

## **Goal: The Osceola Expressway Eastern Extension routed south of (not through) Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area**

CFX Public Meeting info: <https://www.cfxway.com/agency-information/plans-studies/project-studies/concept-studies/>

Please pick several points for your comment email and send to [ConceptStudies@CFXway.com](mailto:ConceptStudies@CFXway.com). If you wish, cc it to [matthew.lamb@ch2m.com](mailto:matthew.lamb@ch2m.com) and [glenn.pressimone@cfxway.com](mailto:glenn.pressimone@cfxway.com).

You can ask questions and find more information on the Friends of Split Oak Forest (FSOF), Facebook group of advocates, [www.facebook.com/groups/friendsofsplitoak](http://www.facebook.com/groups/friendsofsplitoak). For further information, including hike dates, contact FSOF founders Valerie Anderson at [Valerie@andersongeospatial.com](mailto:Valerie@andersongeospatial.com) and Dave Wegman at [dawegman@aol.com](mailto:dawegman@aol.com).

**Purchased with Public Funds**—for environmental value and recreation:

\*The Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area (SOFWEA) was purchased in 1994 at a cost of \$6.4 million by Orange & Osceola Counties and the Florida Communities Trust (a state grant-matching program to help community parks, part of the Florida Forever program). This is taxpayer's money. It is public land.

\*Surplus Property reviews have not revealed justification for any portion of SOFWEA to be declared surplus.

**Well-managed by FWC over 23 years**—especially prescribed burning:

\*Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has been managing the 1700-acre property since 1994—removing invasive plants, conducting prescribed burns and assisting in the relocation of protected Gopher Tortoises. The entire site is under a Perpetual Conservation Easement managed by FWC.

\* Prescribed burning is an integral tool to maintain SOFWEA. FWC recommended as recently as 2009 that smoke-sensitive development be located at least 1000 feet from the SOFWEA boundary. An expressway through any part of SOFWEA would end prescribed burning opportunities over much of the property and would be incompatible with management for Gopher Tortoises and other imperiled animals and plants.

**Animals, Plants, and Mitigation**

\*Some of most important Regional Wildlife Corridors in the state cross this area, including for movement of Florida panthers, bobcats, and deer from the Everglades. SOFWEA is also part of an Audubon Important Bird area, providing a home to increasingly rare birds like Northern Bobwhite (quail), Bachman's Sparrow and Brown Nuthatches.

\* SOFWEA has the only known population of Florida Scrub-Jays in Orange/Osceola Counties in its SE corner and jays were seen in other areas of the property in the past. Due to the prescribed burning, the property's entire uplands are excellent habitat for Scrub-Jays and could be a recipient site for relocation. Proposed routes would destroy active nesting/feeding habitat of these jays.

\* SOFWEA is a Gopher Tortoise Mitigation Bank. In 2009 and as recently as 2016 over 100 Gopher Tortoises have been laboriously relocated to SOFWEA from other areas where construction destroyed their homes.

\* SOFWEA is of continental importance due to endangered and threatened animals, such as indigo snakes.

\*SOFWEA has a high diversity of plants and associated butterflies, for example zebra swallow-tailed butterflies.

\* SOFWEA is a [Land Mitigation Bank](#). Orange County sold mitigation credits to compensate for habitat destroyed through development elsewhere.

\* SOFWEA is next to Back To Nature Wildlife Refuge, Orange County Green PLACE properties and other conservation lands.

**Watersheds**

\* The Lake Hart Basin where SOFWEA is located is the northernmost part of the Everglades watershed.

\* Parts of SOFWEA flow northward into the Econlockhatchee River watershed, which goes north into the St. Johns River. The Econ Headwaters and Upper Econ Mosaic were previously listed on the Florida Forever list for conservation purchase.

\* If a road and commercial development are allowed in the area, pollutants will flow in both directions, and hydrology of these unique ecosystems will be changed.

**Earlier Route Bypassed SOFWEA**

\*The earliest preliminary Osceola Expressway Extension Routes (in studies from 2012-2014) completely bypassed SOFWEA to the south. This made for a curve in the road to avoid existing developments, but there are already precedents of such curves on SR 417 and other roads. We suggest that for the 8 ½ miles skirting SOFWEA there be posted slower speed limits to go around the curve.

**Recreational Value**

\*SOFWEA is increasingly used for recreational purposes, including trail running, horseback riding, hiking and wildlife watching. It is a public outdoor recreation resource in a rapidly developing area. It augments the recreational opportunities of adjacent Moss Park. SOFWEA is uniquely natural, allowing a discovery experience, different from human-made parks.