



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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LAND ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT: Henscratch Ranch/Florida Forever Plan
COUNTY: Highlands
SIZE: 1308.04 Acres (4 Tracts)
PURPOSE: Four Perpetual Conservation and Access Easements
SELLERS: Highland Farms, Inc.
APPRAISED VALUE: \$7,120,000
PURCHASE PRICE: \$7,120,000

HIGHLIGHTS: Henscratch Ranch is included in the Board of Trustees' 2004 Florida Forever Five Year Plan as an "A" project and in the District's Florida Forever Plan. This property is an ongoing, family-owned cattle ranching operation located in the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem, an area where the state is aggressively buying land under the Lake Wales Ridge Florida Forever project to protect some of the rarest and most biologically diverse lands in Florida. The Lake Wales Ridge ecosystem is strategic habitat for many listed species, including the bald eagle, scrub jay, red-cockaded woodpecker, grasshopper sparrow, and numerous wading birds. Henscratch Ranch contains an extensive cutthroat grass seep, one of the state's rarest plant communities. This property is under increasing pressure of residential development. The District has reached agreement with the property owner to enter into conservation easements that will remove development rights and preserve existing natural, vegetative, hydrologic and agricultural conditions. The project will provide on-site benefits by preventing the loss of wetlands and natural areas through future development, and will provide downstream benefits to Fisheating Creek and Lake Okeechobee by preventing future land use intensification that could reduce water storage potential on the ranch or increase nutrient loads in stormwater runoff from the ranch.

CONSIDERATIONS: The District has negotiated cooperative agreements dated August, 2004 and August, 2005 with the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), under its Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), that would provide funding up to 50% of the fair market value for two perpetual conservation and access easements to preserve this property for agricultural uses. Also, the District has negotiated with the Property owner for two additional perpetual conservation and access easements that will maintain current agricultural activities, but prohibit further intensification of agricultural activities in order to comply with District standards. Acquisition of the two easements covering the southerly half of the property will take place in July, 2006 and the acquisition of the two easements covering the northerly half of the property will take place in October, 2006 due to District budget restraints.

GOVERNING BOARD

Kevin McCarty, *Chair*
Irela M. Bagué, *Vice-Chair*
Miya Burt-Stewart

Alice J. Carlson
Michael Collins
Nicolás J. Gutiérrez, Jr., Esq.

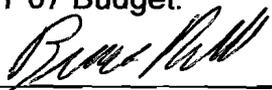
Lennart E. Lindahl, P.E.
Harkley R. Thornton
Malcolm S. Wade, Jr.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

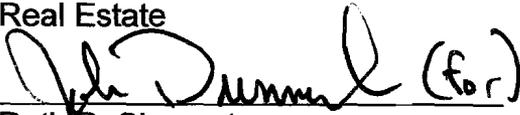
Carol Ann Wehle, *Executive Director*

FISCAL IMPACT: The District will provide 100% of the funding for the two easements to be acquired at the July closing and seek reimbursement from NRCS for 50% of the purchase price for the easement that maintains agricultural uses, according to the terms of the above referenced cooperative agreements. The District will provide 100% of the funding for the two easements to be acquired at the October closing and likewise seek reimbursement from NRCS for 50% of the purchase price of the easement that maintains agricultural uses, or obtain the NRCS share of the funding by the time of closing. At both closings, the District will pay the entire purchase price for the easement that prohibits intensification of agricultural uses, as NRCS will not participate in funding easements that prohibit intensification of agriculture. NRCS approval is required for both types of easements. The purchase prices are based on the appraised value. One half of the appraised value will be paid at the July closing and the other half will be paid at the October closing with no interest accruing and no increase in the purchase price. The Board must authorize a budget transfer of dedicated funds from River Restoration to Florida Forever. Second closing subject to FY07 budget appropriation.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District authorize the purchase of land interests containing 1308.04 acres, more or less, for the Henscratch Ranch/Florida Forever Project, in Highlands County in the amount of \$7,120,000 and associated costs, and authorize a budget transfer of dedicated funds, Florida Forever, from River Restoration to Land Stewardship in the amount of \$3,560,000 for FY 06, and the remainder subject to Governing Board approval of the FY 07 Budget.

Prepared by: 
Bruce Hall
Sr. Real Estate Specialist
Real Estate

5-26-06
Date

Reviewed by:  (for)
Ruth P. Clements
Director
Land Acquisition Department

5-26-06
Date

Approved by: 
Kenneth G. Ammon, P.E.
Deputy Executive Director
CERP

5-30-06
Date

Tract No.	Owner	Purchase Price	Appraised Value	% over Appraisal	Acres
HS-100-009 & HS-100-008	Highland Farms, Inc.	\$3,560,000	3,560,000	0	657.05
HS-100-007 & HS-100-006	Highland Farms, Inc.	\$3,560,000	\$3,560,000	0	650.99
Totals	Highland Farms, Inc.	\$7,120,000	\$7,120,000	0	1308.04

FOR PURPOSES OF A CONFLICT CHECK:

H.L. Clark, III	24%
Carl H. Clark	24%
David C. Clark	13%
Brian Clark	13%
Kevin Clark	13%
Allison C. Milligan	13%