

ALACHUA COUNTY

Office of Planning and Development Staff Report

Chronology:

Application Submitted:	March 26, 2012
Report Released:	May 4, 2012
LPA Hearing:	May 16, 2012
BOCC Transmittal Hearing:	July 10, 2012

Analysis of Request:

Background

Phifer Flatwoods Preserve is owned and managed by Alachua County as part of the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department's (EPD) Land Conservation Program. The Preserve is composed of two separate tracts – Phifer Flatwoods and Phifer Addition. Phifer Flatwoods was acquired with funds from the Alachua County Forever (ACF) Bond and grant funding from the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) on February 10, 2006. Phifer Addition was acquired with funds from the Alachua County Wild Spaces Public Places (WSPP) Surtax on December 15, 2009.

The management plan was developed and approved by the Board of County Commissioners on April 10, 2012 to ensure that Phifer Flatwoods Preserve will be managed and developed in accordance with the goals of the ACF Program, the FCT Grant Contract (Appendix A), and the WSPP Surtax referendum. The requirements imposed by other grant program funds that may be sought for activities associated with the project site shall not conflict with the terms and conditions of the FCT Grant Contract.

NATURAL RESOURCES SUMMARY

Phifer Flatwoods Preserve is a mosaic of pine forests and wetlands that is part of a regional wildlife corridor that connects the Ocala National Forest to the Okefenokee Swamp. Located in the Ocklawaha River watershed, the Preserve contains eleven distinct upland and wetland natural communities in addition to three human-altered landcover types; mesic pine flatwoods is the dominant community type. Wetlands within the Preserve contribute to Lochloosa Creek, which flows into Lake Lochloosa. The Preserve contains habitat that is utilized by thirteen listed or tracked animal species, and five listed plant species are known to occur on the property.

PREVIOUS USES

Although no formal archaeological survey has occurred on Phifer Flatwoods Preserve, one documented archaeological site exists within the Preserve, consisting of a pre-historic lithic scatter.

A 1936 map of the area and abundant physical evidence on the property indicates the Phifer Flatwoods tract may have been a part of the Phifer family's turpentine and naval stores operation. Analyses of historic aerial images of the area show a large area of open pinelands surrounding a settlement with houses in rows near a railroad and major roadway. More recent aerials indicate that intensive silvicultural management has occurred there since the 1960's, including bedding, planting and harvesting of pines, as well as harvesting of hardwoods from wetlands.

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Historic aerial photographs indicate the Phifer Addition tract was likely used as a homestead and for farming. A brick and stone well and remnant foundations on the property support this. More recent uses of the Phifer Addition tract include timber harvesting and recreational hunting.

RECREATION

Recreational features of the Phifer Flatwoods Preserve are currently established and maintained on the Phifer Flatwoods tract, and include three nature trails, two of which adjoin the Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail, several log benches, a covered bench, a covered bench-swing, a bicycle rack, wildlife observation areas, and a geo-caching course. The trails are available to hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. In addition, an interpretive kiosk and sign system educates visitors about the site's natural history and ecological importance.

Recreational features anticipated for the Phifer Addition tract include interpretive trails and wildlife observation areas. Recreational hunting is currently allowed on Phifer Addition by a License Agreement in exchange for site security and maintenance services. General public access to Phifer Addition will be limited to staff-lead guided walks by appointment.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Phifer Flatwoods Preserve project is to protect, preserve, and enhance the unique natural and cultural resources found within the Preserve and to provide an enjoyable and educational passive recreational experience. Phifer Flatwoods Preserve will be managed only for the conservation, protection and enhancement of natural resources, and for public outdoor recreation that is compatible with the conservation, protection and enhancement of the site.

Management goals are aimed at improving the condition of natural communities on the Preserve. Natural communities that are in good to excellent condition will be maintained. Those that are in less than good condition will be improved using management activities including but not limited to invasive exotic plant removal, prescribed fire, forest thinning, and re-vegetation.

Phifer Flatwoods Preserve will be identified in all literature and advertising as having been acquired with funds from Alachua County Forever bond revenues, the Florida Communities Trust, and the Wild Spaces Public Places surtax, and operated as a natural conservation area offering outdoor nature-based recreation.

KEY MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

1. Maintain or enhance existing natural communities where feasible and appropriate.
2. Inventory natural features of the site, including flora, fauna and natural communities.
3. Protect populations of significant and listed plant and animal species.
4. Develop and implement a prescribed fire management plan.
5. Protect water resource values from adverse impacts, and enhance values where feasible.
6. Effectively and responsibly manage cultural resources.
7. Promote public outdoor recreation and environmental education consistent with preserving the natural and cultural resources of the site.

PRIORITIZED MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Maintain and enhance natural communities.
 - Apply prescribed fire to fire-dependent natural communities to manage fuel loads and to promote healthy functioning natural systems.
 - Pursue restoration of degraded natural communities.

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- Manage altered communities such that future restoration potential is enhanced or not degraded.
- Remove feral animals.
- Remove invasive exotic plants.
- Monitor and document effects of management activities.
 - Ensure that management activities do not harm listed species.
- Inventory flora and fauna.
- Protect water quality and soil resources.
- Document, protect, and monitor cultural resources.
- Provide opportunities for passive and educational recreational experiences.
 - Maintain a parking area and trailheads to provide public access.
 - Maintain a network of trails.
 - Maintain interpretive materials.
- Implement creative solutions to accomplish basic stewardship needs such as staffing, security and maintenance.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- RESTORATION / ENHANCEMENT- Restore/enhance approximately 596 acres of disturbed pine forests and approximately 15 acres of disturbed wetland communities.
- FIRE MANAGEMENT - Implement a prescribed fire management plan to aid in restoration and enhancement of natural communities, to discourage non-fire tolerant vegetation and to maintain open habitat for listed species.
- INVASIVE PLANTS - Control or eradicate invasive, non-native plant species.
- CULTURAL RESOURCES - Protect known cultural resources from disturbance, and coordinate with Florida Department of State, Division of Historic Resources to identify and protect cultural resource sites.
- MONITORING - Monitor property through field inspections and photopoints to determine relative success of management strategies and impacts of public use on the resources.

SITE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

- PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS - Maintain roads, trails, fences, gates, firebreaks, and a parking area; construct additional grass parking area.
- RECREATION – Maintain trails, trailheads and trailside amenities; construct wildlife observation platform on basin marsh.
- EDUCATION – Maintain existing interpretive exhibits (kiosks and trail signs), and develop additional exhibits as needed.
- MAINTENANCE - Maintain all improvements.
- SECURITY - perform regular security patrols, install informational and regulatory signage, and install additional access control as needed.

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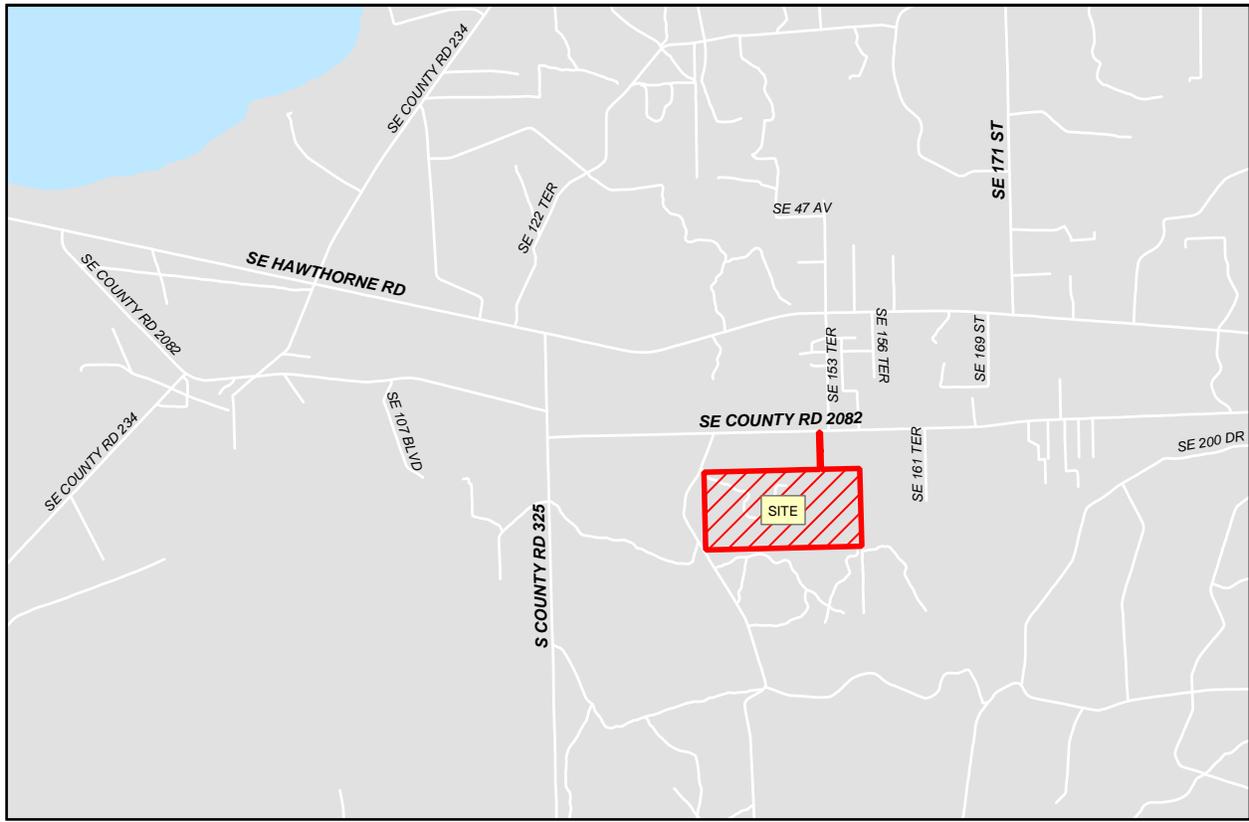


Figure 1. Locator map of the Phifer Flatwoods Addition project area on properties outlined in red.

Adjacent and Surrounding Properties

<u>Direction</u>	<u>FLU</u>	<u>Zoning</u>	<u>Current Use</u>
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Parcel #18235-000-000

North	Rural/Agriculture	Agriculture	Vacant/Agriculture
East	Rural/Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
South	Preservation	Agriculture	Conservation
West	Preservation	Agriculture	Conservation

Parcel #18108-002-000

North	Rural/Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture & Residential
East	Rural/Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
South	Rural/Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
West	Rural/Agriculture	Agriculture	Vacant

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Comprehensive Plan Consistency

Staff finds the proposed request consistent with the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan as a whole as well as the following specific policies:

Conservation and Open Space Element

3.2. PRESERVATION LAND USE CATEGORY

Objective 3.2: A preservation land use category shall be established to recognize and protect natural resources within publicly owned lands in Alachua County.

Policy 3.2.1 Preservation areas shall consist of publicly owned lands, including lands owned and managed by non-profit conservation organizations, which are intended for use as natural reserves or managed conservation lands for the preservation of natural resources in perpetuity.

Policy 3.2.3 A management plan shall be developed for each preservation area by the responsible public agency, in accordance with the following:

1. The management plan shall include but is not limited to:
 - a. Documents and maps that identify the location of areas and natural resources to be preserved, including any protective buffers.
 - b. An assessment of the existing quality and characteristics of the natural resources to be preserved and/or restored.
 - a. A description of the goals and objectives for each site.
 - b. A description of all proposed uses, including existing and any proposed physical and access improvements.
 - a. A description of activities that will be performed to protect, restore, or enhance the natural resources to be preserved.
 - b. A set of schedules and assignments of responsibility for specific implementation activities to be performed as part of the management plan.
2. The management plan shall take into account the ownership interests of public and private entities and provide for protection of private ownership interests.
3. If a preservation area is subject to a conservation easement, the agreement for the conservation easement may serve as the management plan in the absence of a management plan.
4. The land shall be subject to the conservation policies of the Comprehensive Plan that are applicable to the resources within those areas.

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Preservation Area/Land: An environmental land use category that consists of publicly owned lands which are intended for use as natural reserves or managed conservation lands for the preservation of natural resources. Preservation areas include lands owned in fee simple or less-than-fee simple title.

Consistency: The subject properties are in public ownership, and as such are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Preservation designation. The proposed map amendment provides for a Preservation zoning designation and long-term maintenance of natural systems in the County through acquisition and other appropriate management plan mechanisms established to protect natural resources in perpetuity.

The Unified Land Development Code further establishes a Preservation Buffer Overlay District on all real property within 660 feet of parcels with a Future Land Use designation of Preservation as provided in §405.33. Development activities within the overlay district as displayed on the County's GIS/GeoGM Mapper are subject to additional review, and are further limited within a defined buffer distance from the Preservation property that is generally established at 100 feet with some exceptions and adjustments available, primarily for construction of a single family home.

3.3. FUTURE LAND USE MAP

Objective 3.3: Identify conservation and preservation areas on the Future Land Use Map.

Policy 3.3.1 The adopted Future Land Use Map shall identify wetlands, surface waters, wellfield protection areas, floodplains, soils, and preservation areas.

Consistency: The proposed map amendment provides for identification of preservation areas on the Future Land Use Map.

4.9 – BIODIVERSITY

OBJECTIVE 4.9: Maintain and enhance plant and animal species diversity and distribution within Alachua County by protecting significant plant and wildlife habitats, providing for habitat corridors, and preventing habitat fragmentation.

Policy 4.9.1 A critical portion of each significant plant and wildlife habitat type in Alachua County shall be protected. Protection shall be accomplished using all available methods, including land acquisition, incentives and requirements for the provision of conservation or preservation areas, habitat corridors, greenways, and common open space.

Consistency: This map amendment will help ensure protection of a critical portion of habitat utilized by thirteen listed or tracked animal species and five listed plant species, and is part of the larger regional wildlife corridor connecting the Ocala National Forest and the Okefenokee Swamp.

Levels of Service

The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Capital Improvement Element (CIE) requires that public facilities and services needed to support development be available concurrent with the

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impacts of development and that issuance of a Certificate of Level of Service Compliance (CLSC) be a condition of all development orders.

The current zoning designation of these properties is Agriculture, allowing primarily agricultural uses and limited residential development at a density of one unit per five acres. The proposed zoning designation of Preservation for these properties limits uses to those consistent with the approved management plan for the property for preservation of natural resources. Therefore, the proposed designation would translate into a reduction in potential impacts from the current zoning designation for all regulated public facilities, including **Traffic, Water and Sewer, Drainage, Solid Waste, and Public Schools.**

Financial Impact on Housing Affordability

A change of the zoning designation of this property from Agriculture to Preservation will not have a significant financial impact on housing affordability in Alachua County.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends **approval** of CPA-04-12 as shown on Attachment 'A' for transmittal with the bases listed below.

Bases

1. The designation of this publicly owned parcel, acquired for use as a natural resource and managed conservation land, will be consistent with **COSE Objective 3.2** and related policies and the definition of Preservation Area/Land, i.e. "intended for use as natural reserves or managed conservation lands for the preservation of natural resources."
2. The proposed map amendment provides for identification of preservation areas on the Future Land Use Map as required by **COSE Objective 3.3.**
3. Consistent with **COSE Objective 4.9**, this map amendment will help ensure protection of a critical portion of habitat utilized by thirteen listed or tracked animal species and five listed plant species, and is part of the larger regional wildlife corridor connecting the Ocala National Forest and the Okefenokee Swamp.

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Attachments

Attachment A

Application CPA-04-12 (Large Scale Map Amendment) Request Initiated by the County to amend Future Land Use Map 2030 from Rural/Agriculture to Preservation for tax parcels 18235-000-000 and 18108-002-000 on approximately 325.24 acres owned by Alachua County Board of County Commissioners.



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Exhibit 1. Referenced Comp Plan Policies

Conservation and Open Space Element

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4. The land shall be subject to the conservation policies of the Comprehensive Plan that are applicable to the resources within those areas.

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4.0 NATURAL RESOURCES

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Exhibit 2. Staff and Agency Recommendations

Environmental Protection Department: The Environmental Protection Department supports this application to amend the Future Land Use Map 2030 from Rural/ Agriculture to Preservation.

Public Works Department: The Public Works Department has no comments or concerns in regard to this request.

Fire/Rescue Services Department: The department has no comments or concerns with regard to this request.