

ITEM 17:

Vote on whether to amend the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Florida Forever Project Boundary to add one parcel totaling approximately 170 acres in Volusia County with a tax assessed market value of \$745,725.

LOCATION:

Volusia County

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

The St. Johns Riverbend South amendment proposed by the City of DeBary and The Aquatic Preserve Alliance of Central Florida Partnership, adds one parcel in Volusia County totaling approximately 170 acres to the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Florida Forever project. The property consists of one parcel owned by the Recicar Trust, with a tax assessed value of \$745,725.

The parcel is located along the 1.5-mile bend of the St. Johns River adjacent to the Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve and the Black Bear Wilderness Area and west of River City Nature Park. The property is proposed for fee simple acquisition with confirmation that the landowner is a willing seller. The Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (RCP) and the City of DeBary have committed to manage the property if acquired and are pursuing funding to assist with the acquisition. The parcel is accessed from Fort Florida Road off U.S. Highway 17/92. It contains 77 acres of uplands and 152 acres of freshwater floodplain marsh surrounded by a 1.1-mile berm. The berm includes several culverts and has been breached in several places providing hydrologic connection with the river. There are also two recorded cultural sites associated with the property. The property would provide enhanced recreational opportunities including hiking, biking and paddling and has been proposed as the site for a freshwater research and educational station with emphasis on science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) criteria.

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:

Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Florida Forever Project is in Lake, Orange, Seminole and Volusia Counties. The project was approved on the CARL list in 1995. The project was designed to conserve a contiguous natural landscape of wetlands and uplands stretching from Orlando north to the Ocala National Forest by protecting existing natural corridors between multiple state and federal conservation lands in this rapidly growing region of the state. When complete, the project, will provide a critically important refuge for the Florida black bear, and other wildlife such as the bald eagle, swallow-tailed kite, and Florida scrub jay. Public recreation benefits include a wide array of resource-based recreational opportunities for Florida residents and visitors including camping, fishing, swimming, hiking, and paddling.

The Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Florida Forever Project includes over 80,779 acres with 22,156 acres remaining and is ranked number 6 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 \$188,186,015.

FNAI Review:

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), 100% of the site contributes to Ecological Greenways and Functional Wetlands with significant contributions to Natural Floodplain Function, and Surface Water Protection. Based on habitat for imperiled species, the site also scores 80% for Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas and 99% for FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

Project	DHR	FFS	Lynetta Griner	FWC	Bill Palmer	Elva Peppers	DEP	Selected
Wekiva-Ocala Greenway: St. Johns Riverbend South								



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[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)

To: Deborah Burr, DEP/OES
From: Katy NeSmith, FNAI
Date: November 9, 2020
Subject: Proposed Boundary Modification to Florida Forever BOT Project: **St. Johns Riverbend South, Wekiva-Ocala Greenway**, Volusia County

The major goals of the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Florida Forever Project are to protect the springs, riverine systems, and wetland and upland natural communities from the burgeoning Orlando area north to the Ocala National Forest, their rare plant and animal inhabitants, and a variety of recreational pursuits for residents and tourists. Both the Wekiva and St. Johns River basins are part of this project.

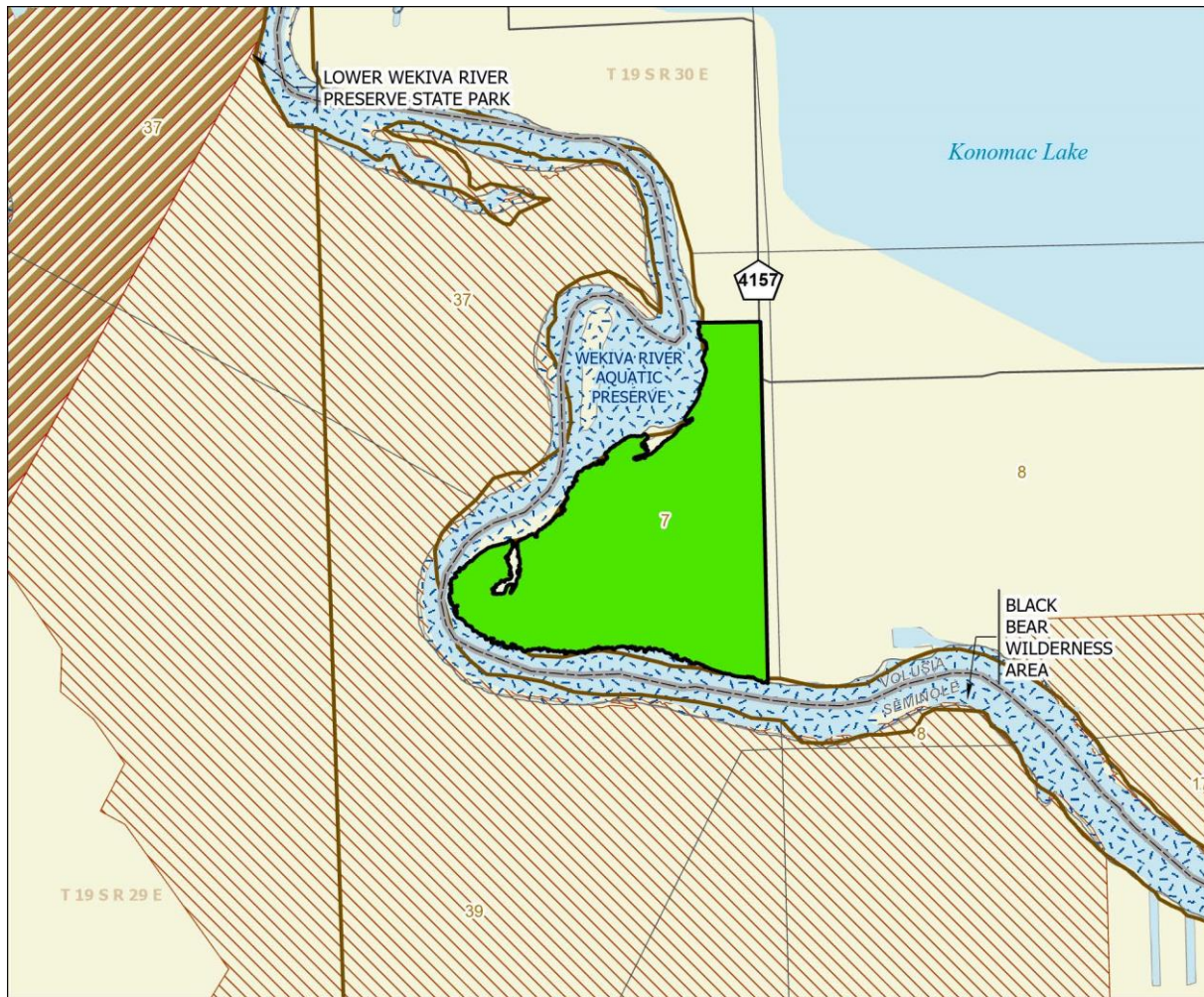
The proposed addition is a single parcel on the east bank of the St. Johns River totaling 170 acres (167.60 GIS acres) located within the City of DeBary, in southwestern Volusia County. The site borders the Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve (the river) for 1.5 miles. Black Bear Wilderness Area (Seminole County) is on the west bank of the river, which itself is connected to the Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park (and the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway). River City Nature Park (City of DeBary and Volusia County) is approximately one half mile upstream (east) from the proposed addition. The property is proposed as fee simple and the City of DeBary is proposed as the manager.

The property forms a westward facing, wide, peninsula in the St. Johns River as it turns north after a more westerly stretch from Lakes Harney and Monroe to the east. It is comprised of roughly 17 acres of uplands and 152 acres of floodplain marsh. The upland acreage, all located in the very northeastern corner of the property, is a combination of oak/palm mesic hammock and grassy pasture where cattle are grazed. The floodplain marsh is ringed by a 1.1-mile berm, a relic from historical dredging to create a safer navigable channel for barges to avoid the sharp turn around the peninsula and safely make their way north; four 12-inch culverts and breaches along the berm provide hydrological connections between the river and the marsh. The marsh is broken by small areas of cypress and palm islands and appears to have a narrow band of hydric hammock/floodplain swamp along parts of the river edge.

The City of DeBary and the Aquatic Preserve Alliance of Central Florida are pursuing additional public and private acquisition partners to help augment funding for the site, including Volusia Forever and U.S. Small Grants Program. The City and the Alliance wish to partner with the Aquatic Preserve program to establish a Freshwater Research and Education Center on the upland portion of the property.

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 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. There is one bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, G5/S3, N, N) nest monitored by Audubon EagleWatch that was active in 2020 within a mile east of the southeastern corner of the property. Two other eagle nests within a mile south and west are not currently monitored and were last surveyed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 2014 and last known active in 2011 and 2008 respectively. The state-listed Threatened Little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*, G5/S4, N, T) was seen in the marsh during an October, 2020 survey by the applicants. No doubt, additional wading birds would be noted to frequent the marsh through more extensive surveying of the property.

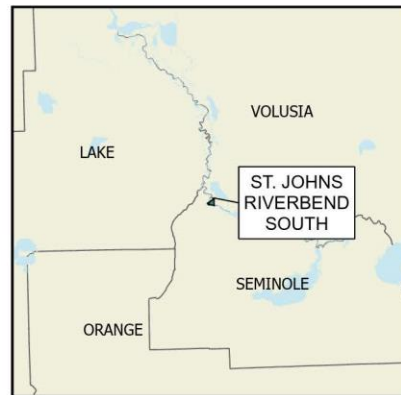
The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) at the end of this memo is based on the Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment developed by FNAI. The data used in that analysis represent a standardized, statewide perspective of natural community distributions based primarily on data from the Cooperative Land Cover Map. The proposed addition contributes substantially (by percent of site, not total acreage) to protection of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities, Ecological Greenways, Natural Floodplain Function, Surface Water Protection, and Functional Wetlands.



**WEKIVA-OCALA GREENWAY PROPOSED ADDITION
(ST. JOHNS RIVERBEND SOUTH)**

CLAY COUNTY

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



NOVEMBER 2020



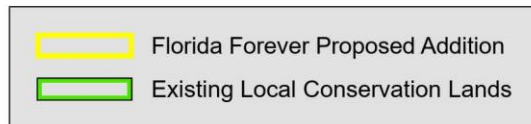
Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Proposed Addition (St. Johns Riverbend South)

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF NOVEMBER 2020



Map Produced by: N. Pasco, November 2020

Background: World Imagery Resolution = 0.3 meter



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Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Addition (St. Johns Riverbend South): Florida Forever Measure Evaluation 20201104

GIS ACRES = 167.60

MEASURES	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	131.88	79%
Priority 3	1.33	< 1%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Total Acres	133.21	80%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	41.48	25%
Priority 5	78.95	47%
Priority 6	45.03	27%
Total Acres	165.46	99%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	167.46	100%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	167.46	100%
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	121.98	73%
Priority 3	36.08	22%
Priority 4	1.28	< 1%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	159.34	95%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	165.24	99%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Priority 7	0.00	0%
Total Acres	165.24	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	123.21	74%
Priority 3	35.92	21%
Priority 4	0.89	< 1%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	160.01	96%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0.00	0%
Priority 2	0.00	0%
Priority 3	0.00	0%
Priority 4	0.00	0%
Priority 5	0.00	0%
Priority 6	0.00	0%
Total Acres	0.00	0%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
<small>(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)</small>		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
		2 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 most noticeable on small sites.