



THE POST

PROTECTING OUR RURAL LANDS

July 2007

LEVY PRAIRIE PROJECT



The 3,317-acre Levy Prairie project forms the northern border of the 2,303-acre Barr Hammock Preserve, nominated by CTF and purchased by Alachua County in 2006. The Levy Prairie project will protect a large portion of the greenway planned to connect the Ocala National Forest to the Goethe State Forest, as proposed by the Office of Greenways and Trails and CTF. Photo by Ramesh Buch.

CTF working on behalf of the Alachua County Forever land conservation program, submitted a grant that seeks matching funds to purchase the 3,317-acre Levy Prairie project, one of Alachua County's top ranking projects. The grant, submitted to Florida Communities Trust (FCT), will be reviewed in September. The proposed Levy Prairie project forms the northern border of the 2,303-acre Barr Hammock Preserve, which was nominated by CTF and purchased by Alachua County in 2006.

These parcels are part of the 12,000-acre Barr Hammock-Ledwith Prairie/Levy Prairie ecosystem and it is one of Alachua County's "crown jewels." Levy Prairie and the surrounding uplands are historically one of the most significant examples of prairie/lake ecosystems in north central Florida. Levy Prairie, one of the largest privately owned wetlands in the county, connects Barr Ham-

mock, a majestic "land bridge" to Ledwith Prairie, another large wetland located to the south of Barr Hammock. The Levy Prairie project is also connected to the 21,000-acre Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park.

Levy Prairie features a variety of natural communities, including freshwater marshes, a black water stream, wet prairie, hardwood swamp, pine flatwoods, and open water, and contains habitat supports a variety of threatened and endangered species, such as sandhill cranes, wood storks, and bald eagles.

Archaeological evidence in the proposed area encompasses several recognized historic cultures, including the Alachua period and nineteenth century American. The property may also contain a portion of William Bartram's 1774 route from his camp at Cuscowilla (now the Town of Micanopy) to the Suwannee River.

(continued on page 4)

Letter from the President

Dear Members and Friends of CTF:

The Tallahassee-based organization, 1000 Friends of Florida recently released a study prepared by the UF Geoplan Center, that models what land use might look like in Florida in 2020, 2040 and 2060 if population continues to grow at its current rate. By 2060 the population will almost double totaling almost 36 million inhabitants. This staggering increase in population will result in 7 million additional acres of land being converted from rural to urban uses if existing development densities continue, including 2.7 million acres of existing agricultural lands and 2.7 million acres of native habitat.

This alarming report suggests much must be done on many fronts to avoid a dismal future for the state. Florida Forever, the state's principal conservation land acquisition program is about out of money and must be refunded robustly. Similarly, funding for less than fee simple land acquisition through the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, should be funded. County land acquisition programs must be defended against the statewide property tax rollback that will hamstring acquisition efforts by limiting the opportunities for leveraging locally generated monies.

Land trusts and their use of easements, must play a greater role in conservation efforts to mitigate the disaster envisioned by the 1000 Friends of Florida Report. The recent federal increase in tax deductions for conservation easements should help in the effort. Through this change, any donor can increase their tax deduction for a conservation easement from 30 to 50 percent of their adjusted gross income in any year. Farmers and ranchers may deduct up to 100 percent of their income and may spread the deduction across 15 years instead of 5. Note, however, that these enhanced deductions apply only to easements donated in 2006 and 2007.

Carbon credits, to offset the release of CO2 emissions, may yield a new source of funds with which to purchase conservation easements on land that would otherwise be urbanized by 2060. Keeping land rural and curbing sprawl at the same time are two good ways to diminish climate changing gas emissions.

We are in a race against time in protecting Florida against unsustainable and unplanned growth. It is heartening that 1000 Friends of Florida, the Century Commission and other groups are seriously looking at the future of the state. Land trusts such as CTF generally work on those small, local projects that are critical to a complete conservation strategy for the state, yet they face a Herculean task in conserving Florida's rural lands.

We greatly appreciate the donation of time and funds our members have made to ensure the success of our land conservation programs. We have received generous grants from the AEC Trust, Michael A. Singer, the Quail Roost Foundation, and an anonymous donor to support our efforts to protect these important rural lands and natural areas. A special thank you to Kathleen Williams for donating her time to CTF's Development and Outreach Committee.

Sincerely,



David Carr
President of the Board

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TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS PROGRAM

The effort to create a transfer of development rights (TDR) program in Alachua County moved forward at a late May meeting of the County Commissioners. The transfer of development rights is one of the tools in the land conservation toolbox.

The TDR program is basically a trading game. Here's how it works: the TDR program creates "sending areas" where new development is not desired, and "receiving areas" where denser development is appropriate.

Landowners in sending areas who voluntarily choose to participate, sell their density rights to developers in receiving areas. It's a win-win situation: sensitive conservation and agricultural lands are preserved at no cost to the public, property owners realize some of the economic value

of their land, and developers receive increased density for commercial and residential areas. TDRs are an important land conservation tool because it creates a private source of funds to compensate landowners who choose not to develop their land.

Conservation Trust for Florida staff began working with the Alachua County Growth Management Department to create a TDR program in March of 2006, when Conservation Trust for Florida and Alachua Conservation Trust co-sponsored a workshop on transfer of development rights with the University of Florida Law School.

Since then CTF has participated in several meetings about a 'hybrid' program developed by the county staff called a Planned Development/Transfer of Development Rights (PD/TDR) program.

The consensus at the recent meeting was that Alachua County would be better served by adopting a more traditional approach to a TDR program. County staff is currently working with the public, doing additional research, looking for funding for the program, and working to make the plan consistent with the existing land use programs and legislation.

CTF favors a program which will 1) pre-designate receiving areas (rather than areas being determined on a case-by-case basis by the County Commission); 2) will allow not only conservation lands but agricultural lands as sending areas; 3) locate the receiving areas inside the urban areas; 4) allow participation of municipalities within the county to designate

(continued on page 6)

FLORIDA CATTLEMAN'S MEETING

The Conservation Trust for Florida hosted a booth at the annual meeting of the Florida Cattleman's Association in Marco Island on June 19th and 20th. Farmlands Program Director Ellen Huntley Dube', Board Member Keith Glynn and volunteer Marlene Conaway attended the event.

Marlene is the former Chief of Comprehensive Planning at the Florida Department of Community Affairs and former Agricultural Land Preservation Program Administrator for Carroll County, Maryland, which has one of the most successful land preservation programs in the nation.

Marlene attended the Public Relations meeting with Sean Sexton and discussed how to encourage the legislature to fund the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, which will provide a funding source to purchase conservation easements on working farms and ranch lands. Thanks to Carlton Ward, Jr. who lent two photos of the Adams Ranch to CTF for the booth.



Mr. Leroy Baldwin, owner of the Baldwin Angus Ranch in Ocala with Ellen Huntley Dube', CTF Farmlands Program Director, at the Florida Cattleman's Association Annual Meeting in Marco Island. Photo courtesy of CTF.

(continued from page 1, Levy Prairie Project)

The proposed Levy Prairie project will restore and enhance native plant communities through plantings, control of invasive exotic species, and prescribed fire. The Natural Resource Conservation Service Wetlands Reserve Program, in conjunction with Ducks Unlimited, are developing a restoration plan to restore natural water flows on approximately 1,100 acres of the project area. Acquisition will protect and enhance the long-term quality of public water supplies by removing agricultural sources of contamination from the Floridan aquifer.

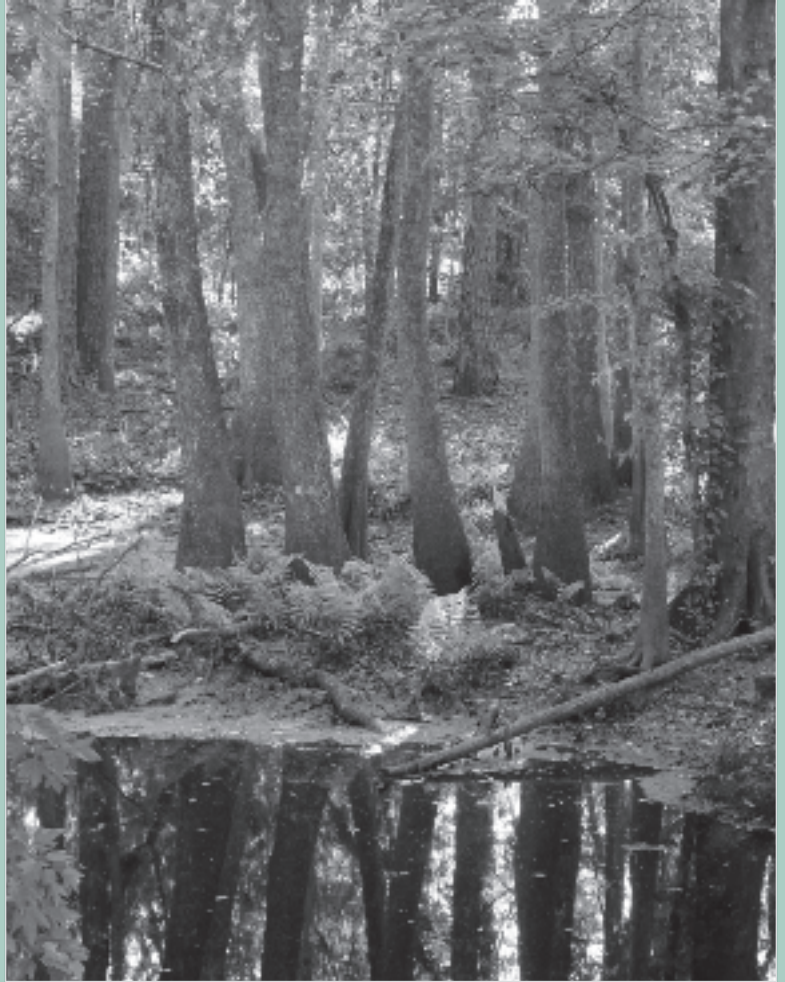
The Natural Resource Conservation Service Wetlands Reserve Program holds a perpetual conservation easement on 3,052 acres of the project area. Alachua County seeks to purchase the remainder interest in Levy Prairie to (a) enhance resource protection and ecological management; and (b) protect the property beyond that afforded by the NRCS easement; and (c) create enhanced recreational opportunities. This is accomplished by placing the remainder interest, currently in private ownership, into public conservation ownership and management.

Purchase of Levy Prairie will not only enhance ecological connectivity through a unified management plan, but also greatly simplify and expedite public access and enjoyment by providing enhanced recreational opportunities to the entire Barr Hammock Preserve and Levy Prairie area.

Over one-half mile of trails on the Still Branch parcel of the Levy Prairie project site will directly connect to over 14 miles of existing trails on the Barr Hammock Preserve. An additional four miles of trails on Levy Prairie will create over 18 miles of trails. Most importantly, the Levy Prairie project will connect the east and west sections of Barr Hammock, which are separated by the privately owned 75-acre Still Branch parcel. This project would therefore unite the divided portions of Barr Hammock, and connect the entire project directly to Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park.

This project promotes a cooperative relationship between a federal agency, a local government, and several non-profit organizations to restore and protect wildlife habitat and a regionally significant wetland.

The project is located within an area proposed to be the "Alachua County Bald Eagle Reserve," which has one of the greatest concentrations of bald eagle nests in Florida. Based on 2006 data, there are approximately 43 eagle nests in the proposed Alachua County Eagle Reserve Area that are currently active or were active since 2002 out of a total of



If the Levy Prairie project area is acquired by the Alachua County Forever program, over 18 miles of trails will be connected on the Barr Hammock Preserve and Levy Prairie. This is a photo of one of the old canals on Levy Prairie. Photo by Matt Dube'.

59 nests in the county. The Bald Eagle Reserve would create higher protection standards than the state and federal regulations in Alachua County's comprehensive plan.

The proposed Levy Prairie project has drawn strong community-based support and received letters from 22 organizations including a letter from Donald V. Forgione, Chief of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Parks District 2. Mr. Forgione writes: "The shallow prairie systems of southern Alachua County are karst solution features that usually maintain direct connections to the Floridan Aquifer, the main source of drinking water for the region. Protection of these wetlands is critical, not only for the flora and fauna that inhabit them, but for our own well-being"

Additional letters of support were received from State Senator Steve Oelrich, State Representative Charles Chestnut, III, the Alachua County Historical Commission, the Micanopy Historical Society, the Town of Micanopy, Alachua Conservation Trust, the Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau, Women for Wise Growth, The Bartram Trail Conference, and others. ☞

PROTECTING HORSE COUNTRY

MARION COUNTY LAND CONSERVATION OPTIONS WORKSHOPS

CTF and the Marion County Extension Service co-sponsored a workshop on March 27th at the Extension Office in Ocala. Approximately 25 landowners attended. Marion County Livestock Agent Mark Shuffitt helped organize and invite landowners to the event.

Ellen Huntley Dube' presented information about the new federal tax incentives for conservation easements. Richard White, an estate attorney representing White & Crouch, P.A., also attended the event on behalf of CTF.

Additional presentations about the Protecting Horse Country project were made to the Arrendondo Dressage Society, the Florida Horse Trials Association, and the Marion County Clean Water Initiative. CTF also had a booth at the Festival of the Horse at the Florida Horse Park. ☞



Michael Page, three-time Olympian and three-time coach for the United States Eventing Team, was the Guest of Honor at the H.I.T.S. outreach event.

L to R: Mr. Page, Cynthia Shires, and David Wright. Photo by Carol M. Gordon.

H.I.T.S. HORSE SHOW OUTREACH EVENT

As part of our Protecting Horse Country project and to raise awareness about land conservation options to horse farm owners, the Conservation Trust for Florida hosted an outreach and educational event on Saturday, March 10th at the "Horse shows in the Sun" (H.I.T.S.) horse show at Post Time Farm in Ocala. The event was held in the VIP tent, which overlooked the Grand Prix show jumping ring.

Our Guest of Honor, Michael Page, is a three-time Olympian and three-time coach for the U.S. Eventing Team. Mr. Page spoke of the increased importance of protecting horse farms. The loss of land has significantly impacted the "cross-country" portion of the three-day event. The modern three-day event is now held on small parcels of land, making it much shorter than in the past.

Mr. Page is from North Salem, New York and he trained at the French Cavalry School in Saumur, France from 1957-1958. He coached the Canadian three-day team at the 1976 Olympics and served as Chef d'Equipe at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, the 1990 World Championships, and 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. He was inducted into the U.S. Eventing Association's (USEA) Eventing Hall of Fame in 2006 and his horse Grasshopper was inducted into the USEA Hall of Fame in 1999.

A special thank you to our sponsors: Ocala Equine Hospital (OEH), Bernie Little Distributing, Liquors at the Marketplace, Martha Johnston, Esq., and to H.I.T.S. for donating the VIP tent. ☞



(continued from page 3, TDR Program)

receiving areas; and 5) encourage fair market value to land-owners for development rights.

The next meeting on the TDR program will be held Monday, July 23 at 4:00 PM at the County Administration Building in the Grace Knight Conference Room. For more information please feel free to contact us at 352-466-1178. We also encourage you to contact the County Commission to show support for the TDR program. E-mail for the Board of County Commissioners: boccc@alachuacounty.us or 352-264-6900.



NEW LAW ALLOWS CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS FROM YOUR IRA

A section of the same federal bill that gave you expanded tax incentives for conservation easement donations, the Pension Protection Act of 2006, also offers you a tax break when you invest in the land trust community's good work. If you or someone you know is 70½ years of age or older, the new law permits you to make direct contributions from your IRA to a charitable organization of your choice — up to \$100,000 per year in 2007.

These charitable contributions can satisfy your IRA's required yearly minimum distribution and will be excluded from your federal taxable income! One essential detail: your plan administrator must issue the check directly to the charity. And because your contribution is not taxable income, you cannot claim an additional charitable deduction. Consult your tax advisors for more information about this provision.

NEW TAX INCENTIVES FOR CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

On August 17, 2006 the Pension Protection Act was signed into law that expands the federal tax incentive for conservation easement donations. The expanded tax incentive allows a landowner earning \$50,000 a year who donates a \$1 million conservation easement to deduct \$25,000 for the year of the donation and \$25,000 for an additional 15 years. That's \$400,000 in deductions. If the landowner qualifies as a farmer or rancher, he or she could take a maximum of \$800,000 in deductions for their \$1 million gift. The new law:

- 1) Raises the deduction a donor can take from 30% of his or her income to 50%;
- 2) Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income;
- 3) Extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take deductions from 5 to 15 years.

This legislation only applies to easements donated in 2006 and 2007, but the Land Trust Alliance is working to make the new tax incentives permanent. Senate bill S. 469 has been introduced by Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) that would make the new tax incentive permanent.

Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Dave Camp (R-MI) introduced H.R. 1576 which parallels the Senate bill. For more information: www.lta.org/publicpolicy/tax_incentives_updates.htm or CTF's web site at www.conserveflorida.org.

Two of the Conservation Trust for Florida's co-founders, Gary and Nancy Meffe, recently moved to Vermont. Gary, who is the Editor-in-Chief for the scientific journal Conservation Biology, served as Executive Director and on the Board of Directors and will continue to serve on the Advisory Board. Nancy served as the Secretary and Treasurer for several years.

Advisory Board Member Tom Saunders, (who will continue to serve as an Advisory Board member), and his wife Lisa Auel also moved to Pennsylvania this summer. Tom will serve as the new President and CEO of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, a 75-year old non-profit land and water conservation organization. Tom was the Community Development Director for the City of Gainesville for the past ten years. Prior to that, Tom was the Director of the Maryland Environmental Trust, which is one of the largest land conservation organizations in the country.



L to R: Nancy and Gary Meffe. CTF held a social on Saturday May 26th at the Micanopy Historical Society Museum to thank Nancy and Gary for their commitment and dedication to CTF. Photo by Busy Shires Byerly.



CTF President David Carr, his son Adam Carr and CTF Board Member Terry Zinn put up a sign to designate the new parcel purchased by the Alachua County Forever program as a Preservation Area.

The Bishop and Henderson property is located at the intersection of Williston Road and south Main Street and it borders Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. The property will be managed by Paynes Prairie. Photo by Busy Shires Byerly.

EVINSTON HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROJECT

The Conservation Trust for Florida continues its effort to protect and restore the Wood & Swink Old Store and Post Office and the Wood family farm in Evinston. The Alachua County Forever program and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service hope to finalize the conservation easement on the Wood farm by this fall.

CTF is working to protect the Wood & Swink Old Store & Post Office and raise an additional \$180,000 to purchase an historic preservation easement to protect the building's facade in perpetuity and upgrade the store with central heat and air, and a few other amenities to prevent the U.S. Postal Service from discontinuing the Evinston zip code.

Twenty percent of the proceeds (about \$17,000) from the sale of paintings at the Evinston to Cross Creek Paint Out in 2006 which was co-sponsored by CTF and the Artists Alliance of North Florida (AAONF), are being held in an interest bearing account and reserved for the project.

Proceeds from the sale of the paintings at the Evinston Paint Out Reunion held in February 2007 at the Wood & Swink by AAONF went to the AAONF's Heart of Florida loop trail project. CTF did not receive a percentage to support the restoration and protection of the Wood & Swink, although we look forward to working with Freddie and Wilma Sue Wood to raise additional funds to complete the project. ♻️

A special thank you to those who worked on the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) grant for the 3,317-acre Levy Prairie project. The grant was delivered to Tallahassee on May 9th. The FCT Governing Board will meet sometime in September to determine which projects are funded. CTF will attend the September FCT meeting to show our support for the project. We will send a notice about the September meeting.

Thank you !

John Hendrix for completing four sections of the grant relating to water quality, vegetative enhancement, and natural areas.

Erik Lewis for completing the maps.

Michael Campbell for his assistance with field trips and for providing knowledge about the site.

Ellen Huntley Dube', Carol Gordon, and Rob Brinkman for staying up very late to collate 10 copies of the grant (which weighed 5.5 pounds!)

Matt Dube' for taking photographs.

Christian Newman at **Pandion Systems** for helping compile information about the natural communities.

Alachua County Environmental Protection Department staff, **Diane Dijseleers** for help with the maps, **Sandra Vardaman** and **Kelly McPherson** for help compiling exotic species and natural communities information, and **Sara Leitman** and **Ramesh Buch**.

Brian Block of **The Nature Conservancy** for negotiating with landowners. ♻️



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The mission of the Conservation Trust for Florida is to protect the rural landscapes of Florida. We focus on farms, ranches, working forests, and natural areas that provide landscape connections.

We have successfully protected approximately 5,000 acres of rural landscapes through publicly funded land conservation programs and privately donated conservation easements. CTF, in conjunction with the Office of Greenways & Trails, has also helped begin and facilitate the protection of a 153,000-acre project, the Camp Blanding to Osceola National Forest Ecological Greenway.

Lake Palestine is part of the Ocala National Forest to Osceola National Forest Ecological Greenway (O2O). The greenway is a wildlife corridor for Florida Black Bears. Photo by Erik Lewis.

Save the Date for the
Fourth Annual

Fall Fundraiser & Awards Ceremony

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2007
WHITEHURST LODGE