

Forest Legacy LWCF Project

Rosewood Bluffs

Jefferson County Florida

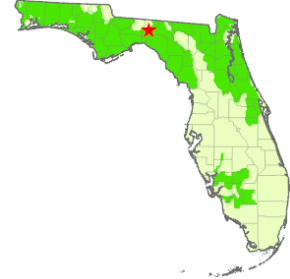


FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2024 Forest Legacy Program Funding	\$11,040,000
FY 2024 Non-Federal Cost Share	\$3,680,000
FY 2024 Project Costs	\$14,720,000
FY 2024 Project Acres	3,680

Forest Legacy Funding To Date	\$0
Total Project Costs	\$14,720,000
Total Project Acres	3,680

★ Project Location
Forest Legacy Areas



Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Rosewood Scenic Heritage Tract	3,680	\$14,720,000	\$11,040,000	\$3,680,000	Proposed 2024

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

A CONSERVATION EASEMENT (CE) on the Rosewood Scenic Heritage Tract (RSHT) provides one of the best opportunities to maintain the health of a nearby first-magnitude spring while conserving quality wildlife habitat in a rapidly-developing region of Florida. The tract contains old-growth bottomland forest while the uplands offer foraging habitat for the first reintroduced population of federally-listed Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers (RCW), which occur on adjacent property, as well as other state-listed, pineland-endemic birds. Perhaps most significantly, a CE on RSHT would bring immense water quality and quantity benefits to Wacissa Springs. The springs form the Wacissa River, one of the most pristine rivers in Florida. The river supports a thriving recreation-based economy that, coupled with the hunting and timber activities that take places on RSHT, inject millions into the local economy. RSHT, however, may not provide these benefits much longer. Development greatly threatens this rural region of Florida and the future of this property. A CE on RSHT will safeguard the land from these future impacts while helping to achieve stated goals in a broad spectrum of state and national conservation plans.



Federally protected species benefit from RSHT prescribed fire.
(Photo by Preston Ballard)

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS – TIMBER:** Timber from RSHT produced an average of \$255,274 in revenue annually over the last 12 years, helping to support local timber harvesters, truckers, and timber mills in Jefferson County, a state-designated Rural Community of Economic Opportunity.
- 2,165 acres of mature Loblolly Pine and 105 acres of planted Longleaf Pine grow on RSHT which will help sustain local timber markets for both species long into the future. Furthermore, the landowner continues to plant additional acreage in Longleaf Pine each year.
- The landowner has implemented prescribed fire in the uplands every 2-3 years for the past 22 years, improving forest health, reducing wildfire risk to surrounding communities, and minimizing the likelihood of wildfire impacts to nearby timber stands.

- **ECONOMIC BENEFITS – NON-TIMBER:** RSHT has been used as a quail-hunting property since 2000. Every \$1 invested in a Red Hills Region quail-hunting property generates \$0.88 to other local businesses, according to a 2018 Florida State University study.
- Conservation of RSHT benefits water quality of the spring-fed Wacissa River, designated as an Outstanding Florida Water. Approximately 15,600 people visit the Wacissa Springs Boat Ramp annually, amounting to an economic contribution of \$450,996 to Jefferson County.
- Conservation of RSHT helps maintain scenic views along two county-designated "Heritage Roads" that attract tourists and encourage them to spend money locally. The Flatwoods Wilderness Trail and Spanish Trace Trail border the western and southern edges of RSHT, respectively, for 5.2 miles total.
- RSHT is leased to 28 hunters each year, generating direct revenue of over \$49,537 annually for White-Tailed Deer and Wild Turkey hunting.
- Pine straw harvesting from RSHT generates approximately \$10,395 per year and supports local harvesters based in the region, while providing the commodity to local community consumers.
- **THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT:** Federally-threatened Wood Storks have been observed foraging immediately adjacent to RSHT within similar wetland habitat, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission identifies RSHT as potential Wood Stork foraging habitat.
- RSHT is within 0.6 miles of the first reintroduced population of Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers. RSHT falls within the dispersal range of 19 active RCW cluster territories occupying the Avalon CE and provides the habitat required for this currently-isolated population to expand.
- State-threatened Little Blue Herons utilize RSHT for foraging habitat. Large, intact wetlands with abundant food are critical for birds raising hungry young in nearby rookeries. Two documented rookeries exist on permanently protected lands within 6 miles of RSHT.
- Florida State Wildlife Action Plan-listed species documented on RSHT include Northern Bobwhite, Snowy Egret, Swallow-Tailed Kite, Red-Headed Woodpecker, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Brown-Headed Nuthatch, Bachman's Sparrow, Prothonotary Warbler, Common Ground-Dove, and Florida Black Bear.
- RSHT offers habitat for two species that the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) tracks, the Louisiana Waterthrush and King's Hairstreak. The Louisiana Waterthrush is an indicator of healthy riparian systems. The King's Hairstreak is a declining pollinator listed in most states where it occurs.
- **FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS AND UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES:** 202.5 acres of RSHT has been classified as upland hardwood forest, a habitat type designated by FNAI as an underrepresented natural community in Florida. According to FNAI, this habitat type contains over 50 state-listed plant species.
- 54 bird species have been documented on RSHT, while 60 other species have been documented from an eBird hotspot along a public road that borders much of RSHT and part of the adjacent Avalon Woodland Ravines tract. Collectively, the species count is the second-highest of any site in the county.
- The bottomland forests on RSHT are extraordinarily intact. Old-growth Spruce Pines, Southern Magnolias, and White Oaks tower above a diverse understory and crystal-clear seepage streams. The bottomland forests are virtually free of invasive plant species, which is exceedingly rare in the region.
- **WATER SUPPLY, AQUATIC HABITAT AND WATERSHED PROTECTION:** 100% of RSHT falls within the Wacissa Springs Group Priority Focal Area (PFA). Lands in the PFA are directly linked to this first-magnitude spring zone which births the Wacissa River, one of the most pristine rivers in Florida.
- Several large sinkholes provide direct recharge conduits into the Floridan Aquifer. Keeping these sinkholes in a natural state is important for the health of the aquifer, which 72% of Jefferson County residents directly rely upon for their drinking water, and for the health of the Wacissa River.



*RSHT benefits Wacissa Springs, boosting the local economy.
(Photo by Preston Ballard)*

- **SCENIC:** RSHT offers 10.1 miles of scenic viewshed from public roads, allowing the public to see the property from all sides. WPA Road, which borders RSHT to the east, is the 8th most species-rich eBird hotspot in Jefferson County and continues to be a popular birding destination.
- **HISTORIC/CULTURAL:** RSHT contains 3 known archaeological sites listed in the Florida Master Site File. The sites pertain to artifacts that date to the Late Archaic period, 3,000-5,000 years ago, predating the Apalachee Tribe that inhabited the area until colonization.

Threatened

- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** RSHT is zoned AG20, allowing for agriculture, subdivision, and residential development at 1 unit/20 acres. RSHT's boundary has not changed since the mid-1800's, yet no legal restrictions against development exist for the property, leaving it vulnerable to future alteration.
- **LAND AND LANDOWNER'S CIRCUMSTANCE:** The landowner has conserved nearby land and owns the first private property in the United States of America to be involved with RCW translocation. Applying a CE on RSHT would allow the superior stewardship ethic being implemented to carry on in perpetuity.
- The landowner is in poor health, and a new generation is taking ownership of the multiple properties he owns around the nation. Many of the family's land holdings will be sold to unknown entities, or outright developed for exponential financial gain in the near future.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** An industrial-scale solar facility has been proposed on natural land 0.8 miles from RSHT with nearly identical landcover. Industrial-scale solar constitutes one of the most substantial threats to rural lands in the Red Hills Region.
- A 2019 Florida Legislative proposal pushed for the construction of a toll road from Citrus County, Florida through Jefferson County. Though the project is currently inactive, this proposal could come up again due to the number of people relocating from South Florida to the Panhandle.
- Leon County, home to Tallahassee and immediately west of Jefferson County where RSHT is located, has lost 98,900 acres of rural land to development since 1948 according to the Leon County Planning Department. Much of that loss has occurred on the east side of the county within 15 miles of RSHT.
- As of 2020, the closest major city, Tallahassee, had a population of 192,885 and was growing at a rate of 0.75% per year. The city continues to expand its Urban Service Area (USA) eastward, such as when it increased the USA boundary by 2,810 acres in 2021.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** RSHT is less than 1.5 miles from the Highway 19 exit (Exit 225) on Interstate 10 (I-10) and its uplands are bounded on two sides by the four-lane Highway 19, leading to a very high development potential. Development continues to advance from I-10 towards RSHT.
- 65% of RSHT is classified as prime farmland by the United States Department of Agriculture, making it vulnerable to future conversion to row-crop agriculture if not encumbered by a CE for current usage. Water withdrawals associated with that land-use change have impacted the Wacissa Springs Group.
- Vast expanses of land such as RSHT are now highly vulnerable to the exploding commercial solar industry, as energy companies buy out landowners throughout Florida for solar array installation. Industrial-scale solar often renders working forests and natural habitat categorically defunct.



RSHT's intact bottomlands filter water through to the aquifer.
(Photo by Preston Ballard)

Strategic

- **CONSERVATION INITIATIVE – NATIONAL:** Permanently conserving 3,680 acres will support President Biden's 30x30 Initiative, which seeks to reverse biodiversity declines and combat climate change by conserving 30% of the land area within the United States of America by 2030.

- RSHT falls entirely within an active Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program project area, and furthers NRCS landscape initiatives including those regarding Longleaf Pine, Gopher Tortoise, and Northern Bobwhite recovery efforts. 133.8 acres of RSHT falls within the Lloyd Creek NRCS Sourcewater Protection Area.
- Conservation of RSHT will help to accomplish America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative's goal to increase coverage of longleaf from 3.4 million to 8 million acres by 2025. Specifically, the project encourages the continued planting of Longleaf Pine and increasing prescribed fire usage to foster natural longleaf regeneration.
- Critical breeding/foraging habitat for at least 22 migratory bird species, including Hooded Warblers, Summer Tanagers, Acadian Flycatchers, and Prothonotary Warblers observed onsite, will be protected. Conserving critical habitat for Neotropical migrants directly supports the goals of the United States North American Bird Conservation Initiative.
- CONSERVATION PLAN – NATIONAL: RSHT is currently enrolled in the Safe Harbor Program, an agreement authorized by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission under the federal Endangered Species Act for RCWs. Enrollment in the Safe Harbor Program is specifically mentioned in the RCW Recovery Plan.
- CONSERVATION PLAN – STATE: The project supports the Florida Forest Service's 2020 Forest Action Plan by reducing forest fragmentation, supporting sustainable forest markets, implementing prescribed fire on private lands, protecting water quality and quantity, and improving the economic vitality of forests.
- Conserving 3,680 acres within the Wacissa Springs Basin Management Action Plan and PFA furthers the goals of the 2016 Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act. According to a 2019 report by the Florida Springs Institute, the Wacissa Springs Group is the healthiest major spring complex in Florida and this project will help to maintain that status.
- CONSERVATION STRATEGY – STATE: 37% of RSHT (1,357 acres) falls in Priority 2 of 5 in the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, a state initiative with a goal to link existing conservation lands that promote wildlife movement, and a component of the Florida Wildlife Corridor. \$300 million was recently allocated through the passage of SB 976 to specifically conserve lands within this corridor.
- COMPLEMENT PROTECTED LANDS: RSHT is adjacent to 8,586 acres of land permanently conserved via conservation easements and is adjacent to 13,078 acres of land proposed to be conserved through the Florida Forever (FF) program. RSHT itself is a FF project, administered through a partnering agency. The Forest Legacy Program and FF program have successfully partnered together many times in the past.
- RSHT will augment an existing, interconnected network of publicly-owned conservation lands such as Aucilla Wildlife Management Area, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, and Plank Road State Forest, that links source populations for declining wildlife species, provides recreational opportunities for thousands of residents, and offers a wide range of ecosystem services.



RSHT bottomland hardwood forests are extraordinarily intact.
(Photo by Peter Kleinhenz)

Readiness

Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	1
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	1
Readiness Total Tally Score	6

Supporting Parties

United States Fish and Wildlife Service; Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape; Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Florida Forest Service; Florida Department of Environmental Protection; Division of State Lands; Suwannee River Water Management District; Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy; Apalachee Audubon Society; and Aucilla Research Institute.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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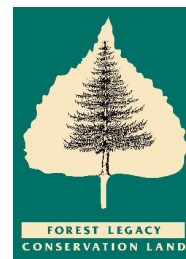
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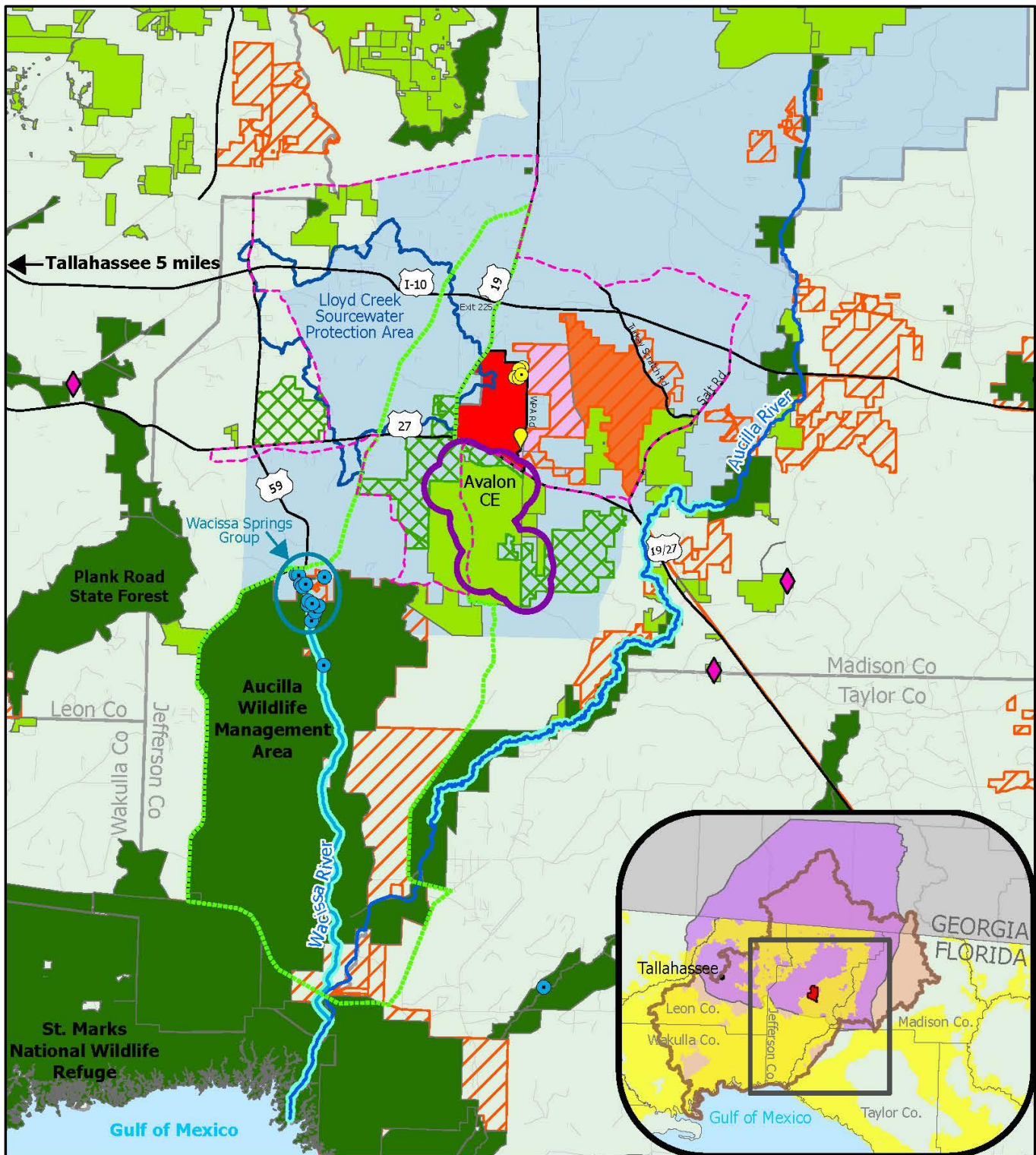
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Rosewood Scenic Heritage Tract **FY 2024 Forest Legacy Program Proposal** **Jefferson County, Florida**

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The depicted boundary is an approximation and does not represent a legal survey, legal description, or subdivision plat. The depicted boundary is intended for designated users for informational purposes. Created on 9/27/2022 by Tall Timbers Research Inc.

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| Rosewood Scenic Heritage Tract Forest Legacy FY 2024 | RCW Foraging Habitat Areas |
| Avalon Woodland Ravines - Phase I Forest Legacy 2024 | Designated Paddling Trail |
| Avalon Woodland Ravines - Phase II Forest Legacy 2025 | Flatwoods Wilderness Trail |
| Florida Forever Program Proposed Projects FY 2023 | Spanish Trace Trail |
| Florida Forever Program Accepted Projects | Springs |
| Conservation Easement Protected Property | Sinkholes |
| Public Noneasement Protected Property | Rookery |
| Wacissa Springs Group PFA | eBird Hotspot |
| Red Hills Region | NRCS RCPP Project Area |
| | Ecological Greenways |