

Forest Legacy Project

Suwannee Working Woodlands

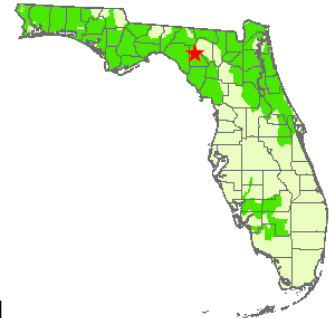
Suwannee River Basin, Madison & Lafayette Counties, Florida



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2018 Forest Legacy Program Funding \$2,500,000
FY 2018 Non-Federal Cost Share \$6,000,000
FY 2018 Project Costs \$8,500,000
FY 2018 Project Acres 14,986

Forest Legacy Funding To Date \$0
Total Project Costs \$12,500,000
Total Project Acres 23,259



★ Project Location
■ Forest Legacy Areas

Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Mallory Swamp - Match Tract	6,724	\$4,500,000	\$0	\$4,500,000	In Review 2018
San Pedro Forest I	8,262	\$4,000,000	\$2,500,000	\$1,500,000	In Review 2018
San Pedro Forest II	8,273	\$4,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	In Review 2019

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Celebrated in song, the legendary Suwannee River winds its way through a forested landscape known as Florida's "woodbasket." Long undiscovered, change is coming to a region at risk of losing the natural resources on which its local communities and wildlife depend. These forests are being converted to recreational and agricultural uses at an alarming rate. The Suwannee Working Woodlands (SWW) is a project advanced and strongly supported by a coalition of conservationists and the timber industry. Once the three phases are complete, the SWW project will protect over 23,000 acres through CONSERVATION EASEMENTS that will enhance the local economy by protecting more than 2,500 regional jobs. It will also support plants and wildlife, protect aquatic ecosystems, and help to ensure future supplies of clean and plentiful drinking water. The Mallory Swamp (the match tract) EASEMENT will consolidate a 55,000-acre block of conservation lands. The phased acquisition of the Forest Legacy funded San Pedro Forest 1 (SPF1) and 2 EASEMENTS will conserve a large portion of Florida's largest privately-held roadless area, serving as an ecological greenway for Florida's black bear population, as well as two federally listed and numerous other species.

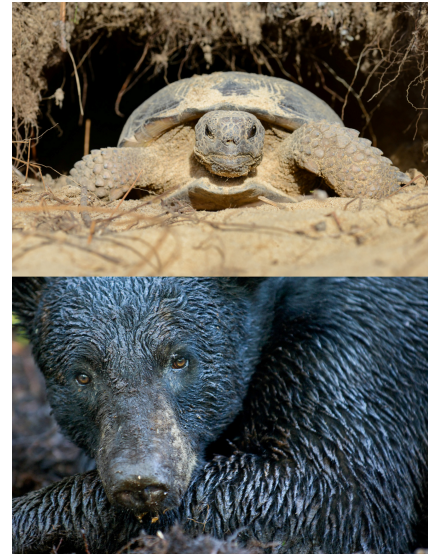


Within crucial wood supplying region and largest privately-held roadless area. (Photo by Todd McNew)

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS – TIMBER:** The entire SWW is located within a four-county region in which the timber industry supports 1,969 jobs and infuses about \$1.4 billion into the local economy (University of Florida) - all within a region containing a total population of 89,000.
- SPF1 contains nearly 4,000 acres of managed slash pine plus additional harvestable acreage, producing timber for seven mills within 75 miles that employ a total of more than 2,500 people. Several hundred are also employed by logging companies that harvest and transport timber.
- Managed pine on SPF1 generates about 20,000 tons of pine saw logs and pulpwood annually. The average forest Site Index [(SI) measures site productivity for growing timber] of the SWW is 70 at 25 years. The typical range for published slash pine SI curves is 30 to 80, so 70 is in the top quartile.
- The entire SWW are third-party certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and are enrolled in Florida's Silviculture Best Management Practices Program to ensure the long-term viability of timber harvesting.
- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS – NON-TIMBER:** Four hunt clubs (more than 100 members) lease sections of SPF1. They purchase ammunition, food, gasoline, lodging and more – boosting the local economy. The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies estimates that the average hunter spends \$1,896/year.
- Based on average spending per hunter, members of these clubs collectively spend an estimated \$190,000 per year – much of it within the region. Since the land will remain private, local property taxes for SPF1 amounting to approximately \$15,000 per year (in 2015) will also continue to be paid.
- **THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT:** The entire SWW and SPF1 specifically provide habitat for two federally-listed species - the eastern indigo snake and wood stork.
- The entire SWW and SPF1 specifically also provide habitat for six state-listed species including gopher tortoise, Sherman's fox squirrel, Suwannee cooter, snowy egret, white ibis and little blue heron.
- **FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES:** The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has identified SPF1 as a Strategic Habitat Conservation Area for Florida black bear and American swallow-tailed kite as well as the above-mentioned six state-listed species.
- Part of the largest privately-owned (and mostly unprotected) roadless area remaining in state, SPF1 contains under-represented (unprotected) rare natural communities, including mesic and wet flatwoods, identified in Florida's Conservation Needs Assessment as highest priority for land conservation.
- Due to habitat values and status as a critical linkage area, especially for Florida black bear, the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project, a partnership of state and federal agencies, universities, NGOs, and private sector has categorized SPF1 as a priority one (of five) natural resource.
- **WATER SUPPLY, AQUATIC HABITAT AND WATERSHED PROTECTION:** The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) has identified SPF1 and its more than 5,000 acres of wetlands a top conservation priority due to its key location within San Pedro Bay (a large wetlands complex - not an actual bay).
- San Pedro Bay is at the headwaters of a vast wetland system spanning 900 square miles that leads to the coastal river systems along the Gulf.
- Per the SRWMD, water resource values of the SWW are significant, influencing the Floridian Aquifer, tens of springs, the Suwannee River and coastal rivers system. Conservation of SPF1 will positively



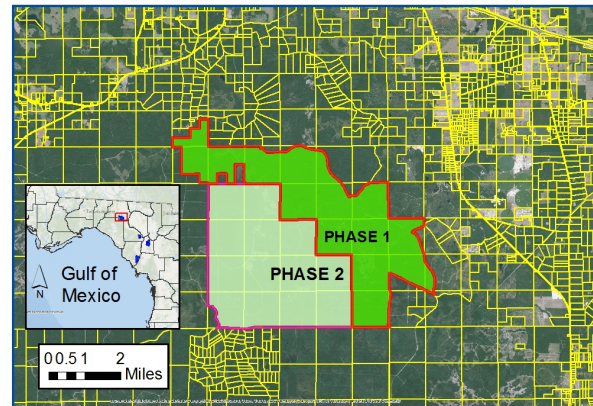
SWW provides critical habitat for the Threatened gopher tortoise, FL black bear. (Photo by Carlton Ward)

influence these hydrological systems.

- SRWMD has identified the entire SWW as a high priority since nearly all is within moderate to high quality aquifer recharge zones - crucial to maintaining regional springs and drinking water.
- Protecting the SPF1 will prevent conversion to more intensive agriculture or residential uses that would harm regional springs and water quality downstream in the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge and Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve (both about 25 miles southwest as the crow flies).
- The nearby (about eight miles from SPF1) and downstream Suwannee River is one of the largest free-flowing rivers in the Southeast. Starting in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp, it winds 246 miles to the Gulf of Mexico near the town of Suwannee, Florida.
- PUBLIC ACCESS and SCENIC: A preferred route for the westward expansion of the Florida National Scenic Trail passes through the SPF1. This would eliminate a lengthy road walk and provide access to and up-close views of several miles of working forest by users of the newly-expanded trail.
- HISTORIC/CULTURAL: The nearby Suwannee River and springs have attracted human occupants for millennia, as evidenced by prehistoric artifacts (8,500–1,000BC) found a mile to the east. More sites are likely to be found in the upland areas of SWW, per the Florida Division of Historical Resources.

Threatened

- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** The entire SWW lack any legal or regulatory restrictions that would prevent conversion, fragmentation or parcelization for agricultural, recreational or residential uses.
- Between 2010-2015, per United States Forest Service data, Florida's forests were converted to other uses at an average rate of 102 acres per day.
- **LAND AND LANDOWNER'S CIRCUMSTANCE:** The investment-group landowner is conservation-minded and motivated to partner on easements; however, it plans to sell the SPF1 property within ten years to maximize its investment.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** The entire SWW is within a state-designated "Rural Area of Opportunity" and is promoted as "Florida's Rising Region" for affordable land, abundance of transportation infrastructure (interstates 10, 75), accessible airports and multiple seaports including the Port of Jacksonville.
- Given its location less than a 15 minute drive from Interstate 10 exit 258, off of County Road 53, growth pressure is strong on SPF1. Residential, commercial and high-intensity agriculture are encroaching from the north and east.
- Land to the south of SPF1 has been subdivided into 40-acre +/- recreational lots. Access to these lots is already causing management problems related to encroachment and sharing of access roads. Another subdivision (lots of 100-300 acres) lies along the northern boundary.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** Access to paved roads with utilities via a less than one-half mile right-of-way would facilitate parcelization of SPF1 for agricultural, residential and recreational uses. Zoning is Agriculture I, allowing one homestead per 40 acres.
- Despite the preponderance of wetlands and the rich mix of natural resources on site, SPF1 has, all total, the potential for subdivision into more than 200 lots.
- Matching funds from the State's easement program would allow conversion to other agricultural uses, but Forest Legacy restrictions will limit use to forest management and recreational activities over the entire SWW project area.



Disappearing forests and encroaching development surrounding San Pedro Forest. (Photo by Scott Taylor)

Strategic

- **CONSERVATION PLAN - NATIONAL:** The entire SWW is within the greater project area of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program proposed FY17 "Gulf of Mexico - Forest to Sea" project. The region is currently The Conservation Fund's primary focus area in Florida and south Georgia due in part to this proposed project.
- Most of the SWW, including a majority of SPF1, lies within the Middle Suwannee River Area Watershed, a focus area for NRCS's overall Gulf Initiative efforts. By preventing conversion, the placement of these easements will help NRCS to realize goals of reducing (or avoiding added) organics, sedimentation and pollution from agricultural operations in the focus area and the Gulf of Mexico.
- The tie-in with the Middle Suwannee Watershed also meshes with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council's Comprehensive Plan for Restoring the Gulf Coast's Ecosystem and Economy which includes plans to reduce nutrient loading downstream into the Big Bend coastal region, containing one of the two largest contiguous seagrass beds in the continental U.S.
- The entire SWW project is located within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Big Bend Watershed focal area, described in its 2013 Vision for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico Watershed. The placement of these easements will help fulfill one of the eight associated conservation strategies to "conserve working lands."
- A preferred route for the westward expansion of the Florida National Scenic Trail passes through SPF1. Securing this conservation easement could assist anticipated expansion of and buffer the trail.
- **CONSERVATION PLAN – STATE:** Due primarily to the wetlands and natural communities within, and SWW's location between two major rivers that drain into the Gulf, two additional State agencies that identified SWW as a priority for conservation are the Florida Department of Agriculture (Rural and Family Lands Protection Program) and the Department of Environmental Protection (Florida Forever Program).
- The entire SWW project has been included in the 2017 update of the SRWMD's Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan. Conservation of the SWW will help address watershed challenges by protecting resources, creating partnerships to support the region and leveraging funding. SRWMD is also interested in the potential to host water resource development projects on-site.
- **COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS:** Downstream, the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge protects one of the largest undeveloped river delta-estuarine systems in the nation. Conservation of SPF1 and the overall SWW project will protect water quality in the Refuge (about 25 miles southwest).
- Protection of the entire SWW will conserve wildlife habitat, resulting in greater numbers of wildlife and enhancing recreation on contiguous and nearby conservation lands owned and managed (or easements monitored) by the FWC, Department of Agriculture, SRWMD and a private mitigation bank.
- Protection of the match tract (Mallory Swamp) builds upon the SRWMD's recent acquisition of the adjacent 31,000-acre Mallory Swamp Restoration Area. Along with nearly 20,000 acres of other contiguous state lands, conservation of the match tract would consolidate about 55,000 acres of conserved land reaching to within one-half mile of conserved lands along the Suwannee River.



Provides crucial aquifer recharge areas for regional drinking water supplies. (Photo by SRWMD)

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	1
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	0
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	5

Supporting Parties

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson; Florida Forest Service; Suwannee River Water Management District; The Conservation Fund; The Longleaf Alliance; Florida Audubon; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Defenders of Wildlife; Van Aernam Timber Management, Inc.; North Florida Timber Dealers, Inc.; M.A. Ragoni, Inc.; Knothole Timber, LLC; Klausner Lumber One; and U.S. Forest Service, National Forests in Florida (Florida National Scenic Trail).

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