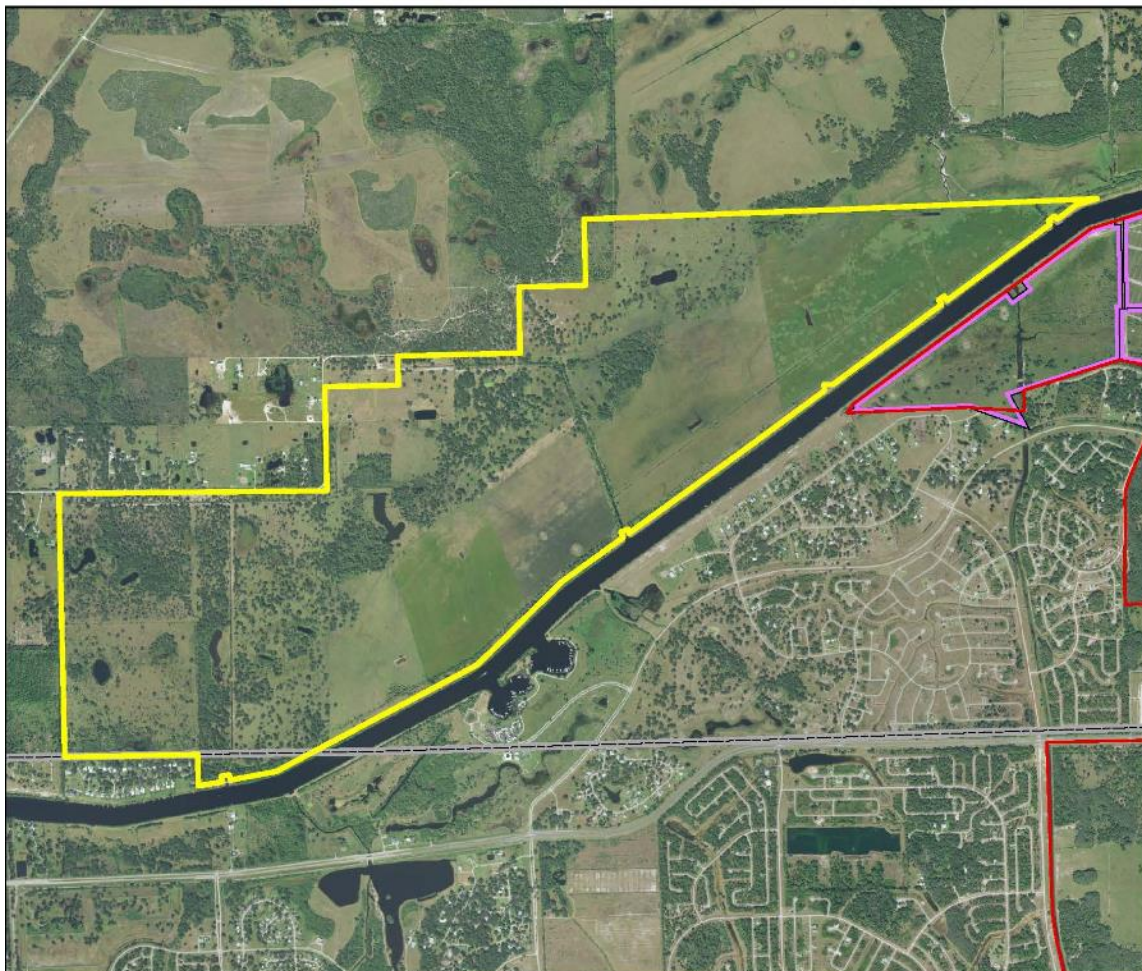


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B2:

**Amtel Farms Florida Forever Proposal**

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSED BOUNDARY AS OF MARCH 2020

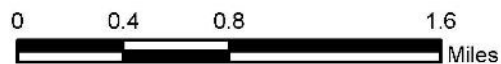


Map Produced by: N. Pasco, March 2020

Background: 2017 NAIP Imagery Resolution = 1.0 meter



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Map 2 Aerial map



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**Appendix C:**

**Property ID Numbers for Final Recommended Boundary**

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Assessed Value	Just (Market) Value
Glades	A25-42-29-A00-0050-0000	AMTEL FARM INC	571.9	\$110,991	\$2,802,065
Glades	A26-42-29-A00-0030-0000	AMTEL FARM INC	338.3	\$61,029	\$1,707,608
Glades	A30-42-30-A00-0040-0000	AMTEL FARM INC	171.8	\$30,294	\$839,233
Glades	A34-42-29-A00-0010-0000	AMTEL FARM INC	639.0	\$71,809	\$4,125,248
Glades	A35-42-29-A00-0010-0000	AMTEL FARM INC	427.2	\$81,401	\$2,094,603
Glades	A36-42-29-A00-0050-0000	AMTEL FARM INC	39.2	\$9,189	\$191,884
Hendry	1 29 43 03 A00 0003.0000	AMTEL FARM INC	20.0	\$2,426	\$756,840
		<b>Total</b>	<b>2,207.5</b>	<b>\$367,139</b>	<b>\$12,517,481</b>

Source: Application



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## **Appendix D:**

### **Florida Forest Service: Management Prospectus for Amtel Farms, a fee simple proposal.**

Concurrent with its adoption of the annual Conservation and Recreation Lands list of acquisition projects pursuant to s. 259.035, the Board of Trustees shall adopt a management prospectus for each project. The management prospectus shall delineate:

#### **The management goals for the property:**

Florida Forest Service (FFS), as the lead manager of the Amtel Farms property, will coordinate state forest and any potential Wildlife Management Area (WMA) boundaries with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). FFS management of the property will allow for further development of the conservation corridor still being established in the area. Conservation properties nearby include Charlotte County's Charlotte Harbor Preserve, Yucca Pens, Fisheating Creek WMA, Babcock-Webb WMA and the FFS-managed, 73,000-acre Babcock Ranch Preserve, as well as the conservation lands to the southeast of the subject property. Those lands include South Florida Water Management District lands and the FFS-managed, 32,000-acre Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest. The subject property serves as a link between the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever project and the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever project, thus potentially providing a significant improvement to the connectivity of managed areas within the region.

The primary management objective of the property is to enhance connectivity, restore and manage forest lands as forests, preserve the water quality in the region, and ensure that the resource-based outdoor recreational opportunities of the property will continue to be enjoyed by the community, youth groups, disabled American veterans through events hosted by the FFS Operation Outdoor Freedom program, and others in the public. FFS will promote recreational activities on the property that enhance the value of the natural resources and protect imperiled species and sensitive habitats.

Further, FFS management will allow for restoration and sustainable management of the timber resources, provide protection to the Caloosahatchee River basin and surrounding waterbodies, and provide for a diverse array of dispersed, resource-based recreational opportunities. The FFS will seek to maintain the property by reintroducing and utilizing prescribed fire to manage fire-dependent communities, controlling, and removing invasive species, harvesting off-site pine species, and replanting site-appropriate species.

The FFS will utilize a multiple-use management regime on this property, similar to other FFS-managed lands. The FFS has a nationally recognized prescribed burning program that is a model for land management agencies across the country. The FFS will implement this cost effective and ecologically sound program on the property at the appropriate frequency and intensity. Landscape-scale restoration



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and management conducted by the FFS will allow for re-vegetation or re-population by rare, threatened, and/or endangered plants and animals otherwise native to the property. The FFS may employ its own Plant Conservation Program to survey, census, and offer management recommendations for long-term conservation of threatened and endangered plants.

**The conditions that will affect the intensity of management:**

The property should not require intensive management in the short term. Over the long term, the intensity of management and related costs will significantly increase as management emphasis shifts from protection and planning, to restoration efforts and a broader public use, with more use of the infrastructure already on the property.

**An estimate of the revenue-generating potential of the property, if appropriate:**

The FFS foresees revenue generation from the management of this property. The amount of future revenue generated from silviculture will be minimal and depend on the acreage that is managed as such. Due to the high recreational potential of the property, visitor fees will be the primary revenue generated on the property and will increase significantly as time progresses and opportunities are established. FFS may consider establishing leases on portions of the property for grazing or other lease considerations, as appropriate.

**A timetable for implementing the various stages of management and for providing access to the public, if applicable:**

Once the property is acquired and assigned to the FFS, short term management efforts will concentrate on site security, control of vehicle access, and management planning. Consideration will be given during the management planning process to accommodate a variety of recreational developments. The magnitude and diversity of future resource-based recreation opportunities offered will depend on establishment of a management plan for the property, funding for positions and using established infrastructure. The FFS will expedite short-term management on portions of the property that are near already FFS-managed lands including, Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest, and potentially Babcock Ranch Preserve, by utilizing existing resources. Additional equipment required to manage the property includes, but is not limited to, one 4x4 pickup, one farm tractor with implements, and one UTV.

**A description of potential multiple-use activities as described in this section and Section 253.034, F.S.:**

The property lends itself to diverse recreational opportunities, including but not limited to camping, hunting, fishing, paddling, trails (hiking, off-road bicycling, equestrian), picnic pavilions and group recreational opportunities. Wildlife viewing, birding, and nature study are other passive nature-based recreation opportunities. Potentially, the subject property could have a very strong component featuring specialty youth hunting and Operation Outdoor Freedom events.