REGIONAL MITIGATION PLAN
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mitigation Project: **Upper Coastal Mitigation Bank**
County: Citrus County

Project Number: **SW 91**
Location: Sec. 28, 33, T19S, R17E

IMPACT INFORMATION

The UCMB will be evaluated to provide compensation for future FDOT wetland impacts in the basin.

MITIGATION ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

Mitigation Type: Enhancement and preservation

Project Description

A. **Overall project goal:** The Upper Coastal Mitigation Bank (UCMB) is a 148.8 acre tract located in northwest Citrus County (Figure A). The UCMB is located within a regionally significant and critical habitat and wildlife corridor; representing a key parcel in the only remaining habitat that can provide a terrestrial connection between the expansive Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge/Withlacoochee State Forest to the south, and the Crystal River State Buffer Preserve system to the north (Figure B). Due to the high value and functions of habitat and water resources, the tract was previously targeted for public land acquisition through the State's Florida Forever program. The primary goals of the UCMB include the preservation and enhancement of ecologically significant forested wetland and upland habitat, and provide protection of the on-site spring that discharges to the Homosassa River. Protection and enhancement of this tract benefits the expansive and valuable preserved public lands to the north and south by providing improved connectivity of habitat.

B. **Brief description of current condition:** The UCMB has a mosaic of upland and wetland habitat (Figure C). The dominant wetland community includes 83.6 acres of mixed hardwood forest wetlands (FLUCFCS #617). The swamp habitat is primarily within the eastern and northwestern portion of the property, and includes a diverse mix of hydrologic regimes and associated vegetative communities. The diverse canopy coverage includes American elm, pignut hickory, red maple, sweet bay, popash, sweet gum, black gum, water oak, laurel oak, and cabbage palm. The subcanopy contains numerous seedlings of the same tree species as well as wax myrtle and saw palmetto. Sparse groundcover in the wetland includes a dominance of various fern species. A unique feature within this wetland includes a pristine spring that emerges from a deep, rocky pool that discharges through a spring run for 600 feet before disappearing into another deep pool at the northern end of the property (photo). Mixed hardwood upland habitat (FLUCFCS #438, 36.5 acres) provides a buffer transition between the hardwood swamp and the mixed hardwood-conifer upland habitat. The canopy is comprised of a mix of upland and transitional hardwood species including red cedar, magnolia, cabbage palm, sweet gum, various oak species,
and occasional slash pine. The understory is comprised of immature cabbage palm, wax myrtle, viburnum, beautyberry, coontie, Virginia chain fern, and occasional saw palmetto. The hardwood-conifer mixed habitat (24.3 acres) is dominated by slash pine and live oak, with additional coverage provided by transitional species such as cabbage palm, cedar, and magnolia. In many areas of this upland community, there is also a xeric subcanopy of coastal plain staggerbush, myrtle oak, and sand live oak. The understory is dominated by dense saw palmetto, while subdominant coverage is provided by fetterbush, wax myrtle, and bracken fern. It appears that some damage occurred to the tree canopy across the site as a result of recent active hurricane seasons. The reduced canopy has allowed the opportunity for invasion by nuisance and exotic species, particularly vines. Overall, exotic coverage is low and patchy except along the north and south edges of the site. The habitat functions of the site, provided by mature hardwood swamp, diverse upland habitat, and a unique spring run, include food, cover, denning, and water sources for wildlife using the area as well as a corridor connection to adjacent public lands.

C. Brief description of proposed work: The primary goals of the UCMB mitigation plan are: 1) to preserve 148.8 acres of intact wetland and upland ecosystems to establish a corridor link for Florida black bears and other wildlife species; 2) to enhance natural community functions; and 3) to protect the integrity of the on-site spring system and headwaters of the Homosassa River. The plan includes restricting site access, eliminating nuisance and exotic species, restoring the upland communities by selectively reducing shrub coverage, and preserving the site in perpetuity by conveying a conservation easement to the SWFWMD. Establishment of a management trust fund will ensure ecological values and benefits are maintained in the long term.

D. Brief explanation of how this work serves to offset the impacts of the specified DOT project(s): The UCMB will be evaluated in the future to possibly provide mitigation for FDOT wetland impacts in the basin.

E. Brief explanation of why a mitigation bank was/was not chosen, in whole or in part, including a discussion of cost: The UCMB is a mitigation bank in the Upper Coastal basin.

F. Brief explanation of why a SWIM project was/was not chosen as mitigation, in whole or in part, including a discussion of cost, if the anticipated impacts are located within a SWIM water body: At the time of mitigation selection, there were no SWIM-sponsored restoration projects in the Upper Coastal basin that could appropriately compensate for the anticipated wetland impacts.

MITIGATION PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Entity responsible for implementation: Upper Coastal Mitigation Bank
Contact Name: Wade Waltimyer, EarthBalance, Corporation Phone Number: 941 – 426 - 7878
Entity responsible for monitoring and maintenance: EarthBalance, Corporation

Project cost: To be determined upon designating wetland impacts for mitigation at the bank.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Description of existing site and proposed work. Refer previous discussion, SWFWMD ERP #44029983 is available for review, attached site photos.

2. Aerial photograph with date and scale. Refer to Figure C, 1999 infrared aerial.

3. Location map and design drawings of existing and proposed conditions. Refer to Figure A (location map), Figure C (existing & proposed habitat).

4. Schedule for work implementation, including any and all phases. Refer to previous implementation discussion. No construction activities required, currently within the land management, maintenance & monitoring activities.

5. Success criteria and associated monitoring plan. Monitoring and success criteria for habitat enhancement are specified in the ERP. Since the site is proposed as a mature preservation and enhancement parcel, typical monitoring methods will not be required to document vegetative and hydrological success. Success criteria for the bank will therefore be evaluated as “events.” These events include recording the conservation easement to restrict use and access, funding the management trust fund, strategic fencing and signage along the bank perimeter, eradication of inappropriate plant species to less than 5% total coverage, eradication of exotic plant species to 1% coverage or less, and completion of the initial shrub reduction event in uplands.

6. Long term maintenance plan. The long-term management plan addresses vegetative maintenance, fire management, site security, access, and approved activities are recorded with the conservation easement. The location of these planned activities are depicted on Figure C. The mitigation banker will remain the responsible entity for site management and plans to retain fee-simple ownership of the parcel. At some point, the land may be transferred to an appropriate public agency or private owner who will be responsible to maintain the habitat conditions.