



South Florida Water Management District

RECREATIONAL PUBLIC FORUM AGENDA

March 25, 2024

5:00 PM

Conservancy of Southwest Florida
1495 Smith Preserve Way
Naples, FL 34102

FINAL

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks - Drew Bartlett, Executive Director, SFWMD, and Newton Cook, Facilitator
2. Public Use Project Updates - Dan Cotter, Section Leader, SFWMD
3. Big Cypress National Preserve Recreational Opportunities - Lisa Andrews, Outreach Education Coordinator, Big Cypress National Preserve
4. Fakahatchee Preserve State Park Recreational Opportunities - Ezell "BJ" Givens, Bureau Chief, District IV Administration, Division of Recreation and Parks, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
5. Green Heart of the Everglades Property
 - A. Introduction, Property Overview and Summary of Public Comments - Rory Feeney, Bureau Chief, SFWMD
 - B. Draft Land Management Plan and Public Use Plan Overview - Justin Nolte, Section Administrator, SFWMD
 - C. Next Steps - Rory Feeney, Bureau Chief, SFWMD
6. Recreational Discussion, Updates and Future Meeting Topics
7. Adjourn

Final presentations for agenda items: 2, 3, 4, and 5

Agenda Item Background:

2. Public Use Project Updates
3. Big Cypress National Preserve
4. Fakahatchee Preserve State Park
5. Green Heart of the Everglades Property



Public Use Project Updates

Recreational Forum

March 25, 2024

Dan Cotter
SFWMD, Land Stewardship Section





S-356 Boat Ramp Miami-Dade County



Video – celebrating new boat ramp

[WCA 3B Boat Ramp](#)



Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)

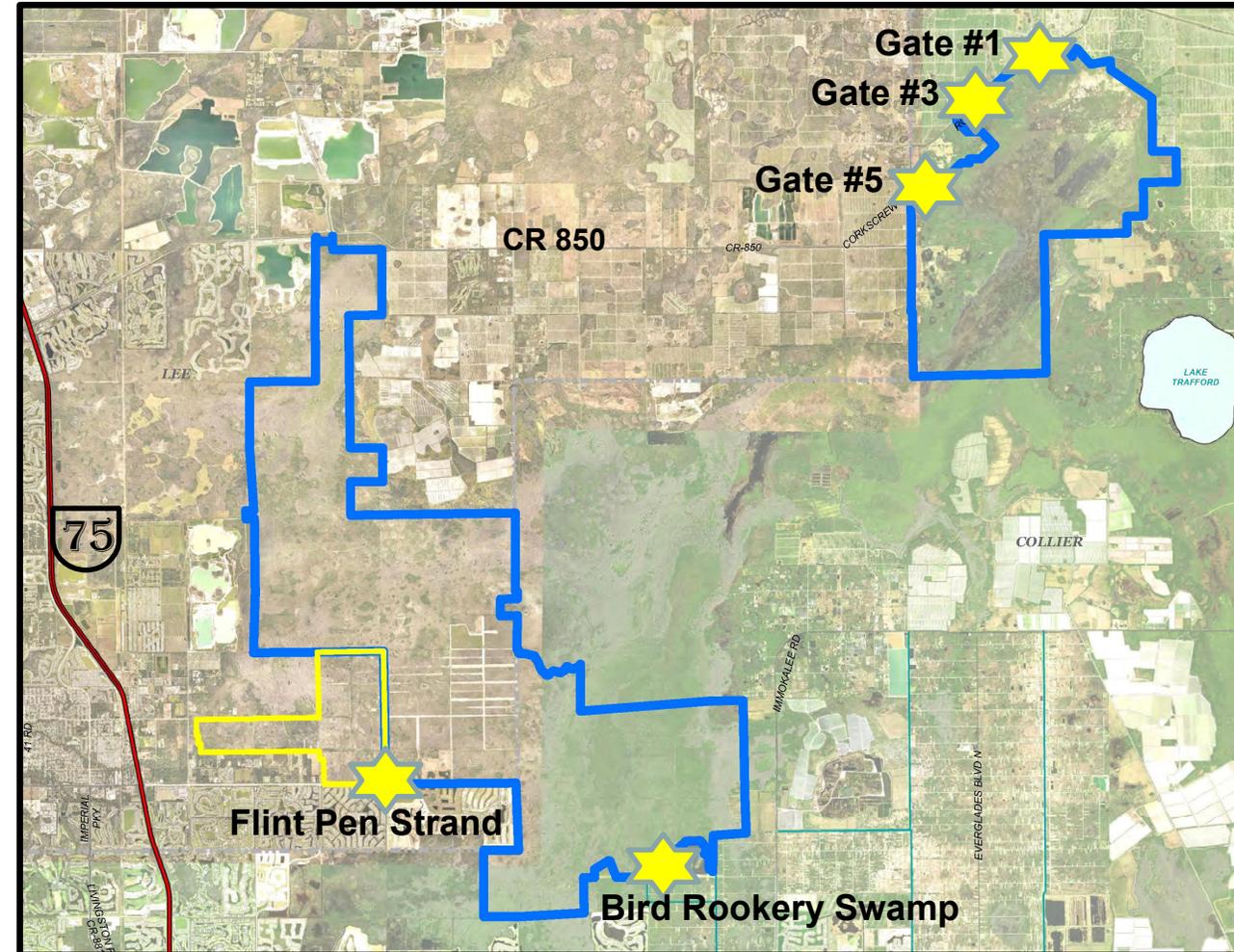
- The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) located in both Lee and Collier counties and provides natural flood protection, water purification and critical aquifer recharge
- Provides many public nature-based recreational opportunities.





CREW Recreational Access

- Recreational access points to the District's CREW property:
 - Corkscrew Marsh Trail (Gate #1)
 - Marsh Primitive Campsite (Gate #3)
 - Cypress Dome Trailhead (Gate #5)
 - Bird Rookery Swamp
 - Flint Pen Strand (3 parking areas)
- Approx. 65,000 visitors to the District's CREW area last year.





CREW Recreational Access

➤ Wide range of compatible nature-based activities allowed on CREW including:

- Hiking
- Biking
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Horseback riding
- Camping
- Wildlife viewing
- Environmental education





CREW Volunteers

- Volunteerism is very active at CREW.
 - Recent work by volunteers to support public use and environmental education.



Benches installed for environmental education programs



CREW Partnerships

➤ Partnerships with the District to expand recreation opportunities and assist with management:

- CREW Land & Water Trust
 - Provide environmental education, outreach, guided tours, public use facility maintenance, volunteer coordination, and land management support.
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
 - Coordinate and manage public use including hunting and its regulations.
 - Provide wildlife and land management assistance and enforcement of rules and regulations.





Kissimmee River Navigational Signage

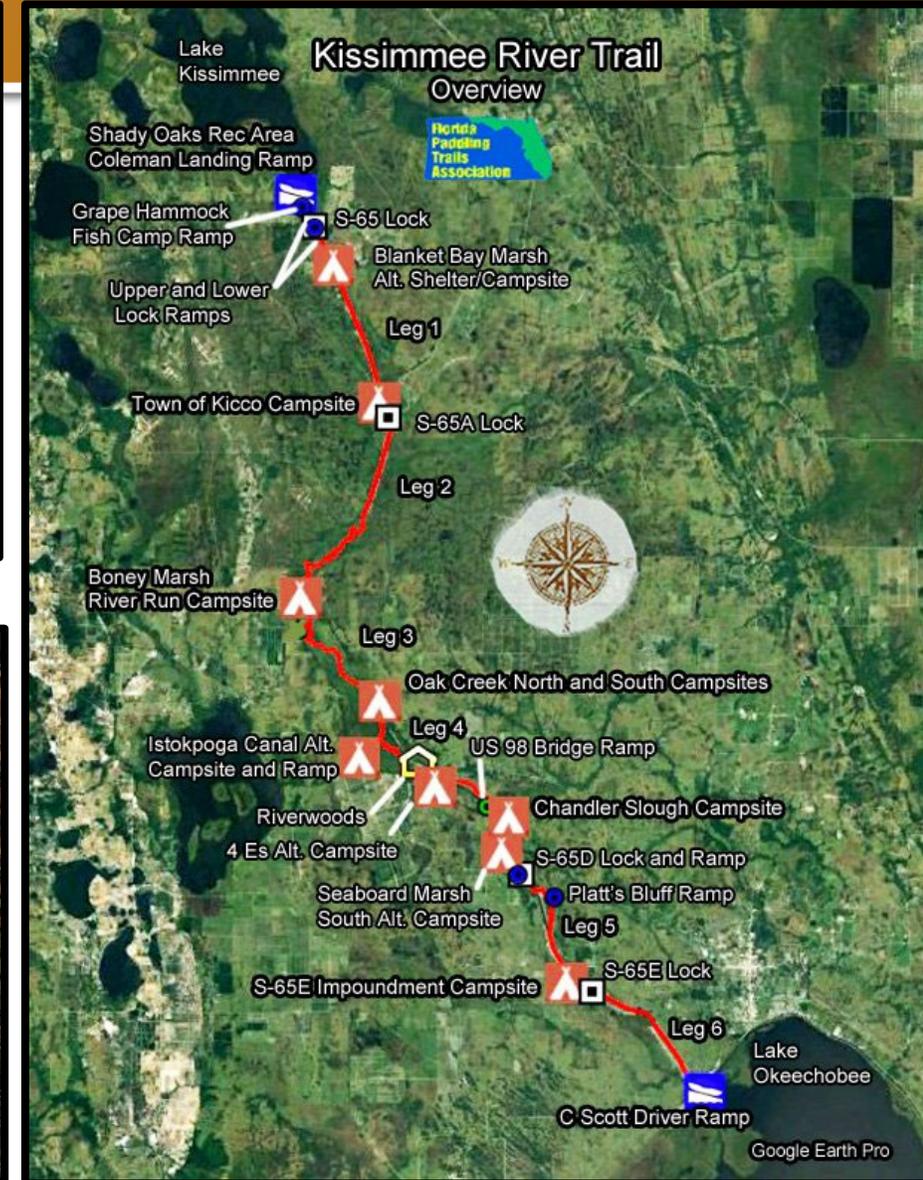
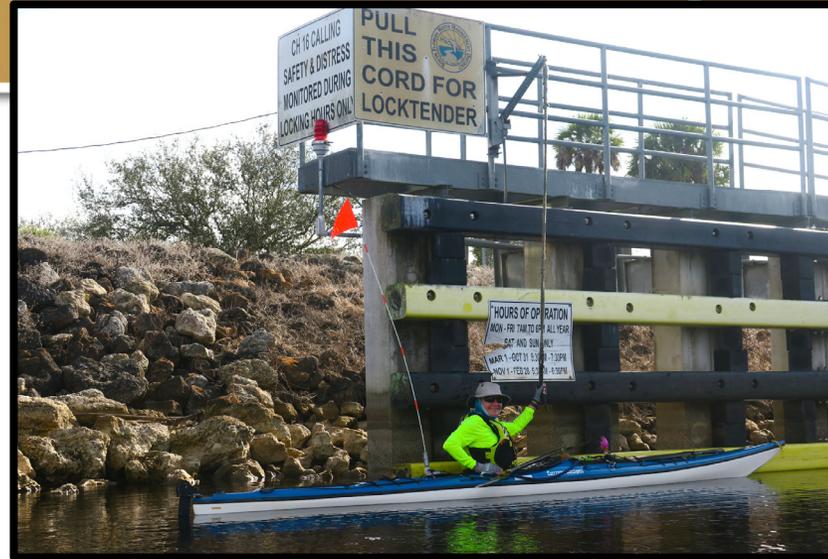
- Corps contractor has mobilized staging area and will soon begin to install warning signage along the Kissimmee River. Project duration ~ 6 months.





Kissimmee River Multi-Day Paddle Event

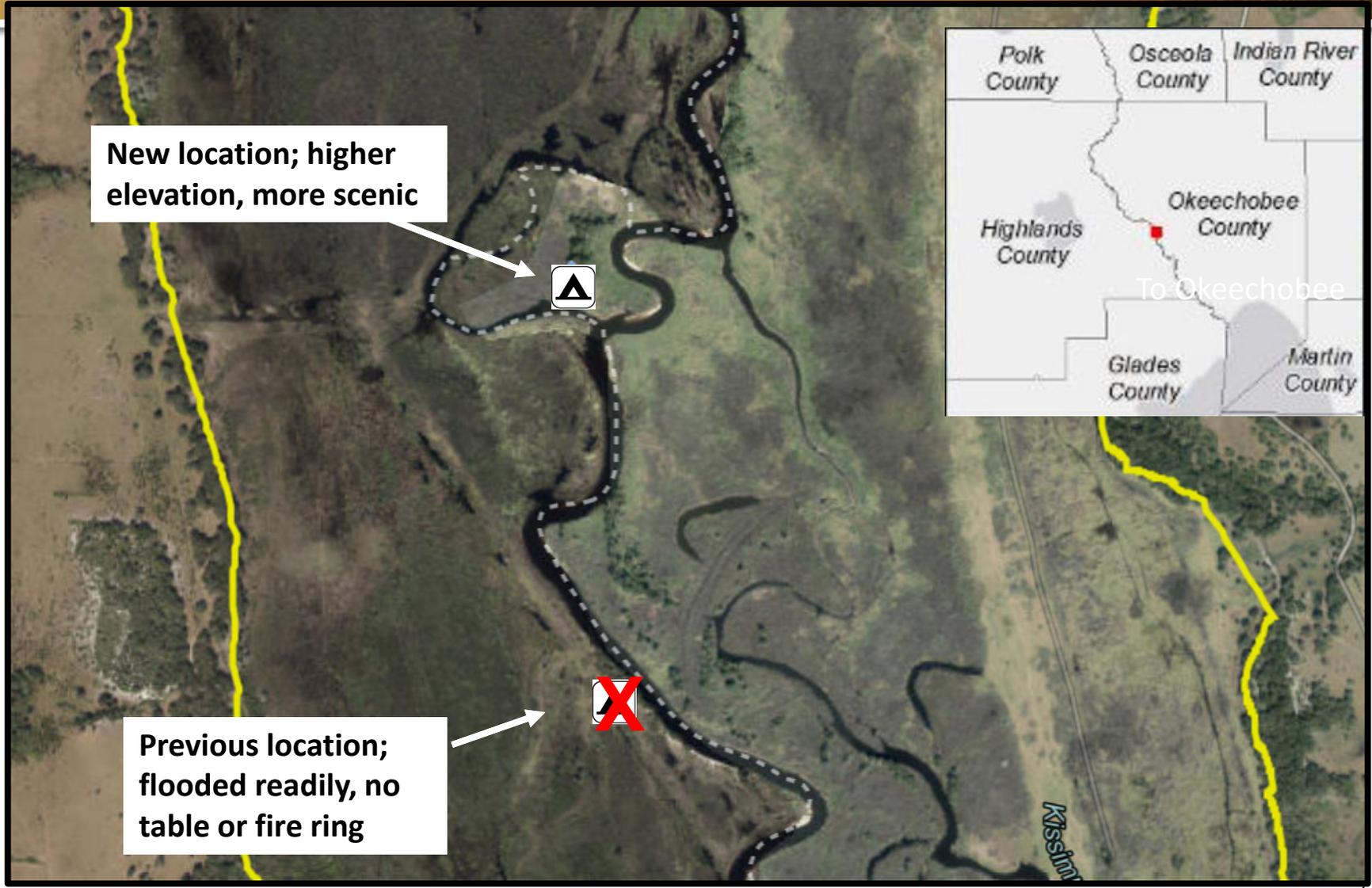
- Florida Paddlers Trail Association (FPTA) recently conducted a 6-day paddle from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee.
- Thanks to volunteers who worked on new river campsites.
- Currently working on the Kissimmee River Blueway designation.





Kissimmee River Boney Marsh Boat-in Campsite Relocated

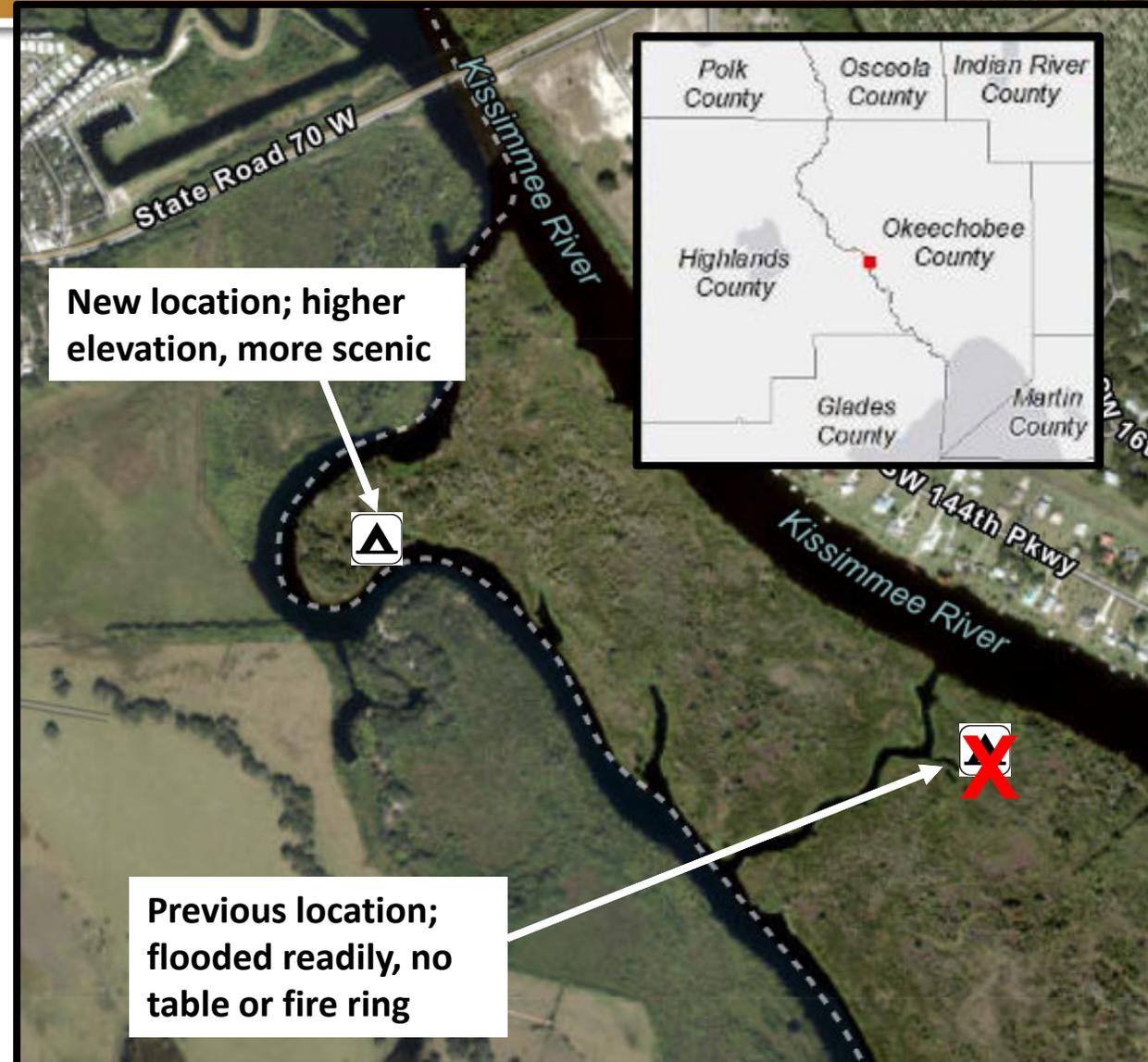
- Boney Marsh boat-in campsite relocated to a better area.
 - Primitive campsite with picnic table and fire ring.
 - Boat-in accessible only.





Kissimmee River S-65E Boat-in Campsite Relocated

- S-65E boat-in campsite relocated to a better area.
 - Primitive campsite with picnic table and fire ring.
 - Boat-in accessible only.
- A Special Use License to camp can be obtained at:
(<https://www.sfwmd.gov/recreation/sul>)

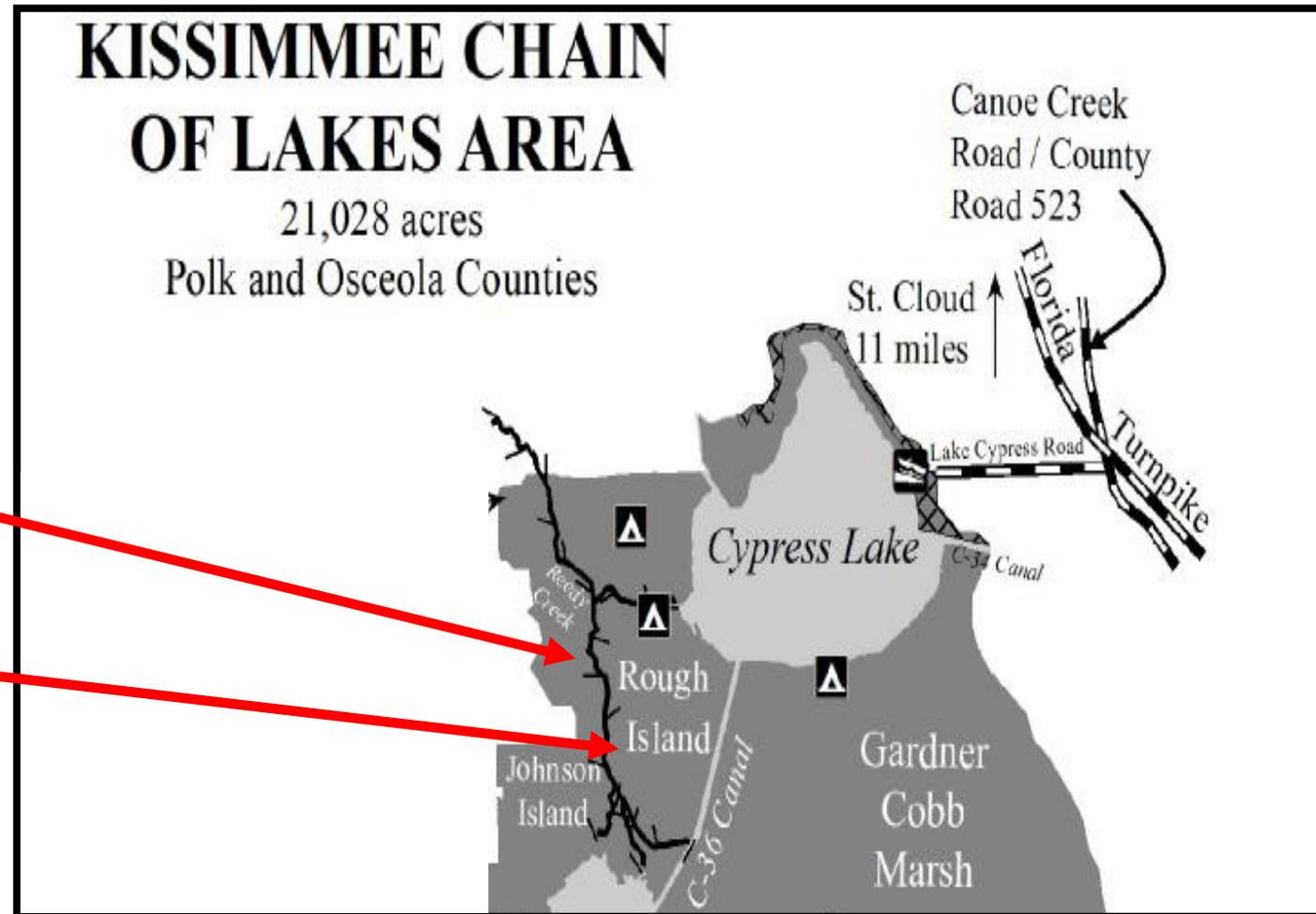




Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (KCOL) Campsite Additions

➤ Plan to designate two existing day use areas in the KCOL Management Area to primitive camping areas.

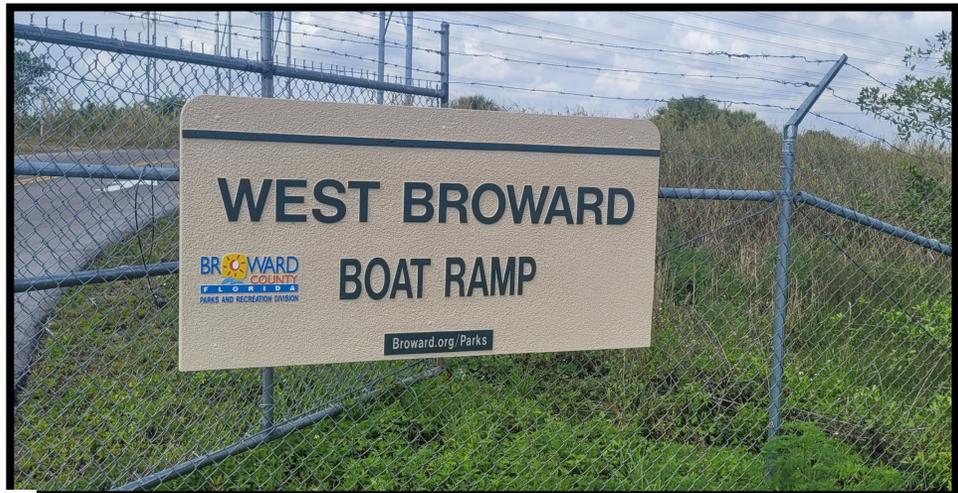
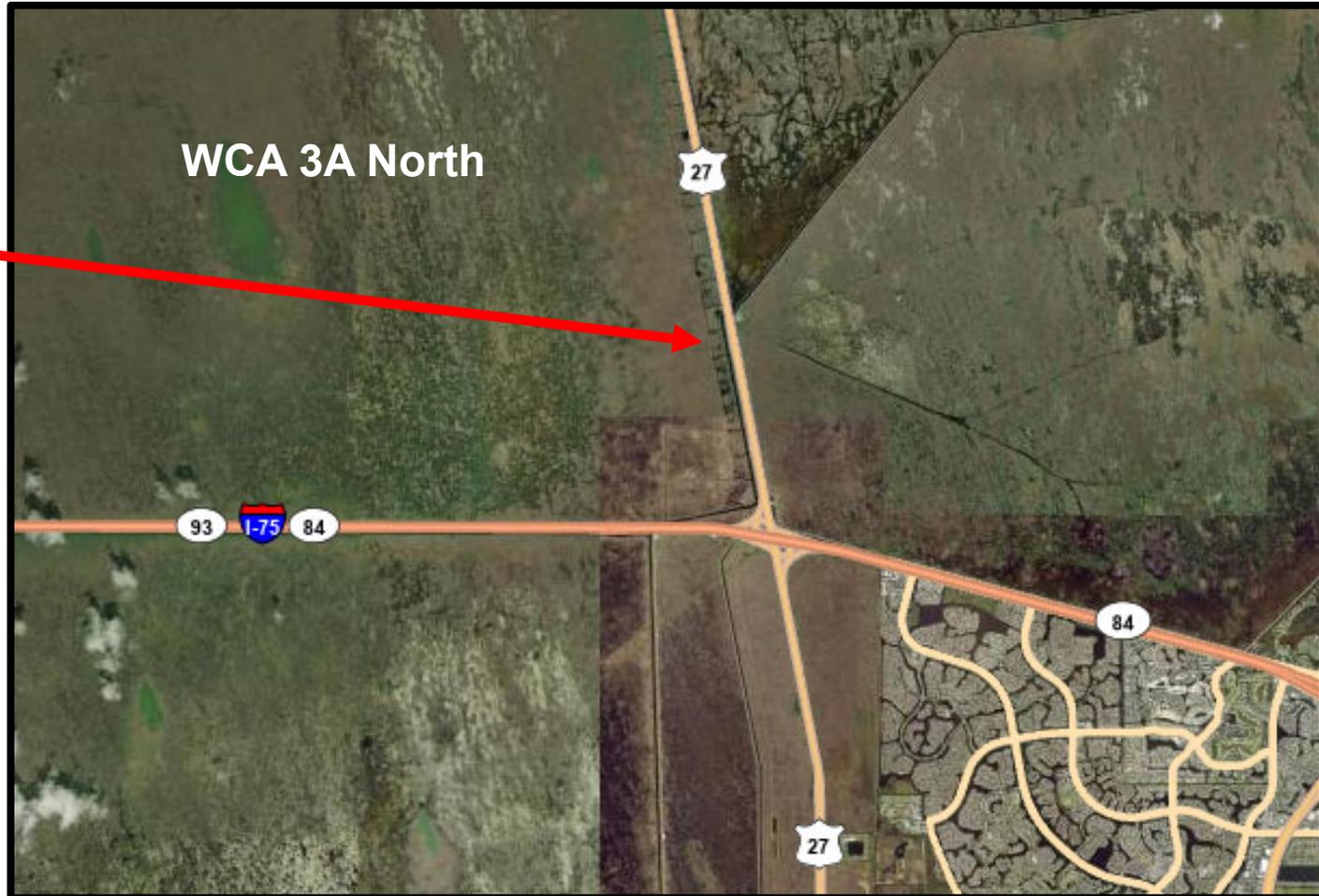
- Cowboy Camp 
- Rough Island South Hammock 





West Broward Boat Ramp

➤ Boat ramp and parking area has been reopened located in western Broward County on west side of US 27.





West Broward Boat Ramp

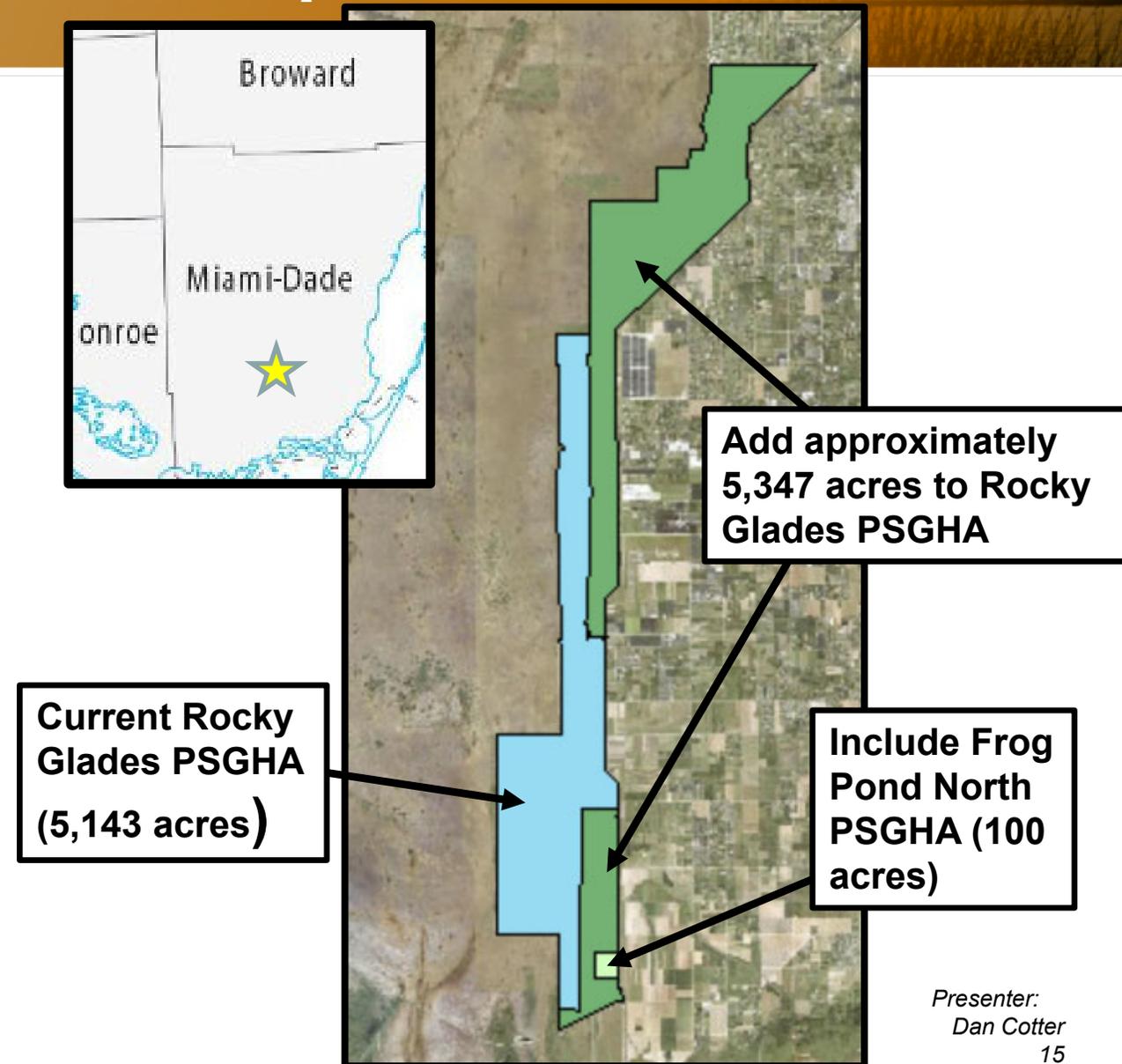
- Parking area and ramp have been refurbished.
 - Thanks to Broward County and FWC.





Rocky Glades PSGHA Expansion

- Rocky Glades Public Small Game Hunting Area (PSGHA) is located in Miami-Dade County.
 - Plan to expand area by ~5,347 acres to allow for more opportunities, including python removals, and apply consistent rules and regulations across entire area. Area to total ~10,490 acres.
 - Will go to District's Governing Board for approval of area expansion.



C-44 Stormwater Treatment Area

- C-44 is located in Martin County.
 - Consists of an approximate 3,400-acre reservoir and 6,300-acre stormwater treatment area.





C-44 Stormwater Treatment Area

- Plan to construct parking trailhead facilities for access to the STA.
 - Engineer designs are complete and include:
 - Parking include ADA spots
 - Kiosks and interpretive signage
 - Prefab concrete restroom
 - Shelter and benches at parking area and designated areas within the STA



Example parking area and trailhead amenities



Interpretive kiosks



C-44 Stormwater Treatment Area & Reservoir

- Will go to District's Governing Board for public access designation and hunting approval.
- Phase 1- Open for managed activities:
 - Audubon guided birding tours
 - FWC managed waterfowl and alligator hunts
- Phase 2- Construct parking trailhead facilities for access to the STA.
 - Activities to include hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing.



Audubon birding tour

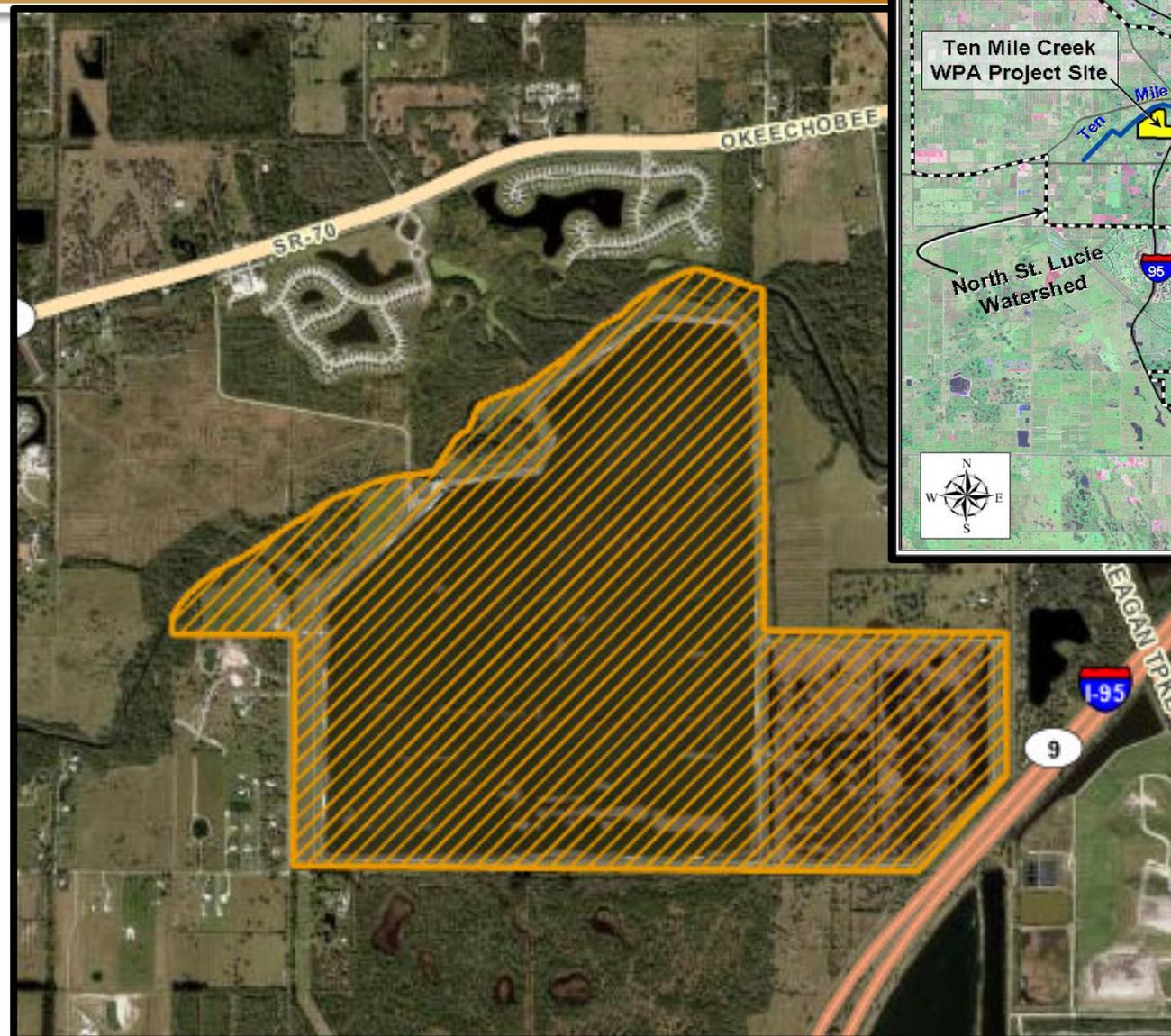


WW gator hunt



Ten Mile Creek (TMC) Water Preserve Area

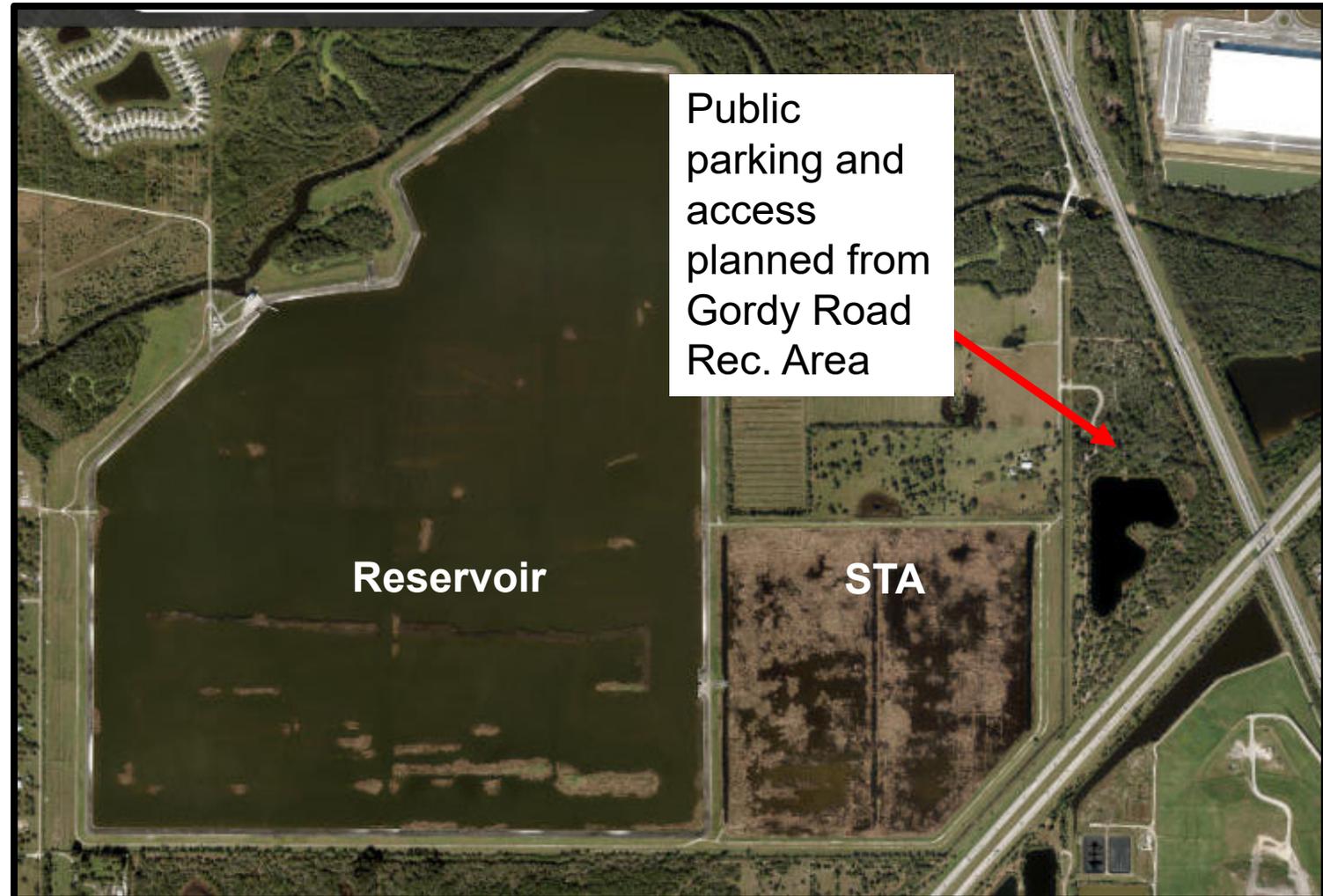
- TMC is located in St. Lucie County.
 - Consists of an approximate 526 acre reservoir and 132 acre stormwater treatment area.





Ten Mile Creek Water Preserve Area

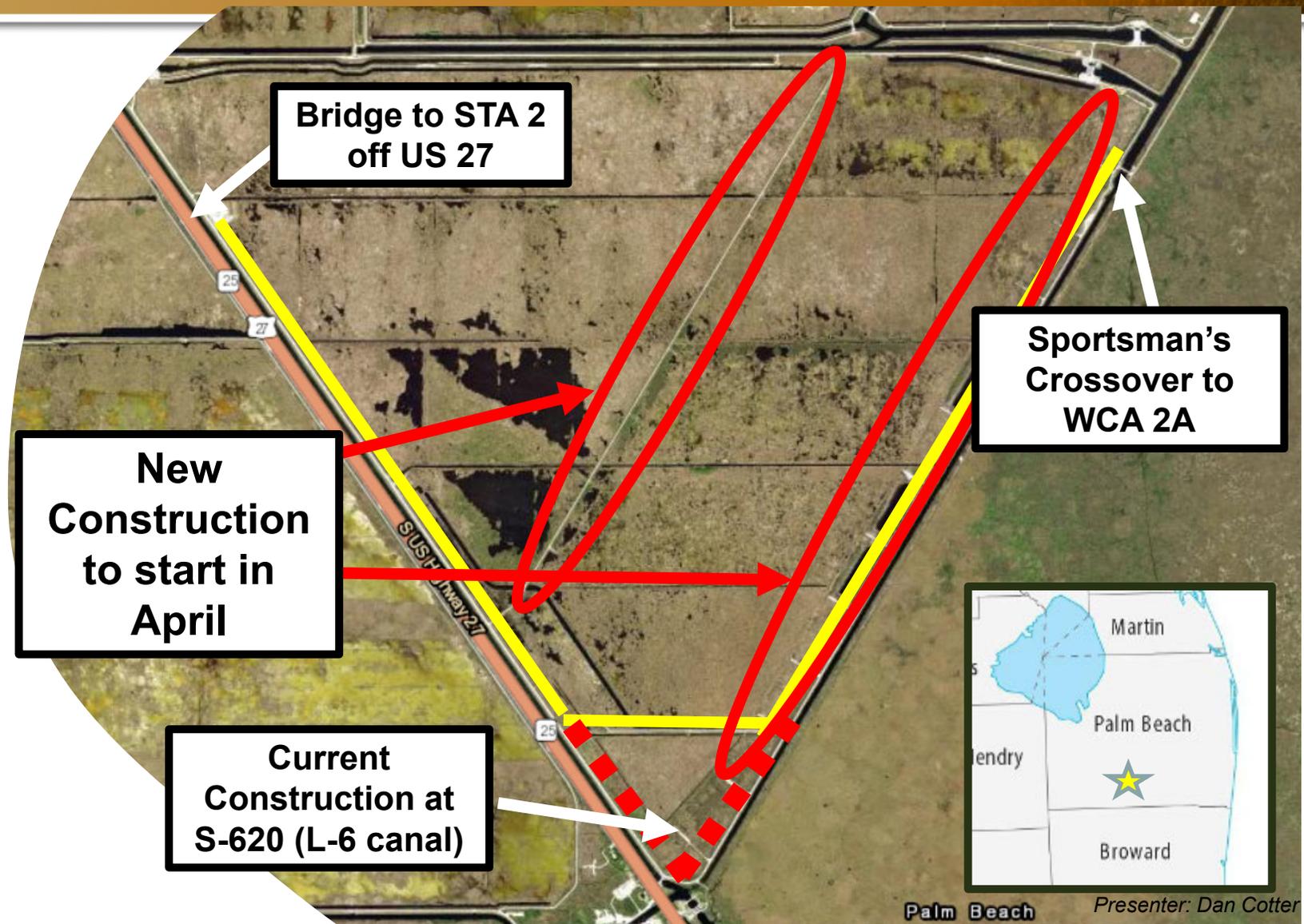
- Future public parking and access to TMC will be from St. Lucie County's Gordy Road Recreation Area.
 - Activities will include hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing.
 - Will go to District's Governing Board for public access designation approval.





Stormwater Treatment Area 2 Closure Update

- Temporary access on Saturdays and Sundays thru STA 2 to WCA 2A is currently being allowed around the S-620 construction.
- Complete temporary closure will need to start in April due to new construction - raising of FPL pads.
- Projected completion of construction to be Nov.-Dec. 2024.





Public Use Facility Refurbishment Projects

CREW Bird Rookery Boardwalk

- CREW Bird Rookery Swamp located in Collier County.
 - 1400' boardwalk links to 12 miles of hiking and biking trails.
 - Replacement of structure under design this year.
 - Construction to refurbish boardwalk scheduled for next year.





Public Use Facility Refurbishment Projects

Stormwater Treatment Area 1W Boardwalk

- STA 1W boardwalk/overlook located in West Palm Beach.
 - Boardwalk was recently refurbished.





Public Use Facility Refurbishment Projects Hungryland – Nine Gems Parking Area

- Hungryland – Nine Gems located in Martin County.
 - Parking area needed to be repaired.





Public Use Facility Refurbishment Projects Hungryland – Nine Gems Parking Area

➤ Parking area has recently been completely redone.



After



Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Volunteer Project

- On January 13th KCOL waterway cleanup held by Kissimmee River Valley Sportsman Association (KRVSA).
 - 51 volunteers, 15 airboats, 3 side by sides.
 - 2,200 pounds of trash.
 - Volunteer in-kind services valued over \$12,000.





Florida Trail Association Volunteer Led Hike

➤ On February 24th volunteers from the Florida Trail Assoc. conducted an annual hike event to celebrate 10 miles of the Florida National Scenic Trail. Took place at the District's Micco Landing property on the Kissimmee River located in Okeechobee County.

➤ 13 Volunteers

➤ 49 Hikers





Upcoming Kissimmee River Volunteer Project

- On Saturday May 4th there will be a volunteer workday scheduled to remove old fence posts and debris and assist with the installation of public use signage.
- If wishing to participate, please contact Matt Nelson from Florida Sportsmen Conservation Association (FSCA) at mattnelson480@gmail.com.



**Volunteers
removing posts**



**Signs for
airboat line**

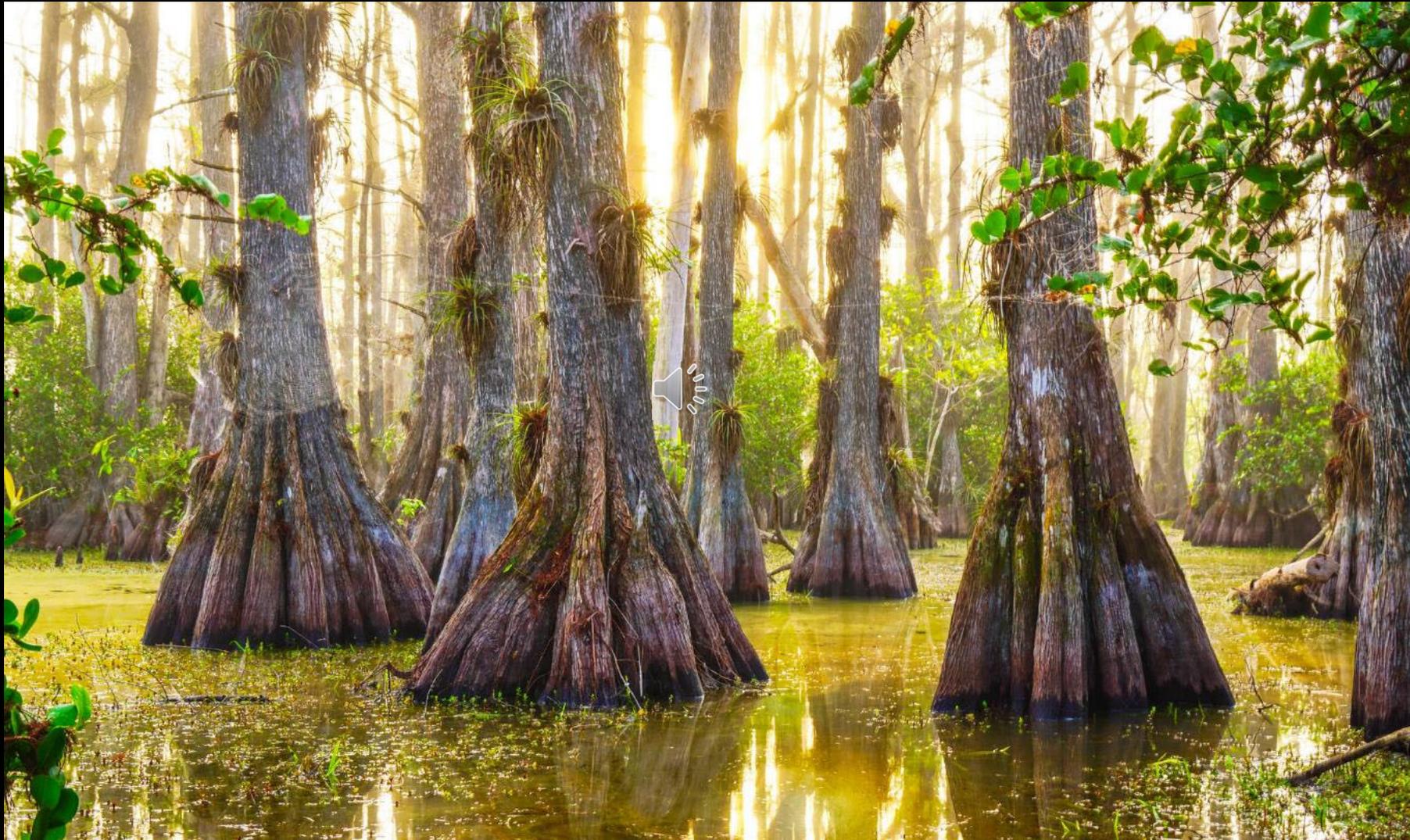


Questions / Comments?

If you would like to be informed of upcoming meetings please subscribe at no-cost to:
<https://SFWMD.link/30QLmka>



BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



32

LISA ANDREWS
OUTREACH/EDUCATION COORDINATOR
BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE

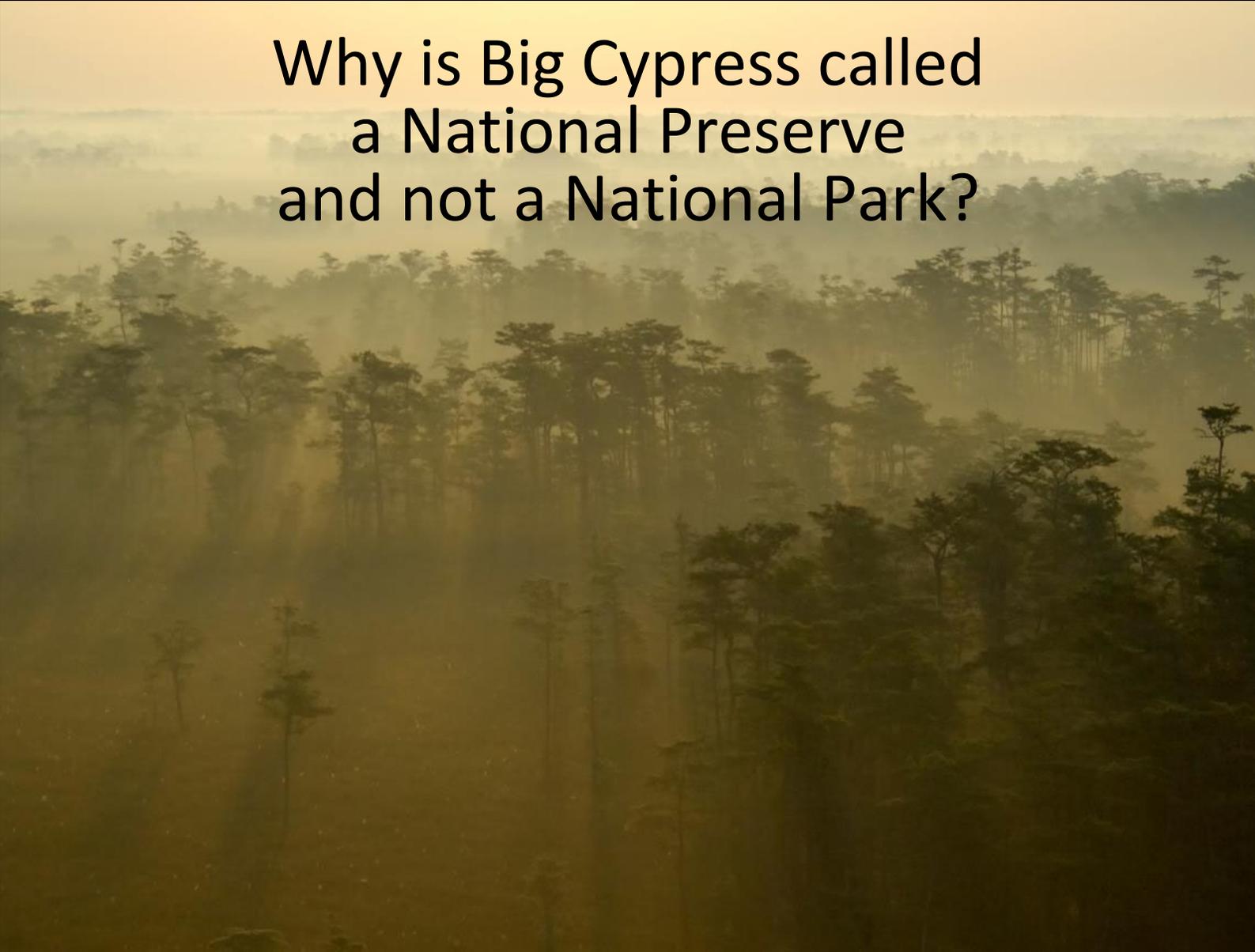
SFWMD RECREATIONAL PUBLIC FORUM
MARCH 25, 2024

The National Park Service

America's Best Idea



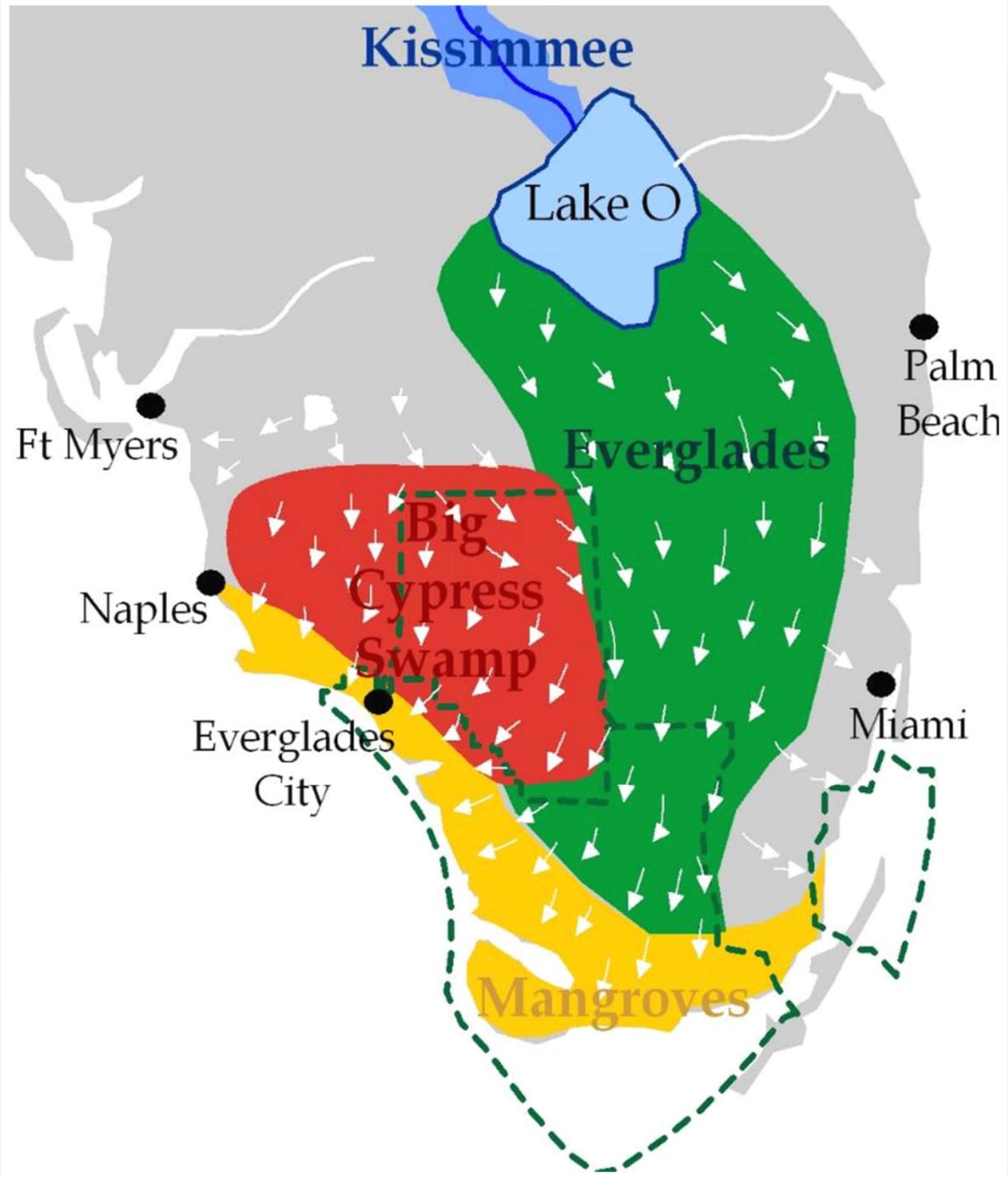


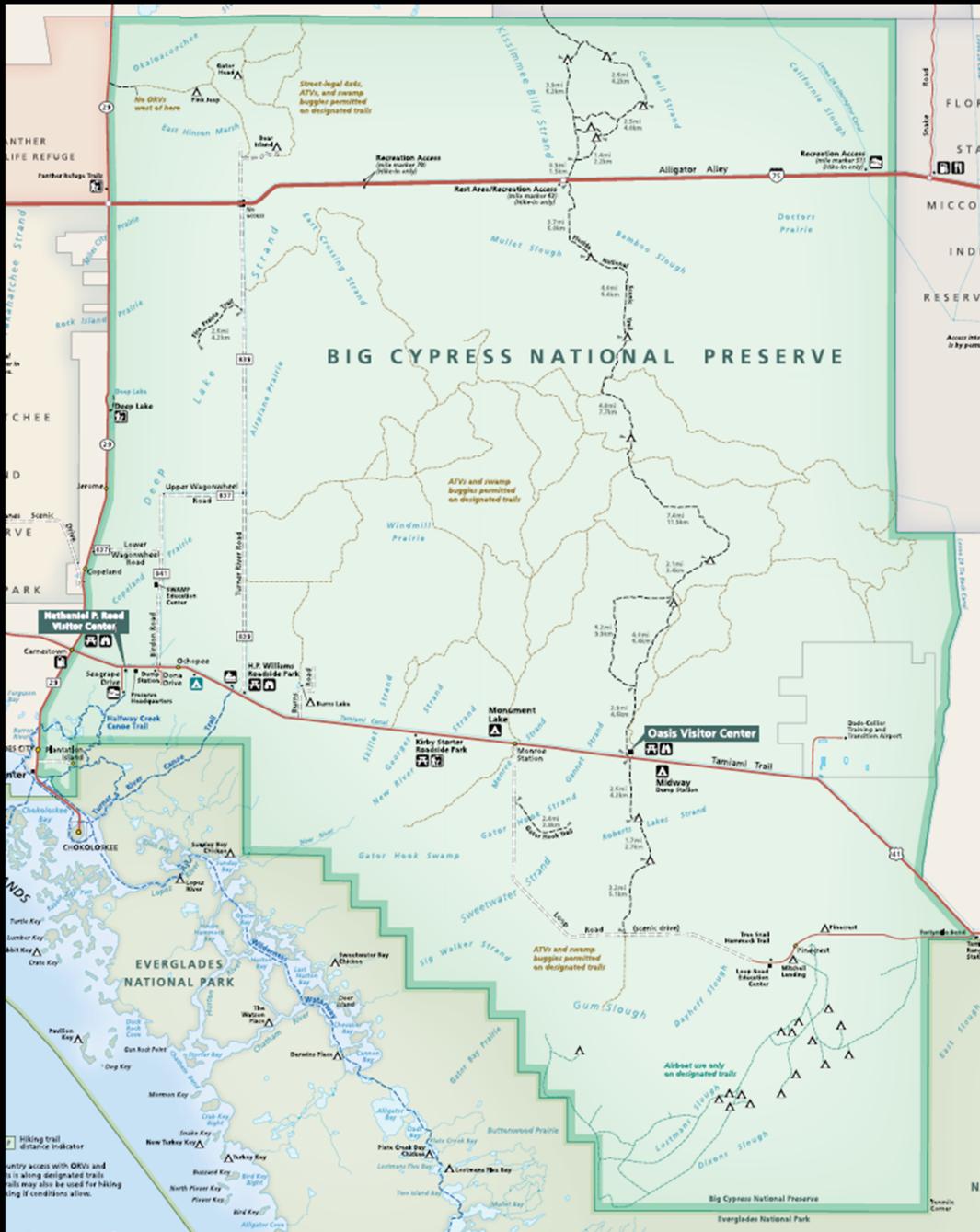


Why is Big Cypress called
a National Preserve
and not a National Park?







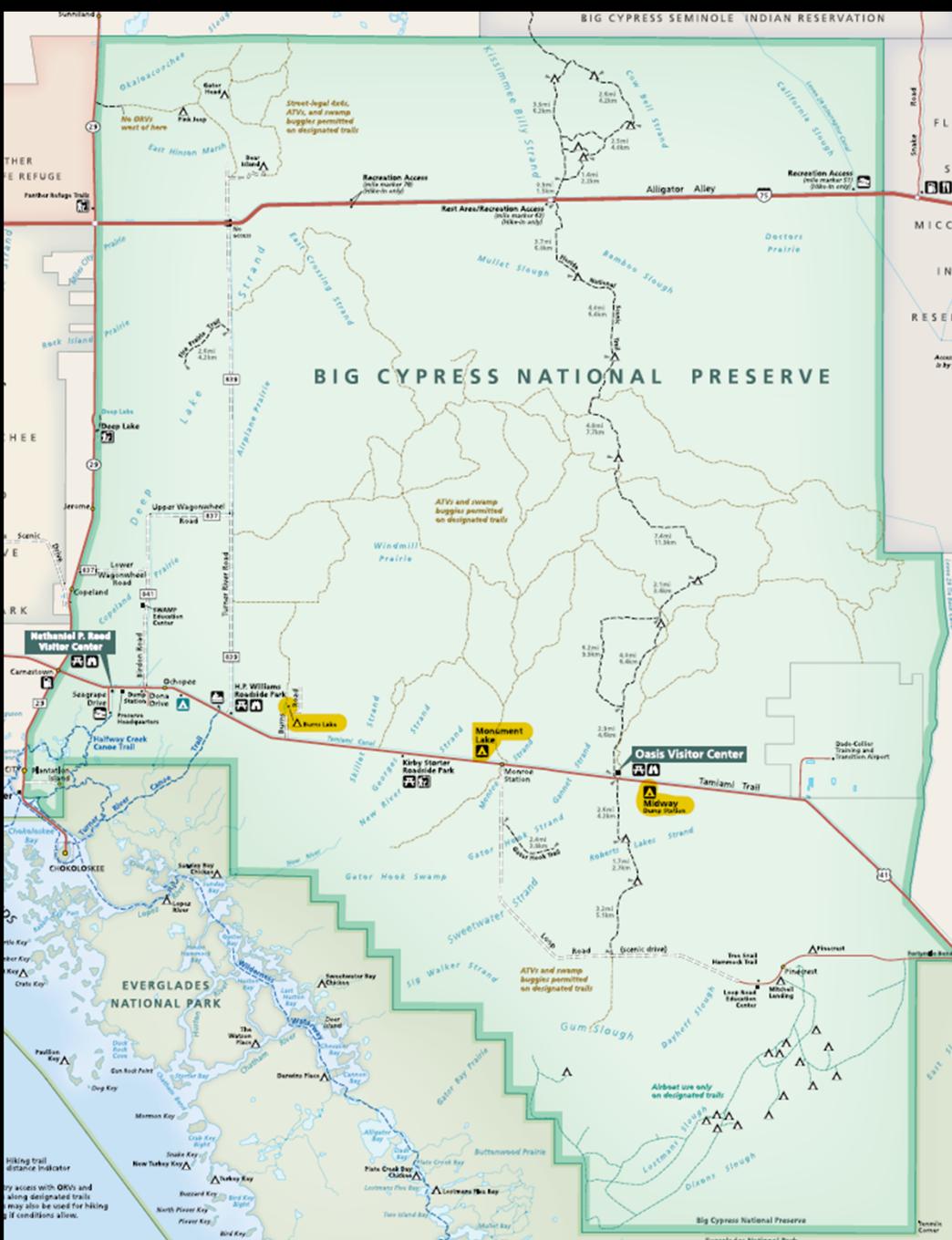


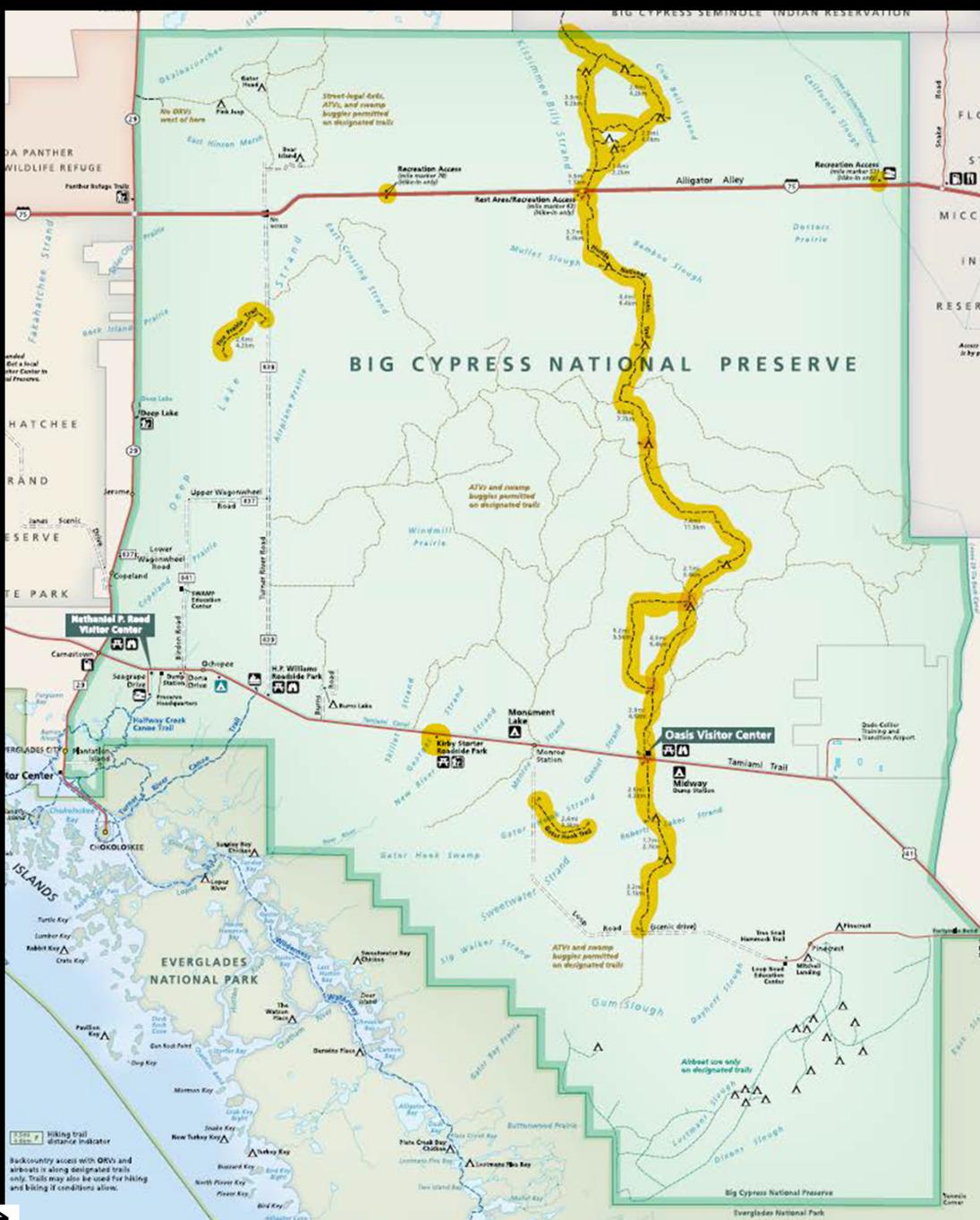




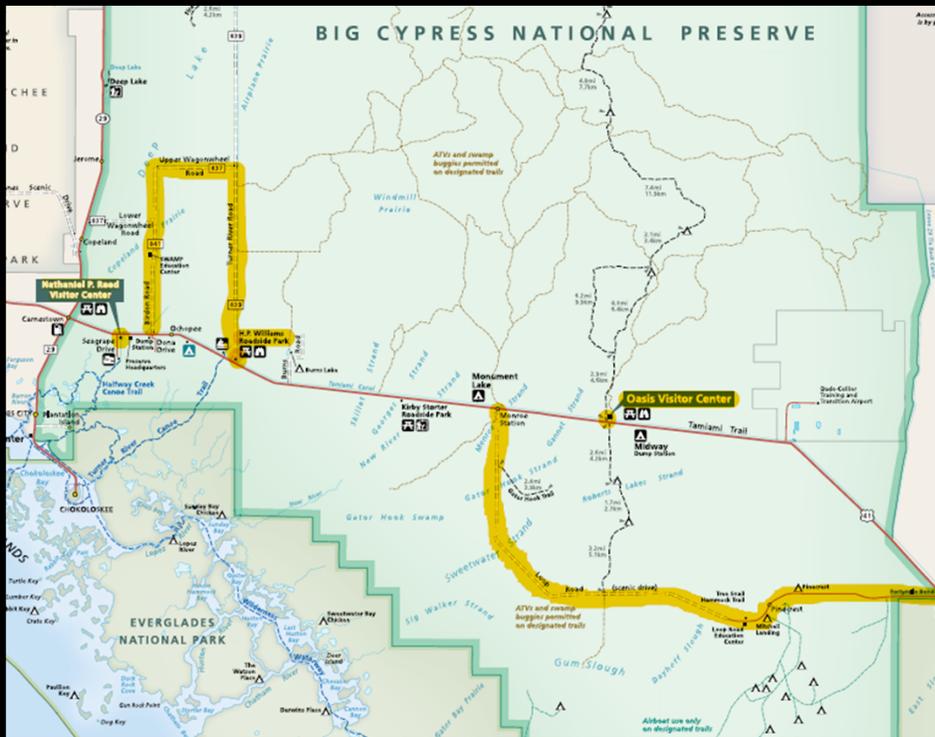












Scenic Drives and Wildlife Viewing

- Turner River Road, Wagon Wheel Rd., Birdon Rd. Loop
- Loop Road
- HP Williams Roadside
- Oasis VC
- Reed VC



Oasis Visitor Center



Nathaniel P. Reed Visitor Center



S.W.A.M.P. 6th Grade Environmental Education







For more information

Visit our Website and Facebook page

www.nps.gov/bicy

www.facebook.com/BigCypressNPS

Or contact:

Tom Forsyth, Superintendent

Big Cypress National Preserve

239-695-1101

Thomas_Forsyth@nps.gov



Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park



Ezell (BJ) Givens
Bureau Chief

Division of Recreation & Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Presentation Overview

Review early history of the Florida Park Services, to include how Fakahatchee Strand Preserve fits within the system of parks, an overview of early acquisition efforts, the effects of logging and recreation opportunities today.



Florida Park Service – Mission

To provide resource-based recreation while preserving, interpreting and restoring natural and cultural resources.



Southwest District – D4

Sumter to Monroe County

(excluding Keys)

34 State Parks

Fakahatchee Largest Park in the State





Florida Park Service - Unit Designations

State Parks

Balance of Recreation and
Preservation

Historic Sites

Prioritize Specific Event or Feature

Recreation Areas

Prioritize Recreation





Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

Preserve
Prioritize Natural Resources over
Recreation





Fakahatchee Strand - Early Conservation Efforts

Intact Cypress Forest

1922 - Henry Ford





Fakahatchee Strand - Early Conservation Efforts

1930's – New Deal Era - CCC

1935 - Florida State Park System
Fakahatchee not Considered

1948 – Rejected for NPS Status





Logging the Strand

Lee Tidewater Cypress Company

1944- 1957 - Cypress Logged

1 Million Board Feet Per Week

Town of Copeland





Logging the Strand

Construction of Trams

Steam Engines

Orange Trees





Swamp Land for Sale

1966 - Gulf American Land Company

Sold 1.4 Acres Lots

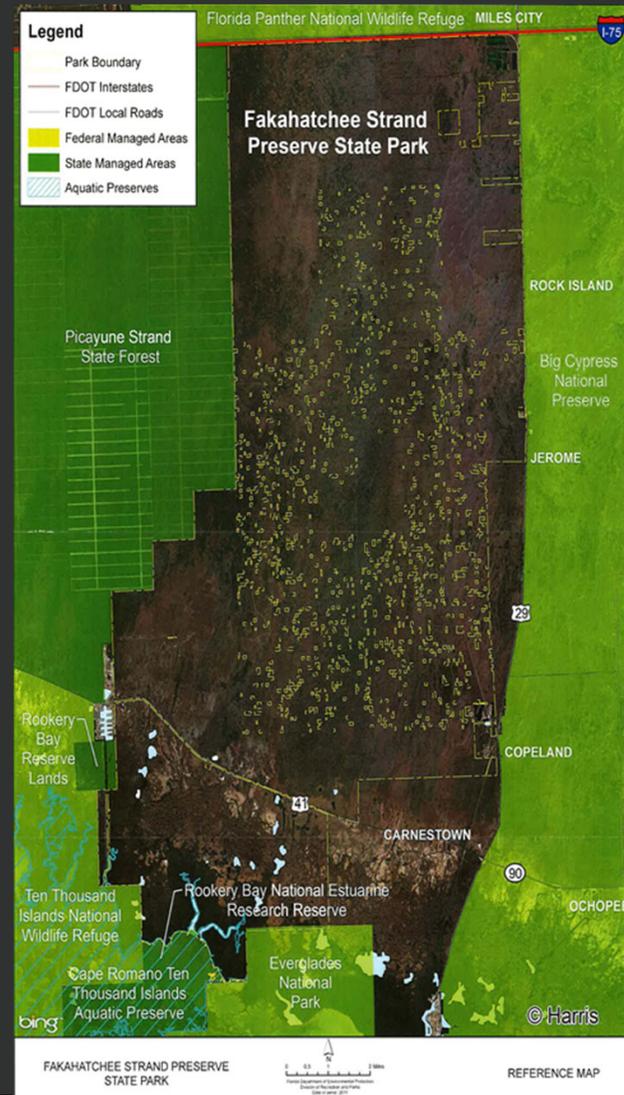




Fakahatchee Strand Preserve – Established

1972 – First 9,235 Acres from Tidewater

Inholding Acquisitions





Fakahatchee – Today

85,000 Acres

Trams to trails





Fakahatchee – Superlatives

Largest Park in the System

Crucial Habitat for a Significant number of Imperiled Species

Largest Concentration and Diversity of Orchids in the US

Largest Population of Native Royal Palms in the US

Largest Strand Swamp in the World



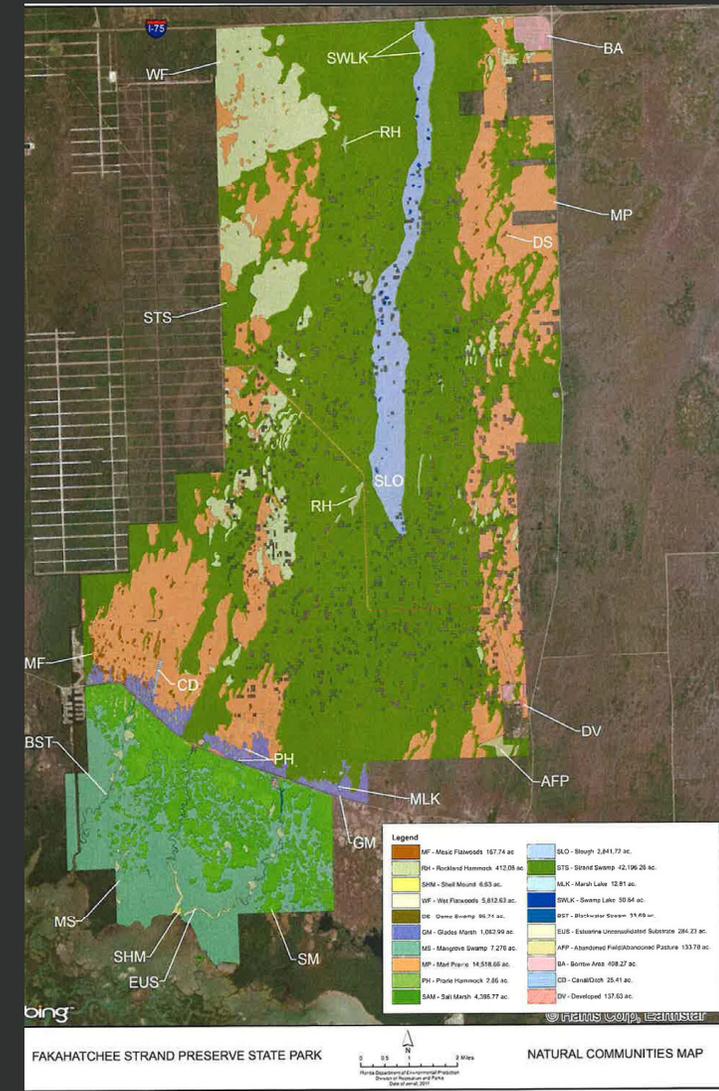


What's a Strand

Webster

A strand is a shallow, forested usually elongated depression or channel situated in a trough within a flat limestone plain.

20 miles long X 5 miles wide.





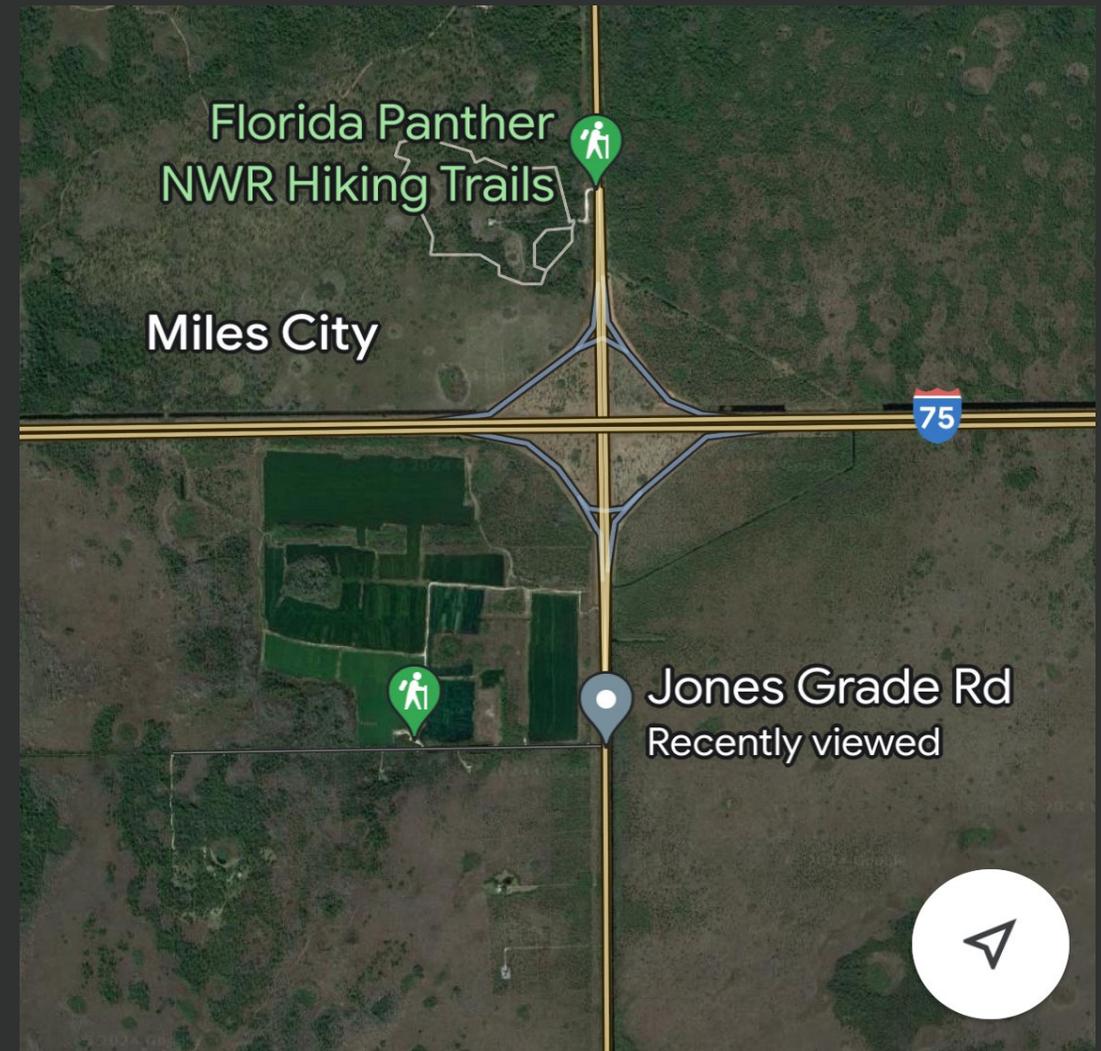
Recreation – Jones Grade

Series of Large Deep Borrow Pits

Fishing, Kayaking, but no Swimming

Trail System through Strand Swamp

Access off State Road 29, just south of the Interstate 75 intersection.





Recreation – East River Canoe Launch

Small launch tucked away down an unmarked dirt drive off U.S. 41 South side of the road.

Rookery Viewable from the Shore

Entry By Pre- Reservation Only



Photo © Michael Lanza/TheBigOutside.com



Recreation – Janes Scenic Drive

11 Mile Road

Main access point to most of the hiking and biking trails in the park.

Access off Hwy 29 @ Copeland





Friends of Fakahatchee – Tours

Ghost Rider Trams

Moonlight Tram Tours

Fakahatchee Night Sky Experience

Swamp Walks





Recreation – Big Bend Cypress Boardwalk

**1957 - Lester Norris Saved 640 Acres
From Logging**

Constructed 2,500-ft Long Boardwalk

Deeded to the State Along with 67k

Avg 100k Visitors Annually

**The boardwalk is located off U.S. 41,
about 7 miles west of State Road 29.**





Big Bend Cypress Boardwalk

Average 100k Visitors

Parking for 15

Indian Village Adjacent





Recreation – New Development





Recreation – Big Bend Cypress Boardwalk





Its Your Back Yard





Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park



THANK YOU

Ezell (BJ) Givens
Division of Recreation and Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Green Heart of the Everglades

Rory Feeney
Land Resources Bureau Chief
Recreational Forum
March 25, 2024



Green Heart of the Everglades

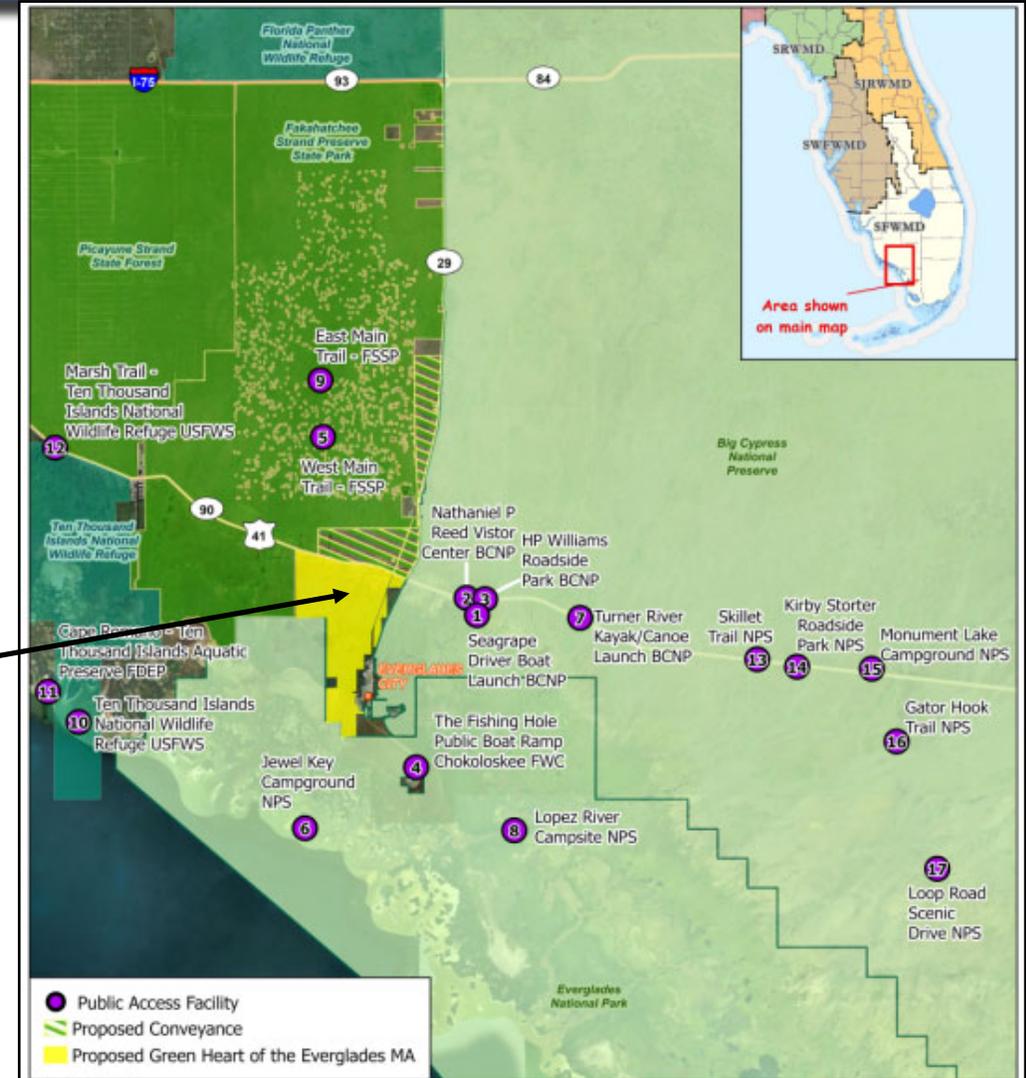
Overview

- Location and Land Acquisition Plan
- Resource Description
- Project Scoping Meeting – Comments
- Interim Management Plan Development
- Next Steps

Green Heart of the Everglades

Project Lands

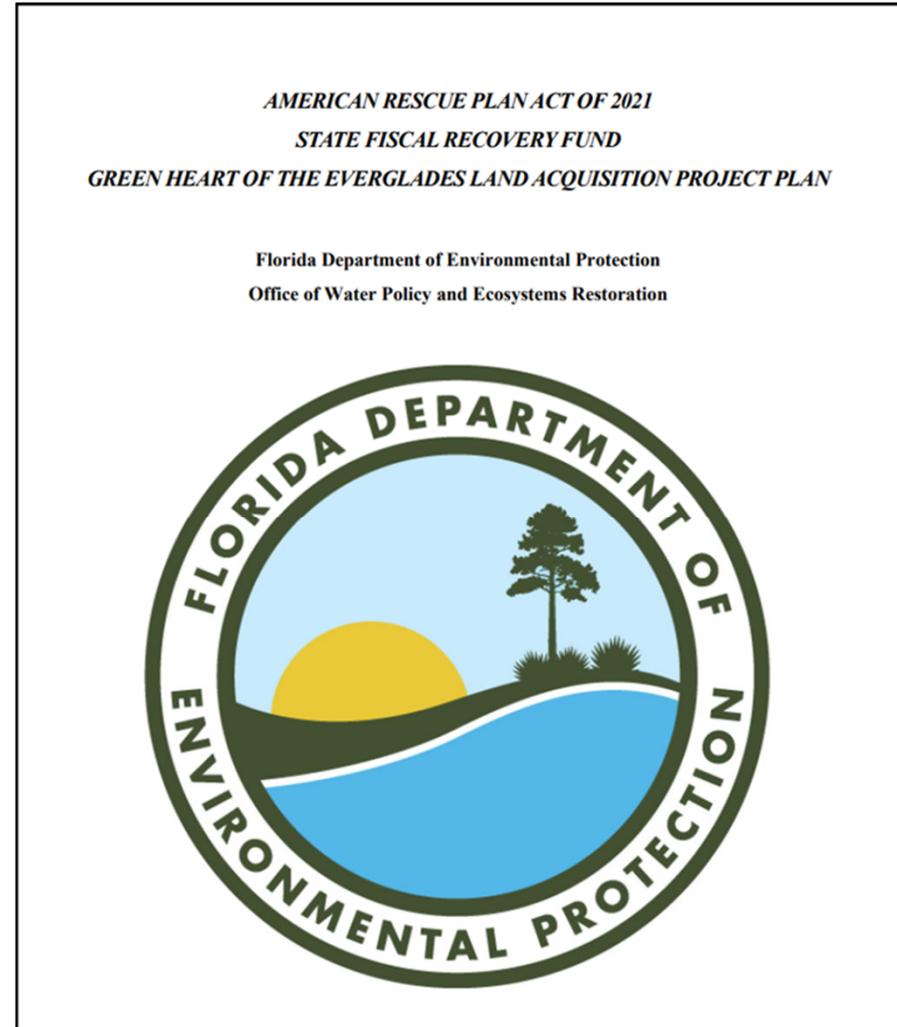
- Approximately 11,053 acres near Everglades City, Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Picayune Strand State Forest



Green Heart of the Everglades

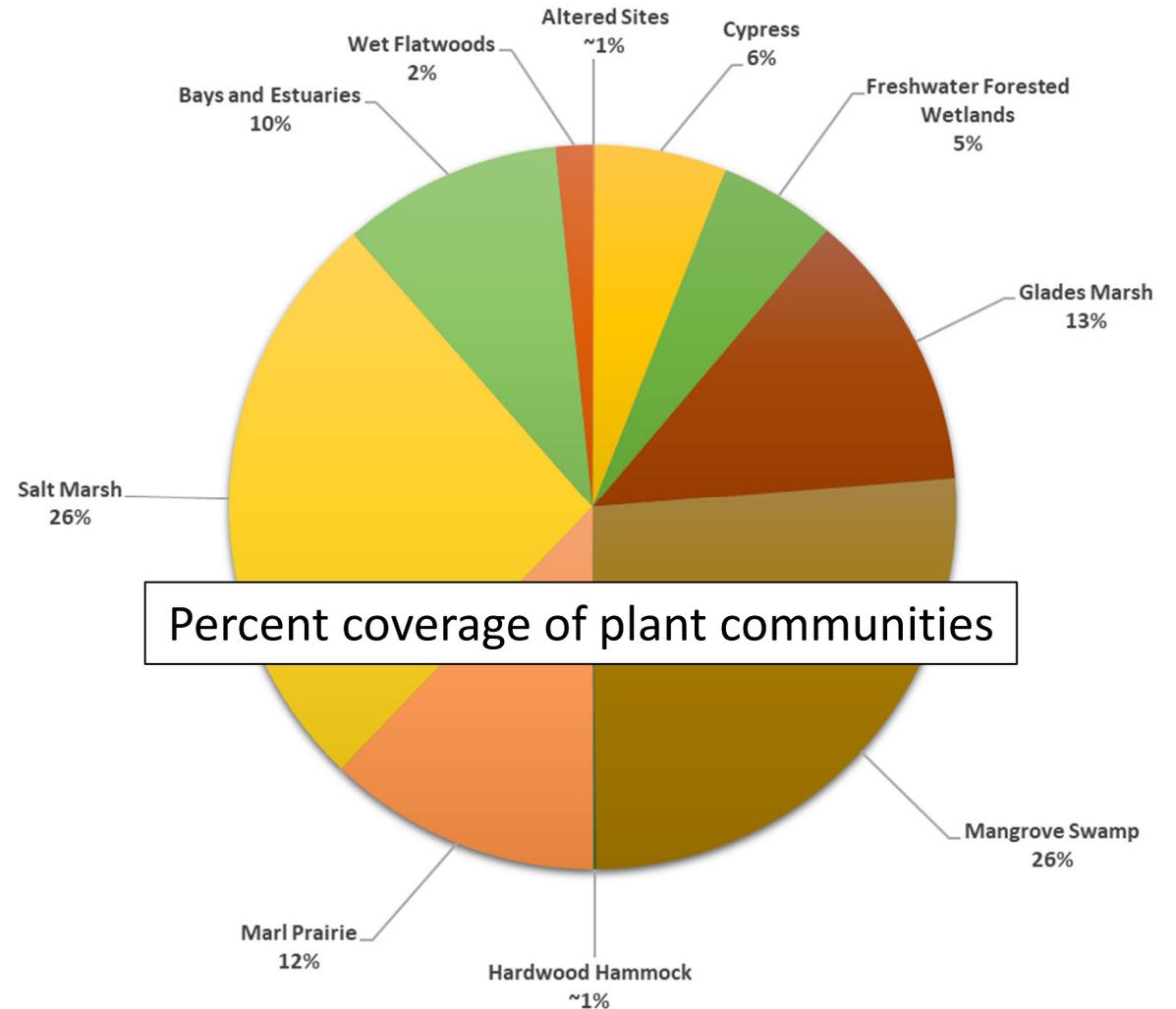
Land Acquisition Project Plan

- Florida Legislature 2022 Appropriation
- 11,053 Acres
- Purchase price \$29,850,000
- Four different landowners
- Oil and mineral rights
- Enhance habitat connectivity
- Preserve exceptional Florida lands



Green Heart of the Everglades

There are nine distinct natural community types within the Green Heart of the Everglades. The District groups natural community types based on the descriptions contained in the Florida Natural Areas Inventory Classification System (FNAI 2010) and the Florida Land Cover Classification System (Kawula & Redner 2018).



Green Heart of the Everglades



Cypress Forests



Wetland Prairies

Green Heart of the Everglades



Coastal Marshes



Mangrove Swamps

Green Heart of the Everglades



9 Federally listed animal species



31 State listed animal species of special concern



120 Florida State Listed Plant Species

- 36 Orchid Species

Green Heart of the Everglades



Florida Panther



Black Bear

Green Heart of the Everglades



Snail Kite



American Alligator

Green Heart of the Everglades



Everglades Mink



Florida Manatee

Green Heart of the Everglades



Ghost Orchid



Little Metalmark Butterfly

Green Heart of the Everglades

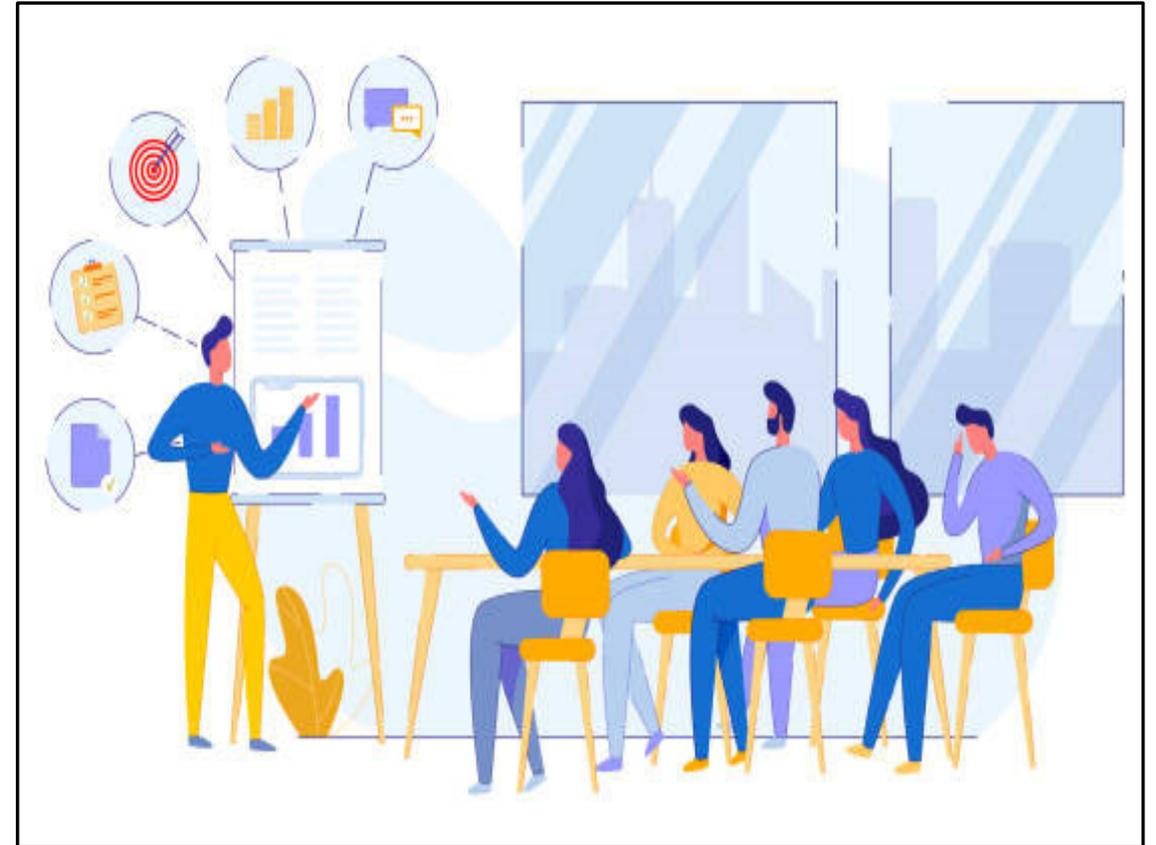


Everglades City – Looking South

Green Heart of the Everglades

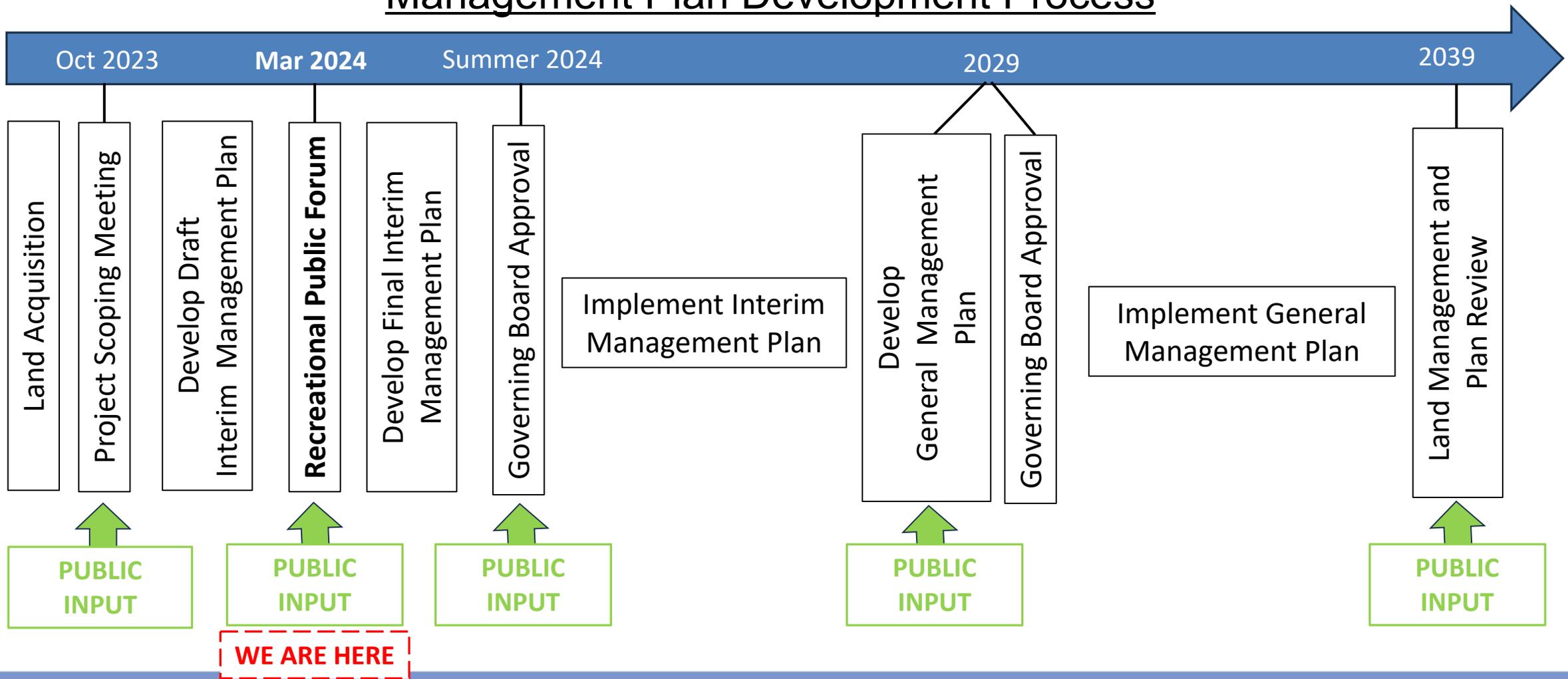
Public Scoping Meeting

- October 17, 2023 at Rookery Bay, Naples
- Purpose: Work with stakeholders to encourage and receive public input regarding the Green Heart of the Everglades Project as we develop the “Green Heart of the Everglades Interim Management Plan”
- Goals:
 - Identify project goals
 - Characterize project needs
 - Identify project constraints and limitations
 - Consider resource and budget requirements



Green Heart of the Everglades

Management Plan Development Process





Green Heart of the Everglades

Justin Nolte
Land Stewardship Section Administrator
Recreational Forum
March 25, 2024



Green Heart of the Everglades

Why Do We Have A Management Plan

- Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, directs the District to:
 - Purchase property to conserve and protect the State's water resources
 - Manage and maintain the District's lands to ensure a between public access, recreation, restoration, and protection of the land.
- The District develops a management plan to describe the acquired property, its resources, and public use opportunities.



sfwmd.gov

Green Heart of the Everglades

District Interim Management Plan

- Establishes purpose for the land
- Establishes interim land use designation
- Identifies land management goals, objectives and activities
- Characterizes the general features and resources on the property
- Incorporates resource protection, public education and recreational opportunities
- Identifies initial land management and maintenance budget requirements
- “Interim Management Plan” is updated after 5 years
- Governing Board adopts the 10-year “General Management Plan”



Green Heart of the Everglades

Interim Management Plan Development

- Outline
 - Executive Summary
 - Introduction
 - Management Goals and Objectives
 - Area History
 - Resource Description and Assessment
 - Public Use
 - Resource Management
 - Administration

CREW Management Area General Management Plan 2021 – 2031
South Florida Water Management District, Land Stewardship Section

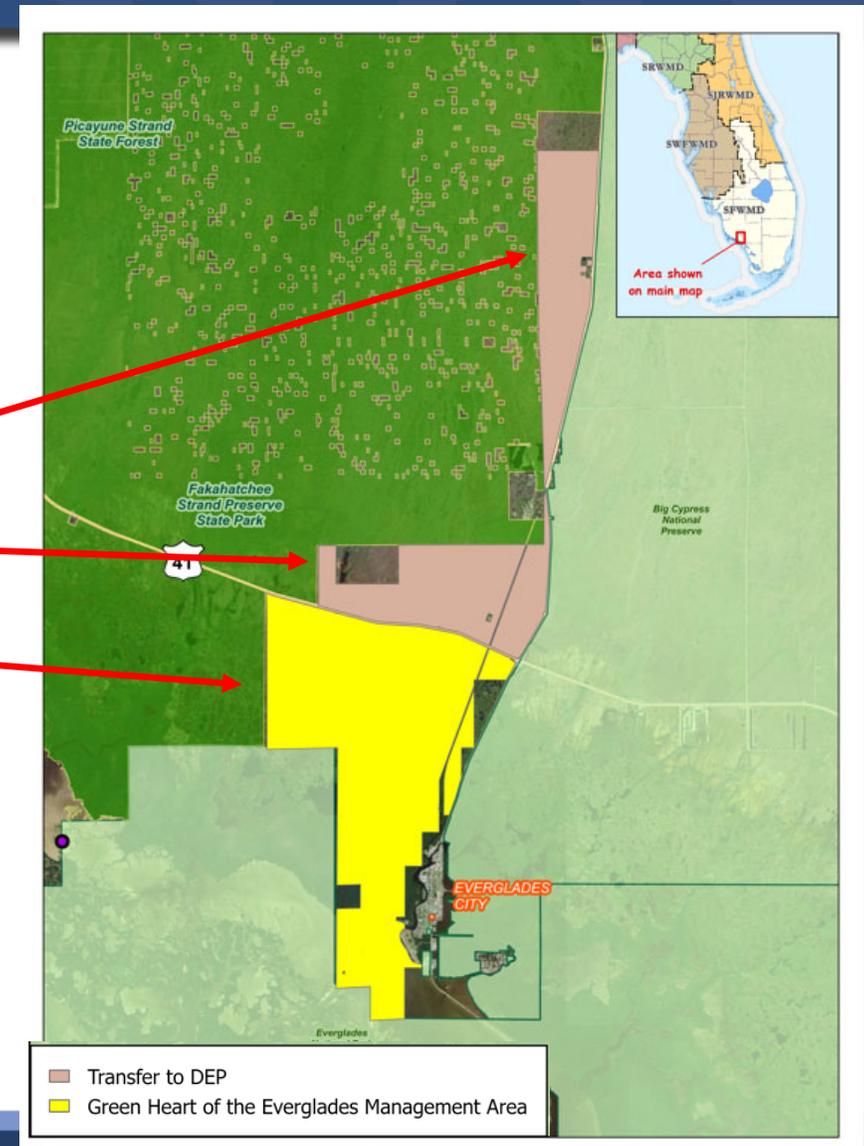
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Green Heart of the Everglades

Interim Land Management Plan Goals and Objectives

- Goal 1 - Designate the land use and resource managers for the property.
 - Transfer lands north of US41 to DEP
 - Retain lands south of US41
 - Designate as District Management Area
 - Authorize FWC to create Public Small Game Hunt Area



Green Heart of the Everglades

Management of Wildlife and Habitats

- Goal 2 – Manage natural communities and modified habitats to protect and enhance floral and faunal resources.
 - Assess current condition and develop a strategy
 - Identify wildlife and habitat monitoring needs
 - Prescribed burning



Green Heart of the Everglades



Camera trap on Abiaki Prairie



Fewflower milkweed

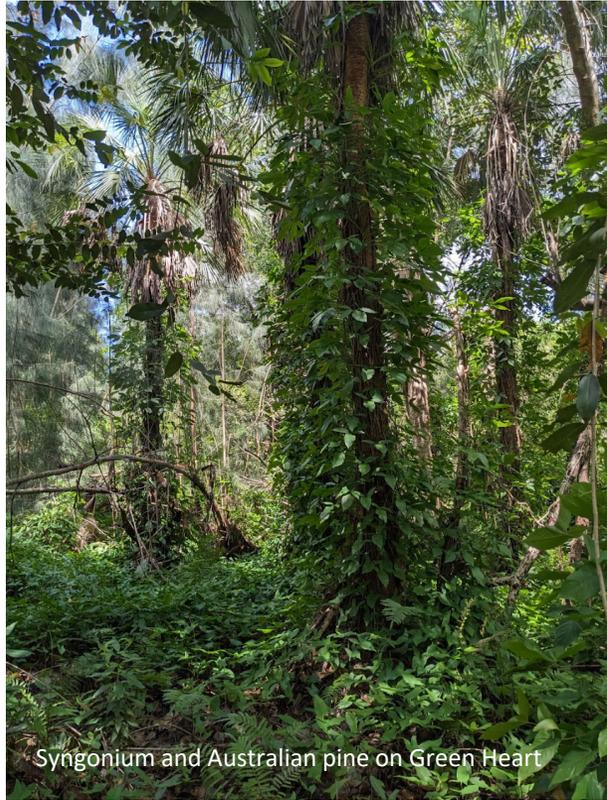
Green Heart of the Everglades

Nuisance and Invasive Species Management

- Goal 3 – Manage nuisance and invasive species to minimize their negative impacts on native species and natural communities.



Anthony Flanagan



Syngonium and Australian pine on Green Heart

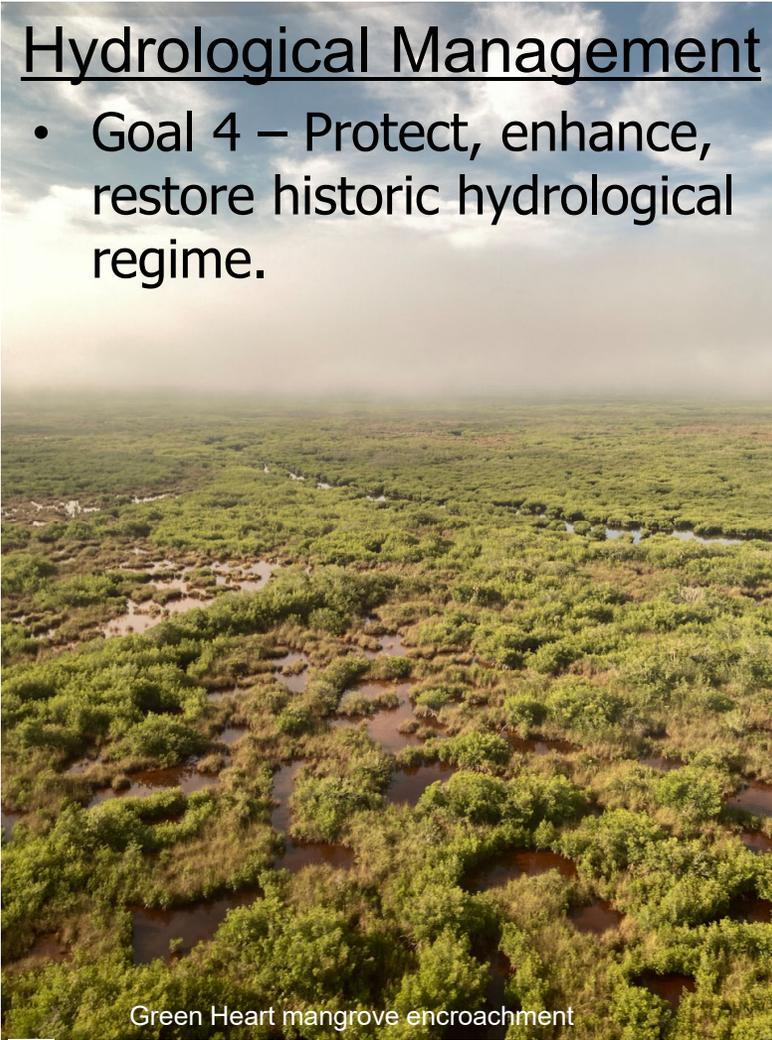


Camera trap on Abiaki Prairie

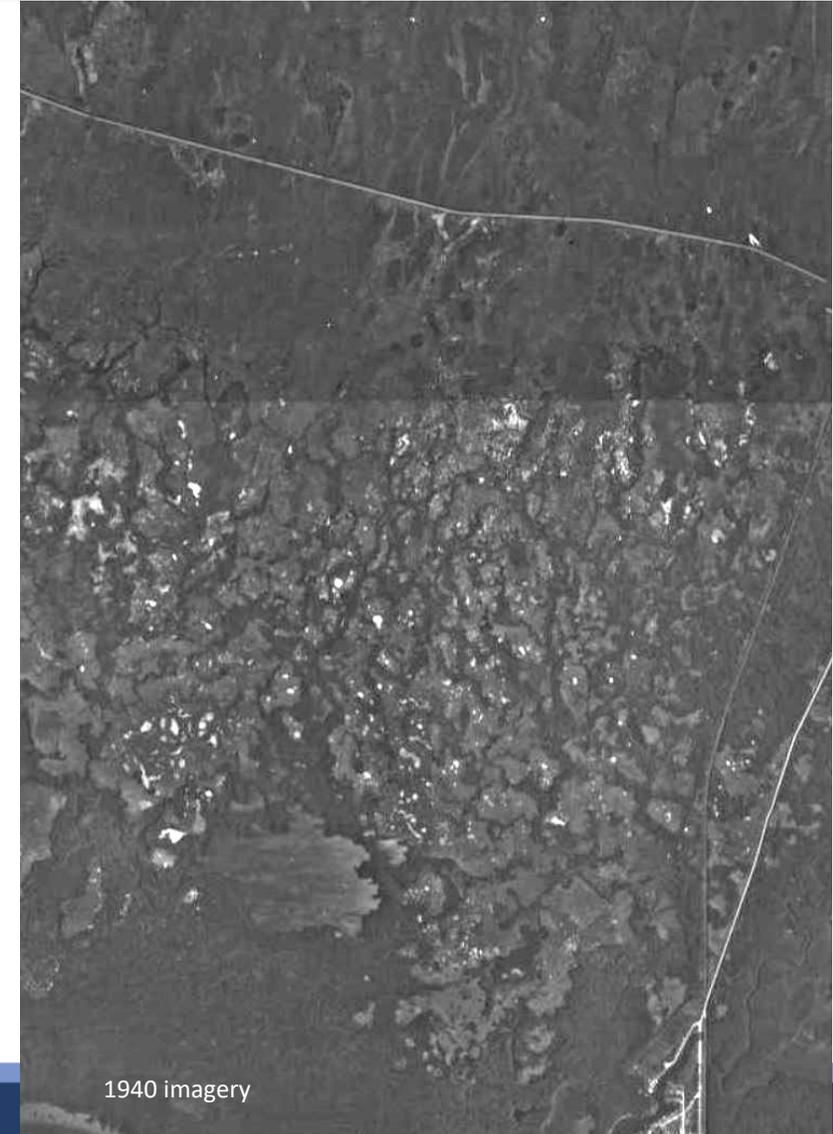
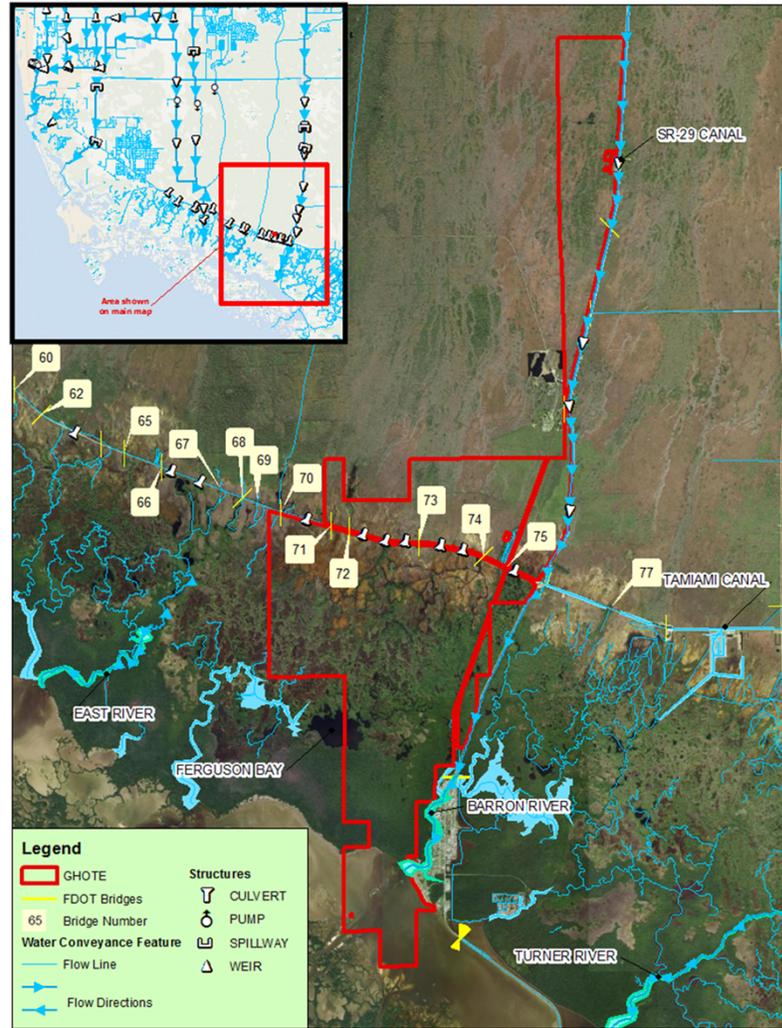
Green Heart of the Everglades

Hydrological Management

- Goal 4 – Protect, enhance, restore historic hydrological regime.



Green Heart mangrove encroachment



1940 imagery

Green Heart of the Everglades

Public Access and Recreational Opportunities

- Goal 5 – Provide nature-based recreational opportunities.
 - Coordinate with FWC on hunting regulations
 - Allow motorized vessel access
 - Existing access is limited



Duck hunting at an STA



Ferguson Bay Trophy Snook

Green Heart of the Everglades

Operation and Maintenance of Capital Facilities and Infrastructure

- Goal 6 – Identify, maintain, and improve facilities and infrastructure.
 - Very few existing facilities
 - Seek partners and funding



Derelict vessel on Green Heart



Airboat tour operator off US41

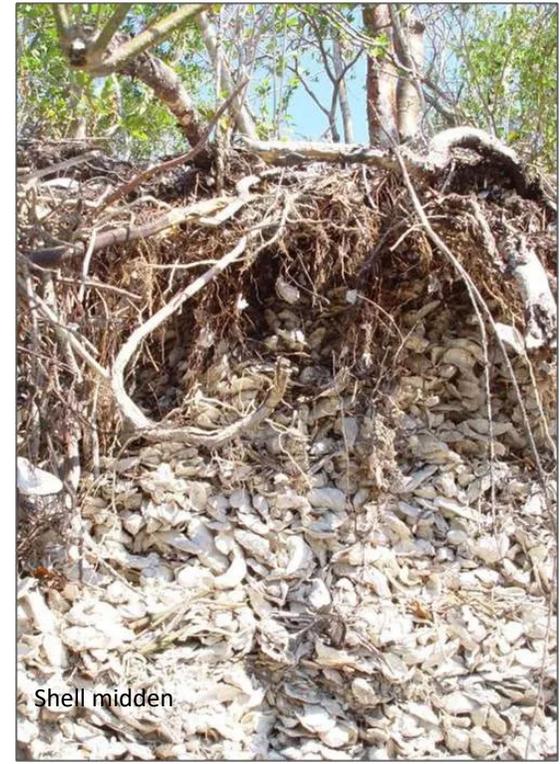


STA 5/6 Boardwalk

Green Heart of the Everglades

Cultural Resource Management

- Goal 7 – Identify and protect existing cultural resources.



Shell midden



Historic Border Patrol airboat
www.honorfirst.com

Green Heart of the Everglades

Next Steps

- Draft Interim Management Plan posted on District website:
SFWMD.gov/LandManagement
- Comment Period March 26 - April 23
 - Comments may be emailed to:
greenheartoftheeverglades@sfwmd.gov
- Goal 1 items to be presented for Governing Board consideration
 - Modification of transferred lands (north of US41) to FDEP State Parks
 - Designation of retained lands (south of US41) as District Management Area
 - Adoption of the Green Heart of the Everglades Interim Management Plan
 - Authorize FWC to Establish Public Small Game Hunting Area

Green Heart of the Everglades



Questions and Comments?

greenheartoftheeverglades@sfwmd.gov