

# Myakka Ranchlands

Sarasota County

Less-Than-Fee

## Purpose for State Acquisition

This project is composed of two areas, on opposite sides of the Myakka River State Park, that connect and protect a contiguous system of conservation areas, forming a corridor of connection among state, county and non-profit conservation lands in southwest Florida. Acquiring these lands would increase the number of acres protected with fee-simple purchase (802 acres) and with alternatives to fee-simple acquisition (17,941 acres), contributing to building landscape-size protection areas of more than 50,000 acres, by adding to the existing 121,000 acres of conservation land already protecting the Myakka River and Charlotte Harbor Estuary. It would protect lands that are documented to have rare plants and animals, and protect waters of the state and functional wetlands.

## Manager

Sarasota County Natural Resources, a division of the Sarasota County government, is recommended as the manager of 802 acres of the project once it is acquired, with assistance and cooperation from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and Myakka River State Park. The rest of the proposed project, 17,941 acres in two parcels, is recommended as a less-than-fee acquisition and therefore would be monitored through the Office of Environmental Services (OES), Division of State Lands (DSL).

## General Description

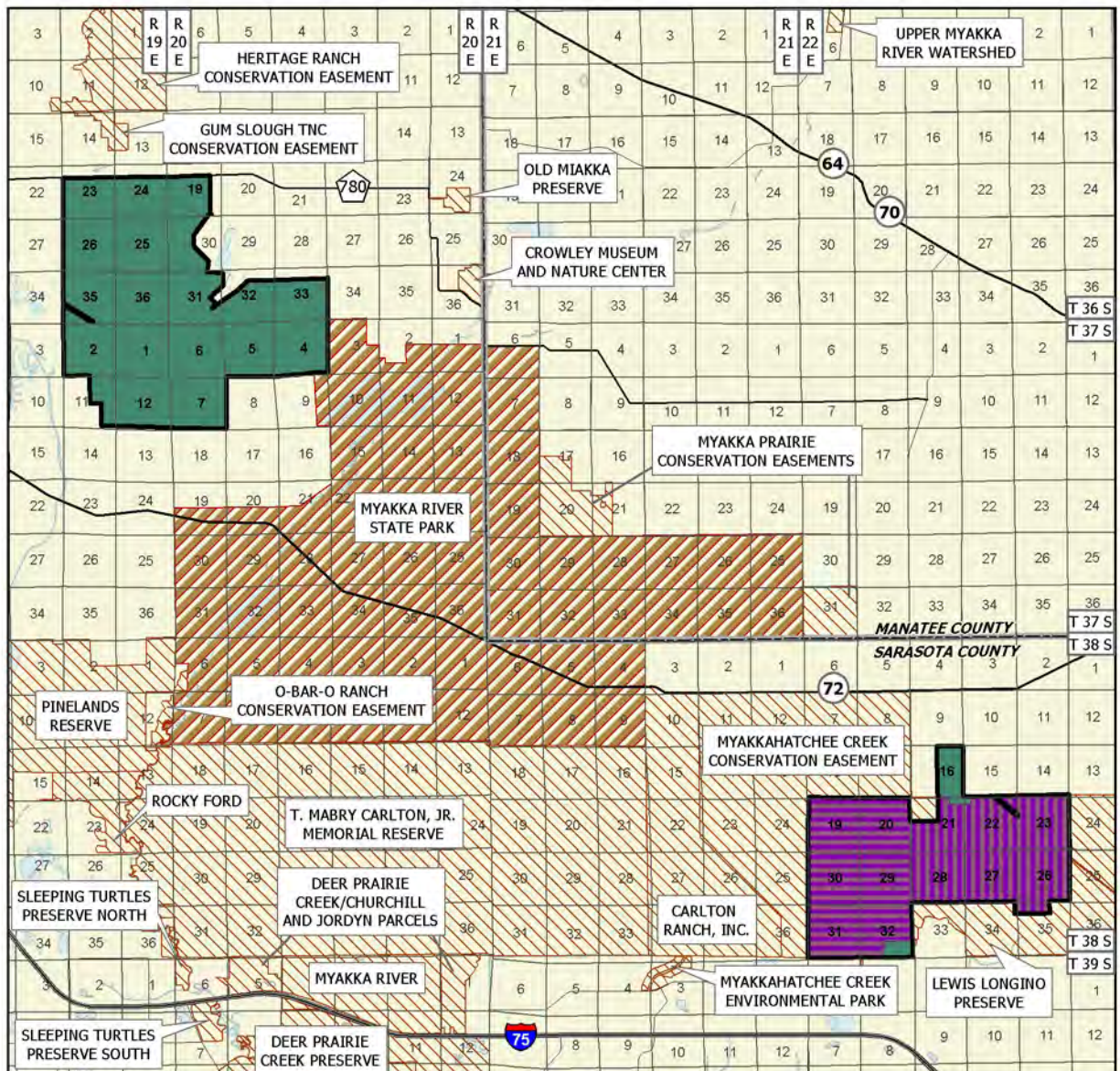
The Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever proposal is composed of 18,737 (GIS) acres, consisting of three ownerships in two disjunct tracts: the Hi Hat Ranch in

the northwest (10,770 acres) and the combined Walton and Longino Ranches in the southeast (7,969 acres). The Hi Hat tract is about five miles east of the city limits of Sarasota in the northern part of Sarasota County, and abuts the Myakka River State Park. The Longino/Walton tract is about 13 aerial miles southeast of Hi Hat Ranch, between State Road 72 and I-75 in eastern Sarasota County. It is part of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Florida Forever Work Plan. The eastern edge of the tract abuts the Lewis Longino Preserve, a 3,895-acre conservation easement purchased by Sarasota County and the SWFWMD to protect regional water supplies.

The three working ranches support ongoing cattle operations, sod farms, row crops, citrus groves, pine and cabbage palm harvesting, and hunting. The Hi Hat tract includes 2,500 acres of wastewater spray field owned by the City of Sarasota for which the owners have rights to purchase back from the City. The Hi Hat owners also retain a permit from the SWFWMD for withdrawal of 6-7 million gallons of groundwater per day at the ranch. All of the properties are crisscrossed with internal roads, access ways and ditches associated with ranch and farming operations. About 53 percent of the ranchlands, combined, have been converted to pasture, agriculture, or various uses such as impoundments, canals, roads, and buildings. The majority of these areas are improved pasture. The remaining natural areas (47 percent of the properties, combined) support a mosaic of mesic flatwoods, depression and basin marshes, prairie and hydric hammocks. The quality of these natural communities is variable, depending upon the fire history and levels of physical disturbances or

Myakka Ranchlands FNAI Elements	
Gopher Tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed Kite	G5/S2
Florida Sandhill Crane	G5T2T3/S2S3
Crested Caracara	G5/S2
Bald Eagle	G5/S3
Least Bittern	G5/S4
6 rare species are associated with the project	

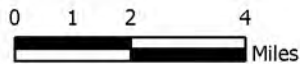
<b>Placed on List</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Project Area (GIS Acres)</b>	<b>18,737</b>
<b>Acres Acquired (GIS)</b>	<b>7,498</b>
<b>at a Cost of</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>Acres Remaining (GIS)</b>	<b>11,239</b>
<b>with Estimated (Tax Assessed) Value of</b>	<b>\$85,657,692</b>



## MYAKKA RANGLANDS

### SARASOTA COUNTY

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands



SEPTEMBER 2010



## Myakka Ranchlands

invasive exotic plant encroachments.

### Public Use

In the 802 acres within the Hi Hat Ranch to be managed by Sarasota County, it is anticipated that some the existing roads and trails may become multi-use trails for hiking and horse back riding.

Longino Ranch and Walton Ranch, and the remainder of Hi Hat Ranch, will likely not have any public access granted under the terms of their conservation easements. Without public access there will not be any public-resource based outdoor recreation potential in these areas.

### Acquisition Planning

On 12/14/2007 the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to add the Myakka Ranchlands to the A list of Florida Forever projects. The application proposes a combination of full-fee and less-than-fee acquisition. Longino Ranch is less-than-fee; Hi-Hat is fee and/or less-than-fee; and Walton Ranch was proposed as fee simple, but the owner is willing to consider it as a less-than-fee acquisition.

On 7/15/2010 Sarasota County purchased fee simple approximately 3,760 acres known as Walton Ranch and sold to the SWFWMD conservation easement rights.

On 8/19/2010 SWFWMD and Sarasota County acquired Longino Ranch Conservation Easement (3,981 acres).

### Coordination

Acquisition of the Myakka Ranchlands would be a shared acquisition along with Sarasota County and the SWFWMD.

### Management Policy Statement

Principal purposes of the project include protection of biodiversity, protection of the quality and natural functions of the land and water systems, availability of sufficient quantities of water and, within the portion to be managed by Sarasota County, provision of resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities. Programs would be oriented towards conservation and protection of wildlife species, and careful control of public uses. The primary land management goals for the management of the tract are to restore, maintain and

protect in perpetuity all native ecosystems; to integrate compatible human use; and to insure long-term viability of populations and species considered rare. This ecosystem and multiple use approach will guide the management activities on this project.

### Management Prospectus

**Qualifications for State Designation** The project's size, diversity, and location make it desirable for use and management compatible with the adjacent state park. The majority of the acreage of this project consists of isolated wetlands in oak hammock and improved pasture supporting an active cattle operation. Approximately 20 percent of the proposal has been converted to cattle operations and spray irrigation. The improved pastures total approximately 160 acres with multiple grass species planted in them. Hi Hat Ranch has been managed for cattle for over 40 years with pastures devoid of most native groundcover and under story species.

**Manager** Sarasota County Natural Resources, a division of the Sarasota County government, is recommended as the manager of the 802 acres of the project once it is acquired, with assistance and cooperation from the Southwest Florida Water Management District and Myakka River State Park. The rest of the proposed project, 17,941 acres in two parcels, is recommended as a less-than-fee acquisition and therefore would be monitored through the Office of Environmental Services, Division of State Lands.

**Conditions affecting intensity of management** Much of the project's former dry prairie and pine flatwoods have been altered by cattle operations and spray irrigation fields. Hi Hat Ranch will fence the 802 acres and remove the above ground spray irrigation equipment at no cost to the project. Hydrological alterations in the form of ditches will be analyzed for potential restoration. Such areas may be restored with native ground covers and canopy. The level of management intensity and related management costs is expected to be minimal to obtain the necessary information and resources to restore and manage this system compatible with the state park. Once this information is obtained and the resources are available, long-term management costs are expected to be low to maintain this area like the adjacent state park.

**Timetable for implementing management, and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure** Once the fee-simple portion of the project is acquired

and assigned for management to Sarasota County, existing trails will be evaluated for nature-based recreation use. After the installation of the fence and removal of the above ground spray irrigation equipment by Hi Hat Ranch at no cost to the project, primitive trails will be opened to hikers. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on resource inventory, providing site security, assessing public and fire management access, and hydrological restoration potential. Inventories of the site's natural resources, threatened and endangered flora and fauna will be conducted to provide a basis for the formulation of a management plan. The numerous roads throughout the property necessitate the development of a road plan to identify which roads will continue to be used for vehicular access by the public, which are required for administrative use, and which are unnecessary for management or access and should be closed. Steps will be taken to insure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously affording protection of sensitive resources.

**Revenue-generating potential** The revenue-generating potential of the portion managed by Sarasota County is expected to be moderately low. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities, if such projects could be economically developed.

**Cooperators in management activities** Sarasota

County proposes to manage the 802-acre section of the project like the adjacent state park and will carry out management activities and coordinate public access and use. Sarasota County will cooperate with and seek the assistance of Myakka River State Park, the SWFWMD and interested parties as appropriate.

**Capital Expenditures** No capital project expenditures will be needed on the parcel managed by Sarasota County, but land management activities such as prescribed fire, vegetative restoration, and primitive public access/use will need to be funded. As more information is gathered and an analysis of the site is completed, Sarasota County intends to include project funds contingent on availability.

**Management costs and sources of revenue** It is anticipated that management funding will come from Sarasota County's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program. Budget needs for initial management are estimated as follows. Annual funding could be lower.

*Updated 4/12/2012*

<b>SALARY (0.1FTE)</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>
<b>EXPENSE</b>	<b><u>\$3,000</u></b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,000</b>