

State of Our Lands

Division of State Lands



Babcock Ranch

Preserving an Environmental Legacy



n June 19, 2006, in a bright green pasture bordered by pine flatwoods, Governor Jeb Bush signed the Babcock Preservation Act, taking Florida one step closer to completing one of the largest conservation land purchases in state history. The new law provides \$310 million of State money to acquire nearly 74,000 acres of the Babcock Ranch property, which spans both Lee and Charlotte counties in Southwest Florida.

Home to the Florida panther, Florida black bear and the crested caracara, Babcock Ranch is 91,000 acres of ranch lands, cypress domes, flatwoods, scrub and wetlands. The land is sandwiched between two fast-growing areas, Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte to the north and Fort Myers to the south.

Part of the State's Florida Forever land conservation program, the acquisition will provide a connection with other conservation lands, with the goal of preserving a 65-mile natural land corridor from Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf of Mexico—the single largest tract of contiguous conservation lands in the state's history.

The purchase of the Babcock property complements the Florida Forever program because funding came from outside the program, saving funds to purchase other environmentally sensitive and valuable properties.

History of the Ranch

Hunting lured Edward Vose Babcock, a Pittsburgh lumber magnate to Southwest Florida and in 1914 he bought a tract of land, where he established the Crescent B Ranch as a logging and farming business.

In the 1930s, his son Fred C. Babcock assumed responsibility for the ranch and is credited with establishing environmental stewardship of the property. An advocate for preserving natural spaces, he replanted the ranch's logged-over forests, removed invasive non-native plants and donated thousands of acres to the State for preservation.

After Fred died in 1997 at the age of 83, the Babcock Florida Company continued operating the cattle ranch; however, the Babcock family was interested in selling the property.

The Art of the Deal

Many would-be purchasers courted the family with significant offers, eager to buy the land and divide it into ranchettes, selling it off piece by piece. This was not the Babcock family's vision for the property they had so carefully managed for over 90 years.

In July 2005, Kitson and Partners, LLC—a West Palm Beach-based development company—reached an agreement with the Babcock Florida Company to purchase the ranch and began working with the State

Showing off our History to other States

An article co-authored by Jim Farr and Greg Brock that describes the great land-conservation programs of Florida will appear in the July issue of the Kentucky journal, *Sustain*. The article begins with the Land Acquisition Trust Fund of 1963, describing the Environmentally Endangered Lands program and its successors up through the Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever programs.

to preserve more than 90 percent of the land. At a total cost of \$350 million, the State is purchasing most of the historic ranch for preservation, with Lee County contributing more than \$40 million to the acquisition.

Kitson & Partners, and its new management company, Babcock Ranch Management, LLC, will manage the ranch for 10 years. On the land not included in the state purchase, Kitson will build a mixed-use community that will provide a wide range of housing options as well as commercial spaces. The existing business operations—cattle ranching, sod farming, ecotours, rock mining and timber cultivation—will continue.

An Environmental Legacy for Everyone

Babcock Ranch will be available to the public for hiking, bicycling, camping, horseback riding and other recreational activities, including hunting.

But there's no need to wait, visitors can enjoy the Babcock Ranch today. Since 1991, Babcock Wilderness Adventures has been offering ecotours of the ranch and its natural areas to nearly 30,000 people every year. During a 90-minute tour, a guide talks about the ranch activities, wildlife and the natural environment. A museum featuring Florida history, Babcock operations, and natural history artifacts and exhibits is housed in a movie set used by Warner Brothers to film the Sean Connery movie *Just Cause*. Visitors can bring a picnic lunch or enjoy a lunch at the seasonal Gator Shack Restaurant. Reservations required: for more information call (800) 500-5583 or visit BabcockWilderness.com.

Governor Jeb Bush
Secretary Colleen Castille
Deputy Secretary Bob Ballard
Director Eva Armstrong

State of Our Lands is a publication of news for and about the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Division of State Lands. This annual newsletter is available online at: FloridaForever.org.

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All photos in this issue were taken by John Moran at The Babcock Ranch.

Appraisal Standards

It's a perfect tortoise and the hare analogy—Florida Forever's land purchases took the slow and steady path as real estate prices shot up over the past few years.

The boom seems to have crested. More "For Sale" signs are now accompanied by "Price Reduced" signs and properties may not be selling nearly as fast. The run-up started about three years ago, driven in large part by the very low interest rates that were set to keep the American economy rolling after the shock of September 11th.

According to Kerry Drakes, an Appraiser Administrator of the Division of State Lands, Bureau of Appraisal, property appraisers adopted careful standards in the 1980s after another jump in real estate prices fizzled and many savings and loan institutions went bankrupt. The Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) are set by The Appraisal Foundation, a professional society, and adopted by the federal government and the State of Florida for all federally subsidized lenders. Buying land for Florida Forever was now based on the deals that have closed, not on the currently advertised sales.

The USPAP rules are also supplemented by state regulations for appraisals. But, those rules carry a statement that rules are no substitute for good judgment.

"The appraisal will have to be historical, by the standards adopted by the federal government, and used by the state," Drakes explained. Historical data is based on the courthouse records of closed transactions, along with interviews of buyers and sellers to verify the details of a transaction. The commercial market sometimes has an imbalance of information between sellers who know the value of their land and buyers who don't know the property as well as they could.

The appraisal standards not only protected the Florida Forever funds, but also protected the portfolio of lands for the projects. The inflated prices did impact Florida Forever purchasing, but it's hard to

say exactly how much. Lands purchased in Florida Forever projects are in widely varying parts of a large state, making it hard to compare the land purchased to buffer a beachfront area with, for example, pasture land purchased in one of Florida's inland counties.

You Think We Have Problems?

Tales of Public Land Management

People in Berlin went hog wild when the infamous Berlin Wall was torn down in 1989. So did the hogs. Wild boars in the woods of Brandenburg, around the city, moved into the city after the concrete walls and steel fence were torn down. The boars are smart enough to get used to traffic, garbage cans, backyard gardens and the occasional person who thinks the boars are cute and illegally feeds them.

According to National Geographic Magazine, city officials estimate there may be as many as 8,000 *Wildschweine* in the city. They weigh as much as 300 pounds, can be the size of a steamer trunk, and despite their city smarts, there's a traffic accident involving a boar about once a day.

Public Land Management No Place for Wimps



Ich bin ein Berliner!

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lorida Forever News



IN MARCH plans were made for conservation groups to join with DEP to help conserve more than 28,000 acres of forests in the Florida Panhandle. Two non-profit groups, The Nature Conservancy and the Conservation Fund, will work with DEP and the Northwest Florida Water Management District to acquire land for the Yellow River Ravines project and along the Perdido River, and to augment the Blackwater River State Forest.

IN APRIL Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Cabinet approved buying the 145-acre Okeechobee Battlefield site. This is the site a historic skirmish in the Second Seminole War that took place 1835-1842. On Christmas Day in 1837, more than 1,000 U.S. Army and Missouri Volunteer soldiers led by Colonel Zachary Taylor attacked several hundred Seminoles and Miccosukees at this site. Another 65 acres of the 211-acre project remain on the State's acquisition list. This site was added to the National Register of Historic Places in the 1960s and is now a National Historic Landmark.

IN MAY the Legislature passed House Bill 1347 to provide the necessary funding for acquiring the Babcock Ranch near Fort Myers. This will not only preserve a 74,000-acre area in fast-growing Southwest Florida, but will also preserve a corridor of natural lands between the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Okeechobee. The legislation also creates a non-profit corporation to manage the property. Also, the Governor and Cabinet approved the first purchase, for 2,615 acres, of the Upper St. Marks River Corridor Florida Forever project.

About Florida Forever

Established in 1999 by Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature, the 10-year, \$3 billion Florida Forever program is the largest land buying initiative in the nation, conserving environmentally sensitive lands, restoring water resources and preserving important cultural and historical places. Under the Governor's leadership, more than 1.2 million acres have been placed in public ownership throughout the state.

Upcoming State Land Conferences

October 2006

ELRC in St. Augustine

The Division of State Lands is Florida's liaison this year for the Eastern Lands and Resources Council's conference in St. Augustine.

The conference is October 22-26, 2006 at the Casa Monica Hotel, and is aimed at providing a "soup to nuts" discussion on how the Billion Dollar Florida Forever Land Acquisition Program was legislated, funded and implemented. Topics will also include appraisals, conservation easements, and stretching acquisition dollars. Special emphasis will be placed on networking, learning and interacting with peers from around the country.

Conference registration information will be available online at www.elrc.com. For immediate information, please e-mail Vicki.Thompson@dep.state.fl.us.

November 2006

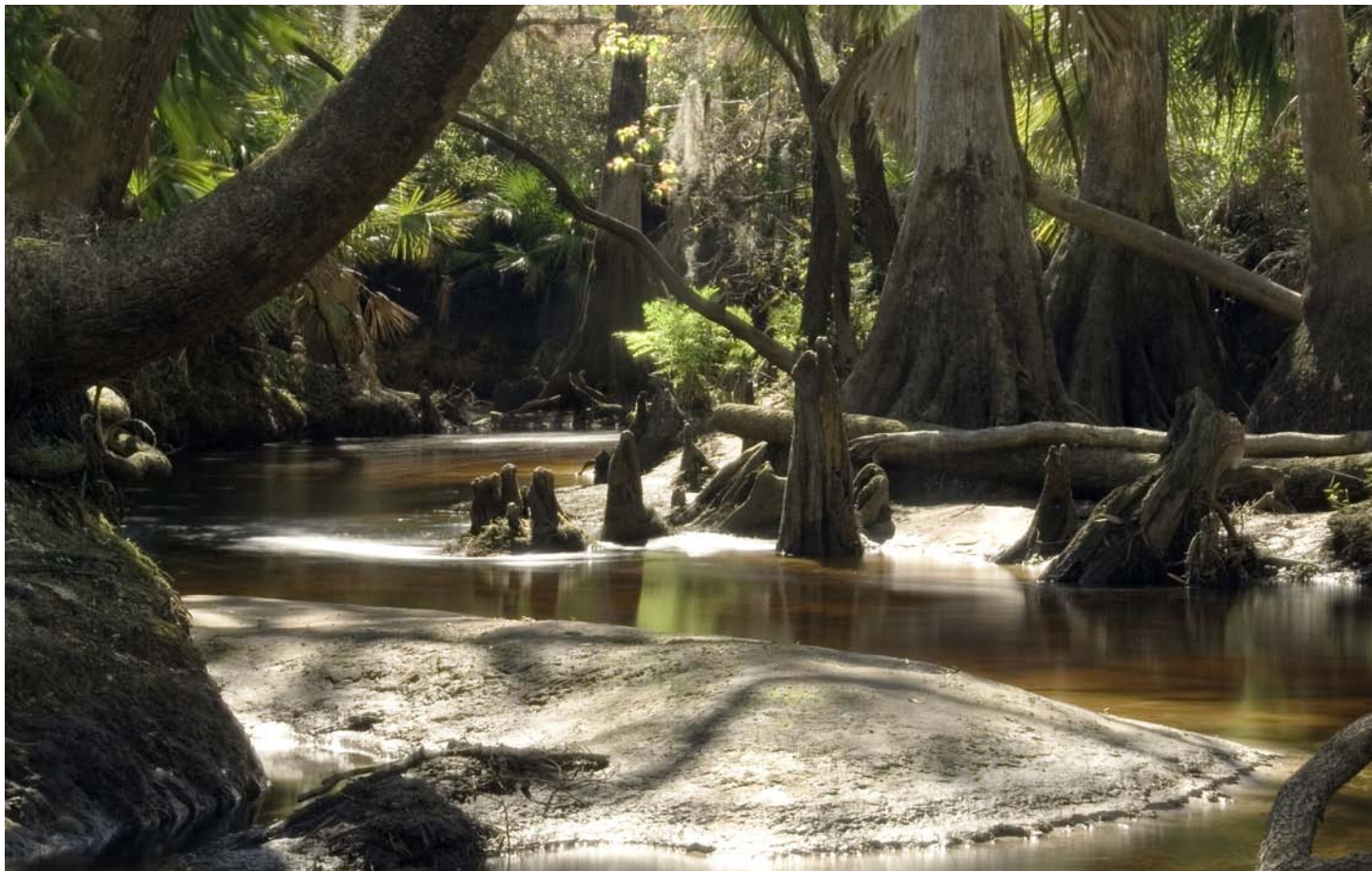
PLAM in Jacksonville

Florida is changing, and so is the annual Public Lands Acquisition and Management Conference.

Attendees now include officials from state agencies, city and county governments, and non-governmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the Trust for Public Land.

As Florida becomes more urban and suburban there is much more concern about structured recreation areas, such as state parks in urban areas, or the parks and historic sites set up with help from the Florida Communities Trust.

The conference, November 1-3, 2006 at Jacksonville's Hyatt Regency Hotel, is hosted by the St. Johns River Water Management District. The Division of State Lands is already planning field trips to nearby preservation areas. The website for the conference is www.ces.fau.edu/plam2006/.



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Conferences

CONSERVING LAND WITH CONSERVATION EASEMENTS, a Land Trust Alliance seminar, July 31-August 3 at the Magnolia Hotel in Houston, Texas. Details are at www.lta.org/training/.

91st ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA, August 6-11, in Memphis. Information at www.esa.org/memphis.

ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION COUNCIL, August 10-11 at the Douglas Building in Tallahassee. Schedule and information are available at www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/oes/ARC/2006agenda_summCal.htm.

CONFERENCE ON WATER MANAGEMENT, September 6-8 at Innisbrook Resort, Tarpon Springs. Information at sjr.state.fl.us/programs/outreach/news/index.html.

NORTH AMERICAN WEED MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (NAWMA) Conference September 18-21 in Calgary, Alberta. Details at www.invasiveplants.ab.ca/NAWMA2006.htm.

ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION COUNCIL, October 12-13 at the Douglas Building in Tallahassee. For more info, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/oes/ARC/2006agenda_summCal.htm.

LAND TRUST ALLIANCE ANNUAL RALLY, October 12-15 in Nashville, Tennessee. The Rally invites 1,600 guests to more than 100 seminars on conservation and management. Details are at www.lta.org.

NATIONAL TRAILS SYMPOSIUM, October 19-22, in Davenport, Iowa. Issues will include trails and economic development, and motorized and non-motorized trails. Online registration starts in June at www.americantrails.org.

EASTERN LANDS AND RESOURCES COUNCIL, an association of state lands officials, has their conference October 22-26 at the Casa Monica at St. Augustine. Details are available at www.elrc.org.

2006 PUBLIC LAND ACQUISITION & MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, November 1-3, sponsored by the St. Johns River Water Management District, at the Jacksonville Hyatt. Information is available at www.ces.fau.edu/plam2006.



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