



Legislation Text

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Agenda Item Name:

Alachua County Forever Priorities and Strategies

Presenter:

Charlie Houder / (352)264-6804

Description:

A presentation by staff to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) reviewing the progress of the Alachua County Forever program, current priorities, and strategies for the future.

Recommended Action:

Hear informational presentation.

Prior Board Motions:

On 3/9/21 the Board passed a motion directing staff to provide an update on: Wild Spaces Public Places overall, lessons learned, future visions including agricultural lands in preparation for infrastructure surtax and any inventory or prioritization of lands.

Fiscal Consideration:

Not applicable - informational presentation

Background:

Alachua County Forever (ACF) was initiated in 2000 with the mission to acquire, improve, and manage environmentally significant lands that protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. The Strategic Ecosystems identified in the Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project (KBN/Golder Associates, 1996) became the basis for ACF acquisition project areas. An evaluation matrix, developed with assistance of the Land Conservation Board (LCB), has been used to screen individual properties nominated for acquisition under the program. Properties placed in the Priority Pool by the LCB are forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners to be considered for addition to the Active Acquisition List.

ACF is a citizen-driven, willing-seller program. As such, staff works within the Active Acquisition List to effect acquisitions that provide the greatest natural resource value at the lowest cost. To date, the County has protected 24,689 acres through the acquisition of either fee title or conservation easements. Since the 2016 round of Wild Spaces and Public Places funding, the County has acquired 5,213 acres at an average land cost \$3,745 per acre. The Board recently approved an agreement to purchase the 3,995-acre Fox Pen Connector at a cost of \$2,690 per acre.

While ACF continues to operate effectively, staff has identified the need to update data sources that feed the evaluation process. In addition, the original program criteria were created without adequate recognition of the threat of climate change. To address this, staff initiated a \$20,000 project with Tom Hocht of the University of Florida GeoPlan Center. His results, available later this spring, will be reviewed by the LCB for potential revision of the evaluation matrix.

Subject to Board direction, ACF, per its mission, will continue to focus on water resources and wildlife habitat. The ACF experience can help inform the Board as it develops strategies to address other conservation needs, such as community agriculture.

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.”