

FOREST LEGACY APPLICATION GUIDE

Dear Prospective Applicant:

This packet contains Florida Forest Legacy Application instructions and information to assist you in filling out your application and understanding how your application will be evaluated and ranked based on program selection/ranking criteria and Forest Legacy Area (FLA) Objectives.

Using the attached Forest Legacy Area map, you will be able to determine:

- (1) if your land falls within a Forest Legacy Area (*blue or green on map*);
- (2) if your property has an identified Project Sponsor (*blue on map*)
Note: a Project Sponsor must be a government entity intending to hold title to interest acquired and to contribute the local matching funds.
- (3) which FLA Region your property lies within (*Panhandle, North-Central, Southwest-Central, Southeast Coastal*); and,
- (4) the objectives for you FLA Region (*see Florida Forest Legacy Objectives*)

Any property submitted for consideration must, at a minimum, meet the *Application Criteria* listed on the attached *Forest Legacy Project Selection/Ranking Criteria* chart. Applications not meeting these criteria will be returned to the applicant with a written explanation of the reason(s) the property does not qualify for further evaluation and ranking.

Applications meeting the *Application Criteria* will receive a comprehensive review to evaluate the property and determine the extent to which it meets State and Federal program goals and objectives. These criteria are also listed on the attached *Forest Legacy Project Selection/Ranking Criteria* chart under *Selection Criteria*. This objective analysis will be performed and reviewed by the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee to assist with prioritizing projects based on how well the project meets the FLA objectives and federal ranking criteria.

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) will fund no more than 75 percent of a parcels acquisition cost. Additionally, due to program funding restraints and competition amongst States, the actual percentage of the local match requirement may be greater than 25 percent. Landowner donation may be used for all or part of the local match requirement. Landowner donations may have tax benefits. A qualified local, state, or conservation group (Project Sponsor) willing to hold the title interest being acquired, and provide management (fee purchase) or easement monitoring (easement) is not required to submit an application, but must be identified before an application can be placed on Florida's Forest Legacy Project Opportunity List.

The process and timing for submitting, reviewing and prioritizing projects is outlined on the attached Forest Legacy Project Application Review and Ranking Procedures. Please feel free to contact me, if you have any questions or concerns.

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Forest Legacy Project Selection / Ranking Criteria

Application Criteria	DESCRIPTION
1. Willing Landowner	Landowner must provide written expression of interest.
2. Sufficient Forest Cover or Potential	Consistent with FLP guidelines. Sustainable Forestry [‡] based on FNAI Florida Forever Sustainable Forestry layer.
3. Forest Legacy Area	Land must fall within an approved FLA. Must fall within one or more of the data layers described under <i>Selection Criteria</i> , 1. through 7. (<i>quantitative only</i>)
4. Partnerships & Local Match	Partnerships with local, state, or other conservation groups providing at least 25% of project costs from non-federal cash or in-kind. Partnerships with other federal management agencies are encouraged but can not be included in 25% local match requirement.
Selection Criteria	DESCRIPTION
1. Fish & Wildlife Habitat	FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities for Rare Species and FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (<i>qualitative analysis</i>)
2. Threatened & Endangered Species	FNAI Element Occurrence Database (<i>qualitative analysis</i>)
3. Natural Communities	FNAI Florida Forever Under-represented Natural Communities layer (<i>qualitative analysis</i>)
4. Watershed Values	FNAI Florida Forever High Quality Watersheds layer (<i>qualitative analysis</i>) - o Significant Surface Waters - o Floodplain: "Natural floodplain"
5. Groundwater Recharge	FNAI Florida Forever Aquifer Recharge layer (<i>qualitative analysis</i>)
6. Wetlands	FNAI Florida Forever Functional Wetlands layer (<i>qualitative analysis</i>)
7. Connectivity	Landscapes and Linkages (<i>qualitative analysis</i>) - o University of Florida/Office of Greenways & Trails Ecological Greenways - o Contiguous or adjacent to other public and protected lands or lands slated for purchase as part of an established conservation project.
8. Threat of Conversion	Conversion to non-forest use - o Development Pressure from GeoPlan Model - o Parcelization Threat - o Fragmentation Threat
9. Readiness	Clear description of project's current status; timeline for completion.

FLORIDA FOREST LEGACY OBJECTIVES

Panhandle FLA

Established Objectives for FLA:

- Support land conservation strategies of the Northwest Florida Greenway Project and connections to the Blackwater SF and Conecuh NF in Alabama which would include Yellow River Ravine Florida Forever project and the Florida Forest Service's Inholdings and Additions program.
- Focus on riverine systems and aquifer recharge/natural spring protection
- Seek opportunities to buffer existing public lands and conserve inholdings.
- Support sustainable forestry practices important to the area's economic viability.
- Protect key wildlife corridors
- Outreach to private, non-industrial forest landowners to participate in FLP through the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (when funded).

Public Benefits:

- Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species
- Water quality and fish habitat
- Established wildlife corridors
- Conserved natural springs
- Buffered public lands
- Stable forest-based economy

Potential Conservation Partners:

Department of Environmental Protection, Northwest Florida Water Management District, Counties, TNC, local land trusts, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and Department of Defense.

North-Central FLA

Established Objectives for FLA:

- Focus on areas of the region where implementation of FLP could contribute to local or regional land use planning efforts, the reduction of urban sprawl, and protection of the forest resources.
- Protect surface waters and aquifer recharge
- Support sustainable forestry practices important to the area's economic viability
- Seek connectivity opportunities between already-conserved lands
- Seek opportunities to buffer existing public lands and conserve inholdings

Public Benefits

- Safe, potable water supplies
- Fish and wildlife habitat, including Threatened and Endangered Species
- Stable forest industry
- Natural Community conservation
- Public lands buffers
- Curb parcelization and fragmentation of forest resources

Potential Conservation Partners:

Department of Environmental Protection, Suwannee River, St. Johns River and Southwest Florida Water Management Districts, county conservation programs, land trusts, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and Army National Guard Bureau.

FLORIDA FOREST LEGACY OBJECTIVES

Southwest-Central FLA

Established Objectives for FLA:

- Maintain a healthy flow of clean water vital to local citizens and the Everglades Natural Communities, flora and fauna
- Conserve critical fish and wildlife habitat including Threatened and Endangered Species such as the Florida Panther, black bear, and whooping crane.
- Focus on areas of the region where implementation of FLP could contribute to local or regional land use planning efforts, the reduction of urban sprawl, and protection of the forest resources.

Public Benefits:

- Protected flora and fauna
- Critical natural communities conserved
- Potable water supplies
- Curb parcelization and fragmentation of forest resources

Potential Conservation Partners:

Department of Environmental Protection, St. Johns River, Southwest, and South Florida Water Management Districts, county conservation programs, land trusts, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM NATIONAL CORE CRITERIA

Importance – The public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property.

This criterion reflects the ecological assets and the economic and social values conserved by the project and the scale of people's interest in its protection. It is meant to assess the attributes to be conserved and the size of the community receiving those benefits. Examples of high quality attributes include:

- Scenic – In the viewshed of a designated scenic area.
- Fish and wildlife habitat – Important fish or wildlife habitat exists.
- Threatened or Endangered Species Habitat – Site has known habitat or rare, threatened or endangered plants and animals or includes unique forest types or communities.
- Watershed protection – Contiguous riparian area, Sensitive watershed lands, lakefront, buffer to public drinking water supply.
- Forestry – Integral in supporting the local resource-based economy for a community or region and the tract is a foundation to maintain the economically viability of forestry for the community or region.
- Recreation – The property is a public access location or acts as a gateway to increased public access.
- Cultural – known culturally significant values are located on site.

Threatened - Conversion to non-forest uses is possible to imminent and will result in a loss of forest values and public benefits.

This criterion reflects an estimate of the urgency of the threat of conversion. It is meant to reflect the likelihood of a conversion that would result in the loss or diminution of the assets of a larger forest area.

Strategic - The project fits within a larger conservation plan, strategy, or initiative and enhances previous conservation investments.

This criterion reflects the project's relevance or relationship to conservation efforts on a broader perspective.

Project Readiness - A graduated scale indicating the level of commitment and likelihood a project will be completed in a predictable timeline.

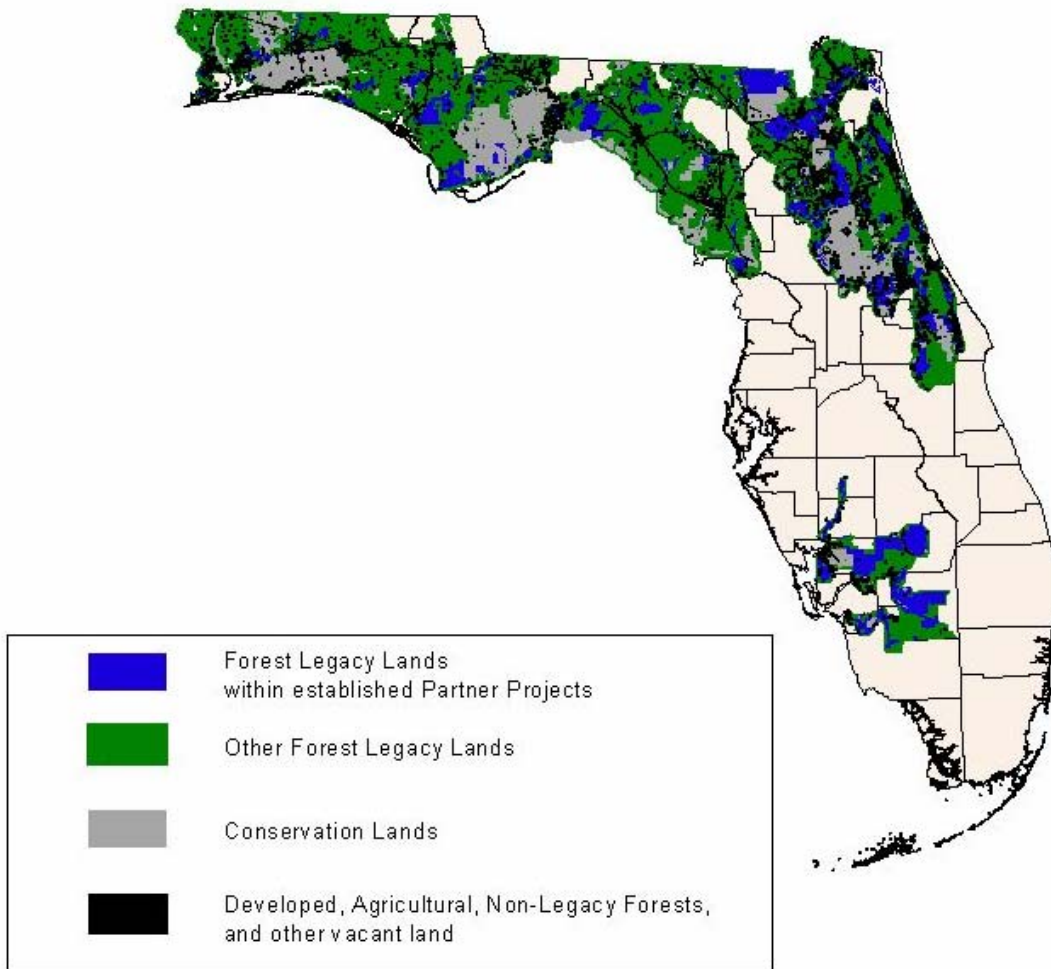
Items to be completed include:

- Completed appraisal
- Final easement or fee acquisition conditions
- Cost Share commitment
- Signed option or purchase and sales agreement
- Held by a third party at the request of the State

Project readiness is a criterion that reflects the degree of due diligence applied and the certainty of a successful FLP project. It is intended to be a guide to project selection decisions. The readiness level is determined by the cumulative progression of items completed. Readiness status is updated up until the time of National Ranking in January of the year following application, if received prior to the deadline.

1. USFS FLP Information and Guidelines available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/cooperativeforestry/library/flp_guidelines.pdf
2. Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions provided via link in FLP Guidelines
3. Printed copies may be obtained from the Florida Forest Service – Forest Legacy Program Coordinator, see page 1

FLORIDA FOREST LEGACY AREAS



Two Forest Legacy Areas have been established with different resources, threats, and areas of emphasis. The Forest Legacy Areas are:

- ❖ **North Florida FLA** consists of eligible forest lands within all or part of the following counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Gulf, Franklin, Liberty, Gadsden, Wakulla, Leon, Jefferson, Taylor, Madison, Hamilton, Suwannee, Lafayette, Dixie, Levy, Gilchrist, Columbia, Baker, Nassau, Duval, Union, Bradford, Clay, St. Johns, Alachua, Putnam, Flagler, Marion, Volusia, Lake, Seminole, Orange, Brevard, and Indian River.
- ❖ **South Florida FLA** consists of eligible forest lands within all or part of the following counties: Hardee, Highlands, DeSoto, Charlotte, Glades, Lee, Hendry, and Collier.

PROJECT APPLICATION REVIEW AND RANKING PROCEDURES

Step I - Preliminary Review of Acquisition Project Applications.

- (1) Applications must be submitted in writing to:
Forest Legacy Program, Attn: Laramie Ferry
Florida Forest Service
3125 Conner Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650
- (2) The Department shall accept applications on an ongoing basis.
- (3) Two copies of each application and supporting documentation shall be submitted to the Department for review.
- (4) Each acquisition project application shall, within 30 days of receipt, be reviewed by Department staff to verify sufficiency of information in accordance with the application requirements. Incomplete applications shall be returned to the applicant, with a letter identifying each deficiency, for completion and resubmission within 30 days of the date of the deficiency letter. If the information is not received within 30 days, the application will be returned to the applicant or placed on hold until the information is received.
- (5) This initial review shall include a determination of:
 - (a) Landowner willingness to participate in Forest Legacy.
 - (b) Percent of forest cover consistent with Forest Legacy guidelines.
 - (c) Whether the project falls within an approved Forest Legacy Area. To make this determination, each complete application shall receive a preliminary review of natural resource benefits identified in the approved Assessment of Need. This shall be a quantitative evaluation only.
 - (d) Commitment from a local, state, or other conservation group project sponsor to hold the proposed title interest. While a commitment to provide at least 25% of project costs from non-federal source is not required to accept an application, it will be required prior to initiating Step III below.
- (6) Applications shall be rejected if the project fails to meet all of the items listed under (5) (a) – (d) above, and the landowner shall be notified, in writing, of the reason(s) for the rejection.
- (7) When the Department's preliminary review is complete and an application is accepted, the applicant shall be notified of the acceptance, and schedule for final review and ranking.
- (8) For an acquisition project application to be considered for final review, during a particular cycle, a complete application must be received by the Department on or before August 1st.

Step II - Comprehensive Review of Acquisition Project Applications

- (1) Following review and acceptance of an application, a comprehensive evaluation shall be performed. The evaluation shall include:
 - (a) An analysis of the natural resource characteristics of the property both quantitatively and qualitatively. (*Importance*)
 - (b) An evaluation of connectivity, including its potential for providing linkage for greenways and its proximity to other public and protected lands or lands slated for purchase as part of an established conservation project. (*Strategic*)
 - (c) A determination of the level of threat of conversion to non-forest use. (*Threatened*)
 - (d) A detailed analysis on the projects current acquisition status, including commitment to provide at least 25% of project costs from non-federal source, and timeline for acquisition. (*Readiness*)
- (2) The Florida Forest Service, as lead agency for FLP, shall review the completed evaluations in (1) (a) – (d) above for each project and prepare a set of recommendations for the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee (SFSCC).

III - Final Project Approval and Ranking

Florida Forest Service recommendations shall be submitted to SFSCC annually approximately 60 days prior to date established by FS regional unit for submittal of projects for inclusion on *Project Opportunity List*. SFSCC shall be provided the technical review and supporting documentation on the importance, threat, readiness, and strategic nature of each tract, along with a recommendation of the State Lead Agency as guidance for its approval and prioritization. The SFSCC shall consider the degree to which the project meets the *Established FLA Program Objective* in prioritizing each project. SFSCC shall use the objective technical evaluation, but may consider other social, economic, cultural, environmental and political aspects of the project in its decision process.

- (1) The recommendations of the Florida Forest Service shall be compiled and submitted to the SFSCC at least once a year approximately 60 days prior to the deadline for submitting a priority list to the FS regional unit for inclusion on the "Project Opportunity List."
- (2) Upon receipt of the Division's recommended list, the SFSCC may:
 - (a) Approve the recommendations as submitted; or,
 - (b) Remove or reprioritize project(s) from the list and approve the amended list.
- (3) If a proposed project is removed, the Division may reinstate the steps provided under Step II above and resubmit a recommended list of projects to the SFSCC for consideration.
- (4) Once the SFSCC approves a prioritized list of projects, the Division shall submit the list to USDA Forest Service – Regional Unit for inclusion on the "Project Opportunity List."

EXAMPLE OF A PROJECT SELECTION CALENDAR

This flowchart outlines the basic FLP project selection process.

