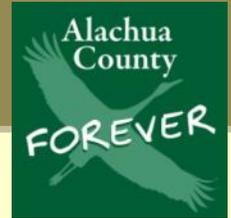




TOUCHSTONES



Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, Land Conservation Division
408 West University Avenue Suite 106, Gainesville, Florida 32601
www.alachuacountyforever.us ▪ landconservation@alachuacounty.us ▪ 352-264-6800

Merger Talks in the Air

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

Alachua County Open Space & Parks Superintendent Robert Avery has retired after a long career with Florida State Parks and Alachua County. For a couple of years, his impending retirement prompted discussions among Public Works and Environmental Protection staffs about merging the Public Works Parks and Recreation Division into the Environmental Protection's Land Conservation Division. While initially one may wonder why anyone would consider this merger, after some examination of the two programs, we recognized some commonalities and some opportunities for synergy. Mr. Avery's retirement was one of the opportunities; the other is the ACF Program's transition to full-time stewardship and recreation. This will necessitate additional skillsets and tools.

Part of the core mission for both programs is providing safe, useable outdoor recreation opportunities. Parks provides those opportunities in a more formal structured setting, land conservation at a more primitive and self-guided manner. Both require infrastructure and Parks has competent capital improvements staff that can assist with designing and implementing boardwalks, overlooks and bridges on conservation lands. Nearly 1,000 of the 1,200 acres of Parks can be considered environmentally sensitive and in need of a conservation biologist's touch. ACF staff has already worked on restoration projects and prescribed fire at Poe Springs Park.

The vacant Parks Superintendent position is being considered for reclassification to a Public Education Program Coordinator. It is envisioned that this person will formalize the recreation programming, education, volunteer coordination and outreach work that is done by the conservation staff freeing them to focus more fully on site restoration and maintenance. Long term, as the cities continue to grow and annex they will inherit some of the County parks. This creates opportunities to re-train and re-assign some of the Parks crew to work on conservation projects providing much-needed assistance in the woods.

The merger has a lot of moving pieces including staff positions budgets, and in which department we will reside. All that being said, the merger can be accomplished with no increase to the County budget. The final decision is in the hands of the County Commission as it deliberates its Fiscal Year 2014 budget. If it is approved, it will take effect on October 1, 2013. Stay tuned!

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Kelly McPherson working the Prescribed Fire at Poe Springs

ACF Dashboard

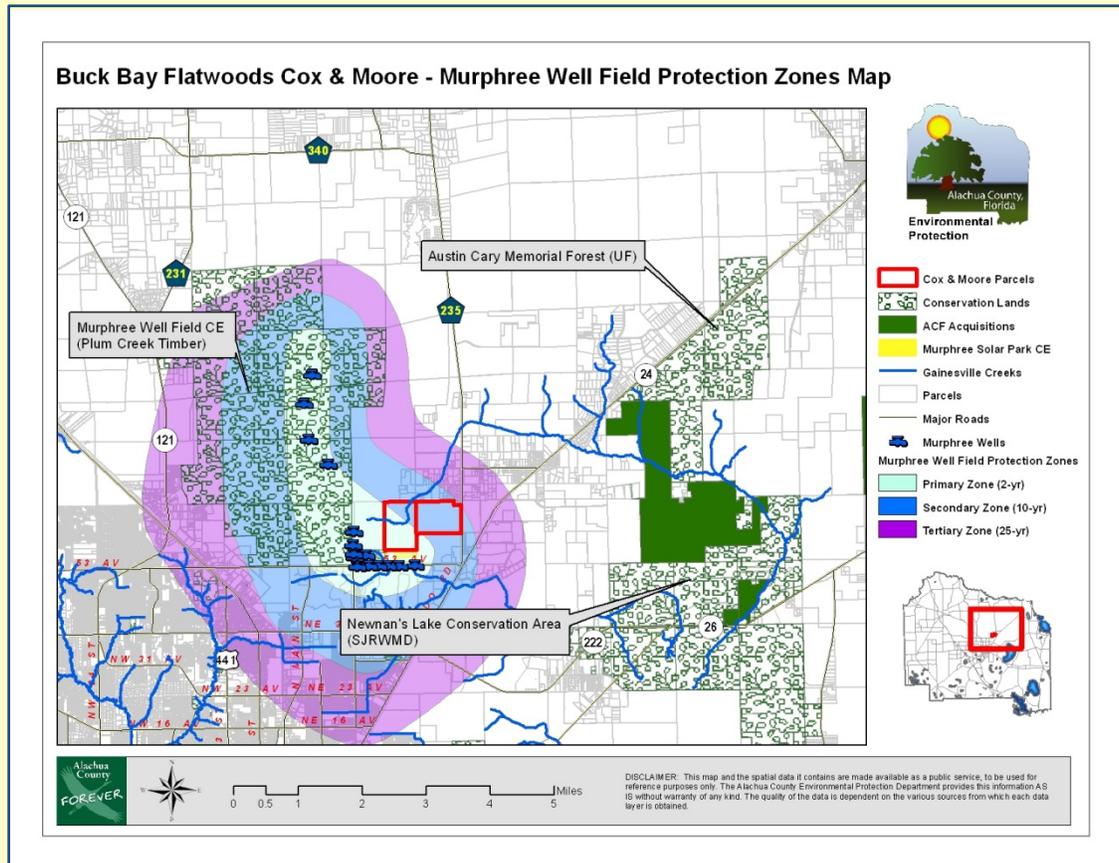
Acquisition List protected:	22,385
With Direct ACF funding:	18,708
Remaining on List:	28,071
Under contract:	543
Value of land protected:	\$98,411,556
County share:	\$37,328,306
Partner share:	\$61,083,250
Managed by County:	10,665
Managed by Partners:	11,720
Percent Acreage Open or Opening soon:	76%
As of: 7/23/2013	

This is an electronic newsletter distributed to anyone interested in following the Alachua County Forever Program. To be added to the distribution list, please click [here](#).
The information in this Newsletter is available in alternate formats upon request. Back issues are available on our [website](#).

"What is the extinction of the Condor, to a child who has never known a wren?" – Robert Michael Pyle.

Protecting Our Drinking Water

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor



Above: The Buck Bay Flatwoods (Cox & Moore) Preserve and the Murphree Wellfield Protection Zones

Our last acquisition was the 463-acre Buck Bay Flatwoods (Cox & Moore) property, located on NE 38th Street (County Road 225), north of NE 53rd Avenue. It consists of two parcels which were managed for timber production. The City of Gainesville's Murphree Water Plant and Wellfield is close to the west edge of the property. The wellfield is the public drinking water supply for the City of Gainesville. The source of the water supplying the wellfield is the Floridan aquifer. In this area of Alachua County, water in the Floridan aquifer is protected by confining sediments of the Hawthorn Group whose low permeability aids in preventing the downward migration of contaminants. However, wells, improperly constructed or that exist in a deteriorated state, which penetrate these confining units may serve as conduits for contaminants to migrate into the aquifer. Chapter 355 of the Alachua County Code establishes wellfield protection regulations that govern land uses, development, facilities that store hazardous materials, hazardous cargo transport, and well construction and abandonment will ensure protection of groundwater that is used for public supply. The Buck Bay property lies within the primary and secondary protection zone of the well field and are located within one-quarter mile of existing production wells. The zones roughly approximate travel times for groundwater to the wells and have a tiered set of restrictive regulations from the Tertiary Zone increasing to the Primary Zone. The eastern 40 acres of this property was zoned industrial which may have led to all kinds of interesting land use conflicts down the road. Fortunately with this acquisition, that conflict has been averted. The property owners also generously donated the standing timber crop on the property significantly reducing the price we had to pay for the land.

The property itself consists primarily of mesic pine flatwoods interspersed with forested wetlands. Most of the planted stands are slash pine. However past silviculture was practiced lightly and has encouraged abundant and diverse native groundcover. Longleaf pine are scattered throughout the property, and are naturally regenerating. Active gopher tortoise burrows are also located within the mesic flatwoods community. Wetlands on the property consist of floodplain swamp and bottomland forest associated with Hatchet Creek which runs for 4,000 feet through the property, and several isolated dome swamps.

This is the forty-ninth acquisition by ACF and the twentieth acquisition using the Wild Spaces and Public Places Surtax, approved by the voters in 2008 to extend the ACF Program. We expect to open this property to the public in a few years and will highlight its contribution to protecting our drinking water supply.

Barr Hammock Preserve: Snake Education through Functional Art

By Kevin Ratkus, Environmental Specialist

Alachua County Forever enjoys incorporating functional art and environmental education in its Preserve infrastructure. The recent public opening of Levy Prairie at Barr Hammock Preserve was no exception. Since the entire trail loop surrounds a wet prairie of over 1,000 acres, your chances of seeing a snake that enjoys living around water during your hike is rather high. This was a great opportunity showcase the difference between the most common misidentified water-loving snakes in this area: Cottonmouths (*Agkistrodon piscivorus conanti*) & Florida Water Snakes (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*). Since one of the grants awarded for the purchase of Barr Hammock Preserve required a bike rack located at the trailhead, we used this as the snake prop. The bike rack was fabricated so that one half resembles a venomous Cottonmouth Snake and the other half a non-venomous Florida Water Snake. Since one of the best differentiating features between these two snakes is the head shape, we searched for a local detail oriented artist who can work with metal. Raymond Rawls of Raymond Rawls Design, LLC, was an ideal match for the project since he specializes in natural history museum installations. Raymond fabricated the two heads from individual pieces of sheet metal and hammered them into shape before welding them together into realistic head shapes. After the rack was powdercoated, Raymond painted on the snake pattern detail so the metal rack took on a lifelike appearance of these two slithering reptiles. A sign will soon be installed adjacent to the bike rack that will assist the public with identification and also inform visitors on interesting facts about these two slippery snake species. So, now, as visitors walk the trail, they will be able to differentiate between these similar looking reptiles sunning themselves along the water's edge. Also, look forward to more creative projects as ACF opens up the future phases of Barr Hammock Preserve's wild acreage!

To learn more about the artist:
<http://www.raymondrawls.com>



Raymond hammering a bend into a section of the snake heads.



The cottonmouth side and the Florida Water Snake of the rack.

Critter Corner

After a recent prescribed burn in Phifer Flatwoods Preserve, ACF staff observed and documented the presence of gopher frog (*Lithobates capito* also known as *Rana capito*) in the freshly-burned mesic pine flatwoods. The gopher frog is a Species of Special Concern in Florida, and is tracked by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory. Gopher frogs depend on fire-maintained dry, sandy uplands which contain isolated wetlands or ponds. They are nocturnal creatures, taking cover during the day in holes or burrows in the sand – they especially like gopher tortoise burrows. In our area, gopher frogs migrate from the uplands to the ponds for breeding from October through April.



Gopher frog taking cover in the mouth of a gopher tortoise burrow in Phifer Flatwoods Preserve. Photo by Michael Drummond.



The bike rack installed at the Barr Hammock Preserve

Kill-a-Weed Corner

An occasional series to help our neighbors steward our public places

By Kevin Ratkus, Environmental Specialist

Making Lemonade Out of Our Lemons



Common Name: Camphor Tree

Scientific Name: *Cinnamomum camphora*

Origin: Southeast Asia

Description: Camphor is an evergreen tree with an average height of 30 feet, but can reach 100 feet. Leaves are dark green and shiny with an oval to elliptical shape, arranged alternately on the stem. The bark is variable, from scaly to irregularly furrowed with flat-topped ridges. In winter/spring it produces an abundance of fleshy, dark blue to black fruit 1 to 1.5 cm in diameter. It is frequently found in residential areas and spreads to dry to moist natural areas in bird droppings. Smell a crushed leaf and it is easy to identify by the strong camphor scent.

Suggested Treatment: Pull seedlings by hand. Mature trees should be cut down as close to the ground surface as feasible. Immediately paint just inside the bark (cambium) with a 50/50% glyphosate & water solution. Paint treatment onto the clean & smoothly cut stump with a disposable paintbrush. Note: Herbicide brand names could be Round-up or Rodeo. The purchased strength of the product's active ingredient, glyphosate, should be at 41% (before you dilute it 50% with water).

Camphor is a Florida Category 1 non-native invasive species.

For more information:

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/101>



What does ACF do with camphor logs?

Alachua County Forever Staff uses larger camphor trees removed from Preserves to build benches and bridges. If kept from having soil contact, its strong natural chemical compounds help the wood weather the elements and insect infestation. Staff takes the problematic tree out of natural areas, turning it into a functional trail amenity and installs an educational sign on the bench, so people can learn more about this invasive plant. This practice promotes sustainability: it's a free material and its use prevents the harvesting of other tree species that may have been selected to build our Preserve infrastructure. So, enjoy these amenities along our trails, and realize there is a little story behind them all.



Split camphor log bridge over creek: Mill Creek



Camphor log bench built into kiosk: Barr Hammock

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Balu Forest. Managed for the County by ACF

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

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Alachua County Commission

Mike Byerly, Chair
Lee Pinkoson, Vice-Chair
Susan Baird
Charles "Chuck" Chestnut IV
Robert "Hutch" Hutchinson

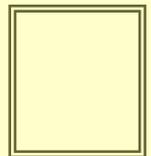
Administration

Betty M. Baker, County Manager
Chris Bird,
Environmental Protection Dept. Director

ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER MISSION

Approved in November 2000 by the voters, to acquire, improve and manage the county's environmentally sensitive lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.

*Alachua County Environmental Protection
Department, Land Conservation Division
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Gainesville, Florida 32601*



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