

ITEM 6:

Consider the October 9, 2020 meeting summary.

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

None

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the meeting summary.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

- APPROVE
- APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____
- DEFER
- WITHDRAW
- NOT APPROVE
- OTHER: _____

Acquisition and Restoration Council Meeting Summary

Council Meeting: October 9, 2020
Time: 9:00 a.m.
Location: Webinar meeting

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Dr. Tim Parsons, DHR
Mr. Erin Albury, FFS
Ms. Lynetta Griner, Citizen Member
Dr. Thomas Eason, FWC
Ms. Elva Peppers, Citizen Member
Mr. Shawn Hamilton, ARC Chair, DEP

ARC Staff Director: Ms. Shauna Allen, DEP

Item 1: Call to Order at 9:00 a.m.

DEP Interim Deputy Secretary for Land and Recreation Shawn Hamilton called the meeting to order. He welcomed the new Florida Forever Program Manager Ms. Sine Murray, formerly with the Division of Recreation and Parks. He asked ARC Staff Director, Shauna Allen, to conduct the roll call. The quorum was established with five members in attendance.

Ms. Allen provided housekeeping announcements including webinar instructions and information for public comments. She also announced an addition to the meeting summary and update to items 8 and 9 to delete the staff recommendation to rename the Welannee Watershed Forest proposal instead retaining the name submitted in the application.

Item 2: Consider the August 21, 2020 meeting and September 1 and 2, 2020 regional hearing summaries.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the meeting summaries.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the August meeting and September regional hearing summaries with Dr. Eason seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

ARC STAFF REPORTS

Item 3: Items approved by the Division of State Lands via the online negative response process since the August 2020 ARC meeting.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen stated that one management plan for properties less than 160 acres, the Mosquito Lagoon Marine Enhancement Center and one incompatible use request from Citrus County for a utility easement across Withlacoochee State Trail were submitted and approved via the negative response process.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 4: 2020 Annual update on the Division of State Lands conservation easement monitoring program.

DSL Staff Remarks: Ms. Allen provided an update on the status of the conservation easement monitoring program for Fiscal Year 2019-2020, including monitoring for 29 easements and the acquisition of six new easements bringing the total easements owned by the Board of Trustees to 129.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 5: Annual Land Management Review Team findings and the Land Management Uniform Accounting Council 2020 Annual Report and Biennial Report.

DSL Staff Remarks: Mr. Keith Singleton stated that the Department reviews conservation, preservation and recreation lands in accordance with their management plans and public access. All the managed areas reviewed were following their management plans and deemed adequate or excellent. Of special mention were John M. Bethea State Forest for improving forest resilience using prescribed fire, Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway for use of prescribed fire in the urban-wildland interface, Chassahowitzka WMA for management of the Florida black bear subpopulation habitat, coverage and forage and Seminole County for proactive management of invasive species in Spring Hammock Preserve. The Annual Land Management Uniform Accounting Council report documents Fiscal Year 2019-2020 expenditures of each agency and operational report for each management area. The biennial report provides an assessment of the progress towards achieving long and short-term goals in the management plan. Both reports are also included in the Annual Land Management Review team report.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 6: Division of State Lands Acquisition Progress Review Presentation.

DSL Staff Remarks: Mr. Robbie Parrish stated that the DSL acquisitions in the first three months of this fiscal year total 32,019 acres at the cost of \$74 million and included 11 projects

acquired in fee simple and conservation easements. He stated that there were currently eight acquisitions in closing totaling 5,311 acres and another 4 acquisitions approved at the September 22, 2020 Board of Trustees meeting for 3,855 acres. There are 30 other projects in some phase of the acquisition process.

Discussion: Dr. Eason asked for an explanation of the in-progress anticipated expenditure. Mr. Parrish answered that the total represented the amount expended for the project, not the amount spent on that phase.

Ms. Griner joined during the presentation and was recognized by Chair Hamilton. Chair Hamilton also thanked Mr. Parrish and Mr. Singleton for their reports.

ARC Action: No action required.

FLORIDA FOREVER

Item 7: Hear presentations and take Public Testimony on the Florida Forever 2020 Cycle 2 Proposals and other Florida Forever Projects.

Discussion: Mr. Dean Saunders spoke in support of Abington Ranch; however, his presentation was cut short prematurely due to audio issues.

Mr. Adam Bass, Conservation Florida, spoke in support of Welanee Watershed Forest, an 8,373 acre less-than-fee proposal in Okaloosa County. The property was purchased by Edwin Henry in 2005 who has restored 1,100 acres of loblolly pine plantations with Longleaf Pine. Mr. Henry has also established a prescribed fire regime to improve the sandhill habitat. The project contributes to the regional landscape, ecological greenways network and corridors of significance and contributes to protecting the Yellow River corridor from the state line to Pensacola Bay. The project also protects habitat for the gulf sturgeon, shellfish and endangered reptiles. Mr. Bass also mentioned that the property has received \$2.9 million towards acquisition from the Forest Legacy Program.

Mr. Keith Fountain on behalf of the landowners spoke in favor of the less-than-fee Withlacoochee River Addition (Citrus/Hernando Counties) proposal to add approximately 15,000 acres to the Withlacoochee River Corridor project approved earlier this year. This proposal will bring the larger landowners into the Florida Forever program along the 8-mile gap between Flying Eagle Preserve in the north and the Withlacoochee State Forest to the south. The properties are in predominantly natural condition and contribute 100% to aquifer recharge. The dominant communities are floodplain swamp, basin marsh and mesic hammock and provide habitat for the Eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, little blue heron, Southeastern fox squirrel, bald eagle and Florida sandhill crane. The property also includes 10 sites in the Florida master site file. Mr. Fountain concluded by sharing the landowners support for the staff recommendation to combine the properties with the Withlacoochee River Corridor project.

Mr. Kent Wimmer, Defenders of Wildlife, congratulated the Division on the progress towards acquisition, especially the Bluffs of St. Teresa and offered support for the staff recommendations to the Florida Forever list. He spoke in favor of the Crayfish Habitat Restoration proposal that provides protection for habitat critical to the endemic Panama City crayfish under consideration for federal listing as an endangered species and the state endangered Henry's spider lily. He also addressed his letter to the council on ranking priorities for the 2021 Florida Forever priority list.

ARC Action: No action required.

Item 8: Consider project evaluation reports for Abington Ranch, Bluefield to Cow Creek, Crayfish Habitat Restoration, Welannee Watershed Forest and Withlacoochee River Addition 2020 Cycle 2 Florida Forever proposals.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the Project Evaluation Reports.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: Dr. Eason made the motion to approve the project evaluation reports with Ms. Peppers seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 9: Vote on whether to add five 2020 Cycle 2 Florida Forever proposals to the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote on proposals to be added as projects to the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List. If approved, consider amending the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector Florida Forever Project boundary to add Abington Ranch and amending the Withlacoochee River Corridor Florida Forever Project boundary to add Withlacoochee River Addition.

Discussion: None.

ARC Action: ARC voted unanimously by six members to add Abington Ranch, Bluefield to Cow Creek, Crayfish Habitat Restoration, Welannee Watershed Forest and Withlacoochee River Addition to the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List.

ARC voted unanimously by six members to amend the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector boundary to add Abington Ranch.

ARC voted unanimously by six members to amend the Withlacoochee River Corridor boundary to add Withlacoochee River Addition.

Recess: Council unanimously approved a five-minute recess, with Chair Hamilton making the motion and Dr. Eason seconding. The council meeting resumed at 9:54 a.m. and established a quorum by roll call with six members present.

Item 10: Consider a staff recommendation to remove Tippen Bay Ranch, Caber Coastal Connector, Estero Bay and Upper St. Marks River Corridor projects from the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Removal of the Tippen Bay Ranch project from the priority list as considered complete. Removal of the Caber Coastal Connector, Estero Bay and Upper St. Marks River Corridor projects from the priority list because they are at least 90% complete.

Discussion: Ms. Deborah Burr, DSL Office of Environmental Services, presented an overview of the process and discussed each project. Ms. Burr stated that the projects are at least 90% acquired and if removed are still eligible for acquisition of the remaining parcels with Florida Forever funds. The Tippen Bay Ranch project in DeSoto County is 100% complete following the acquisition of the single owner property this year. Caber Coastal Connector in Levy County is 99% complete with over 3,000 acres acquired or protected and the remaining lands removed at the request of the landowner. Estero Bay in Lee County is 91% complete with over 22,000 acres acquired including approximately 10,300 acres of sovereign submerged lands. Upper St. Marks River Corridor in Jefferson, Leon and Wakulla Counties is also 91% complete with nearly 14,000 acres acquired in fee simple.

Ms. Peppers asked why the two 91% complete projects would not be added to the Substantially Complete Category. Ms. Burr responded that although we could add projects to the Substantially Complete category that are at least 85% complete, statute allows us to remove projects that are 90% complete and they remain eligible for funding to acquire the remaining parcels. The removals help with housekeeping for the upcoming ranking process. Ms. Peppers questioned how the remaining parcels are tracked once the project is removed from the list and stated her concern that these projects that are nearly complete not be overshadowed by new projects. Ms. Burr indicated that the properties are tracked within the Bureau of Real Estate services which manages the acquisitions with willing sellers. Dr. Eason commented that this is a procedural step and that the properties don't drop off the radar screen.

ARC Action: Ms. Griner made the motion to approve the project removals with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC voted unanimously by six members to remove each project from the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List.

Item 11: Vote on whether to amend the Florida's First Magnitude Springs Florida Forever Project Boundary to add two parcels totaling approximately 37.6 acres in Hernando County with a tax assessed market value of \$535,365.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote to approve the boundary amendment.

Discussion: Ms. Deborah Burr, DSL Office of Environmental Services, presented the item to add the 37.6-acre Mud Spring parcel to the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project boundary as a fee simple acquisition. The property is adjacent to the Southwest Florida Water Management District Weekiwachee Preserve. The recommended manager is Hernando County

Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program who has submitted a management prospectus. The second magnitude Mud Spring is the headwaters for the Mud River and flows into the Weeki Wachee River. Ms. Burr also indicated that the property includes salt marsh with tidal creek and two additional spring vents along with 23 acres of uplands comprised of mature slash pine.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the boundary amendment with Ms. Griner seconding. ARC voted unanimously by six members to approve the amendment.

Item 12: Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever Project Boundary to add three parcels totaling approximately 79.63 acres in Polk County with a tax assessed market value of \$61,310.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote to approve the boundary amendment.

Discussion: Ms. Laramé Ferry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, presented the proposed amendment to the Crooked Lake West unit of the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem project boundary. Adjacent to the Crooked Lake WEA, five of eight parcels are within the project boundary, the proposal is to bring the remaining three into the boundary for either fee simple or less-than-fee acquisition. The proposal will improve habitat connectivity and protection for the WEA from encroaching development. The properties provide nesting habitat for the Florida sandhill crane, habitat for swallowtail kites, Florida panther, southeastern American kestrel and southern fox squirrel among others and will benefit from long-term conservation of the area. The property also provides the potential for expansion of recreational opportunities on the WEA. Ms. Ferry also noted that the Southwest region district biologist, Ms. Jennifer Myers was available to answer questions.

ARC Action: Ms. Peppers made the motion to approve the boundary amendment with Dr. Parsons seconding. ARC voted unanimously by six members to approve the amendment.

Item 13: Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever Project Boundary to add one parcel totaling approximately 221 acres in Highlands County with a tax assessed market value of \$187,502.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote to approve the boundary amendment.

Discussion: Ms. Julie Morris, National Wildlife Refuge Association, presented the Larson Ranch amendment (222 acres) as a proposed conservation easement in Highlands County adjacent to Lake Istokpoga, Florida's fifth largest lake. She stated that the property is bordered to the south by FWC Royce Ranch Unit and the XL Ranch Lightsey's Cove on the north. The property protects approximately 1.1 miles of shoreline on the lake and will reduce residential development and fragmentation of the shoreline and marshes. The property sits within the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Avon Park Sentinel Landscape and is an important conservation corridor on the Lake Wales Ridge. The property has documented Florida panther and Florida black bear use. Ms. Morris also referenced Audubon's support letter in which Dr.

Paul Grey discussed the adverse impacts to aquatic life and long-term health of the lake from shoreline development and marsh fragmentation.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the boundary amendment with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC voted unanimously by six members to approve the amendment.

Item 14: Vote on whether to amend the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever Project Boundary to add two parcels totaling approximately 354 acres in Highlands County with a tax assessed market value of \$179,638.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Vote to approve the boundary amendment.

Discussion: Ms. Julie Morris, National Wildlife Association, presented the Miller properties (354 acre) boundary amendment less-than-fee proposal. The adjacent properties are owned by father and son and are managed as low intensity cow-calf operations. The property provides a buffer for the Highlands Hammock State Park threatened by rapidly encroaching suburban development. Within the Peace River Watershed, Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and the Avon Park Sentinel Landscape, the properties help achieve conservation and military training goals of these projects. The property is a documented wildlife corridor for the Florida panther and provides essential habitat for the Highlands Glades subpopulation of the Florida black bear. Ms. Morris concluded by stating the properties are small but necessary to conserving habitat for viable populations of wide-ranging species and critical habitat functions.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the boundary amendment with Dr. Eason seconding. ARC voted unanimously by six members to approve the amendment.

LAND ADMINISTRATION

Item 15: Consider whether a 0.98-acre± parcel of land managed by City of Doral under Board of Trustees Lease No. 4617 is more appropriately owned by the City of Doral pursuant to Chapter 18-2.021, F.A.C.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the item.

Discussion: Mr. Scott Woolam, DSL, presented the City of Doral request to acquire a small strip of land in fee simple ownership that is currently under a Board of Trustees (BOT) lease to the city. The property, used for conservation, was acquired by the state through foreclosure, not with conservation funds. The City has included the property in their master plan for the adjacent park directly north. If approved, the property deed will have a restriction to ensure that the property remains in conservation. This request requires both ARC and BOT approval.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the recommendation to the Board of Trustees with Ms. Griner seconding. ARC concurred with six members in favor of the recommendation.

Item 16: Consider whether an approximately 0.28-acre parcel of state-owned land managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as part of the Florida Keys Wildlife and Environmental Area is no longer needed for conservation purposes in exchange for approximately 1.01 acres of private property.

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the item.

Discussion: Mr. Scott Woolam, DSL, presented the owner request for a land exchange for a strip of land currently managed as part of the Florida Keys WEA that includes a limerock road owned by the BOT and shared by the adjacent private landowner. The road has fallen into disrepair and will need to be raised to improve the maintenance. The DSL has worked with the landowner and FWC to identify a suitable parcel to be granted to the BOT in exchange for the road property. This request requires both ARC and BOT approval.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the recommendation to the Board of Trustees with Ms. Peppers seconding. ARC concurred with six members in favor of the recommendation.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

Item 17: Consider an update to the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Lease No. 2785).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the item

Discussion: Ms. Dylan Haase, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, presented the management plan update and noted that the area district biologist Steve Glass was available to answer questions. The 65,333-acre Three Lakes WMA in Osceola County was named for the three area lakes, Lake Kissimmee, Lake Marion and Lake Jackson. The area also shares boundaries with conservation easements and other managed areas. Most of the property, 43,282 acres was acquired in 1974 under the Environmentally Sensitive Lands program with a few additions over the years including the Luck L. Ranch in 2008. The specific purpose was to protect and manage the wet prairies and marshes to improve water quality and provide flood plain protection. Approximately 50% of the property is evenly divided between dry prairie and mesic flatwoods providing home to numerous imperiled species including Audubon's crested caracara, Florida panther and Florida scrub jay. Ms. Haase made special mention of the successful Florida Grasshopper Sparrow project which has released captive reared birds which have become part of the breeding population. The managers plan to release another 45 captive reared sparrows in 2021 and continue the breeding and population monitoring. The agency also manages 25 archaeological and historic sites, campground facilities, boat ramp and observation tower on Lake Jackson and over 40 miles of trails including a portion of the Florida National Scenic Trail. Management Objectives include ongoing maintenance, invasive species management, maintaining fire adapted communities, aquatic plant harvesting and muck removal for Lake Jackson and replacement or repair of the pole barn at Sunset Ranch.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the management plan with Ms. Peppers seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

Item 18: Consider an update to the Half Moon Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Lease No. 3789).

DSL Staff Recommendation: Approve the item.

Discussion: Ms. Dylan Haase, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, presented the management plan update and mentioned that lead area biologist Chris Green was available to answer questions. The 9,554-acre Half Moon WMA in Sumter County lies on the Marion County line and Withlacoochee River adjacent to the Flying Eagle Preserve, Gum Slough Conservation Easement and Potts Preserve. Approximately 4,000 acres were acquired by the Southwest Florida Water Management District under the Save Our Rivers program, the eastern 5,500 acres were acquired by the BOT under the Conservation and Recreational Lands program. The property was acquired specifically to preserve the watershed of the Withlacoochee River and Gum Slough. The dominant habitats consist of floodplain swamp (20%), mesic hammock (15%) and mesic flatwoods (13%) which provides habitat for the Florida pine snake, Florida sandhill crane, Florida scrub jay and gopher tortoise. The agency also manages 14 archaeological and historic sites. Recreational hunting, fishing, hiking, bicycling and horseback riding are some of the activities featured. The agency maintains over 30 miles of roads and trails. Management objectives include maintenance of fire adapted communities and construction of a new restroom and check station in the southern portion on BOT lands.

ARC Action: Chair Hamilton made the motion to approve the management plan with Dr. Parsons seconding. ARC approved the item unanimously.

CLOSING COMMENTS

ARC Announcements: Chair Hamilton announced the next scheduled ARC meeting is the annual 2-day meeting beginning December 10th at 1 p.m. and December 11th at 9 a.m. either in the Douglas conference room or virtually. Dr. Eason expressed appreciation to DEP staff for a good meeting and the behind the scene efforts.

Dr. Eason moved to adjourn the meeting with Mr. Albury seconding. ARC approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.