

**ITEM 14:**

Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Forever Project Boundary to add two parcels totaling approximately 354 acres in Highlands County with a tax assessed market value of \$179,638.

**LOCATION:**

Highlands County

**DSL STAFF REMARKS:**

The Miller Properties amendment proposed by Jimmy Wohl, Terraventure Real Estate, and Julie Morris, National Wildlife Refuge Association, adds two parcels in Highlands County totaling approximately 354 acres to the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project. The Miller Properties owned by Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Miller, Sr. and Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Miller, Jr. have a combined tax assessed value of \$179,638.

The Miller Properties are adjacent to Highlands Hammock State Park on the north and include Haw Branch Creek to the south and an unnamed slough originating at Lake Jackson from the north. The property is within the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. The property contains improved pasture, forested wetland slough and mature pine forest. Residential development is adjacent to the property on the west, south and east borders. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

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), majority of the proposed addition contributes to Ecological Greenways, Surface Water Protection, and Aquifer Recharge, with a potential to support Sustainable Forestry.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

| <b>Project</b>                                | <b>DHR</b> | <b>FFS</b> | <b>Lynetta Griner</b> | <b>FWC</b> | <b>Bill Palmer</b> | <b>Elva Peppers</b> | <b>DEP</b> | <b>Selected</b> |
|---|------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem: Miller Properties |            |            |                       |            |                    |                     |            |                 |



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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** – Miller property, Highlands County

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

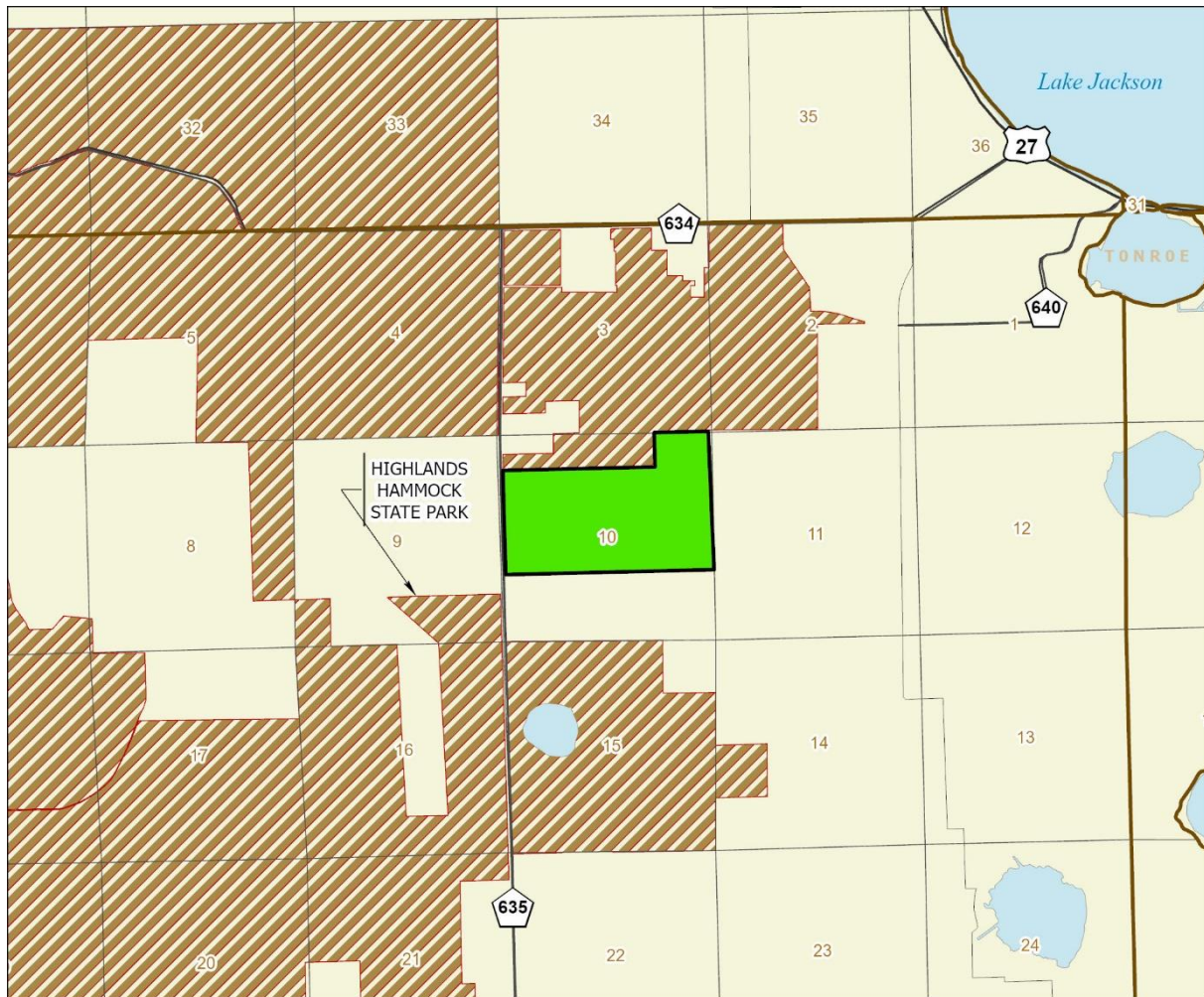
The proposed addition includes 354 acres in northwestern Highlands County near the city of Sebring. The property is offered for less-than-fee protection. The entire northern boundary of the property is contiguous with Highlands Hammock State Park, portions of which also lie to the west and south, although separated from the proposal by private lands. Most other private lands adjacent to the state park and proposed property have been developed as residential subdivisions.

Nearly all of the upland portion (elevation ca. 115-125 ft, probably former scrubby flatwoods) of the site has been converted to improved pasture (202 acres, ca. 57% per proposal) for ranching. The center of the property is forested wetland (slough/swamp) on the northeastern side of Haw Branch; the topographic map indicates what appear to be three drainage canals within this swamp to drain high waters to Haw Branch. The application notes that most of the wetland forest maintains a canopy of longleaf and slash pine, with some hardwood inclusions that may represent baygall. Smaller areas of mesic/wet flatwoods border the wetter forest. The application also notes small examples of wet prairie and depression marsh.

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, numerous other rare species are known from less disturbed habitats, mostly uplands, nearby, but on-site habitat conversion may have eliminated populations locally. A variety of wetland birds is expected to utilize the property for foraging.

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

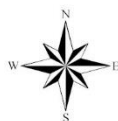
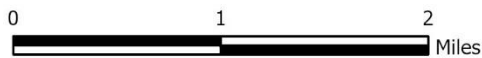
contributes to Ecological Greenways, Surface Water Protection, and Aquifer Recharge, with a potential to support Sustainable Forestry.



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

**HIGHLANDS COUNTY**

-  Proposed Florida Forever BOT Project Addition
-  State Owned Lands

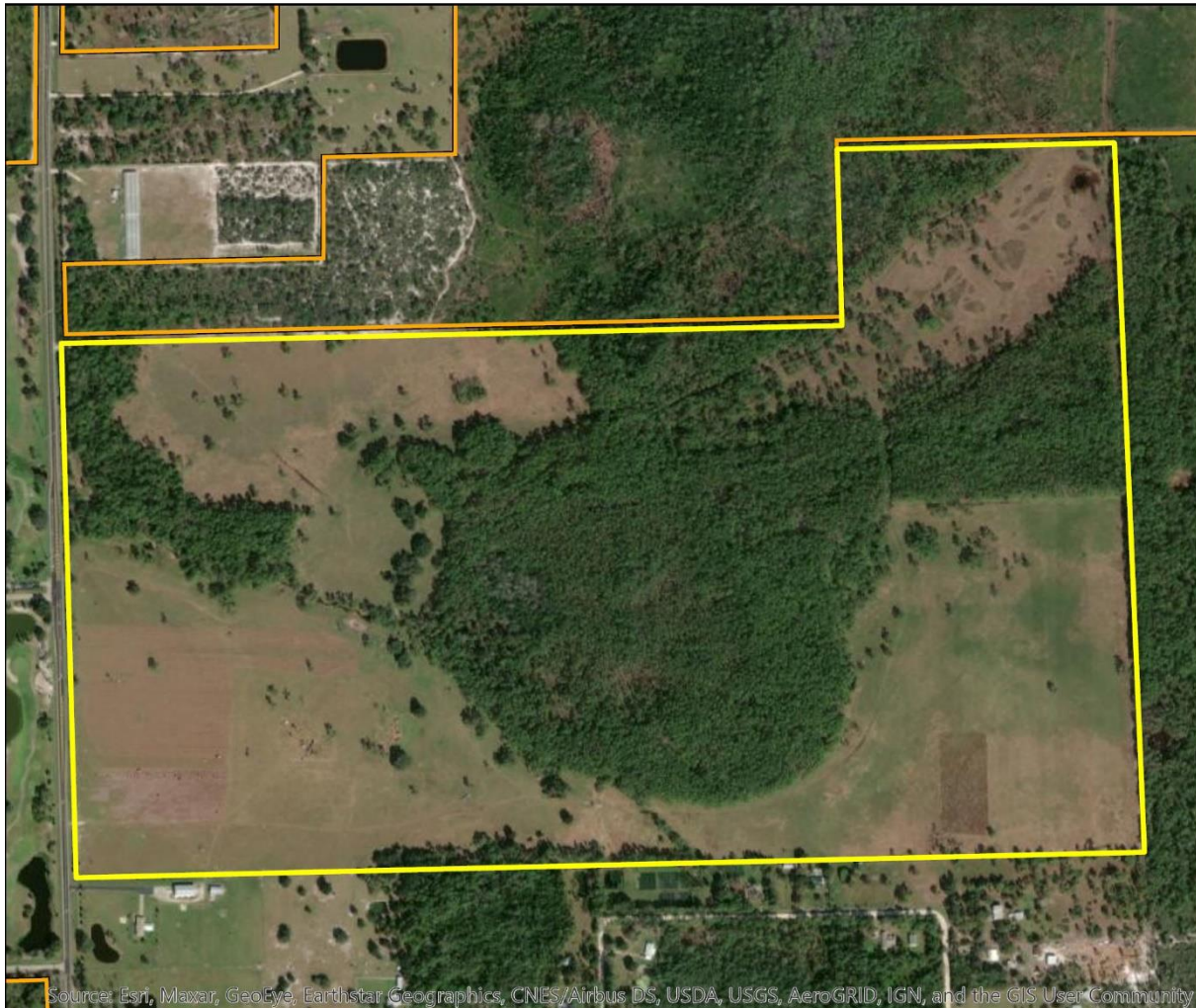


SEPTEMBER 2020



## Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Proposed Addition (Miller Property)

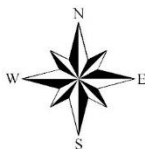
FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSED ADDITION AS OF SEPTEMBER 2020



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



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

GIS ACRES = 354

| MEASURES   | Resource Acres <sup>a</sup> | % of project |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas</b>  |                             |              |
| Priority 1                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 2                                       | < 1                         | < 1%         |
| Priority 3                                       | 119                         | 34%          |
| Priority 4                                       | 1                           | < 1%         |
| Priority 5                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                               | <b>120</b>                  | <b>34%</b>   |
| <b>B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities</b>  |                             |              |
| Priority 1                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 2                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 3                                       | 5                           | 2%           |
| Priority 4                                       | 133                         | 38%          |
| Priority 5                                       | 1                           | < 1%         |
| Priority 6                                       | 87                          | 24%          |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                               | <b>226</b>                  | <b>64%</b>   |
| <b>B3: Ecological Greenways</b>                  |                             |              |
| Priority 1                                       | 286                         | 81%          |
| Priority 2                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 3                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 4                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 5                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 6                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                               | <b>286</b>                  | <b>81%</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)                                 | 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)                         | 19                          | 5%           |
| Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)                      | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                               | <b>19</b>                   | <b>5%</b>    |
| <b>B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species</b>   |                             |              |
| G1   | 0                           |              |
| G2   | 0                           |              |
| G3   | 0                           |              |
| G4   | 1                           |              |
| G5   | 0                           |              |
| <b>Total</b>                                     | <b>1</b>                    |              |
| <b>C4: Natural Floodplain Function</b>           |                             |              |
| Priority 1                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 2                                       | 23                          | 7%           |
| Priority 3                                       | 89                          | 25%          |
| Priority 4                                       | 39                          | 11%          |
| Priority 5                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 6                                       | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                               | <b>151</b>                  | <b>43%</b>   |

| MEASURES (continued)   | Resource Acres <sup>a</sup> | % of project |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>C5: Surface Water Protection</b>  |                             |              |
| Priority 1   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 2   | 171                         | 48%          |
| Priority 3   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 4   | 183                         | 52%          |
| Priority 5   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 6   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 7   | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>   | <b>354</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   | 23                          | 7%           |
| Priority 3   | 85                          | 24%          |
| Priority 4   | 11                          | 3%           |
| Priority 5   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 6   | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>   | <b>119</b>                  | <b>34%</b>   |
| <b>D3: Aquifer Recharge</b>  |                             |              |
| Priority 1   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 2   | 4                           | 1%           |
| Priority 3   | 35                          | 10%          |
| Priority 4   | 205                         | 58%          |
| Priority 5   | 110                         | 31%          |
| Priority 6   | 0                           | 0%           |
| <b>Total Acres</b>   | <b>354</b>                  | <b>100%</b>  |
| <b>E2: Recreational Trails (miles)</b><br><small>(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails &amp; Univ. Florida)</small> |                             |              |
| Land Trail Priorities  | 0.0                         |              |
| Land Trail Opportunities   | 1.0                         |              |
| <b>Total Miles</b>   | <b>1.0</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   | 17                          | 5%           |
| Priority 4   | 0                           | 0%           |
| Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands   | 230                         | 65%          |
| <b>Total Acres</b>   | <b>247</b>                  | <b>70%</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. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is greatest on small sites.