



Legislation Text

File #: 20-1040, **Version:** 1

Agenda Item Name:

Addition of a certain land conservation projects to the Alachua County Forever Active Acquisition List

Presenter:

Charlie Houder / (352) 264-6804

Description:

Request the Board of County Commissioners approve the addition of Lake Santa Fe - Bryson II, Lochloosa Slough - Colasante and Mill Creek - Rembert land conservation projects to the Alachua County Forever Active Acquisition List (Full Price List).

Addition of these projects to the Active Acquisition List, authorizes staff to: obtain title work and appraisals, negotiate price and terms with the owner, and execute an option contract.

Any commitment to purchase a property or a conservation easement, such as exercising an option, will be brought back to the Board for consideration.

Recommended Action:

1. Approve the addition of Lake Santa Fe - Bryson II property on the Active Acquisition List as a Conservation Easement. (Full Price List)
2. Approve the addition of Lochloosa Slough - Colasante property on the Active Acquisition List as a Fee Simple Acquisition or Conservation Easement. (Full Price List)
3. Approve the addition of Mill Creek - Rembert property on the Active Acquisition List as a Conservation Easement. (Full Price List)

Prior Board Motions:

N/A

Fiscal Consideration:

Bryson II- Cost Estimates for:

- Acquisition (\$447,183)
- Stewardship (\$0) - initial 10yrs.

Colasante - Cost Estimates for:

- Acquisition (\$604,682)
- Stewardship (\$23,865) - initial 10yrs.

Rembert - Cost Estimates for:

- Acquisition (\$1,610,352)
- Stewardship (\$5,500) -initial 10yrs.

Total Cost Estimates for Acquisition & Stewardship: \$2,691,582

Due Diligence - Operation: 021.41.4160.537.31.00 - 6184160

(Exhibit 4)

Note: The purchase price is unknown at this time. The Property Appraiser's Just Value is provided as a rough approximation.

Background:

As with all of our conservation lands, if accepted as an acquisition, this property will go through the vetting process for the Registry of Protected Places.

Bryson II

On August 20, 2020, Mr. Bill Bryson nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program. On October 22, 2020, the Land Conservation Board placed the 67.07-acre Lake Santa Fe - Bryson property on the Priority Pool as a conservation easement.

The Bryson property consists of two parcels (18380-002-000 & 18379-001-000). It is referred to as Bryson II or Bryson Addition because this second nomination expands the initial Byron project footprint from the January 23, 2020 Bryson nomination. The newly nominated land would assist with ACF's effort to connect Lake Alto to Little Lake Santa Fe, via Hickory Pond. These Bryson II parcels fill in a gap between Hickory Pond and the surrounding lands already on the Active Acquisition List: Bryson I, Fisher and Jefferson. (Exhibit 1)

The northern parcel of the Bryson II property supports mainly improved cattle pasture with a high number of successional hardwood trees along with some historically dug farm ponds. The southern parcel consists of a combination of natural areas, historically dug farm ponds/canal and pasture grass areas with eight small structures. The natural areas on the south include 4 acres of Hickory

Pond, 580 feet of its undeveloped shoreline, 8 acres of basin swamp buffering the pond and about 4 acres of mesic flatwoods. A conservation easement on this property would focus on ecological corridors while attempting to exclude the areas with built structures & inhabitation.

The landowner has observed Florida Black bear, American alligator, Eastern diamondback rattlesnake, water moccasin, coral snake, softshell turtle, snapping turtle, bobcat, sirens, river otter, Mississippi kites osprey and others. Modest amounts of exotic plants were found on the property during the site visit.

Colasante

On September 8, 2020, Ms. Ona Colasante nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program. On October 22, 2020, the Land Conservation Board placed the 424.7-acre Lochloosa Slough - Colasante property on the Priority Pool for a fee simple or conservation easement or a combination of both acquisition.

The Colasante property consists of three parcels (20127-001-001, 20127-00-000 and 20167-002-000). The property is located 6 miles south of Hawthorne in the southeastern portion of unincorporated Alachua County. Specifically, it is nestled between ACF's Lochloosa Slough Preserve and St. John's River Water Management District's (SJRWMD) Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area.

The significance of this property is that it is the last large privately owned piece of Lochloosa Slough in Alachua County, and it connects the actual Slough on the ACF Lochloosa Slough Preserve with the Slough on the SJRWMD's land. The Slough is part of an important wildlife corridor from Ocala National Forest into southeastern Alachua County. In addition, the property is within the highest priority Florida Ecological Greenways Network in Alachua County and 56% of the property is within the Lochloosa Slough Strategic Ecosystem.

The largest of the three parcels include 90 of the roughly 100 acres of the Lochloosa Slough system. This parcel's wetland communities are in excellent condition, while the uplands are good to fair condition due to their conversion to slash pine timber plantation. These upland flatwoods buffering the slough can be restored over time with a combination of pine thinning, prescribed fire and planting of longleaf pine.

The two smaller Colasante parcels are impacted by historical use and current home site alterations. These alterations include mowed grass areas around a residential home, barn, cottage, sheds and a 4.5 acre dug out pond. With that said, there are areas on the two smaller parcels that are in natural/undisturbed condition in good ecological condition. Over all, the exotic plants seen on the property were in low densities.

The LCB desired acquisition negotiations to include fee simple, conservation easement or a combination of both in order to achieve protection of the Lochloosa Slough and its buffers, while simultaneously allowing the landowner accomplish their goals. (Exhibit 2)

Rembert

On September 2, 2020, Mr. Davis Rembert nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program. On October 22, 2020, the Land Conservation Board placed the 718-acre Mill Creek - Rembert property on the Priority Pool as a conservation easement.

The Rembert family project includes twelve parcels under two ownerships (03000-001-001, 03000-

000-000, 03000-005-000, 03000-005-001, 02971-000-000, 02977-000-000, 02975-004-000, 02975-003-004, 02972-001-000, 02978-000-000, 02981-000-000 and 02980-003-000). The property is located within the northern city limits of Alachua, in north-central Alachua County. About 238 acres of the land fall within the Mill Creek Strategic Ecosystem.

The property is a mosaic of natural communities in excellent - good condition mixed with pasture/row crops and pine plantation. The most outstanding natural feature of the property is the over three miles of winding blackwater stream and seepage stream with the surrounding high quality slope forests which traverse the property. Nine of the twelve nominated parcels contain portions of this creek system, which are tributaries of Mill Creek and feed into the Mill Creek Sink, approximately 2 miles downstream from the Rembert property. In the 1938 aerial imagery, the slope forests along this creek system are intact and have remained so until present. The majority of the uplands above the slope forests were converted to pasture prior to the 1938 aerial imagery. In the 1990's some of this pasture was planted in longleaf pine. Today, the pasture utilized for hay production.

Active gopher tortoise borrows were observed as well as State Threatened and commercially exploited plants. The landowner has previously seen Sherman's fox squirrel, Florida sandhill cranes and canebrake rattlesnakes on the property. Overall, invasive plant density was low in the natural areas, but pasture grass was abundant in the historically cleared areas. (Exhibit 3)

Acquisition of a conservation easement on this property would further protect the Mill Creek Sink stream to sink system, and add a key piece of protection in the Springs Protection Zone in this area. Dye tracing studies have shown that Mill Creek Sink is hydrologically connected to Hornsby Springs, which then feeds into the Santa Fe River, an Outstanding Florida Waterway. Protection of the Santa Fe River is one of the highest priorities of the Alachua County Forever Program.

Comp Plan Reference:

Policy 6.0 Land Conservation Program within the Conservation and Open Space Element, states "Establish and maintain a land conservation program for the purchase, preservation, and management of natural areas and open space to complement the regulatory approaches identified in other section of this element."