

## Administration

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Flagler County makes first Environmentally Sensitive Lands purchase in a decade, adds 25 acres to Pellicer Creek Conservation Corridor

**March 28, 2024** – Flagler County, in partnership with the St. Johns River Water Management District, on Tuesday (March 26) acquired a 25-acre parcel along Princess Place Road, adding to the “crown jewel” of its parks system – Princess Place Preserve. It is the first purchase made through the county’s Environmentally Sensitive Lands program in a decade.

“This is a great addition to our conservation lands inventory,” said General Services Assistant Director Mike Lagasse. “It’s been known as the ‘Kelly’ parcel, previously owned by a family of the same name, and was the last privately-owned, undeveloped parcel on the Princess Place Road.”

The property is adjacent on three sides to the St. Johns River Water Management District’s Pellicer Creek Conservation Area – approximately 3,000 acres of conservation land in northeastern Flagler County that is connected to the 1,500-acre Princess Place Preserve.

“This acquisition adds to this several-thousand-acre Pellicer Creek Conservation Corridor, which conserves and protects wildlife habitat and water quality to the region,” Lagasse said.

Flagler County’s Environmentally Sensitive Lands program has been active since its inception in the late 1980s, seeking to acquire and preserve environmentally sensitive lands that are also recreation areas, water recharge areas, threatened and endangered species habitats, and unique biological communities. The motto early on was “Conserving Today for Tomorrow.”

“The Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program has really benefitted Flagler County and the municipalities,” Lagasse said. “Whenever possible we try to leverage our funds with other sources, like the state’s Florida Forever program or the St. Johns River Water Management District, to stretch the ESL purchasing power. It brings money back to the county.”

As a part of Flagler County’s partnership with the St. Johns River Water Management District, the property will be managed by the latter due to its adjacency to the Pellicer Creek Conservation Area.

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Andy Dance  
District 1

Greg Hansen  
District 2

David Sullivan  
District 3

Leann Pennington  
District 4

Donald O’Brien, Jr.  
District 5

“This acquisition is a great reminder of the work that the Environmentally Sensitive Lands program has been doing in Flagler County since the late 1980s,” County Administrator Heidi Petito said. “It is important to conserve and preserve properties that our local landowners and citizens have identified as critical to remain natural for future generations.”

#### Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program History:

- In 1988, Flagler County voters approved an ad valorem tax to acquire environmentally sensitive lands, recreation areas, and water protection areas. The catalyst for this action was the desire to preserve and protect for public benefit Princess Place Preserve, a site of significant historical and ecological importance.
- The Land Acquisition Selection Advisory Committee (LAC) was formed in 1989 to advise the Flagler County Board of County Commissioners about potential purchases.
- However, the first purchase by this program was Bings Landing Park, which was acquired in 1989. Princess Place Preserve was purchased in phases in 1993 and in 1996.
- In 1998, the Board of County Commissioners decided to refinance the original bond and obtain additional funds – supported by a debt service millage – netting the county an additional \$1.52 million for land acquisition.
- In 2002, more than 74% of voters reaffirmed their support for the ESL program by passing a referendum for the issuance of Environmentally Sensitive Lands bonds. This referendum authorized the county to issue general obligation bonds in an amount not to exceed \$6.7 million payable from annual ad valorem taxes levied at a rate not exceeding 0.163 mill for a term not exceeding 14 years.
- A 2008 referendum was also approved by voters to extend the program for an additional 20 years. The referendum established a flat 0.25 millage levy that is not required to be bonded. It provided the flexibility to finance up to \$40 million.
- This new program also included a provision allowing an amount equivalent of up to 10% of the purchase price that could be used for land management, public access improvements, and habitat enhancement.

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