

2021 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan

Econfina Timberlands

Summary of Recommendations and Status
as of
December 2020



Division of State Lands
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Econfina Timberlands

Critical Natural Lands Project
Jefferson

Project-at-a-Glance

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Year Added to Priority List | 2019 |
| Project Acres | 1,665 |
| Acquired Acres | 0 |
| Cost of Acquired Acres | \$0 |
| Remaining Project Acres | 1,665 |
| 2019 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres | \$1,830,972 |

Purpose for State Acquisition

Purchasing the tracts of the Econfina Timberlands project would advance the landscape connectivity along the Aucilla River that extends north from the Gulf Coast through such lands as the Walker Spring Conservation Easement, the Middle Aucilla Conservation Area, the Upper Aucilla Conservation Area and the Pickney Hill Plantation Conservation Easement. This project is important habitat for the Florida black bear and is within the Strategic Habitat Conservation Area for the swallow-tailed kite and for the Cooper’s hawk. Because the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) classifies 44 percent of this area as wetland, preserving this land would also help protect the water resources of this area, including the Aucilla River, Beasley Creek and Raysor Creek.

Manager

This property would be managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

General Description

Econfina Timberlands is in eastern Jefferson County, and has two parcels that touch the Suwannee River Water Management District-managed Middle Aucilla Conservation Area and



the TNC-managed Turkey Scratch Conservation Easement. The project area is currently managed by Econfina Timberlands, LLC of Fernandina Beach, Florida.

This project is in the Gulf Coastal Lowlands, situated between the Tallahassee hills and the coastal swamps. The FWC’s GIS analysis of the area shows that about 42 percent of this area is (loblolly) tree plantation, 28 percent is freshwater forested wetlands and 6.8 percent is marshes. The remaining land is small percentages of the total acreage, and includes floodplain swamp, dome swamp, cypress, and prairies and bogs. There are 13 distinct community natural types within the boundary. All of it is important habitat for the Florida black bear. There is no record found of Florida panthers in this area, but it is within the FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Area for the Cooper’s hawk and the swallow-tailed kite.

Though silvicultural activities have altered the landscape, impacting native groundcover, perennial grasses such as wiregrass persist. With activities such as thinning and burning, plantations with intact native groundcover can be restored to the former natural community.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

| <u>FNAI Elements</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Gopher tortoise | G3/S3 |
| Florida black bear | G5T4/S4 |

2 rare species are associated with the project

Public Use

This property would be managed by the FWC for recreational and wildlife conservation purposes.

Acquisition Planning

2019

On October 18, 2019, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added Econfina Timberlands 1,665 acre (GIS) to the Florida Forever project list as a fee simple project. The project had a 2019 tax assessed value of \$2,368,711. The land within the approved boundary was designated essential. This project was sponsored by the FWC.

Coordination

The southern boundaries of both parcels are shared with conservation easements and public conservation areas. The Aucilla Wildlife Management Area, managed by the Florida Fish and



Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), is located approximately ten miles southwest of Econfina Timberlands.

Management Policy Statement

Being near other important conservation lands, acquisition of Econfina Timberlands would significantly help with landscape connectivity and wildlife corridors.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

Econfina Timberlands meets numerous Florida Forever goals, performance measures, and criteria as outlined in F.S. 259.105. This project would help meet Florida Forever goals including enhancing the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects; increasing the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state; ensure sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state and would increase natural resource-based public recreation and education opportunities.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

Resources described in this Management Prospectus indicate conditions affecting intensity of management. These include natural community types, topography and soils, surface and ground water conditions, extent of historic disturbance, and already existing improvements. Environmentally sensitive areas, such as erosion-prone sites, important habitats, outstanding natural areas, and wetlands will be identified, appropriately managed, and protected.

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

If acquired and leased to the FWC for management, an amendment to the existing Aucilla Wildlife Management Area (AWMA) Management Plan will include management goals and objectives necessary to implement future resource management programs on Econfina Timberlands. The management plan will also establish the current and future roles of cooperating entities including governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders.

Long-range plans would stress ecosystem management and the protection and management of locally important, rare, and imperiled species. If acquired, historic analysis of natural communities and vegetation types may be conducted, if deemed necessary, and quantified



vegetation management objectives will be developed. The FWC would also assess the condition of wildlife resources and provide planning support to enhance management of locally important species and recovery of imperiled species in the area. Use of prescribed fire and other essential resource management activities will be implemented to maintain and restore natural communities and vegetation types to benefit native wildlife resources.

Programs providing multiple fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreational uses will be considered for implementation following acquisition. These potential recreational uses will enhance the public's understanding of the region while providing ample opportunities for outdoor recreational enjoyment. Essential roads will be maintained to provide all weather public access and management operations. Unnecessary roads, fire lanes, and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical.

Infrastructure development will be limited to only that which is necessary to allow public access and to provide for the necessary facilities, security, and management of the property.

Archaeological and historical sites will be managed in coordination with Division of Historical Resources.

Revenue-generating potential

Revenue from this conservation land can include sales of various permits and recreational user fees and ecotourism activities, if such projects could be economically developed. Area regulations would be developed to identify the necessary and required permits, fees, and regulations. Timber sales from thinning operations or restoration of off-site plantations may also yield additional revenue. Apiary leases will be considered as a revenue source depending on whether the area meets the criteria of the FWC's Apiary Policy. In addition, the Florida Legislature appropriates funds for land management. The long-term values of ecosystem services to local and regional land and water resources, and to human health, are expected to be significant.

Cooperators in management activities

The FWC will cooperate with other federal, state, and local governmental agencies including the Florida Forest Service, Department of Environmental Protection, Suwannee River Water Management District, Jefferson and Madison counties, and other private conservation organizations in the continuing management of the property.

Management costs and sources of revenue

The initial non-recurring (first year only) start-up cost for the Econfina Timberlands is estimated to be \$266,400, which includes public access and infrastructure and fixed capital outlays

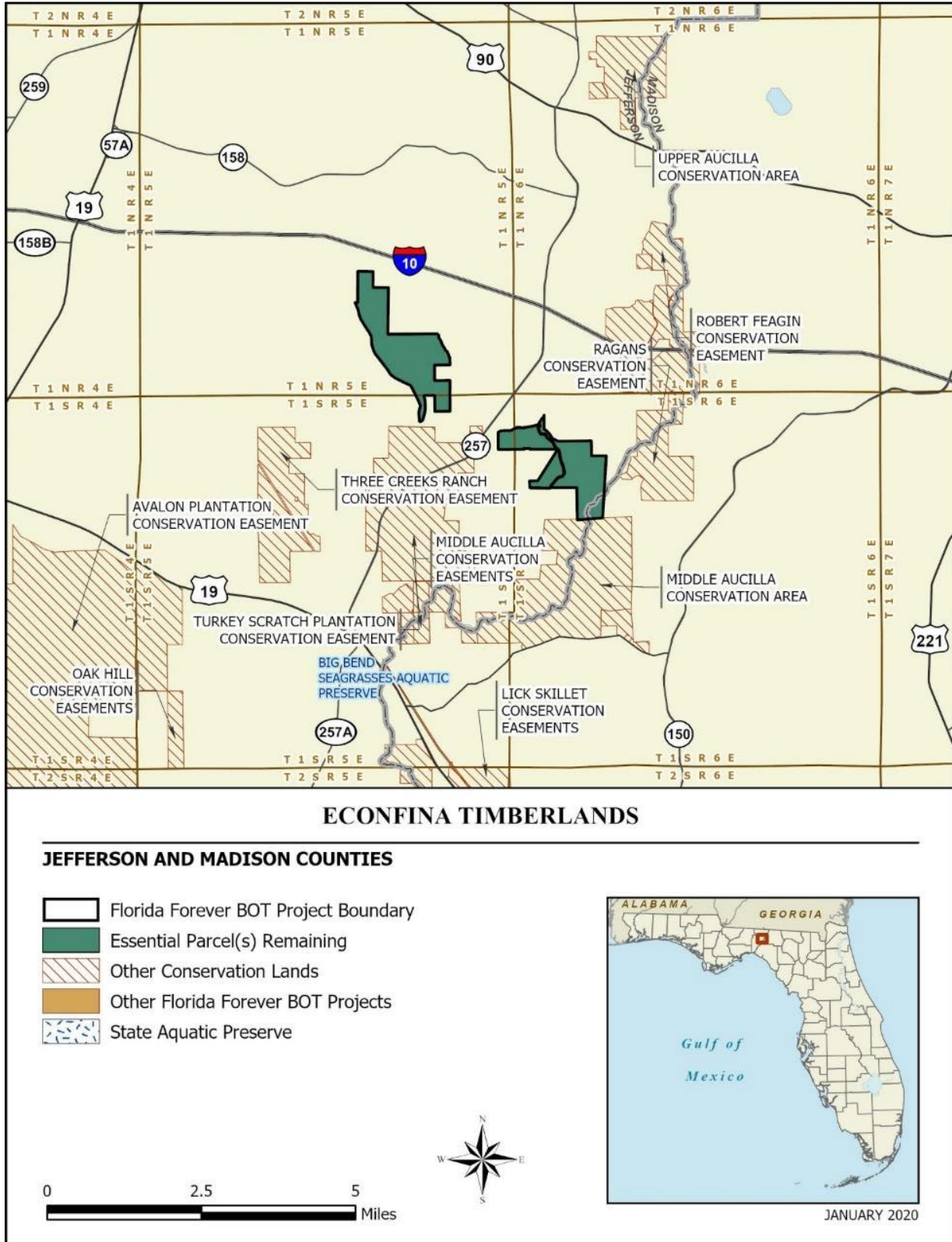


necessary for management of the area. All land management funding is dependent upon annual legislative appropriations

Management Cost Summary

| <u>FWC</u> | <u>Recurring</u> | <u>Non-recurring</u> | <u>Notes</u> |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|--|
| Source of funds | | | State of Florida Visitor entrance fees and charges |
| Salary | | \$27,114 | for 1 FTE position |
| Expense | \$17,799 | | |
| OCO | \$63,636 | | |
| FCO | \$17,083 | \$266,400 | |

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



Map 1 : FNAI, January 2021