

\$500,000 Grant Awarded To Polk For Conservation Easement

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Polk County was awarded a \$500,000 grant for the purchase of a conservation easement. (Colin Miner/Patch)

POLK COUNTY, FL — A \$500,000 grant was awarded to Polk County for the purchase of a conservation easement in Southeast Polk, near the Avon Park Air Force Bombing Range, according to Polk County Board of County Commissioners.

The county, following board approval, has two years to plan, negotiate and spend the funds to purchase easements in a buffer, known as a Military Influence Planning Area, around Avon Park Air Force Range. The application process for the grant was about a year in the making.

“Polk County submitted the application in partnership with Avon Park Air Force Range and Central Florida Regional Planning Council,” Tabitha Biehl, Polk’s land and water natural areas manager said. “This award would not have been possible without their support. Our partnership works together to create a buffer around the Avon Park Air Force Range in Polk that enables the continuation of military training exercises and protects Polk’s working landscapes and wilderness areas.”

Conservation easement purchases like this place limits on the development of land and help protect the existing environment on the property, while property owners retain full ownership of the land, officials said.

In the case of this project, the easement purchases will protect the land buffer around the bombing range from development that could hinder military training exercises, the county commission said.

The next step in the process will be for Polk County to enter a grant agreement with the Florida Defense Support Task Force and the funds are administered through the Florida Enterprise, Inc., a nonprofit organization, according to officials.