

# 2021 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan

## ***Corrigan Ranch***

Summary of Recommendations and Status  
as of  
December 2020



Division of State Lands  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



# Corrigan Ranch

Critical Natural Lands Project  
Okeechobee

### Project-at-a-Glance

Year Added to Priority List	2019
Project Acres	6,211
Acquired Acres	0
Cost of Acquired Acres	\$0
Remaining Project Acres	6,211
2019 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres	\$18,311,664

### Purpose for State Acquisition

Acquisition of Corrigan Ranch would add 6,211 acres to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park and would allow for the protection and management of thousands of acres of additional high-quality habitats in an area of Florida known for its rare wildlife, imperiled habitats and significant hydrological resources. It would provide additional resource-based public recreation opportunities such as assisting with the completion of the Florida National Scenic Trail and expand the acreage of the park’s Dark Sky certification status. It would protect approximately 3,000 additional acres of imperiled dry prairie ecosystem and improve connectivity for both wildlife and watershed.

The project meets the following public purposes:

1. Enhance the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects;
2. Increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels;
3. Protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state;
4. Ensure that sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state;
5. Increase natural resource-based public recreation or educational opportunities;
6. Preserve significant archaeological or historic sites; and,
7. Increase the amount of forest land available for sustainable management of natural resources.



## Manager

The Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) will manage the proposed project.

## General Description

Corrigan Ranch is a 6,211-acre fee simple proposal located in northwest Okeechobee County in South Central Florida. The entrance to the ranch is at the end of Micco Bluff Road, approximately ten miles northwest of the point where U.S. 98 crosses the Kissimmee River. It is essentially an inholding in a large landscape of conservation lands, chiefly Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, which borders the proposal's northern boundary for 3 miles, and Avon Park Air Force Range located just to the northwest. Its western boundary follows the Kissimmee River and its associated conservation land, connected by privately managed agricultural properties. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Easements border the entire eastern border. The property is in the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge Conservation Partnership Area and has been identified as a priority by USFWS due primarily to its abundant wildlife, well-managed habitats, connectivity to protected lands, and for its role in watershed protection within the Kissimmee River Basin and the Greater Everglades ecosystem.

There are 4,070 acres of Priority 1 biodiversity resource lands on the ranch. Nearly all the remaining property is classified as priority 2 biodiversity resource lands. Corrigan Ranch contains approximately 2,605 acres of dry prairie, an imperiled ecosystem that has undergone an estimated decline of 80 to 90-percent since pre-settlement. In addition, 1,602 acres of the pastureland contain vegetation typical of dry prairie habitat. There are 1,000 acres of freshwater marsh on the property as well. There are no inholdings in this project boundary, and the parcel is leased out for hunting white-tailed deer and turkey. Cattle are grazed across the ranch using a rotational grazing program. Development pressures are increasing in the region.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Glossy ibis	G5/S3
Tricolored heron	G5/S4
White ibis	G5/S4

*3 rare species are associated with the project*

**Public Use**

This proposal is for fee simple acquisition. Though public recreation opportunities will be determined in the management planning process, potential compatible recreational activities could include bicycling, camping, dog walking, environmental education and interpretation, fishing, hiking, jogging, horseback riding, wildlife observation and photography.

**Acquisition Planning**

*2020*

Corrigan Ranch was submitted for Hugh Corrigan by Saunders Real Estate and the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

**Coordination**

The property is in the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge Conservation Partnership Area and has been identified as a priority by USFWS due primarily to its abundant wildlife, well-managed habitats, connectivity to protected lands, and for its role in watershed protection within the Kissimmee River Basin and the greater everglades ecosystem. The entire property is identified by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 2009 as part of the Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

**Management Policy Statement**

Corrigan Ranch is surrounded by conservation lands and located in a high ecological priority area of the state. The ranch is wholly within Priority 1 ecological greenways. As Division of Recreation and Parks-managed property, the DRP provided the following general management policy for the property:

*It shall be the policy of the DRP to promote the state park system for the use, enjoyment, and benefit of the people of Florida and visitors; to acquire typical portions of the original domain of the state which will be accessible to all of the people, and of such character as to emblemize the state's natural values; conserve these natural values for all time; administer the development, use and maintenance of these lands and render such public service in so doing, in such a manner as to enable the people of Florida and visitors to enjoy these values without depleting them; to*



*contribute materially to the development of a strong mental, moral, and physical fiber in the people; to provide for perpetual preservation of historic sites and memorials of statewide significance and interpretation of their history to the people; to contribute to the tourist appeal of Florida.*

## Management Prospectus

### *Qualifications for state designation*

This project has significant conservation and recreation value. It is critical to watershed protection, wildlife corridors and enhanced ecological function within the Kissimmee River Basin and the Greater Everglades ecosystem.

### *Manager*

The Division of Recreation and Parks proposes to manage the entirety of the fee-simple acquisition as part of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park.

### *Conditions affecting intensity of management*

Historically, the entire ranch would have been composed of dry prairie with freshwater marshes and swales interspersed throughout. Given the existing condition of the acquisition proposal, restoration to its original natural condition would be feasible, although on an extended timeline. Restoration of the pasturelands back to the historical natural communities is well within the DRP's capabilities, given the appropriate resources and timeframe. Restoration of the dry prairie and freshwater marsh communities would follow the model already being implemented at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, with emphasis on the application of prescribed fire at an appropriate interval and seasonality. The existing network of roads, culverts, crossings, and structures provide the access infrastructure to establish management zones and a potential location for housing personnel and equipment. The resource management goals would be most effectively achieved by establishing the unit as an addition to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, where similar largescale restoration efforts in former pasture prairie have already been successful. There are many species of imperiled plants and animals that have either been confirmed or have the potential to occur at Corrigan Ranch. Most notable is the confirmed presence of the critically endangered Florida grasshopper sparrow.

### *Timetable for implementing management, and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure*

Should the property be acquired, resource management activities would be carried out by park staff. Preliminary recreational development could occur quickly and would focus on the development of low-intensity passive recreation such as hiking, cycling, and horseback riding. A



composting restroom, picnic pavilion, and trailhead kiosk could be installed to provide access to a preliminary system of hiking trails.

*Revenue-generating potential*

The potential of the acquisition to accommodate secondary management purposes would be analyzed. Secondary purposes would be considered within the context of DRP’s statutory responsibilities and the resource needs and values of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. This analysis would consider the acquisition’s natural and cultural resources, management needs, aesthetic values visitation, and visitor experiences. Grazing activities may be appropriate as a means of generating revenues for land management activities such as natural community restoration and exotic plant species control.

*Cooperators in management activities*

DRP would work with the Florida Forest Service on the development of wildfire emergency plans, prescribed burns, and proposed forestry activities that would support full restoration of the project. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission would provide the enforcement of state laws pertaining to wildlife, freshwater fish and other aquatic life existing within the park. In addition, the FWC would aid DRP with wildlife management programs, including imperiled species management. The Division of Historical Resources would assist staff to ensure protection of archaeological and historical sites, as well as interpretation of significant cultural resources to park visitors.

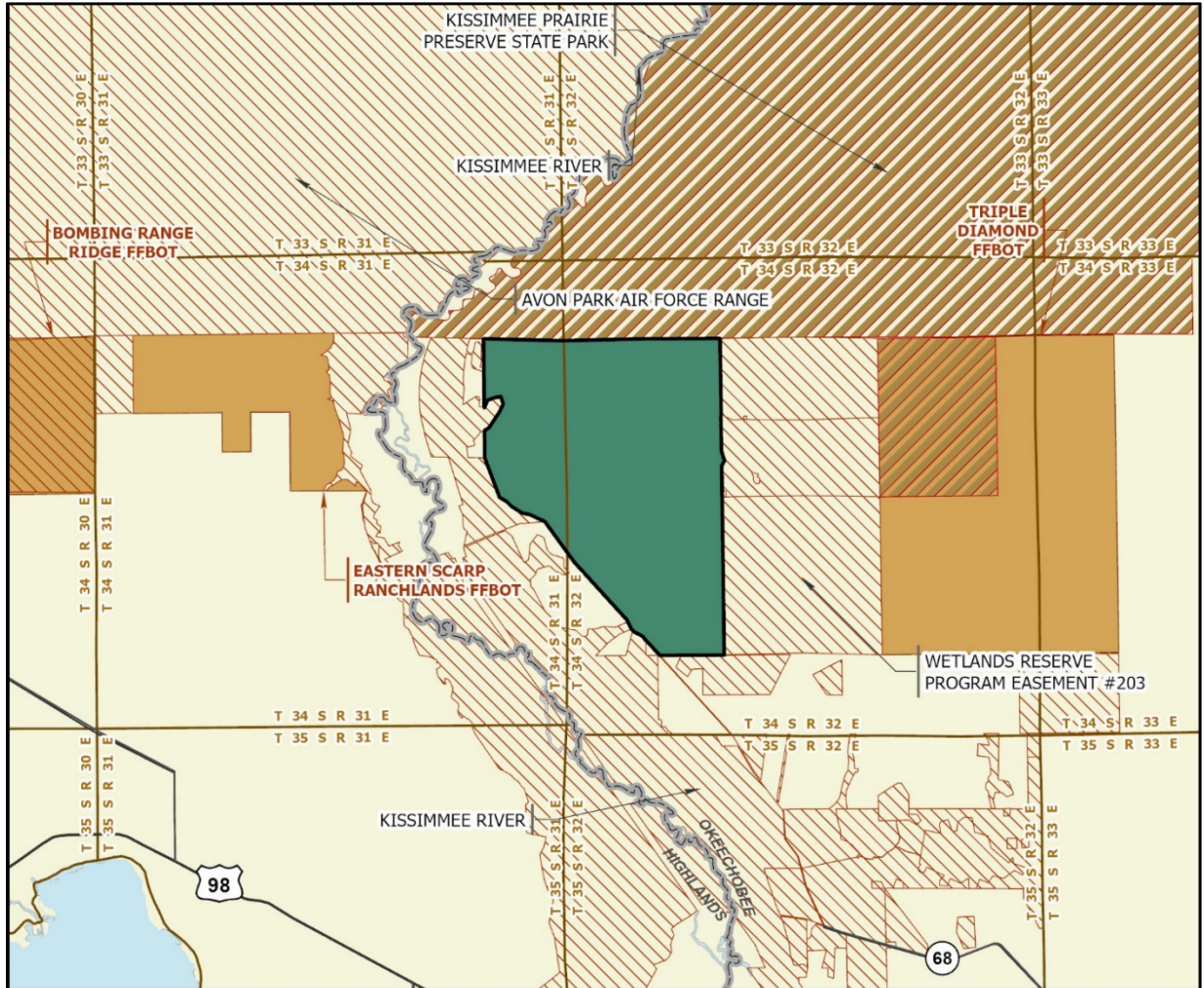
*Management costs and sources of revenue*

Actual revenue from the addition of this acreage to the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park could not be projected, but visitor fees and charges would be the principle revenue generated.

Management Cost Summary

<u>DRP</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Salary	\$39,500
Expense	\$0
OCO	\$0
FCO	\$0
TOTAL	\$39,500

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



### CORRIGAN RANCH

#### OKEECHOBEE COUNTY

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



FEBRUARY 2021



Map 1 : FNAI, January 2021