



FLORIDA FOREVER GRANT PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Florida Forever?

Florida Forever is the state's conservation and recreation lands acquisition program, a blueprint for conserving Florida's natural and cultural heritage. Florida Forever supports a wide range of goals, including water resource protection, coastal resiliency, preservation of cultural resources, public access to outdoor recreation, and the restoration and maintenance of public lands.

How much land has been acquired under the Florida Forever program?

More than 907,412 acres have been acquired under the Florida Forever program. Since 1963, Florida has invested approximately \$8.5 billion to conserve more than 4 million acres of land for environmental, recreational and preservation purposes.

Who may propose property for acquisition by the Florida Forever program?

Anyone may propose a project. Federal, state and local government agencies, conservation organizations or private citizens are project sponsors. Florida Forever is a willing seller program and, if the project is proposed by a sponsor, an acknowledgment by the landowner that indicates their willingness to sell their land is required.

What is the process for submitting a new Florida Forever Project or amending a current Florida Forever project boundary?

To be considered for acquisition, a project must have a willing seller and be on the Florida Forever Priority List. The Florida Forever Priority List is developed by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) and is approved by The Board of Trustees (BOT). Projects placed on the Florida Forever Priority List are suitable for conservation and meet the Florida Forever Goals, Measures and Performance Criteria (Chapter 259, Florida Statutes). Applications for new project proposals are accepted two times each year, October 15 and April 15. Current Florida Forever projects may be modified per criteria specified in Rule 18-24, Florida Administrative Code, and can be considered by ARC throughout the year. Complete applications must be received at least 60 working days before a scheduled ARC meeting.

Who decides which lands to buy?

The ARC evaluates and votes on new proposed projects twice per year, in June and December. Boundary amendment proposals may be considered and voted on by ARC during one of the public meetings that are held six times per year. Meeting dates and more information about ARC can be found on the ARC webpage.

How are Florida Forever lands prioritized for acquisition?

All current and newly approved projects are assigned to one of six categories specified in Chapter 259, F.S. Each December, the ARC votes within each category to rank projects in numerical order from highest to lowest priority. After projects are approved and ranked, the Florida Forever Priority List is submitted to the Governor and Cabinet, serving as the Board of Trustees, for approval. The Governor and Cabinet may remove projects from the list but cannot otherwise change the ARC-recommended list. The Florida Forever Priority List is used by DEP to prioritize specific projects and ownerships within projects that may be negotiated for purchase with the available Florida Forever funds allocated annually by the Legislature.

How long does it take for the state to buy a piece of property, assuming it is on the Florida Forever Priority List?

The program is highly competitive. After a project is added to the Florida Forever Priority List, acquisition is dependent on funding availability, and therefore, could take six months or many years, depending on the project's priority ranking. Additional steps in the acquisition process will include a preliminary survey, appraisals, price negotiations and closing products.

When can an owner of property on the Florida Forever Priority List expect to be notified by DEP's Division of State Lands?

Florida Forever is a willing seller program. Sponsors of proposed projects are required to provide proof that they notified landowners before applying. Once a property has been added to the Florida Forever priority list, a letter is sent to the landowner from the Division of State Lands to inquire about the potential purchase of their property. If the landowner acknowledges the letter and is a willing seller, a land acquisition agent will then contact the landowner to begin negotiations. Landowners are also notified before any survey or appraisal work begins.

Who negotiates the sale and purchase of property for the state?

DEP's Division of State Lands, Bureau of Real Estate Services negotiates with owners to buy land on behalf of the people of Florida. DEP must obtain the consent of the Governor and Cabinet, serving as the Board of Trustees, who approve transactions where property title will be held by the State of Florida. More information about selling land to state can be accessed on the Bureau of Real Estate Services webpage.

Who owns the lands purchased by the Florida Forever program?

Lands purchased by the DEP are owned by the Governor and Cabinet, serving as the Board of Trustees. These lands are held in trust for the benefit of the people of Florida.

Who manages the property acquired through the Florida Forever program?

A land managing entity must be identified and secured and a commitment letter or management prospectus from the proposed manager must be submitted with the application to the Florida Forever program. If the land is proposed for acquisition through a conservation easement, the Division of State Lands will monitor the property according to the terms of the easement.

What role can a nonprofit organization play?

Nonprofit organizations, particularly land trusts may play a role in acquiring state property. They may act as intermediaries with owners and may assist with tax and estate planning issues. For general information about the role of land trusts in the acquisition of conservation land, please visit the Land Trust Alliance.

Does being on the Florida Forever list affect property value?

No.

Must a property owner sell to the state?

No. Florida Forever is a willing seller program and acquisition is almost exclusively voluntary.

What are the advantages of selling property to the state?

The state acquires property through cash sale. Selling property to the state may also provide certain tax benefits. An owner's decision to sell property to the state has other, less tangible benefits such as the satisfaction of knowing he or she has helped protect important ecological resources for future generations of Florida residents and visitors.

Are there other ways to protect land without an owner selling all his or her property/property rights to the state?

Yes. Alternative land protection methods are available, depending on the interest of the property owner and the state. An owner might consider donating the property to the state, or pursue a life estate, which enables the owner to continue to live on the property but ensures state ownership and management after his or her lifetime. By granting or selling a conservation easement, an owner may retain title to the property along with certain negotiated rights while protecting the natural resource values of the property.

A conservation easement also allows the owner to receive certain tax advantages. If an owner does not wish to sell the property now, he or she could offer the state a first-right-of-refusal. That gives the state the chance to try to buy the land in the future, if circumstances change and an owner decides to put the property on the market.

Are there additional programs that can assist local governments with acquiring land for conservation purposes?

Yes. Florida Communities Trust, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program are all programs that can assist with locally- and regionally-suitable acquisitions. Each program has various funding sources, application deadlines and requirements. Visit the DEP's Land and Recreation Grants website for more information.

How do I remove my property from a Florida Forever project boundary?

Landowners may request their property be removed from a project boundary by sending a certified letter that includes a parcel ID number and a copy of documentation validating your interest in the property (for example, a tax card or land title document) to:

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services

3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 140

Tallahassee, FL 32399

In some cases, a property may be determined by ARC to be of such critical importance to the success of a Florida Forever project that a recommendation to keep the project on the list could be made to the Governor and Cabinet.