



Posted March 1, 2024 – Applications will begin being reviewed on March 11, 2024

Job Title: Rangeland Specialist (Okeechobee County, FL)

Purpose of the Position: Provide professional services in range management and soil and water conservation activities while assisting in the planning of conservation practices on ranches and farms.

Job Summary:

This is a grant-funded position managed by Alachua Conservation Trust to engage with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and private landowners to create rangeland management plans for soil, water, and aquatic species conservation. Over the course of three years the goal of this grant is to create at least 90 management plans covering over 125,000 acres of protected lands. There are 2 years left on this grant with an expected 60 grazing plans to be completed. Ideal start date is May 1, 2024.

Background:

The NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (NRCS ACEP) is protecting hundreds of ranch and grazing lands in Central and South Florida with perpetual federally held wetland reserve and grassland conservation easements. Under program rules, these protected properties require a rangeland management plan that details the implementation of land protection, restoration and management referenced in the conservation easement. The rangeland management plan will include recommended farmer and rancher practices to protect and restore water resources and native wildlife habitat.

This position will work directly under the Florida Natural Resources Conservation Service field and central office. The rangeland specialist position will be based in the USDA NRCS Okeechobee office and will include travel to protected lands in the adjacent counties. Developing these management plans will require outreach, site visit coordination and building relationships with landowners. This work will facilitate deeper landowner understanding of land management practices that protect natural resources and ensure that management plans are properly implemented over time.

Responsibilities and Scope:

- Develop resource conservation management plans with ranch operators and other land and resource decision-makers with an interdisciplinary approach to solutions to protect aquatic species and other species of concern.
- Work with ranchers and landowners to make range site and condition inventories, analyze ranch resources, recommend varieties of forage, and assist with calculating livestock feed and forage balance.
- Work with ranchers and landowners to make condition inventories for native plants, wildlife, aquatic species, soils and natural community needs.

- Work with cooperators to implement plans, determine success and failures of established practices and give assistance in establishment of supplemental practices.
- Monitor and document trends and changes to natural community and working land vegetation, soil, wildlife and water in response to applied management practices.
- Management plans will create guidance to improve management (including both planning and implementation) of ranching practices that address economic and technological considerations in improving water quality in agricultural discharges. These practices include nutrient management, water resource protection, grazing and prescribed fire.
- Management plans will incorporate Best Management Practices (BMPs) that align with the goals stated in state and federal programs to protect water quality and species habitat in this region and downstream.
- Familiarity with native grassland, pasture, and wildlife habitat in South Florida.
- Working knowledge of major soils and local conservation resource needs.
- Florida lands are highly connected to Florida waterways, estuaries, wetlands and groundwater. A successful applicant will familiarize themselves and have a basic understanding of the following programs that guide water resource protection prior to interviewing for this position:
 - The NRCS Agricultural Land Easement Program (ACEP), especially Wetland Reserve Easements and Grassland Easements; and Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP)
 - Florida Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (FDACS) relevant Best Management Practices (BMPs) for rangelands
 - Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) in the project area: St. Lucie and Loxahatchee, Lake Okeechobee, and Caloosahatchee
 - Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program (NEEP)
- Coordinate outreach and travel to visit private lands
- Respond to land conservation/stewardship inquiries from private landowners, community groups, public agencies and the general public.
- Contribute project articles and updates to newsletters, electronic bulletins, website content and annual reports and other communications materials related to this project.
- Advance and maintain skills, education, and knowledge of best practices that are relevant to the job description.
- Work with ACT to document and track all grant expenses, receipts, expenditures and deliverables
- Report on grant activities and deliverables quarterly for grant management.
- Candidates will not be required to have NRCS certification for approving EQIP practices at time of application but may receive training and be certified after being hired.

Desired Qualifications:

Please note that the job qualifications are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. Grow with us – don't hesitate to apply!

- Bachelor's degree (advanced degree preferred) in relevant field (natural resource planning/management, biological sciences, agricultural sciences, rangeland sciences, geography, etc.) with at least 20 hours in animal sciences and/or botany.

- Prior experience with writing management plans.
- Experience communicating effectively with a variety of stakeholders, including local landowners and agency partners.
- A self-starter with experience managing multiple priorities, with assignments sometimes coming from a number of sources.
- Must have excellent computer skills – Word, Excel, including experience and demonstrated proficiency with GPS and GIS.
- Familiarity with Florida plants, landscapes, and communities is preferred, particularly an ability to work with rural and agricultural landowners.
- Familiarity with Florida cattle production practices and BMPS is preferred.
- Must have enthusiasm and experience working with diverse groups of people in an educational and outreach capacity.
- Must be willing to travel occasionally and meet with landowners – travel expenses will be reimbursed.
- Must be willing and physically able to work in the field and perform site visits.
- Must be able to work in a fast-paced environment to meet established goals and deadlines.
- Must be committed to the organization’s conservation mission and be able to maintain strong, positive, collegial working relationships with staff and Board, as well as outside partners, professional advisors, consultants and private landowners.
- Must be willing to contribute to maintaining a collegial, efficient and ethical working environment with staff, Board, agency partners, and others.
- Must have a valid driver’s license and good driving record.

Working Conditions: This job operates in a professional office environment, and routinely uses standard office equipment such as computers, phones, photocopiers, and audiovisual systems. This job also includes site visits to outdoor locations.

Benefits of the Position:

- This is a full-time position. Grant funding is secure for at least 2 full years.
- Starting salary \$64,000 - \$68,640 based on experience
- 10 days paid vacation, plus Federal holidays and three personal days
- 10 days paid sick leave
- Health insurance stipend and personal stipend for equipment or supplies
- Enrollment in ACT’s SEP-IRA retirement plan after 180 days of employment
- Training and professional development opportunities

Equity and Inclusion

ACT is an equal opportunity employer that strives to increase equity, representation and inclusion in all elements of our work to support the intersection of land conservation and people in a rapidly changing North Central Florida. ACT hires, trains, compensates, and promotes regardless of race, marital status, religion, age, mental or physical disability, national origin, citizenship, ancestry, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity (including gender nonconformity and status as a transgender individual), past, current, or prospective service in the uniformed services, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal, state, or local law.

No person shall, on the grounds of the above-mentioned categories, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of ACT. ACT recognizes that diversity on the staff and board strengthens the organization.

Candidates are invited to learn more about ACT's commitment to keeping Florida wild for all at: <https://www.alachuaconservationtrust.org/flwild-for-all>

How to Apply:

Candidates should submit a cover letter, resume, and three references in a single PDF document labeled with your name and the job title, by email to:

act.tkay@gmail.com

Failure to follow these instructions may result in disqualification.

No phone calls will be taken regarding this job announcement. However, if you have a disability and require an accommodation or assistance with our application process, please tell us how we can help by calling us at 352-373-1078. Candidates will be notified regarding the status of their applications. For further information about the organization, please visit ACT's website:

www.alachuaconservationtrust.org

Applications will be reviewed beginning on **March 11th** and this position will remain open until filled.

If selected for this position, a background check will be conducted.

About Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT):

Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) is an accredited nonprofit land trust working to protect the natural, historic, scenic and recreational resources in and around North Central Florida. As part of its mission, ACT works to engage with private landowners to protect working lands through conservation practices. In 2022, ACT received grant funding through the National Fish and Wildlife Federation to facilitate the hiring of a Rangeland Specialist based in the office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture NRCS in Okeechobee County, Florida.

About Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):

NRCS provides America's farmers and ranchers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily put conservation on the ground, not only helping the environment but agricultural operations too. Funding and program guidance to aid producers and ranchers is provided through the U.S. Farm Bill. The NRCS administers the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to help landowners, land trusts, and other entities protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and working farms and ranches through conservation easements. NRCS also provides financial and technical assistance to apply conservation practices through landowner assistance programs through programs called Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).