

*Florida  
Forever*

2014



*Northwest Florida Water Management District  
Land Acquisition Work Plan*

# **Northwest Florida Water Management District Governing Board**

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## Introduction

Section 373.199(7), F.S. requires the Northwest Florida Water Management District (District) to annually update the Florida Forever Work Plan. To date, this is the 13th annual update of the 2001 Florida Forever Work Plan. 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 has continued the state's long-term commitment to environmental land acquisition, restoration of degraded natural areas, and high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

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 these 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 224,783 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 acquisitions and surplusings completed in 2013 is provided below.

### Summary of Acquisitions and Surplusings Completed in 2013

Fee Simple Acquisitions					
Property	Date Purchased	Acres	Cost	Funding Source(s)	Water Management Area
Sartor	09/24/13	10	\$15,000	Reserves	Econfina Creek
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>\$15,000</b>		
Surplused Lands					
Property	Date Surplused	Acres	Sale Price	Funding Source(s)	Water Management Area
Parch Road	12/13/13	0.4	\$2,400.00	Preservation 2000	Blackwater River
Old River Road	12/13/13	1.5	\$3,400.00	Preservation 2000	Yellow River
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>\$5,800.00</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; and the size, accessibility and overall condition of each property. Recommendations from interest groups, landowners, local governments, agency representatives and other interested parties 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’s, Division of State Lands in order to minimize redundancy and facilitate an efficient and mutually supportive land acquisition effort.

## Approved Acquisition Areas

The approved acquisition areas listed below are not presented on a priority basis. For each of these water bodies, 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 other Tributaries of 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 and St. Vincent Sound Buffer
	Blackwater River including Juniper, Big Coldwater and Coldwater creeks	Gainer Springs		
	Ochlockonee River and its major tributaries			
	Yellow and Shoal Rivers			
	Perdido River and Bay			

<b>Groundwater Recharge Areas</b>	<b>Donated Lands</b>
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.

<b>Exchange Lands</b>
The District may exchange lands it has acquired under the Florida Forever program for other lands that qualify for acquisition under the program. 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 there is no net loss of wetland protection and that there is a net positive environmental benefit.

<b>Mitigation Acquisitions</b>
Under Florida law, unavoidable losses of natural wetlands or wetland functions require "mitigation" through the acquisition or 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 often paramount, the District will acquire or manage isolated tracts at times.

<b>Surplus</b>
Chapter 373.089, F.S., allows the Governing Board of the District to sell (surplus) lands or interest or rights in lands to which the District has acquired title or to which it may hereafter acquire title. Any lands, or interests or rights in lands, determined by the Governing Board to be surplus may be sold by the District at any time for the highest price, but in no case shall the selling price be less than the appraised value.

## Surplus Lands

In the fall of 2012, District staff conducted an evaluation of all District lands to determine if there were any parcels appropriate for surplus. The parcels recommended for surplus were small, non-contiguous, isolated tracts or connected only on a corner. The following tracts were declared surplus by the District's Governing Board.

WMA	Acres	County	Acquired Date	Status
Escambia River	110.5	Escambia	April 26, 1994	For Sale
Blackwater River	0.4	Santa Rosa	August 3, 2001	Sold on 12-13-13
Yellow River	1.5	Okaloosa	December 15, 1999	Sold on 12-13-13
Choctawhatchee River	38	Walton	July 31, 1992	Under Contract
Choctawhatchee River	38	Walton	July 31, 1992	For Sale
Econfina Creek	10	Washington	December 19, 1997	For Sale

During FY 2013-2014, District staff will continue to evaluate District lands for potential surplus parcels.

## Note to Landowners

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

This plan includes a number of areas the District has identified for potential purchase. 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.

## Less Than Fee Methods of Land Protection

In "less than fee" purchases, the District attempts 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 provide a number of public benefits. First acquisition funding can be conserved, thereby enabling the protection of more land with limited funds. Also, the property continues in private ownership and thus may remain 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 for less than fee acquisition, but the potential benefits make these kinds of transactions a viable alternative to the District's typical fee-simple land purchases.

## **DEP Florida Forever Priority List**

The Florida Forever Priority List can be found at <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/FFplan.htm>

## **Florida Forever Goals and Numeric Performance Measures**

As outlined in Chapter 18-24, F.A.C., the District is required to report on the goals and measures for lands to be acquired under the Florida Forever program. The following page summarizes the goals and measures applicable to Northwest Florida Water Management District.

## ***Florida Forever Goals and Numeric Performance Measures***

Reported as of October 1, 2013

### Rule No. 18-24.0022

(2)(d)1. For proposed acquisitions, see section 5.1, (Florida Forever) Land Acquisition Five-Year Work Plan in the Consolidated Annual Report.

Acquisitions of lakes, wetlands, and floodplain areas to date =	187,112	Total acres
	15,255	Florida Forever acres

(2)(d)2. Acquisitions for water resource development to date = 41,616 Total acres (incl. fee and l-t-f)  
3,663 Florida Forever acres (incl. fee and l-t-f)

(3)(a)2. Refer to section 5.2, (Florida Forever) Capital Improvement Work Plan of the Consolidated Annual Report for funded capital improvements identified in SWIM, stormwater, or restoration plans.

(3)(a)3. NFWFMD lands to be treated for upland invasive, exotic plants = <100 acres  
The District has not conducted surveys to identify the spatial distribution of invasive exotic plant infestation on District lands. It is known that invasive plant problems exist at varying levels on some District lands, and staff treat with herbicide as needed.

(3)(b) New water to be made available through Florida Forever funding for water resource development - Major water resource development accomplishment provided by additions to Econfina Creek Water Management Area. Additionally, Florida Forever funding contributed to the construction of a 750,000 gallon reuse storage facility for the City of Freeport to serve a 0.6 MGD reuse water service area. Funding for water supply development, including construction of water reuse facilities, is primarily provided through the Water Protection and Sustainability Program Trust Fund, NFWFMD General Fund, and local funding. See the NFWFMD Five Year Water Resource Development Work Program report and Consolidated Annual Report.

(4)(a)1. All NFWFMD lands are in need of and are undergoing management by the District.

In need of restoration =	15,696 acres
Undergoing restoration =	1,186 acres
Restoration completed =	18,369 acres
Restoration maintenance =	18,369 acres

(4)(a)3. Refer to section 5.2, (Florida Forever) Capital Improvement Work Plan of the Consolidated Annual Report for capital improvements identified in SWIM, stormwater, or restoration plans.

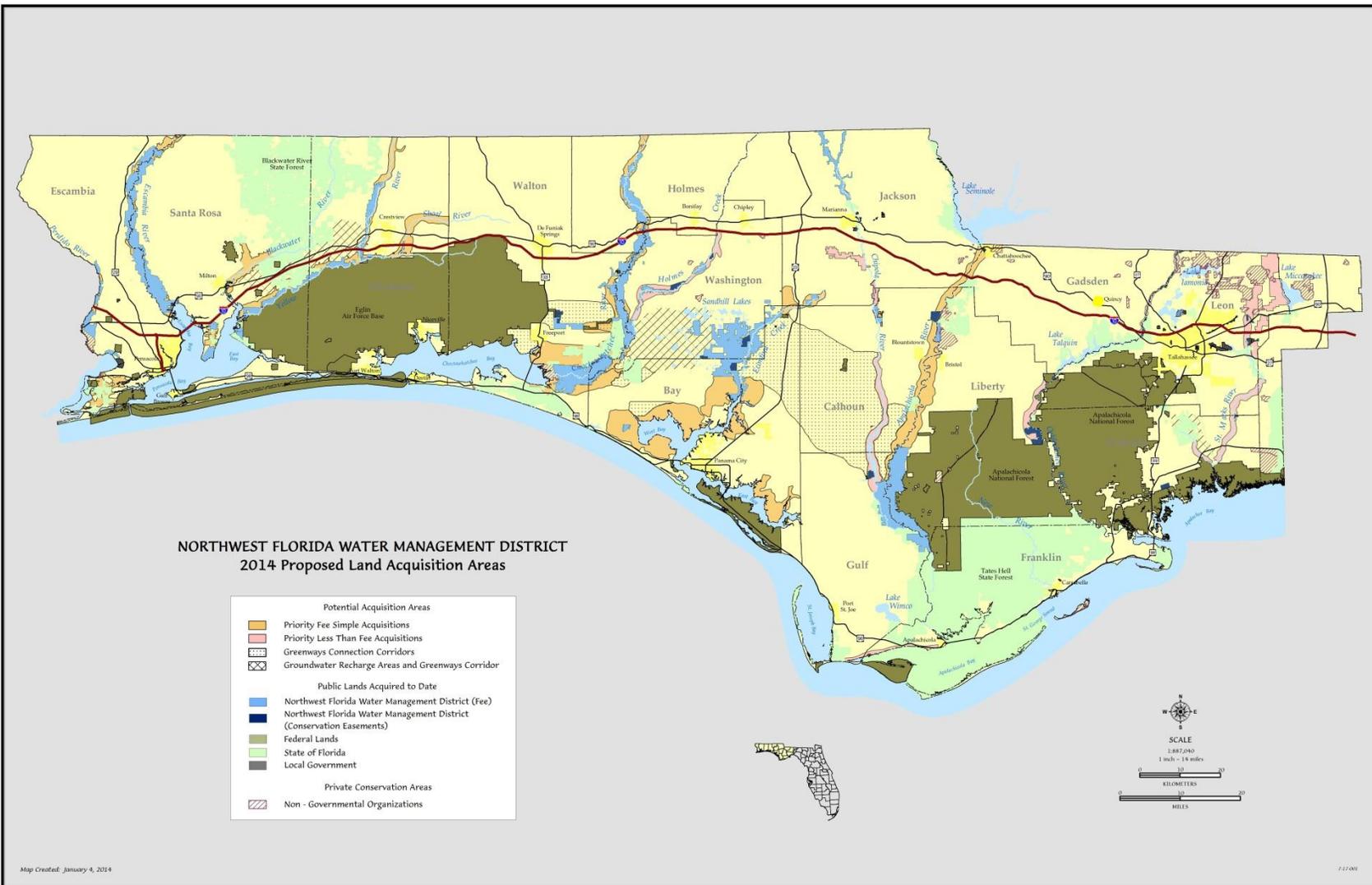
(4)(a)6. NFWFMD lands under upland invasive, exotic plant maintenance control = <3,500 acres

(4)(b) Refer to section 4.1, Five-Year Water Resource Development Work Program: FY 2012-2013 of the Consolidated Annual Report for quantity of new water made available through regional water supply plans.

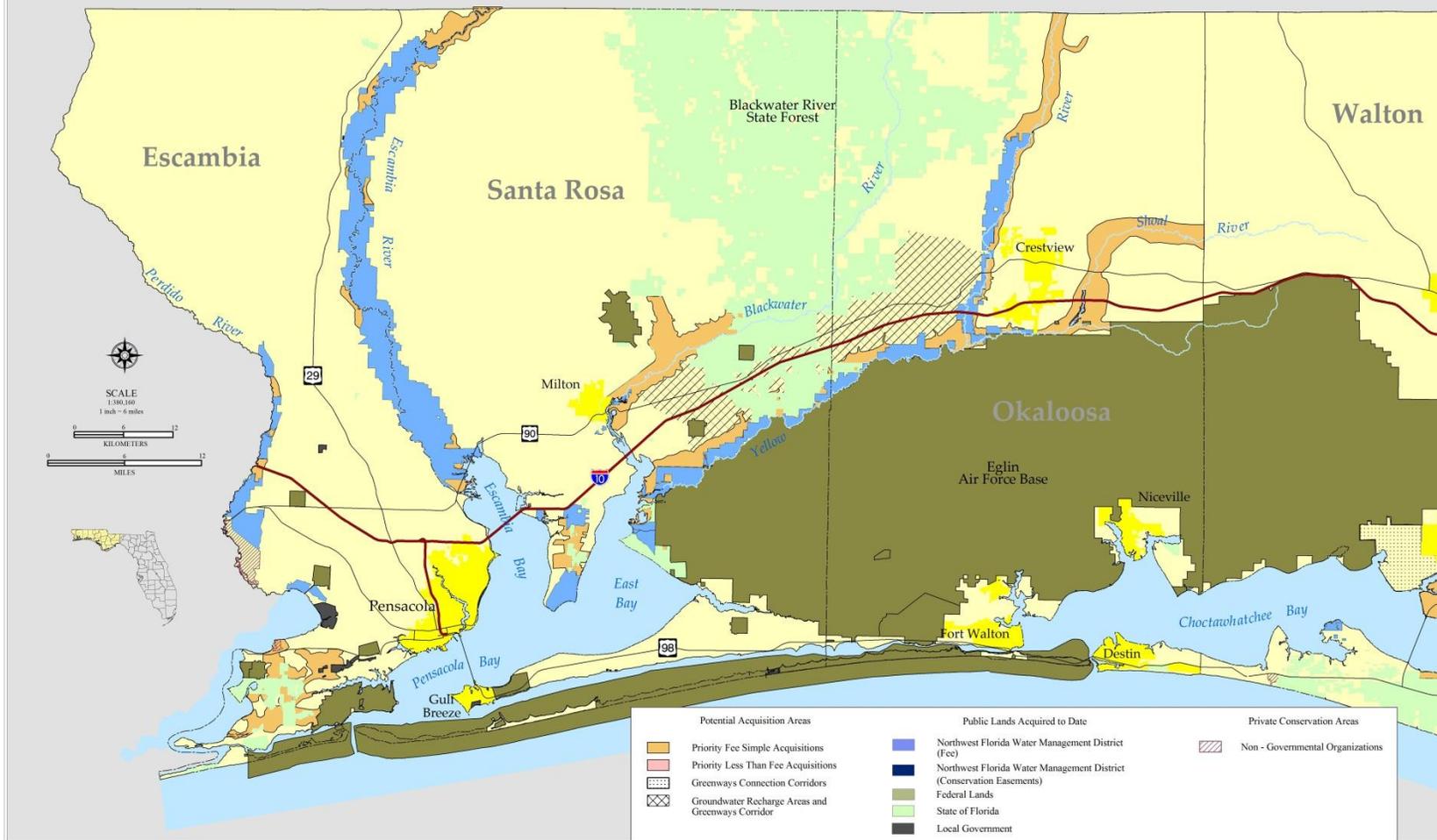
(4)(c) See section 5.1, (Florida Forever) Land Acquisition Work Plan (Table 2) of the Consolidated Annual Report for resource-based recreation facilities by type.

## **Land Acquisition Projects**

The Florida Forever Act, in particular section 373.199(3) 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.



**NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
WEST REGION  
2014 Proposed Land Acquisition Areas**



# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Perdido River and Bay Basin**

The Perdido River serves as the state line, separating Florida from Alabama. The Perdido River 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, unique to portions of Northwest Florida, south Alabama, southern Mississippi and eastern Louisiana, while the lower end of the river is characteristic of a black water stream. The District owns 6,261 acres in fee and 4 acres in less than fee between the Perdido River and Bay.

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 along the river, around the river mouth, and designated tributaries.

The Perdido Bay is an estuarine system which receives fresh water from the Perdido River. Subsidiary embayments within the Perdido Bay estuary include Tarkiln Bay, Arnica Bay, Wolf Bay, Bayou La Launch and Bayou St. John. Perdido Key separates Perdido, Tarkiln, and Arnica bays, Bayou La Launch and Bayou St. John from the Gulf of Mexico. Big Lagoon adjoins Perdido Bay to the east, separating it from Pensacola Bay. Currently, the District owns 810.19 acres along Perdido Bay.

Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to the bay which can enhance water quality protection 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.

## **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: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and 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 the Pensacola and Perdido bay watersheds. The proposed acquisition borders a major urban area and is experiencing 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 important to the quality of water resources in the Pensacola and Perdido bay systems. Acquisition will help limit nonpoint pollution and untreated stormwater runoff by preventing channelization. Wetlands and upland buffers will also be preserved, and riparian buffer zones will be maintained. Additionally, public access will be improved 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 Wetland 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and 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 discharging 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 River 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 35,413 acres in fee and 19 acres in less than fee 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.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 6,644 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: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Garcon Point Ecosystem**

This proposed land acquisition project contains most of the Garcon Point Peninsula, which borders Pensacola, Escambia, East and Blackwater bays. 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 the surrounding estuary, as well as harboring a number of rare and endangered species.

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.

Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands. Currently the District owns 3,245 acres on Garcon Point.

## **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 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Blackwater River Basin**

Originating in the Conecuh National Forest in Alabama, 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 River is considered one of Florida's best preserved waterways. Currently the District owns 381 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; and blackwater stream and seepage slope communities. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands. Approximately 380 acres have been acquired along the Blackwater River immediately south of Milton in Santa Rosa 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 11,449 acres have been identified for possible acquisition. Sufficient lands have been identified to allow for a flexible implementation strategy over the next five years or more. The timing of any given acquisition will depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Yellow and Shoal River Basin**

The Yellow River has its headwaters in Conecuh National Forest in Alabama 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 River, the largest tributary to the Yellow River. Large private landowners own a majority of the floodplain in this project, but considerable areas of the bordering and buffer lands are being sought to ensure effective management and protection of water resources. Highest priority will be given to tracts in the western portion of the project within the 100-year floodplain. 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 are thus 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 the 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**

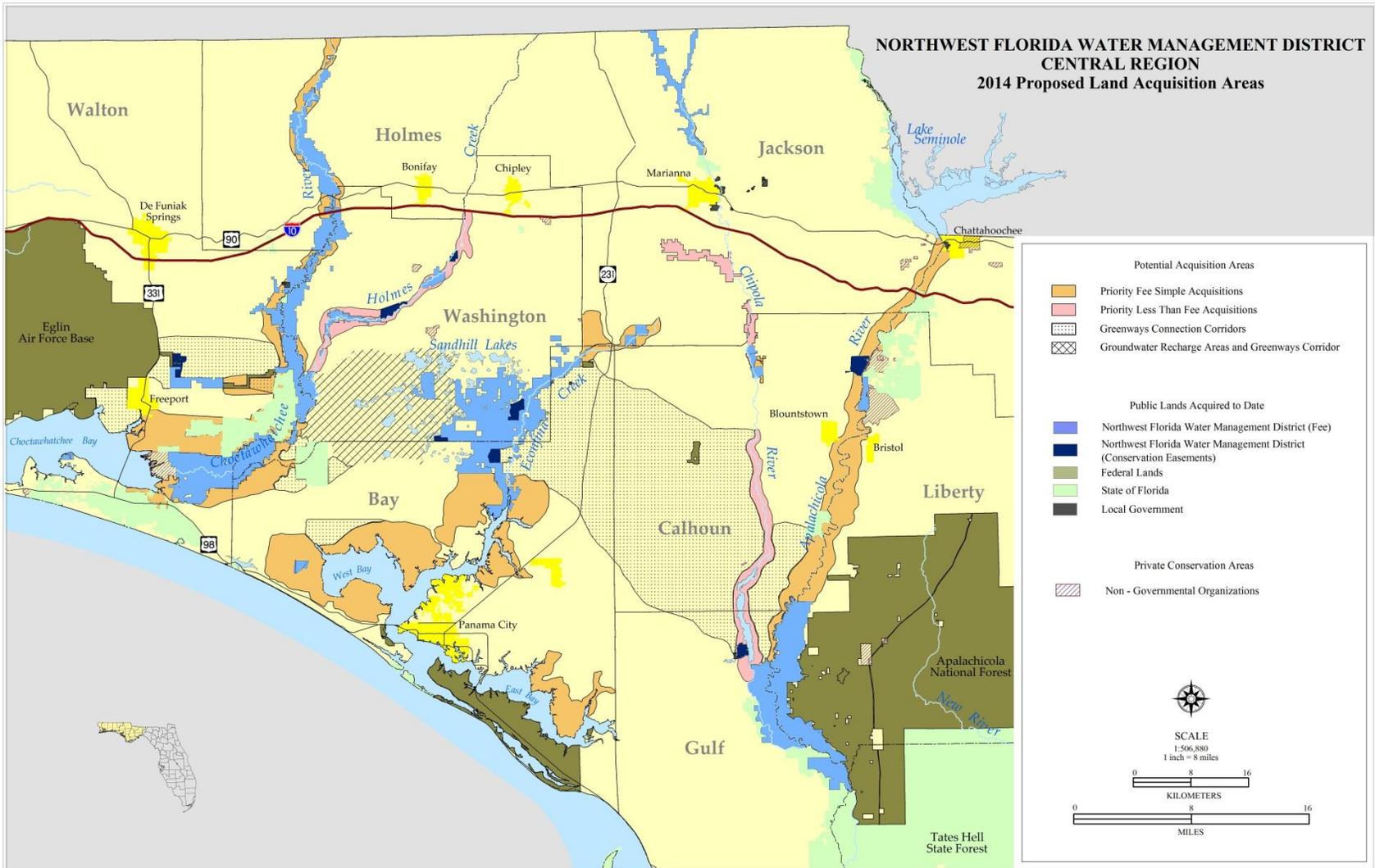
All District conservation lands are available for public use. Such uses include fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, boating, swimming, and other recreational and educational activities. Access issues are addressed on a parcel-by-parcel basis.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 39,140 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: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and 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 important for future water supply sources.



# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Lafayette Creek**

Originating in south central Walton County, the Lafayette Creek drainage basin is located northeast 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.

The area between the Choctawhatchee River and Eglin Air Force Base is part of the Northwest Florida Greenway Corridor which serves to protect open space stretching from the Apalachicola National Forest to Eglin Air Force Base. It is intended to preserve environmentally sensitive areas, sustain existing military lands and airspace, maintain the economic viability of forest lands and provide recreation. The District, in cooperation with Eglin Air Force Base, acquired a 1,095.3-acre conservation easement from Nokuse Plantation utilizing Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) funds. Acquisition of this Conservation Easement will ensure the protection of seepage streams within the Magnolia and Lafayette Creeks and buffer Eglin Air Force Base lands to the west.

## **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 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Choctawhatchee River and Holmes Creek Basin**

Originating in Alabama and flowing into Choctawhatchee Bay, the Choctawhatchee River/Holmes Creek basin encompasses the second largest floodplain in the state. Approximately 3,133 square miles of the watershed is in Alabama and 2,052 square miles is in Florida. The river is 170 miles long with about 88 miles in Florida. Although the river basin exhibits localized water quality problems, primarily due to agricultural land use in the upper basin, 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 63,386 acres along the river and creek in fee and less than fee. Priority purchases will be concentrated on parcels adjacent to existing District lands, around the river's mouth, designated tributaries such as Holmes Creek, and 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.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 55,064 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and 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 other lands 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. Potential impacts include the long-term degradation as a result of nonpoint source pollution, as well as 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. Preserving 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 initiatives also 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.

## **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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Econfina Creek**

Econfina Creek is the major contributor to 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 diversity 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 a nearly intact ground cover of wiregrass and dropseed. At least 18 species of rare or endangered plants inhabit the sand hills area. The District currently owns over 43,771 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 aquifer recharge potential.

## **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 39,669 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: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and 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 residential, commercial and industrial water uses in Bay County.

# 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.

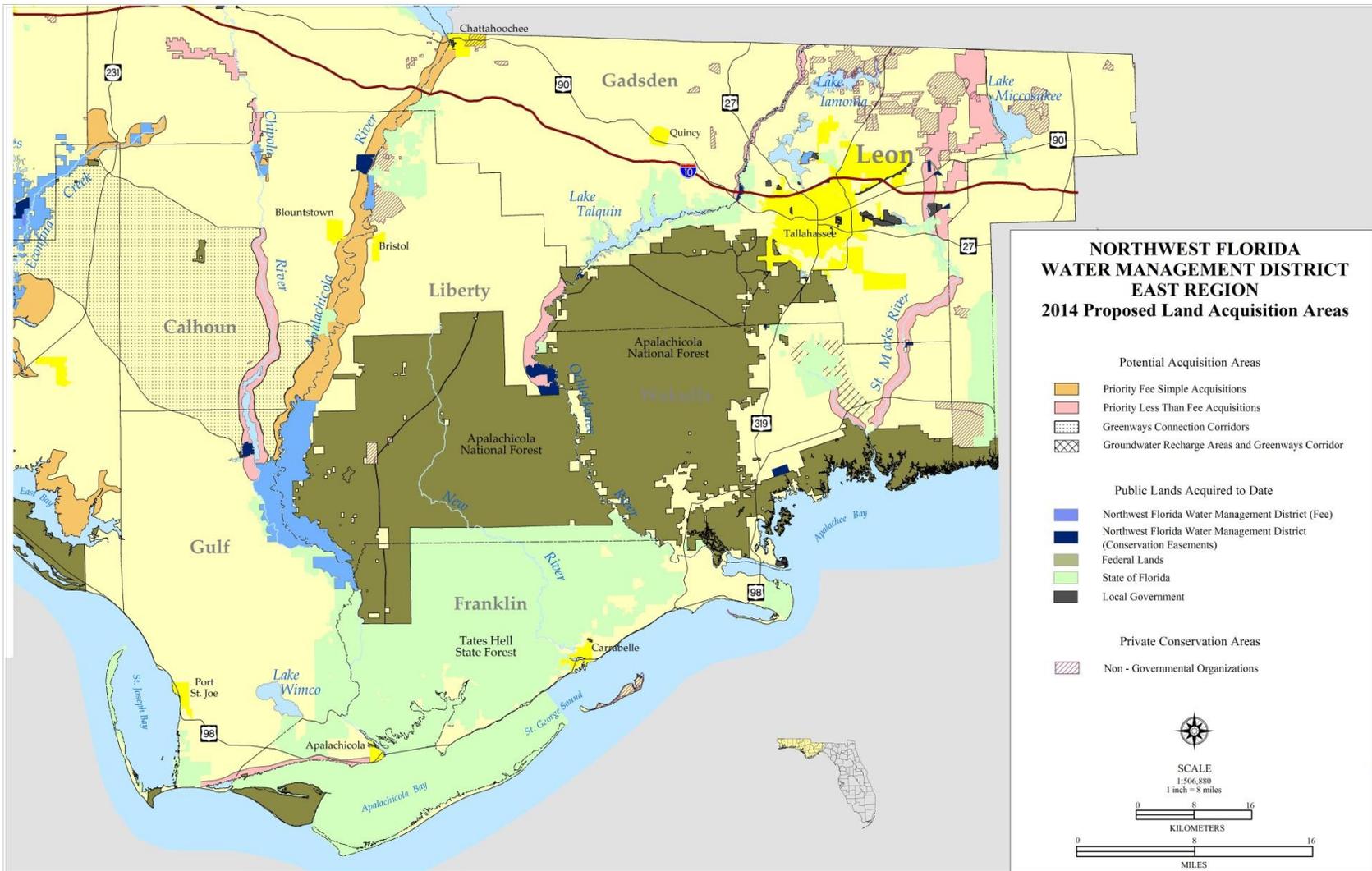
Preservation of the Sandy Creek basin will protect a major tributary basin of East Bay. In so doing, it would preserve water quality and a mosaic of interconnected upland, wetland, stream, and estuarine habitats. The acquisition would also protect water quality by providing a substantial riparian buffer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

## **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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.



# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Chipola River Basin**

A new area along the Middle Chipola River has been identified for less than fee acquisition. The area is comprised of approximately 2,400 acres in northern Calhoun and southern Jackson counties. Acquisition of this tract will help protect over 3.4 miles of the west bank and 4.25 miles of the east bank of the Chipola, River. In 2009, the District acquired 1,377.76 acres in fee along the Middle Chipola River, including the “Look-N-Tremble” rapids. 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 additional areas have been identified for less than fee acquisition along the Chipola River. The first is comprised of approximately 6,000 acres in the Spring Lake Spring Group area located in central Jackson County. Acquisition of land in the Spring Lake Spring Group area with its numerous springs, and tributaries which end up in the Chipola River, 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.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 1,025 acres has been identified for possible fee acquisition and 28,400 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Apalachicola Bay and 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 the integrated forest and wetland community bordering St. Vincent Sound and Apalachicola Bay. The acquisition would limit 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 which would help prevent channelization from new impervious surfaces.

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.

## **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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and 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 36,823 acres of river floodplain and holds a conservation easement on 1,550 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.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 50,132 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **Ochlockonee River Basin**

The Ochlockonee River originates in the coastal plain 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 flows closer to the Gulf of Mexico. The Ochlockonee is primarily fed by rainwater runoff, and is therefore susceptible to pollution by 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 and 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 3,675 acres in less than fee holdings 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.

## **Land Acquisition**

Approximately 11,767 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

# FLORIDA FOREVER LAND ACQUISITION PROJECT

## **St. Marks and 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 in Wakulla County. The St. Marks River starts east of Tallahassee as a narrow stream, widens considerably below Horn Spring, and then disappears underground at Natural Bridge. After 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. 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 depend upon such considerations as: Governing Board policy; Threats to the resource; Availability of willing sellers; Tract size; General market conditions; Available staff resources, and Availability of funds.

## **Implementation of the 2012-2013 Work Plan**

### **Land Acquisition**

The District acquired one 10-acre inholding in fee simple in the Econfina Creek WMA.

### **Land Management**

The District completed numerous land management activities during Fiscal Year 2012-2013. Management and restoration efforts including prescribed burns, native species planting and timber harvesting, continue across the District's 212,379 managed acres. In addition, the District maintains and improves public access and recreational amenities such as boat ramps, primitive campsites, and swimming and picnic areas. In the pages that follow, **Table 1** and **Table 2** provide additional information on specific land restoration activities completed during the year. The projected Fiscal Year 2013-2014 staffing and management budget by WMA can be found in **Table 3**.

To date, the District has conserved and protected 224,782, acres primarily through fee simple acquisition. These lands protect natural systems, wetland and floodplain functions, groundwater recharge, surface and groundwater quality, and fish and wildlife habitat. District-owned lands are all accessible to the public and are managed to protect water resources while providing public access and resource-based recreation.

District lands include the majority of the Escambia and Choctawhatchee river floodplains, as well as extensive lands along the Perdido, Blackwater, Yellow, Shoal, and Apalachicola rivers; Lafayette, Holmes and Econfina creeks; and on Perdido Bay, Garcon Point and Live Oak Point. In addition, the District manages and conducts habitat restoration and maintenance on Yellow River Ranch, Live Oak Point, Ward Creek West and Sand Hill Lakes Mitigation Bank. The District has acquired the majority of the groundwater recharge area for springs that discharge into Econfina Creek and form a crucial component of the water contribution to Deer Point Lake Reservoir.

### **Land Management Accomplishments (FY 2012-2013)**

- Phase II of the Econfina Springs complex restoration program continued with the completion of final designs and permit applications for the Williford Spring component. Funding sources were identified and secured for construction in the spring of 2014.
- Prescribed burns were conducted on approximately 9,700 acres of District-owned land.
- Vegetation management and habitat enhancement activities were conducted on approximately 1,875 acres.
- 249 group camping permits at seven reservation-only sites on District lands.
- 23 special resource area permits were issued for larger events on District property.
- Six timber harvests were conducted on District lands totaling 1,952 acres.

- A cooperative project with Walton County to improve a boat ramp and camping area at Dead River Landing was substantially completed.
- Over 9,000 acres of District-owned land were surveyed for invasive exotic plants, and control measures were implemented for all identified problem areas.

### **Restoration**

The District accomplishes water resource restoration through several interrelated programs, primarily Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM), Land Management, and Mitigation.

Approved NFWFMD plans with substantial restoration components include the following:

- *Apalachicola River and Bay Management Plan* (1996)
- *Pensacola Bay System SWIM Plan* (1997)
- *Lake Jackson Management Plan* (1997)
- *Choctawhatchee River and Bay SWIM Plan* (2002)
- *St. Andrew Bay Watershed SWIM Plan* (2000)
- *St. Marks River Watershed SWIM Plan* (2009)
- *Tate's Hell State Forest Hydrologic Restoration Plan* (2010)
- *Florida Forever Capital Improvements Plan*

### **Restoration Accomplishments (FY 2012-2013)**

- A streambank restoration project at Dead River Landing in Walton County totaling approximately 225 feet was implemented using a vegetative retaining wall to stabilize the eroding riverbank at a popular recreation site. The project was built by Walton County staff with assistance from the District.
- The District also completed the hand planting of 621 acres of disturbed longleaf pine, wet pine flatwoods, and wiregrass habitat across northwest Florida. These habitat restoration activities enhance groundwater recharge, improve wetland functions, and offset wetland losses due to Department of Transportation projects.
- Over 284,000 longleaf pine tubelings were planted on the Perdido River, Escambia River, Yellow River, Choctawhatchee River and Econfina Creek WMAs and the Sand Hill Lakes Mitigation Bank.
- The District also reestablished groundcover habitat, planting over 372,000 plugs of upland and wetland wiregrass and toothache grass on disturbed habitat sites on the Sand Hill Lakes Mitigation Bank and the Perdido River mitigation tract.
- Seeds for many District groundcover projects were collected from District land on Econfina Creek WMA. The District continues to research, refine and establish new habitat restoration techniques that increase species diversity and ecosystem health.

**Table 1: Restoration, Enhancement and Maintenance (2013)**

Water Management Area	Acres Burned					Acres Planted					Acres Harvested				Acres Treated
	Total	Fuel Reduction	Site Preparation	Growing Season	Wiregrass Propagation	Total	Upland/Wetland Wiregrass and Toothache Grass	Longleaf Pine	Slash Pine	Upland Hardwoods	Total	Restoration	Thinning	Habitat Restoration	For Invasive, Non-native or Off-site Species
Escambia River						7		7							22
Garcon Point	78	78													2000
Blackwater River															1
Yellow River						23		23							
Perdido River	850	850				205	27	151		27					862
Choctawhatchee River	3560	2504	97	959		160		130		30	49	11	38		3630
Econfina Creek	4061	1493	1302	845	421	25		25			1172			1172	1019
St. Andrews	168	146			22						351	301	50		
Carter Restoration	493	493				201	68	133							
Ward Creek West	127	127													
Devils Swamp Restoration															
Chipola River	77	77													20
Apalachicola River	46	46													
Lake Jackson	205	205									132		132		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9665</b>	<b>6019</b>	<b>1399</b>	<b>1804</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>469</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>1704</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>1172</b>	<b>7554</b>

**Table 2: Access and Recreation Management (2013)**

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	11			1	2		27	14				40	2
Garcon Point				3														10	
Blackwater River	1					1					1							6	1
Yellow River	9	2	7	6		4	4		50				47					10	
Perdido River		3	3	4	1	3	4	3	9				32	40				30	1
Choctawhatchee River	8	9	13	12		11	8		15				103						1
Econfina Creek	10	14	8	18	5	4	14	56	22	18	2		130	195				30	
Chipola River	3			3		2	2	4	6	3									
Apalachicola River	1	1		1		1	1			3									
Lake Jackson			1	2			1	7		10		7							
<b>Totals</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>249</b>				<b>126</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 3: Projected Funding, Staffing and Resource Management for FY 2013-2014**

<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	35,413		\$147,043	\$93,470
	Escambia Conservation Easements	19		\$1,051	\$500
	Garcon Point	3,245		\$80,810	\$39,750
	Yellow/Escribano	17,729		\$94,303	\$55,750
	Blackwater	381		\$20,349	\$9,400
	Perdido	6,261		\$157,395	\$110,450
	Perdido Conservation Easements	4		\$1,051	\$500
	<b>Western Region Total</b>	<b>63,052</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>\$ 502,002</b>	<b>\$309,820</b>
<b>Central</b>	Choctawhatchee	60,848		\$368,612	\$219,125
	Choctawhatchee/Holmes Conservation Easements	2,537		\$19,905	\$13,000
	Econfina	39,184		\$903,639	\$677,255
	St. Andrew/Econfina Conservation Easements	2,433		\$4,923	\$500
	Ward Creek West	719		\$0	\$0
	Carter Restoration	2,155		\$57,250	\$57,250
	<b>Central Region Total</b>	<b>107,876</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>\$1,354,329</b>	<b>\$967,130</b>
<b>Eastern</b>	Chipola	9,094		\$174,941	\$101,250
	Apalachicola	36,823		\$98,874	\$44,350
	Apalachicola/Chipola Conservation Easements	2,359		\$3,899	\$500
	Lake Jackson	516		\$165,440	\$131,178
	St. Marks Conservation Easements	1,376		\$4,116	\$750
	Ochlockonee Conservation Easements	3,675		\$4,999	\$750
	<b>Eastern Region Total</b>	<b>53,843</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$452,269</b>	<b>\$278,778</b>
<b>Regional Totals</b>		<b>224,771</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>\$2,308,600</b>	<b>\$1,555,728</b>

<b>Other Projects</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Assigned Staff</b>	<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>Funding for Resource Management</b>
Land Management Administration		4	\$2,200,347	\$1,625,664
IT Initiative			\$132,116	\$132,116
Land Management Database			\$204,107	\$134,250
Florida National Scenic Trail - Econfina Creek			\$10,000	\$10,000
Williford Spring Restoration			\$33,439	\$0
Live Oak Streambank Restoration			\$4,892	\$0
Hightower Streambank Restoration			\$4,892	\$0
Spurling Streambank Restoration			\$3,964	\$0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>224,771</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>\$4,902,357</b>	<b>\$3,457,758</b>

