



Volusia Forever Advisory Committee Listening Session Minutes



Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Brannon Center

105 South Riverside Drive, New Smyrna Beach, FL

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Mary Anne Connors, Chair
Wanda Van Dam, Vice Chair
John Gamble
Jessica Gow
Derek LaMontagne
Suzanne Scheiber
Steve Crump
Derek Orberg (online)

COUNTY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Danny Robbins

STAFF PRESENT

Clay Ervin, Growth and Resource Management Director
Dona Butler, Community Services Director
Brad Burbaugh, Extension Services Director
Ryan Ossowski, Chief Financial Officer
Ginger Adair, Environmental Management Director
Tim Baylie, Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Director
Russ Brown, Senior County Attorney
Danielle Dangleman, Special Project Coordinator
Nick Dunnam, Land Management Activity Manager
Sarah Presley, Administrative Aide

Call to order:

Chair Connors called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUOCP7ag48k>

Public Participation

Sonia Guidry spoke in favor of protecting areas of Volusia County from development. She encouraged the committee to strict to science-based criteria not popularity. Diverse habitats are important and the number nine ranked property on the Florida Forever list located in DeLand offers such habitats. She feels it would be a good opportunity to partner with Florida Forever. She thanked the committee for volunteering and stated there are many people willing to work with them. Ms. Guidry provided a written statement which can be found as part of the meeting minutes.

Nancy Vaughn thanked the committee and staff for setting up the listening sessions. She spoke on behalf of the League of Women Voters and The ECHO Volusia Forever Alliance. She spoke to the importance of the transparency and community involvement in the Volusia Forever program as well as no County Council Members involvement in land negotiations. Volusia Conservation Corridor completion is an important element and will help with water resources. They are thrilled with the addition of the forest and farmlands as well as water resources. She stated partnerships are important and believes they should be continued. She would like to see Doris Leeper completed. She is thankful for the community members working for water restoration and Volusia Forever funding could help those efforts. Ms. Vaughn provided a written statement which can be found as part of the meeting minutes.

Libby Levette thanked the committee members for volunteering. She read a section of Florida Statute 259.1055 better known as Florida Wildlife Corridor Act. She stated there is a lot of property to be purchased in West Volusia such as Farmton and Osteen to protect the water supply.

Member Orberg (online) thanked the speakers and staff. He encouraged people to speak of their interests.

Jim Keese spoke regarding grants for those that cannot afford to upgrade their septic tanks in the Mosquito Lagoon and the Indian River areas.

Mr. Ervin informed Mr. Keese that those activities are not in the scope of Volusia Forever. He also stated that Mr. Ulrich, Utilities Director, recently received a grant for sewer extension into the DeLeon Springs area. He suggested Mr. Keese follow-up with Mr. Ulrich's office.

Randy Herman thanked the committee members. He asked the how the committee is approaching the rising cost of land and reluctant sellers.

Mrs. Adair stated that under the new program no lands have been purchased. She reviewed the willing seller process and stated it was not an issue in the past and it is something that will be addressed once the program begins purchasing lands.

Mr. Ervin reminded the audience the properties for purchase must have an appraisal and the program does not pay more than the appraised value.

Member LaMontagne, District 3 representative, made a statement. He thanked the speakers. He hopes the land on the A list in district 3 will be acquired as soon as possible, specifically in the Doris Leeper area. He finds it troublesome with all of the changes occurring such as land cleared without permits and animals being displaced. Protecting the Spruce Creek is important, the water quality is suffering. Recently land that was identified to be protected had an administrative amendment to the boundary survey and allowed building on protected lands. He wants to make sure that does not continue to occur. He appreciates the existing 18 criteria and feels that no land is too big or too small that should be considered. The public should have an input and if they want a particular piece of land he feels it should be considered. Saving tax payers money is an important and could be achieved with Volusia Forever. He asked if there would be any type of credit for easements given?

Mr. Keese spoke regarding issues of run off into storm sewer.

Chair Connors noted that water resources issues are important but advised Mr. Keese that his issue was not relevant to the Volusia Forever program.

Ms. Butler requested discussion regarding the ECHO committee's request to hold a joint meeting.

Discussion ensued regarding the purpose of the joint meeting and the effect it would have on the timing of the Forever program moving forward. After much discussion, a consensus was achieved that the joint meeting should be held on May 13 at 1:00 p.m.

With no more discussion, Chair Connors asked for a motion to adjourn.

Member Gamble made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Vice-Chair Van Dam; the meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

April 28, 2021
Brannon Center Listening Session
New Smyrna Beach

To: Volusia Forever Advisory Committee Members

From: Sonya Guidry

Topics: Volusia Forever Policy and Guidelines
Possible Partnership with other agencies as SJRWMD, and Florida Forever

Dear Volusia Forever Advisory Board:

Policy Guideline:

Please be sure to draw up science based criteria for 2020 Volusia Forever's policy going forward. It is also important continue the environmentally sensitive habitat corridor approach that the previous 2000 Volusia Forever Advisory Committee drew up before funds were depleted.

Partnership:

Our FNPS Pawpaw Chapter set up a "Walk with our Lawmakers" field trip in early January 2018 guided by longleaf pine experts to showcase a last remnant of Longleaf Pine habitat on the Deland Ridge just four miles north of DeLeon Springs hoping that Florida Forever funds could be used to protect this land. The guides, Dr. Cindy Bennington and Dr. Susan Carr, also pointed out the value of longleaf pine sandhill habitat for continued water recharge to the Floridan aquifer. Alas many Florida Forever projects as this Longleaf Pine Ecosystem project which was ranked #9 in the 2017 Critical Natural Lands survey has continued to be bypassed by our Florida State officials.

This may be an opportunity where Volusia Forever could partner with Florida Forever to finally preserve a section of a once vast historic Longleaf Pine Ecosystem that extended across the whole southeastern United States and ultimately into Volusia County. This longleaf pine system provides habitat for the red cockaded woodpecker and Sherman's Fox squirrel, as well a wide diversity of native plants that took thousands of years to co-evolve in this unique longleaf pine habitat.

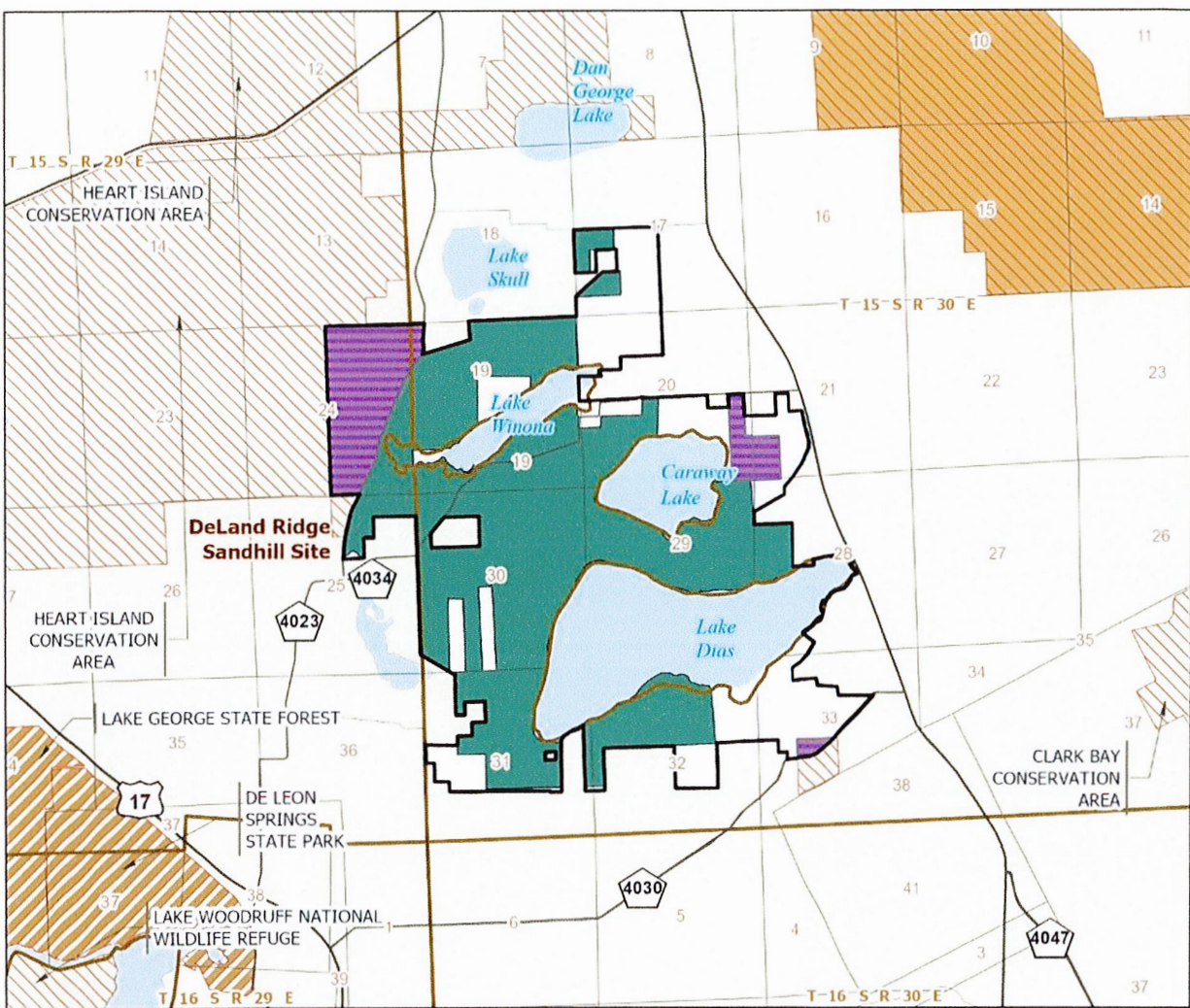
Below is a link to the 2020 Florida Forever 5 Year Plan that focuses on preserving the historic longleaf pine ecosystem habitat that crosses 4 counties to end in its most southeasterly terminus here in Volusia County.

[2020 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan Excerpt : Longleaf Pine Ecosystem](#)

Thank you for the work you do and will continue to do to preserve unique wildlife corridors and habitats that make Volusia County so special,

Respectfully submitted,

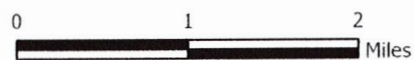
Sonya Guidry
1205 Lurian Street
New Smyrna Beach



LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 5

VOLUSIA COUNTY

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



JANUARY 2020

Project Map 159: Source → Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI, January 2020)

Clay Henderson

To: Volusia Forever Advisory Board and Staff
Earth Day: April 22, 2021

Re: Implementation of Volusia Forever

Congratulations on your appointment to the Volusia Forever Advisory Board. You may well look back on this with pride as the opportunity to build upon a lasting legacy of conservation in our community.

For those of you I don't know, I chaired our first in the nation bond issue campaign in 1986, and co-chaired the Volusia Forever/ECHO campaign in 2000. In various capacities with The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and Florida Audubon Society, I worked to establish many other county level land acquisition programs across the state. Over 20 counties have since approved environmental land acquisition programs that have raised in excess of a billion dollars. Volusia is one of the very few places where voters have approved financing land conservation three times!

The Volusia Forever/ECHO Alliance has provided you a position paper on issues concerning implementation of Volusia Forever. That document is based in part on what was heard from the public during the successful campaign. It is vitally important that you are conducting these listening sessions and keeping transparency in the program will be a critical success factor for keeping the trust and support of the public.

I would like to stress some important points for your consideration. First, your job is to review applications and make recommendations and not to negotiate land deals. The county council's job is to review your recommendations and either approve or deny them. It is not the county council's job to negotiate with land owners. There are multiple examples around the state where county commissioners have not taken that advice and ended up under investigation or indictment. Your recommendations on the Volusia Forever procedures should include this wall of separation.

Next, it is critical that the implementing procedures require an independent appraisal, from a licensed appraiser on either the state or water management district approved list, and that over a certain amount there should be two appraisals. It is vital to the long-term integrity of the program that the county pay no more than the appraised amount. The state does not allow it, and there are too many other tools in the toolbox to work with landowners to achieve a price that does not exceed appraisal.

The county should engage with established non-profit conservation groups who have the experience with working with the state and with landowners. The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and Conservation Fund are all national organizations with established programs in Florida. They have different priorities, but they are professionally run and have proven success. These three organizations have protected over 3 million acres in Florida! There are also a few regional land trusts that also have professional operations. Both Conservation Florida and the North Florida Land Trust, are accredited land trusts, and have worked to acquire properties in Volusia County.

Volusia Forever projects should consider both acquisition in fee, and less than fee, otherwise known as conservation easements, or purchase of development rights. Conservation objectives can often be met through easements rather than outright purchase, and this also keeps private land owners in possession of the land and responsible for management. This will be particularly important as you consider “farms and forests,” which makes the renewal the program a little different from the past. Take a look at the conservation easement templates for the Rural and Family Lands Program as well as the NRCS Agricultural Easement Program. In addition, easements are another opportunity to work with landowners to protect shorelines along the St. Johns River or Indian River Lagoon.

A key to earlier success was partnering with state and water management district programs. In doing so, you can be assured that projects have been fully vetted by staff and there are matching funds available. The SJRWMD five-year acquisition map is available at this link: <https://www.sjrwmd.com/static/lands/acquisition/Acquisition-map.pdf>. The Florida Forever Priority List is available at this link: <https://floridadep.gov/lands/environmental-services/content/florida-forever>. As of this writing, the Legislature is poised to appropriate \$100 million for Florida Forever next year.

Completion of the Florida Forever projects should be a priority for the new program. Maps and data for these projects can be found at the Florida Forever Atlas: <https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Florida%20Forever%20Project%20Atlas.pdf>.

The largest project on that list is the Volusia Conservation Corridor. According to the Florida Forever Atlas, at least 17,000 acres remain to be protected, though some of that is in Flagler County. Much of these remaining lands could be protected through easements.

While most of the Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve has been acquired, there remains about 366 acres of inholdings that should be considered for acquisition.

There are two other multi-county Florida Forever projects with lands identified within Volusia County. The Indian River Blueway project includes Turnbull Hammock as “essential parcels remaining.” Much of this could be achieved through continuation of the small lot acquisition program for Cape Atlantic Estates. The Long Leaf Pine Ecosystem project includes lands in the vicinity of Lake Winona, Carraway Lake, and Lake Dias.

The committee should also consider reaching out to the Florida State Park System. Tomoka, Bulow Creek, and North Peninsula were significantly expanded through partnership between Volusia County and Florida State Parks. The optimum state park boundaries includes inholdings and additions along what is commonly referred to as the Ormond Loop.

Resolution 2009-91 should be your starting point for consideration of criteria for acquisition. These criteria need to be tweaked to take into consideration a few nuanced changes to Volusia

Forever. The 2020 Referenda language placed an emphasis on water resource protection and included the language on “farms and forests.”

With regard to financing, the county should be urged to bond a portion of the Volusia Forever tax levy to take advantage of historic low interest municipal bond rates. Real property valuations in Volusia are increasing far greater than the interest rates on municipal bonds. Bonding provides you more bang for the buck. This is one of those situations where if you “pay as you go,” it will cost the county more in the long run.

Lastly, the continuation of Volusia Forever gives you an historic opportunity to truly think big! The combined efforts of those who came before you have conserved 233,000 acres or roughly one third of the county. But we are now in a growth era where more land is being converted to development than preserved. Ecologists argue that we need somewhere between 40-50% of our lands in conservation in order to protect critical ecosystem services that we all utilize for clear potable water, flood control, wildlife habitat, and resource-based recreation. So use your time and talents to think big. How can we develop partnerships for conservation that will add at least another 50,000 acres to our mosaic of conservation lands? Maybe you will get lucky and aim even higher? Future generations of Volusians will certainly thank you.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Ch. Ad", written in a cursive style.