



Environmental Protection Department
LAND CONSERVATION DIVISION



What is Alachua County Forever?



In November 2000, 60 percent of the voters approved a \$29 million program funded by a 1/4 mil property levy to create a program that has made, on our common behalf, the most important investment of all – to protect forever our natural heritage. Alachua County Forever has achieved all three of its original goals: the protection of water

quality, wildlife habitats and providing natural areas for resource-based recreation. That commitment was re-affirmed in 2008 with the passage of the Wild Spaces Public Places referendum creating an additional \$15 million in conservation funds.

Only the public nominates land for conservation – the Commission, the Land Conservation advisory board and staff is prohibited from sending in applications. Nearly one-third of the County has been nominated to date. Staff contacts the owners to determine if they are willing to conserve their lands. ACF does not have the power to condemn lands. If they are willing, staff conducts a field evaluation, presents the data to the Land Conservation Board who makes a recommendation to the County Commission to or not to add it to the Acquisition List. Staff then appraises the property and works with the landowner on a deal. If successful, the contract is brought back to the Commission for approval. Sites are opened to the public as resources are available top fund improvements and operations. Most sites are also open by appointment if not open daily. In addition to recreational amenities including trails, overlooks, and interpretative signage, the County works to maintain and enhance the wildlife habitat and other resource values of the preserves.

Mission Statement: To acquire, manage and improve environmentally significant lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitat, and to provide natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.

Vision and Values: Alachua County Forever will be a conscientious, innovative, progressive leader in land conservation and use acquisition, stewardship, and funding development practices to preserve the environmental integrity of Alachua County and improve the quality of life for current and future generations.

Accomplishments:

Acquisition List protected: 18,218 ac	With Direct ACF funding: 15,284 ac
Remaining on List: 33,173 ac	Under contract: 1,268 ac
Value of land protected: \$81 million	
County share: \$29 million	Partner share: \$52 million
Managed by County: 9,484 ac	Managed by Partners: 8,734 ac
Open to the public: 90% by acreage	

As of June 30, 2010.

Other People's (Stewardship)

Money



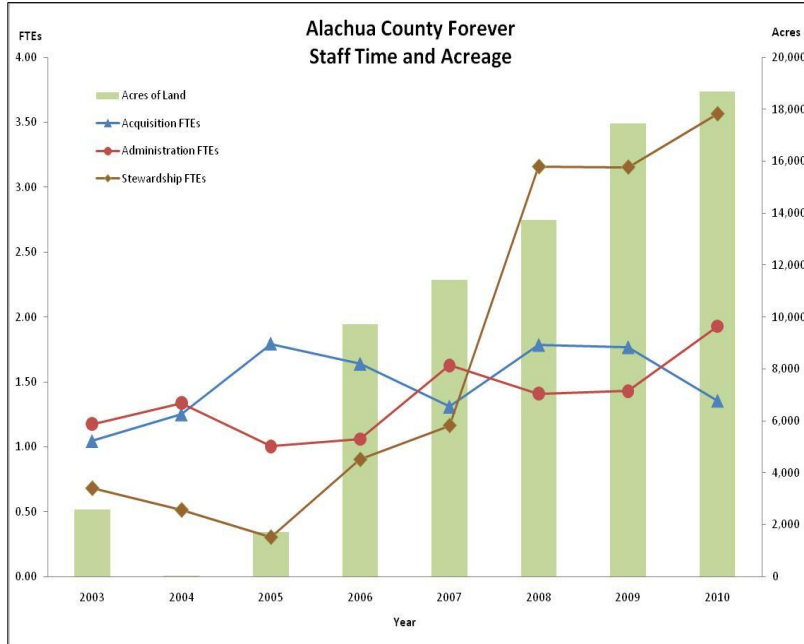
One of the well-documented successes of the Alachua County Forever Program is its ability to leverage OPM -- Other People's Money. Most people are aware of the acquisition side of the house But did you know the Program has been even more successful leveraging Stewardship dollars? For the last three fiscal years, the Program's \$62,000 resource-management budget was used as seed money for grants and coordination. The Program was able to leverage almost \$1 million in stewardship costs. Over five dollars returned in OPM for every general fund dollar invested.

Fiscal Year	Total
FY2008	\$484,607
FY2009	\$194,941
FY2010	\$311,149
Total	\$990,697

There are myriad ways the Program has creatively leveraged its funding. We have negotiated agreements with the St. Johns River Water Management District and the City of Gainesville to manage jointly-owned sites. We have used License Agreements with neighbors, hunters, previous lease-holders and tenants to continue their care and stewardship of the property on the taxpayers' behalf. Program staff has hosted Community Service Workers and volunteer groups at special events – often on weekends – to pull weeds and exotic plants, clear trash and re-plant native vegetation.

It is especially gratifying to see the diversity of groups that approaches us to volunteer their time. This past year alone we worked alongside a group from Trinity United Methodist Church and the U.F. Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers. Each has "adopted" a site and we know we can call on them as the need arises to assist us take care of these assets. Jim Kauffman, Joel and Polly Smith, who have served as caretakers for Barr Hammock since the 1970s, continue in that same role for us today. To do this on our own would be cost-prohibitive, inefficient and perhaps even a little selfish. Each of these relationships benefits the County not only in avoiding a direct cost but also to build a sense of place and strengthen our shared commitment to that investment. So we thank our partners and those in the community who have volunteered their time and energy, and we look forward to continuing our tradition of rooting people in the ground.

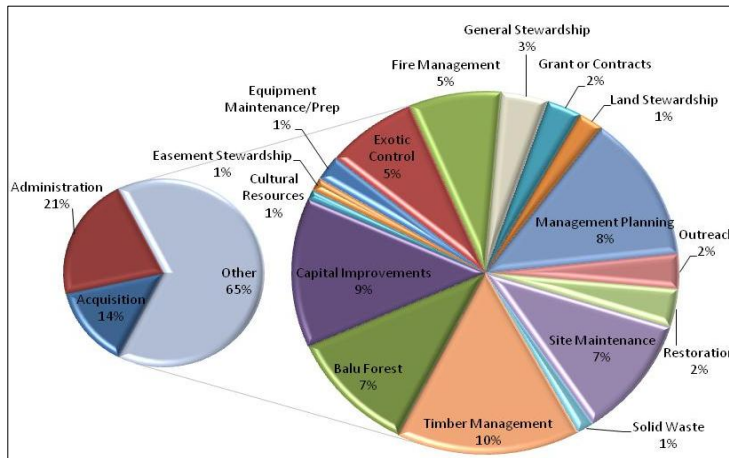
Staffing Effort:



The Graph at left demonstrates the staffing levels of ACF as land have been acquired and managed. The Program Administration and Acquisition FTEs remain fairly constant. The stewardship FTEs have increased as lands have been acquired and the Program goal is to maintain a **5,000 acres/FTE** level of effort (table below). By way of comparison, Volusia County: **3,325 acres/FTE** and the National Median: **285 acres/FTE**

Year	Acres/Stewardship FTE
2003	3,803
2004	45
2005	5,651
2006	10,776
2007	9,814
2008	4,355
2009	5,532
2010	5,241

Staffing Breakdown 3rd Quarter FY10:



Myths and Legends:

- *"We cannot afford to take more land of the tax rolls."* The **decrease in revenues is not significant relative to the tax base** and benefits we receive. The taxable value of all acquisitions was \$7,758,200 at the time they were purchased; or 0.07% of the 2009 tax base. The decrease in tax revenue for all taxing authorities just \$173,334. The decrease in the County's General Fund revenue is just \$58,934; or 0.05% of the revenues. In comparison, a 2004 study in Alachua County demonstrated that land adjacent to conservation lands increase in value \$8,000 - \$10,000 per lot. <http://www.alachuacounty.us/Depts/EPD/Documents/Land/Files/Alachua%20Write-up%20Jul%2004.pdf>
- *"This is just another pet Commissioner project."* **County residents support environmental measures repeatedly.** In 1999, 2008 and 2010, conservation polled at the top of taxpayers' quality-of-life issues. They backed up that up with passage of Alachua County Forever and Charter Amendment 1 creating Air and Water Quality protection codes in 2000, and Wild Spaces & Public Places in 2008. These results are reflected nationwide. The Trust for Public Land tracks open space measures since 1998 and reports over 75% of the 2206 referenda passed authorizing \$54 billion for conservation. Local quality-of-life questionnaires done over the years show that environmental concern is among the highest of residents' values. Alachua County's Comprehensive Plan is a model of progressive environmental programs, concepts and goals. This public document, repeatedly debated in hearings, and supported by multiple commissions demonstrates the breadth and depth of the community's concern for their natural heritage. Source: <https://www.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct?a=dbpage&pageID=10/000000A/https://www.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct>
- *"Environmental programs are just fluff."* **Land conservation provides many benefits to the human and wild community.** Any community must strive for sustainability and that starts with maintaining the foundation of its quality-of-life. Clean water, breathable air, recreational spaces, open space aesthetic, the stress relief and other health benefits have real economic costs that are only realized when they are missing from our lives.