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## Santa Fe Untamed

<b>Applying Organization</b>	Alachua Conservation Trust	<b>Application Date</b>	5/13/2026
<b>Applying Contact</b>	Heather Obara	<b>Status</b>	Submitted
<b>Record Type</b>	Member Collective	<b>Created By</b>	Heather Obara, 5/12/2026, 4:23 PM
		<b>Create Account</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Project Overview

<b>Project Name</b>	Santa Fe Untamed	<b>Requested Amount</b>	\$50,000.00
<b>Project/Campaign Name</b>	Santa Fe Untamed		
<b>Type of Project</b>	Acquisition	<b>Project Multiple Locations</b>	
<b>Project Location (State or Territory)</b>	FL	<b>Longitude</b>	-82.808099
<b>Latitude</b>	29.932974		

### Organization Details

<b>Organization Name</b>	Alachua Conservation Trust	<b>Primary address for organization</b>	7204 County Road 234 Gainesville, Florida 32641 United States
<b>Contact Name</b>	Heather Obara	<b>Contact Title</b>	Associate Director
<b>Contact Email Address</b>	skoehler@alachuaconservationtrust.org		
<b>Annual Operating Budget</b>	\$12,420,115.00	<b>Tax Status/Organization Type</b>	501c3 Organization
<b>Staff Size</b>	23	<b>Main Phone</b>	352-373-1078
<b>Total Membership</b>	0	<b>Organization Website/Social Media Feed</b>	https://www.alachuaconservationtrust.org/
<b>BIPOC-led</b>	No	<b>C-Suite Staff</b>	

### Grant Details

<b>Awarded Amount</b>		<b>Awarded Date</b>	
<b>Funding Program</b>			
<b>Primary Project Type</b>		<b>Secondary Project Type</b>	
<b>Term Start Date</b>		<b>Term End Date</b>	

### Proposal Questions

<b>Mission/History Of Organization</b>	The mission of Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) is to protect the natural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources in and around North Central Florida. ACT protects land through	<b>Location Details</b>	The Santa Fe River and its surrounding landscape have been a conservation priority for ACT since its founding in 1988. Along with local and state partners, ACT has been dedicated to the
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purchase, donation, and conservation easements in 22 counties. Since its founding in 1988, ACT has facilitated the conservation of more than 70,000 acres including the direct acquisition of 27,600 acres, owns and operates more than a dozen preserves open to the public on 7,200 acres, and has assisted private landowners with conservation easements on 7,500 acres. ACT is an accredited nonprofit land trust. We also facilitate land purchases with municipalities and local partners, engage with our community through environmental education programs, and find innovative ways for people to explore wild spaces. From sea turtle habitat on the coast, to fire-based longleaf pine flatwoods, to our local rivers and waterways, ACT is committed to protecting and conserving land for current and future generations.

goal of protecting over 75% of the Santa Fe River through land acquisition by 2045. To date, these efforts have resulted in the permanent protection of more than 60% of this iconic waterway. ACT's conservation efforts along the Santa Fe River have resulted in the permanent protection of thousands of acres of land, including the 563-acre Sawdust Springs Preserve, 195-acre Little Awesome Preserve, and 1,067-acre Santa Fe River Preserve. Hundreds of acres of privately-owned land permanently protected with ACT and its partners under conservation easements also adds significantly to North Central Florida's conservation landscape along the Santa Fe River corridor. ACT's Santa Fe River Basin acquisition projects are part of a much larger ongoing effort to protect the entire Santa Fe River Watershed and the larger Lower Suwannee River Basin to ensure that it remains a viable and healthy conservation corridor that provides clean water, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat to the region. The Santa Fe River totals 75 miles that is separated into a lower and upper segment flowing east to west from the Osceola to Ocala Wildlife Corridor into the Suwannee River, which finds its way into the Gulf. The river travels underground for several miles within River Rise State Park through an extensive cave system. The river supports 36 named freshwater springs as well as the underlying Floridan Aquifer System, which is North Florida's main source of drinking water. The Santa Fe River is also connected to the Ichetucknee River, which flows into it, and the Suwannee River, which it flows into. In addition to being a major source of drinking water and source for recreation, the watershed is also a vital habitat to many endemic species and other endangered and imperiled species. Currently, ACT is working with multiple landowners located in the watershed that are in the process of placing their properties into conservation through fee-simple acquisition. These properties are each unique in their own ways featuring springs, wetlands, riparian buffers, and upland areas that serve as vital habitat and provide aquifer recharge.

<b>Final Success</b>	Acquisition of these properties will result in the permanent protection of an additional 470 acres of riparian buffer and wetlands, over 1-mile of riverbank, and two fourth-magnitude springs with a 150-foot spring run, that contribute to the health and recovery of the Santa Fe River and the Floridan aquifer system.	<b>Impact on Climate and Biodiversity</b>
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To date, conservation efforts in the Santa Fe River Basin have resulted in the permanent protection of thousands of acres of land along more than 60% of the river within and near several established wildlife corridors. The proposed project properties will be added to that existing network of protected lands that are connected to one another by the river with the goal to eventually link up more than 75% of the land along the river to existing ACT and government-owned conservation lands.

The State of Florida has prioritized protection of the Santa Fe River watershed through the adoption of a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), which outlines the steps needed to improve water quality in the region by reducing nitrogen and phosphorus contributions to the system. The BMAP identifies one of the most effective and permanent solutions to protect water resources in the Santa Fe River Basin as conserving land through direct fee-simple purchase or by working with individual landowners to protect their properties through conservation easements. The proposed project properties along the Santa Fe River are located within its critical BMAP-area as well as priority areas identified for conservation by ACT. The entire watershed serves as a vital habitat to many endemic species and other endangered and imperiled species. Some of these federally endangered or threatened species include the oval pigtoe, Suwannee moccasinshell, wood stork, Gulf sturgeon, and the West Indian manatee. State-threatened animals include the Suwannee alligator snapping turtle, little blue heron, and tricolored heron. In addition to these species, the area is home to other wildlife including the Florida black bear, river otter, beaver, bobcat, grey fox, and migratory birds. Maintaining and increasing available habitat for these species will continue to be a large focus for conservation efforts in this region as the state experiences rapid development and growth in more rural areas.

Additionally, flooding along the Santa Fe River during times of increased rainfall and hurricanes can impact existing structures and residences. Permanent land protection of these areas right along the river will increase storm resiliency by securing floodplains and leaving those lands undeveloped. These areas can still serve as recreational opportunities for residents and visitors while protecting nearby communities as storage for floodwaters and recharge areas for our springs, rivers and aquifer.

**Expected Economic & Recreational Impact**

The acquisition of these proposed project properties will add to ACT's existing network of nature preserves in the Santa Fe River Basin, which provide free recreational access to residents and visitors alike. In 2025, ACT's public nature preserves welcomed approximately 79,000 visitors, who benefited from over 28 miles of recreational trails on more than 7,200 acres. The proposed project properties will add approximately 470 acres of conservation land to the region, which will provide opportunities for habitat

**Strategy & Timeline For Final Success**

Of the five projects that are a focus of this proposal, one was successfully acquired in March 2026. ACT is still actively fundraising for that project to pay back funds owed on the acquisition. Of the remaining four projects, three are actively under contract with closing dates ranging from May through the end of 2026. One additional project is expected to be under contract before the end of May. A general summary of each project along with applicable timelines is included below. Project names have been kept general to respect landowner

restoration; recreational trails for hiking, biking, and wildlife observation; and access to the Santa Fe River for paddling and other forms of passive water recreation. Nearby towns such as High Springs, Worthington Springs, and Gainesville benefit from increased or sustained tourism to the river and springs as this area of the state is a popular destination for outdoor recreation including hiking, swimming, tubing, paddling, and diving.

In addition to the increased recreational and economic opportunities that long-term land conservation provides, the region will benefit from the avoidance of conversion of these lands to more intensive uses as development in this region continues to increase substantially. Conversion of lands along the river would have a negative impact to the entire ecosystem, affecting wildlife that depend upon these waterways for survival and also degrading water quality. Despite already being imperiled, North Florida's springs and rivers remain a crown jewel of the State and attract millions of visitors every year. Conservation of these lands where impacts are reduced or avoided will improve the water quality of surface waters as well as the main drinking water source for 80% of the state.

privacy.

Santa Fe River - 20: This property includes 20 acres with almost ½ mile of river frontage along the Lower Santa Fe River. The property also features two freshwater springs and a 150-foot spring run. ACT closed on this property in March 2026 and continues to fundraise for the acquisition. ACT staff have begun management on the property with the intention to open it to the public in the future once it is fully paid off.

Santa Fe River - 39: This property consists of 39 acres with just over 1500-feet of river frontage along the Lower Santa Fe River. At just over 2.5 river miles away from the "Santa Fe River - 20" property, this property is located approximately ¼-mile from the confluence of another major river, the Ichetucknee River. All due diligence has been completed and this project is scheduled to close on May 28, 2026. The landowners have agreed to a bargain sale of the property, resulting in a landowner contribution of \$156,000, and ACT will continue to fundraise for this acquisition following the closing.

C.M. Ranch: This project includes 392 acres along the Lower Santa Fe River with approximately ⅔-mile of river frontage as well as upland habitat for sandhill species such as gopher tortoise and Southern fox squirrel. This property is close to several existing conservation lands including ACT's Little Awesome and Sawdust Springs preserves. This project is expected to be under contract before the end of May and will close in summer 2026 with owner-financing, which will allow ACT to continue to raise funds for the project through the summer and fall.

Santa Fe River Preserve Addition - 6: This property consists of just over 6 acres of upland pine habitat between ACT's Santa Fe River North and Santa Fe River South properties, which make up the 1,067-acre preserve. This property is an inholding that will help ACT eventually connect up both portions of the preserve and protect that entire stretch of the Upper Santa Fe River. This project is currently under contract with due diligence in progress and an expected closing in October 2026.

Santa Fe River Preserve Addition - 13: This 13-acre property is located across the street from ACT's existing Santa Fe River Preserve North and rail trail. It consists of mostly wetlands; protection of which is critical for the rivers and springs within the Santa Fe River Basin. This project is currently under contract with due diligence in progress and an

expected closing on or before July 3, 2026. ACT will continue to raise funds for this project through the summer and fall.

There are no anticipated barriers at this time. ACT has been successful in fundraising for acquisitions along the Santa Fe River previously through grants, donations, and local campaigns such as the Amazing Give. Just last month, ACT raised over \$105,000 towards the above-named acquisitions along the Santa Fe River. Additionally, one of the landowners has agreed to a bargain sale (valued at \$156,000), while another project will be purchased with owner-financing to help support this conservation effort. We will continue to seek funds from private foundations and donors to assist with the acquisition costs associated with these projects and we are requesting support from The Conservation Alliance to help with due diligence and a portion of the anticipated closing costs, which are often a challenge to cover due to donor interest in funding the actual acquisition cost.

**Key Decision Makers** N/A

**Working With Business Community**

ACT has maintained strong relationships with the local business community, which has historically supported our fundraising events, trail access and restoration, as well as environmental education programming. We also receive support from the faculty and staff at the University of Florida both individually and through its employee giving program. Both the Florida Paddling Trails Association and REI Co-op have supported ACT's efforts along the Santa Fe River, including assisting with cleanup and restoration efforts and installing kayak takeouts on two of ACT's public preserves. ACT is always looking for additional opportunities to engage with the business community, which is why we work with local businesses to host regular community service events. These efforts have resulted in additional corporate support for ACT's trail accessibility program and have helped ACT plant over 1 million longleaf pine trees over the last eleven years

**Elevate Voices** ACT works to elevate and engage with communities of color and local communities through its general outreach, events, and accessibility and educational programming across all of its conserved lands. In addition to hosting free public events across ACT's 17 public preserves each month, including a weekly Walk & Talk where participants explore one of ACT's preserves with a local volunteer guide, ACT has also expanded opportunities for individuals with disabilities and their families to access nature. ACT offers two tracked-chair wheelchairs known as EcoRovers for reservation at no cost to individuals

**Measurable On-Ground Outcomes**

Measurable outcomes for this project include the number of acres, miles of river, and number of natural features permanently protected as well as the number of individuals with changed behavior, number of acres with a reduction in invasive species, and number of acres with an increase in native species. For this project, ACT is focusing on the long-term conservation of five properties which cumulatively represent 470 acres, over 1-mile of riverbank, two fourth-magnitude springs, and a 150-foot spring run. Additionally, more than 10 individual landowners will have changed behaviors by placing their

and their caregivers. This program allows individuals with mobility limitations, who might not otherwise be able to access our unpaved trails, to experience the joy of nature with their families and friends - in some cases for the first time ever.

ACT also hosts several educational and internship programs that engage with local students, which provide on-the-ground opportunities to learn about conservation and network with local professionals. ACT's Women in the Woods Initiative focuses on providing opportunities for women to pursue a career path in conservation through its existing internship programs, which serve both men and women. Additionally, ACT's Creekside Environmental Ed for Kids (CrEEK) program serves approximately 2,500 K-12 grade students annually from Title I schools and summer camps in Alachua and Putnam counties, providing a no-cost field trip to Little Orange Creek Nature Park where students engage in interactive activities on topics related to environmental science and conservation. In 2025, 80% of the students served through the CrEEK program represented communities of color. For schools unable to visit the park, ACT brings the outdoors to them with school visits and activities designed to meet curriculum needs, utilize outdoor space on campus, and engage students who may not otherwise experience the outdoors due to socioeconomic barriers.

land into conservation as several of the properties are owned by multiple landowners or heirs. Lastly, habitat management and restoration of these properties is expected to result in the reduction of invasive plant species present on approximately 19 acres and the conversion of approximately 120 acres of non-native bahia grass to longleaf pine forest and dry prairie/savanna.



**TCA Funding Plan**

TCA's support to fund due diligence and a portion of the closing costs associated with the properties being protected will enable us to complete the conservation process and complement our other fundraising efforts to acquire these properties. Oftentimes, it is challenging to cover due diligence costs for acquisition projects where donors often prefer that their funds be used towards the acquisition itself and not the steps leading up to the purchase, which are both necessary and required for accredited land trusts like ACT. ACT has sufficient funds on hand to cover due diligence costs temporarily, but will ultimately need to secure grant and donor funds that reimburse these expenses. With TCA's support, ACT will be able to cover all of the estimated due diligence costs and partial closing costs on all five proposed properties, allowing us to focus our efforts on fundraising for the final purchase price of each property.

**Confidential Items**

N/A; ACT is not providing identifying property information for confidentiality reasons.

**Other Relevant Application Details**

Thank you for this opportunity to apply.