

# LAND-BANK CONCEPT A WINNER THE SPLIT OAK PRESERVATION EFFORT, A JOINT VENTURE OF ORANGE AND OSCEOLA COUNTIES AND THE STATE, WILL REAP BENEFITS FOR ALL INVOLVED.

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## Document Text

Split Oak may be a misnomer for the 1,700-acre land deal that is about to be consummated by Orange and Osceola counties with help from the state.

Getting three governments and a landowner to cooperate on a deal that has been two years in the making has been anything but a "split" effort. In fact, experts say the project is unique in its intergovernmental coordination.

Next week, both the Orange and Osceola county commissions are expected to vote on acquiring the property, which straddles the county line. The Florida Communities Trust, a state agency that helps local governments with conservation and recreation, is scheduled to finalize March 4 its \$5 million contribution to Split Oak. The upcoming votes are key to establishing a land-saving concept that has the potential to serve as a model in the state.

Most of the property is high and dry land with a healthy sprinkling of thriving wetlands. The area is rich with scrub jays, fox squirrels, gopher tortoises and sandhill cranes. Longtime landowner Maury L. Carter never allowed hunting there, so it is thick with turkey and deer.

The real beauty of Split Oak, in addition to its scenic landscapes and views of Lake Hart, is that different groups would help pay for it. The county and state governments would pay the upfront costs. Then developers would repay those governments by "buying into" the preservation project as a way to offset environmental damages in developing areas.

The secret to success of such "land banks" is to ensure that they are fair to everyone. That was not the case last year, when Orange County agreed to pay \$900,000 for damaging already-deteriorated wetlands at the convention-center project. It remains to be seen where that excessive amount would be spent, but it could go into Split Oak. Despite that one overly generous agreement, though, the land bank concept is still a good one.

The state has been establishing numerous such "land banks" throughout Florida for the past year or two, but never have two counties joined the state to initiate one.

For Orange County, Split Oak marks one of its first large-scale preservation efforts. It couples nicely with its adjoining neighbor, the 1,550-acre Moss Park, to form a wildlife corridor on the county's southern end.

For Osceola County, the undertaking is the county's first attempt to buy land that would be used mostly for hiking and protection of wildlife.

The state Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission would take care of the property, assuring that it would remain a healthy place for many species of wildlife.

Considering all of the various players that have united to help it become a reality, Split Oak should be known for coordination rather than a split.

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## **Abstract** (Document Summary)

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