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## South Florida Water Management District

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### RECREATIONAL PUBLIC FORUM AGENDA

October 28, 2024

5:00 PM

District Headquarters, B-1 Auditorium

3301 Gun Club Road

West Palm Beach, FL 33406

#### FINAL

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks - Drew Bartlett, Executive Director, SFWMD, and Newton Cook, Facilitator
2. Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area - Michael Weston, Forestry Resource Administrator, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
3. Grassy Island Bike Club - Scott Dawson, Grassy Island Trail Coordinator
4. Recreational Project Updates - Dan Cotter, Section Leader, SFWMD
5. Recreational Discussion, Updates and Future Meeting Topics
6. Adjourn

Presentations (Staff contact, Yvette Bonilla)

#### **Agenda Item Background:**

[02 Okaloacoochee SWMA](#)

[03 Grassy Island Bike Club](#)

[04 Recreational Public Use](#)



# Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest



Michael Weston  
Forestry Resource Administrator

# Overview

- **Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest (OSSF) is comprised of 32,349 acres located in the SW Hendry County and NE Collier County, approximately 6 miles north of Immokalee, FL and 12 miles southeast of Labelle, FL. The forest is bisected by County Road 832.**
- **Acquired as part of the *Save Our Rivers (SOR), Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL)* and Preservation 2000 acquisition funds for the primary purposes of ecological, hydrological, and wildlife habitat protection, conservation, restoration and management**
- **The Forest's diverse ecological communities include: slough marsh, mesic flatwoods, wet flatwoods, depression marsh, basin marsh, wet prairie, mesic hammock and strand swamp. OSSF shares a boundary to the east with Dinner Island WMA and Okaloacoochee Slough WMA, and to the west Spirit of the Wild WMA along with various private lands.**

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

# Multiple Use Management

Chapter 253.034 F.S.

**“Multiple Use” is defined as the harmonious and coordinated management of timber, recreation, conservation of fish and wildlife, forage, archaeological and historic sites, habitat and other biological resources, or water resources so that they are utilized in the combination that will best serve the people of the state.**



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# Partnerships in Management

- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
  - Adjacent properties and cooperation
- South Florida Water Management District
- Hendry/Glades Audubon
- Neighboring Landowners

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# Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest

## Multiple-Use Management:

- Sustainable Forest Management
- **Recreational Opportunities**
- Natural Resource Conservation
- **Protection of Cultural Resources**
- Protection of Water Resources
- **Wildland Fire Protection**
- **Habitat Restoration**



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# Management Work

- Approximately 3,000 acres of planted south FL slash pine
- Significant work to reduce understory competition



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# A Wet Forest



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# Upland Islands



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# Management in the Field

- Property never lost it's water
  - Limited canals
- Single ownership in past
  - ALICO
- Non-native invasive plants



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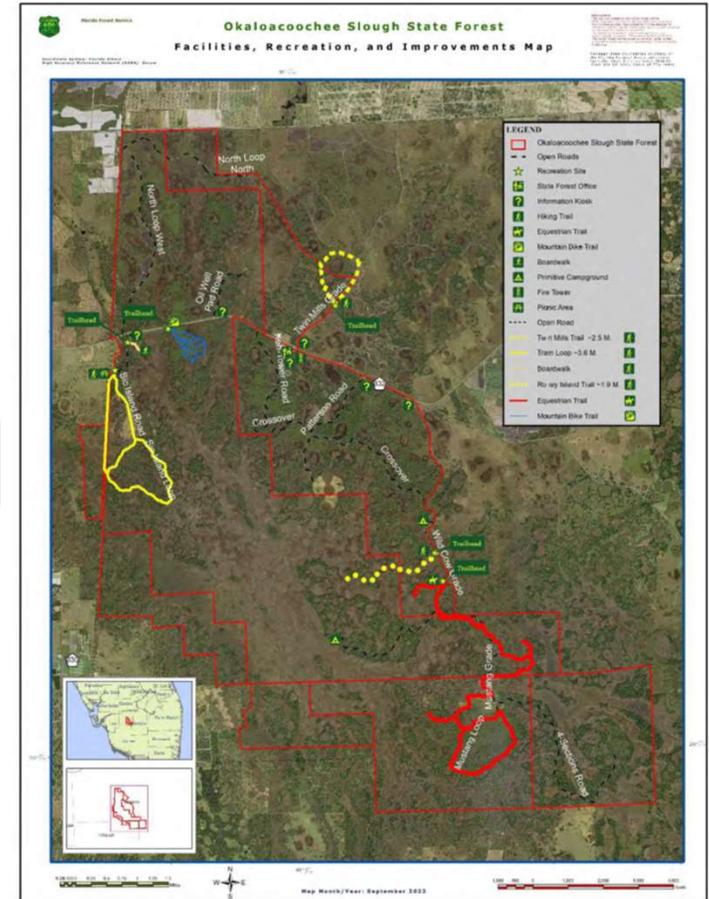


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# Current Recreation Facilities

## Current Status:

- Panther Pond Campground – 16 primitive campsites
- Overflow Campground – 6 primitive RV sites
- Hunt Camp – 5 primitive RV sites and 1 primitive tent site
- Wildcow Group Camp – 1 group camp site
- 16 miles of Equestrian trails with 4 covered paddocks
- Twin Mills Hiking Trail – 2.5 miles
- Roney Island Trail – 1.9 miles
- Tram Loop Trail – 3.6 miles
- Boardwalk Trail – 1/8 mile
- Mountain bike trail – 3.1 miles
- 2 parking sites: Tram Loop trailhead, Patterson Road



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# Planned Recreational Activities

- Working on new 10-year land management plan for approval in 2025.



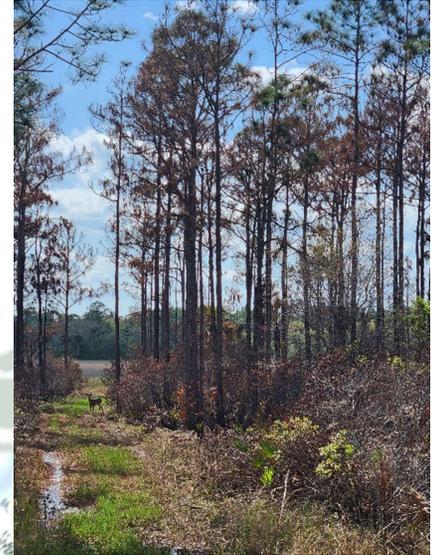
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# Recreation in the Forest

- Hunting
  - Managed in cooperation with FWC
  - 40-acre dog training area
    - Patterson Road near crossovers



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# Panther Pond Campground

- 15 Primitive Camp sites
- Porta-potties and dumpster



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# Hunt Camp

- 5 primitive RV sites
- 1 primitive tent site
- 1 porta-potty



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# Overflow Camp

- 6 primitive RV sites
  - 3 have small tent pads in back
  - Porta-potty



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# Wildcow Group Camp

- 1 group camp site
  - Up to 10 people
  - Non-potable water well
  - Quiet, out of the way



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## Bike Trails

- 3.1 mile bike trail
- Finished in 2019
- Series of loop
- Biking is really good on road system
  - Light traffic
  - Winding through forest/natural areas



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## Trails – Tram Loop

- Traverses a portion of the old railroad grade on the western part of the forest
- Small kiosk and large parking at trailhead



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# Trails – Boardwalk Trail

- 1/8 mile trail
- 800' boardwalk over slough
- Learning Adventure on approach path



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# Trails – Mustang Horse Trail

- 16 mile horse trail
  - 2 loops and a spur trail
- Trailhead
  - 4 covered paddocks
  - Non-potable well



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# Trails – Twin Mills

- Trailwalker program trail
- 2.5 miles
- Visits remnants of former saw mill site



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## Recreation – Other Activities

- **Wildlife Viewing**
- Nature Driving
  - Mustang Loop – unimproved road
- **Geocaches**
  - 3 FFS approved Geo-cache sites
  - [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)



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# Forest Education

- Occasional On-Site Events
- Off-site events more popular
- Friends of Florida State Forests
  - [Floridastateforests.org](http://Floridastateforests.org)
- Recreation Newsletter
  - 2-3 editions per year – if you give us your email



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# Questions/Comments

[Michael.Weston@fdacs.gov](mailto:Michael.Weston@fdacs.gov)

(239) 690-8021



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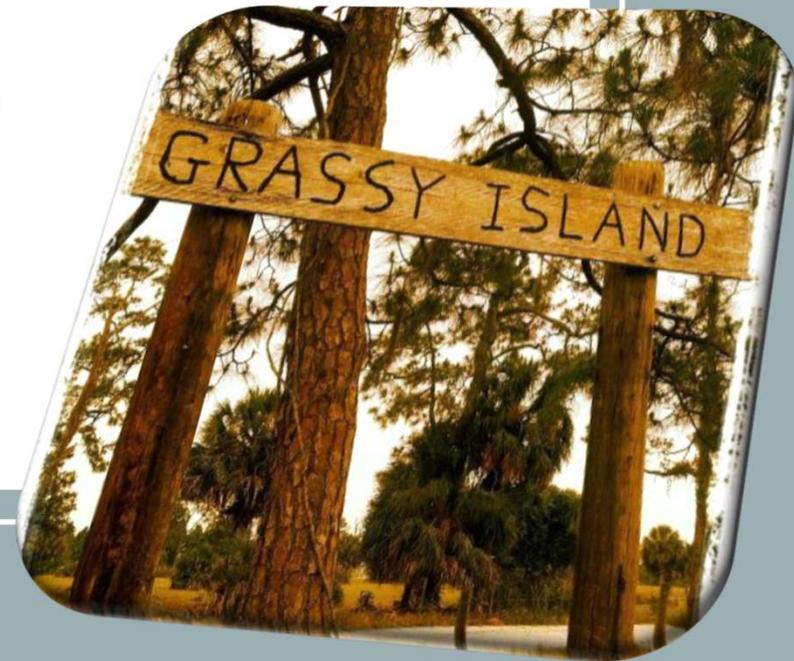
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# Grassy Island Bike Trail

South Florida Water Management  
District

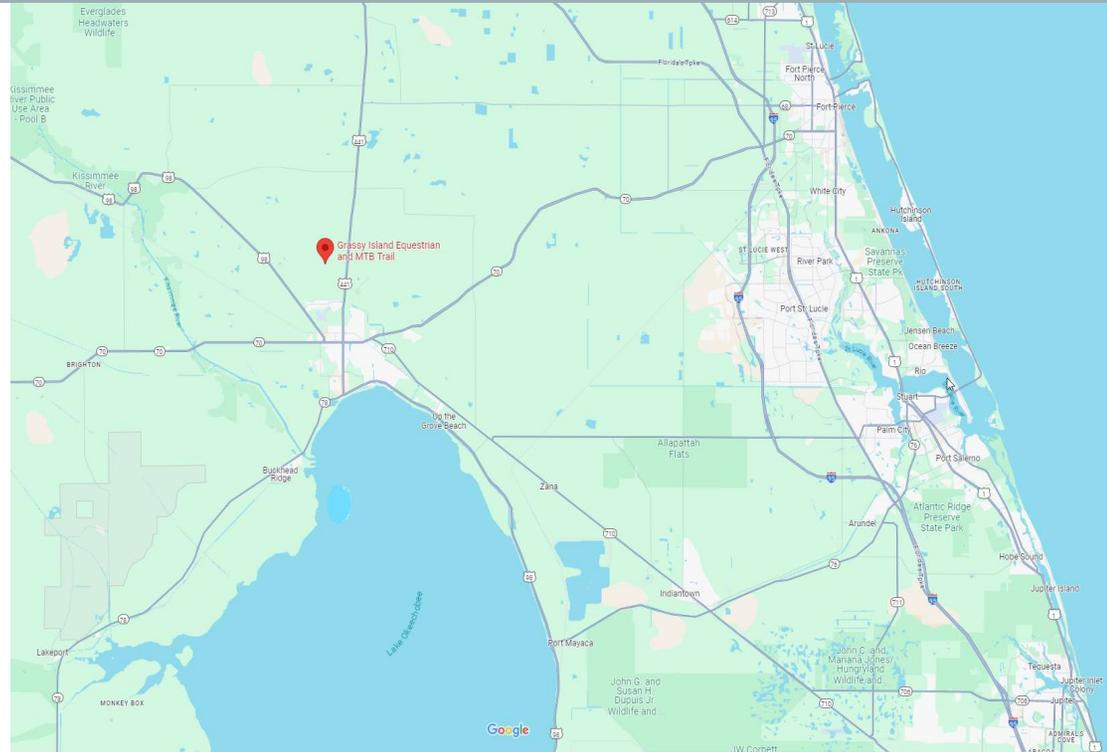
Recreational Public Forum  
October 28, 2024

Scott Dawson,  
Trail Coordinator



# GRASSY ISLAND TRAIL

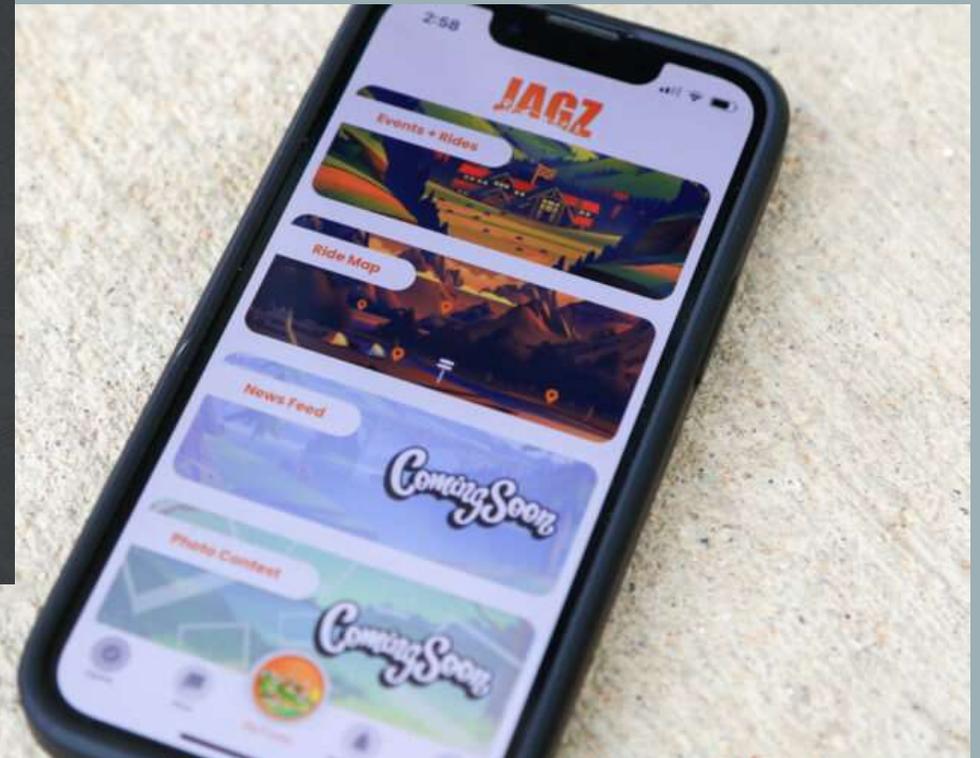
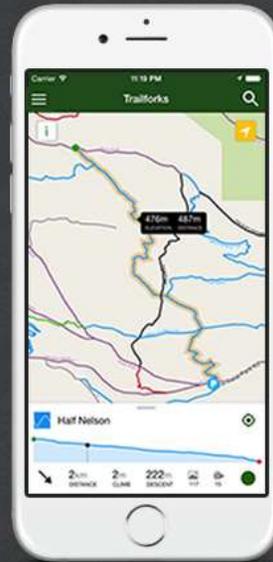
Located in Okeechobee Florida  
1901 Hillard Road  
Okeechobee, FL 34972



# TRAIL USAGE HIGHLIGHTS



**TRAILFORKS** APP



# CURRENT CHALLENGES

Grassy Island Bike Trails  
1901 Hillard Road  
Okeechobee, FL 34972



# KEY BENEFITS OF TRAIL ACCESS

1. Health and Wellness
2. Tourism and Local Economy
3. Conservation and Education
4. Community Engagement
5. Sustainability and Low Impact









## ENDORSEMENTS AND RECOGNITIONS

International Mountain Biking Association  
Horseback riders

Grassy Island Bike Trails  
1901 Hillard Road  
Okeechobee, FL 34972

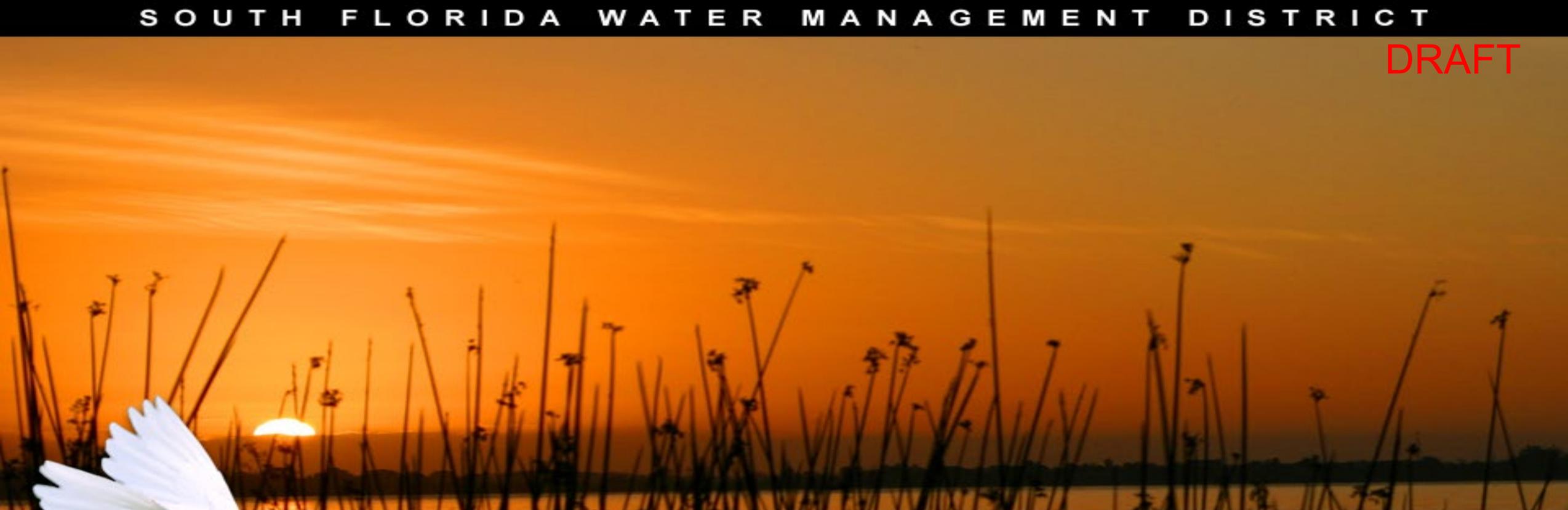
- Grassy Island Trail represents a valuable asset to the community, promoting health, tourism, and environmental stewardship.
- Continued access to the property and trails are essential for maintaining its positive impact on the local community, outdoor enthusiasts, and the broader public.
- Addressing the challenges of wet and hurricane seasons will help preserve the trail's quality, but \*\*with the short-wet season and quick drying time\*\*, users can expect minimal interruptions to trail access.

Grassy Island Bike Trails  
1901 Hillard Road  
Okeechobee, FL 34972



# Thank you Grassy Island Trail Users

Grassy Island Bike Trails  
1901 Hillard Road  
Okeechobee, FL 34972



# Recreational Project Updates

## Recreational Forum

### October 28, 2024

Dan Cotter  
SFWMD, Land Stewardship Section





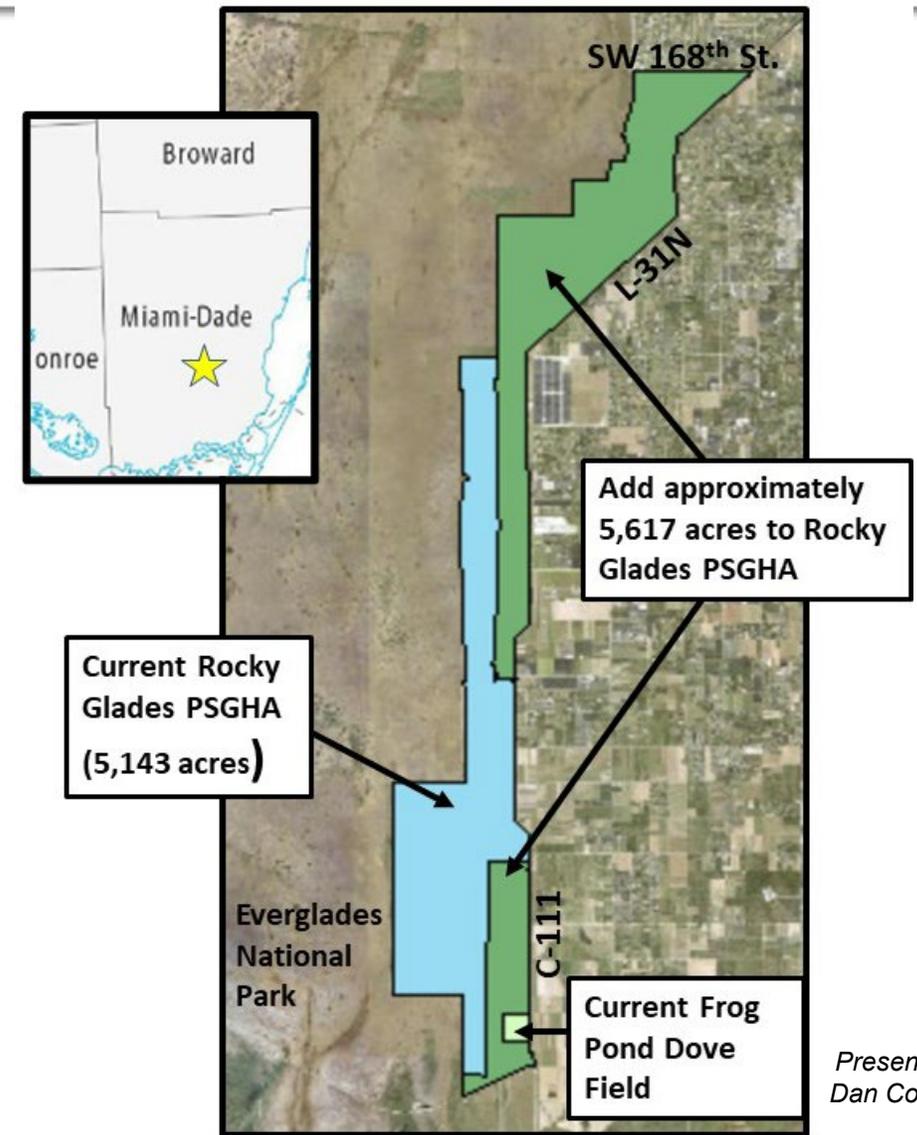
# Recap Hurricane Helene & Milton Response

- In response to Hurricane Helene and Milton District lands were temporarily closed.
  - Helene: Emergency Order
    - Temporary closure of District lands September 25, 2024, 8:00pm
    - Reopening District lands September 27, 2024, 6:00am
  - Milton: Emergency Order
    - Temporary closure of District lands October 8, 2024, 6:00pm
    - Reopening District lands October 11, 2024, 6:00am



# Rocky Glades Hunting Area Expansion

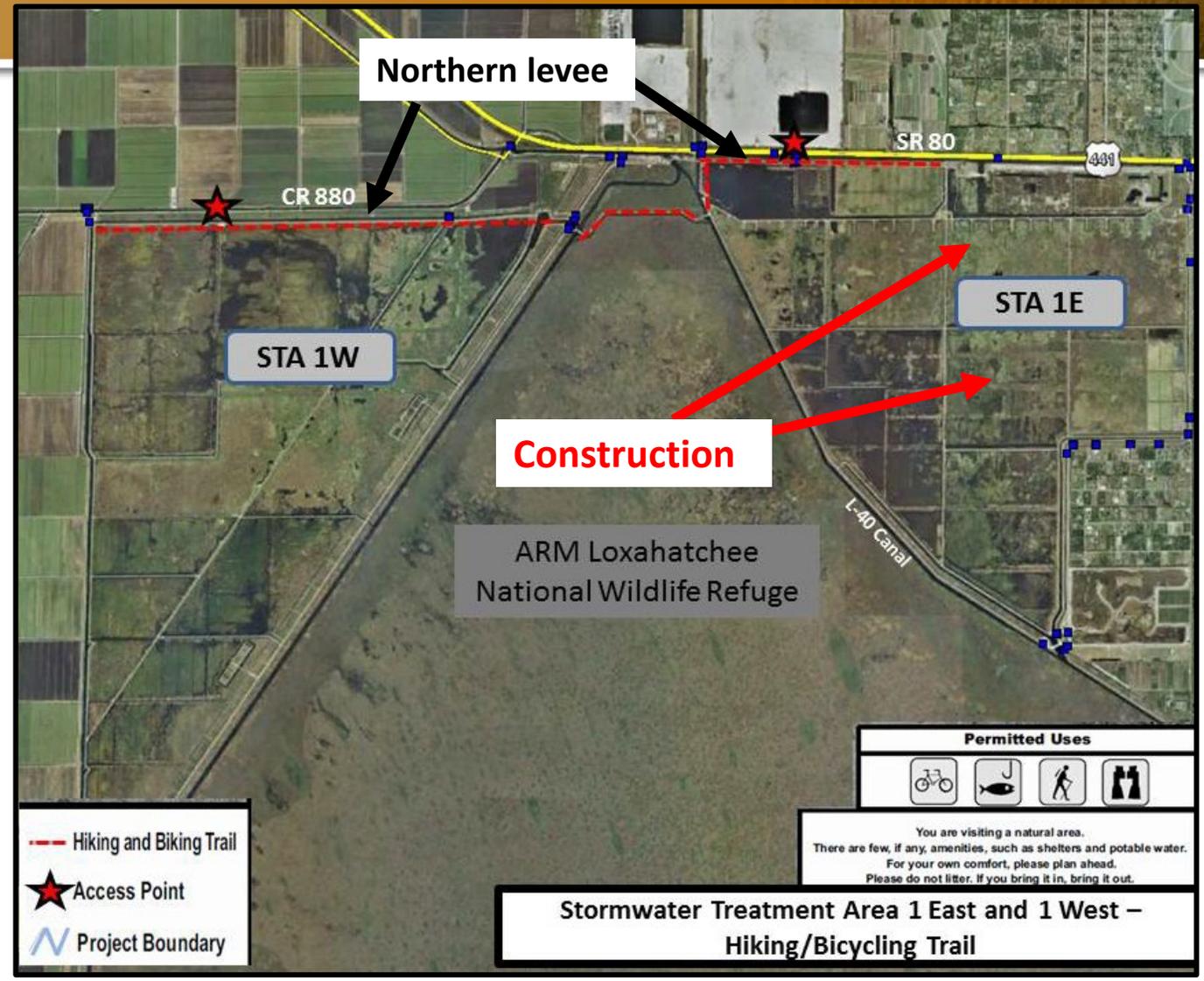
- Rocky Glades Public Small Game Hunting Area is located in Miami-Dade County.
- Currently working with FWC to create new boundary map with the expansion areas that were approved by the South Florida Water Management Governing Board.





# STA 1E Construction

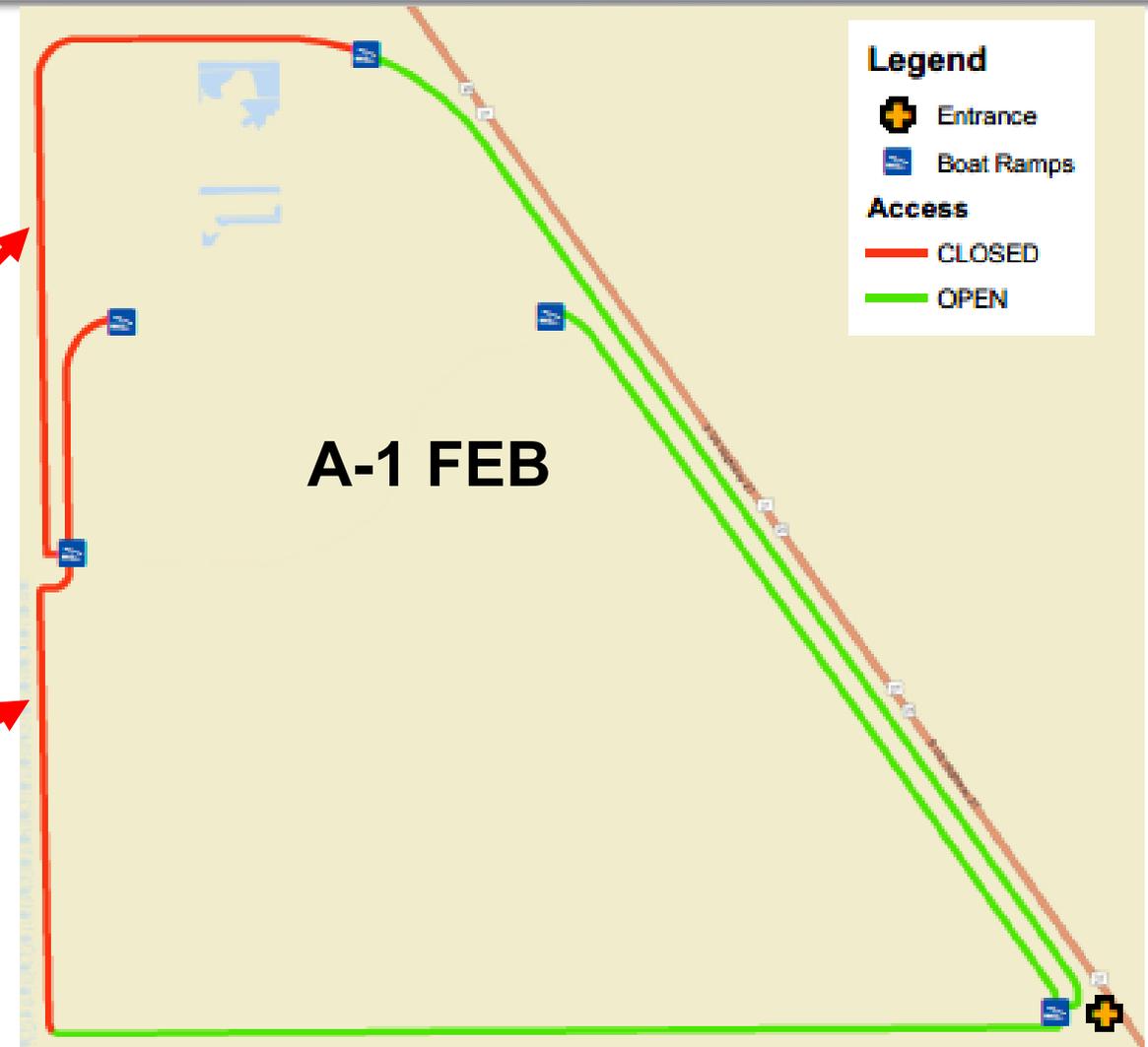
- STA 1E located in Palm Beach County.
  - Construction currently taking place throughout STA 1E until Spring of 2026.
  - Parking and access along north levee is still open, including the biking trail from STA 1E to STA 1W.
  - Access is prohibited south of northern levee.



# A-1 FEB Levee Closure Status

## ➤ A-1 FEB located in Palm Beach County.

- Closure of north and entire west levee continues due to construction.
- NW levee closure for upwards to ten years due to EAA construction.
- SW levee anticipated to be complete in approximately one year.



# Shingle Creek Management Area Closures

## ➤ Shingle Creek Management Area in Orange County.

- Powerlines are located on the N/S and E/W hiking / biking trails.
- Due to powerline construction activities, there will be temporary closure of the trails from mid-December 2024 to mid-January 2025.
- Notices and maps will be on the District's website at [SFWMD.gov/Recreation](http://SFWMD.gov/Recreation) prior to the closure.

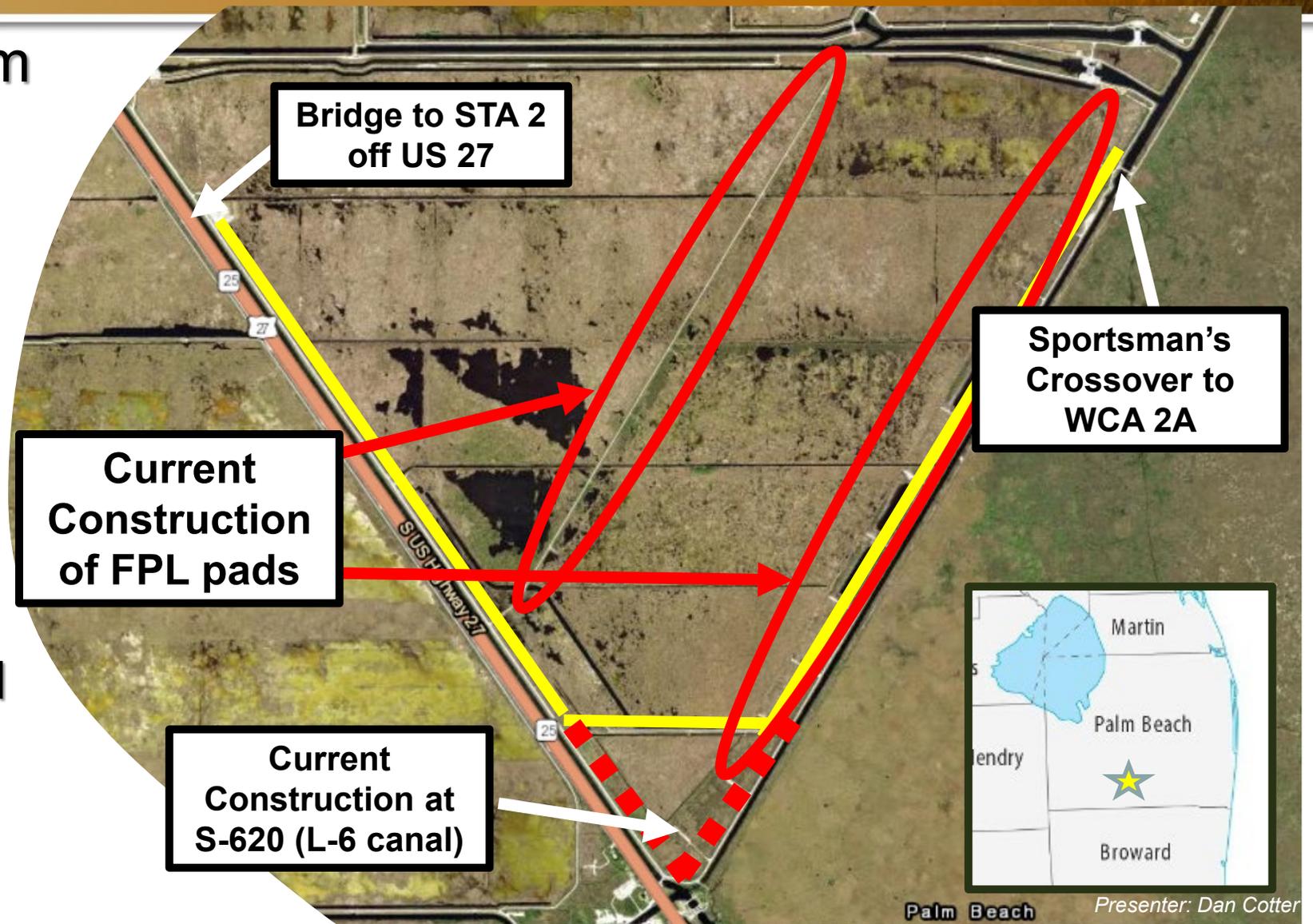


Hiking/biking trail



# Stormwater Treatment Area 2 Closure Update

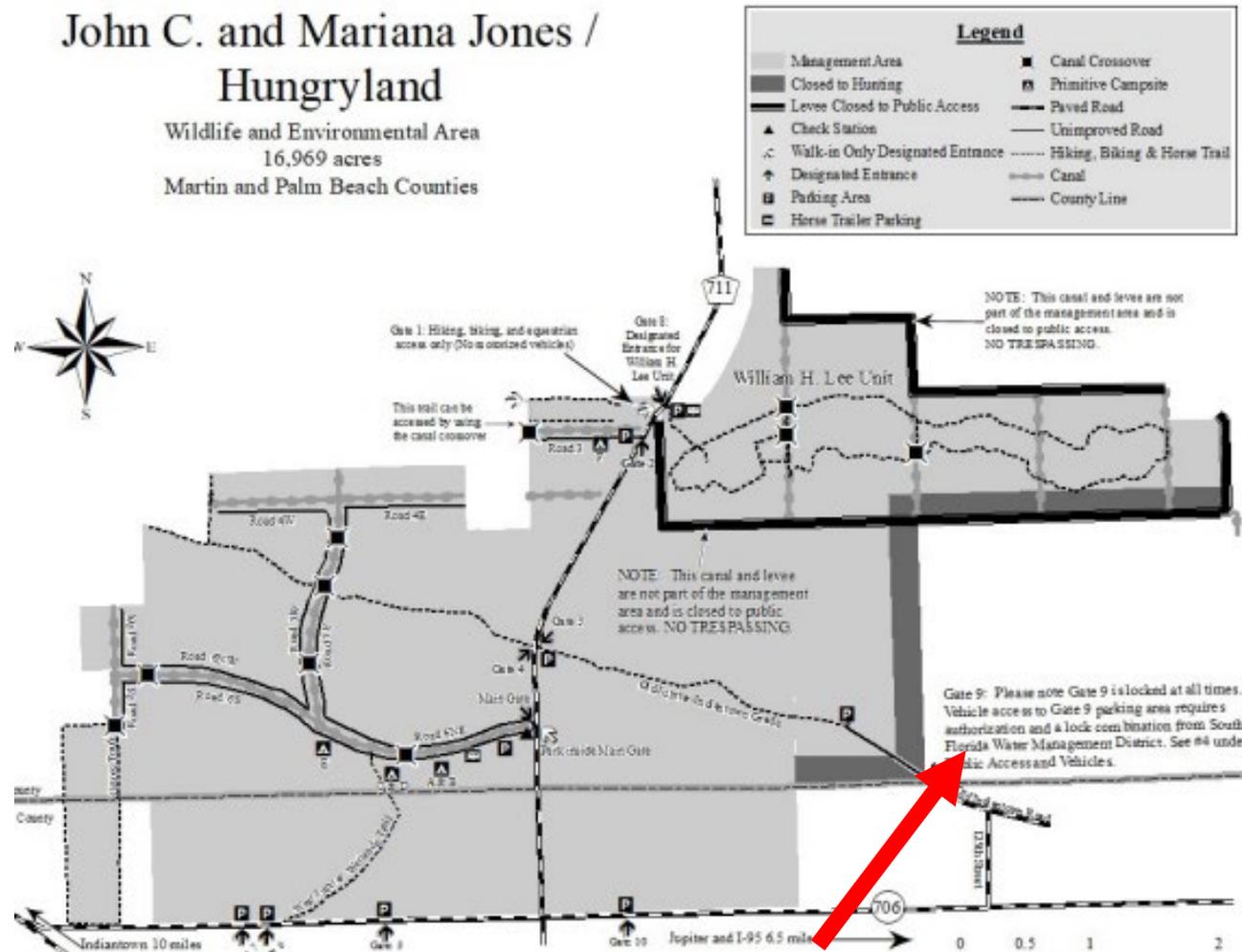
- STA 2 in western Palm Beach County.
- Temporary closure of entire area due to FPL pad construction.
- Projected completion of FPL construction projected to be complete by early November 2024.
- Once complete, weekend access will be resumed. (yellow line).



# Hungryland – Gate # 9 Temporary Closure

## ➤ Hungryland - Nine Gems in Martin County.

- Due to a failed culvert at the beginning of the access road and trail to Hungryland at Gate #9 (SE corner of Hungryland), public access thru this gate is temporarily closed until construction activities are completed.



# Hungryland - Nine Gems Parking Area

- Hungryland - Nine Gems located in Martin County.
  - Parking area recently completely refurbished.
  - The public should not be unloading / loading off road vehicles in parking area.
  - New signs were recently installed.





# Kissimmee River Navigational Signage

➤ The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contractor completed the installation of navigation warning signage along the Kissimmee River where rip rap was placed and at the S69 weir.





# Kissimmee River Navigational Signage

➤ Signage downstream and upstream (~500') of the S69 weir.



S69 Weir on the KR



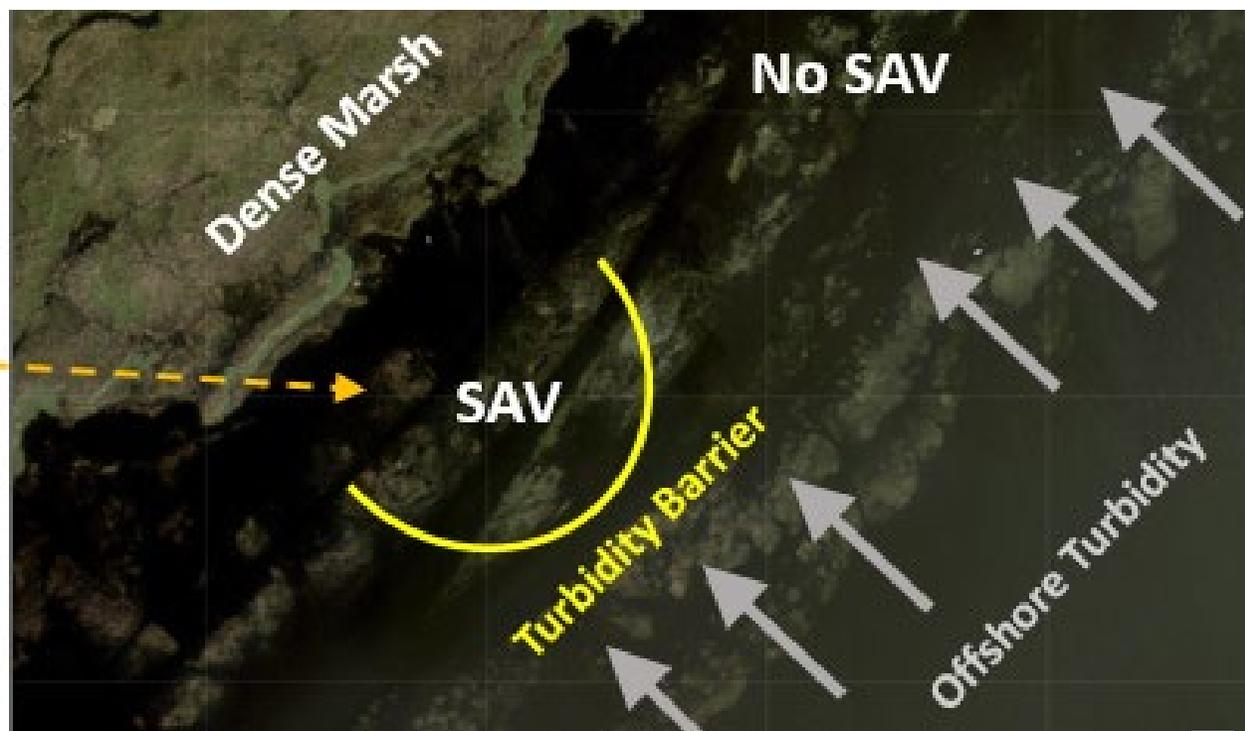
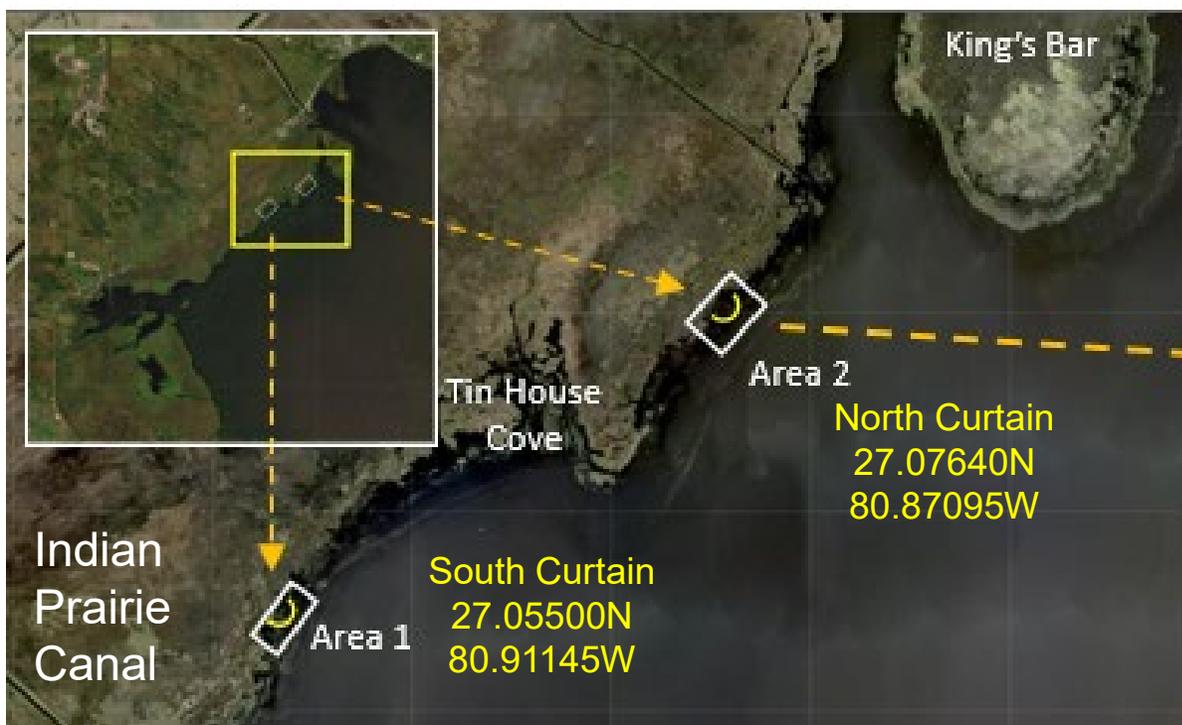
# Lake Okeechobee Turbidity Control Project

- Temporary turbidity curtains installed on Lake Okeechobee.
  - Up to one year deployment at two locations.



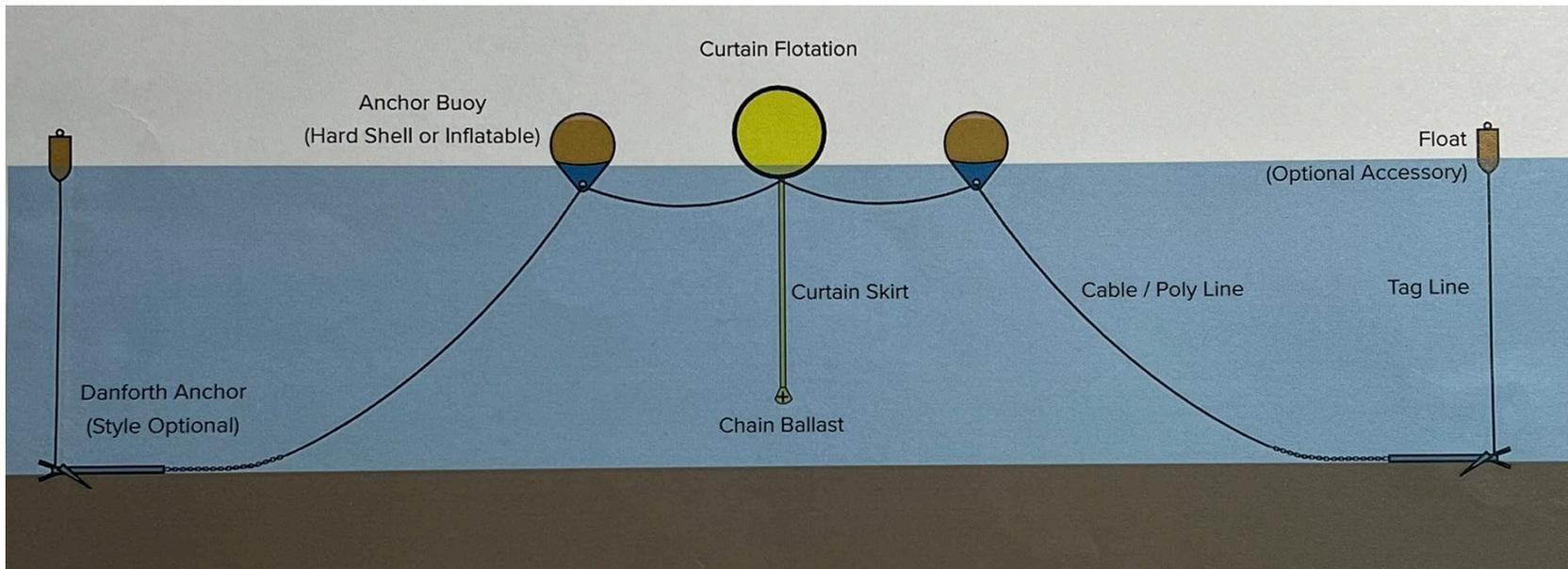
# Lake Okeechobee Turbidity Control Project

- Study is assessing feasibility, effects on turbidity & SAV.
  - Booms located north and south of Tin House Cove.
  - Exact locations noted below.



# Lake Okeechobee Turbidity Control Project

- Avoid yellow/orange buoys and floating booms (curtains) north and south of Tin House Cove.
  - Please pass this on to other boaters and club members.





# STA Hunting Access

➤ Staff has worked diligently this past year to provide enhanced STA hunting access and improve signage to notify where access is allowed and prohibited.



Marsh Master



Access trail

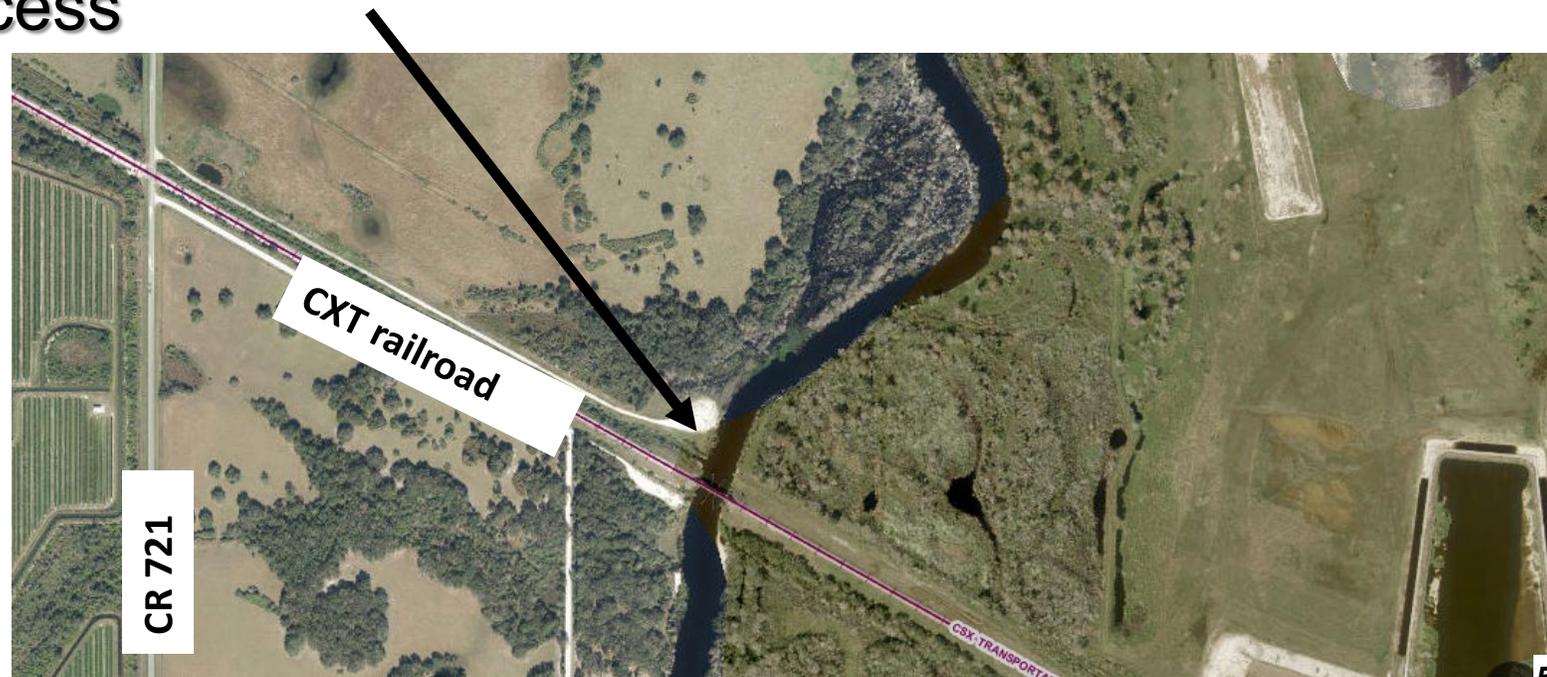


Signage installation



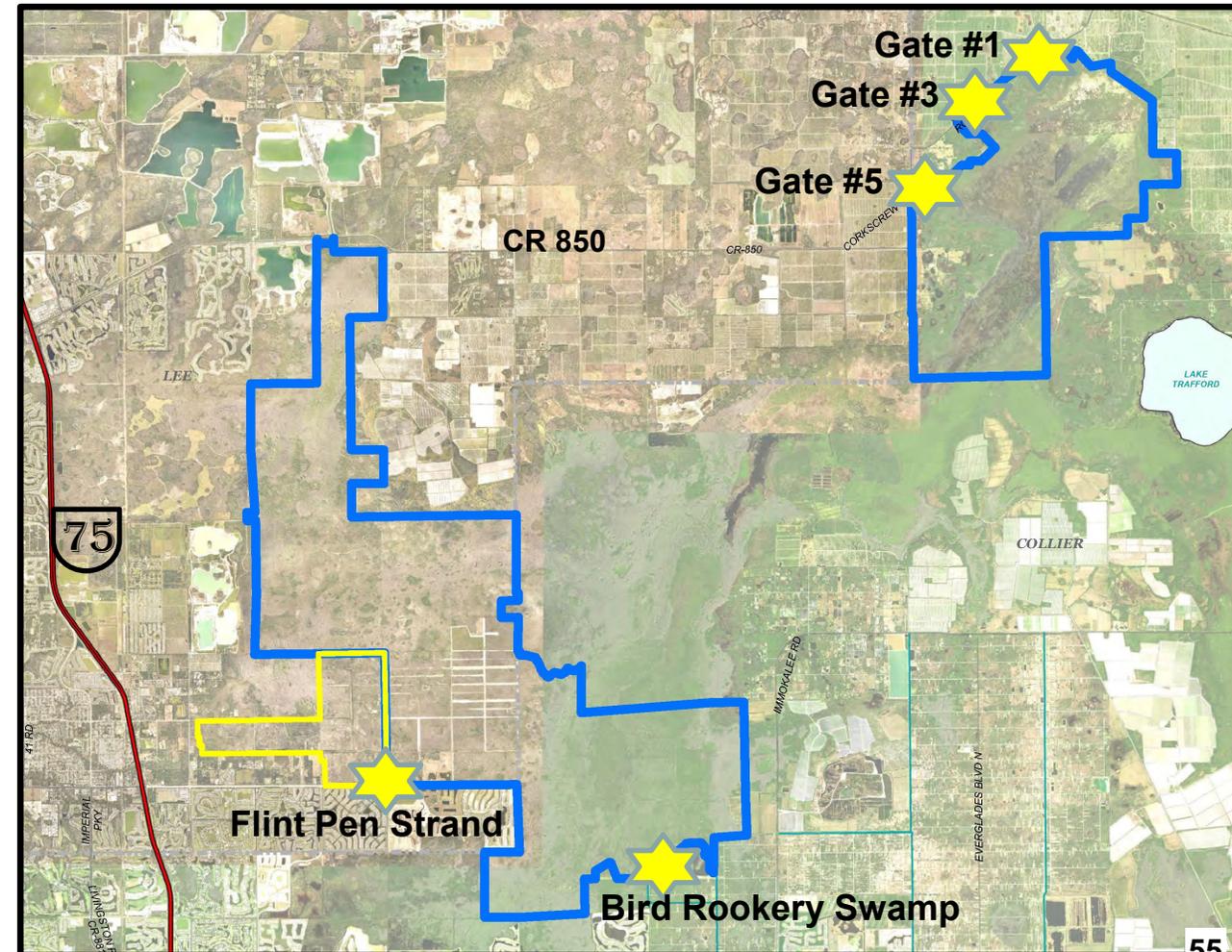
# Kissimmee River Access

- Proposed additional access point and parking area on the Kissimmee River Public Use Area.
  - KR “Seaboard Marsh North” public access point will provide access for:
    - Walk-in and hunting access
    - Fishing
    - Wildlife viewing
    - Potential canoe/kayak
  - KR Blueway point



# CREW Recreational Access

- The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) in both Lee and Collier counties.
  - Provides several access points and many public nature-based recreational opportunities in partnership with the CREW Trust and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).
- Proposed new primitive campsite inside the Flint Pen Strand area.

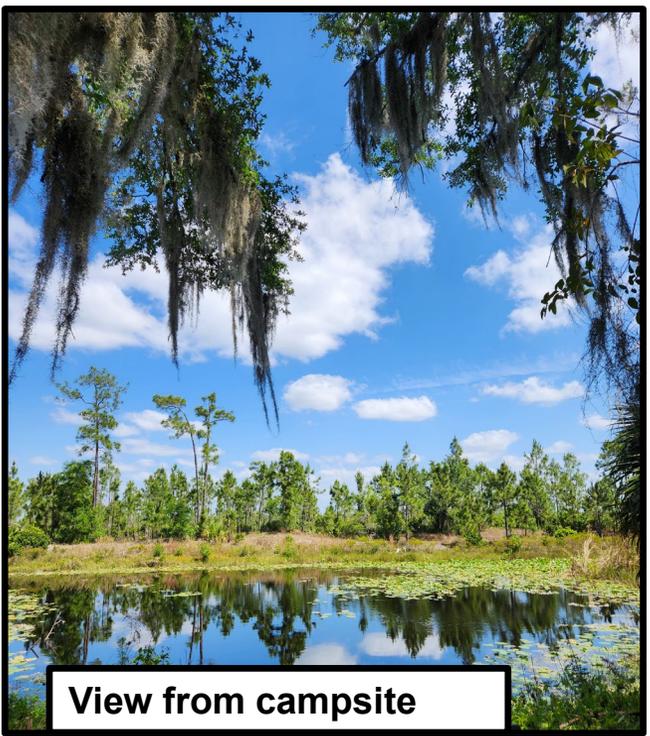




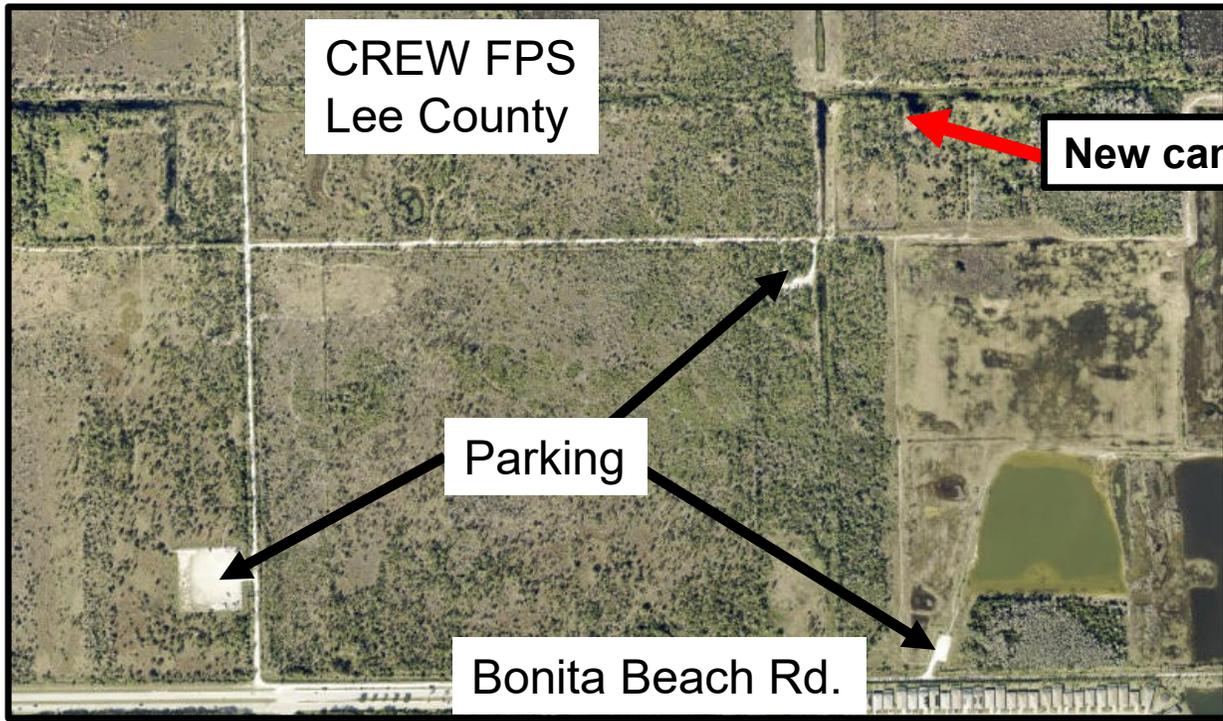
# Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)

DRAFT

- Proposed new campsite location within Flint Pen Strand Unit.
  - Plan to install signage, fire ring, picnic tables.
  - Public will be able to obtain no-cost Special Use License & map online.



View from campsite



CREW FPS  
Lee County

New campsite location

Parking

Bonita Beach Rd.



# Public Use on Future Restoration Projects

➤ Public use access and recreational facilities planned on restoration projects:

- C-44 STA and Reservoir
- C-23/24 STA and North and South Reservoirs
- C-25 STA and Reservoir
- Ten Mile Creek
- Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) A-2 Reservoir and STA
- C-43 Reservoir



C-44 STA

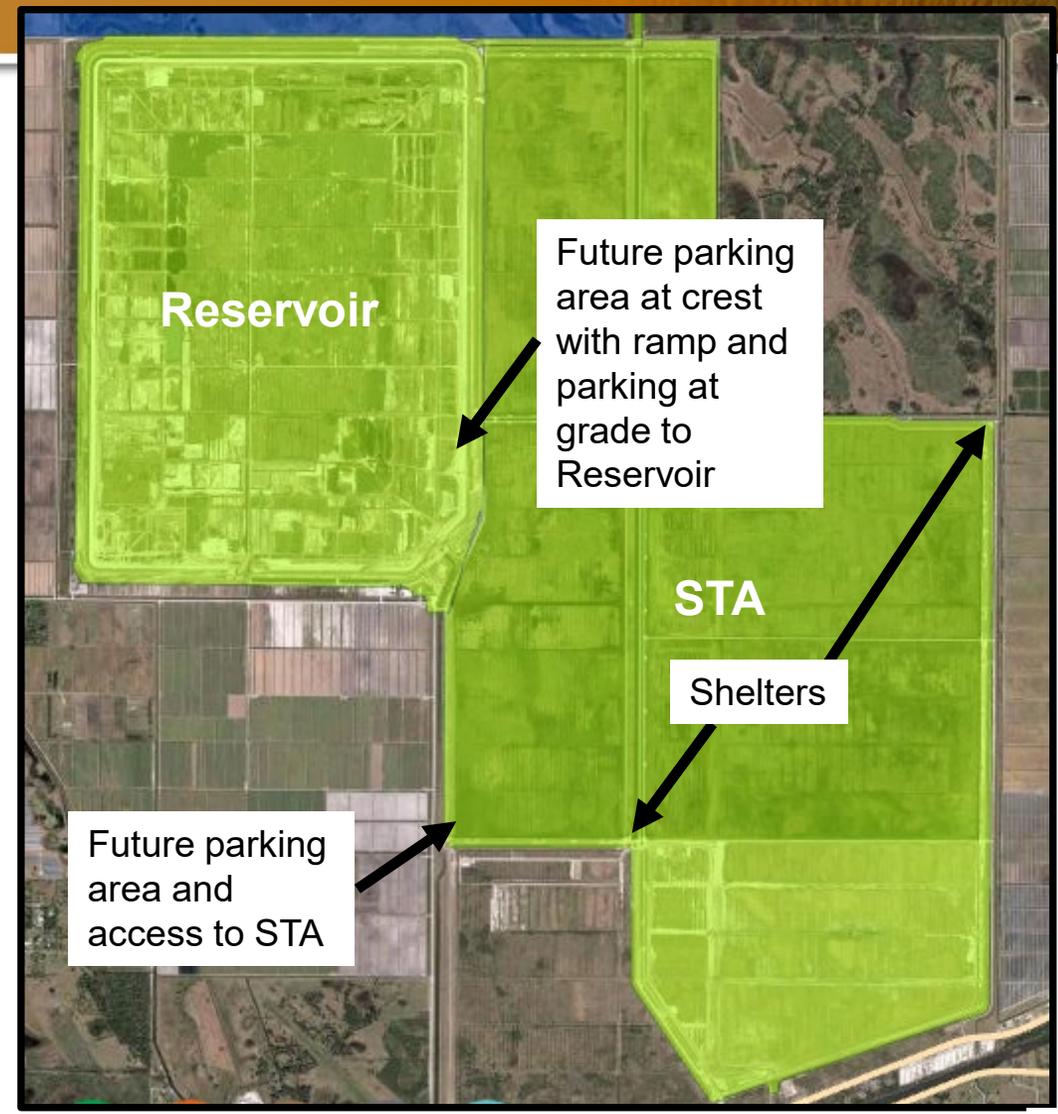


# C-44 Stormwater Treatment Area and Reservoir

DRAFT

## ➤ C-44 in Martin County.

- Consists of a 6,300-acre stormwater treatment area and 3,400-acre reservoir.



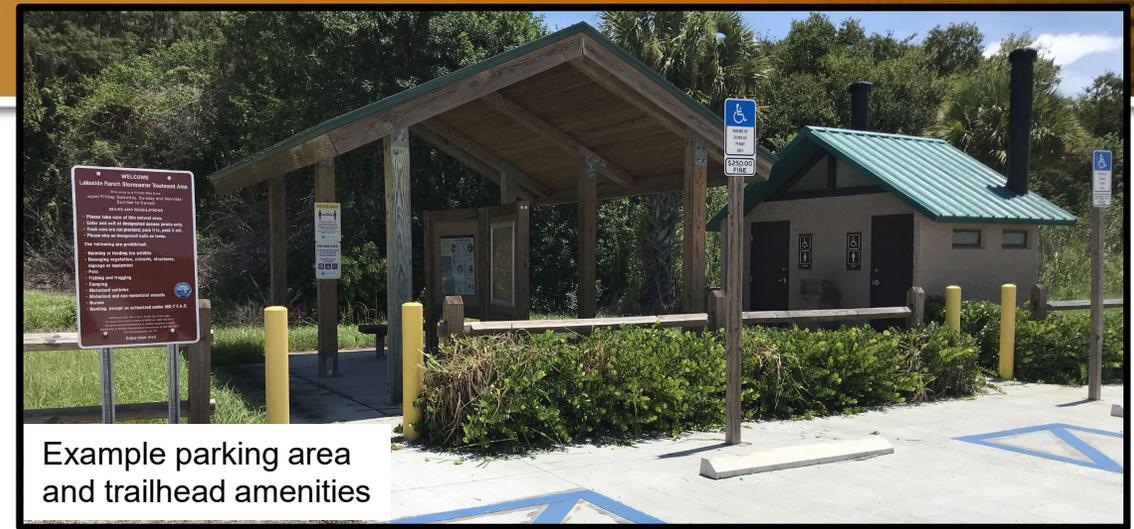


# C-44 Stormwater Treatment Area & Reservoir

DRAFT

➤ Construction contract to the October Governing Board.

- Engineer designs include:
  - Parking areas including ADA access.
  - Kiosks and interpretive signage.
  - Prefab concrete restrooms.
  - Shelter and benches at parking area and designated areas within the STA.
  - Boat ramp access to the Reservoir.



Example parking area and trailhead amenities



Interpretive kiosks



# C-44 Stormwater Treatment Area & Reservoir

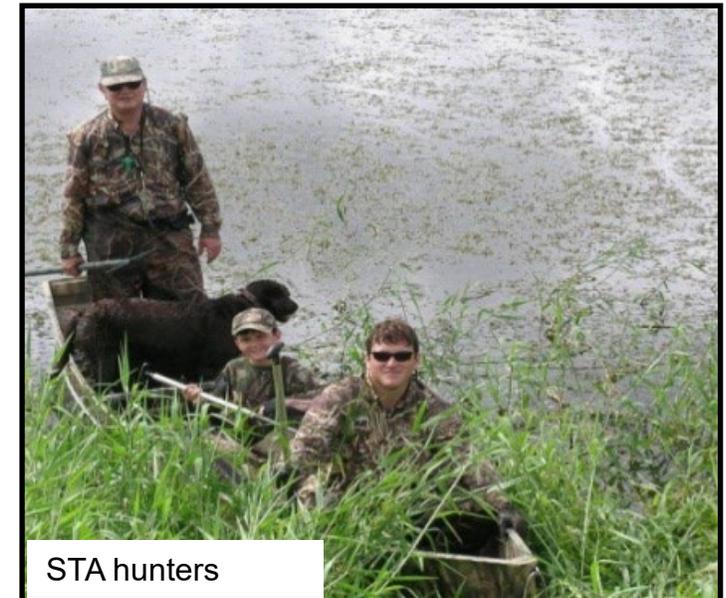
**DRAFT**

## ➤ Planned activities:

- Audubon scheduled guided birding currently taking place on the STA.
- Review this year with FWC for potential managed waterfowl and alligator hunts for next season.
- Completion of parking trailhead facilities for access into the STA will allow for regular extended weekend use.
  - Activities to include hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing.



Audubon birding tour



STA hunters

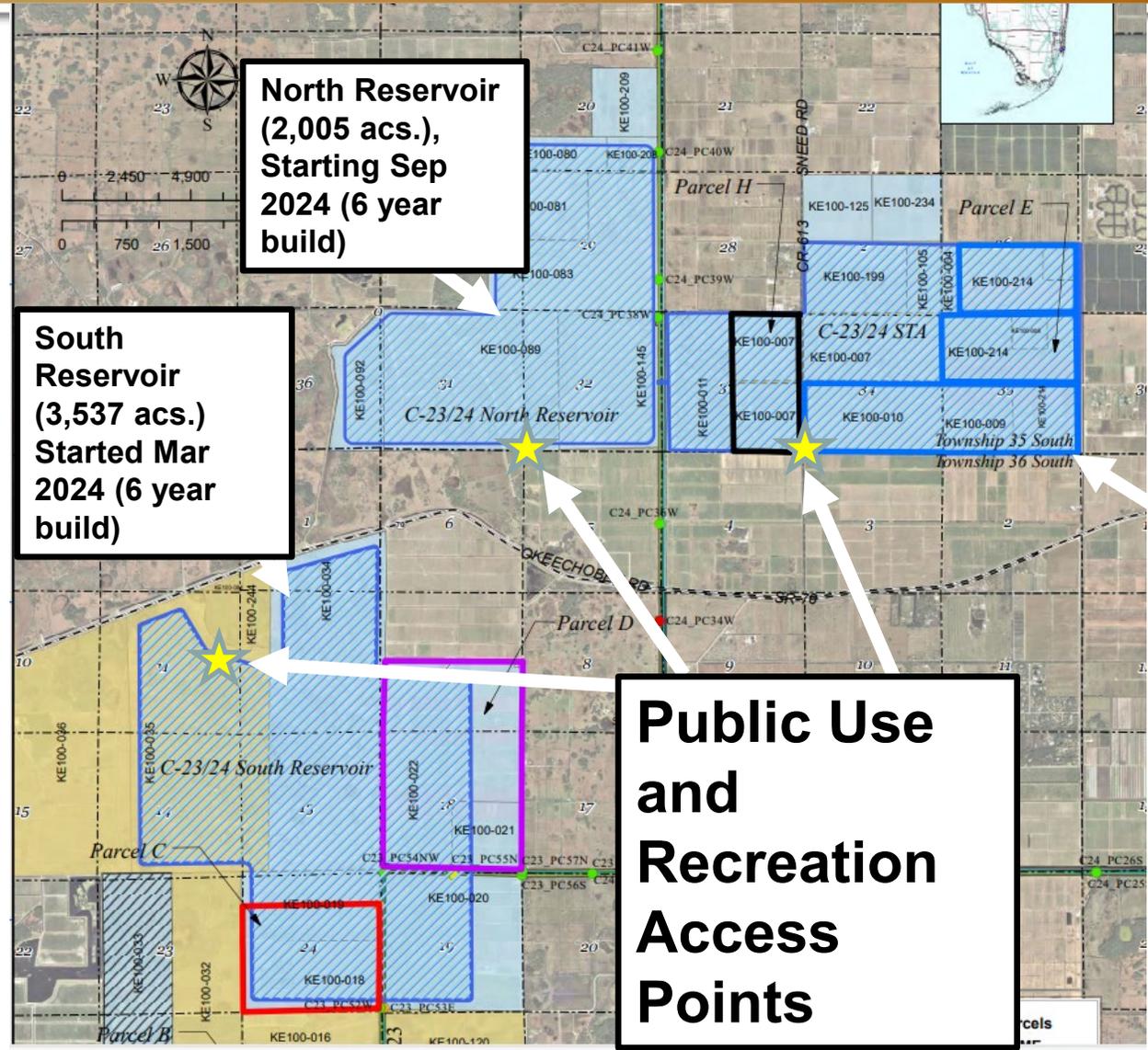


# C-23/24 North and South Reservoirs and STA

DRAFT

➤ C-23/24 Reservoirs and STA in St. Lucie County and will provide similar public use activities and facilities to other projects.

- Hiking, biking, boating, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing.



**STA (1,970 acs.) currently under construction (end Oct 2025)**



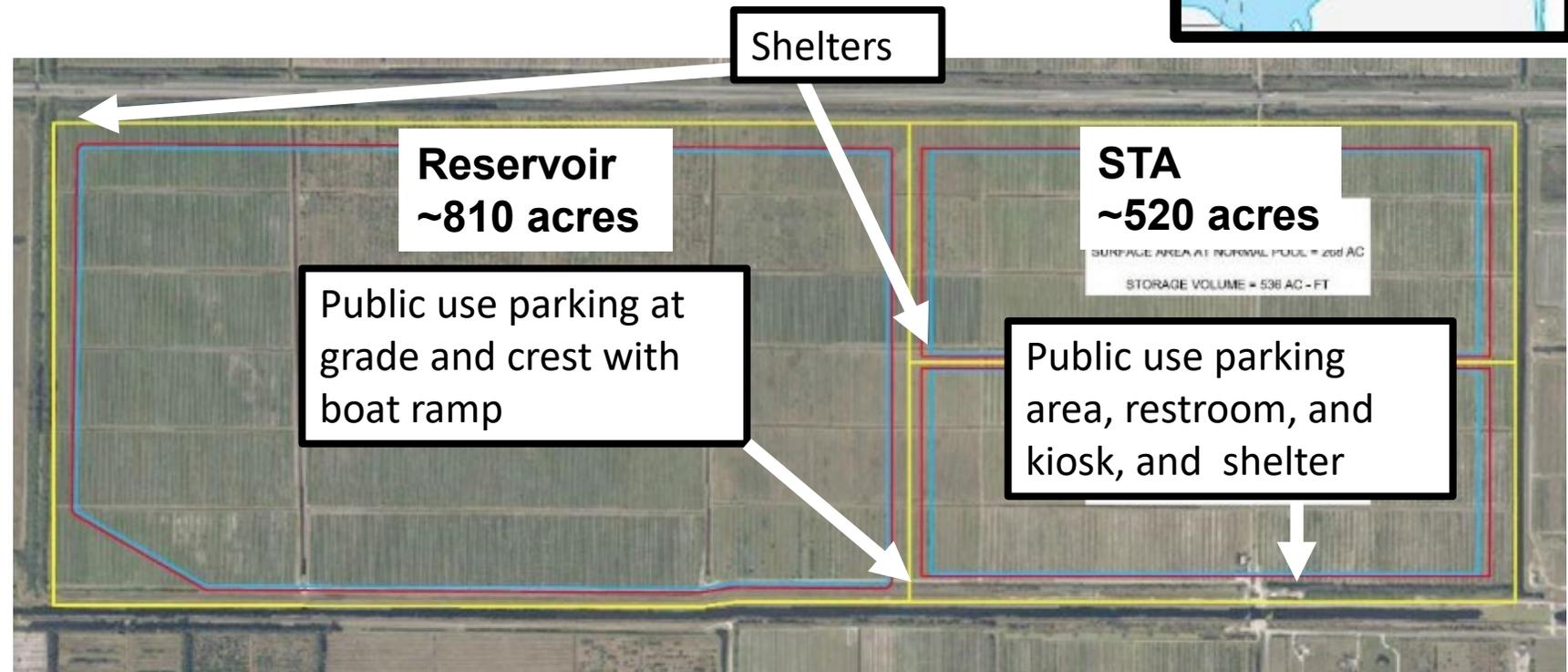
# C-25 Reservoir and STA

DRAFT

- C-25 Reservoir and STA in St. Lucie County and will provide similar public use activities and facilities to other projects.



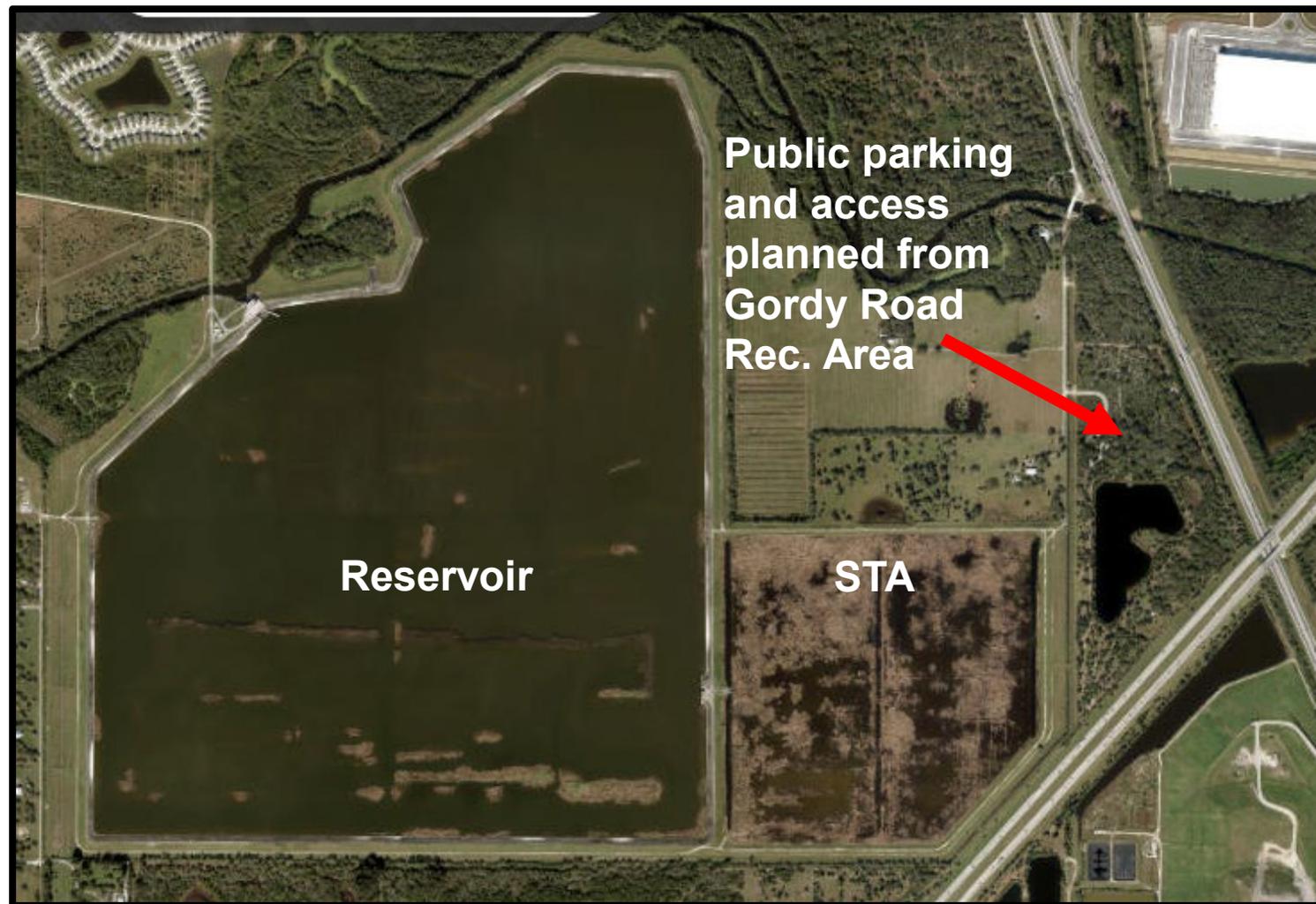
- Hiking, biking, boating, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing.
- Construction completion 2028





# Ten Mile Creek Reservoir and STA

- Future public parking and access to Ten Mile Creek will be from St. Lucie County's Gordy Road Recreation Area.
  - Consists of an approximate 526-acre reservoir and 132-acre stormwater treatment area.
  - Activities will include hiking, biking, fishing, and wildlife viewing.
  - Will go to District's Governing Board for public access designation approval.

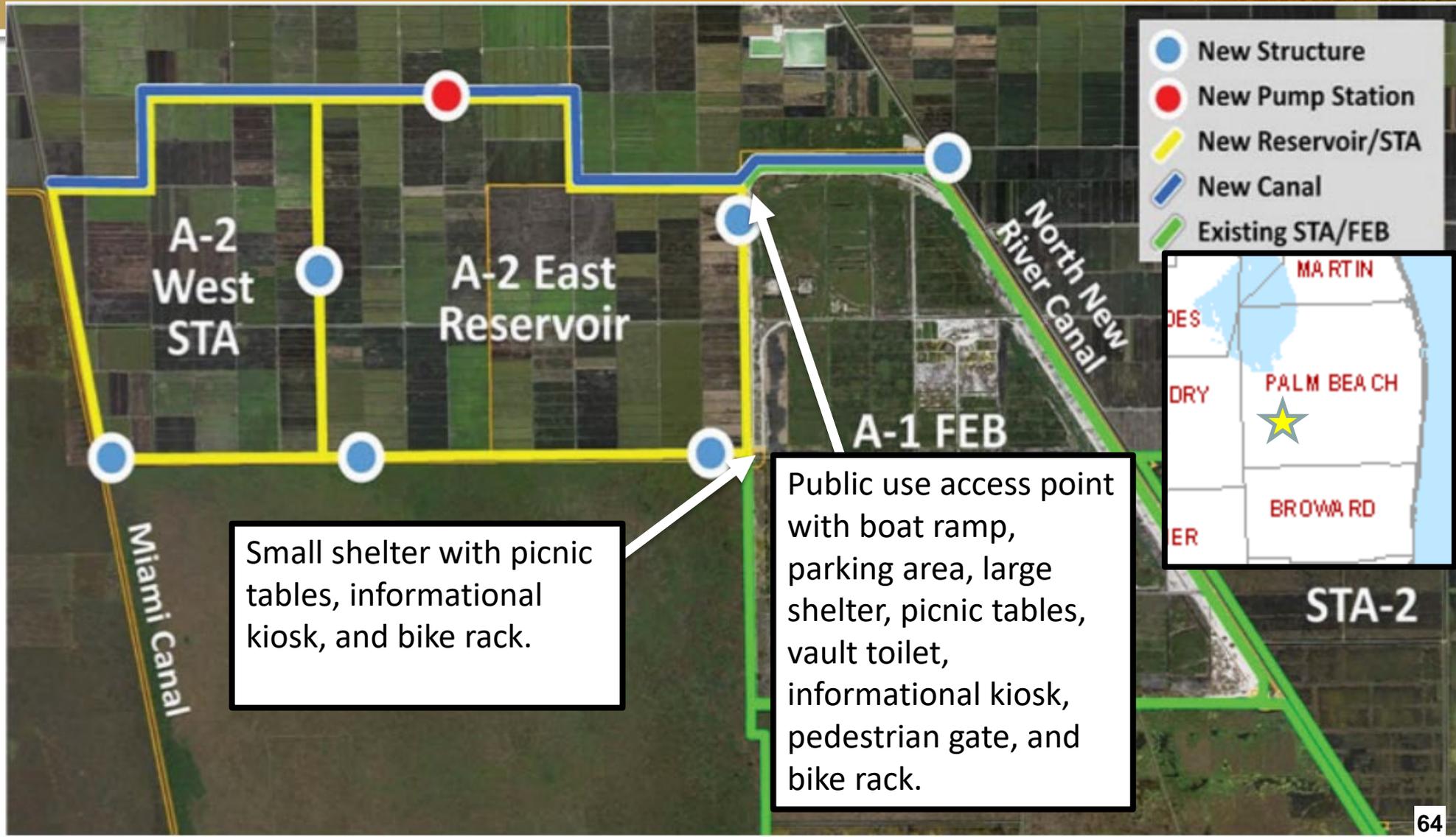




# Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) A-2 Reservoir and STA

DRAFT

- EAA Reservoir in Palm Beach County
  - 10,000-acre Reservoir for public use.

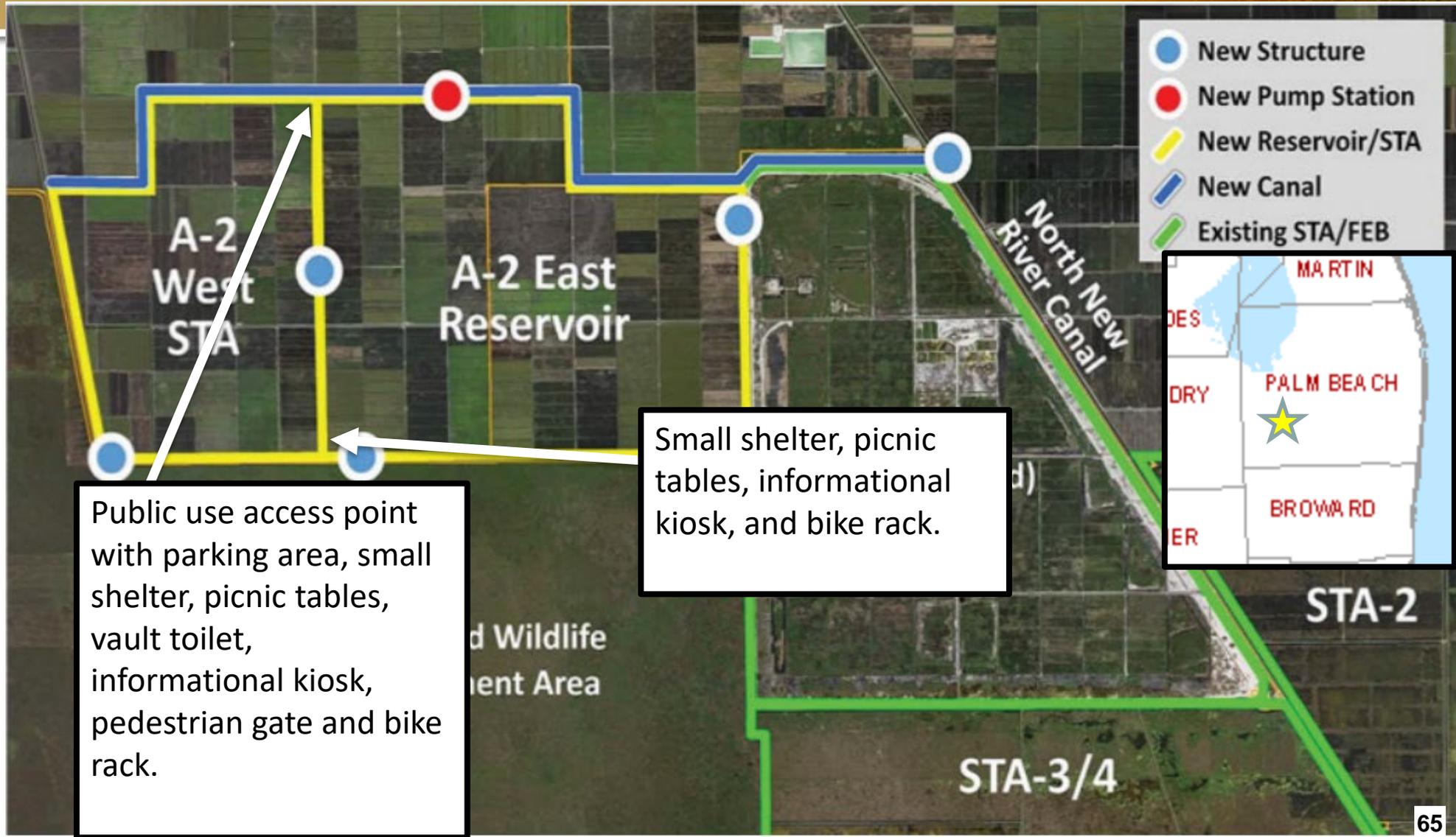




# Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) A-2 Reservoir and STA

DRAFT

➤ 6,500-acre STA for public use.





# Caloosahatchee (C-43) Reservoir

- C-43 Reservoir located in Hendry County consists of an approximate 10,500 acre reservoir.
  - Site will provide public access within and outside the Reservoir including:
    - Hiking and wildlife viewing
    - Biking
    - Boating including canoeing and kayaking
    - Fishing
    - Equestrian use

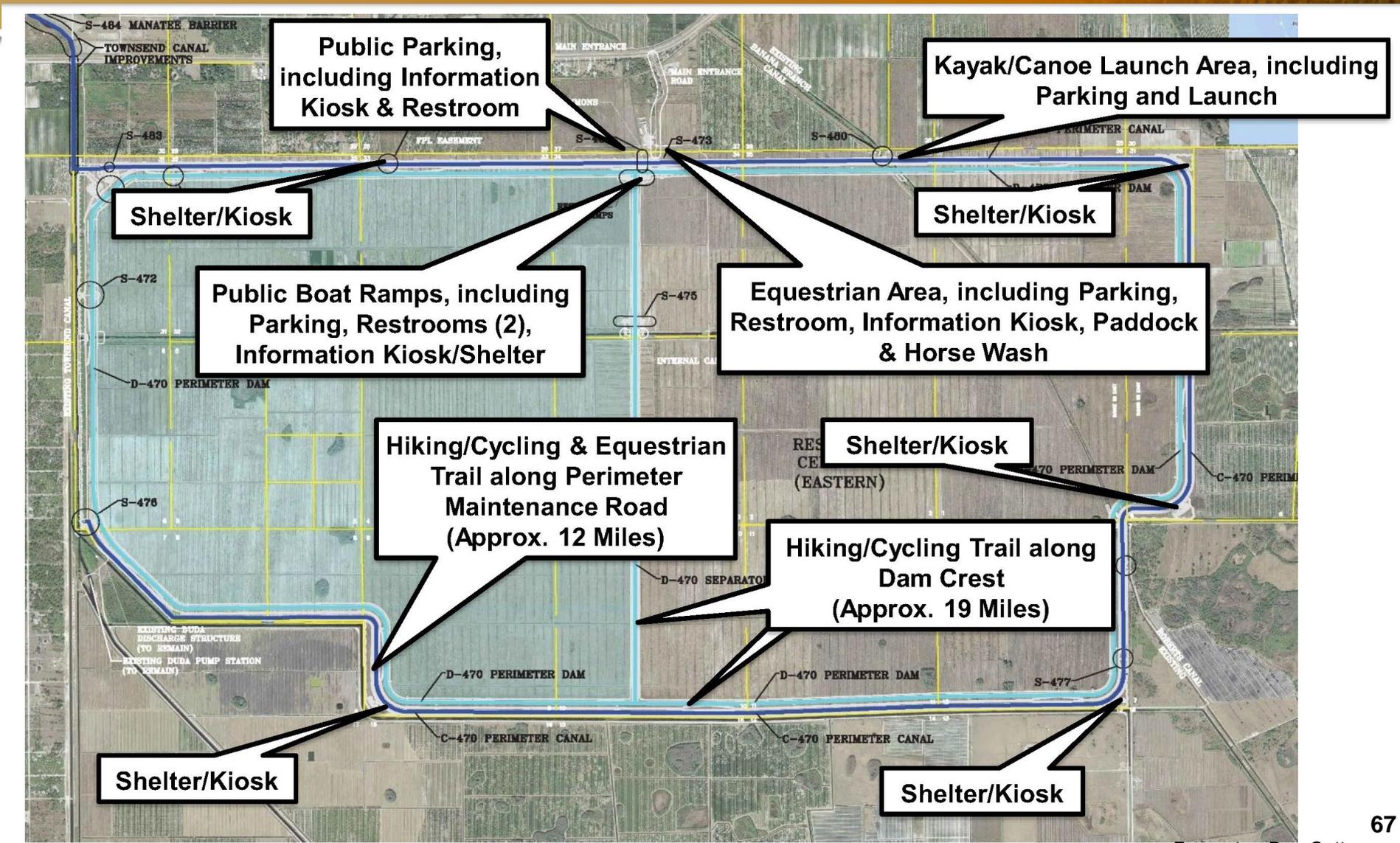


# Caloosahatchee (C-43) Reservoir



➤ C-43 Reservoir future recreation facilities.

- Reservoir testing to start in 2025.
- Rec features to be built in late 2026.
- Open for public use by 2029.





# Capital Refurbishment Projects

➤ This upcoming year the District will continue to install needed public use facilities and refurbish and replace infrastructure that has exceeded its life span.

■ This includes:

- Boardwalks
- Restrooms
- Camping area improvements
- Fishing pier access
- Boat ramp access
- Parking area improvements including kiosks and signage



DuPuis Cypress Boardwalk



# Capital Refurbishment Projects

- **CREW Bird Rookery Swamp in Collier County.**
  - 1400' boardwalk links to 12 miles of hiking and biking trails.
  - Replacement of structure for design/build to begin this fiscal year.
  - Currently out for bid.
  - Construction to replace boardwalk projected to start next fall.





# Capital Refurbishment Projects

➤ Install new or replacement kiosk interpretive information panels throughout the District.



## WHAT IS AN STA?

Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) are large, constructed wetlands with a variety of aquatic plants. The plants remove and store nutrients such as phosphorus that are found in stormwater runoff before it is moved out of the STA. Nutrient concentrations, particularly phosphorus, were naturally ultra low in the Everglades. The STAs have dramatically reduced the concentrations of phosphorus in Everglades-bound water. Water from Lake Okeechobee travels south to America's Everglades and providing clean water is vital to protecting critical habitats. STAs are continually monitored to maximize water treatment capacity.

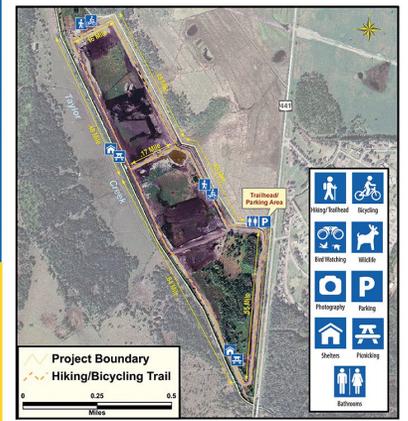
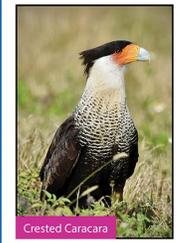
This STA is located adjacent to Taylor Creek on 170 acres in Okeechobee County. Taylor Creek runs along the western boundary of this property and continues to flow under HWY 441 just south of this project, through the City of Okeechobee and ultimately into Lake Okeechobee. The purpose of this STA is to take some water from Taylor Creek and run it through a wetland treatment process. After the water is treated, the clean water is released back into Taylor Creek for its journey onto Lake Okeechobee.

This property is open to the public for recreation, enjoyment and education about our valuable natural resources. The trail around the site is approximately 3.1 miles. For your pets safety, please do not bring dogs into the STA. Dog walking, even on a leash, is not permitted.

**HOURS: SUNRISE TO SUNSET, 7 DAYS A WEEK**  
Periodically, the STA may be closed for maintenance activities.

## Taylor Creek Stormwater Treatment Area

Enjoy a wide variety of bird species and other wildlife along more than three miles of hiking and biking levee trails



## WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE HERE

Commonly observed birds here include sandhill cranes, crested caracara, wood storks, great blue herons, tricolored herons, white ibis, glossy ibis, a variety of egrets, and many songbirds. In addition, deer, wild turkey, American alligators, and otters are observed here.



## PARTNERSHIPS

The Taylor Creek STA has been implemented by a partnership between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District. Public use of this STA is made possible by the partnership between Okeechobee County and the South Florida Water Management District.

For more information, please contact the South Florida Water Management District, Okeechobee Service Center at 863-462-5260.

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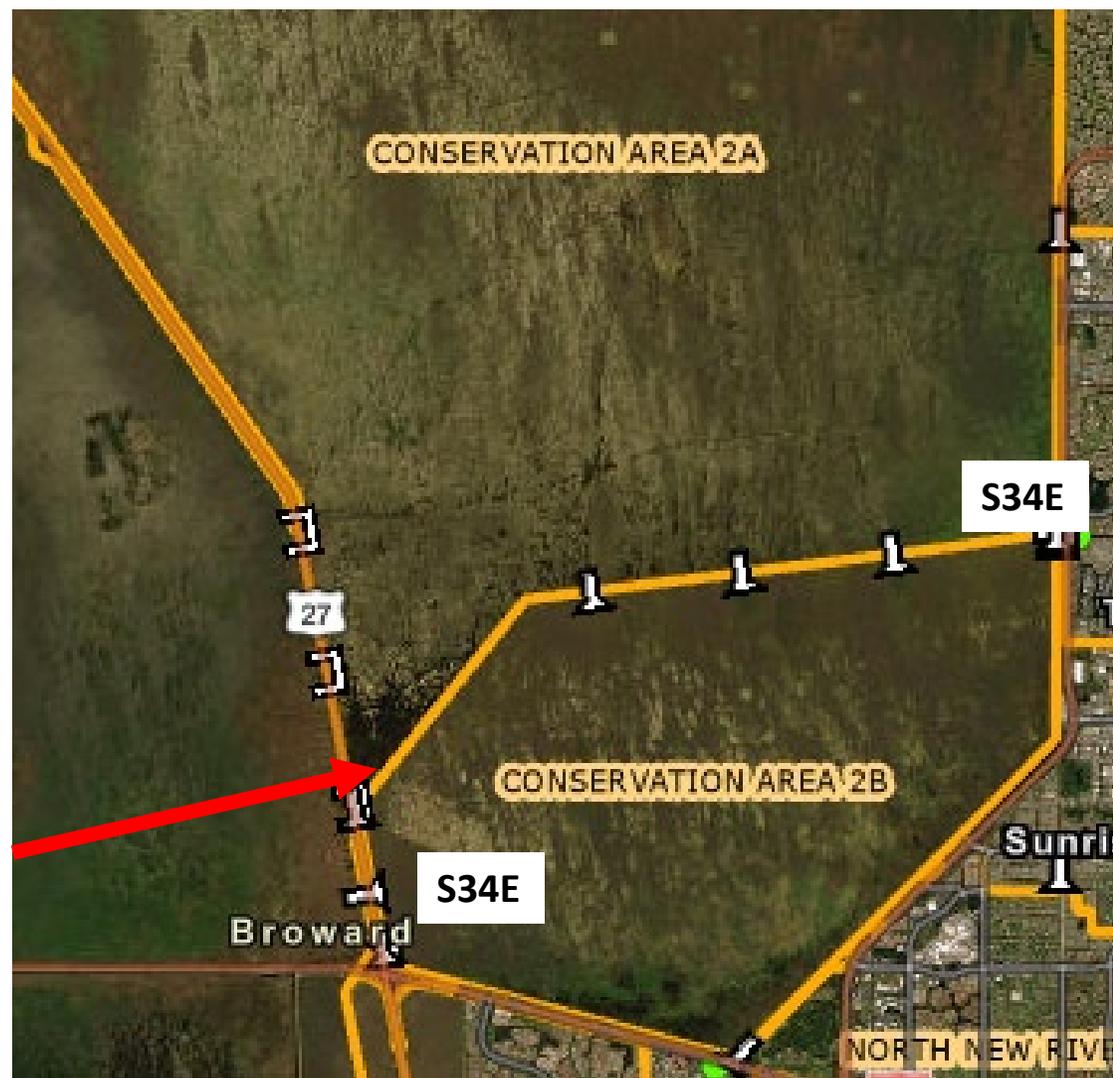


Scan the code to learn more about recreational opportunities

SFWMD.gov

# Water Conservation Area (WCA) 2B Access

- District has reviewed several potential locations for boat ramp access into WCA 2B.
  - Several constraints to building new access point, including substantial on/off highway improvements, levee expansion, and providing a suitable parking area.
  - District reviewing the potential proposal to construct a crossover from WCA 2A to WCA 2B, needs to be vetted with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

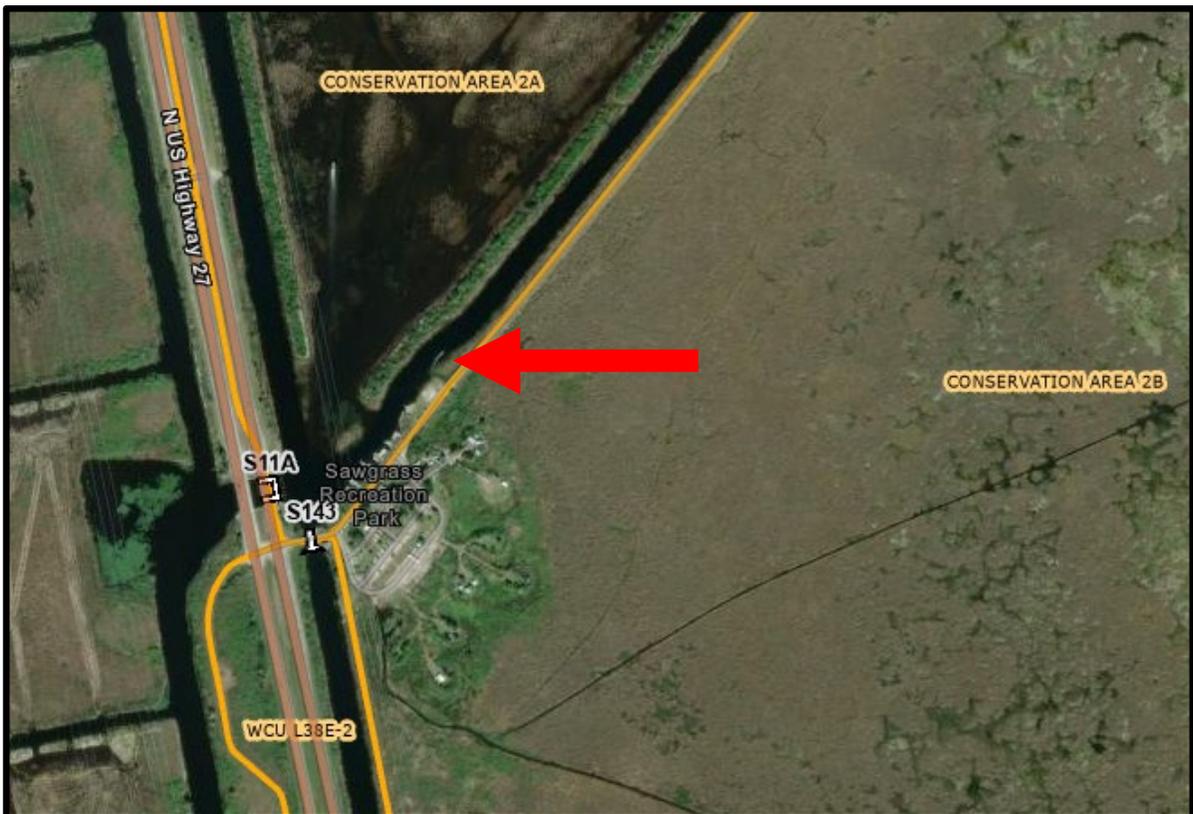




# WCA 2B Access

DRAFT

➤ Proposed location just NE and adjacent of Sawgrass Recreation Park.



Example Airboat Crossover



# Questions / Comments?

DRAFT

For information on upcoming meetings visit [SFWMD.gov/Meetings](http://SFWMD.gov/Meetings) to sign-up to receive the latest District information!

