

Land purchase will help preserve the Florida Wildlife Corridor

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Red Hills Conservation Area

It's the second major purchase since state officials put a

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The Florida cabinet on Tuesday approved buying nearly 17,000 acres of land that are key connectors to help wildlife migrate through the state. It's the second major purchase since state officials put a priority on preserving natural land in those wildlife corridors.

Seven parcels of land were approved for purchase that are part of the **Florida Wildlife Corridor**. That's natural land that is considered vital to letting wildlife migrate, reducing the possibility of inbreeding or even extinction.

The \$32 million will be used to preserve ancient Florida scrub on the Lake Wales Ridge, land around the Everglades, longleaf pine forest and help protect endangered species like the Florida panther.

Several environmental groups lauded the move.



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future generations," said Jason Laursen, chief conservation officer of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation. "This \$32 million public investment is a huge step toward preserving key linkages throughout the Florida Wildlife Corridor."

The purchase comes after the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act became law in July, targeting land within the corridor for protection. In September, nearly 20,000 acres were approved for acquisition.

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Map of the parcels approved for purchase Tuesday

Here's the seven parcels approved for purchase:

- The **Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem** Florida Forever Project conservation easement contains two properties that lie within the Florida Ecological Greenways Network and represent the last opportunity to protect the highest concentration of narrowly endemic scrub plants and animals on the Lake Wales Ridge, many of which are in jeopardy of extinction. The easement will be funded in full (\$1.47 million) by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and will be monitored by the DEP's Office of Environmental Services.

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Lake Wales Ridge

- Norias Plantation, part of the **Red Hills Conservation** Florida Forever Project, is a conservation easement that will protect biodiversity and natural communities, restore, and maintain the natural functions of the land, water, and wetlands systems of this Red Hills region. The easement will be funded in full (\$4.7 million) by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and will be monitored by the DEP's Division of State Lands Office of Environmental Services.

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Red Hills Conservation Area

- The land acquisition in the Wolfe Creek Florida Forever Project is part of the North corridor connection from the state forest to Whiting Field Naval Air Station and other state-owned conservation lands. This project funding includes over \$2.9 million in USFS Forest Legacy Program (FLP) federal funding and is administered by FDACS-Florida Forest Service. This property will be managed as part of the Blackwater River State Forest and an additional grant from the Knobloch Foundation in the amount of \$1.8 million. The remaining funding will come from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

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Wolfe Creek Forest

- Chaparral Slough, part of the **Fisheating Creek Ecosystem** Florida Forever Project, is a conservation easement that will link Okaloacoochee Slough, Big Cypress Swamp, Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area and Lake Okeechobee. The 11-mile-long, one-mile-wide project area is key to ensuring the survival of the Florida panther, the swallow-tailed kite, and many other rare, endangered, and migratory species. This easement is funded in full (\$10.6 million) through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and will be monitored by the DEP's Office of Environmental Services.

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Fisheating Creek ecosystem

- The **Wakulla Springs Protection Zone** Florida Forever Project acquisition will work to protect land above the conduits that feeds the caverns and springs which connect one of the largest and deepest artesian springs in the world to Apalachicola National Forest. This land provides habitat for native Florida species and will ensure important landscape linkages and additional public access within Wakulla State Forest. Project funding includes 75% in FLP funding (\$1.6 million), with the remaining 25% funded through the Department of Environmental Protection. This property will be managed by the Departments of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Florida Forest Service as part of the Wakulla State Forest.



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Wakulla Springs

- **Todd Clemons Family, LLC Ranch**, part of the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, is a conservation easement that will preserve the numerous creeks on the property that contribute to the flow of the Kissimmee River, as well as provide a habitat for a population of sandhill cranes. This project will be funded in part (89% or \$2 million) by a grant from the U.S. Air Force Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative, a program in partnership with the Avon Park Air Force Range's Sentinel Landscape program. The remaining funds will come through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

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Todd Clemens family lands

- The **Charlie Creek Cattle Co.**, part of the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, is a conservation easement that will bring the percentage of protected land within the ranch to 67%. The property includes bottomland hardwood, wetlands, and wildlife travel corridors through which travel gopher tortoise, Sherman's fox squirrel, burrowing owl, swallow-tailed kite, and others. This program will be funded in part (50% or \$700,000) by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, with the remaining 50% funded through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Charlie Creek, a tributary of the Peace River, flows through the Charlie Creek project.

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Charlie Creek Cattle Co.

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Steve Newborn

Steve Newborn is a WUSF reporter and producer at WUSF covering environmental issues and politics in the Tampa Bay area.

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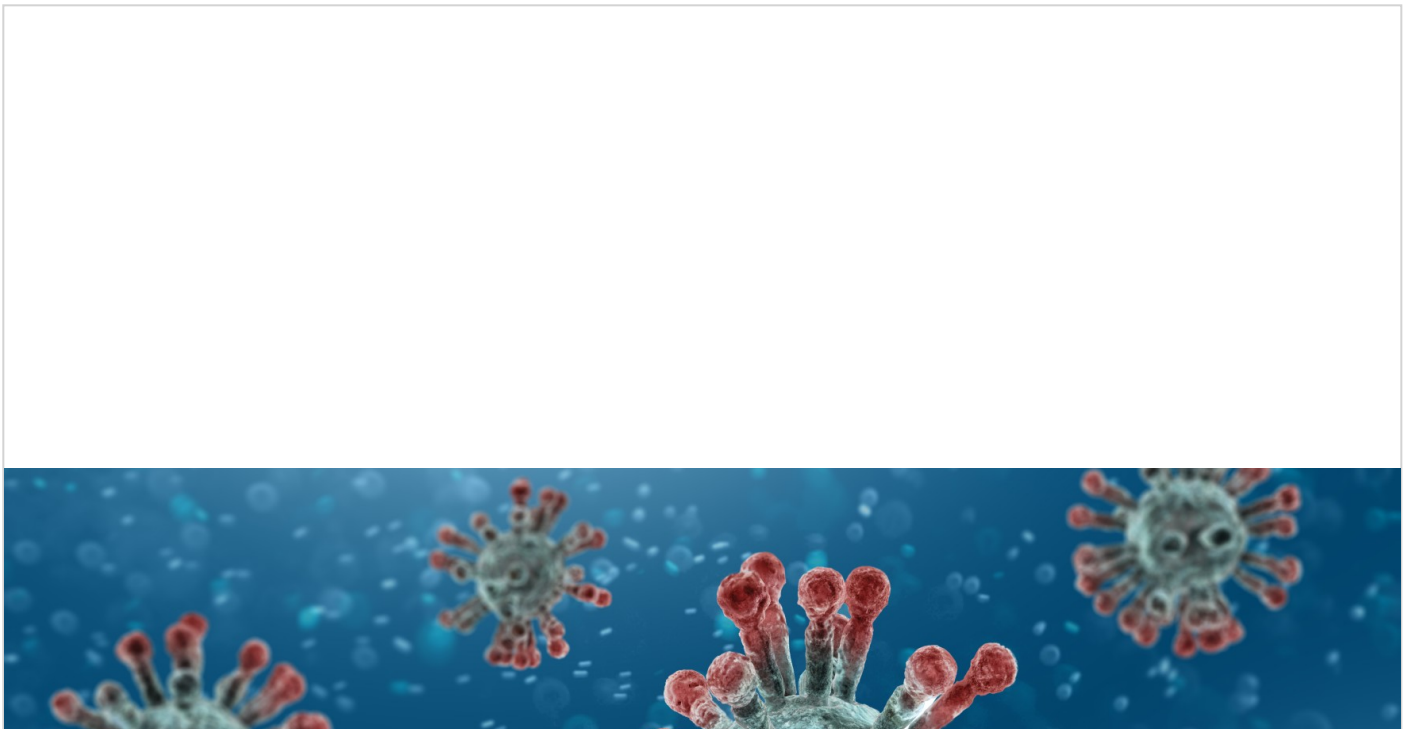
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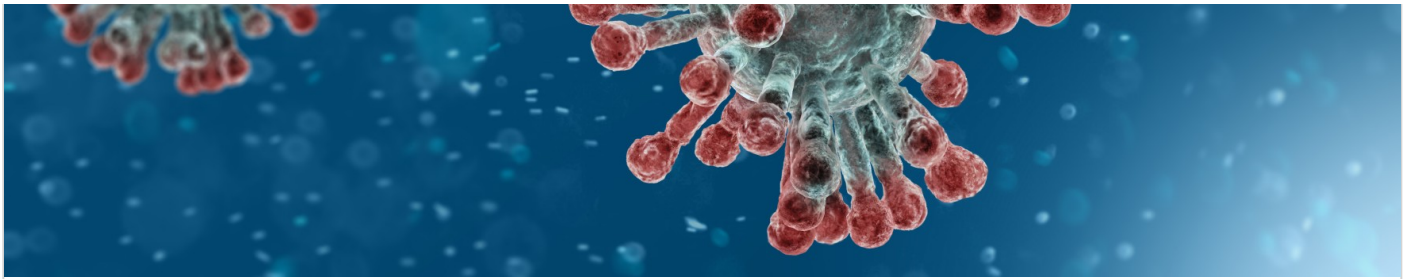


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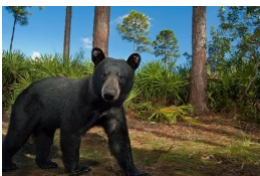
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