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2010

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**Northwest Florida Water Management District**

## *Land Acquisition Work Plan*

Program Development Series 2010-01

**NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER  
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
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## Introduction

Section 373.199(7), F.S. requires the Northwest Florida Water Management District to update annually the Florida Forever Work Plan. To date, this is the ninth annual update of the 2001 Florida Forever Work Plan and since 2006 this plan has been presented as a separate chapter in the Consolidated Annual Report as required by Section 373.036(7), F.S. This plan contains information on projects eligible to receive funding under the Florida Forever Act and also reports on land management activities, lands surplused and the progress of funding, staffing and resource management of projects for which the district is responsible.

## Florida Forever Program

In 1999, the Florida Legislature passed the Florida Forever Act (Section 259.105, F.S.) which continues the state's long-term commitment to environmental land acquisition, restoration of degraded natural areas, and high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities. The Florida Forever Program authorizes issuance of up to \$300 million annually in bonds over a ten-year period to several state agencies and the five water management districts (WMDs). In 2008, the Florida Legislature reauthorized the Florida Forever Act for an additional ten years, to 2018. As part of the reauthorization, the water management districts allocation was reduced from \$105 million annually to \$90 million annually (see table below).

**Annual WMD Funding Distribution of Florida Forever Funds**

<b>Water Management District</b>	<b>Percent to Each WMD</b>	<b>Estimated Amount</b>
<b>South Florida</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>\$31,500,000</b>
<b>Southwest Florida</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>\$22,500,000</b>
<b>St. Johns River</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>\$22,500,000</b>
<b>Suwannee River</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>\$6,750,000</b>
<b>Northwest Florida</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>\$6,750,000</b>

While previous programs focused almost exclusively on the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, the Florida Forever program is somewhat different in that it authorizes the use of up to half of the program funding for certain types of capital improvement projects. Eligible uses of the “discretionary” funds include water resource development, stormwater management projects, water body restoration, recreation facilities, public access improvements, and removing invasive plants, among others. The remaining fifty percent must be spent on land acquisition.

Since the inception of the District's land acquisition program, the goal has been to bring as much floodplain as possible of our major rivers and creeks under public ownership and protection. The Florida Forever Land Acquisition Program continues to increase the acres of wetland, floodplain and aquifer recharge areas acquired by the District. To date, over 221,000 acres have been protected for water resource purposes through the land acquisition efforts of the District either in fee simple or through conservation easements. A summary of the acquisitions and surplusings completed by the District in 2009 is provided below.

### Summary of Acquisitions and Surplusings Completed in 2009

Property	Date Purchased	Acres	Cost	Funding Source(s)	Water Management Area
<b>Fee Simple Acquisitions</b>					
Herndon	01/28/09	.45	Exchange	N/A	Perdido River
Bellamy	03/31/09	338.70	\$297,000	Florida Forever	Chipola River
Dutex	06/12/09	809.85	\$1,930,795.77	Florida Forever	Perdido River
Woolley	08/27/09	40	\$104,500	DOT Mitigation	Choctawhatchee River/ Holmes Creek
Plum Creek	10/23/09	121.50	\$304,300	Florida Forever	Choctawhatchee River/ Holmes Creek
Plum Creek	12/18/09	160.10	\$232,000	Florida Forever	Econfina Creek
Chipola Timberlands	12/23/09	1,377.76	\$5,235,488	Florida Forever	Chipola River
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>2,848.36</b>	<b>\$8,104,083.77</b>		
<b>Less-Than-Fee Acquisitions</b>					
Herndon	01/27/09	4.20	Exchange	N/A	Perdido River
Billingsley *	06/12/09	194.50	\$440,000	Florida Forever	St. Marks River
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>198.70</b>	<b>\$440,000</b>		
*The District paid one-half of the cost or \$440,000.					
<b>Surplused Lands</b>					
Washington County School Board	01/29/09	(96.20)	Donation	N/A	Econfina Creek
FDOT	10/05/09	(.20)	\$700.00	FDOT paid \$700	Yellow River
Mt. Pleasant Cemetery	11/18/09	(1.0)	Donation	N/A	Econfina Creek
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>(97.40)</b>	<b>\$700.00</b>		
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>2,949.66</b>	<b>\$8,544,083.77</b>		

## **Acquisition Planning**

The District employs a watershed approach to select and prioritize the important water resource and natural systems within the major river basins of northwest Florida. Primary among the considerations in this process are how specific floodplain or buffer areas help satisfy the District's water resources and natural system protection objectives, the availability of funds, the seller's willingness, how different areas fit into the District's land management scheme, as well as the size, accessibility and overall condition of each property. Recommendations from interest groups, landowners, local governments, agency representatives and other interested parties are always welcome and are given full consideration in the acquisition process.

Subject to receiving funding for Florida Forever, the District's acquisition efforts this year will focus on the purchase of inholdings and additions to the existing water management areas (WMAs) as well as Conservation Easements in each of the existing WMA's. Existing WMAs include the Perdido River, Escambia River, Blackwater River, Yellow River, Garcon Point, Choctawhatchee River/Holmes Creek, Econfina Creek, Chipola River, and Apalachicola River. All of these WMAs will be high priority areas for the acquisition of additions and inholdings. Acquisition efforts will be directed toward acquiring those properties which the District adjoins on one, two or three sides (additions) or those parcels which the District surrounds on all sides (inholdings).

In developing the annual update to the District's Florida Forever Five Year Land Acquisition Work Plan, District staff shall review Florida Forever projects proposed by DEP, Division of State Lands, to minimize redundancy and to facilitate an efficient and mutually supportive joint land acquisition effort. District staff shall continue to coordinate the Land Acquisition Five Year Plan with the District's FDOT regional mitigation plan developed under section 373.4137 F.S. to ensure the greatest possible cumulative benefit for water resources, wetland functions, and public benefits.

## Approved Acquisition Areas

The approved acquisition areas listed below are not presented on a priority basis. For each of these waterbodies, it is desirable to acquire both the floodplain and a natural buffer zone to provide further water resource protection.

Rivers & Creeks Originating In Florida	Rivers and Creeks Originating Outside Florida	Springs	Lakes & Ponds	Other Ecosystems, Basins and Buffers
Wakulla River	Apalachicola River	St. Marks River near Natural Bridge	Lake Jackson	Southwest Escambia County Ecosystem
St. Marks River	Lower Apalachicola River Wetland	Spring Lake/ Spring Group Area	Sand Hill Lakes	Garcon Point Ecosystem
Econfina Creek and others flowing into Deer Point Lake	Chipola River	Waddell Springs		West Bay Buffer
Lafayette Creek	Choctawhatchee River including Holmes Creek	Bosel Springs		Sandy Creek Basin
	Escambia River	Hays Springs		Apalachicola Bay/ St. Vincent Sound Buffer
	Blackwater River including Juniper, Big Coldwater & Coldwater creeks	Gainer Springs		
	Ochlockonee River & its major tributaries			
	Yellow & Shoal Rivers			
	Perdido River and Bay			

Groundwater Recharge Areas	Donated Lands
Such lands may be designated by the District as Recharge Areas for the Floridan, Sand-and-Gravel and other important aquifers.	The District will accept donations of lands within its major acquisition areas if those lands are necessary for water management, water supply and the conservation and protection of land and water resources.

Exchange Lands
The District may exchange lands it has acquired under the Florida Forever program for other lands that qualify for acquisition under the program. In an exchange, the District's Governing Board establishes the terms and conditions it considers necessary to equalize values of the exchange properties. In all such exchanges, the District's goal will be to ensure that is no net loss of wetland protection and that there is a net positive environmental benefit.

Mitigation Acquisitions
Under Florida law, unavoidable losses of natural wetlands or wetland functions require "mitigation" either through the acquisition or the restoration of other nearby wetlands. The District is often the recipient of such lands in the form of donations, and also serves as the mitigation agent for the Florida Department of Transportation. Whenever possible, the District attempts to acquire mitigation lands contiguous to its existing ownership, but since proximity to the original wetland impact is paramount, the District at times must acquire or manage isolated tracts.

## **Note to Landowners**

It is important to note that the District's land acquisition process only involves willing sellers and is usually opportunity driven in that landowners initiate the process by offering parcels for sale.

This plan includes a number of areas the District has identified for purchase, subject to available funding and especially the presence of willing sellers. If your property is included in any of our acquisition areas or maps and you do not desire to sell your land to the District, Florida Statutes require the District to remove your property from the acquisition plan at the earliest opportunity. Please contact the Division of Land Management and Acquisition at (850) 539-5999 at any time if you wish to remove your property from possible purchase consideration. The District will maintain a list of such requests and annually adjust its acquisition plan accordingly.

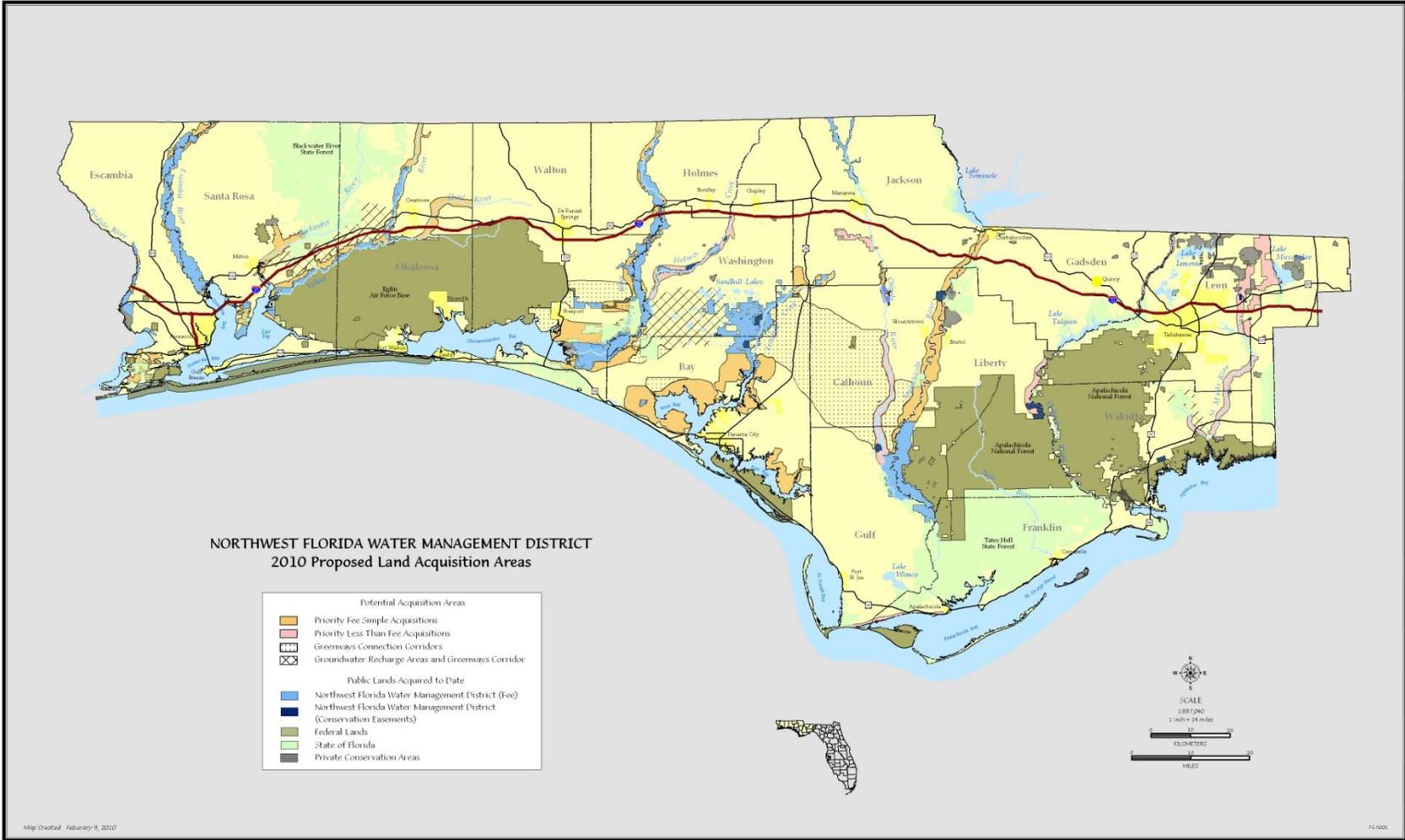
## **Note on Less-Than-Fee Methods of Land Protection**

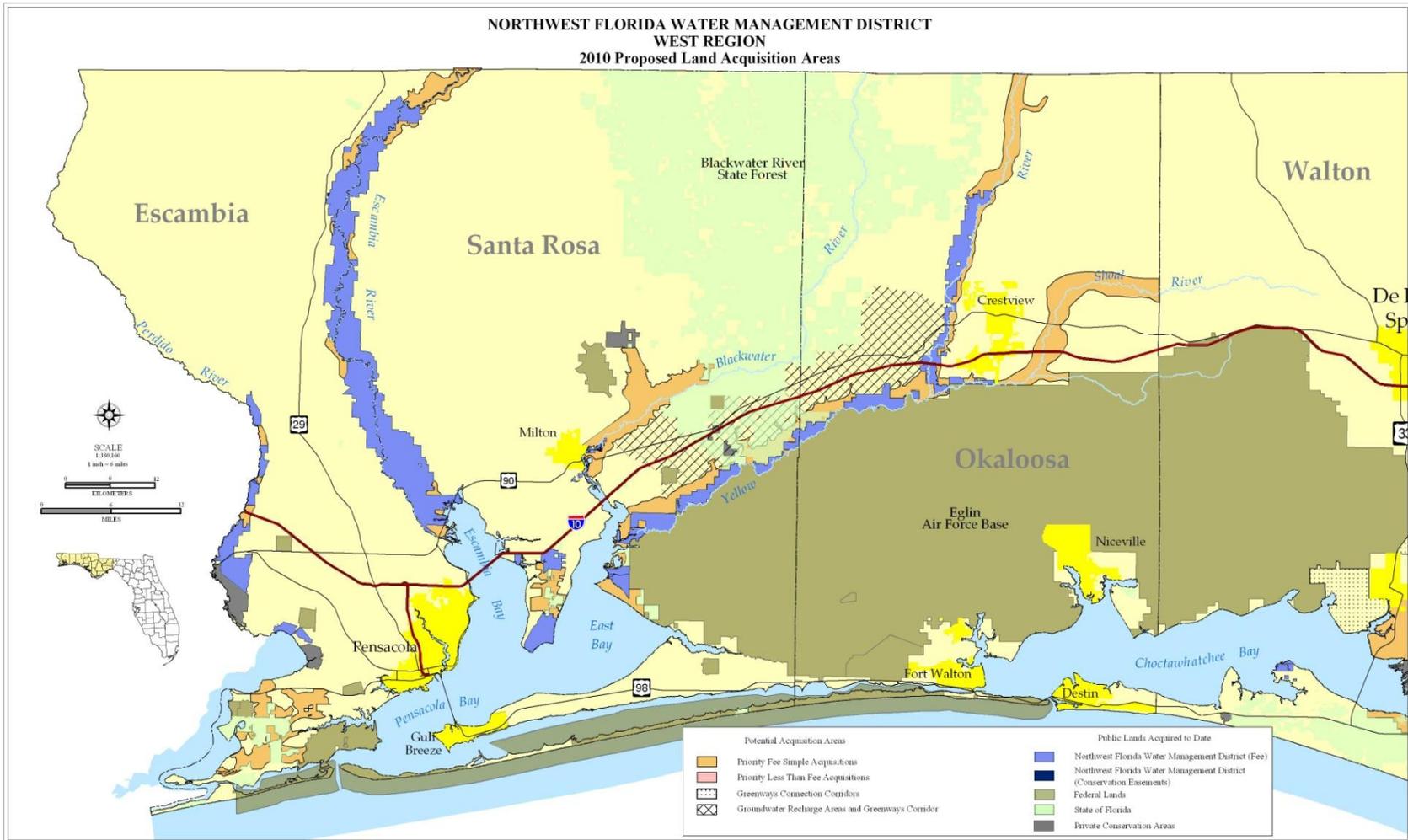
Florida's commitment to acquire the lands needed to permanently protect local water and environmental resources has resulted in the most successful program in the United States. However, there is not, and probably never will be, sufficient public funding available to acquire outright all the important water resource lands that need protection. Accordingly, the Florida Legislature has directed the state's water management districts to expend part of their land acquisition funding to purchase eligible properties using alternatives to "fee simple" acquisition. Under this scenario, the District buys a significant portion of the property rights the seller owns. In "less-than-fee" purchases, the District would attempt to acquire only those rights in property, i.e. development and land use conversion rights, that are needed to accomplish specific water resource and environmental protection goals.

Such less-than-fee methods can clearly provide a number of public benefits. One is that acquisition funding can be conserved, thereby enabling the protection of more land with limited funds. The property also continues in private ownership and thus remains on local property tax rolls. Moreover, the District does not incur the long-term costs of land management since the property's management and maintenance remains the landowner's responsibility. Not all properties are suitable nor are all landowners agreeable to less-than-fee acquisition, but the benefits make these kinds of transactions an attractive supplement to the District's usual fee simple land purchases.

## **Land Acquisition Projects**

The Florida Forever Act, in particular Section 373.199(s) F.S., identifies information that must be included for each Florida Forever Project. Some of the required information is relatively general and applicable to all projects. To reduce the redundancies of this plan, general information is provided separately as part of the District's Five Year Plan for the Florida Forever Program. Specific land acquisition projects are individually identified and detailed information specific to the project is provided in the following pages.





**2010 Proposed Land Acquisition Areas (West Region)**

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Perdido River and Bay Basin**

The Perdido River serves as the state line, separating Florida from Alabama. The Perdido has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water and Special Water system, a canoe trail, and a recreation area. The upper part of the river is a shifting sand river system, which are unique to portions of Northwest Florida, south Alabama, southern Mississippi and extreme eastern Louisiana, while the lower end of the river is characteristic of a black water stream. Currently the District owns 5,451 acres in fee and 4 acres in less-than-fee.

The project area is mostly undeveloped and contains a diverse list of species. Acquisition of any floodplain area along the Perdido River, whether in fee or less than fee, will significantly protect the water resources of the area as well as enhance water quality protection efforts for the Perdido Bay system.

Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands around the river mouth and designated tributaries.

The Perdido Bay is an estuarine system which receives fresh water from the Perdido River. Other bays in the immediate area include Tarkiln Bay, Arnica Bay, Bay La Launch and Bayou St. John. Perdido Key separates Perdido, Tarkiln, and Arnica bays, Bay La Launch and Bayou St. John from the Gulf of Mexico. Two barrier islands, Perdido Key and Santa Rosa Island, surround Perdido Bay. Currently, the District owns 809.85 acres along Perdido Bay.

Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to the bay which can enhance water quality protection of the bay and mitigate for wetland impacts associated with DOT highway construction in southern Escambia County.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 1,447 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will depend upon such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Southwest Escambia County Ecosystem**

Several major estuarine drainages, including Jones Swamp, Bayou Grande, Big Lagoon, and Tarkiln Bay, intersect in southwest Escambia County. These, in turn, comprise portions of Pensacola and Perdido bays. The proposed acquisition borders a major urban area and is under rapid encroachment from residential and commercial development. The project area is characterized by an undulating topography where remnants of ancient dune lines alternate with lower intervening swales that drain east or west, parallel to the Gulf coast. The wet prairies in the area are some of the last examples of what may be one of the most diverse plant communities in the southeast, supporting large stands of white-topped pitcher plants and almost 100 other plant species.

Protecting the ecological integrity of this area is very important to the quality of water resources in the Pensacola and Perdido bay systems. Acquisition will preclude new nonpoint pollution sources and will limit stormwater runoff by preventing channelization and placement of new impervious surfaces. Wetlands and upland buffers will be preserved, and riparian buffer zones will be maintained. Additionally, public uses will be maintained and fish, wildlife and estuarine productivity will be protected.

This acquisition is consistent with a number of major initiatives designed to protect environmental and other public resources in the region. These include water quality treatment systems, acquisition programs for the Jones Swamp Buffer Preserve and the Perdido Pitcher Plant Prairie, and efforts to prevent encroachment on NAS Pensacola. Together with nearby state parks, these acquisitions will provide for a major environmental reserve and greenway system within a rapidly urbanizing area.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 11,000 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

## **Groundwater Recharge Area**

Designated area has groundwater recharge potential.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Escambia River Basin**

Beginning at the confluence of the Conecuh River and Escambia Creek above the Florida-Alabama border and emptying into Escambia Bay, the Escambia River corridor contains a rich diversity of plant and animal species, as well as many rare fish and waterfowl. The Escambia basin is broad and well drained in the upper reaches, and swampy below Molino, Florida. While the overall water quality is considered good, many point and non-point pollution sources empty into the river. Currently the District owns 34,919 acres along the river.

Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands around the river mouth and designated tributaries.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 7,138 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Garcon Point Ecosystem**

This proposed land acquisition project contains most of the Garcon Point Peninsula in Pensacola Bay. The project area is largely undeveloped and includes a variety of natural communities that are in good to excellent condition. The entire tract provides considerable protection to the water quality of Pensacola Bay, as well as harboring a number of rare and endangered species. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands. Currently the District owns 3,245 acres.

The emergent estuarine marsh that borders several miles of shoreline within the project is an important source of organic detritus and nutrients, and serves as a nursery for many of the species found in Pensacola Bay. These wetlands function as both stormwater filtration and a storm buffer area, as well as providing erosion controls to the neighboring uplands. A minimum of 13 endangered or threatened species are known to live in the region including the recently listed federally endangered reticulated flatwoods salamander. The northern wet prairie portion is known to be an outstanding pitcher plant habitat.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 3,200 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Blackwater River Basin**

Originating in the Alabama Conecuh National Forest, the Blackwater River has a large portion of its Florida watershed further protected by the Blackwater River State Forest. In all, nearly 50 miles of the river corridor is remote and undeveloped. As a result, the Blackwater is considered one of Florida's best preserved waterways. Acquisition by the Florida Division of Forestry will bring into public ownership much of the lower, least protected portion of river floodplain and estuary. The District will assist in these acquisitions as needed. Currently the District owns 380 acres along the river.

The acquisition area includes a large area of mature longleaf pine forest, considerable bottomland forest and marsh acreage, upland mixed forest, blackwater stream and seepage slope communities. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands. Some 380 acres have been acquired along the Blackwater immediately south of Milton.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 11,449 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Yellow/Shoal River Basin**

The Yellow River has its headwaters in Alabama's Conecuh National Forest and forms the northern border of Eglin Air Force Base (AFB) across much of eastern Santa Rosa and western Okaloosa counties. The proposed acquisitions would bring much of the remainder of the Yellow River floodplain in Florida under public ownership. Included in the project is a segment of the lower Shoal, the largest tributary to the Yellow. Large private landowners own a majority of the floodplain in this project, but considerable areas of the bordering and buffer lands must also be acquired to ensure effective management and the protection of water resources. To accomplish these objectives, acquisition of the bordering land within the 100-year floodplain, along with an additional buffer of at least 50-feet, will be required. Highest priority will be given to tracts in the western portion of the project. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands. Currently the District owns 17,742 acres along the river.

Although the Yellow and Shoal rivers exhibit good overall water quality, both are fed largely by rainwater runoff and thus are highly susceptible to pollution from land use activities. The proposed purchase area would provide water quality protection from the Alabama border and encompass roughly 39,000 acres. Purchase of lands northwest of Eglin AFB, along the I-10 corridor, would provide approximately 52,000 acres of land that has excellent potential for future water resource development to supplement the strained potable water sources in southern Santa Rosa and Okaloosa counties. Acquisitions in this area are recommended by the District Regional Water Supply Plan for Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Walton counties to protect future supply sources.

## **Public Access**

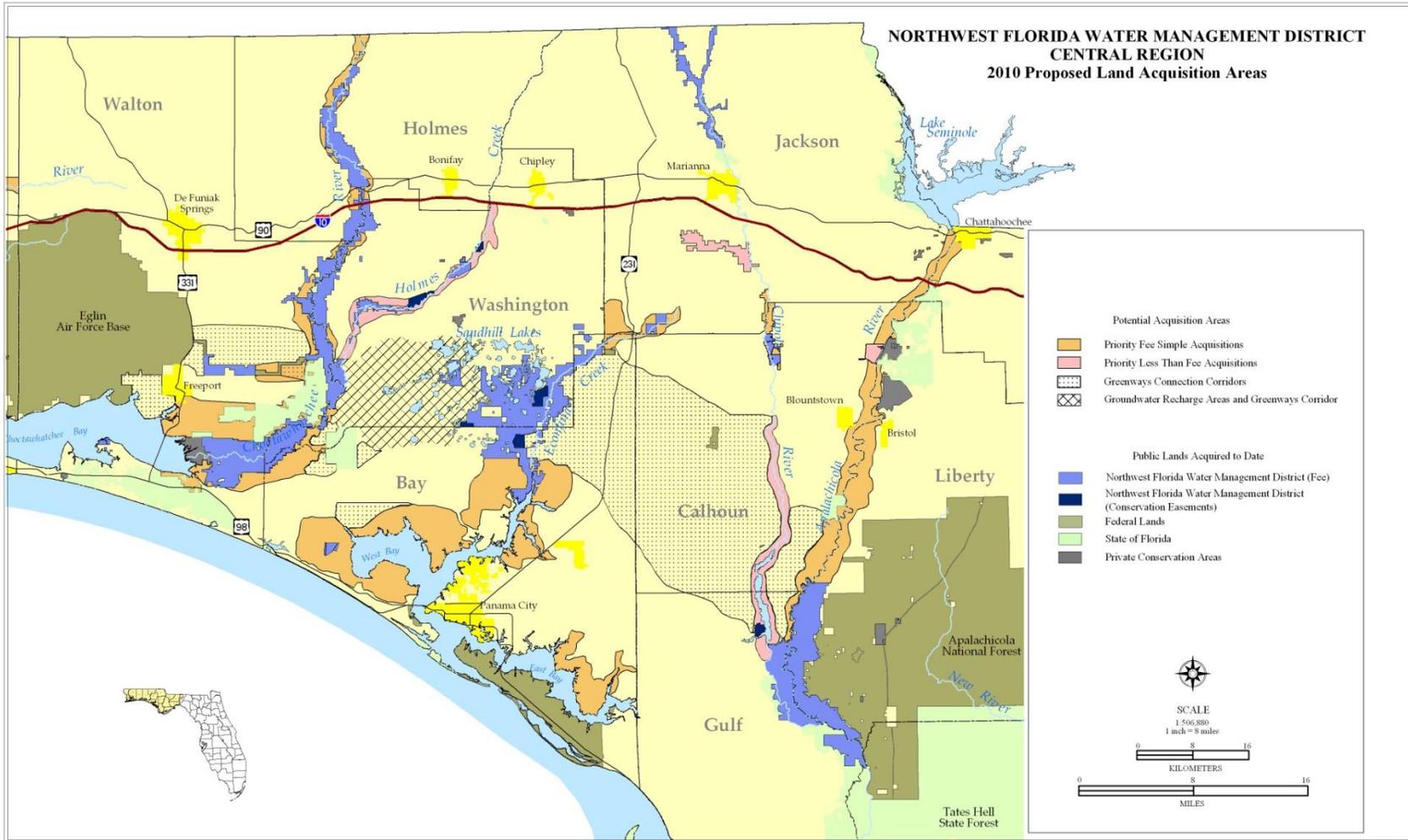
All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 39,982 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

## **Groundwater Recharge Areas**

In Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, the Sand-and-Gravel Aquifer is the principal source of potable water for public supply. The Sand-and-Gravel Aquifer is unconfined or poorly confined, making it particularly susceptible to contamination by land uses. Land acquisition along the I-10 corridor between the Yellow and Blackwater rivers in Santa Rosa County would protect recharge areas that are particularly important for future water supply sources.



**2010 Proposed Land Acquisition Areas (Central Region)**

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Lafayette Creek**

Originating in south central Walton County, the Lafayette Creek drainage basin is located due east and north of Freeport, Florida. The main stem of the creek begins about seven miles east of Freeport and runs due west for about six miles before it turns south and empties into LaGrange Bayou/Choctawhatchee Bay. Additional purchases along the creek will protect many diverse natural communities and habitat types. In addition, any proposed acquisitions will also protect a portion of the water resources of Magnolia and Wolf creeks, both of which are significant tributaries to Lafayette Creek. Currently, the District owns 3,160 acres along the creek, including 420 acres for DOT mitigation purposes.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 5,800 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Choctawhatchee River/Holmes Creek Basin**

Originating in Alabama and flowing into Choctawhatchee Bay, the Choctawhatchee River/Holmes Creek drains roughly 3,300 square miles of northwest Florida, the second largest floodplain in the state. Although the river basin exhibits more localized water quality problems than most in northwest Florida, the overall water quality is considered good. The river basin encompasses several springs and a variety of habitats including bottomland hardwood forests, marshes and Tupelo-Cypress swamps.

Due to the river corridor's undeveloped nature, the basin provides habitat for a variety of native wildlife, including several endangered plant and animal species. The river also serves as a breeding and migratory area for both the Alligator Gar and the Gulf Sturgeon. The District currently owns over 59,000 acres along the river and/or creek in fee and less-than-fee. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands, around the river's mouth and designated tributaries such as Holmes Creek and such other projects that can mitigate for wetland impacts associated with DOT highway construction.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 56,159 acres have been identified for fee simple acquisition on the Choctawhatchee River and Holmes Creek, and 7,000 acres have been identified for possible less-than-fee acquisition on Holmes Creek. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **West Bay Buffer**

West Bay is the westernmost embayment of the St. Andrew Bay estuary. The bay supports notable shellfish and seagrass communities, important fisheries, and other environmental and economic resources. The West Bay watershed is characterized by extensive pine flatwoods, as well as hardwood forests, cypress wetlands, mixed-forested wetlands, freshwater marshes, wet prairie and other wetlands. Salt marshes, inland forested wetlands, and associated upland communities are especially prominent in several areas, including the Breakfast Point peninsula and adjacent to the Burnt Mill and Crooked Creek tributaries.

Like other estuaries, the bay is vulnerable to impacts associated with intensive residential and commercial development. Such potential impacts include the long-term effects of nonpoint source pollution and habitat loss and fragmentation. The proposed acquisition would help prevent such degradation by preserving intact an extensive ecosystem of forests, scrub, salt marshes, and freshwater wetlands. The acquisition would preclude new sources of pollution, prevent habitat loss and fragmentation, and protect the stability and integrity of littoral vegetation. Preserving intact the associated wetland and upland communities in the vicinity of the bay would also protect water quality by providing a substantial riparian buffer and maintaining the natural hydrology in the vicinity of the bay. The District currently owns 719 acres in the West Bay Buffer.

In addition to providing for water resource protection and public use, this acquisition will be consistent with several ongoing initiatives, including the West Bay Sector Plan. These include efforts to restore seagrass communities in the bay and to improve the treatment and management of domestic wastewater.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 47,281 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Econfina Creek**

Econfina Creek is the major contributor to the Deer Point Lake, which serves as the public water supply for Bay County, including Panama City, Panama City Beach and neighboring communities. The proposed purchases along the creek contain several spring-run streams, which are imperiled biological communities. The slope forest communities that border considerable lengths of the creek contain some of the highest species diversities encountered in Florida. The sand hills portion of the project features high rolling pinelands, steephead ravines and numerous sandhill upland lakes. Much of the sand hills area is of excellent quality, with nearly intact ground cover of wiregrass and dropseed. At least 18 species of rare or endangered plants inhabit the sand hills area. Because of the upland nature of the sand hills sites, the region is being developed with little regulatory restriction. The District currently owns over 43,700 acres in fee and less-than-fee, including the 2,155-acre Sand Hill Lakes Mitigation Bank. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands and parcels with significant recharge.

## **Public Access**

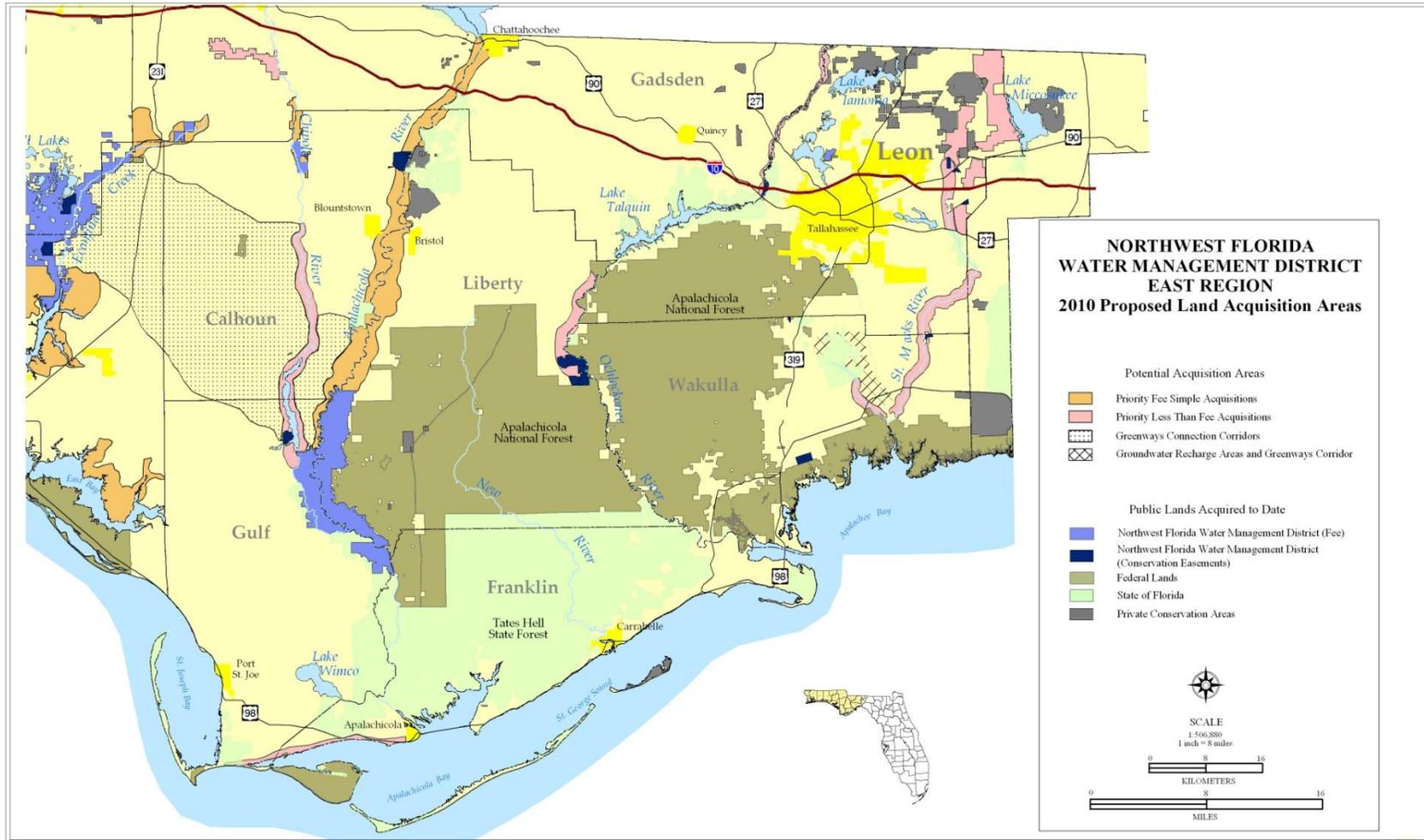
All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 39,740 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

## **Groundwater Recharge Areas**

The upper portion of the acquisition project is a significant recharge area of the Floridan Aquifer. The majority of the acreage purchased by the District and targeted for future purchase is one of the most important recharge areas for the Floridan Aquifer in northwest Florida. Recharge rates in the area have been estimated at 25 to 40 inches per year, and this recharge drives the spring flows along Econfina Creek, the largest tributary of the Deer Point Lake Reservoir. The reservoir currently provides approximately 50 million gallons per day for public supply and industrial water uses in Bay County.



**2010 Proposed Land Acquisition Areas (East Region)**

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Sandy Creek Basin**

Sandy Creek is a major tributary of East Bay, the easternmost embayment of the St. Andrew Bay estuary. The creek's basin is characterized by extensive pine flatwoods, as well as hardwood forests, saltmarshes, cypress wetlands, mixed forested wetlands, freshwater marshes, wet prairie and other wetlands. Salt and freshwater marshes, inland forested wetlands, and associated upland communities are especially prominent along the creek and its tributaries.

Preservation of the Sandy Creek basin will protect a major tributary basin of East Bay. In so doing, it would preserve water quality and a mosaic of interconnected upland, wetland, stream, and estuarine habitats. The acquisition would also protect water quality by providing a substantial riparian buffer and maintaining natural hydrology.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 15,000 acres have been identified for acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Chipola River Basin**

A new area along the Middle Chipola River has been identified for fee acquisition. The area is comprised of 3,952 acres in northern Calhoun and southern Jackson counties. Acquisition of this tract will protect over seven miles of the west bank and 10 miles of the east bank of the Chipola, River. In addition, three 3<sup>rd</sup> magnitude springs (Barrel, Grotto and Sally) and both sides of “Look-N-Tremble” rapids will be protected. In addition, a less-than-fee acquisition, containing 123 acres, will protect an additional 1.5 miles of riverfront along the Chipola River. In 2009, the District acquired 1,377.76 acres in fee along the Middle Chipola River, including “Look-N-Tremble”. The District now owns a total of 9,094 acres in fee simple and holds a conservation easement on 810 acres in the Chipola River Basin.

Two areas have been identified for less-than-fee acquisition along the Chipola River. The first proposed less-than-fee acquisition is comprised of approximately 6,000 acres in the Spring Lake/Spring Group area located in central Jackson County. Acquisition of the Spring Lake/Spring Group area and its numerous springs, which ultimately flow into Dry Creek, a significant tributary stream to the Chipola, will provide enhanced water resource protection to the area.

The second proposed less-than-fee acquisition contains a core tract of roughly 20,000 acres in the river basin in Calhoun and Gulf counties. The Chipola River is the largest tributary to the Apalachicola River and its mostly spring-fed waters make an important and consistent contribution of sediment-free water to the Apalachicola. The degree of biological diversity of the Chipola appears to be nearly as high as that of the Apalachicola. Priority purchases will be focused along the middle reaches of the Chipola River.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 2,574 acres has been identified for possible fee acquisition and 26,000 acres have been identified for possible less-than-fee acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Apalachicola Bay/St. Vincent Sound Buffer**

Apalachicola Bay has been recognized as a resource of state, federal, and international significance. The bay has extensive fish and shellfish resources, and it supports noteworthy commercial and recreational fisheries and other recreational and economic activities. It has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water, a State Aquatic Preserve, and an International Biosphere Reserve. It includes the Apalachicola Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and the St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge. State and federal agencies, as well as the NFWFMD, have made extensive investments in acquiring and protecting lands throughout the basin. This project would provide an important addition to these efforts.

Like other northwest Florida estuaries, Apalachicola Bay is vulnerable to impacts associated with development. Such potential impacts include the long-term effects of non-point source pollution and habitat loss and fragmentation. The proposed acquisition would help prevent such degradation by preserving intact the integrated forest and wetland community bordering St. Vincent Sound and Apalachicola Bay. The acquisition would preclude new sources of pollution, prevent habitat loss and fragmentation, and protect the stability and integrity of littoral vegetation. The acquisition would also protect water quality by providing a substantial riparian buffer and precluding new impervious surfaces and channelization.

The land targeted through this project is immediately adjacent to some of the most productive oyster harvesting areas of the Apalachicola Bay system, including the Indian Lagoon, Scorpion and Paradise bars.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 5,200 acres have been identified for less-than-fee acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Upper Apalachicola River Basin**

The Apalachicola River begins below Lake Seminole at the confluence of Chattahoochee and Flint rivers. It has the largest floodplain in the state and is widely regarded as one of the state's most important natural resources. The Apalachicola River supports the highly productive fishery in Apalachicola Bay, and more endangered plant species can be found along the river's upper stretches than in any comparably sized river in the state. The District owns 35,506 acres of river floodplain and holds a conservation easement on 1,544 acres.

Major habitat types along the Apalachicola River include coastal marshes, freshwater marshes, flatwoods and bottomland hardwood swamp. Water tupelo, Ogeechee tupelo, bald cypress Carolina ash and swamp tupelo have been identified in the floodplain, as well as numerous species of rare fish. Substantial additional acreage of the Apalachicola system is owned by other public agencies and private conservation organizations. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands, other conservation lands and designated tributaries.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 51,449 acres have been identified for possible fee acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Ochlockonee River Basin**

The Ochlockonee River originates in the Piedmont hills of Georgia and traverses parts of five Florida counties. Water quality in the river is lowest when it enters Florida and generally improves as it moves to the Gulf of Mexico. The Ochlockonee is primarily fed by rainwater runoff, hence highly susceptible to pollution of land use activities. Large parts of the watershed are publicly owned, including Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area, Lake Talquin State Forest and Apalachicola National Forest. The District's primary focus is to acquire less-than-fee rights on privately owned floodplain land separating existing federal/state properties. Public ownership of the erosion-prone lands bordering this usually fast flowing river will reduce the likelihood of water quality degradation. The District presently has 3,565 acres in less-than-fee (conservation easement) in the area.

## **Public Access**

All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis prior to acceptance.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 11,876 acres have been identified for less-than-fee acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **St. Marks/Wakulla Rivers**

The Wakulla River originates at Wakulla Springs and flows south approximately 10 miles to join the St. Marks River at the town of St. Marks. The St. Marks River starts east of Tallahassee as a tiny stream, widens considerably below Horn Spring, and then disappears underground at Natural Bridge. Reemerging as a much stronger river at St. Marks Spring, it flows 11 miles to its confluence with the Wakulla River. While the lower reach of the river below the town of St. Marks is protected and preserved as part of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, much of the remainder of the two river watersheds is threatened by active riverfront development and in the adjacent highlands. The St. Marks supports one of the most heavily used inshore saltwater fisheries in north Florida, the viability of which is largely dependent on the quality of freshwater flowing into the estuarine system. Both the Wakulla Springs State Park and the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge are major refuges for numerous biological species. Much of the remaining privately owned land is timberland that is under intense development pressure. The District presently has 1,376 acres under less-than-fee acquisition in the area.

## **BluePrint 2000**

In December 2003, the Northwest Florida Water Management District and the City of Tallahassee-Leon County BluePrint 2000 Intergovernmental Agency entered into a five-year Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to work cooperatively to acquire conservation easements to protect and preserve the water resources of the St. Marks River basin in Leon County. Although this MOA has now expired, the District and BluePrint 2000 successfully purchased conservation easements on a 132.62-acre tract and 194.5-acre tract, both located in Leon County.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 45,456 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over at least the next five years. The timing of any given acquisition will be dependent on such considerations as: (1) Governing Board policy, (2) Threats to the resource, (3) Availability of willing sellers, (4) Tract size, (5) General market conditions, (6) Available staff resources and (7) Availability of funds.

**LAND MANAGEMENT  
ACTIVITIES  
CONDUCTED DURING 2009**

**Land Management Activities: Restoration, Enhancement and Maintenance (2009)**

Water Management Area	Acres Burned					Acres Planted				Acres Harvested					Acres Treated
	Total	Fuel Reduction	Site Preparation	Growing Season	Wiregrass Propagation	Total	Wiregrass	Longleaf Pine	Slash Pine	Total	Replanted	Restoration	Thinning	Habitat Restoration	For Invasive, Non-native or Off-site Species
Escambia River	77	52		25											5
Garcon Point	37				37										25
Blackwater River															5
Yellow River	57	25	32												15
Perdido River	230	230							709				709		20
Choctawhatchee River	1994	1994				1087	211	876							86
Econfina Creek	2662	1918		675	69	58	12	26	20	1084			1084		404
St. Andrews										387		93	294		
Carter Restoration	206	38	168			87	87								
Ward Creek West						57	57								
Devils Swamp Restoration	548	548													
Upper Chipola River															
Apalachicola River															
Lake Jackson															
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5811</b>	<b>4805</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>1289</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2180</b>			<b>93</b>	<b>2087</b>	<b>560</b>

**Lands Management Activities: Access and Recreation Management (2009)**

Water Management Area	Primitive Campsites	Picnic Grounds	Public Parks	Parking Areas	Reserved Group Sites	Boat Landings	Portolet Stations	Horse Trail	Canoe Trail	Hiking Trail	Nature Trail	Bike Trail	Access Road	Group Use Permits	Birding	Nature Trail	General Purpose	Information Signs	Weather Pavilions
	Number Maintained							Miles Maintained						Issued	Maps/Brochures Printed			Installed	
Escambia River	13	9	8	9	1	8	10			1	2		27	24				20	2
Garcon Point				3						3			3					15	
Blackwater River		1				1												10	1
Yellow River	9	2	7	6		4	3		50				47					50	
Perdido River		3	3	4	1	3	4	3	9				32					110	1
Choctawhatchee River	8	9	12	12		10	8		15				43					80	4
Econfina Creek	10	14	8	18	4	4	12	56	22	18	2		23	168				279	8
Upper Chipola River	1		1	1		1		2	10	2	1	2	3						
Apalachicola River	2	1	1	2		2	1				4		6						
Lake Jackson			1	2				9		5	1	9	4	4					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>196</b>				<b>564</b>	<b>16</b>

**Projected Funding, Staffing and Resource Management for FY 2009-2010**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Water Management Area</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Assigned Staff</b>	<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>Funding for Resource Management</b>
<b>Western</b>	Escambia	34,919		\$457,206	\$385,600
	Escambia Conservation Easements	23		\$1,498	\$500
	Garcon Point	3,245		\$122,957	\$96,425
	Yellow/Escribano	17,742		\$355,070	\$310,200
	Blackwater	380		\$88,306	\$62,850
	Perdido	6,261		\$453,027	\$379,500
	<b>Western Region Total</b>	<b>62,570</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>\$1,478,064</b>	<b>\$1,235,075</b>
<b>Central</b>	Choctawhatchee	60,848		\$1,047,049	\$894,400
	Choctawhatchee/Holmes Conservation Easements	1,442		\$27,889	\$25,500
	Econfina	39,112		\$1,660,695	\$1,392,900
	St. Andrew/Econfina Conservation Easements	2,433		\$3,686	\$500
	Ward Creek West	719		\$53,548	\$47,750
	Carter Restoration	2,155		\$243,146	\$167,600
	<b>Central Region Total</b>	<b>106,709</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>\$3,036,013</b>	<b>\$2,528,650</b>
<b>Eastern</b>	Upper Chipola	9,094		\$145,814	\$109,500
	Apalachicola	35,506		\$552,242	\$482,350
	Apalachicola/Chipola Conservation Easements	2,360		\$3,686	\$500
	Lake Jackson	516		\$61,452	\$8,100
	St. Marks Conservation Easements	1,376		\$3,139	\$750
	Ochlockonee Conservation Easements	3,565		\$3,686	\$500
	<b>Eastern Region Total</b>	<b>52,417</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$770,019</b>	<b>\$601,700</b>
<b>Regional Totals</b>	<b>221,696</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>\$5,284,096</b>	<b>\$4,365,425</b>	
	Management Administration		4	\$1,040,793	\$589,700
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>221,696</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>\$6,324,889</b>	<b>\$4,955,125</b>	