

# **VOLUSIA FOREVER PROGRAM PROJECT RANKING REPORT**

**SITE NAME (APPLICATION NUMBER):** 2023-1-2033-Lake Harney

**OWNER NAME:** Frank Ford Jr.

**APPLICATION TYPE:** Fee Simple Acquisition

**SIZE:** 5,578 +/- acres

**LOCATION:** Lake Harney Road Osteen

**DATE:** August 24, 2023

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

This project is near the end of Lake Harney Road and along most of Under Hill Road off Osteen-Maytown Road in Osteen. It is operating as a cattle ranch currently. The property has a future land use of Environmental Systems Corridor (ESC), Forestry Resource (FR), and Agriculture Resource (AR) designations with the Natural Resource Management Area (NRMA) and Environmental Core Overlays (ECO).

The ESC designates important ecological corridors comprised of environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant lands. Land use activities occurring within these corridors shall not degrade these natural functions and connections. The minimum lot size is twenty-five (25) acres. The FR designation is primarily suited for silviculture activities (the cultivation and harvesting of timber for commercial purposes) and limited agricultural activities. The minimum lot size is twenty (20) acres. The AR consists of lands suited for intensive cultivation, ranching, aquaculture, and timber farming. This designation allows for 1 dwelling unit per 10-acres.

The NRMA overlay contains expanses of relatively uninterrupted lands that need to be managed as a system. It is the intent of this category that development does not adversely impact the quality and quantity of existing resources. Accordingly, development standards for lands located within the NRMA are more restrictive than for the same uses falling outside of the NRMA. ECO contains an area of interconnected natural systems of environmentally sensitive lands, including public and private conservation areas and lands linking these areas where possible to achieve wildlife and habitat connectivity. This overlay represents land areas that should receive the greatest degree of protection and the least impacts from development.

The zoning classifications of Resource Corridor (RC), Forestry Resource (FR), and Prime Agriculture (A-1) have been assigned to the site.

The RC classification is to provide protected, natural corridors consisting of environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant lands which connect to other protected areas such as parks and water bodies. The corridor shall provide a contiguous hydro-ecological pathway, where the wetlands and uplands are integrated and conducive to the maintenance and perpetuation of the system. The minimum lot size is twenty-five

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(25) acres. The FR classification is to preserve land that is suited for multiple use forest management and will allow limited agricultural activities. The minimum lot size is twenty (20) acres. A-1 is a prime agriculture classification. The purpose and intent of this classification is to preserve valuable agricultural land for intensive agricultural uses, and to protect land best suited for agricultural uses from the encroachment of incompatible land uses. The minimum lot size is 10 acres.

This property is within Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) Priority Area 1. FEGN Priority Areas 1, 2, and 3 make up the Florida Wildlife Corridor; as such, this property is within the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

### **NATURAL AREA DESCRIPTION**

The property lies within the St. Johns River (SJR) watershed. Lake Harney borders the west side of the project area. There are approximately 19 different natural habitat areas within the boundaries of the project. The dominant upland natural areas are pine flatwoods and grassland/mixed rangelands. The pine flatwoods are mixed throughout the property, with the rangelands occurring on the east side of the project (east of Underhill Road). The pine flatwoods include wet, mesic, and scrubby vegetative communities. Generally longleaf and sand pine are naturally mixed within scrubby flatwoods. The mesic flatwoods contain a mix of longleaf pine and/or slash pine while the wet flatwoods typically have slash and/or pond pine. When intact, the understory of the flatwoods is generally comprised of gallberry, various oaks, palmetto, fetterbush, wiregrass and numerous herbaceous species. The grassland/mixed rangelands are where the natural vegetation is predominantly grasses, grass like plants, forbs or shrubs. These areas may be used extensively as wildlife forage.

The dominant wetland natural areas are bottomland swamp and freshwater marsh. The bottomland swamp starts in the north section of the property just below Lake Harney Road and extends south to Lake Harney's bank. The freshwater marsh runs from the northwest "handle" of the property and follows Lake Harney around on the projects west side. The bottomland swamp is a low lying, closed canopy system containing vegetative species such as cabbage palm, laurel oak, sweetgum, blackgum, red maple, American elm, water oak, Carolina ash, and cypress. A very diverse assemblage of animals is associated with these swamps. These include southern toad, cricket frog, gray treefrog, pig frog, Southern leopard frog, alligator, river cooter, stinkpot, mud snake, redbelly water snake, brown water snake, cottonmouth, yellow-crowned night heron, wood duck, pileated woodpecker, various warblers, golden mouse, black bear, raccoon, and bobcat. Freshwater marshes are non-tidal, non-forested marsh wetland that contains fresh water, and is continuously or frequently flooded. Freshwater marshes primarily consist of sedges, grasses, and emergent plants and are void of trees and shrubs, if they are in the system, they are sparse. Many types of animals use freshwater marshes for habitat at some point in their life cycles. Birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish and macro-invertebrates can be found within freshwater marshes.

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## **CONNECTIVITY TO OTHER CONSERVATION LANDS**

This property is immediately adjacent to the 1,385-acre Deering Preserve at Deep Creek that is owned by the County and the Farnton Green Key conservation area that is privately owned.

## **HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

There are known archaeological sites located on the property documented on the Florida Division of Historical Resources master site file. No formal comprehensive archaeological survey of this property has been conducted.

## **MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

This property contains large continuous acres of intact uplands. Management responsibilities will include the introduction of prescribed fire within the pine upland habitats, timber management, mechanical treatments and the possible restoration of pasture into natural habitats. Surrounding areas are rural and with the application of smoke management, it should not be problematic. Some exotic species were observed on site, but occurrences were minimal. The internal road system is intact and provides good access for management. Some hydrological restoration such as low water crossings and culverts may be needed. Depending on the level and type of public access allowed, such as primitive trails, hunting and primitive camping, secondary management needs might be required.

## **ECONOMIC/ACQUISITION ISSUES**

## **POTENTIAL MATCHING FUNDS SOURCE**

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

## **VOLUSIA FOREVER CRITERIA**

This property meets fourteen (14) of the nineteen (19) Site Ranking Criteria which included three (3) of the Proximity and Connectivity criteria, one (1) of the Furtherance of Acquisition Efforts, two (2) of the Water Resources criteria, four (4) of the Environmentally Sensitive Lands criteria, three (3) from Provide Resource Based Recreation Lands and one (1) from Management.