

BRIEFING



BRINGING FL-SOLARIS TO LIFE:

*The Development
of the Florida
State-Owned
Lands & Records
Information System*

April 2013

The state of Florida owns nearly 115,000 parcels of land and roughly 20,000 facilities worth billions of dollars, which are owned and/or managed by 65 different state entities.¹ Until very recently, the decentralized records of these assets limited the state's ability to effectively coordinate administrative and management responsibilities.

Being able to identify assets and liabilities and effectively audit those records is a basic management function that improves the efficient use of assets, and can help lead to the appropriate disposition of underutilized spaces that create unnecessary costs. A single, organized, interconnected database where this information can be stored and accessed can improve efficiency through enterprise-wide and sector-specific management and provide significant benefits to taxpayers.

The consolidation of this information is a long-standing Florida TaxWatch Government Cost Savings Task Force recommendation. It will allow the state to properly manage owned, rented, and leased space; reorganize and consolidate underutilized space and resources; identify those properties that should be candidates for disposition; and improve the possibility of true sector management for Florida's governments.

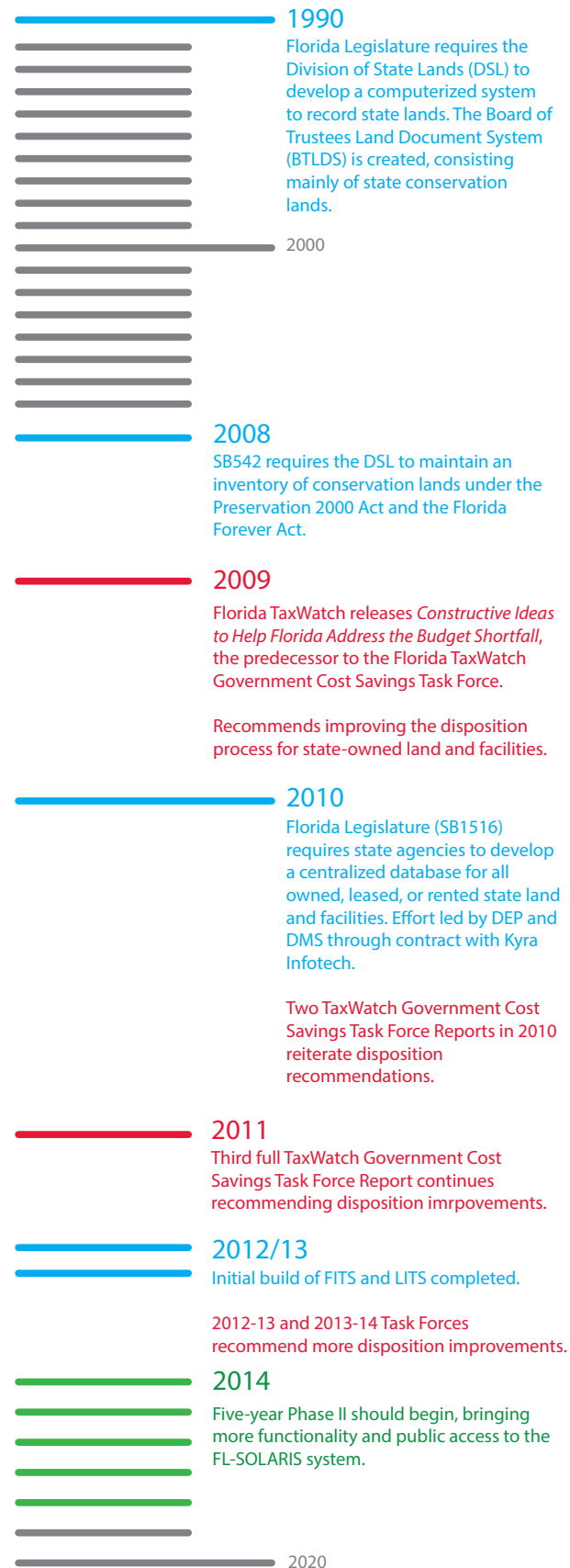
THE DEVELOPMENT OF FL-SOLARIS

In 2010, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was directed by statute to partner with the Florida Department of Management Services (DMS), and work with nearly 65 government entities to compile the necessary information for all facilities and land owned by the state, and then utilize this database to present an annual Disposition Report of underutilized land and facilities to the Governor and Legislative leadership.²

Released as a Request for Proposal (RFP) by the DEP, the technical development of this project was awarded to Kyra Infotech, a Florida-based company whose bid was selected due to overall cost, technical merit, and oral presentation; and the company was able to deliver the end product on time, and within budget.

The database has two components, the Facilities Inventory Tracking System (FITS) and the Land Inventory Tracking System (LITS). Originally, the project that became FL-SOLARIS was started for the development of the LITS database, but the passage of SB1516 in 2010 made FITS the first priority. The FITS, a comprehensive inventory of all state facilities (including address and GIS coordinates, square footage, facility deficiencies, operating costs, and leasing information for each property³) went live in April 2012, and data inputs were finished in June of that year.

Florida Land and Facility Consolidation Timeline



Providing an inventory primarily of non-conservation land, the LITS component of the FL-SOLARIS database was then completed in January of 2013.

THE DISPOSITION OF STATE LANDS

The fast tracking of FITS was done in response to 2010 legislation requiring DMS and DEP to produce an Annual Disposition Report assessing and identifying state-owned properties that are underutilized or unneeded and could be disposed.

Multiple Florida TaxWatch Government Cost Savings Task Force Reports have called for improvements to the disposition process to generate significant government savings. The most recent report (January 2013) produced a conservative estimate that if half of the active category properties sold for half of their appraised value, approximately \$39 million in annual savings could be produced.

The *Disposition of State Lands and Facilities 2012 Annual Report* estimated that there were 632 surplus state owned properties, on 5,700 acres, with an approximate value of \$169 million. Of the \$169 million in surplus state assets, approximately \$155 million is in the “active category,” meaning the property is being noticed, valued, and beginning the disposition process.

This process follows very specific rules established in statute defining how the agencies evaluate both conservation and non-conservation lands and determine if they are candidates for disposition.

DEP/DMS BEGIN OFFICIAL PROJECT

Once DEP and DMS had collected the relevant records, and assembled the Executive Management Team, the vendor's role was to develop a user-friendly, accessible system that would allow all government entities to manage their respective real estate records, which they are statutorily required to update at least annually.

The work and collaboration of DEP and DMS on this project exemplifies the manner in which inter-agency collaboration should take place. Specifically, it shows that adding a good agency partner to an existing project can be done without slowing down or jeopardizing the project, and should be a model for future collaborative efforts between multiple agencies and outside vendors.

NEXT STEPS

With the basic database set up, the state should look to move into what DEP and DMS have described as Phase II.

Further development of FL-SOLARIS would provide the state with opportunities to capitalize on the significant benefits this system has to offer. According to the DEP and DMS, Phase II involves three main steps over five years.⁴

Step 1 would merge the conservation lands within the BTLDS database into the FL-SOLARIS database. Merging these systems would eliminate redundant components and reduce operating costs.

Step 2 would make FL-SOLARIS accessible to the public online, which offers several opportunities. Increasing public awareness of land and facility dispositions and lease renewals increases competitive bids to fill those renewals, thereby increasing revenues by bringing individuals to the table that would not have otherwise known about the opportunity. Also, the scope of this system has great potential for creative retail uses; for instance, map-based interfaces allow agencies to easily and quickly track real estate assets, and creates the potential for desktop and mobile applications that help tourists and citizens find local parks, conservation lands, and camping grounds.

Step 3 would help enable true sector management by including the management plans for state lands in the database, thereby allowing for consistent management through one lead agency. Today's land management is often disjointed and neighboring properties' management plans can be contradictory, leading to increased expenditures and inefficient management activities.

CONCLUSION

Progress has been made, although there is more to be done. The large, yet basic database has been established, but the important tasks of maintaining its relevance and making improvements remain.

Clearly, a centralized database for state-owned land and facilities is necessary for the administrative and management responsibilities of any government entity, and is imperative to maximize the efficient use of state assets.

The Legislature should streamline the disposition process for non-conservation lands, as the elimination of surplus land and assets generates significant revenue and cost-savings by providing lump-sum payments and eliminating long-term operational expenses.⁵

Phase II of this project offers significant value to the taxpayers of Florida, and the Legislature should take the necessary steps to ensure that the DEP and DMS have the resources and authority to proceed in that direction.

Endnotes

1. Entity count includes state agencies, universities, the Florida College System, and water management districts. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government. February 12, 2013. FDEP and FDMS. FL-SOLARIS. slide 11 (Retrieved from: http://www.flsenate.gov/PublishedContent/Committees/2012-2014/AGG/MeetingRecords/MeetingPacket_2031.pdf)
2. Disposition of State Lands and Facilities 2012 Annual Report. October 1, 2012. Florida Department of Management Services & Department of Environmental Protection. (Retrieved from: [http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/files/sb1516\(3\)_annualreport.pdf](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/files/sb1516(3)_annualreport.pdf))
3. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government. February 12, 2013. FDEP and FDMS. FL-SOLARIS. slide 12 (Retrieved from: http://www.flsenate.gov/PublishedContent/Committees/2012-2014/AGG/MeetingRecords/MeetingPacket_2031.pdf)
4. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government. February 12, 2013. FDEP and FDMS. FL-SOLARIS. slide 9 (Retrieved from: http://www.flsenate.gov/PublishedContent/Committees/2012-2014/AGG/MeetingRecords/MeetingPacket_2031.pdf)
5. Two related bills are making their way through the 2013 Legislature; SB 1074 and HB 1145, reflect the recommendation of the Government Cost Saving Task Force.

ABOUT FLORIDA TAXWATCH

As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and analysis of issues related to state and local government taxation, expenditures, policies, and programs. Florida TaxWatch works to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government. Its research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of fiscal and economic policies and practices on citizens and businesses.

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