

LANDSCAPES

4

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ACQUISITIONS

Experience what a day might
entail with one of our acquisitions
team members

8

STRATEGIC CONSERVATION PLANNING

How NFLT is helping local counties
create conservation plans

10

SALT MARSH

Saving one of Florida's most
important ecosystems



The Green Treefrog
(*Hyla cinerea*), is one of the
many species that can be
found in our preserves.

CONSERVATION ACQUISITIONS EDITION



Letter from **LEADERSHIP**

Friends and Supporters,

What a privilege it is to be part of such a vibrant community to help protect North Florida's unique places. As I transitioned from the Board of Directors to serve as Interim President for North Florida Land Trust, it is truly an honor to lead this organization to ensure our treasured lands are protected in perpetuity. Like you, I want my grandchildren to know what the Real Florida looks like.

We are at a critical point in preserving what makes North Florida so special - our waterways, forests, grasslands, farms, and marshlands. Over the last 23 years, we all together have accomplished so much, and we cannot skip a beat in our efforts. The development wave from the rest of Florida has hit our region full force, and even more powerful than ever before in Florida's history. It seems, some days, that all of America is moving to Florida.

With your support, you empower the North Florida Land Trust to continue to protect and preserve what makes Florida exceptional. For the first time, we are launching an End-of-Year Campaign to raise \$600,000 to help save more land.

Because, it is Now or Never. We must act, Now, to protect the places we love or they will soon look like Orlando or New Jersey.

North Florida Land Trust's Conservation Acquisition Team provides the workforce and expertise to save the places we love. They work alongside conservationists, government agencies, community leaders, and landowners to protect land and maximize conservation benefits. Florida's natural lands are this state's most significant economic asset, and our Conservation Acquisitions Team is committed to protecting Florida. In this edition of the fall Landscapes, learn more about the Conservation Acquisitions Team's work and current projects. We have a great team.

If we are going to preserve land for future generations, we must act now, or the chance will be lost—forever. Your support strengthens our efforts to protect our treasured lands, and I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you for your help in advancing the work North Florida Land Trust can accomplish.

Together we can save the lands we love.

In service and gratitude,

Rev. Cn. Allison DeFoor, Interim President



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NFLT is an accredited land trust. The mission of the North Florida Land Trust is to preserve and enhance our quality of life by protecting North Florida's irreplaceable natural environment.



The many ways we PRESERVE LAND

It is easy to think of conservation acquisition in simplified terms. See it, want it, buy it—right? There is a lot to unpack from our toolbox when contemplating real estate acquisitions for NFLT's conservation program.

The first step is to identify prospective properties, which can happen in several ways.

NFLT is a willing seller program, meaning NFLT only buys or facilitates the purchase of properties from willing sellers. Potential properties can be offered by sellers, suggested by partners, or promoted by conservation-minded members of the public. Our NFLT team will develop a relationship with the seller to determine the seller's wishes, goals, and motivation to participate in a transaction.

In developing a relationship with sellers, there are many considerations. Does the seller want to liquidate and have no future concern for the property? Does the seller need or want to occupy the property for any period of time? Is the seller willing to consider a donation of the property in part or whole? Does the property fit NFLT's mission? Does NFLT have the capacity to manage the property interest being considered for conservation? Has a funding source been identified, or do we need to fundraise? Having answered the above questions, we can then unpack the conservation acquisition toolbox. Properties, whether fee or less than fee, must be monitored annually for conservation easement compliance and to identify and evaluate a management plan's success.

Fee Land

The most straightforward transaction is an NFLT-owned fee simple acquisition (purchase or donation), where NFLT will become the sole owner and steward of the property. Another is a shared interest in a fee acquisition, which may take the form of a 50/50 shared ownership with NFLT and some other entity.

Conservation Easement

A conservation easement, also known as a "less than fee interest," is where an owner retains some rights of use and sells the development rights. With this option, conservation value is preserved, and the owner retains use of the property under agreed-upon terms.

Facilitation

In this transaction, NFLT manages the transaction but will not take ownership of the property interest. In some cases, an owner and funding are identified, but the transaction needs a champion. This is where we lend our expertise to a partner.

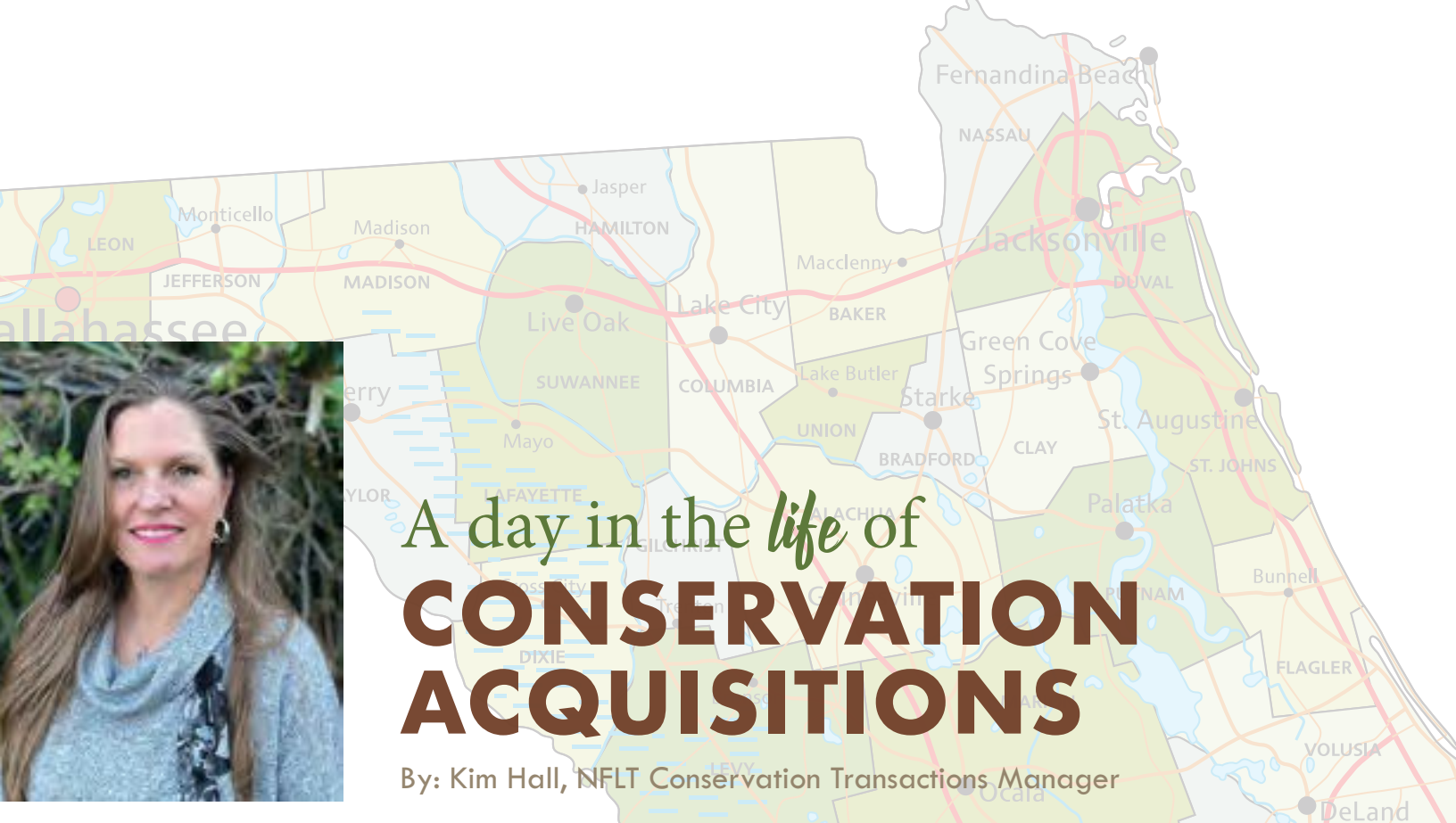
Trade Land

Trade lands typically come to our attention from donors that have non-conservation assets which are used to raise capital that we may use for other conservation acquisitions. This is the least utilized and sometimes misunderstood tool, which can be very useful if carefully cultivated. Sometimes a trade land is the only asset a donor can give in support of conservation.

CONSERVATION *Toolbox*

Life Estate

Another underused tool is a life estate. In a life estate, a property is purchased for the remainder value of the estate upon the death of the owner/seller. This estimated value is based upon the estimated remainder of the life of the owner. In this scenario, the owner occupies the property until death, at which time NFLT would assume ownership.





Background

I am not an environmentalist, a botanist, or a scientist of any type. I am simply in love with all things outdoors. My head stays in the clouds or the sun (weather depending), my feet in the woods and swamps, and nose in the flora and fauna. I remain in awe of the great outdoors and what it has to offer. A calming feeling of being connected to something bigger than myself. For that reason, I am humbled to serve my community for the last 20 years in a capacity that conserves and preserves these precious gems for generations to come.

Common Descriptions of Acquisition

It takes just as much work to acquire a one-acre parcel as it does a 500-acre parcel. The path along the way can be described using the following metaphors: Disney's "It's a Small World" attraction captures the initial stages of the process, peaceful exploratory with everyone in the boat, on the same page, and with the same goals. The short period between a seller's verbal agreement and negotiations is reminiscent of the iconic Snow White tune "Whistle While you Work," "hm hmm, hmm hmm, hmm hmm hm hm hm hm." All is right with the world and wonderful things are happening. The stages after negotiations to the closing may include some, or all, of the following: Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, the popular carnival ride "The Scrambler," replacing the engine on an aircraft in midair, and finally, closing. I have often reassured parties to a transaction, "This plane will land. No matter the holes in the wings, the fire in the fuselage, and despite the missing landing gear, it will land, even if it is in a belly flop on the tarmac."

My job as the transactions manager is to keep the passengers in the boat and on the plane calm and focused. I prepare them to land and to disembark with all parties feeling whole and satisfied. Despite whatever challenges the journey may bring, the goals are reached.

Continued on next page.

**"Despite
whatever
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may bring,
the goals
are reached."**

Skills-testing subjects for would-be NFLT real estate practitioners who want to save the Real Florida – The Conservation Acquisitions Team

- Which is worse, Chiggers or ticks? Describe home remedies for extra credit.
- How to possibly spend \$17M in Defense Funding in three months while leaping tall buildings in a single bound.
- Determining how fresh is that bear scat.
- Taking a boat full of scientists into the swamps to explore an isolated upland with an emphasis on: boat backing skills, appropriate outdoor clothing (chest waders, mosquito netting, duct tape), quicksand survival techniques, recognizing the symptoms of heat stress, and determining which tiki bar mirages are real.
- Dodging a pygmy rattlesnake on an appraisal tour while leading appraisers wearing Italian loafers and landowners in flip-flops.
- Explaining to landowners that showing the appraisers the numerous Gopher Tortoise burrows and many, many frog-filled marshes are not good items for any appraisal tour itinerary.
- Traversing home-made bridges 20 feet in the air (made from mobile home frames).
- Avoiding stampeding cattle.
- How best to avoid being chest-bumped by a donkey protecting its flock of sheep.
- Navigating 12-foot alligators while assessing property in a kayak.
- How to tell the difference between a kid's fort in the woods and a meth lab.

Ramesh Buch wading through marsh grass while viewing a possible acquisition.



Match Making and Connections

On any given day, we receive donations or offers to buy land, or requests to pursue lands for conservation. These lands are evaluated for conservation values, fitness for proper stewardship, and best conservation approach. This requires a broad understanding of the various considerations in assessing conservation value and networking with all potential stakeholders or partners.

Not all properties are created equal. Our pre-acquisition review includes what conservation values exist (wetlands, marshlands, recharge, and endangered species), adjacency to existing conservation properties, and the management considerations (who is best suited to manage, is the property accessible, restoration considerations, and management budget constraints, etc.). There are times when acquisition by NFLT is not ideal due to geography, staffing, budget constraints, or management considerations. If a property is deemed unsuitable for NFLT to own or manage, NFLT will attempt to locate a partner better suited for the task.

Contracting and Due Diligence

Once a property has been approved for acquisition, there are three paths to acquisition, 1) fee acquisition by NFLT, 2) conservation easement acquisition by NFLT, or 3) facilitation of either of those options for a partner willing to own and manage the property. Once we are approved by the NFLT Land Conservation and Stewardship Committee, the Board of Directors, and any other applicable entities, we proceed to establish the value and begin to negotiate the terms of the deal. Once under contract, the real work begins. The due diligence phase is often uneventful, but sometimes it can be an adventure all in itself.

Recently, I attended a phase one environmental site assessment. This inspection aims to rule out the existence of any environmental conditions that would require remediation prior to the transfer of title. As the story goes, I have been an outdoorsy person, spending ample time in the Keys, the Everglades, scrubby flatwoods, sandhills, and rivers all my life. Naturally, I am the one jumping out of the boat to explore the salt marsh island with our



The Stewardship Team meets with Ramesh Buch on a site assessment.



Scenic view of a site located at the end of a neighborhood that the Conservation Acquisitions Team assessed.



Kim Hall checking out a property with the use of some waders.

contractor; a little dirt never made me squeamish. Picture me as I gently lower myself off the bow of the boat, find my footing, start to follow the contractor to the interior of the island and on the first step I go down like Carrie Ingalls, face down and feet up. I must have squealed, because I hear my name called, “Kim?” with quite the concern. While examining the terrain up-close and personal, it occurred to me, as the fiddler crab crawled from its now impacted hole of a home past my nose, just how different the salt marsh smelled from that the swamp rot of the Everglades. “I’m good,” I call out, blushing for having lost my footing, in the squishy salt muck that I can only describe as walking on snot. Smelly snot. The remainder of the island exploration was uneventful, albeit beautiful and peaceful, observing only the natural beauty of the island.

The remaining hours were otherwise spent taking in the majesty of the marsh from the safety of the boat. We witnessed the sunrise and wading wildlife going about its business; morning fishing being enjoyed by the roseate spoonbills and other inhabitants. A day like this is rejuvenating and solidifies the joy I find in this more-than-worthwhile work we do in the name of conservation.

Other notable due diligence activities are title examination and survey. Title examination is slightly less glamorous. Imagine the documentation in multiple three-foot stacks of papers to review. This part of the process is often tedious and

monotonous, but occasionally garners interesting findings. I once found a deed signed by President Thomas Woodrow Wilson. Another examination revealed a service railroad to nowhere, built and used for early nineteenth century logging. Every portion of the process can yield the most interesting results.

The Closing

This is where, more often than not, a transaction can become the most interesting, especially with so many parties involved-- buyers, sellers and lawyers. This can be a smooth and uneventful mail-away closing, like sailing into the sunset, or frantic episodes reminiscent of Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam. I often explain that it is my job to absorb the frustrations of closing, keeping all parties on track towards the ultimate goal.

Finally, The End Goal

Once the closing occurs, the transaction team hands the newborn conservation land into the caring hands of NFLT’s Stewardship Team. The euphoric feeling of accomplishment remains as we hand over this beautiful gem (or screaming baby) in great need of managed care. We labor for the transaction only to hand off the responsibility of raising said child. With a shoulder shrug and sometimes an apology, we say goodbye to the transaction and begin exploring the landscape for the next adventure.



STRATEGIC CONSERVATION PLANNING

How it is helping local counties create conservation plans

By: Heather Nagy, NFLT Conservation Acquisitions Coordinator

North Florida Land Trust utilizes the most current decision-making tools and technology to protect land through acquisitions, donations, and other strategies. We manage these lands for sustainability, ecosystem health, and conservation value. Our regional footprint and vast knowledge and experience gives us a deep understanding of how community, people, government, and business integrate within the environmental value chain. The result is an unprecedented ability to protect and preserve land for future generations in Northeast Florida.

Strategic conservation planning is the process by which conservation agencies, community governments, stakeholders, and nonprofits can identify natural resources and rank and prioritize those resources towards their own goals. By using Geographic

Information Systems (GIS) technology, NFLT creates an adaptable database to identify the highest priority lands for conservation in any geographic area based on a variety of natural resource attributes. These attributes include landscape connectivity, soil quality, water quality, habitat for endangered species, and climate resilience. NFLT used this process to determine our own strategic conservation plan, known as the Preservation Portfolio, which identified 112,000 acres throughout our operating area as preservation priorities. Through this strategic process, NFLT can target the most resource-rich lands for conservation and optimize the resulting portfolio to best meet the goals of all stakeholders.

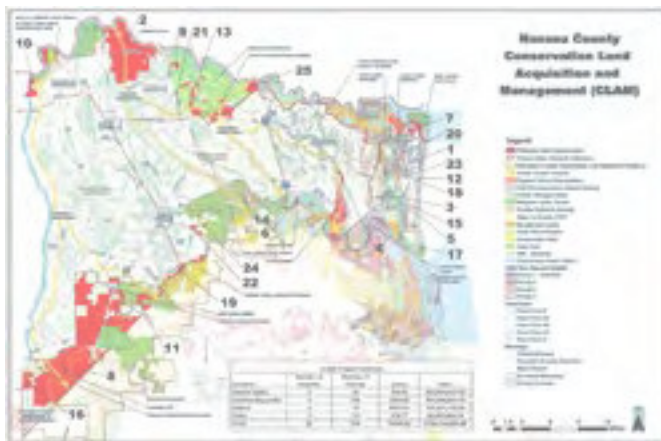
In addition to directing and facilitating land preservation, NFLT provides strategic conservation

planning services to other nonprofit organizations and local governments. We have assisted or are currently assisting Flagler County, Amelia Island, the City of Fernandina Beach, the City of New Smyrna Beach, the City of Jacksonville, Camp Blanding, and the Department of the Navy to protect ecological lands of importance.

In 2020, NFLT was approached by Nassau County for assistance in developing a conservation program to protect the county's rich natural resources which include wild and scenic rivers, a unique barrier island, and boundless miles of forestland. Nassau County was behind the state average for natural resource protection, at only 7% of its landmass protected versus the statewide average of 29%. Nassau County also faced new and significant development pressure, transforming a mostly rural county to a significant regional growth center. NFLT developed a multi-phase plan to assist the county in creating the Conservation Land Acquisition and Management (CLAM) program. Through a series of meetings and workshops, NFLT worked with County Commissioners, staff, and the public to identify, rank, and assess lands for acquisition

and management. After determining the county's top conservation values, NFLT developed a detailed GIS model to determine and rank the areas of the county most in-line with those conservation values. In addition to hosting workshops and developing a GIS model, NFLT created a manual of operations for the CLAM program to be used by county staff for administration and management of the program.

In August 2022, NFLT was awarded a contract from Clay County to lead them in the creation of a conservation acquisition and management program similar to Nassau County's CLAM. NFLT will work closely with Clay County staff and the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to customize the conservation planning process according to the needs of the county. This process will also include community input to ensure the plan reflects the communities' values. The goal of this planning effort will be a portfolio of well-managed lands that reflects the values of the community and the BOCC as well as be financially sustainable. NFLT will kick off this conservation program later this year with an educational and informational workshop for the BOCC members.



Planning Department hosts presentations on Conservation Land Acquisition and Management Program.

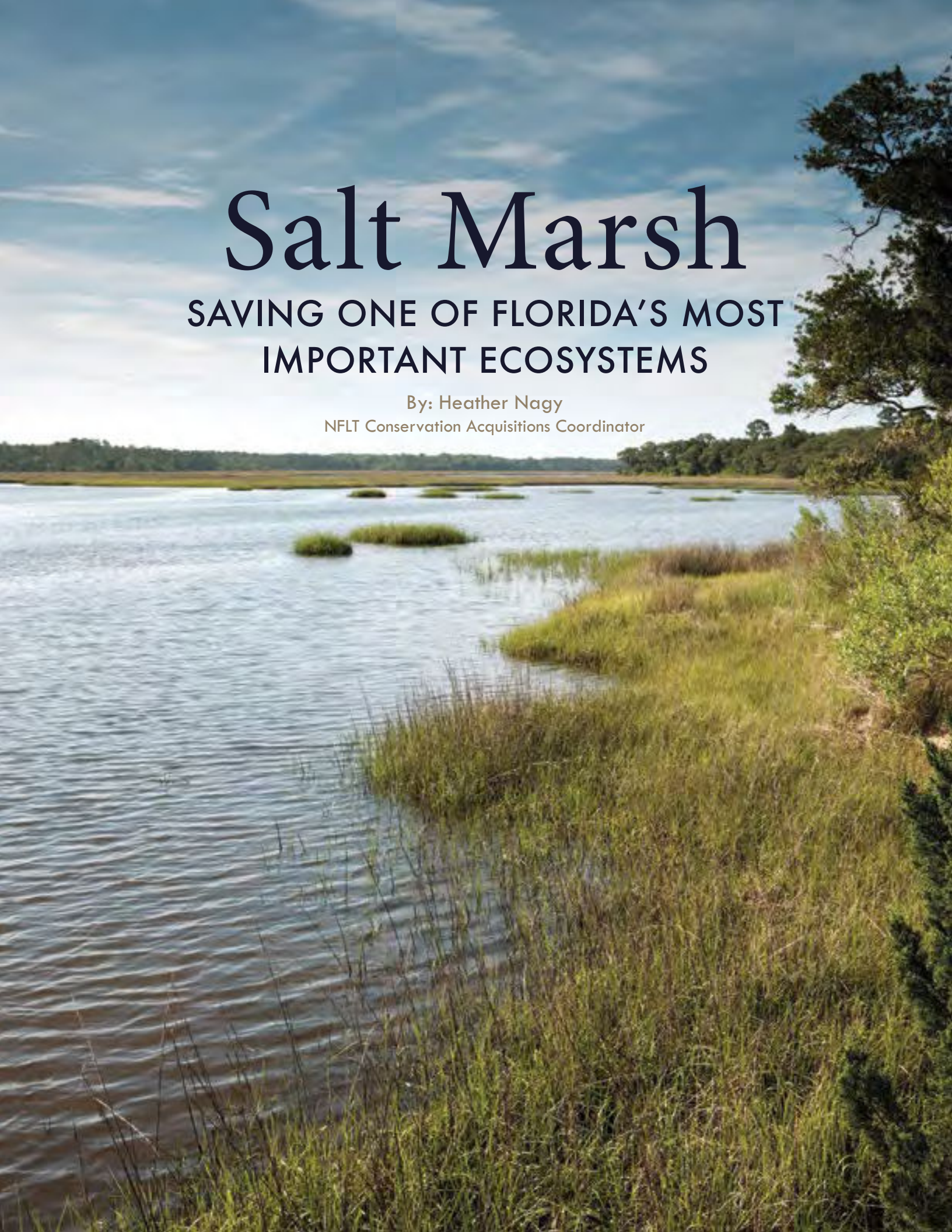


Salt Marsh

SAVING ONE OF FLORIDA'S MOST
IMPORTANT ECOSYSTEMS

By: Heather Nagy

NFLT Conservation Acquisitions Coordinator



Northeast Florida's salt marsh grasslands are some of the most ecologically productive and important areas on the planet. These estuary ecosystems, with their mix of fresh and salt water, create an incredibly nutrient-rich environment that supports an abundance of plants and animals. Salt marshes, like other marshes and as opposed to swamps, are distinctive for their lack of trees. They are composed of a variety of plants, including cordgrass, needlerush and sedges. These seemingly simple grasses are weighty multi-taskers, providing habitat and shelter for aquatic species, filtering water, and stabilizing our coastline. During storm events, salt marsh grasses act as a giant sponge, soaking up flood waters and reducing destructive storm surge impacts. Hundreds of species, from oysters and reptiles to herons and bobcats, depend on salt marshes for their survival. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, over 75% of fisheries species spend some part of their life cycle in salt marshes. Many salt marsh species, such as redfish, blue crab, and black duck, are crucial to recreational and commercial fishing, hunting, birding, and other coastal businesses. Along with other coastal wetlands, salt marshes moderate the climate by absorbing almost 8.1 million tons of carbon dioxide in the U.S. each year, seven times as much per acre as a terrestrial forest.

Though salt marshes provide myriad benefits, they face increasing pressure from rising seas and coastal development. Unfortunately, many areas desirable for coastal development are home to the most ecologically fragile and vulnerable areas of salt marsh. Salt marsh can also be lost inadvertently to excess nutrient and sediment loads coming from areas further upstream. Without proper planning to allow for its natural movement inland to higher ground as sea level rises, salt marsh will drown and its benefits to coastal populations will be lost. Salt marsh loss would be detrimental to Florida's marine fisheries, which would decline or even disappear without this critical coastal habitat.

"Salt marshes moderate the climate by absorbing almost 8.1 million tons of carbon dioxide in the U.S. each year, seven times as much per acre as a terrestrial forest."

In 2021, NFLT completed a year-long strategic plan to redefine its mission and conservation priorities to better position itself as a leader in conservation for Northeast Florida. During this process, staff and the Board of Directors identified salt marsh conservation as a key conservation priority, both for its numerous ecological benefits and for its vulnerability to development. This means salt marsh will play a key role in NFLT's strategic conservation planning, and properties containing salt marsh will be viewed as high priority for protection, either through fee purchase or conservation easement.

Additionally, NFLT recently joined a regional

conservation effort led by the South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI). SASMI is bringing together a diverse group of partners from across the southeast, including local, state and federal interests, scientists, cultural groups, landowners, and nonprofit organizations, with the goal to develop a coordinated Regional Conservation Plan focused on conserving and restoring salt marsh from North Carolina to Florida.

Priority actions from the plan will benefit people, communities, military installations, and wildlife that depend on the salt marsh. SASMI's goal is to support the migration, conservation, and restoration of one million acres of salt marsh in the South Atlantic states.

In August 2022, NFLT received a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to lead a Florida-focused effort to map and prioritize areas of opportunity for salt marsh conservation, restoration, and future migration. In addition, NFLT will engage important stakeholder groups in this effort, such as state agencies, frontline communities, and landowners, to utilize their expertise and guidance on how best to prioritize remaining areas of salt marsh and to look toward future marsh migration areas. NFLT will use the input from these stakeholder meetings, in coordination with Pew and SASMI, to develop a mapping tool to determine high priority areas for conservation. NFLT will also develop funding proposals that incorporate these mapping products and priority areas to fund future acquisitions, conservation easements, or restoration efforts.



PRESERVE NORTH FLORIDA DONATE TODAY

**Scan code with your
smartphone camera
to donate.**

WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT NFLT BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR

As the current year closes and a new tax year begins, consider making a charitable gift to the North Florida Land Trust. This year has presented Americans with the highest inflation in more than 40 years, along with rising interest rates and frequent volatility in U.S. stocks and other asset classes. Despite these conditions, donors have continued to support charities and causes that are important to them steadfastly. Below are a few ways to continue giving with maximum charitable impact and minimize your taxes before year end.

MAKING A CASH GIFT

When donating cash to North Florida Land Trust, a donor can generally deduct up to 60% of your adjusted gross income. If you prefer to give with a check delivered by the U.S. Postal Service, your gift must be postmarked by midnight on Dec. 31 to qualify as a gift for this tax year.

MAKING A GIFT OF STOCK AND APPRECIATED SECURITIES

By giving stock that has been held for at least a year, the 15 percent capital gains tax typically incurred can be eliminated if you sell. In addition, stock donations to charities, like the North Florida Land Trust, are eligible for a charitable tax deduction on both federal and state taxes, adding up to potentially significant savings.

SATISFYING AN IRA REQUIRED MINIMUM DISTRIBUTION (RMD) THROUGH A QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION (QCD)

Beneficiary designation IRAs or other qualified retirement plans are often one of the most tax-efficient assets to leave to charity because they are taxed heavily when left to heirs. When you designate a nonprofit, such as the North Florida Land Trust, as the beneficiary of an IRA as part of your estate plan, 100 percent of the gift will be available to support your philanthropic interests.

Contributions must be received at North Florida Land Trust by December 31, 2022, to qualify as a charitable deduction on 2022 tax returns. Some non-cash asset contributions have review and processing times spanning several weeks or longer. A donor wishing to make a 2022 QCD should submit the request by the end of November to ensure the gift is received by December 31.