

WINDY HILL PURCHASE IS FIRST STEP TO PRESERVE CROOKED LAKE VIEWSHED



As of August 20, 2026, Green Horizon Land Trust has purchased a key parcel overlooking Crooked Lake. Photo and article by Tom Palmer.

The purchase involves a 19-acre parcel north of Hollister Road between Harris Road and Rogers Road in cooperation with Green Horizon's Windy Hill Committee, a group of local preservation advocates who first organized with Green Horizon in 2014.

"Green Horizon is thrilled to see the years of work by the Windy Hill Committee come to fruition with this acquisition," said Kristen Nowak, Green Horizon's board president. "This property is an important piece of the puzzle in connecting the Tiger Creek and Crooked Lake conservation areas and strengthening the broader Florida Wildlife Corridor."

"We're proud to help protect this special place for both people and wildlife for generations to come," she said.

Green Horizon is contracting with local forester Sam Van Hook to re-establish Longleaf Pines on the site to provide improved wildlife habitat and allow enjoyment of the site for hiking, nature study and the ability to enjoy the viewshed from the high lands above Crooked Lake.

Historically the area contained vast Longleaf Pine woodlands, but beginning in the early 20th Century, landowners began clearing the pine forests to plant citrus. The pine trees were sent to a sawmill in Babson Park, according to "Crooked Lake – Babson Park Rediscovered" by the late Louise Quinn.

The high rolling terrain along Scenic Highway in Babson Park has been known as Windy Hill for decades, though no one seems to know how the name originated, said Steve Morrison, one of the committee's organizers.

Windy Hill encompasses an estimated 5,000 acres that include some of the highest spots along the Lake Wales Ridge in Babson Park and stretching east to Tiger Creek, he said.

The property Green Horizon purchased contains one of the highest points along this portion of the Ridge, according to a topographic map of the area.

This initial purchase was significant, Morrison said.

“This purchase is a keystone piece of realizing our dream to save the unique panoramic view of Crooked Lake,” Morrison said, explaining it was made possible by generous local people who cherish this spot and stepped up and contributed the money to buy it, which included Green Horizon and Defenders of Crooked Lake.

“Now that the property is in Green Horizon’s ownership, the wonderful ambiance of this spot will be preserved for the public to enjoy for generations to come,” Morrison said.

Preservation of the land east of Crooked Lake, the only water body in Polk County classified as an Outstanding Florida Water, has been occurring gradually.

Until recently, the only conservation lands in the area were the 525-acre Crooked Lake Prairie and the 25-acre Crooked Lake Sandhill, which are owned and managed by the Polk County Environmental Lands Program, and a three-acre preserve owned by Ridge Audubon Society.

Recently Green Horizon accepted the donation of a 20-acre site in Straw Hat Valley on Cody Villa Road. Green Horizon also owns and manages the six-acre Scrub Plum Trail and outdoor classroom in Babson Park.



