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GOVERNOR AND CABINET APPROVE 11,000-ACRE ACQUISITION CRUCIAL FOR SPRINGS PROTECTION

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~Conservation land will protect 10 springs and provide recreational opportunities~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Today, Governor Rick Scott and the Cabinet members agreed to purchase the 11,027-acre Horn Spring property, located within Leon and Jefferson counties. The property is a major wildlife corridor, connecting St. Marks River Preserve State Park, Fanlew Preserve, Aucilla Wildlife Management Area and Natural Bridge Battlefield Historic State Park. The project will protect water resources, with 10 known springs on the property, protect 12 known historic sites, and provide a variety of public recreational and educational opportunities.

“Acquiring the Horn Spring property is a prime example of efforts to focus taxpayer resources on projects that provide a direct benefit to the environment and local communities,” said DEP Secretary Jon Steverson. “This is the largest Florida Forever acquisition since 2006, and it will provide numerous benefits to our springs while offering recreation for Floridians and visitors.”

The property is located within the Upper St. Marks River Corridor Florida Forever Project, ranked number 9 in the Florida Forever Critical Natural Lands project category, and the St. Joe Timberland – St. Marks Springs site Florida Forever project, ranked number 3 in the Florida Forever Climate Change Lands project category. The ranking

was approved by the Board of Trustees on April 26, 2016. The property will be purchased from Natural Bridge Timberlands, LLC, a subsidiary of AgReserves, Inc.

“As farmers and ranchers, we look to the long term in everything we do,” said Don Sleight, CEO, AgReserves, Inc. “That this land will be preserved in perpetuity for future generations to enjoy is especially gratifying for us. We are glad to see the ecological treasures on this property come under the ownership and care of Florida Forever.”

The southern portion of Horn Spring will be added to the existing Natural Bridge Battlefield Historic State Park and will be managed by the Florida Park Service. The northern portion of Horn Spring will be managed by the Northwest Florida Water Management District in coordination with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

“The District appreciates the efforts by Governor Scott and DEP to further protect and preserve special places like this in Northwest Florida,” said Brett Cyphers, Executive Director of the Northwest Florida Water Management District. “We look forward to working with DEP and FWC for the long-term preservation of this vital natural resource.”

“This acquisition presents an unparalleled opportunity to assist in the protection of the tremendous natural resources of the St. Marks River ecosystem,” said Greg Knecht, The Nature Conservancy. “I applaud the state for their work to protect wildlife habitat and preserve water quality in this vital area of Northwest Florida.”

“Natural Bridge is among Florida’s most valuable conservation lands. We commend the state’s efforts to protect the river and springs for the benefit of people and wildlife,” said Eric Draper, Executive Director of Audubon Florida.

"The board and staff of Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy support this project," said George Willson, Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy board member. "It is a remarkable water resource and river habitat conservation action by DEP and the private landowner which preserves a regionally significant hydrologic corridor from the Red Hills of Tallahassee to tidewater."

About the Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is the state’s principal environmental agency, created to protect, conserve and manage Florida’s environment and natural resources. The department enforces federal and state environmental laws, protects Florida’s air and water quality, cleans up pollution, regulates solid waste management, promotes pollution prevention and acquires environmentally sensitive lands for preservation. The agency also maintains a statewide system of parks, trails and aquatic preserves. Visit the department’s website at www.dep.state.fl.us.

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