



CONSERVATION AND PARK PROJECT WORK PLAN

Site name: Emerson Point Expansion

Area: **98 acres**, excluding 4-acre Reserve Parcel retained for future family homesite(s)

Parcel IDs: Portions of 2388100006 and 2388200004

Location: **Snead Island** - North side of 17th St.; adjacent to Emerson Point Preserve

Zoning: A-1, RSF-1 Future Land Use: RES-1 Current Development Approvals: None

Natural Habitat and Features

This unique coastal property has ½ mile of mangrove shoreline on Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve (an Outstanding Florida Water). The site includes 54 acres of pasture previously used for crops and currently grazed by cattle, and approximately 40 acres of wetlands. On the property sits a 920ft² house built in 1937, which has served as a homesite and fish camp. The property has long been proposed for conservation by the Florida Forever Program and is identified as an essential remaining parcel in the 2023 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan for Terra Ceia.

Support for public acquisition of the Emerson Point Expansion property is echoed by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (see accompanying letter), recognizing existing and potential coastal habitats critical for the protection of the Tampa Bay Estuary. The property, “could serve as prime habitat restoration sites, important migration corridors for the existing tidal wetlands that may become vulnerable in this area in the future, and flood attenuating habitats for surrounding communities.” Protecting and restoring this natural area will help preserve fisheries and manatee foraging grounds and will ensure continued public fishing, boating, and nature observation.

The property includes an area designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as critical habitat for the federally endangered Aboriginal prickly-apple cactus (*Harrisia aboriginum*) (see Map B of Unit APA1: Terra Ceia).

Site Importance

This property is one of the last large, undeveloped coastal properties on Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve. Acquiring this site provides a unique opportunity to protect and improve water quality, increase habitat connectivity, enhance fisheries, provide for the resilience of native habitats, and preserve critical habitat for potential recovery efforts for imperiled species.

Proposed Site Protection

Fee Simple Acquisition by Manatee County is proposed, with the owner retaining approximately four (4) acres for up to four (4) future single family homes in the northeastern corner of the property (adjacent to Amberwynd of Snead Island – a residential community). In partnership with the State’s Florida Forever Program, the County is positioning for the State to purchase the preserved land from Manatee County (fee simple) and enter a lease agreement for Manatee County to manage the property as an extension of Emerson Point Preserve.

In 1991, state acquisition of Emerson Point was completed through the predecessor of the Florida Forever Program, with a 75% state-25% local contribution; Manatee County holds management responsibilities on the property under State Lease 3935.

Proposed Public Access

Recreational opportunities for the public will include hiking, biking, picnicking, fishing and birding. Environmental education, camps and community events may be held as an extension of (or in addition to) the activities provided at Emerson Point Preserve. Restrooms and amenities will be provided near the pavilion(s), which may be reserved for special events. Some trails will connect with the existing Emerson Point Preserve

VACANT
District 1

AMANDA
BALLARD
District 2

KEVIN
VAN OSTENBRIDGE
District 3

MIKE
RAHN
District 4

RAY
TURNER
District 5

JASON
BEARDEN
At Large

GEORGE W.
KRUSE
At Large

trails. A proposed fishing pier will provide access to Clambar Bayou, allowing additional capacity for Learn to Fish programs and camps. The 1930's home/fish camp will be considered for relocation near the planned parking, restrooms, and pavilion to be used as a welcome center for the preserve. Interpretative signage about the area's indigenous peoples, agricultural history, and the last family to fish the waters and graze cattle on the land is anticipated. Additionally, parking planned for the Expansion may relieve pressure on the parking lot adjacent the existing Preserve canoe/kayak launch.

Resource Management

Management of the site aims to protect water quality and threatened and endangered species by restoring and maintaining substantially natural conditions with passive recreational use. Prescribed burns, exotic species management, trail and facilities maintenance, hydrologic rehabilitation, and native species restoration will be conducted. No unusual challenges are anticipated.

- Year 1 Goals:** Inventory resources, secure fences, develop a management plan for approval by Florida Department of Environmental Protection, remove exotic species.
- 5 Year Goals:** Design, permit, and implement habitat rehabilitation and capital improvements for passive recreation and public programming.
- Long-range Goals:** Prescribed fire, exotic species management, trail and facilities maintenance.

Hydrologic Rehabilitation and Habitat Restoration

The landscape position of the Emerson Point Expansion property provides opportunities to restore coastal uplands and expand estuarine ecosystems, including fisheries habitat and habitat for federally listed species (e.g. Aboriginal prickly apple).

The hydrologic rehabilitation and habitat restoration goals will be to enhance ecosystem diversity, provide habitat migration corridors, and create sportfish habitat as ways to strengthen ecosystem resilience along the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve. Initial restoration measures will include invasive plant removal to better visualize hydrologic rehabilitation opportunities along previously excavated agricultural ditches and to gauge long-term management needs. The design will consider rehabilitation of existing hydrologic connections and agricultural drains (removing some and transforming others) into a functioning tidal creek that will flow through created marsh and mangrove habitats and provide intermittent access to backwater fish refuge. Backwater refuge for juvenile sportfish is a critical habitat feature to support the complex life histories of fish.

Habitat restoration, including enhancements that support the federally endangered Aboriginal prickly apple cactus will occur, as appropriate. This may involve species reintroductions in habitats deemed suitable by the USFWS working through existing partnerships with Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Aboriginal prickly apple is endemic to a narrow range along the west coast of central Florida inhabiting plant communities classified as coastal strand, coastal grasslands, coastal berms, maritime hammocks, and shell mounds that support coarse calcareous sand and shell fragment substrates with adequate soil moisture and chemistry. These physical and biological features provide a competitive regime that is suitable for the cactus, including canopy openings created by hurricanes and tidal inundation allowing adequate sunlight and space for cactus growth and expansion.

The habitat restoration project will include engineering design and permitting followed by implementation. Project methodology will include contracting with a science and engineering firm to provide field surveys, finalize design, and prepare permit applications. The current conceptual design will be used to prepare 30% design plans followed by the 75% permit drawings. Manatee County will obtain the permits for the proposed project, including from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Section 404), and the Statewide Environmental Resource Permit (SWERP). Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will ensure that the Aboriginal prickly apple is prioritized in the design. A final component of the project will be to develop the 100% construction engineering plans required to issue permits and ultimately competitively bid and build the project.

Once complete, Emerson Point Expansion will include freshwater/brackish marsh, a tidal creek leading to backwater fish habitats, mangrove fringe, and a saltmarsh migration corridor buffered by coastal uplands (e.g., hammock, pine flatwoods, coastal grasslands/berms supporting the Aboriginal prickly apple). The design allows for near- and long-term habitat migration by designing a mosaic of terrestrial and wetland habitat zones for plant and wildlife movements. Protection of coastal lands from urban development and shoreline hardening provides opportunities for a nature-focused shoreline better able to withstand climate hazards such as rising sea levels and storm surge.

Anticipated Costs, Funding Partnerships and Revenue

County purchase from owner: \$15.5 million

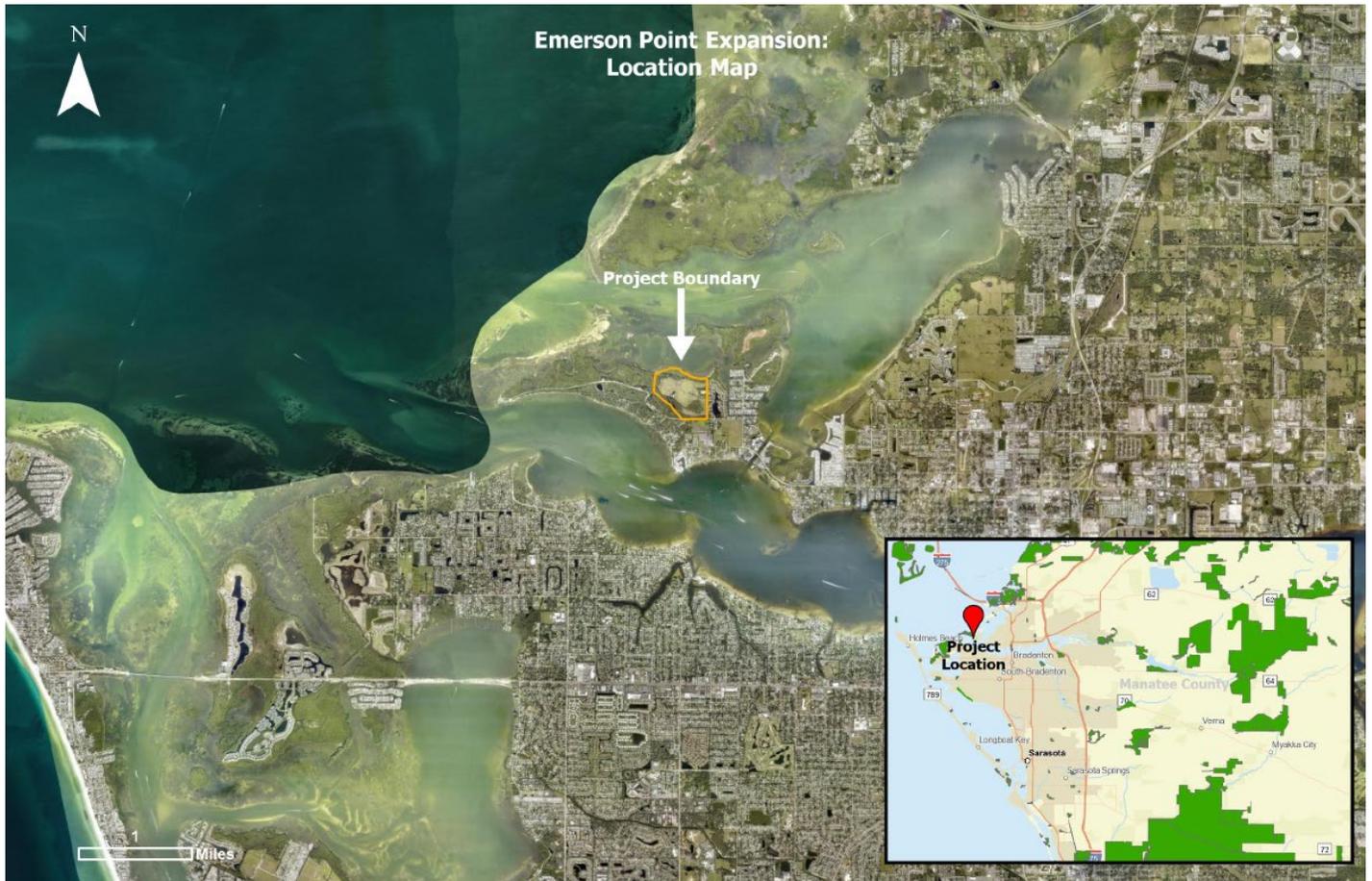
Anticipated State purchase from County: Estimated \$10-\$15 million

Florida Communities Trust (State of Florida): Possible grant for \$1 million to \$3 million (if awarded).

Tampa Bay Estuary Program (FY26): Possible grant up to \$250,000 for restoration project design and permitting (if awarded).

NOAA (FY27) – Possible grant for hydrologic rehabilitation and habitat restoration implementation.

Location Map



Preliminary Concept Map



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Map B of Unit APA1: Terra Ceia

