

ITEM 13:

Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Forever Project Boundary to add one parcel totaling approximately 221 acres in Highlands County with a tax assessed market value of \$187,502.

LOCATION:

Highlands County

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

The Larson Ranch amendment, proposed by Julie Morris with the National Wildlife Refuge Association, adds one parcel in Highlands County totaling approximately 221 acres to the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project. The Larson Ranch property owned by Mr. Karl W. Adler has a tax assessed value of \$187,502.

Larson Ranch located along the shoreline of Lake Istokpoga to the east and Josephine Creek to the south is adjacent to the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area. The property is within the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area and the Avon Park Air Force Range military operating area and sentinel landscape. It contains two structures, a residence and barn and is currently in agricultural operations as a cattle ranch. The proposal would protect over a mile of wetlands along the western shore of Lake Istokpoga from expanding residential development. It would also buffer Josephine Creek, a regionally significant wildlife corridor for the Florida black bear and other rare species and is part of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The proposal meets the criteria to be submitted as a boundary amendment. The parcel is less than 1,000 acres, has a tax assessed value of less than \$2 million, and is 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. The site also scores 100% for FNAI

Habitat Conservation Priorities.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

	DHR	FFS	Lynetta Griner	FWC	Bill Palmer	Elva Peppers	DEP	Selected
Project								
Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem: Larson Ranch								



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850-224-8207
[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)

To: Deborah Burr, DEP/OES
From: Dale R. Jackson, FNAI
Date: September 9, 2020
Subject: Proposed Boundary Modification to Florida Forever BOT Project: **Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem** – Larson Ranch, Highlands County

The major goal of the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever Project (LWRE) 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.

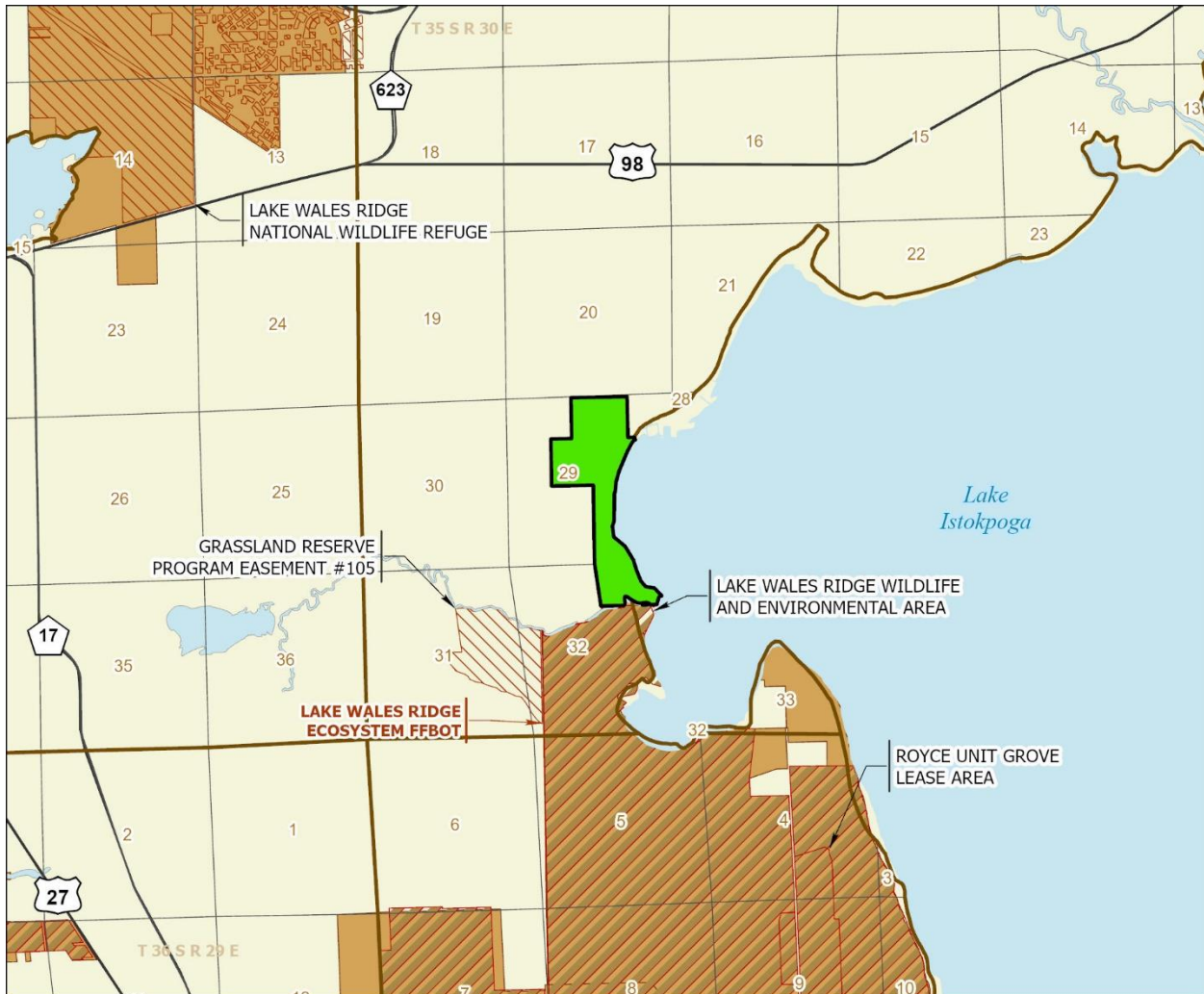
The proposed addition includes 221 acres on the western shore of Lake Istokpoga in central Highlands County, ca. 4 miles east of Sebring. The property is proposed for less-than-fee-simple protection. The narrow southern property boundary is contiguous (across Josephine Creek) with LWRE and Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area (LWRWEA), which itself is contiguous with Royce Unit Grove Lease Area and Grassland Reserve Program Easement #105.

The ranch lies on the eastern slope of the Lake Wales Ridge, with elevations descending from 52 feet to 36 feet along the lake. Bands of freshwater marsh and floodplain swamp with cypress and tupelo extend along the shoreline of the lake (ca. 44 and 56 acres, respectively, per application). Inland from this, most former natural upland habitat (probably flatwoods) has been converted to improved pasture (119 acres per application) with scattered live oaks. Man-made ditches built to drain the property presumably still function. Approximately 2.5 acres are developed (roadway, residential). The ranchland landscape continues westward from the property. Immediately northeast of the site is a residential subdivision.

The FNAI database contains only one record of rare species on site – the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*, G5T4/S4, N, N), based on its being considered abundant regionally by the FWC. However, as noted in the proposal narrative, numerous rare species (e.g., bald eagle, round-tailed muskrat, cutthroatgrass) inhabit the general area, including the adjacent portion of LWRWEA, and it is possible that some of these utilize the property. Narrowleaf naiad (*Najas filifolia*, G3/S2, N, T) is known from the lake immediately adjacent to the site.

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

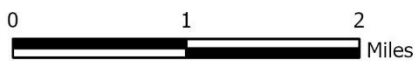
analysis represent a standardized, statewide perspective of natural community distributions based primarily on data from the Cooperative Land Cover Map. Most of the proposed addition contributes to Surface Water Protection and Aquifer Recharge, with substantial contributions to Natural Floodplain Protection and Functional Wetlands.



LAKE WALES RIDGE ECOSYSTEM PROPOSED ADDITION (LARSON RANCH)

HIGHLANDS COUNTY

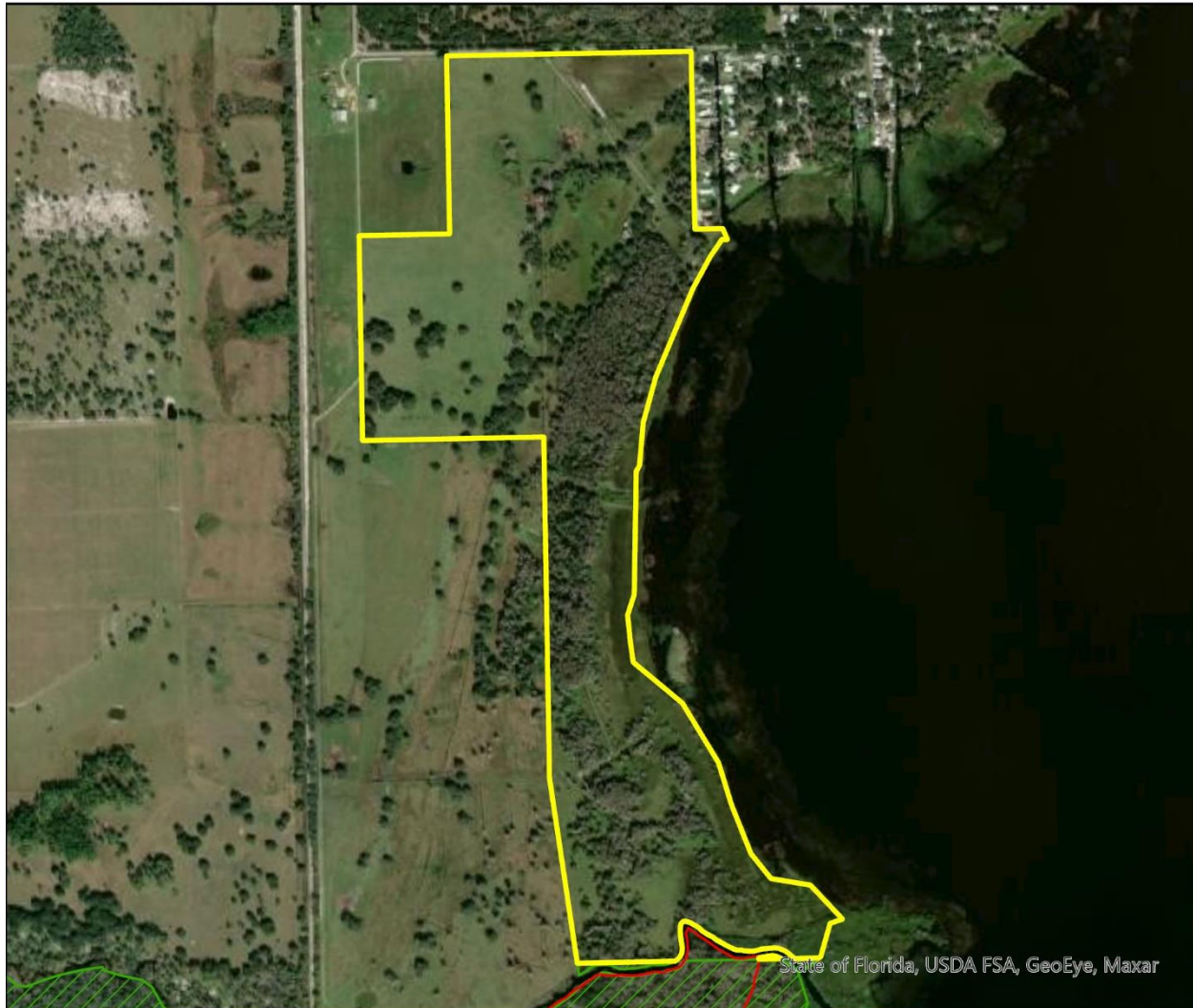
-  Proposed Florida Forever BOT Project Addition
-  Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Owned Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands



SEPTEMBER 2020

Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Proposed Addition (Larson Ranch)

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



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 (Larson Ranch): Florida Forever Measure Evaluation 20200908

GIS ACRES = 221.09

MEASURES	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.44	< 1%
Priority 3	75.45	34%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Total Acres	75.89	34%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	2.50	1%
Priority 5	144.72	65%
Priority 6	74.33	33%
Total Acres	221.56	100%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	2.06	< 1%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	2.06	< 1%
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	1	
G5	0	
Total	1	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	38.86	17%
Priority 3	41.25	19%
Priority 4	36.75	17%
Priority 5	5.45	2%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	122.32	55%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	107.25	48%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	111.97	50%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Priority 7	0.00	0%
Total Acres	219.22	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	39.25	18%
Priority 3	41.36	19%
Priority 4	19.96	9%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	100.58	45%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	169.80	76%
Priority 4	45.98	21%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	215.78	97%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles) <small>(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)</small>		
Land Trail Priorities	0.8	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.8	
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	0.00	0%
Total Acres	0.00	0%
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.