Comment
editorials, letters, viewpoints
Down by the bay

[Image of a wetland area with trees and water]

MORES: Michael Jackson leading trend away from out-of-wedlock births. 3G
Here's a welcome place of peace for Floridians

Just a half-hour's drive can transport you to the magic places where wild things thrive, the Florida of marsh and swamp and watery vistas that stretch to slate-gray nothingness.

Dickerson Bay is a treasure trove of marine life, fringed with spartina and needlerush marsh, filled with nurse sharks, young Kemp’s ridley sea turtles, fiddler crabs and fish. Almost 1,000 acres of surrounding lands could come into public hands if a state land-buying committee chooses wisely on Thursday.

You can stand on the shore and hear nothing but bird calls in the distance and the wind gentling through the underbrush. You can see islands, unspoiled, thick with trees so close you can, without binoculars, identify the hovering osprey.

What a glorious buy this land would be.

Last year, when the tract first came up for consideration by the CARL committee, it came up 21 on the list — high but not high enough. CARL stands for Conservation and Recreation Lands, and the committee ranks, in order, which lands the state will purchase. This tract, which abuts the refuge at St. Marks, must move several notches higher if appraisals are to begin.

Soft-spoken Tallahassee environmental attorney Jay Landers represents the McMillans, whose holdings make up a chunk of the three big parcels that would be part of the state purchase. Landers is a fervent lover of Florida’s water, air and land. He was former chief of environmental protection and natural resources under governors Askew and Graham.

Dickerson Bay

The Conservation and Recreation Lands Committee could decide on Dec. 5 to put these Dickerson Bay plots of pristine wetland into public hands.

Within the last few days, Pinoy Island was donated to the St. Mark’s refuge. It’s still part of the proposed Dickerson Bay purchase — except that Florida taxpayers won’t have to pay for it.

SPEAK OUT
To make your wishes known on the potential Dickerson Bay land purchase, please contact members of the land acquisition advisory council:

- George Percy, director
  Division of Historical Resources
  Department of State
  N.A. Gray Building, Room 305
  500 South Bronough Street
  Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250
  486-1480
  Fax: 486-3353

- Jim Moulton, secretary
  Department of Community Affairs
  The Rhyme Building, Room 106
  2740 Centerview Drive
  Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100
  486-8466
  Fax: 921-0781

- Virginia B. Wetherell, secretary
  Department of Environmental Protection
  Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building, Room
  1041A
  3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, M.S. 10
  Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000
  486-1554
  Fax: 486-7093

- Mr. Kirby Green, assistant secretary
  Department of Environmental Protection
  Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building, Room
  1009A
  3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, M.S. 15
  Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000
  486-7131
  Fax: 486-7093

- Mr. Earl Peterson, director; Mr. Terry Rhodes, deputy commissioner, designee
  Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
  The Capitol, PL 10
  Tallahassee, FL 32399-0810
  486-3022
  Fax: 486-7858

- Dr. Allan L. Egbert, executive director
  Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission
  Farris Bryant Building, Room 101
  620 South Meridian
  Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600
  486-2975
  Fax: 486-6988
Public purchase would allow people to share in the beauty

If taxpayers buy this land around Dickerson Bay, it will be in the name of preserving development and de- ligation. Even so, mankind's foot- steps would still be welcome. Camp- here's what Landers envisions: A deer park dotted with camps- sites, laced with walking trails, sliced through the live oak ham- mocks. "That wouldn't create any edge of threat to the Bay," he says.

The glorious Bay. That healthy ecosystem is the love of many people's lives, not least Jack Rud- loe. From his Gulf Specimen Ma- rine Laboratory he preaches over an array of renewable resources: jellies, sea squirts, fish and sea- urchin-like animals — bugs — sought to harbor a secret to a cancer-cure. He supplies the lab of scientists all over the country who seek in marine life the cures to not only cancer but also other diseases, such as Alzheimer's.

Rudloe — passionate writer, Faulkner eccentric and self-taught naturalist — harvests from rich waters. He also shares intellectual trails with the literary market- place. His most recent book is "Search for the Great Turtle Mother" published by Pineapple Press, which opens with his turtle-hunting adventures in the Bay, a project involving Kemp's ridleys. The late scientist Archie Carr called this creature "the most mysterious ani- mal in North America.

Rudloe never tires of the Bay panorama.

"With this purchase you are not just buying a chunk of dirt," he says. "You are buying the future. You are buying not just biodiversity but also enormous medical compounds.

A dreamscape filled with lush life

A mile or two down the shoreline the McMillian land begins. The damp sand is white as Panhandle beaches. Scores of juvenile crabs dash for cover. Racous birds cluster on a distant spit. The low race of wind in the marsh grass makes background music. Driftwood sits vertically like monuments, statues to the cosmos.

Stand here and savor the mo- ment, make footprints in the sand you know that time will soon erase. You cannot help but think our de- scendants will believe us far-sighted and wise if we capture this land for all time.

Some facts about the tract: It holds both wetlands and uplands. Its coastal waters are a favorite spot of the endangered sea turtle. Suwannee limestone underlies the tidal marsh community. Oyster reefs dot the Bay bottom.

Seven species of butterfly also make of this corridor a migratory path. Permanent residents include bald eagle, wood stork, white ibis and great blue herons. Jay LaVine, a partner in Landers' law firm and a birder watcher since childhood, brought along scope and tripod for this daylong trip. He spotted an ex- ceedingly rare marbled godwit, a long-billed creature hanging out with some other birds near secluded Ul- more Cove. "It's always a good day when you see a godwit," he said from the birder watcher's perspective.

It's a good day, too, when a trea- sure like Dickerson Bay is preserved for all time.