

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Task Team
Wednesday, March 16, 2005
1:00 p.m. to 4:40 p.m.
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL
Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building, Conference Room A (first floor)
Call in number 850-410-0960 or Suncom 210-0960

Attendees:

John Outland

Mark Musaus

Theresa Woody

Jim Muller

Gary Knight

Kathleen Swanson

Mark Glisson

Sally Jue

Ernie Barnett

Greg Jubinsky

By Phone: Beth Jackson

Marsha Bansee

Marilyn Stoll

Barry Wood

David Gillings

Kim Love

Paul Warner

Welcome and Introductions: John Outland and Mark Musaus opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance. John Outland reported that the last edition of the Land Acquisition Strategy was accepted by the Task Force in December and thanked everyone involved for their hard work. Theresa Woody reported that there were very few questions at the Task Force meeting. The December meeting was a joint meeting with the Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC) and most of the questions came from WRAC members.

Task Force approval of the Land Acquisition Strategy: The Task Force provided no specific directions for the next edition. Tacit directions are to synchronize data and make sure the reporting date is the same for all data. The goal is to have the same data in all Task Force documents like the IFP, Strategic Plan, etc. The LATT has polled agencies with land acquisition data and June 30 cut-off reporting date works for all.

Additionally, it was recognized that attention to cross checking the data improved the document. The inclusion of county data in Appendix E and the integration of their conservation land acquisitions in Appendix D were appreciated. Lee County is using the map produced for the LAS as a part of their outreach campaign. People liked the new section on creative approaches.

There was discussion at the last Working Group meeting that we need to target and leverage our resources as the South Florida real estate market is very hot and land prices are escalating. FNAI, FWC and others have created very useful

tools to assist land acquisition managers to target their acquisition dollars. We need to educate our members on these tools.

John Outland reported that there are a couple of bills in the legislature that could help provide additional monies for South Florida land acquisition. We need to take advantage of willing sellers.

Revisions to Task Team Directive: John Outland reported that a revised Task Team directive will be on the April 19-20 Working Group meeting. Two revisions will be made: 1) a new representative from Highlands County to replace Mariah Hutchins and 2) new deliverable dates will be set to reflect the June 30 reporting cut off and September acceptance of the document.

Benchmarks for the next LAS: March 30 data should be reported by May 11. Need to add another benchmark to the timeline. Sally Jue at FNAI needs March 30 GIS data by May 18 and Sheryl Jones at FDEP needs county expenditures for the Habitat table in Appendix D.

FNAI tools for identification of priority lands for conservation: Gary Knight, Director, FNAI provided a power point presentation on the Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment and the F-TRAC review to assist the ARC in targeting the remaining Florida Forever dollars. The F-TRAC evaluation is a Florida Forever tool created by FNAI for efficient resource acquisition and conservation based on the amount of land expected to be acquired on projects by FF program (2001 – 2010). It measures projects across several resources, but not an average of single resource scores. F-TRAC compares projects to an optimal set of sites and targets sites that would protect the most resources.

FNAI provides 3 types of evaluations for Florida Forever projects: 1) FNAI scientists review new proposals; 2) Single Resource evaluation of all projects and; 3) F-TRAC evaluation of all projects. The goal is to identify project that most effectively meet the goals of Florida Forever through a prioritized spatial data set that identifies where each resource type is located.

There are 15 different resource types (goals and measures) used: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCA), FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities, ecological greenways, under-represented natural communities, landscape-sized protection areas, natural floodplain, surface water protection, fragile coastal resources, functional wetlands, aquifer recharge, natural resource-based recreation, and sustainable forestry. For ARC reports, FNAI groups these resources into functional groups: species, communities, landscapes, wetlands, high-quality watersheds, forestry, archaeological resources, historical resources, recreational trails and aquifer recharge. FNAI has GIS data for each resource type and can use this data to identify the best acquisitions to protect a particular resource.

The FNAI Habitat Conservations Priorities includes 265 species: 149 plants, 63 vertebrates and 53 invertebrates. Gary demonstrated how the FNAI species GIS data and field work can protect a particularly rare flower. He also demonstrated how FNAI works with FWC and uses the various data overlays to prioritize land acquisitions that would protect the most species. This information is on the FNAI website and the analysis is designed to assist land acquisition program managers to assess what is currently protected and what lands have a high value to protect these resources. The information can be used to prioritize and target land acquisition dollars.

He also provided a fuller explanation of the F-TRAC Evaluation. This analysis provided to ARC to remaining Florida Forever acquisition dollars. It provides a measure of projects relative to each other (single resource is an absolute measure of resources on projects). The analysis is re-run every 6 months based on the amount of land remaining to be acquired by Florida Forever, so each project source may vary over time. A map of the state provided a snapshot of the 2010 Scenario as of Spring 2004 of the additional lands that the F-TRAC Evaluation indicated would be the priority acquisitions. F-TRAC identifies additional areas outside of current projects. There are other considerations that must be factored into acquisition like willing sellers, active negotiations and completing projects when prioritizing the remaining Florida Forever dollars.

All reports and documentation on FNAI Florida Forever Analysis are on the web at www.fnai.org/FLForever.cfm. His power point and a more detailed guide to using the FNAI data are posted at www.sfrestore.org.

FWC tools for identification of priority lands for conservation: Kathleen Swanson, Biologist IV for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's Center for Spatial Analysis, presented a power point on the tools FWC has developed for conserving biodiversity in Florida. FWC creates landscape scale species habitat and viability models; applies results to a wide range of conservation issues and concerns related to species protection and landscape scale biodiversity; and disseminates information (data) and assists in applying the data as it relates to conservation, species protection and biodiversity.

She discussed the creation of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas through the "Closing the Gaps" analysis and the 2000 Habitat Conservation Needs Study. The first "Closing the Gaps in Florida's Wildlife Habitat Conservation System" was published in 1994. The goal was to identify the minimum Florida lands that should be protected to ensure the long-term persistence of most components of the state's biodiversity (declining wildlife species and rare plant and animal communities).

"Closing the Gaps in Florida's Wildlife Conservation System" describes habitat areas in Florida that should be conserved if key components of the state's

biological diversity are to be maintained. The project employed a computerized Geographic Information System to manipulate geographic data sets and create distribution maps for selected species of wildlife, threatened species of plants, and rare plant communities. The geographic data sets used in the project included a statewide land-cover map derived from Landsat satellite imagery; over 25,000 geographically referenced points documenting known occurrences of rare animals, plants, and communities; soils map; a digitized map of the statewide road network; a digitized map of the statewide road network; a digitized map of selected private lands; and a digitized map of county boundaries. Drawing from techniques developed in the fields of wildlife management and conservation biology, the Geographic Information System was used to assess the degree of security provide to rare species by the current system of conservation lands and to identify important habitat areas no currently protected. The lands recommended in the report for addition protection are referred to as Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas depict lands needed to meet the minimum Conservation goals for the following: *30 pieces of wildlife inadequately protected by the current system of conservation lands, *high quality sandhill sites, *high quality scrub sites *high quality pine rocklands sites, *high quality examples of tropical hardwood hammocks, *bat maternity caves and winter roost caves, *wetlands important to the breeding success of eight species of wading birds, and *lands important to the long-term survival of 105 globally rare species of plants.

The purpose of this tool is to provide information to land use planners, biological consultants, and regulatory agency personnel on ways to evaluate and mitigate the impacts of development on fish and wildlife and their habitats.

The objective is to identify lands in Florida that, at a minimum, must be conserved and managed in order to ensure the long-term survival of key components of Florida's biological diversity. The objective was pursued by (1) identifying habitat areas that are essential to the survival of rare and declining species not adequately protected by the current system of conservation areas; (2) identifying areas important to several globally endangered species of plants and rare animals and plant communities; and (3) identifying regional areas of high biological diversity (hot spots) to assist in local land-use planning.

FWC maintains a series of data layers associated with the "Closing the Gaps" publication in both a grid (raster) format and shapefiles (vector) format to be used in a GIS. These include:

- **The Strategic Habitat conservation Areas** (statewide and county,
- **Biodiversity Hotspots** (statewide and county) and
- **Priority Wetlands** (statewide and county)

FWC also maintains a series of data used in developing the Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, Biodiversity Hotspots and Priority Wetlands. These data layers are available upon request and include:

- Individual species potential and strategic habitat modeling results (statewide and county),
- The Wildlife Observation data (FWC WILDOBS) (statewide).

More recently landcover data is being used to update the “Closing the Gaps” and produce a change detection between the earlier 1985 – 1989 landcover and 2003 landcover. These data include:

- FWC 2003 landcover (statewide),
- 1994 to 2003 Change Detection (statewide and county).

This data can be used to evaluate land acquisition projects. These data are at a scale sufficient to apply to regional and statewide plans and projects. Online documentation exists for each of these data layers in the form of reports. These documents are in a pdf format and downloadable at

- http://floridaconservation.org/oes/habitat_sec/pubs.htm
- http://floridaconservation.org/oes/habitat_sec/Kautz-priorwet.pdf
- http://floridaconservation.org/oes/habitat_sec/Closing_Gaps.pdf

The FWC 2003 Landcover data is downloadable at:

http://myfwc.com/oes/habitat_sec/gis/fl_veg03.htm

CDS can be requested by e-mail, mail or fax at the following

gisrequests@MYFWC.com

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

630 south Meridian Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

FAX (850) 922-5679

Other websites with useful data are:

www.dep.state.fl.us/water/wetlands/techgis/era.htm

<http://nature.org/Florida> (click on SW Florida for information on the Southwest Florida Coastal Corridor).

Ms. Swanson’s power point presentation is posted on www.sfrestore.org

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Reprioritization of the Florida Forever/Board of Trustees Land Acquisition List

Mark Glisson, Staff Director of the Acquisition and Restoration Council, provided information on the remaining projects on the state’s acquisition list. ARC re-ranks twice a year. The Governor and Cabinet asked that the ARC reprioritize the remaining projects as the program has limited funds available to purchase all the lands on the state’s list (\$550,000 until 2010) and there is about \$4 billion worth of land on the FF acquisition list. The concern is that the amount of Florida Forever funds is not adequate to achieve the program’s goals. There has been

discussion of extending the program beyond 2010 but with the escalating land prices, additional funds would be a good strategy.

ACR added four new projects, remove nine projects, and amended the boundaries of five projects on the Florida Forever Priority Lists. ARC also moved thirty projects from Group A to Group B, and moved another two projects from Group B to Group A. If a project is within a CERP boundary, it was removed from the list. The most recent list was approved by the Governor and Cabinet at the February 16 Cabinet meeting.

There are many challenges for government land acquisition. Florida Forever can only pay appraised value, not highest and best use. In today's market, this has resulted in private developers out bidding the state. In many cases, by the time the appraisal is complete, the value of the land has risen by 15%. Mark reported that FF cannot buy land in Southwest Florida. He gave another example of a deal the state tried to work with Latt Maxey. TNC bid \$29M on the state's behalf (appraised value) but a developer stepped in and bid twice that amount and wrote the check. The state used to be the only buyer of large tracts of land but now the state's offer has become the starting point for negotiations with developers.

The Florida Forever Priority list is at www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/acquisition/FloridaForever/FFAnnual2005

Natural Areas Land Acquisition Funding Sources: Theresa Woody reviewed the draft list of funding sources for land acquisitions and conservation easements developed in response to a request from CEQ. Paul Warner at the SFWMD has been tasked with exploring alternative funding sources outside of CERP sources to acquire natural areas in the Indian River Lagoon – South and the Lake Okeechobee Watershed. The SFWMD priority land acquisitions will focus on lands needed for Band 1 of CERP, the Acceler8 projects and the Kissimmee River. There has been a concern expressed that the natural areas will not be acquired if the immediate acquisitions focus on lands needed for construction. Members were asked to review the list and add information for their agencies.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be May 18 at the South Florida Water Management District from 12 – 4:00 p.m. There will be a presentations on the FWC work with NRCS and the FNAI internet-based interactive map of Florida's conservation lands.