

Watermelon Pond Project
Section 11, Township 11, Range 17

Name: Pierre & Nancy Warny

Matrix Score: 7.42 (Environmental Score 4.5 of 6.7, Economic Score 2.9 of 3.3)

Parcel Numbers: 02711-003-000 40 acres
02711-004-000 40 acres

Total Size: 80 acres

FEMA Flood Hazard and Wetlands 46.51 ac

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: The Ashtons as part of the Ashton Biological Preserve manage the Warny property. It is in good shape and consists of wet prairie, sandhill, and prairie hammock. According to Ray Ashton in the documentation submitted with the ACF Section 11 nomination form, "The species of wildlife found on this property are basically the same as those found on the Preserve. In 1996 and 1997 a pair of Florida Sandhills nested in the wet prairie. This wetland was surveyed for breeding amphibians for 3 years and all anurans known to occur in the area breed in this pond. There are no predatory fish in the prairie. Gopher tortoise density is currently at 0.8 tortoises per acre of habitat. This is equivalent to the density of the [Ashton] Preserve prior to burning and relocation."

ECONOMIC/ACQUISITION ISSUES: The Alachua County Property Appraiser's 2001 Just Value for the subject parcels is \$84,000 or \$1,050/ acre. This figure is for comparative purposes between nominated properties, and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the true cost of the property if acquired by the Alachua County Forever Program. There are no structures present on the property.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

Factor	Finding
Location	Southwestern Alachua County, near Levy County line between Newberry and Archer.
Market Conditions	Slow to moderate demand for large-lot (5-10+ acre-lot) single-family detached housing, and manufactured home sites.
Land Use	Current: Vacant, acreage in oak sandhill, hardwoods, ephemeral pond ("Grass Pond"). FLU Map: Rural/Agriculture (1 unit per 5 acres).
Zoning	A (Agriculture, 1 DU per 5 acres).
Parcel Subdivision	Currently two approx. 40-acre tracts. Potentially up to 16 lots, if rezoned to PUD.
Owner Intent	Not indicated.

DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY:

The project site has development potential for single-family detached residential use. The site is distant from public infrastructure and services and is not readily accessible. The northern tract contains Grass Pond and associated wetlands and flood prone areas. A rural subdivision with up to 6 lots each could be feasible on the southern tract parcel. This project area is subject to development pressure from Newberry and Archer, both of which are aggressively pursuing annexation.

ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER
PROJECT RANKING REPORT

DRAFT: 3/9/02, 4/16/02
SITE NAME: Watermelon Pond Project - Section 11, Township 11, Range 17
MATRIX SCORE: Howell - 7.47 of 10 / 34.82 acres, Ashton - 7.40 of 10 / 90.28 acres,
Warny - 7.42 of 10 / 80 acres, Elliott - 7.13 of 10 / 40 acres,
Beltz - 5.2 of 10 / 80 acres, Brennan - 7.22 of 10 / 40 acres

LOCATION/DESCRIPTION: The 4,803 acre Watermelon Pond Project is located in southwestern Alachua County, adjacent to the Gilchrist and Levy County lines. The majority of the project falls within unincorporated Alachua County, however a portion lies in the City of Newberry (Map 1). The Alachua County Forever Watermelon Pond Project partially overlaps the existing Watermelon Pond Florida Forever Land Acquisition project (Attachment 1), and the Watermelon Pond site from the Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project (KBN 1996) (Attachment 2). The existing Florida Forever Project is on the 2002 Florida Forever "Group A Project" list, as a full fee acquisition. This means the Florida Forever Program will pay for the entire cost of the acquisition of the parcels lying within the project boundaries. The Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project, also known as the "KBN Study" ranked the Watermelon Pond Site 15th of 47 sites ranked in the county.

Section 11, with the exclusion of the Howell property (02711-006-006), is being reviewed by Florida Forever staff as a boundary expansion to the Watermelon Pond Florida Forever Land Acquisition project. This project ranking report assumes that Section 11 will be incorporated into the existing Watermelon Pond Florida Forever Project as a full fee acquisition. Should the state not agree to expand the project, the ranking report must be revised. The 35 acre Howell property is already part of the project, and as such the Florida Forever Program will pay the entire cost of acquisition of the property.

The following property owners have given the county permission to access and evaluate their property: Julian Howell (02711-006-006), Ray and Patricia Ashton (02711-006-003, 02711-006-008, 02711-006-011), Pierre and Nancy Warny (02711-003-000, 02711-004-000), Russell Elliott (02711-006-010), Billy Beltz (02711-005-000, 02711-006-0070) and William Brennan (02711-002-000). A one-page description for each of the above properties and scoring matrix are included in the ranking report. Felton and Gail Sheffield, Parcel number 02711-006-004, requested that their property be removed from the project area and as such will not be considered part of this evaluation even though it lies within Section 11. The county is awaiting permission from the remaining owners in Section 11.

PROTECTING WATER RESOURCES: Watermelon Pond is located on the Brooksville Ridge in the unconfined aquifer zone of Alachua County according to the Florida Geologic Survey Open File Report 21 (Map 2). This is an area where the Floridan Aquifer System is overlain by highly permeable, generally thin, undifferentiated sands. It is a low flat area of high aquifer recharge that allows pollutants direct access to the aquifer (Macesich, 1988). "There may be a weak confining layer between the surface and the Floridan Aquifer in this area. The combination of sandy soil and a weak or intermittent confining layer results in no surface drainage systems and eventual percolation into the Floridan Aquifer of all rainfall." (KBN 1996:p4-131). The St. Johns River Water Management District's Aquifer recharge map for Alachua County shows that the site lies primarily in an area of high aquifer recharge, 12 inches or more per year (Map 3).

PROTECTING NATURAL COMMUNITIES AND LANDSCAPES:

<u>Natural Communities/Land Cover Types</u>	<u>Condition</u>
Sandhill	excellent - poor
Mesic Flatwoods	excellent-good
Xeric Hammock	excellent-fair
Prairie Hammock	good-fair
Wet Prairie	good
Basin Marsh	good-fair
Sandhill lake	good
Sinkhole Pond	good

Watermelon Pond - Wary (Draft date 3/7/02)

CATEGORY	Criterion	WEIGHTING	Enter Criteria Value Based on Site Inspection	Average Criteria Score	Average Criteria Score Multiplied by Relative Importance
(I-1) PROTECTION OF WATER RESOURCES	A. Whether the property has geologic/hydrologic conditions that would easily enable contamination of vulnerable aquifers that have value as drinking water sources;		5		
	B. Whether the property serves an important groundwater recharge function;		5		
	C. Whether the property contains or has direct connections to lakes, creeks, rivers, springs, sinkholes, or wetlands for which conservation of the property will protect or improve surface water quality;		3		
	D. Whether the property serves an important flood management function.		3		
(I-2) PROTECTION OF NATURAL COMMUNITIES AND LANDSCAPES	A. Whether the property contains a diversity of natural communities;		2		
	B. Whether the natural communities present on the property are rare;		3		
	C. Whether there is ecological quality in the communities present on the property;		3		
	D. Whether the property is functionally connected to other natural communities;		3		
	E. Whether the property is adjacent to properties that are in public ownership or have other environmental protections such as conservation easements;		2		
	F. Whether the property is large enough to contribute substantially to conservation efforts;		3		
	G. Whether the property contains important, Florida-specific geologic features such as caves or springs;		2		
	H. Whether the property is relatively free from internal fragmentation from roads, power lines, and other features that create barriers and edge effects.		5		
(I-3) PROTECTION OF PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES	A. Whether the property serves as documented or potential habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species or species of special concern;		5		
	B. Whether the property serves as documented or potential habitat for species with large home ranges;		4		
	C. Whether the property contains plants or animals that are endemic or near-endemic to Florida or Alachua County;		4		
	D. Whether the property serves as a special wildlife migration or aggregation site for activities such as breeding, roosting, colonial nesting, or over-wintering;		4		
	E. Whether the property offers high vegetation quality and species diversity;		4		
	F. Whether the property has low incidence of non-native invasive species.		3		
(I-4) SOCIAL AND HUMAN VALUES	A. Whether the property offers opportunities for compatible resource-based recreation, if appropriate;		2		
	B. Whether the property contributes to urban green space, provides a municipal defining greenbelt, provides scenic vistas, or has other value from an urban and regional planning perspective.		3		
	AVERAGE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN VALUES			3.4	
	RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CRITERIA SET IN THE OVERALL SCORE	1.3333			4.5
(II-1) MANAGEMENT ISSUES	A. Whether it will be practical to manage the property to protect its environmental, social and other values (examples include controlled burning, exotics removal, maintaining hydro-period, and so on);		4		
	B. Whether this management can be completed in a cost-effective manner.		5		
(II-2) ECONOMIC AND ACQUISITION ISSUES	A. Whether there is potential for purchasing the property with matching funds from municipal, state, federal, or private contributions;		5		
	B. Whether the overall resource values justifies the potential cost of acquisition;		4		
	C. Whether there is imminent threat of losing the environmental, social or other values of the property through development and/or lack of sufficient legislative protections (this requires analysis of current land use, zoning, owner intent, location and		3		
	D. Whether there is an opportunity to protect the environmental, social or other values of the property through an economically attractive less-than-fee mechanism such as a conservation easement.		5		
	AVERAGE FOR ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT VALUES			4.3	
	RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CRITERIA SET IN THE OVERALL SCORE	0.6667			2.9
	TOTAL SCORE				7.42

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Rough Pasture
Improved Pasture
Planted Pine

Section 11 consists of a mosaic of uplands, wetlands, pastures, pine plantations, and residential and agricultural buildings. The biological quality of the project area is extremely variable throughout its extent. The Ashton Biological Preserve and the surrounding areas under their management are very well managed and highly diverse, while other tracts are highly disturbed and will require intensive resource management activities to restore them.

The Florida Forever Watermelon Pond acquisition project consists of 16,600 acres of land in both Alachua and Levy Counties. Of approximately 4,971 acres in Alachua County, approximately 1,734 are in public ownership. The ACF program incorporated the Florida Forever boundary into the Watermelon Pond Project, with the exception of Section 30, Township 11, Range 18. This section is highly disturbed by sand mining and landfill activities. Map 4 shows the existing and proposed conservation land boundaries for the Florida Forever Acquisition Project. Ray Ashton is working with Florida Forever staff to expand the boundary to include Section 11 in the project.

The only properties in public ownership adjoining the ACF Watermelon Pond Project are other Watermelon Pond parcels acquired through the Florida Forever Program and a small county park. The possibility does however exist to connect to other natural areas in Gilchrist, Levy and Marion Counties and back into Alachua County through the Barr Hammock, Levy Prairie area. The subject area is delineated as a low priority ecological greenway according to the Significant Landscapes, Linkages, and Conservation Corridors Map (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2000: p.11). The Watermelon Pond area is noted in the Closing the Gaps study as a Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (Cox, et al. 1994).

PROTECTING PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES:

Common Name	Endemic	Fed/State Status	FCREPA/FNAI Designation	Observed
Birds				
Southeastern American Kestrel		-/T	T/S3	A,K
Bald Eagle		T/T	T/S3	A,K,F,S
White Ibis		-/SSC	SSC/S4	A
Snowy Egret		-/SSC	SSC/S3	A
Sandhill Crane	X	-/T	T/S3	A,K
Florida Burrowing Owl		-/SSC	-/S3	A
American Swallow-tailed Kite			T/S2	A
Cooper's Hawk			SSC/S3	A
Little Blue Heron			SSC/S4	A, F,K
Wood Stork		E/E	E/S2	A, F,K
Amphibians				
Florida Gopher Frog		-/SSC	T/S3	A,F,K
Striped Newt		-/-	R/S2S3	A
Flatwoods Salamander		-/-	R/S2S3	A
Reptiles				
Florida Pine Snake		-/SSC	SSC/S3	A,K,N
Short-tailed Snake	X	-/T	R/S3	A,K
Eastern Indigo Snake		T/T	SSC/S3	A,N
Florida Box Turtle	X			A,K
Gopher Tortoise		-/SSC	T/S3	A,K
American Alligator		T/SSC	-/-	A, F
Mammals				
Florida Black Bear	X	-/T	T/S2	A
Florida Mouse	X	-/SSC	T/S3	A
Sherman's Fox Squirrel		-/SSC	T/S3	A,K,N,S

X=Endemic, S=observed by Alachua Co. EPD staff and/or an LCB subcommittee member, F=documented as potential habitat by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's 1995 Alachua County, Habitat Distribution Maps, C=Closing the Gaps in Florida's Wildlife Habitat Conservation System, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 1994, N=Florida Natural Areas Inventory Element Occurrence, P=potential for species based on habitat types. A=Ashton, Ashton, & Associates, Inc., K=KBN 1996.

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It should be noted that the projects have been scored assuming the state approves the boundary expansion for the Florida Forever Watermelon Pond Project, and agrees to fully fund the acquisitions. Should the state not include Section 11 in the Watermelon Pond project as a full fee acquisition the scores must be adjusted appropriately.

Property owners in Section 11 have expressed an interest in life estates and conservation easements. They have indicated they are not interested in selling their properties outright. The mean per acre Just Value for properties in the project area is \$937.25 according to the Alachua County Property Appraiser's 2001 values. This figure is for comparative purposes between nominated properties, and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the true cost of the property if acquired by the Alachua County Forever Program. Perhaps the best role for the county to play in these areas is to provide support and facilitate where appropriate.

OTHER: Both historical and archaeological artifacts were observed in the Watermelon Pond Project area. Evidence of a turpentine still from the turn of the century is present on the Elliott property, and a Pinellas point, indicating native American use of the area from A.D. 1,250 to 1,600 was found in a dry area of Watermelon Pond.

REFERENCES CITED:

Ashton, Ashton & Associates, Inc., 2001. Draft-Report on the biodiversity and Management Plan for the Ashton Biological Preserve-Finca de la Tortuga, 2001. Gainesville, Florida.

Cox, J., R. Kautz, M. Maclaughlin, and T. Gilbert. 1994. Closing the Gaps in Florida's Wildlife Habitat Conservation System. Office of Environmental Services, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2000. Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment Summary Report to the Florida Forever Advisory Council, Tallahassee, Florida.

KBN, a Golder Associates company, 1996. Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project. Prepared for the Alachua County Department of Growth Management, Gainesville, Florida.

Macesich, M., 1988. Geologic Interpretation of the Aquifer Pollution Potential in Alachua county, Florida. Open File Report - 21. Florida Geological Survey, Tallahassee, Florida.

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The following animal species were reported by Ashton, Ashton, & Associates, Inc. in the Draft – Report on the Biodiversity and Management Plan for the Ashton Biological Preserve – Finca de la Tortuga 2001.

Animals with large home ranges	Striped Skunk	Barking Frog
American Swallow-tailed Kite	Rice Rat	Pig Frog
Bobcat	Short-tailed Shrew	Black and Turkey Vultures
Wild Turkey	Spotted Skunk	Mississippi Kite
Black Bear	Flying Squirrel	Snow Goose
Other observed animals	Eastern Diamondback	Wood duck
Mosquito fish	Rattlesnake	Barred Owl
Red-shouldered hawk	Florida Crown Snake	Belted Kingfisher
Red-tailed hawk	Southern Ringneck Snake	Pileated Woodpecker
	Oak Toad	

The watermelon pond area was historically very good habitat for Sherman Fox Squirrels, however due to fire suppression and the cutting of longleaf pines it now ranges from good to poor habitat. It should be noted that much of the area could be restored to very good habitat with proper management. The key to maintaining a viable population of fox squirrels and other wildlife in the Watermelon Pond area is connecting the existing areas in public ownership through additional acquisitions or easements and implementing an active resource management program that includes prescribed burning (personal communication John Wooding). Staff and the LCB observed four Sherman fox squirrels during the Watermelon Pond field trip. There is a large gopher tortoise population on portions of the site.

Section 11 has high wildlife and vegetation value and with management will continue to improve.

ACHIEVING SOCIAL/HUMAN VALUES: Portions of the overall project area will provide excellent opportunities for wildlife and nature viewing, as well as fishing and hiking. The project area is delineated as a low priority ecological greenway according to the Significant Landscapes, Linkages, and Conservation Corridors Map (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2000: p.11). Properties within the Florida Forever Project boundary will be managed as part of Goethe State Forest by the Division of Forestry. The site will also serve as an urban defining greenbelt for the City of Newberry and perhaps Archer in the future.

Because the property owners in Section 11 desire conservation easements or life estates and most of the parcels contain homesteads, there is little opportunity for public resource-based recreation in this section.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES: Currently the property manager for the Watermelon Pond Florida Forever Project is the Division of Forestry, therefore any of the properties purchased through Florida Forever will be managed by them as a part of Goethe State Forest.

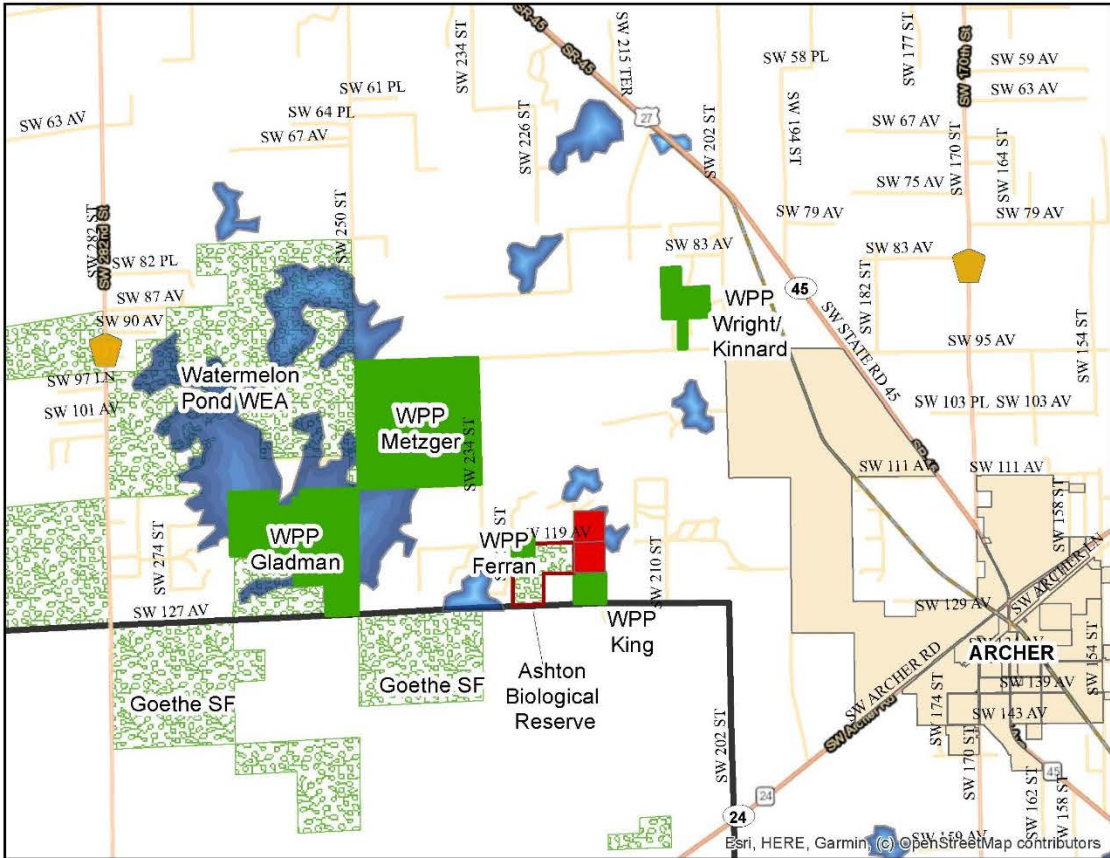
Because the owners in Section 11 are interested in either life estates or conservation easements it is likely that the owners will maintain management responsibility for their properties. The Ashtons are managing the biological resources on their 90 acres, the Warny's 80 acres and assisting Russell Elliott with the management of his 40 acres. They are also providing assistance to other owners in Section 11.

ECONOMIC/ACQUISITION ISSUES: The Watermelon Pond Florida Forever Acquisition Project overlaps the ACF Watermelon Pond Project by approximately 3,237 acres. The existing Florida Forever Project is on the 2002 Florida Forever "Group A Project" list, as a full fee acquisition. This means that the Florida Forever Program will pay for the entire cost of the acquisition. Group A Projects are the highest priority acquisition projects and are so designated because they make the greatest contributions toward achieving the Florida Forever goals and measures, and the Florida Forever criteria.

Section 11, with the exception of the Howell property (02711-006-006), is being reviewed by Florida Forever staff as a boundary expansion to the Watermelon Pond Florida Forever Land Acquisition project. The 40 acre Howell property is already part of the project, and as such the Florida Forever Program will pay the entire cost of acquisition of the property.

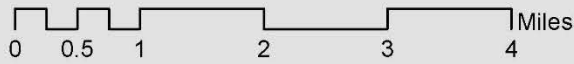


Watermelon Pond - Warny Location Map



Legend

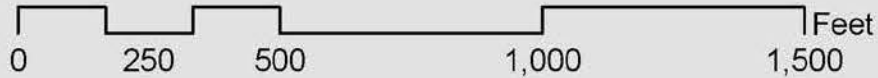
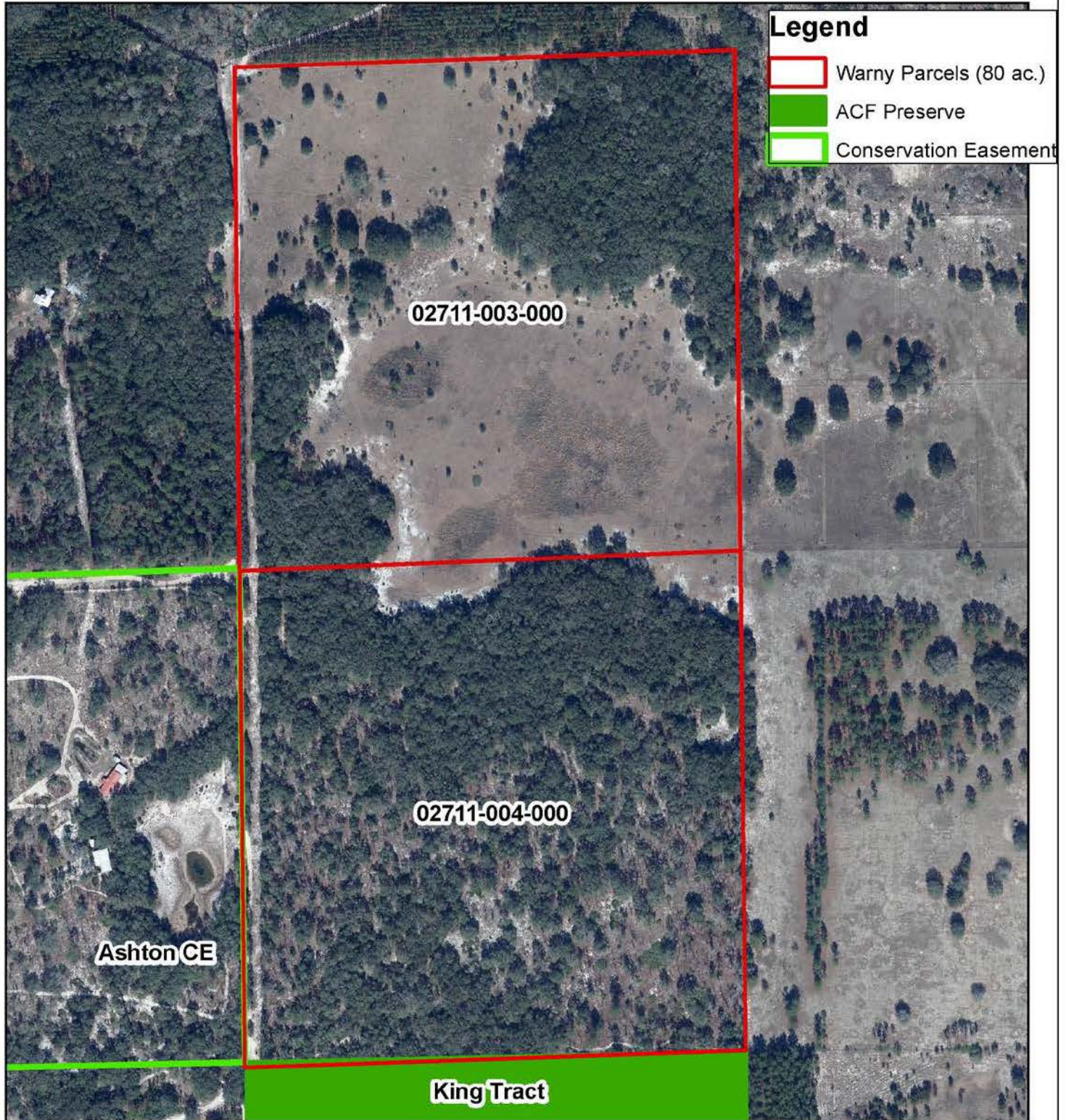
- Warny Parcels (80 ac.)
- ACF Preserve
- ACF Conservation Easement
- Conservation Lands
- Lakes
- City of Archer
- County Boundary



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Watermelon Pond - Warny Parcel Map



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