



NEWSROOM

TNC and Partners Conserve Connected Corridor of Protected Lands and Waters in South Central Florida

Conservation easement on Ravensworth Farms prohibits development and preserves critical habitat and natural systems in the Arbuckle Creek watershed

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MEDIA CONTACTS



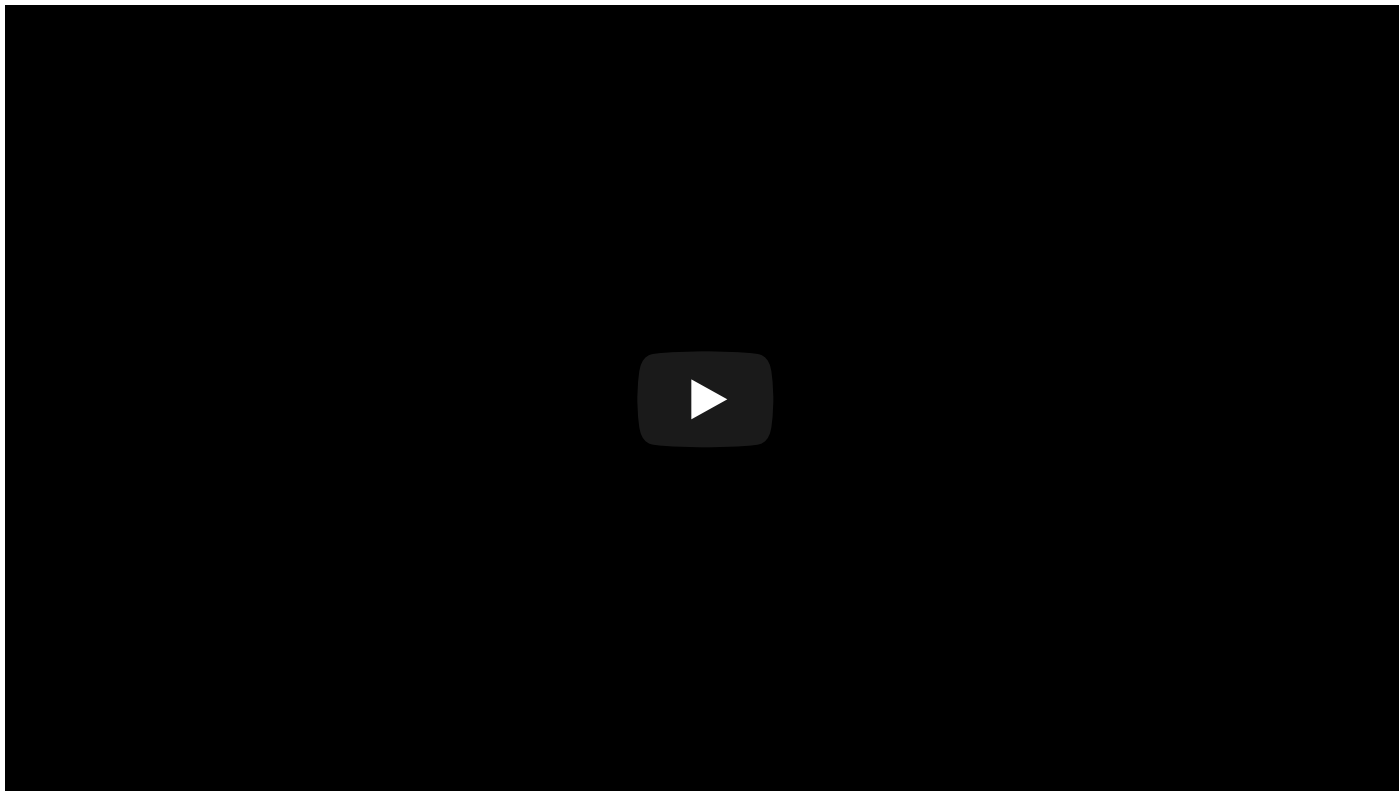
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TNC and partners have completed the protection of the essential and diverse landscape of Ravensworth Farms, a 1,069-acre working cattle ranch located along the eastern edge of the Lake Wales Ridge in Highlands County, Florida. The conservation easement placed on the ranch permanently prohibits development on the property while allowing cattle ranching



operations to continue uninterrupted.

TNC's protection of the property preserves the ranch's role as part of the connected corridor of critical lands that benefit wildlife and supports water flow and storage within the Arbuckle Creek watershed, a critical component of the organization's mission in Florida.



RAVENSWORTH FARMS Join us on a journey to Ravensworth Farms to see the beautiful views and hear the the stories from the partners involved in the protection of this essential and diverse landscape.

The property is a key piece in the network of environmentally important and protected properties in the region. Ravensworth Farms is bordered by other conserved lands and Arbuckle Creek to the east, which separates the property from the 106,000-acre [Avon Park Air Force Range](#). The property is integral to ensuring water quality flowing into the creek and southward toward Lake Istokpoga. It feeds into efforts to protect and buffer the Kissimmee River and other tributaries to Lake Okeechobee, and ultimately the [Everglades](#).

The conservation easement on Ravensworth Farms provides protection for a variety of important habitats including longleaf pine, as well as iconic wildlife such as the [Florida Panther](#), Florida [Black Bear](#), Bald Eagle, Southeastern Fox Squirrel, [Gopher Tortoise](#)

Crested Caracara, and Roseate Spoonbill.

“Securing a conservation easement on Ravensworth Farms is integral to our continued push to preserve lands and water resources critical to the health of Florida’s environment, wildlife, economy and people. Lands and waters that would otherwise be under threat from development and other non-conservation uses,” said Temperince Morgan, executive director of TNC in Florida. “We are grateful to the landowners for their commitment to conservation and thank our partners at the [U.S. Air Force](#)/Department of Defense and USDA’s [Natural Resource Conservation Services](#), as well as our donors, for their tremendous support in this shared mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.”

The \$2.99 million [conservation easement](#) purchase—which was funded by TNC donor funds and through awards from the [U.S. Department of Defense](#) (DoD), through the U.S. Air Force’s implementation of DoD’s [Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration](#) (REPI) Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [Agricultural Land Easements](#) (ALE) Program—is the most recent in a string of conservation easements acquired by TNC. This acquisition will retain the natural agricultural condition of the tract, maintain and conserve the water quality of the wetland areas, and limit any development of Ravensworth Farms.

“These easements keep family farms and ranches intact and prevent development while protecting environmental quality and supporting military readiness,” said Juan Hernandez, NRCS Florida State Conservationist.

“Our family has treasured this land for nearly five decades and we knew it was important to conserve the natural resources that are unique to the property,” said David Dalton, President, Ravensworth Farms, Inc. “We are pleased to be able to work with TNC, DoD, and NRCS to protect our legacy with a conservation easement to safeguard it from future development.”

With the property’s location on the western banks of Arbuckle Creek, and its large portion

of Palmetto Creek which drains eastward into Arbuckle Creek, the protection of Ravensworth Farms advances TNC's [water conservation efforts](#). TNC and its partners continue to work to protect the watershed, which has faced threats from high intensity agriculture and overdevelopment.

Protection of the Ravensworth Farms tract builds on TNC's decades-long history of effective conservation efforts in the region. This includes the culmination, just over a year ago, of the protection of the 5,100-acre [Rafter T Ranch](#). Rafter T Ranch lies approximately a mile and a half to the south of Ravensworth Farms, connected by ranchland protected by a conservation easement held by the USDA NRCS. This region of Central Florida is part of the Everglades watershed, which contains some of the oldest natural habitats and most biodiverse lands in the state and is critical to aquifer recharge and water supply to the Everglades.

The protection of Ravensworth Farms supports the collaborative conservation effort designated by the Avon Park Air Force Range (APAFR) Sentinel Landscape in which the property is located. Known for its rich biodiversity within the [Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge](#) and Conservation Area, the 1.7 million acres is of high priority for improvement of water quality, quantity and storage capacity, outdoor recreation, and education.

“The conservation easement on Ravensworth Farms is a great example of the power of partnerships and the goals of the APAFR REPI and Sentinel Landscape Programs. It showcases years of work and a rare win, win, win opportunity,” said Charles ‘Buck’ MacLaughlin, Range Operations Officer, Avon Park Air Force Range. Promoting cattle operations on Ravensworth Farms while at the same time preserving wetlands and important habitat protects the resiliency of the entire region. It benefits APAFR's own internal conservation efforts and ensures compatible land use within the range's military training footprint.

The protection of Ravensworth farms bolsters the alignment between the DoD's REPI and NRCS' ALE programs. Requirements, goals, and funds of each agency were combined to

support the same conservation endeavor, achieving outcomes that met the needs of both agencies—conservation of agricultural land and water resources and strengthening the Air Force mission by protecting land around the high value military testing and training area.

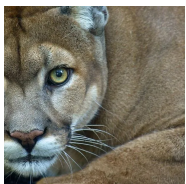
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RAVENSWORTH WILDLIFE



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