



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Over 4,000 acres in the Red Hills to be permanently protected thanks to Florida Forever funding

On March 29th Gov. Ron DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet approved funding to purchase a conservation easement on approximately 4,132 acres of the Norias Property in Jefferson and Leon Counties. Funding will come from Florida Forever, the state's premier land conservation program.

The state now has 120 days to work with the landowner to complete the conservation easement that will prohibit residential, industrial and commercial development on the property while protecting natural areas. Norias is a historic quail hunting property on the eastern shore of Lake Miccosukee and south of Lake Road and TS Green Road.

Once the conservation easement is completed, the Norias property will continue to be privately owned and managed. The conservation easement will allow existing land-uses to continue, such as hunting, agriculture, and forestry, but will prohibit more intensive land-uses like residential development or commercial solar facilities. As with most conservation easements, it does not grant public access. The owners retain the right to sell the land, but the conservation easement restrictions remain in place for all future owners.

The Norias conservation easement will further several conservation goals in the Red Hills, including the continued use of prescribed fire. Landowners throughout the region have a long history of using prescribed fire to manage natural habitats for quail and other wildlife. Prescribed burning mimics a natural process that promotes plant and animal diversity and reduces wildfire risk. Large rural landscapes with minimal development, such as in the Red Hills, make it easier to conduct prescribed burning. Conservation easements limit land fragmentation and development, and thus allow the continued use and benefits of prescribed fire.

Lake Miccosukee, a prominent sinkhole lake in North Florida, will also benefit from this protection. The new conservation easement will prohibit future development on Norias along the lake's shoreline, thereby protecting the forested buffer of mature cypress and tupelo trees. Lake Miccosukee is a popular lake for fishing and waterfowl hunting. "Lake Miccosukee is an

important public resource to our community and supports our local economy by attracting fisherman, duck hunters, and wildlife watchers to the region,” explained Shane Wellendorf, Conservation Coordinator for Tall Timbers. “The natural, undeveloped shoreline and abundant fish and wildlife are all part of the appeal.”

Tall Timbers, a nonprofit research station and land conservancy, works with private landowners to manage and conserve their lands, and has assisted the Norias owners throughout the Florida Forever process. “Tall Timbers is honored to work with the landowner and the state to conserve this historic property in the heart of the Red Hills” stated Bill Palmer, Tall Timbers President/CEO.

The Norias easement will be adjacent to existing conservation easements held by Tall Timbers and will help to expand wildlife corridors among conservation lands in the region. “Thanks to a strong conservation ethic by Red Hills landowners and support from our agency partners, almost 40% of the Red Hills is permanently conserved” explained Palmer.

Going forward, Tall Timbers will continue assisting landowners in pursuing conservation easements on their lands to protect the distinctive Red Hills landscape with its traditional land uses, clean water, and habitats for wildlife.

For project images: The following link provides access to downloadable images, please credit “Photos by Lauren Yoho / Path of the Panther” <https://adobe.ly/3Lq9orZ>

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