

ITEM 4:

Consider a request, pursuant to section 253.42, F.S., to exchange approximately 600 acres of state-owned land in St. Johns County for approximately 3,066.23 acres of property within the Florida Wildlife Corridor in St. Johns, Lafayette, Osceola, and Volusia counties. All or a portion of the adjacent lands and the exchanged land would be placed under a conservation easement.

LOCATION:

St. Johns County

APPLICANT:

The Upland, LLC

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

The Division of State Lands (DSL) received a land exchange request from the applicant, who owns 104.47 acres in St. Johns County which is contiguous to the Guana River Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

The applicant is requesting to exchange four parcels located within the Florida Wildlife Corridor totaling approximately 3,066.23 acres including approximately 220 acres within the St. Johns River Blueway Florida Forever Project in St. Johns County, approximately 1,392 acres within the Lafayette Forest Florida Forever project in Lafayette County, approximately 1,201 acres within the Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch Florida Forever Project in Osceola County, and approximately 252 acres bordering the Volusia Conservation Corridor Florida Forever Project and Little Big Econ State Forest in Volusia County for approximately 600 acres of state-owned land. Pursuant to section 253.42(4), F.S., the applicant shall retain a conservation easement on all or a portion of the land acquired as a result of the exchange.

The state-owned property is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). FWC has provided a memo regarding their concurrence with the exchange.

The parcels that would come under state ownership should the exchange be approved by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT) would be managed by several agencies.

Proposed Exchange:

Pursuant to section 253.42(4), F.S., a person who owns land contiguous to state-owned land titled to the BOT may submit a request to DSL to exchange all or a portion of the privately owned land for all or a portion of the state-owned land, whereby the state retains a permanent conservation easement over all or a portion of the exchanged state-owned land.

This request meets the criteria set forth in this section including:

1. At least 30 percent of the perimeter of the privately owned land is bordered by state-owned land and the exchange does not create an inholding.
2. The approval would not result in a violation of the terms of a preexisting lease or agreement

by the BOT, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services or FWC.

The BOT must make a determination that the exchange of land under this subsection will result in a net positive conservation benefit, with consideration given to the recommendations of ARC and DSL. To inform this, staff offers the following:

- The proposed exchange will provide a net positive conservation benefit because it provides a net gain of approximately 2,466.23 acres of additional conservation lands within Florida Wildlife Corridor. In addition to all parcels being within or bordering a Florida Forever project boundary, both the Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch and Volusia Conservation Corridor Florida Forever Projects are on the 2025-2026 Florida Forever Work Plan while the Lafayette Forest parcel is considered an essential remaining parcel in the 2025 Florida Forever Plan.

The parcel within the St. Johns River Blueway Florida Forever Project will create a new access point to the Deep Creek Conservation Area. The parcel within the Lafayette Forest Florida Forever project will expand public access to the Mallory Swamp Wildlife Management Area. The parcel adjacent to the Volusia Conservation Corridor Florida Forever Project will provide additional access to Lake Harney as part of the Buck Lake Wildlife Management Area and additional frontage to the St. Johns River, connecting to the riverfront Seminole Ranch Wildlife Management Area. The parcel within the Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch Florida Forever project protects acreage in a highly developing area in Central Florida and will provide additional public access as an addition to an existing locally managed park system or as an addition within the state's managed portfolio.

- All or a portion of privately owned land will be placed under a permanent conservation easement ensuring that this unacquired property, currently considered to be an inholding within the WMA will no longer be considered unacquired while ensuring additional acreage within this rapidly growing region of the state is conserved.

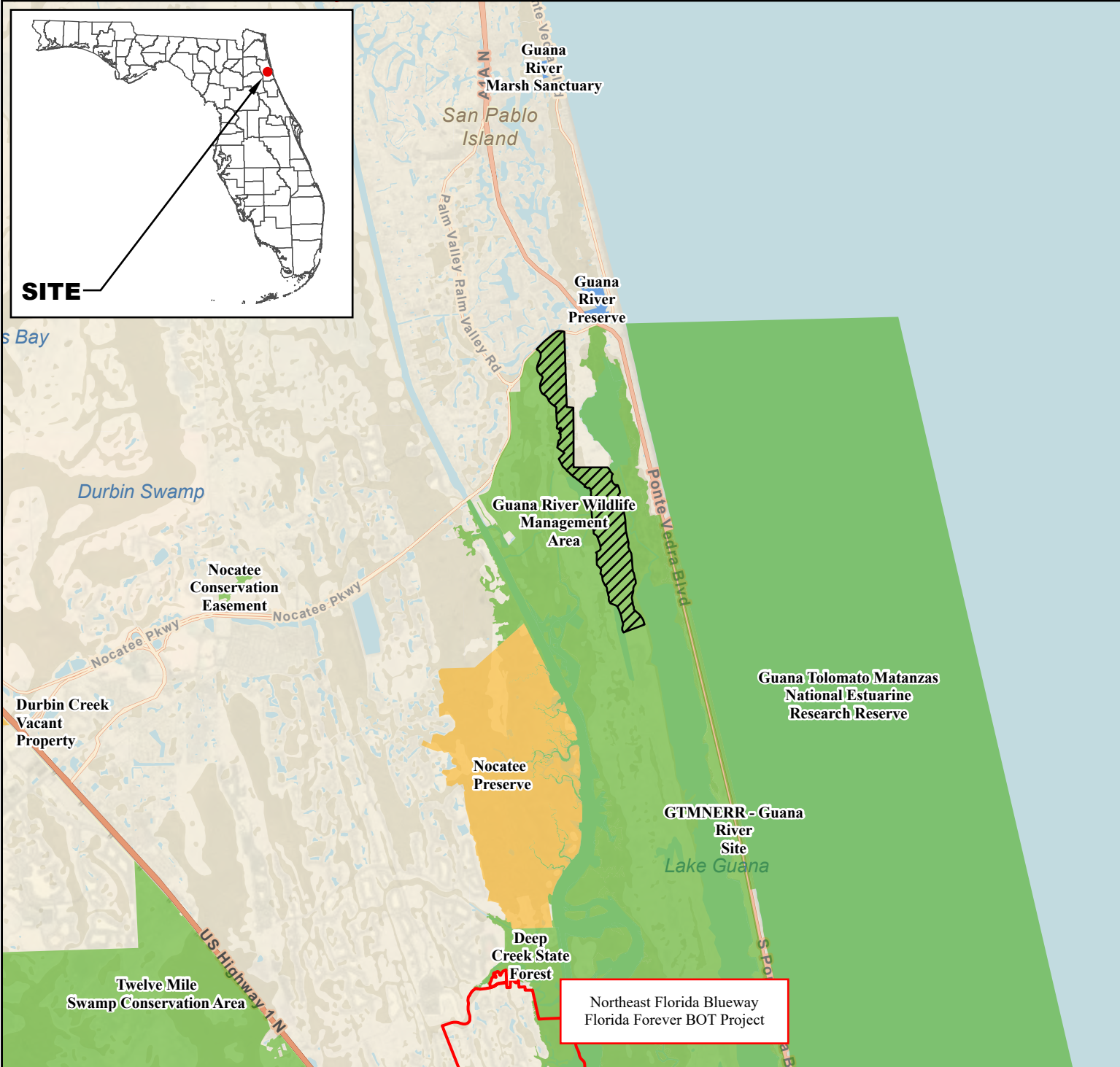
This request is subject to BOT approval.

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

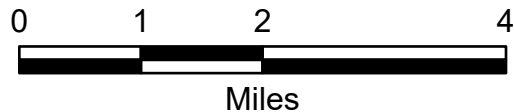
Recommend approval to the BOT.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

- () APPROVE
- () APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____
- () DEFER
- () WITHDRAW
- () NOT APPROVE
- () OTHER: _____

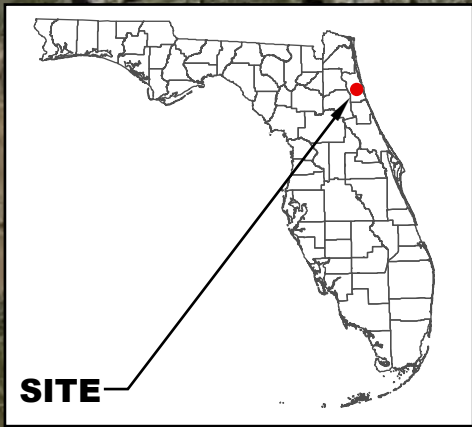


-  Subject Parcels
-  Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Managed Conservation Lands
-  City/ County Managed Conservation Lands
-  Private Managed Conservation Lands

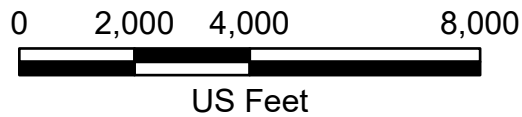


Exchange Parcels

St. Johns County, FL

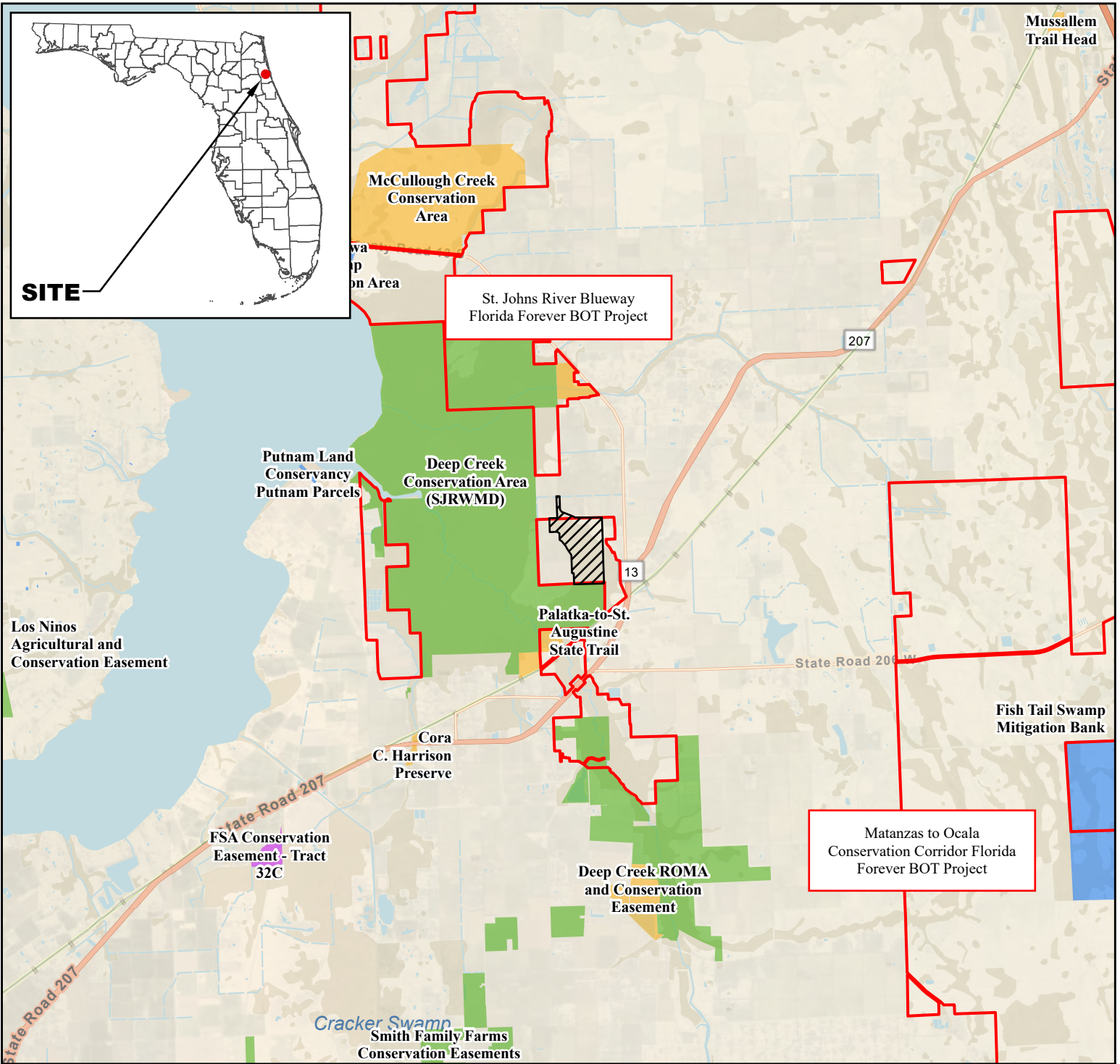


- Subject Parcels
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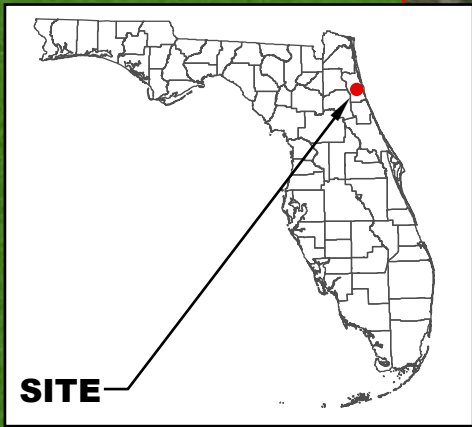
Exchange Parcels

St. Johns County, FL

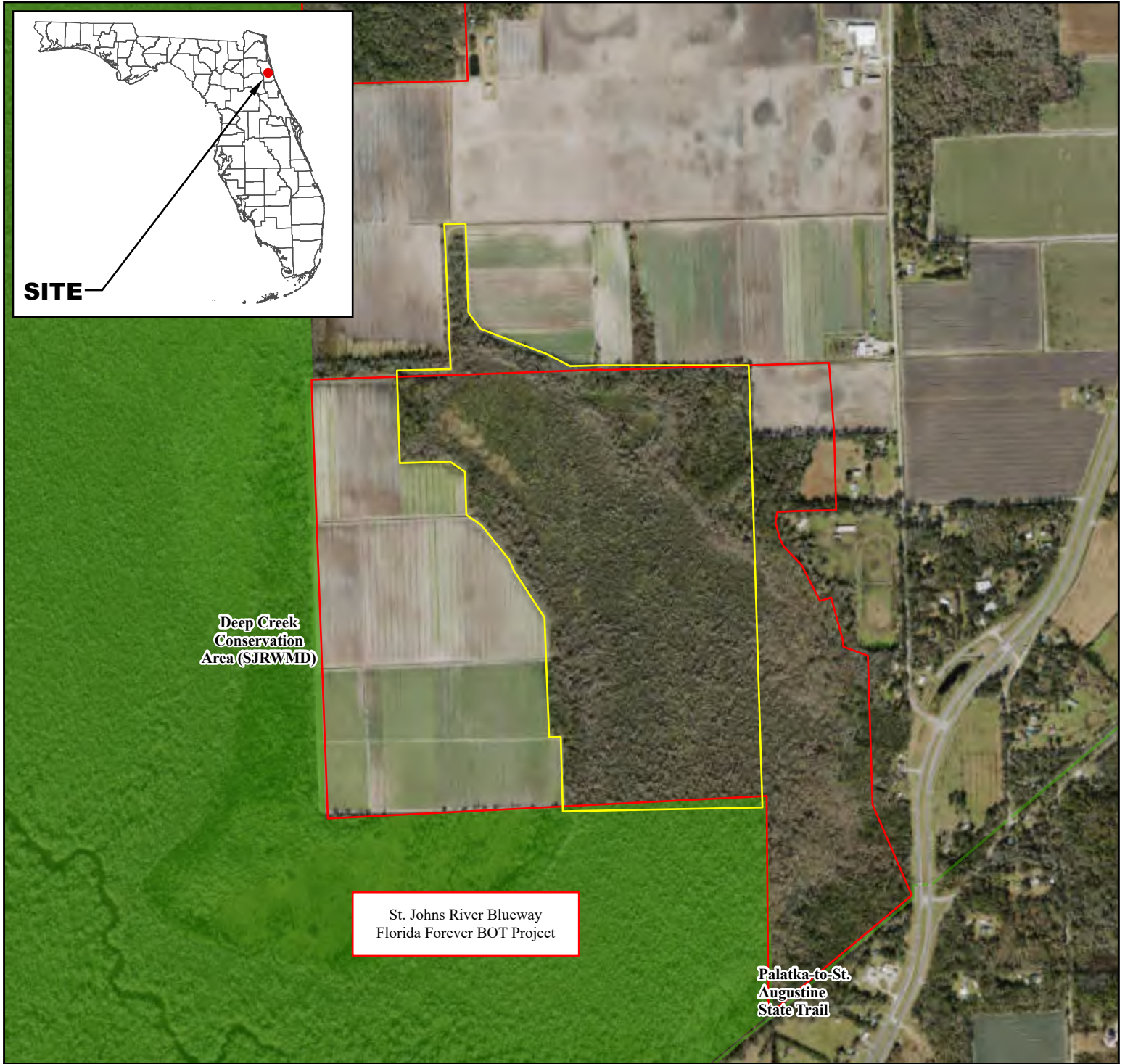


County Road 13 South

St. Johns County, FL



SITE



-  Subject Parcels
-  Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Managed Conservation Lands

0 500 1,000 2,000

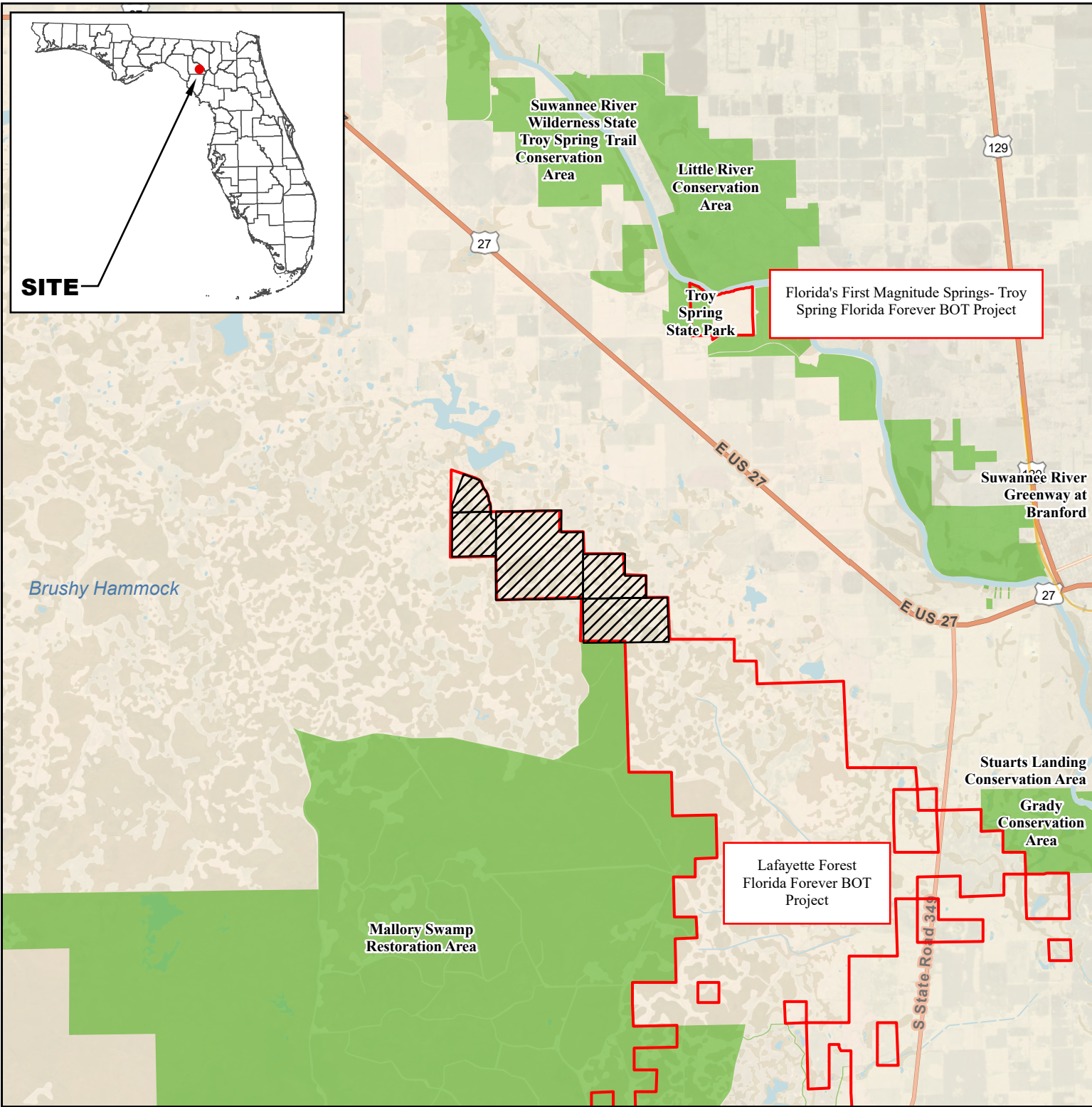


US Feet

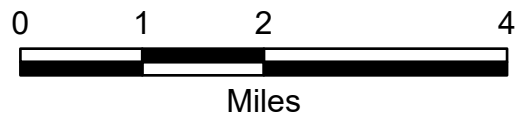


County Road 13 South

St. Johns County, FL

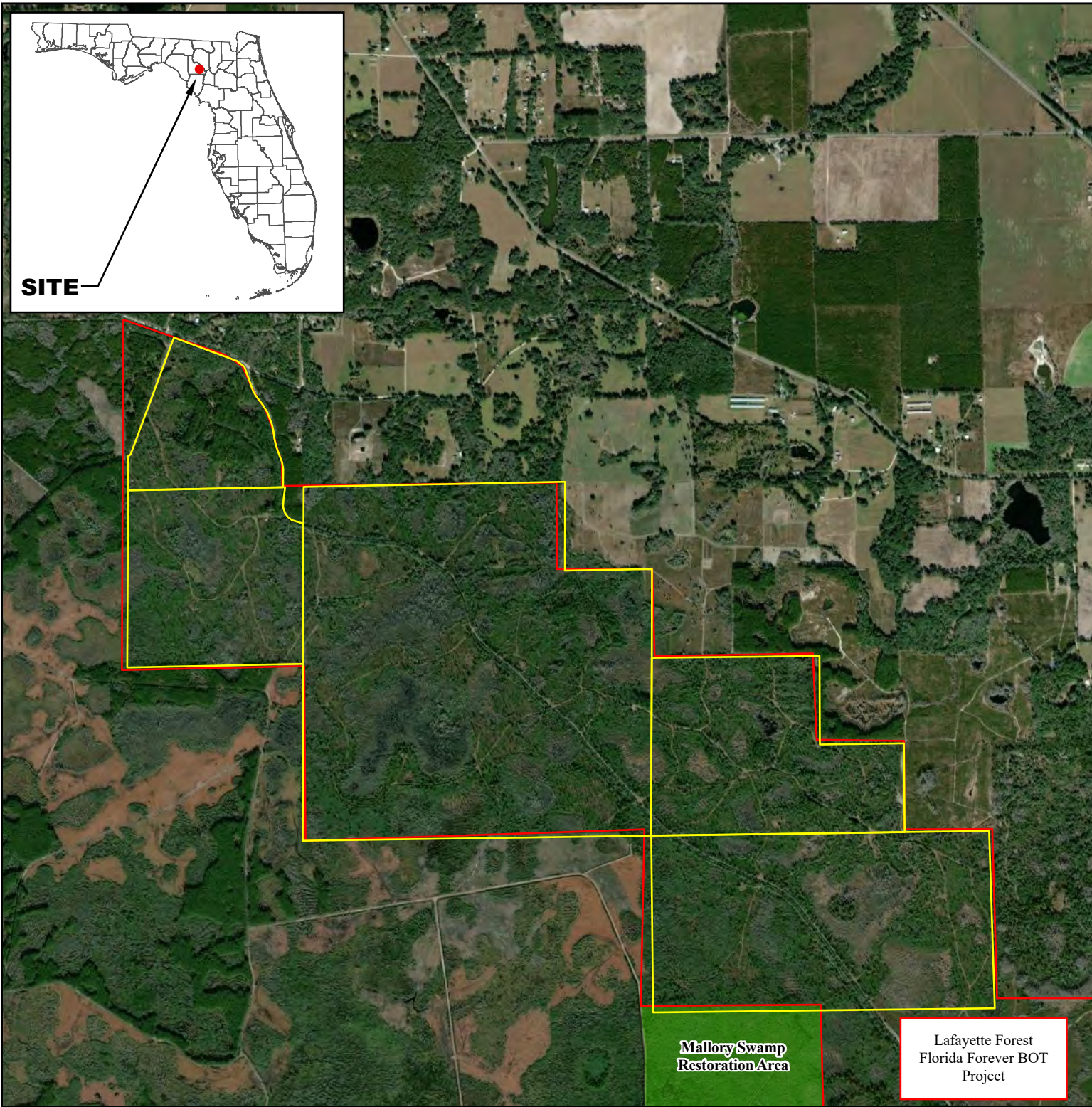


-  Subject Parcel
-  Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Managed Conservation Lands
-  City/ County Managed Conservation Lands



Lafayette Timber Site

Lafayette County, FL



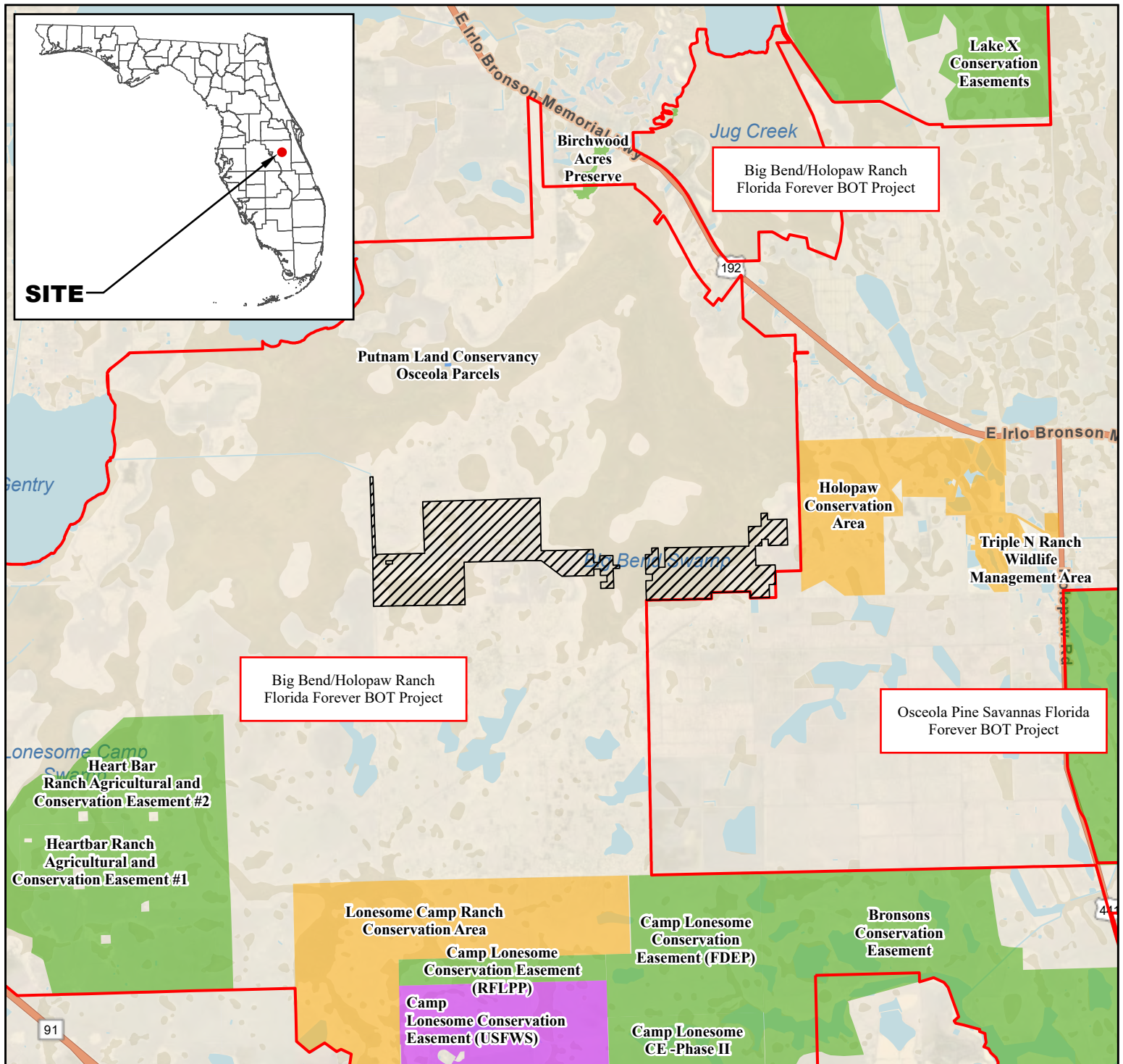
- Subject Parcels
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- State Managed Conservation Lands

0 1,250 2,500 5,000
US Feet



Lafayette Timber Site

Lafayette County, FL



Subject Parcels

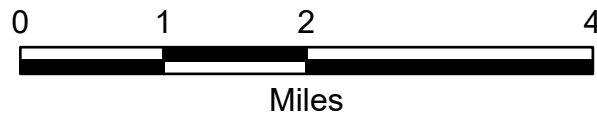
Florida Forever BOT Projects

Federal Managed Conservation Lands

State Managed Conservation Lands

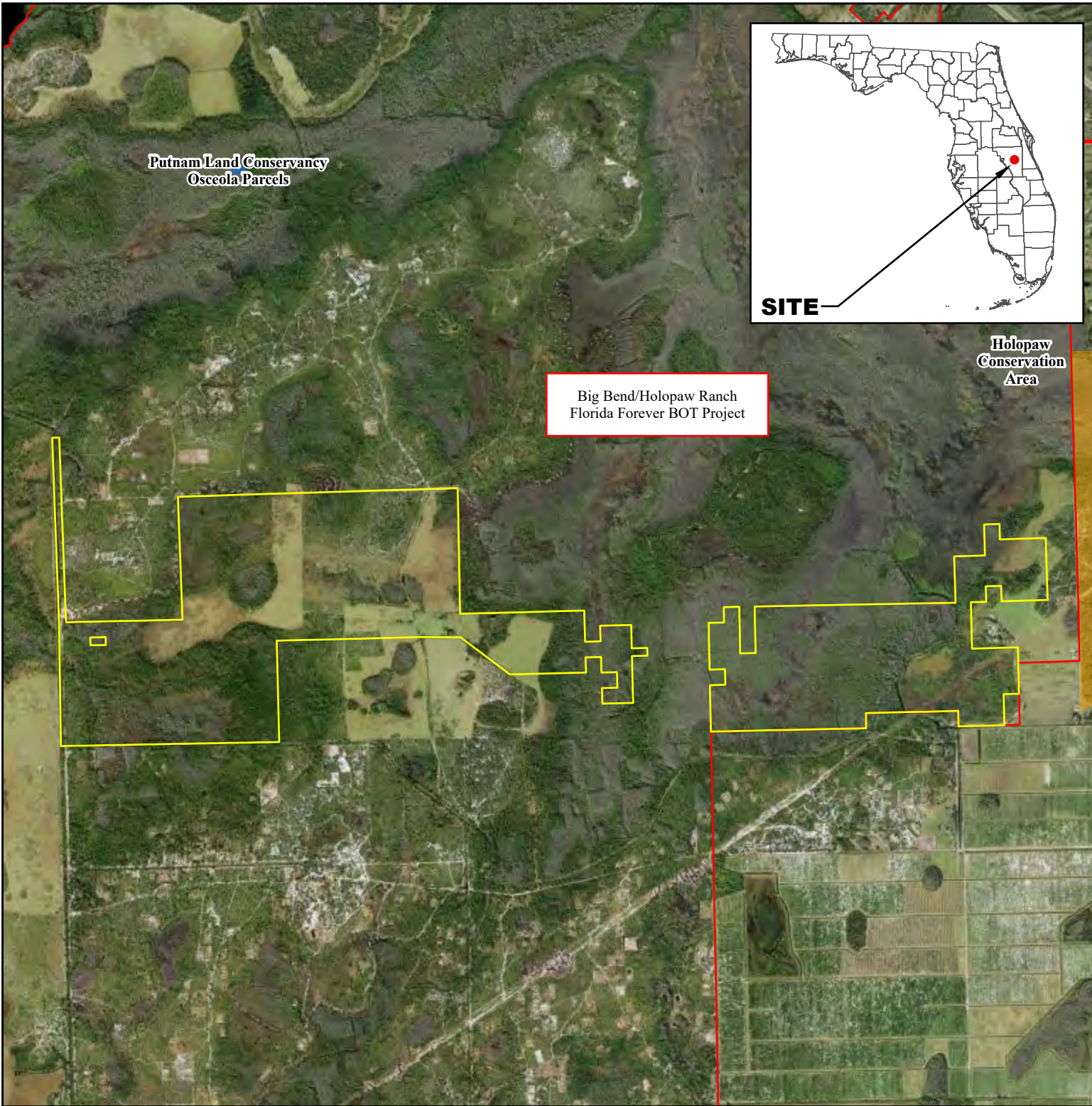
City/ County Managed Conservation Lands

Private Managed Conservation Lands



Holopaw Groves Road Site

Osceola County, FL



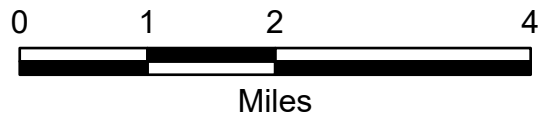
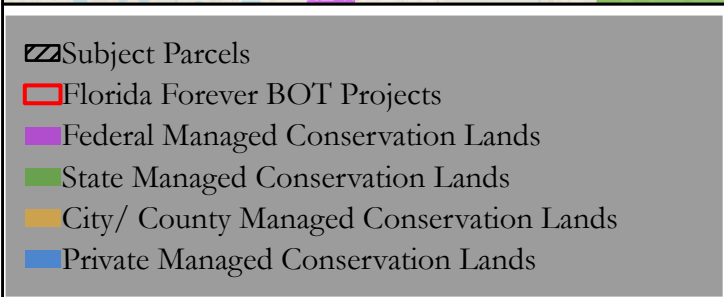
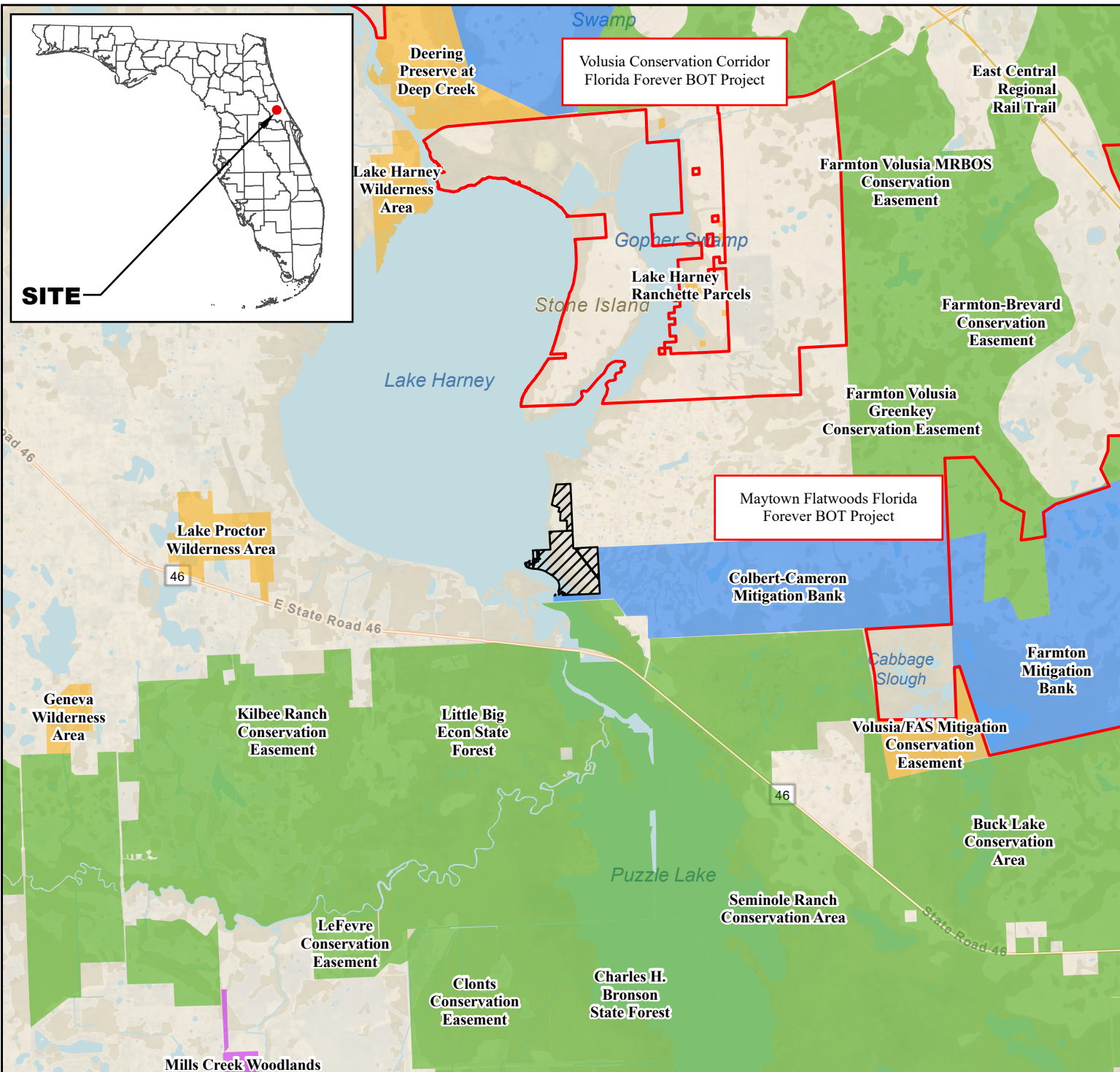
- Subject Parcels
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- City/ County Managed Conservation Lands
- Private Managed Conservation Lands

0 2,000 4,000 8,000
US Feet



Holopaw Groves Road Site

Osceola County, FL



Morgan Alderman Road Site

Volusia County, FL



- Subject Parcels
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- State Managed Conservation Lands
- Private Managed Conservation Lands

0 500 1,000 2,000

 US Feet



Morgan Alderman Road Site

Volusia County, FL

MEMORANDUM

To: FDEP Division of State Lands
From: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Subject: Proposed Land Exchange



A land exchange proposal has been received by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) requesting approximately 600 linear acres within the northern boundaries of the Guana River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in St. Johns County containing mesic hammock, xenic hammock, scrub, mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, maritime hammock, depression marsh, and basin swamp, to be exchanged for approximately 3,065 acres (5:1 exchange) of land located in 4 separate parcels throughout the state, including:

The Lafayette Timber Site, located in Lafayette County, totaling 1,392 approximate acres. The property contains mixed scrub-shrub wetlands, coniferous pine plantations, upland hardwood forest, basin swamp, gum pond, and wet coniferous plantations.

The Morgan Alderman Road Site, located in Volusia County, totaling 252 approximate acres. The property contains mesic flatwoods, mixed hardwood coniferous, wet prairie, mixed scrub wetlands, marshes, mixed wetland hardwoods, hydric pine flatwoods, and cabbage palm hammocks.

The Holopaw Groves Site, located in Osceola County, totaling 1,201 approximate acres. The property contains mesic flatwoods, scrub, wetlands, marshes, cypress wetlands, swamps, mixed wetland hardwoods, hydric pine flatwoods, and woodland pasture.

The County Road 13 Site, located in St. Johns County, totaling 220 approximate acres. The property contains mixed hardwood coniferous, mixed wetland hardwoods, and mixed scrub wetlands.

The proposed land at Guana River WMA is under ownership of the Board of Trustee's, and as lead manager of the property, and in accordance with F.S. 253.42, the FWC acknowledges the authority of the Board of Trustee's and the Acquisition and Restoration Council in the review and disposition of this land exchange proposal.

ARC Questionnaire – Guana River Wildlife Management Area
Proposed Land Exchange

- 1. Description of when and under what program or fund the parcel under consideration was acquired (EEL, LATF, CARL, P-2000, Florida Forever, etc.) or donated.**

Response: In 1984, the land in question was purchased by the State of Florida through its Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) program, as part of a nearly 10,000 acre acquisition. This acquisition became the Guana River Wildlife Management Area. In 1986, the parcel was granted to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (TIITF) of the state of Florida. The exchange parcel is approximately 600 acres (± 599.77 acres), comprising about 6% of the total area.

- 2. Description of the purpose for the parcel's acquisition (P-2000 or Florida Forever goals and criteria or similar purpose descriptions) or donation and any restrictions or conditions of use that apply to the parcel, if any.**

Response: The Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) program was established by the Florida legislature in 1979 to acquire lands of environmental and cultural significance. In 1989, the CARL program was replaced by Preservation 2000 and the funding increased to three billion dollars for conservation land purchases. In 1998, a replacement program called Florida Forever broadened the land purchasing criteria to include historical preservation.

- 3. Description of the current level of public recreational use or public access of the parcel.**

Response: The parcel is currently part of the Guana River Wildlife Management Area. There is a pedestrian trail running north and south through the parcel. There is also an unimproved road running north and south along the eastern boundary of the parcel. The parcel is accessible to the public for waterfowl hunting, fishing, paddling and wildlife viewing.

4. Description of the natural resources, land cover, vegetation, habitat or natural community, if any, that are currently present on the parcel.

Response: The parcels contain mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, freshwater marshes, saltwater marshes, wet flatwoods, mesic and xeric hammock, scrub, maritime hammock, and swamp habitats.

5. Description and list of the imperiled and other wildlife species, if any, that occurs on or use the parcel.

Response: The overall parcel is known to contain various general wading birds and waterfowl, primarily in the wetlands and waterways located to the east and west of the exchange parcel. Although extensive wildlife surveys have not been formally conducted, it is anticipated that the exchange parcel would include wildlife species common to the uplands in the region, with listed species such as the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) possible.

6. Description and list of historical or archaeological resources, if any, that occurs or has the potential of occurring on the site.

Response: There are no known historical archaeological resources known to exist within the proposed exchange area.

7. Formal alternative site analysis that includes a description and assessment of other potential alternative sites and why they are not feasible or practicable alternatives.

Response: There are no alternatives other than the proposed exchange.

8. Assessment of the impacts the proposed alternative use will have on the natural/historical/archaeological/recreational resources, if any, as well as on the current public use and purpose for the site or parcel.

Response: The exchange parcel does not have an impact on archeological resources based on the absence of any findings. The current recreational opportunities on this parcel will not remain; however, the recreational activities throughout the remainder of the more than 9,200 will continue. In addition, the replacement parcels offered will provide for public recreational activities on 3,066.3 acres compared to the Guana parcel totaling 600 acres. The increase in 411% of public conservation lands is a benefit to the public.

9. Assessment of the potential impacts on the larger area of conservation lands the parcel is located within (park, wildlife management area, forest trail, etc.) and on any surrounding conservation lands, if any.

Response: There are minimal impacts to the entirety of the conservation lands, as a majority of the wetland habitats will be avoided to ensure they are under conservation in perpetuity. Existing natural wildlife corridors to the surrounding wildlife management area will remain to ensure there are minimal impacts to wildlife, their habitats and natural movement patterns.

10. Assessment of how the proposed package of consideration and net positive benefit for the requested alternative use of the parcel, such as the generally standard requirement for replacement land (depending on the parcel's size), will offset the impacts and benefit the larger area of conservation lands (park, forest, wildlife management area, trail system, etc.) the parcel is within and particularly how it will offset the impacts or benefit the natural/historical/ archaeological resources, habitat and public recreational uses of the public conservation area the parcel is located within.

Response: Four separate parcels totaling approximately 3,066.3 acres will be provided in exchange for the approximately 600-acre Guana parcel. The proposed replacement parcels are collectively larger in size. Additionally, the exchange parcels are adjacent and connected to Florida Forever Lands and conservation lands which will provide for more contiguous conservation areas within the State of Florida.

The County Road 13 South Site (aka Elkton) totals approximately 220.09 acres and is adjacent to the SJRWMD Deep Creek Conservation area and is Florida Forever BOT lands. The County Road 13 South Site contains mixed hardwood coniferous, mixed wetland hardwoods and mixed scrub wetlands. The preservation of this parcel adds to denning, nesting and foraging habitat as well as preserves upstream resources to Deep Creek Conservation Area.

The Morgan Alderman Road Site (aka Crude AG) totals approximately 252.17 acres and is adjacent to Lake Harney, Colbert Cameron Mitigation Bank, Buck Lake Conservation Area, and nearby the Little Big Econ State Forest. The Morgan Alderman Road Site contains mesic flatwoods, mixed hardwood coniferous, wet prairie, mixed scrub wetlands, marshes, mixed wetland hardwoods, and cabbage palm hammocks. The preservation of this parcel completes the wildlife corridor of these existing conservation lands to Lake Harney ensuring that a significant wildlife corridor will be preserved, preventing any future fragmentation of this corridor connection from development.

The third replacement parcel, Holopaw Groves Road Site, totals approximately 1,201.97 acres and is adjacent to Quickdraw Mitigation Bank and Holopaw Conservation Area, and is within Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch Florida Forever BOT Project. The Holopaw Groves Road Site contains mesic flatwoods, scrub flatwoods, mixed scrub wetlands, marshes, cypress wetlands, swamps, mixed wetland hardwoods, hydric pine flatwoods, and woodland pasture. The preservation of this parcel will also provide additional wildlife corridor, foraging and denning habitat for wildlife species.

The Lafayette Timber Site totals approximately 1,392.07 acres and is adjacent to the Mallory Swamp Restoration Area and nearby the Lafayette Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area, Troy Spring State Park, as well as multiple other conservation areas along the Suwannee River. Additionally, the Lafayette Timber Site is within the Lafayette Forest Florida Forever BOT Project. The Lafayette Timber Site contains upland hardwood forests, wet prairie, mixed scrub-shrub wetlands, cypress wetlands, mixed hardwood-coniferous swamp, basin swamp, and woodland pasture. Protecting these lands is essential to preserving a critical wildlife corridor that connects to the Mallory Swamp Restoration Area, ensuring the integrity of this natural connection and guarding it against future fragmentation by development.

The Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*), Florida Sandhill Crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*), Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*), gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), and Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) are anticipated to utilize the four exchange parcels. The exchange parcels contain vast tracts of undisturbed lands with a mosaic of high-quality habitats that provide exemplary foraging, nesting and breeding grounds for various listed species.

Overall, the replacement parcels for the exchange parcel offer a substantial increase of lands to be placed under conservation for the state. The proposed replacement lands are advantageous to the state due to the fact that these parcels are in areas where conservation management goals and objectives can be attained by forming more contiguous acreage of conservation lands in the state of Florida. The replacement parcels consist of expansive tracts of land with various natural habitat types which offer a wider range of optimal habitat for native wildlife and public recreational use.