

Green Horizon Land Trust Acquires Additional Land On The Ridge

by Tom Palmer

A key piece of green space along the Lake Wales Ridge near Crooked Lake in eastern Polk County has been saved from being turned into rooftops.

The 20 acres that are part of an area known as *Straw Hat Valley* have been acquired by Green Horizon Land Trust.



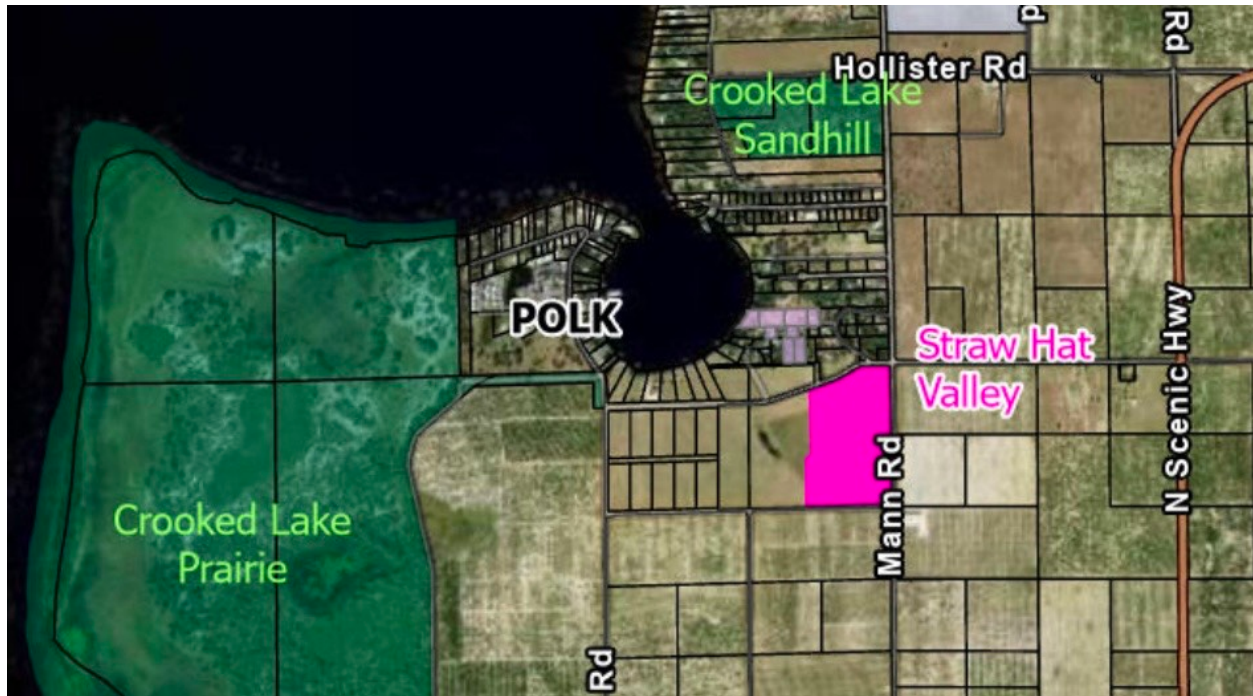
The acquisition occurred in cooperation with adjacent property owners George Skene and Barbara Barry, who purchased the property from a Lake Wales developer in an effort to preserve as much of the area as possible.

“We are grateful to George and Barbara for their efforts to protect this piece of Straw Hat Valley from development,” said Kristen Nowak, president of Green Horizon’s board of directors. “This 20-acre donation is a piece of the puzzle in protecting a conservation corridor linking Tiger Creek Preserve and Crooked Lake West locally, and contributing to the broader vision of an interconnected Florida Wildlife Corridor.”

Skene and Barry said they are hoping others may come forward to purchase lots totaling an additional 16 acres that are still on the market that includes the bottom of an ancient sinkhole from which the area’s name derives.

The area has been under increasing development pressure as Frostproof has expanded its city limits northward toward Babson Park, an unincorporated community that was first settled in the 1890s.

Green Horizon Land Trust, which was founded in 1991 to preserve and protect parcels along the Lake Wales Ridge and other natural areas in central Florida, is one of Florida’s oldest local land trusts.



The property at the intersection of Cody Villa Road and Wes Mann Road in Frostproof lies near two conservation areas—525-acre Crooked Lake Prairie, and 25-acre Crooked Lake Sandhill—that are owned and managed by the Polk County Environmental Lands Program. A third parcel near Crooked Lake Sandhill was recently purchased by the Windy Hill Committee in cooperation with Green Horizon. The Polk County Environmental Lands Program is considering additional purchases in the area.

The valley-like depression received its name from the late Peg Cody Thompson, who said the property looked like her upturned straw hat when it was blown from her head on windy days, according to area resident Sally Morrison, who is a member of the Windy Hill Committee.

Skene, who grew up near Straw Hat Valley and whose family settled the area, said he recalls his early experiences walking through what was then a Longleaf Pine forest before it was converted to citrus.

Green Horizon plans to restore the property to its original Longleaf Pine habitat.

Barry said they decided to acquire the property because of its potential to be something better than more rooftops.

“In our mind this was a terrible place for people to build,” she said.

In addition to preserving green space, Skene and Barry said it would preserve part of the dark sky character of the area.

The Lake Wales Ridge is a series of prehistoric islands that stretches for more than 100 miles from Highlands County to Lake County and is home to one of the largest concentrations of rare and endangered species in the United States.

For more information on Green Horizon Land Trust’s work, go to www.greenhorizon.org.

This article “*Land trust acquires, plans to restore 20-acre plot near Crooked Lake*,” by Tom Palmer was published in the Lakeland Ledger August , Sept 1, 2026.