

Internal Audit Report

2021-04 – VOLUSIA FOREVER PROGRAM, FY 2020

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Internal Auditor

July 23, 2021

Honorable Members of the County Council and County Manager

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to present audit report 2021-04 over the Volusia Forever program for fiscal year 2020 (FY 2020). The objective of this audit was to provide information to Council and the County Manager an evaluation of the Volusia Forever program during FY 2020. The audit included a review of minutes, resolutions, and financial transactions during the year.

I conducted this audit in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, except for the requirement of an external quality control review. standards require that I plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for my findings and conclusions based on audit objectives. I believe that the evidence obtained provides reasonable basis for my findings and conclusions. The audit was performed in the months of June and July 2021.

I appreciate the assistance of the departmental staff involved that oversees the Volusia Forever program as well as the budget and accounting staff for their support during this audit.

Jonathan Edwards, CIA, CPFO

Internal Auditor

www.volusia.org

Background

The Volusia Forever program was a grass-roots initiative resulting from a citizen approved referendum passed on November 7, 2000, Resolution 2000-155. The objectives were to:

- Acquire and improve environmentally sensitive, water resource and outdoor recreation lands
- Conserve the County's unique ecological character and to preserve valuable ecosystems for future generations
- Conserve, maintain, and where necessary, restore the natural environment and provide access for the enjoyment and education of the public
- Ensure sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of the natural systems and citizens of the state
- Promote an appreciation of the state's natural assets and improvement of quality of life for a broad range of outdoor recreational opportunities and develop necessary infrastructure, where compatible with the resource values of and management objectives for such lands
- Acquire, protect, preserve, and restore open space, greenways and public access is necessary that
 was not fully met by previous acquisition programs
- Protect the integrity of ecological systems to provide multiple benefits, including preservation of habitat, recreation space for urban as well as rural areas and water recharge
- Manage public lands with a long-term financial commitment to ensure that the natural resource values of such lands are protected and the public has the opportunity to enjoy the lands to their fullest potential
- Set specific guidelines for an acquisition and improvement program to ensure effective and successful completion

The ballot initiative provided an approved levy of an additional ad valorem tax not to exceed 1/5 mill for 20 years and the authorization to issue limited tax general obligation bonds not to exceed \$40 million in order to finance these properties.

The resolution further states it is the intent of the program to:

- Achieve maximum impact by partnering with other entities through award or acceptance of grants, joint projects and other cooperative efforts
- Use funds to apply for matching grants awarded under the Florida Forever Program or other grant funding

Acquired lands are to be managed and maintained to the extent practical to ensure a balance between public access and restoration and protection of their natural state and condition. Public access and use will be determined in the management plans.

Resolution 2000-155, the enabling resolution, provided many acquisition objectives and gave priority to properties that would achieve a combination of conservation goals, recreational opportunities, improving water resources, and natural groundwater recharge. Over time, different resolutions have been passed by Council to modify certain elements and to establish an advisory committee.

Resolutions for the advisory committee were approved and outlined the purpose, goals, memberships, and terms of members. The committee set criteria and ranking guides for the acquisition program. The committee was suspended in 2011 after the last acquisition exhausted the Volusia Forever proceeds.

Nominations for potential land acquisitions were accepted from governmental entities, conservation organizations, or individual owners. Each application had to meet the criteria established in the Volusia Forever resolutions and state a public purpose for the restoration, conservation, or preservation of environmentally sensitive, water resource protection, resource based recreation lands and water areas, and provide public use opportunities. Properties were initially reviewed by County staff ("staff") and given to the committee for scoring and ranking. Properties were presented in priority-ranking with group "A" properties given the highest importance. Eligible properties were then recommended to Council. Once approved, staff took steps towards acquiring the property.

Group A property listing was maintained and regularly modified no less than twice a year by Council based on a combination of factors including final site ranking, negotiated sale price relative to appraised value, availability of matching funds, urgency of purchase, based on imminent threat of loss, or other factors.

Staff ensured appraisals were completed and complied with the requirements that if the property is over \$500,000 then two appraisals were completed; if between \$100,000 and \$500,000 that one appraisal was completed; if less than \$100,000 that the current estimated market value on file with the County Property Appraiser was completed. Staff also ensured appropriate environmental audits and surveys were conducted. Staff also managed the negotiations on pricing with the property owner. Once all items were obtained and sale price negotiated, Council would approve the purchase. Staff would then take steps to close on the property.

In 2002, Council approved resolution 2002-218 which established the small lot acquisition program to supplement the larger acquisition program. It included sensitive lands in antiquated platted subdivisions, small in size or had no limited physical access and/or infrastructure. The goal was to assemble enough contiguous small lots into ecologically significant tracts. Due to these lots having low assessed value, the procedures were modified in regards to limited survey and appraisal reports.

The enabling resolution granted a 10-percent set aside each year to ensure adequate funding for the public access, land management, and improvements on the Volusia Forever acquisitions. The County employs certain ideals and objectives for the management of these conservation lands to protect and enhance the ecosystem's integrity, function, biodiversity, fire management, stewardship, wildlife habitat, and public trails. To accomplish this, the county at times will sell forest products and other renewable resources and maintain agricultural and other leases. The Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Division manage the land.

The ad valorem tax revenue supporting the Volusia Forever program was approved for an additional twenty years by a voter referendum in November 2020. The program will be extended into 2041. Appendix A contains a schedule of revenues, expenditures, transfers by each project, for each fiscal year.

Scope and Methodologies

On January 19, 2021, County Council approved the 2021 Audit Plan, which included auditing the Volusia Forever Program. Additionally, the November 2020 referendum required an annual audit of the program. The purpose of the audit was to determine, with a reasonable degree of assurance, that the control environment surrounding the Volusia Forever program is based upon sound business processes and ensures that associated activities are conducted efficiently and effectively, while maintaining compliance with relevant laws, rules, and regulations.

The audit scope included all transactions within the Volusia Forever program and county funds associated for FY 2020 (October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020).

Specific audit objectives were:

- To obtain an understanding of internal controls that are significant to the Volusia Forever Program.
- To perform procedures that will provide a reasonable assurance of detecting instances of noncompliance with resolutions passed by Council and guidelines that have been established relating to the Volusia Forever program.
- 3. To perform procedures that will provide reasonable assurance that revenues received by the Volusia Forever ad valorem taxes were allocated, disbursed, tracked, and reported correctly.
- 4. To perform procedures that will provide a reasonable assurance that acquisitions through the Volusia Forever program were appropriately approved, acquired, tracked, and ongoing expenditures are appropriate.

Audit report 2020-02 issued on May 11, 2020, included the Volusia Forever program from inception through September 30, 2019. Contained later in this report is a status of the recommendations contained in the prior report. As noted in that report, the acquisition, small lot program, and the Volusia Forever Committee, was discontinued due to the depletion of the acquisition monies. However, staff continued to utilize the lands management set-aside of 10% of the Volusia Forever Fund during this time.

The only activity during FY 2020 was the land management aspect of the program. Revenues are received from timber sales, land management fees, hunting lease payments, or other miscellaneous revenues relating to the properties. Expenditures relate to the management of the lands to preserve into perpetuity. Table 1 lists the total revenues and expenditures for land management during FY 2020, the amount selected for testing and the percentage tested.

Table 1: Test selection

Category	Total	Total Tested	Percentage Tested
Land Rental Fees	\$ 99,099	\$ 74,875	76%
Land Management Fees	243,080	66,173	27%
Sale of Easements	1,500	1,500	100%
Land Management Expenditures	590,630	200,932	34%

Evaluation

Based on the results of the audit, internal controls are operating as intended over the land management function of Volusia Forever. There were no findings or concerns. The status of prior audit recommendations is included.

Findings, Concerns, and Recommendations

Findings are defined as frequent or commonly seen observations during an audit. They include critical and major failures in a program where requirements have not been effectively implemented or where there are significant issues.

Concerns are defined as infrequent or isolated observations during an audit. They include minor failures in a program where requirements have been met but opportunities may exist for improvement.

FINDINGS:

None.

CONCERNS:

None.

Follow-Up on Prior Audit Recommendations

The prior audit report (2020-02) contained two concerns and two general comments over the Volusia Forever program. The audit scope for that audit was from FY 2001 through FY 2019. The program was renewed by a citizen approved referendum passed on November 3, 2020. In June 2020, Council adopted Resolution 2020-80 with a requirement to create an advisory committee by June 1, 2021 to conduct ongoing review of all projects under consideration and to make recommendations to Council. In January 2021, after the program was renewed, county staff requested Council approve Resolution 2021-11, which created the Volusia Forever Advisory Committee once again. During the months of April and May multiple listening sessions were held throughout the county to obtain citizen input and direction. The Committee will be meeting in the next several months to outline the program going forward, including land acquisitions. A joint workshop of the Committee and Council was scheduled on Tuesday, July 13, 2021. It is anticipated that the recommendations will be approved at an upcoming County Council meeting. A summary of the status is in table 2.

Table 2: Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

Status	Findings	Concerns	General Comments
Completed	-	1	-
In-progress, waiting on Council or Committee approval	-	-	1
In-progress	-	1	-
No longer applicable	-	-	1
Total	0	2	2

Concern 1: County did not seek reimbursement for all allowable acquisition costs

Recap: 2 of 10 property acquisitions tested did not have all the appraisals charged to the proper activity unit within the General Ledger (\$14,650 out of \$113,650 (13%) tested). County did not seek reimbursement for allowable acquisition costs.

Recommendation: Develop a Volusia Forever indexing system from the initial identification for acquisition, while at the same time, coordinate with the Accounting Division to create an activity unit within the Fund. Carefully review all transactions to ensure proper coding of invoices to the activity unit to maximize reimbursement opportunities.

Management's Responses: This is an oversight that needs to be addressed if the program is renewed. If renewed, the county staff will update the Volusia Forever process to include a specific requirement that staff include all applicable costs, including appraisal and other acquisition costs, when seeking funding from grants or as part of a joint-purchase agreement. This will ensure that staff consistently secures all eligible funding from other sources.

Current Status: *In progress.* Staff are developing a new indexing system to track costs associated with each property and will coordinate with Accounting when appropriate as the acquisition program gets underway.

Concern 2: County website linked to the wrong management file

Recap: The management plan for the Deep Creek Preserve was linked to the incorrect plan on the county's website. After being notified by the auditor, this was corrected.

Recommendation: Review website files when posted to ensure links are correctly pulling the correct file.

Management's Responses: This is an issue that needs immediate action, as well as establishment of a protocol for monitoring and updating the website. Growth and Resource Management and Parks and Cultural Affairs already initiated review and update to the website to ensure that there is correct, upto-date information on the website, as well as active links to other data sources. There will be a protocol put in place to ensure staff conduct quarterly reviews of the website and other public information to ensure validity and consistency.

Current Status: Completed.

General Comment 1: Land management set aside consideration

Recap: Council should give direction on land management set aside as the current 10% does not cover all the costs to manage the lands. In FY 2019, this was approximately \$1.1 million of which \$570,000 (or 52%) was paid from the county's General Fund and \$536,000 (or 48%) was paid from the Volusia Forever fund.

Recommendation: Council direction on land management set aside.

Management's Responses: The Volusia Forever Advisory Committee is recommending a set aside of 15% to manage the lands. Additionally, the Committee will recommend funding program staff and operations from the ad valorem assessment for Council's consideration and approval.

Current Status: *In progress.* The Committee is recommending, for approval at an upcoming County Council meeting, as stated above.

General Comment 2: If program is not renewed, Council direction on remaining available funds

Recap: If the program is not renewed, Council should give direction on the usage of available funds, which was projected at approximately \$14.5 million at the end of FY 2021.

Recommendation: Council direction if program is not renewed.

Management's Responses: No longer applicable.

Current Status: No longer applicable

Volusia County Internal Auditor

Appendix 1 – Financial Summary of Volusia Forever FY 2002 – FY 2020

2021-04 Volusia Forever July 23, 2021 FY 2002 FY 2003 FY 2004 FY 2005 FY 2006 FY 2007 FY 2008 FY 2009 FY 2010 FY 2011 FY 2012 FY 2013 FY 2014 FY 2015 FY 2016 FY 2017 FY 2018 FY 2019 FY 2020 Fund Revenues Total 161 - Volusia Forever Volusia Forever Ad Valorem Taxes \$ 2,521,254 \$ 3,653,053 4,192,068 4,775,390 \$ 4,078,401 3,819,103 3,603,501 2,401,566 1,608,937 1,228,232 1,173,757 1,294,268 1,559,348 1,939,261 2,606,109 2,731,292 \$ 3,246,894 \$ 3,972,508 \$ 50,404,943 318 317 312 340 312 571 626 667 6,370 Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) 208 306 172 120 305 602 298 400 499 Investment Income 75,116 81.039 10.322 97,458 210.708 376,391 395,688 347,208 144.917 (64.091) 19,729 33,319 45,457 48,627 64,812 111,661 7.622 425,242 264,760 2.695.984 1,140,333 1,466,150 207,948 90,240 Partner Revenues 77,729 2,982,400 32,602 42 644 36.742 398.903 128,773 136.287 299 550 180 847 239 818 140 942 20 000 127 761 243.080 2.450.372 Land Management Fees 283 362.139 Land Rental Fees 7,000 32,603 7,649 36,742 5,352 31,506 67,145 87,040 31,650 63,590 65,260 67,017 134,700 99,009 736,264 80,000 Mitigation Fees 80.000 Sale of Easements 875 35,850 1,500 38,225 3,776 Sale of Mineral Rights 3,776 7.501 20 458 98 153 11,214 339 1.850 33.062 Miscellaneous Revenues 5.585 80,261 261/262- Limited Tax GO Bonds Volusia Forever Ad Valorem Taxes 5,745,518 3,245,383 3,559,225 3,440,441 3,452,459 3,464,514 3,399,744 3,399,259 3,410,049 3.406.522 3,306,880 3,000,698 3,308,046 3,288,625 3,110,713 52,538,077 18,695,000 Debt Proceeds 18,695,000 234 652 490 661 576 687 657 633 522 Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) 368 380 867 791 683 604 8.804 Investment Income 179,657 223,114 88,077 67,137 31,510 28,298 20,281 16,487 19,781 21,826 27,795 35,455 50,195 60,038 33,815 903,465 361- Forever Capital Projects **Debt Proceeds** 39,998,354 39,998,354 1,033,275 1,065,751 555,590 166,240 41,134 2.861.990 Investment Income Miscellaneous Revenues 49,865 9 16,524 66,397 Sale of Easements 37,750 37,750 Partner Revenues SJRWMD Grants Water Quality Monitor 318,205 318,205 2,799,891 Sale of Land 2.799.891 **Total Revenues** 2,596,577 4,875,026 5,676,358 4,893,613 47,408,529 9,364,669 11,304,542 7,805,030 6,549,026 5,533,458 4,829,444 4,827,121 5,157,233 23,944,814 5,643,243 5,963,204 6,254,635 7,353,432 7,726,575 177,706,527 **Expenditures** 161 - Volusia Forever / 361- Forever Capital Projects TIF Payments 51,775 94,707 126,045 153,722 208,101 200,746 187,849 204,290 108,747 59,171 41,052 37,419 41,020 50,983 50,020 72,236 81,339 94,053 115,446 1,978,721 39,477 92,615 4,510 22,381 1,368 25 22 182 173,952 12,173 1.199 Forever Programs Land Management 130,529 419.491 402,837 442,344 276,369 683,255 363,929 358.584 843,171 529,884 441,951 474.969 362.794 780,773 277.096 551.985 536,014 590.630 8,466,604 Land Acquisitions Meynard Property 916,373 916,373 754,060 Catholic Diocese Property 754,060 1,392,899 1,165,174 Fore Properties 837.488 3.395.560 1,651,261 69 1,651,330 Kaye Properties Plum Creek 4,459,273 4.459.273 Ponce Preserve Project 7,000 6,000 165,497 178,497 518.663 Smith, Corbett 80.017 11,600 610.279 Timberlands Consolidated 599,914 7,000 3,000 10,600 620,514 Bayou Bay 2,506,379 400 2,506,779 Dan Paul Property 350.150 350.150 Eubanks/ Rozier DLSCP Property 1,500 2,000 8,348 916,614 928,462 Festival Property 15 800 8 800 13.800 6,572,284 6 610 684 Gardella Property 164,830 1,500 166,330 440,284 440,284 Garrity Property Green Springs 87.541 87.541 1,791,444 2,025 Lefils Property 1,793,469 493 729 Oglesby Property 11 760 505 489 Townsend/Schroeder Trust Property 16,425 15,400 31,825 15,250 15,250 Akers Quail Ranch Ford Ocklawaha Property 17 700 7 450 738,151 16,963 780.264 11,900 300 Lafayette Landing/ WDA 12,200 11 832 937 Lunsford Property 9 500 11 842 437 Progress Energy Astor 19,950 2,699,921 2,719,871 Double B Ranch 19.900 19.900 David Strawn Properties 17.125 18,800 29,127 3.758.428 1.484 3.824.964 Hughes/ Huntington Trust 22,355 12,400 1,010,644 1,045,399 Russell Port Orange 375 000 375 000 Stanaki / ICI INC 26,300 (1,000)1,693,285 1,718,585 150,023 1.800 Agostine Wiregrass Prairie 151.823 Amy Brooks Property 260.097 260.097 Blanchette DLSCP Property 1,919,313 1,919,313 Charlene Strawn Property 7.050 7.050 Hamlin Dann Cattle Company 15,000 15,000 4.093.861 4.093.861 Krol Property Lao Property 11,250 11,250 Rainey/ Lesher Lake Colby 1,307,246 1,307,246 Underhill Lake Colby Property 400 54 507 54.907 **Duff Property** 411,327 411,327 Fatio Road 4.257 4.257 Fordmikol Project 5,250 5,250 Hicks Trust 3,700 1,238,577 42,564 5,062 20,117 12,646 1,322,666 Holiday Haven Property 47.363 47.363 5,700 1,508,250 1,513,950 Thronby Property 313,319 313.319 Weaver Lake George Properties Glenwood Park 9,898 Kagel-Butts Property 1,400 5,185 6.585

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July 23, 2021																				
<u>Fund</u> <u>Revenues</u>	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Total
Leffler Property	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 21,650 \$	5,000	23,831,910 \$	- \$	- \$	- \$	-	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 23,858,560
Pacetta Preserve	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,000	3,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11,000
Whiting Limited	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	85
SJRWMD Cape Atlantic Estates	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	77,729	90,240	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	167,969
Lake George Fernery-Cade	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,100
Small Lot Acquisition Program	-	51,093	29,603	105,163	167,374	228,786	282,313	370,339	265,782	122,027	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,622,480
61/262- Limited Tax GO Bonds																				
Debt Service Costs	-	-	-	-	3,061,553	3,429,801	3,431,726	3,431,201	3,433,226	3,576,616	3,433,908	3,431,908	3,433,713	21,989,491	3,280,951	3,282,636	3,285,786	3,281,528	3,284,831	69,068,876
61- Forever Capital Projects																				
Debt Service Costs	-	-	-	-	469,337	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	469,337
Total Expenditures	980,321	8,704,817	7,446,765	1,275,361	19,543,934	19,269,017	7,537,040	12,462,317	4,304,917	28,528,198	5,742,111	3,925,291	3,949,727	22,403,268	4,111,766	3,631,968	3,919,110	3,911,777	3,990,908	165,638,614
Transfers In																				
61 - Volusia Forever																				
Commercial Paper Proceeds	-	4,600,000	2,500,000	-	2,863,989	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9,963,989
Barberville Mitigation Tract	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	139,928	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	139,928
Group Insurance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,780	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,519	6,299
To close other VF funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24,500	-	-	-	-	-	24,500
otal Transfers In		4,600,000	2,500,000	-	2,863,989	-	-	-	-	139,928	-	2,780	-	24,500	-	-	-		3,519	10,134,716
Transfers Out																				
61 - Volusia Forever																				
Plum Creek Acquisition	-	401,679	535,369	322,642	582,993	572,928	2,427,747	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4,843,359
Bayou Bay Property	-		171,087	526,895	327,383	322,973	290,634	1,392,214	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,031,185
51- Limited Tax GO Bonds																				
Transfer to Fund 161	-	-	-	-	2,863,989	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,863,989
otal Transfers Out	-	401,679	706,457	849,538	3,774,365	895,901	2,718,380	1,392,214	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10,738,533
let Change in Fund Balance	1,616,257	368,530	23,136	2,768,714	26,954,218	(10,800,249)	1,049,122	(6,049,501)	2,244,109	(22,854,812)	(912,667)	904,610	1,207,506	1,566,046	1,531,477	2,331,235	2,335,525	3,441,654	3,739,186	11,464,096
Beginning Fund Balance - All Volusia Forever Funds	-	1,616,257	1,984,786	2,007,922	4,776,637	31,730,854	20,930,605	21,979,727	15,930,226	18,174,335	(4,680,476)	(5,593,143)	(4,688,533)	(3,481,027)	(1,914,981)	(383,505)	1,947,731	4,283,255	7,724,910	
Ending Fund Balance - All Volusia Forever Funds	\$ 1,616,257	\$ 1,984,786	\$ 2,007,922	\$ 4,776,637	\$ 31,730,854	\$ 20,930,605	\$ 21,979,727	\$ 15,930,226 \$	18,174,335	(4,680,476) \$	(5,593,143) \$	(4,688,533) \$	(3,481,027) \$	(1,914,981)	\$ (383,505)	\$ 1,947,731	\$ 4,283,255	\$ 7,724,910	\$ 11,464,096	\$ 11,464,096