

9. EVERGLADES TO GULF COAST CONSERVATION AREA UPDATES & OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE PROGRESS



Sue Mullins, Florida Conservation Group



Uniting Central and Southwest Florida to Protect Water and Wildlife

PURPOSE



The presentation will highlight land conservation efforts in the Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area, a relatively newly established federal National Wildlife Refuge that overlaps the CHNEP Area.

CCMP Connection:



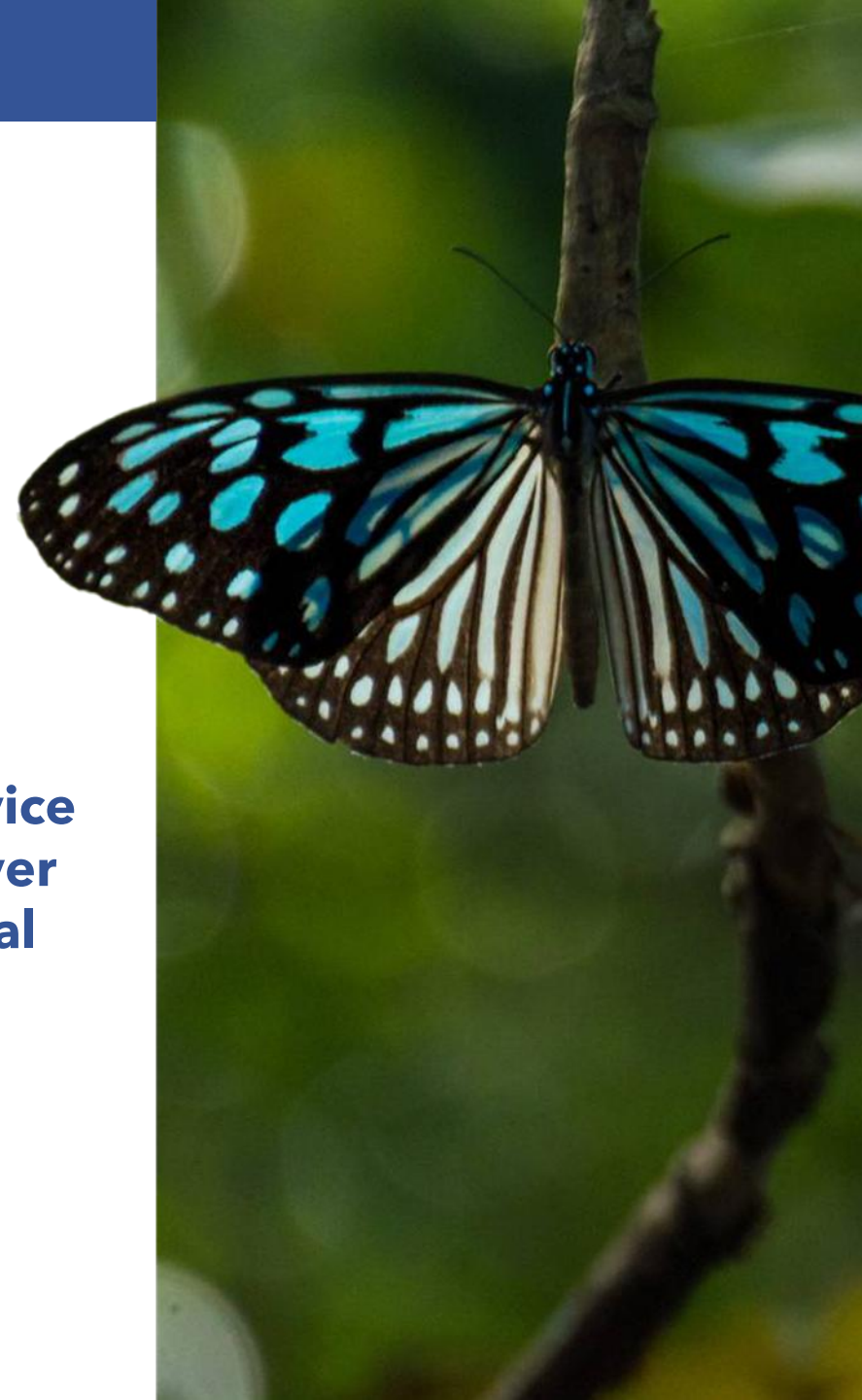
This relates to Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Protection Priority Action 2: Encourage and support the permanent conservation of environmentally sensitive lands and critical habitat areas through land acquisition and conservation easements held in perpetuity for habitat resilience and migration.



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**Land Protection Efforts within the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service
Everglades to Gulf Coastal Conservation area, the Peace River
Valley and the overlap with the Coastal & Heartland National
Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)**



**Florida Conservation Group
Venice • Myakka City**

Conservation Approaches Used for CHNEP at Present

- Full Fee Transactions
- Conservation Easements
- Cost-Share Programs

Florida Forever offers full-fee and conservation easement approaches.

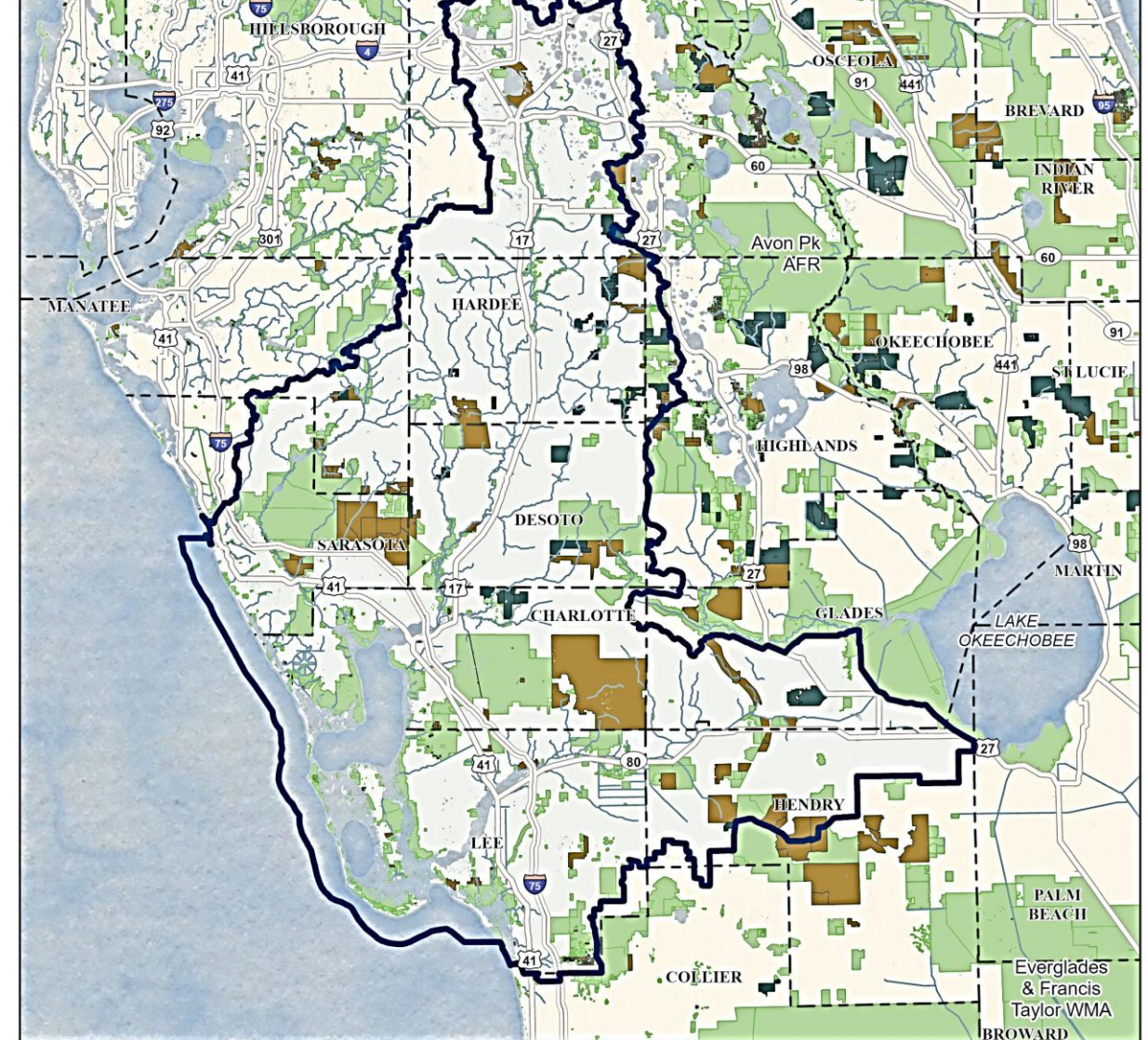
The Rural and Family Lands Protection Program provides rural land protection (conservation) easements.

The USDA offers various full-fee and easement programs, as well as cost-share programs to provide technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and forest landowners to address natural resource issues.

Additional federal programs offer easement and full-fee assistance through partnerships.

CHNEP Completed Conservation Projects

Florida Forever and RFLPP projects recently completed shown with existing conservation areas in the CHNEP.



CHNEP

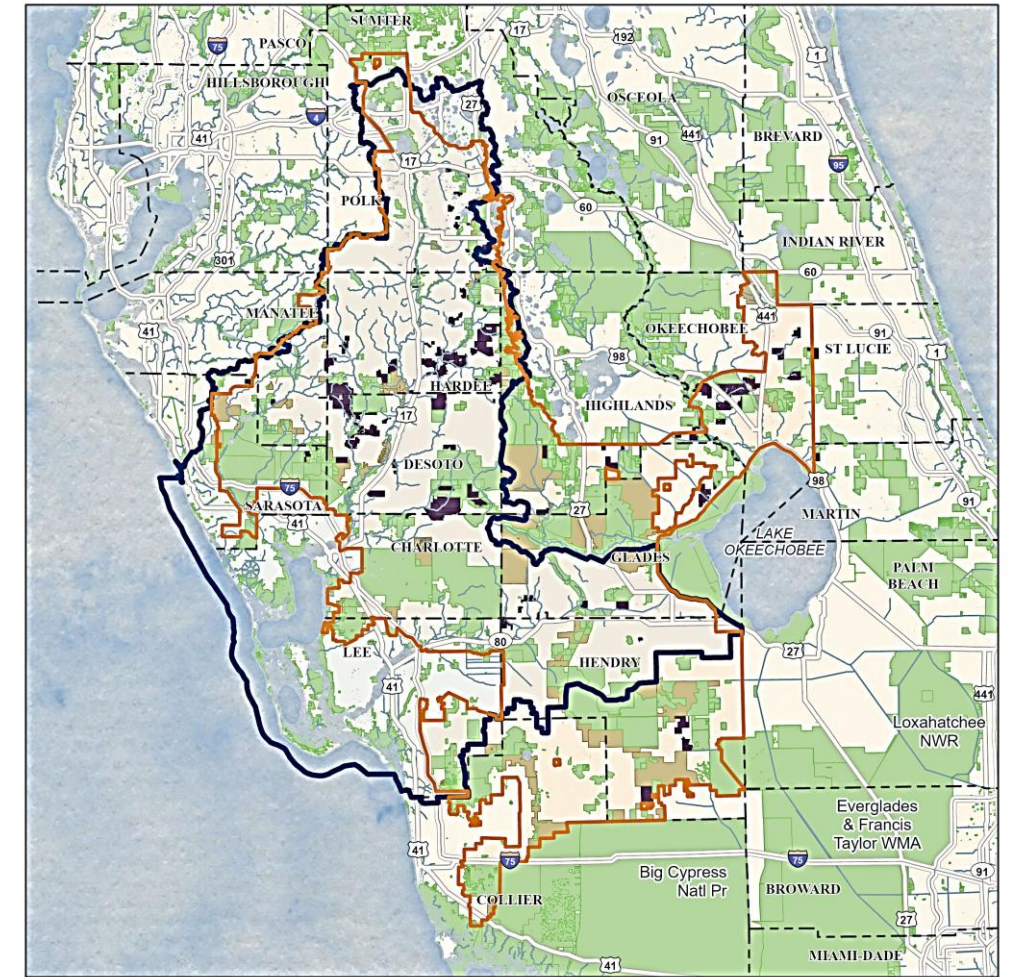
Southwest Florida

-  Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
-  Completed RFLPP Projects (57,284 ac within the CHNEP)
-  Completed FF Projects (194,829 ac within CHNEP)
-  Existing Conservation Areas
-  Named Watercourse (NHD)

Focus Area: Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area

4-million-acre conservation area situated within most of the CHNEP boundaries, borders the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, and spans 12 counties west of Lake Okeechobee from Lakeland to Naples.

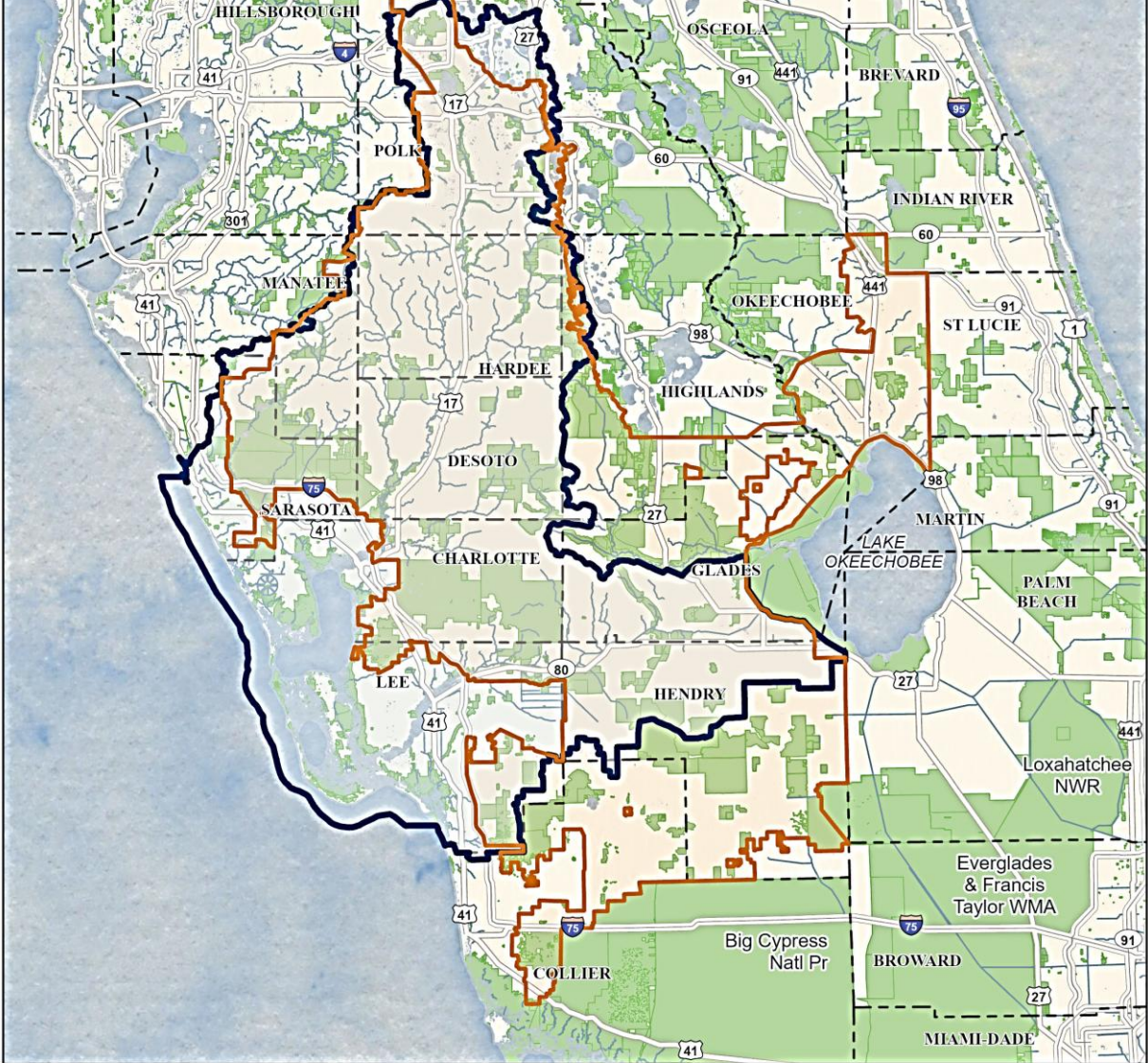
Includes the watersheds of the Peace, Myakka, and Caloosahatchee Rivers, and Fisheating Creek.



CHNEP & Everglades to Gulf
Southwest Florida

- Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)
- Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area (E2G)
- RFLPP Projects in CHNEP/E2G (176,064 ac)
- FF Projects in CHNEP/E2G (352,460 ac)
- Existing Conservation Areas
- Named Watercourse (NHD)

Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area Overlay with CHNEP



Everglades to Gulf & CHNEP

Southwest Florida

- Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area
- CHNEP Boundary
- Existing Conservation Areas
- Named Watercourse (NHD)



Everglades to Gulf Funding

Federal Appropriations:

FY 2024 = \$0

FY 2025 = \$2,500,000

FY 2026 = \$1,000,000

A majority of the \$2.5M from FY25 is going to the Gray Ranch, LLC easement acquisition.

How to Help Everglades to Gulf Funding Effort

- E2G ranks really well in the Land and Water Conservation Fund priority.
- But funding has simply not been there.

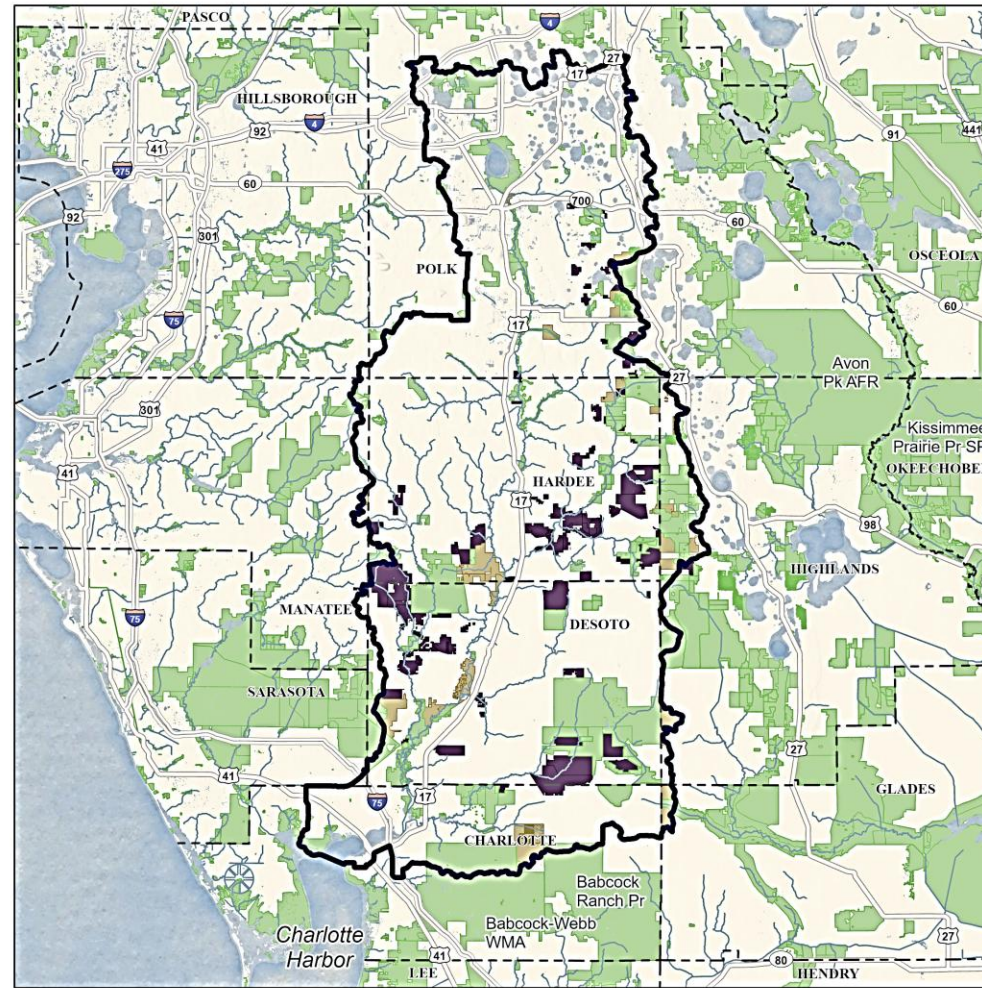
Constituents, elected officials and landowners can reach out to your Members of Congress.

Ask for LWCF funding for the Glades to Gulf Conservation Area. It is primarily for conservation easements, and covers many districts.

Focus Area: Peace River Valley

This map focuses on conservation work being done in the Peace River Valley.

A gap in protected landscapes is evident in the northern section of the CHNEP.



Peace River Watershed
Southwest Florida

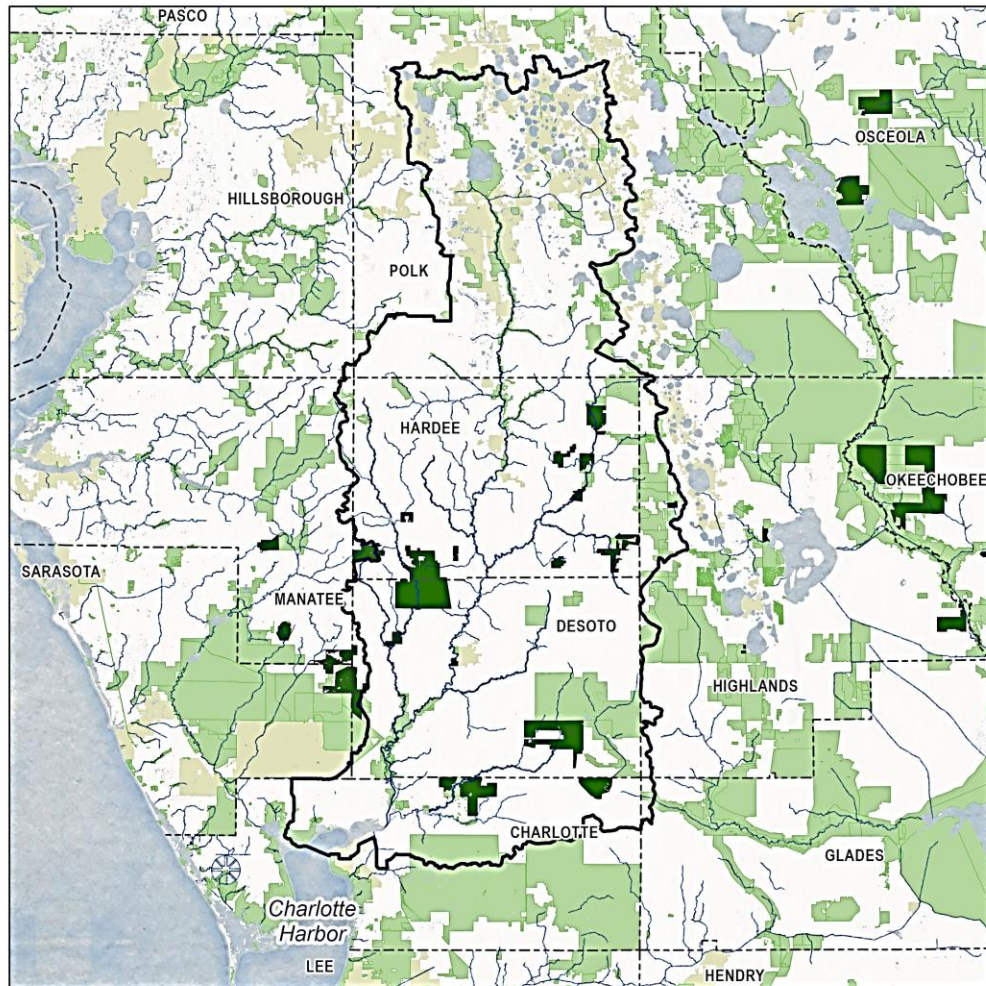
- PeaceRiverWatershed
- RFLPP Projects in PRV (93,289 ac)
- FF Projects in PRV (44,124 ac)
- Existing Conservation Areas
- Named Watercourse (NHD)

Recent Conservation Successes

Ryals Citrus and Cattle Co. in Charlotte County. Two conservation easements, using one with RFLPP and another using RFLPP and NRCS partnership. Totals almost 7,000 acres.

In Hardee County, C&G Cattle Charlie Creek and C&G Cattle Fish Branch. Together, these two working cattle ranches span approximately 1,450 acres RFLPP and also RFLPP/NRCS partnership.

Deer Creek Ranch protected almost 6,000 acres through Florida Forever.



FCG Completed Projects

- Peace River Watershed
- FCG Completed Projects
- Existing Conservation Lands
- City Limits
- County Boundaries

Completed Projects Within the PRV: 53,840 ac





Horse Creek Ranch
Conserved more than 16,000 acres across DeSoto and Hardee counties, and included a partnership between Florida Forever and SWFWMD.



Conservation Funding Partners

Florida Forever: Fee simple and easements. High Resource Value

Rural and Family Land Protection Program: Agricultural Easements

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service- Land and Water Conservation Fund: Fee simple and easements.

National Wildlife Refuge System: Managed by the U.S. FWS, using fee and easements

NRCS RCPP: Regional clusters

WRE Program: Restorable wetlands



Conservation Funding Partners

NRCS ALE: Agricultural easements partner with State/Local

REPI-easements: Partner with state/counties

Water Management Districts: Fee simple and easements

County Programs: Mostly fee-simple, but some now partner on easement purchases

Forest Legacy: Easement and fee simple forest conservation

Which Conservation Program is Right?

- Program criteria: Land uses, resource values. Match the property to the program.
- Landowner current needs
- Landowner future plans
- Funding Opportunities
- Leverage and partnerships are the most in demand



Steps to Keep Progress Moving

1. Increase and Direct Funding at the Federal Level:

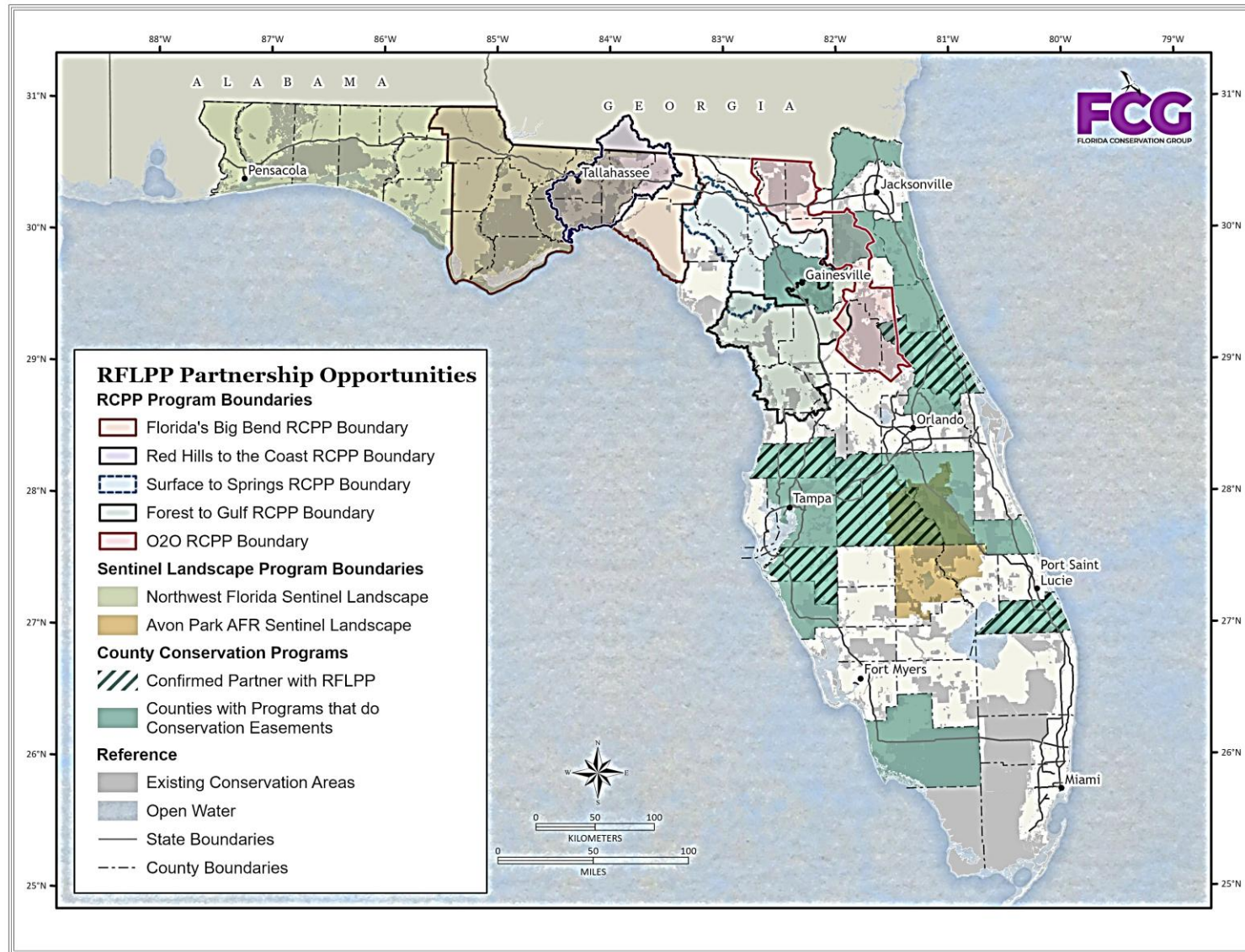
- Local governments can pass resolutions in support increased funding for the Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area projects.
- Utilize relationships with Congress through lobbyists, business leaders, landowners and officials to influence funding for E2G.
- When appropriations are released, use your influence to direct funding to Florida C2G projects.



Steps to Keep Progress Moving

2. Support Local Government Programs:

- Many local governments in Florida, including 29 counties and numerous cities, also have dedicated land conservation programs.
- The November ballot includes new funding measures for Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota counties in the CHNEP.



Questions?

Florida Conservation Group

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NO ACTION ITEM



- For information and discussion only.
- Chair will ask for questions or comments from the members.



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