ITEM 10:

Consider a 10-year update to the Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area Plan (Lease No. 4245).

LOCATION:

Hendry County

APPLICANT:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

Background

The Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area (OKSWMA) is located in South Florida in west-central Hendry County and encompasses approximately 26,510 acres. As the headwaters that eventually supply the Fakahatchee Strand and the mangrove swamps of Ten Thousand Islands, Okaloacoochee Slough is an important hydrogeological resource to the South region of Florida. The Okaloacoochee Slough is a large, nearly pristine sawgrass marsh surrounded by a vast landscape of pinelands, hammocks, and marshes set within a mosaic of conservation and agricultural lands. The OKSWMA, owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Board of Trustees) and managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), lies just to the east of its namesake slough. The OKSWMA is managed by the FWC to conserve habitat for an array of imperiled and more common native wildlife, including the Florida panther, Florida black bear, Audubon's crested caracara, Florida sandhill crane, wood stork, and many others. Further management goals include providing stellar opportunities for wildlife watching and other fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreation *opportunities including hunting, fishing, primitive camping, horseback riding, and hiking.*

Management Plan Overview

Through the services of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), FWC has mapped the natural and anthropogenic community types on OKSWMA. FNAI has identified and mapped a total of 19 natural and altered community types within the OKSWMA. The primary vegetative communities found within the OKSWMA are basin marsh and slough marsh.

FWC has developed the Florida Landscape Assessment Model (FLAM) as a Geographic Information Systems-based assessment tool that incorporates a wide variety of landscape and wildlife species data. The FLAM evaluates the Florida landscape based upon important natural resources and habitat needs of wildlife to identify ecologically significant lands in the state, and to assess the potential impacts of management and land-use changes. The FLAM was developed to provide technical assistance to various local, regional, state and federal agencies and entities interested in wildlife needs and conservation in order to: (1) determine ways to avoid or minimize project impacts by evaluating alternative placements, alignments and transportation corridors during early planning stages, (2) assess direct, secondary and cumulative impacts to habitat and wildlife resources, and (3) identify appropriate parcels for public land acquisition for wetland and upland habitat mitigation purposes. The FLAM ranks habitat from zero to 10; a rank of 10 being of greatest value. The FLAM indicates that the OKSWMA has a very high mean wildlife value of 8.5.

The Division of Historical Resources observations are broken down into five categories: archeological sites, resource groups, historical structures, historic bridges and historic cemeteries. A review of the FMSF indicates that four previous cultural resource surveys have been conducted on the OKSWMA. Two archaeological sites and one resource group have been recorded on the OKSWMA. The FWC consults with the DHR to determine the necessary actions for resource inventory and preservation. All identification, assessment, and preservation strategies are developed in consultation with the DHR.

The Florida Legislature requires that all land management plans include long and short-term goals. These goals must be measurable objectives, and short-term goals must be achievable within a two-year planning period. Pursuant to section 253.034, Florida Statutes(F.S.), the Division of State Lands began compiling the short-term goals from each land management plan approved since July 1, 2016. The management plan identified objectives under the following short-term goals: Habitat restoration and improvement, public access and recreational opportunities, and Forest resource management.

Public Involvement

The FWC conducted a Management Advisory Group Meeting on February 1, 2023. Results of this meeting were used by FWC to develop management goals and objectives and to identify opportunities and strategies for inclusion in this management plan. A public hearing, as required by section 259.032(10), F.S., was held on May 3, 2023. No questions were asked as part of this public meeting.

Surplus Lands

The evaluation of OKSWMA by FWC has determined that all portions of the area are being managed and operated for the original purposes of acquisition and remain integral to the continued conservation of important fish and wildlife resources, and continue to provide good fish and wildlife resource based public outdoor recreational opportunities. Therefore, no portion of the OKSWMA is recommended for potential surplus review.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in January 2016. The review team found that the property is managed in accordance with the purposes for which it was acquired and the management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan. There were three consensus recommendations offered.

- The review team recommended FWC conduct more thorough baseline surveys of non-game species, compared to the previous contracted herp surveys.
- The review team recommended FWC develop a post-fire monitoring protocol to help with improving the fire program and to monitor rare plants which rely on fire for propagation.
- The review team recommended FWC consider installing additional road signs/informational kiosks with trail maps at appropriate locations along existing roads and trails.

The 2016 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan.

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

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

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lead Agency: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
Common Name of Property: Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area
Location: Hendry County, Florida
Acreage Total: 26,510 acres
Acreage Breakdown:

Land Cover Classification	Acres	Percent of Total Area
Abandoned field/abandoned pasture	2,533.6	9.2%
Artificial pond	27.2	0.1%
Basin marsh	4,395.3	15.9%
Canal/ditch	124.1	0.4%
Clearing	5.8	<0.1%
Depression marsh	2,825.0	10.2%
Developed	1,086.9	3.9%
Firebreak	34.5	0.1%
Invasive exotic monoculture	63.5	0.2%
Mesic flatwoods	520.1	1.9%
Mesic hammock	602.0	2.2%
Pasture - improved	7,094.7	25.6%
Pasture - semi-improved	1,392.7	5.0%
Restoration mesic flatwoods	512.6	1.9%
Restoration wet flatwoods	6.2	<0.1%
Restoration wet prairie	18.7	0.1%
Road	74.6	0.3%
Slough marsh	3,175.6	11.5%
Successional hardwood forest	2,251.2	8.1%
Successional hydric shrubland/forest	412.4	1.5%
Wet flatwoods	253.7	0.9%
Wet prairie	271.2	1.0%

*GIS-calculated acreage for land cover classification varies slightly from actual total acreage.

Lease/Management Agreement No.: 4245 (Appendix 11.1)
Use: Single ___ Multiple X
Management Agency: FWC
Management Responsibilities: LEAD, LESSEE (Wildlife Management Area, resource protection, law enforcement)
Designated Land Use: Wildlife Management Area
Sublease (s): None
Encumbrances List: There is one easement for the non-exclusive access, ingress/egress of Alico Inc., which is in Township 45 S, Range 31 E, Section 11. This easement is described in the Official Record Book of Hendry County (Book 581, Page 30) as referenced on the official boundary survey
Type Acquisition: Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever Land Acquisition Programs
Unique Features: Natural: Okaloacoochee Slough and accompanying natural communities, including basin marsh, depression marsh, slough marsh, and others (Figure 7)
Archaeological/Historical: Two archaeological sites and one resource group
Management Needs: Habitat restoration and improvement; public access and recreational opportunities; hydrological preservation and restoration; invasive species maintenance and control; imperiled species habitat maintenance, enhancement, and restoration
Acquisition Needs/Acreage: 41,665 acres FWC Additions and Inholdings list; 82,995 acres remaining in the Devils Garden Florida Forever Project (Figure 12)
Surplus Lands/Acreage: None
Public Involvement: Management Advisory Group consensus meeting and Public Hearing (Appendix 11.4)

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE (FOR DIVISION OF STATE LANDS USE ONLY)

ARC Approval Date _____ BTIITF Approval Date: _____
Comments: _____

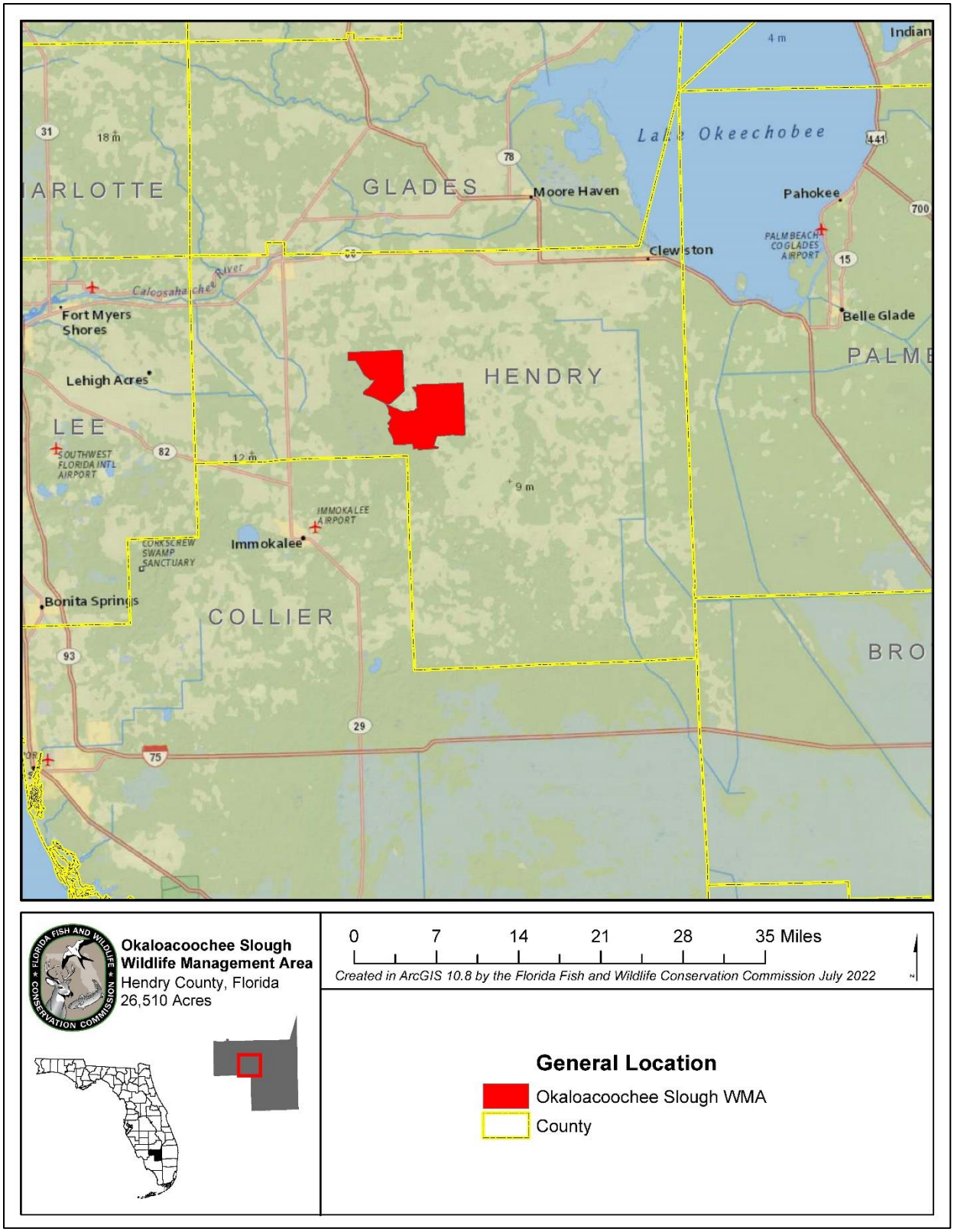


Figure 1. Vicinity Map of the OKSWMA

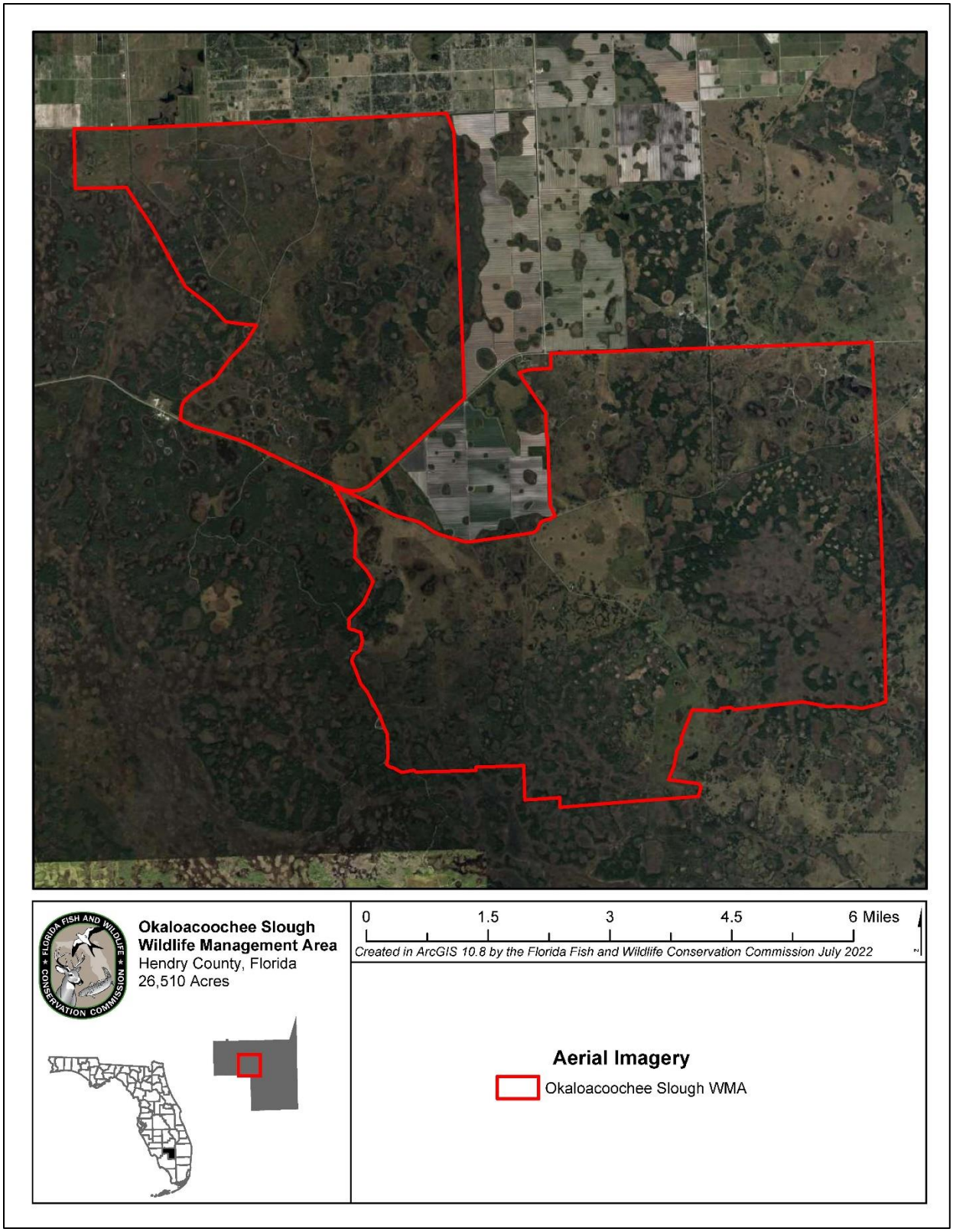


Figure 2. Aerial Imagery of the OKSWMA

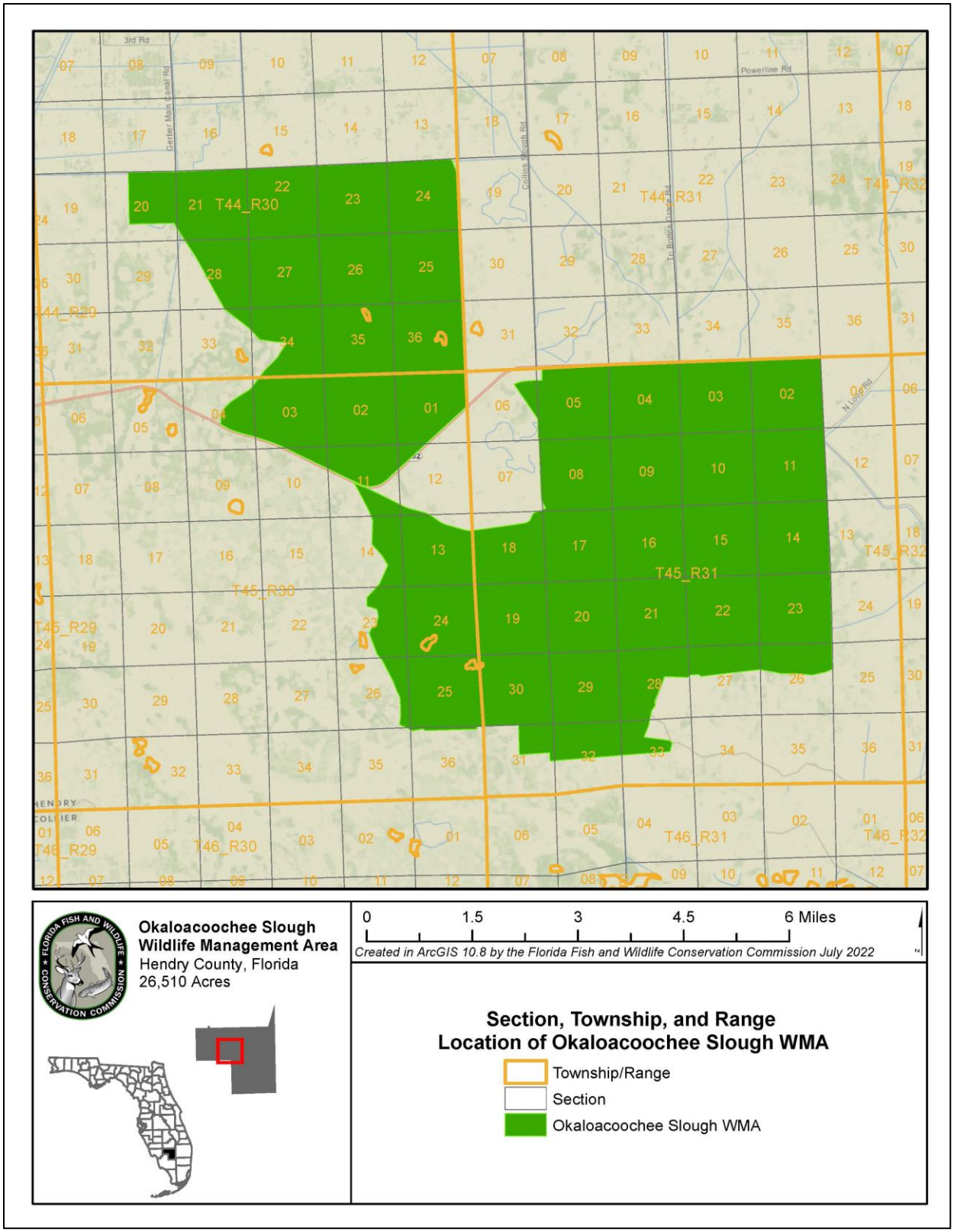
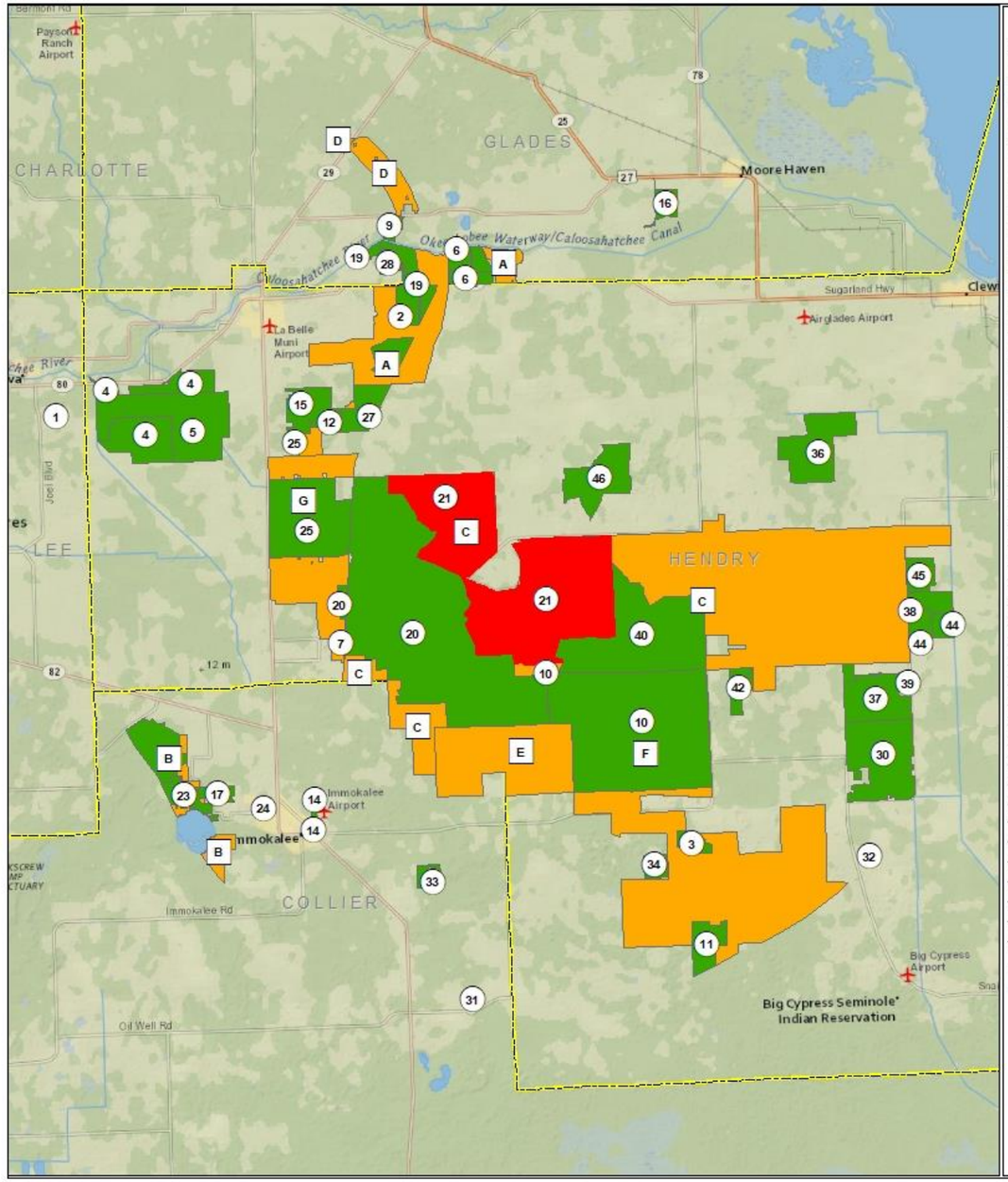


Figure 3. Section, Township, and Range Location



Conservation Lands within 10 miles of OKSWMA

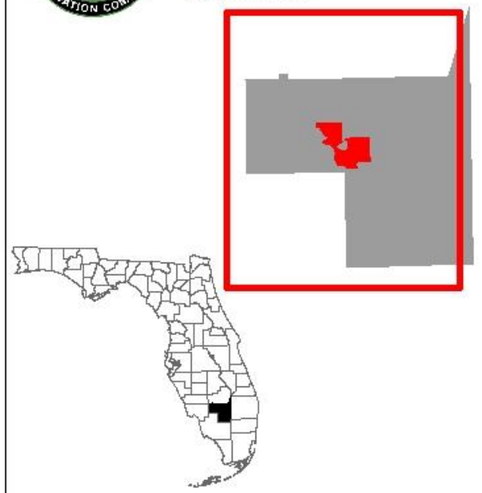
1 Alva Scrub Preserve
2 Black Boar Ranch Conservation Easement
3 BR Bar Ranch Conservation Easement
4 C-43 Basin Storage Reservoir - Part 1
5 Caloosahatchee Basin Water Storage Reservoir
6 Caloosahatchee River Basin Water Quality Treatment and Testing Facility
7 Centerline Conservation Easement
8 Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed
9 Cypress Creek Grove TNC Conservation Easement
10 Dinner Island Ranch Wildlife Management Area
11 Florida Panther Conservation Bank Conservation Easement
12 Florida Panther Conservation Bank II Conservation Easement
13 Grassland Reserve Program Easement #111
14 Immokalee Airport Upland Preserve
15 LaBelle Ranch, Inc. Conservation Easement
16 Lake Hicpochee Hydroelectric Enhancement
17 Lake Trafford Impoundment
18 Lennar Conservation Easement
19 Lone Ranger Ranch TNC Conservation Easements
20 Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest
21 Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area
22 Panther Passage Conservation Bank Conservation Easement
23 Pepper Ranch Preserve
24 Sanders Pines Conservation Easement
25 Spirit of the Wild Wildlife Management Area
26 Trafford Highlands Estates Conservation Easement
27 Verandah West Conservation Easement
28 Weekley Seven Thousand Oaks Conservation Easement
29 Westclox Road Conservation Easement
30 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #101
31 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #133
32 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #151
33 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #169
34 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #171
35 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #177
36 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #187
37 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #188
38 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #191
39 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #192
40 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #193
41 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #197
42 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #198
43 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #199
44 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #204
45 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #205
46 Wetlands Reserve Program Easement #221

Florida Forever Projects within 10 miles of OKSWMA

A Caloosahatchee Ecoscape Florida Forever BOT Project
B Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Florida Forever BOT Project
C Devil's Garden Florida Forever BOT Project
D Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever BOT Project
E Half Circle L Ranch Florida Forever BOT Project
F Panther Glades Florida Forever BOT Project
G Twelvemile Slough Florida Forever BOT Project

Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area

Hendry County, Florida
26,510 Acres



Legend

Okaloacoochee Slough WMA
Conservation Lands
Florida Forever Projects
County

N

0 3.75 7.5 15 Miles

Created in ArcGIS 10.7 by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission March 2023

Figure 4. Nearby Conservation Lands and Florida Forever Projects

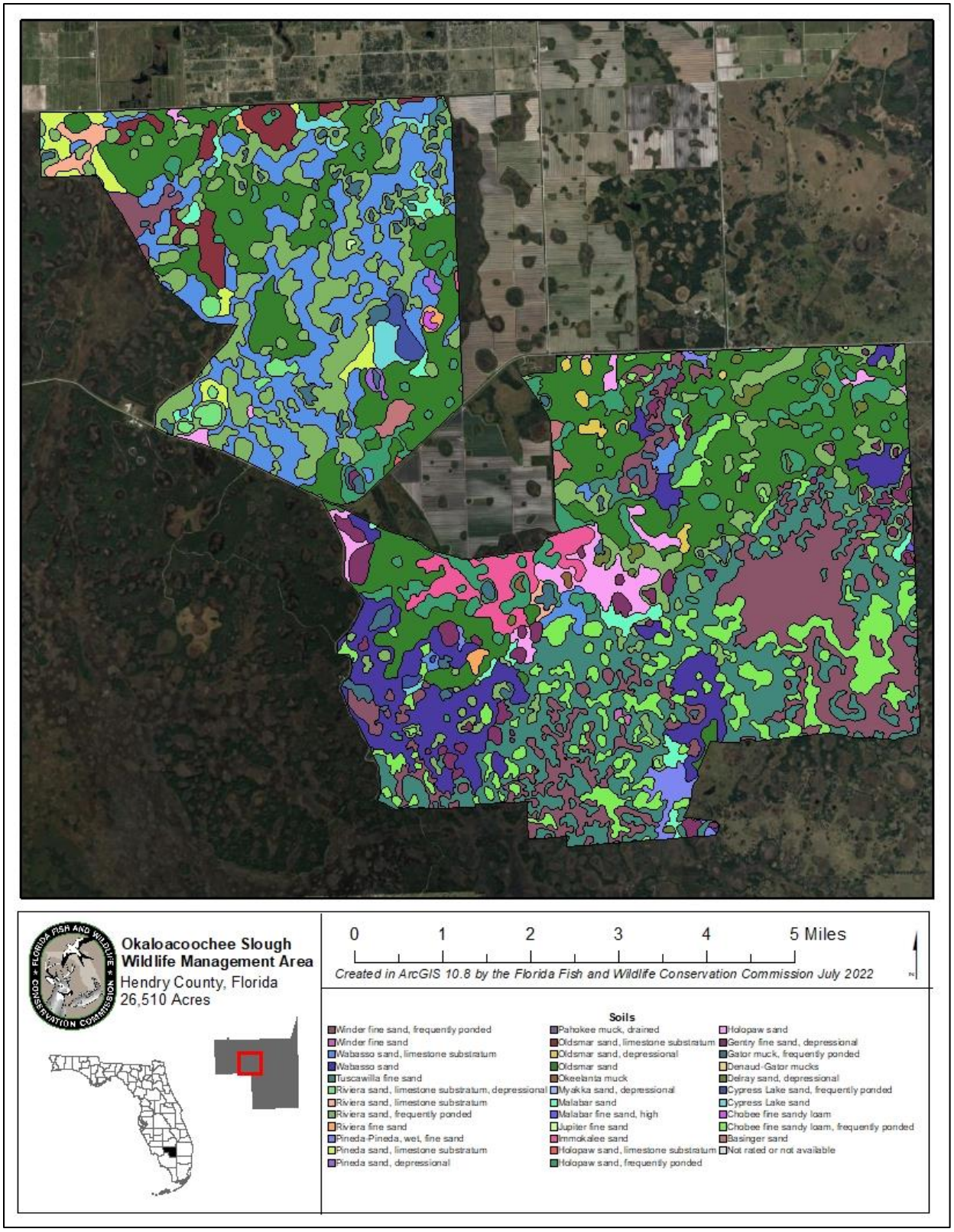


Figure 5. Soil Types on the OKSWMA

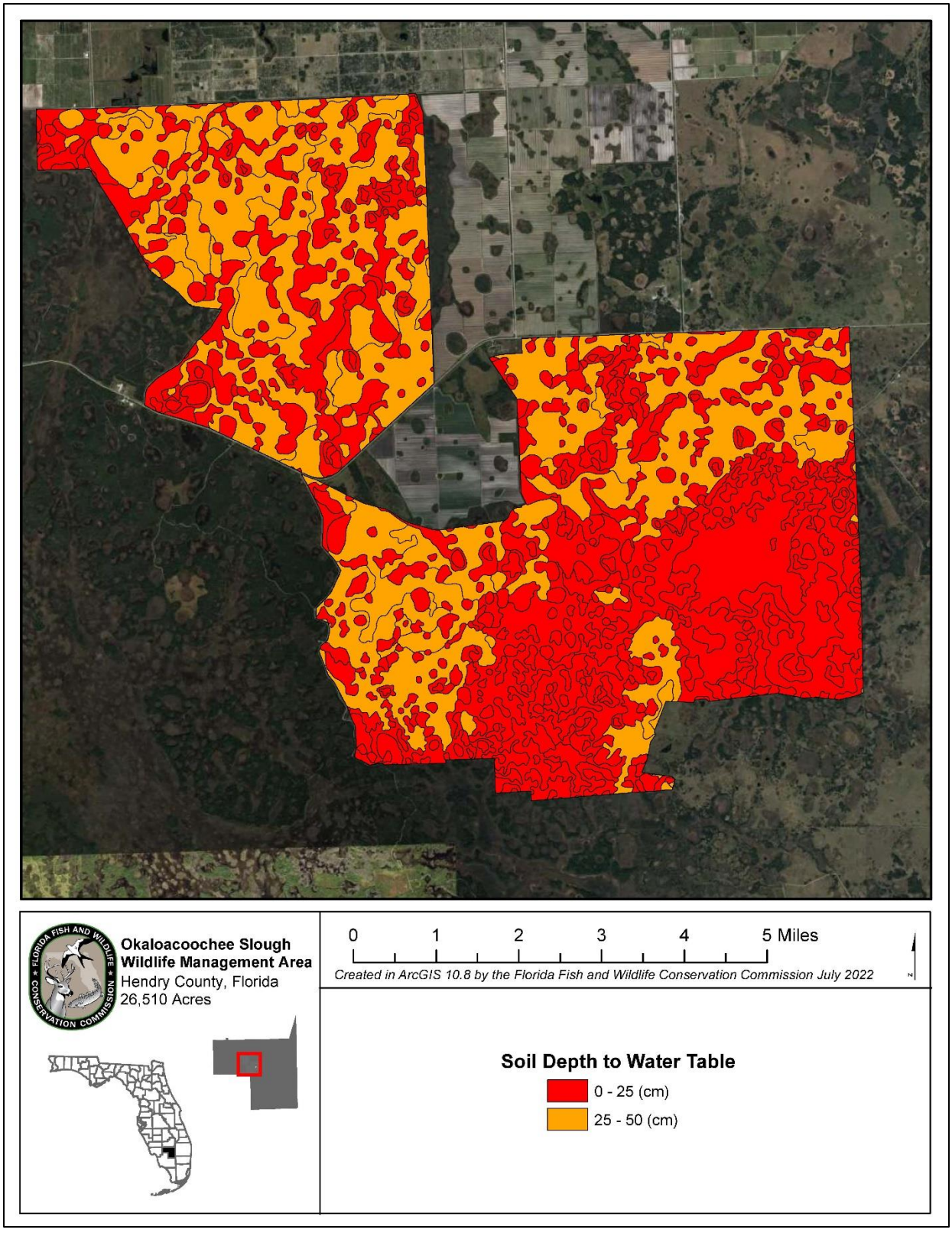


Figure 6. Depth to Water Table on the OKSWMA

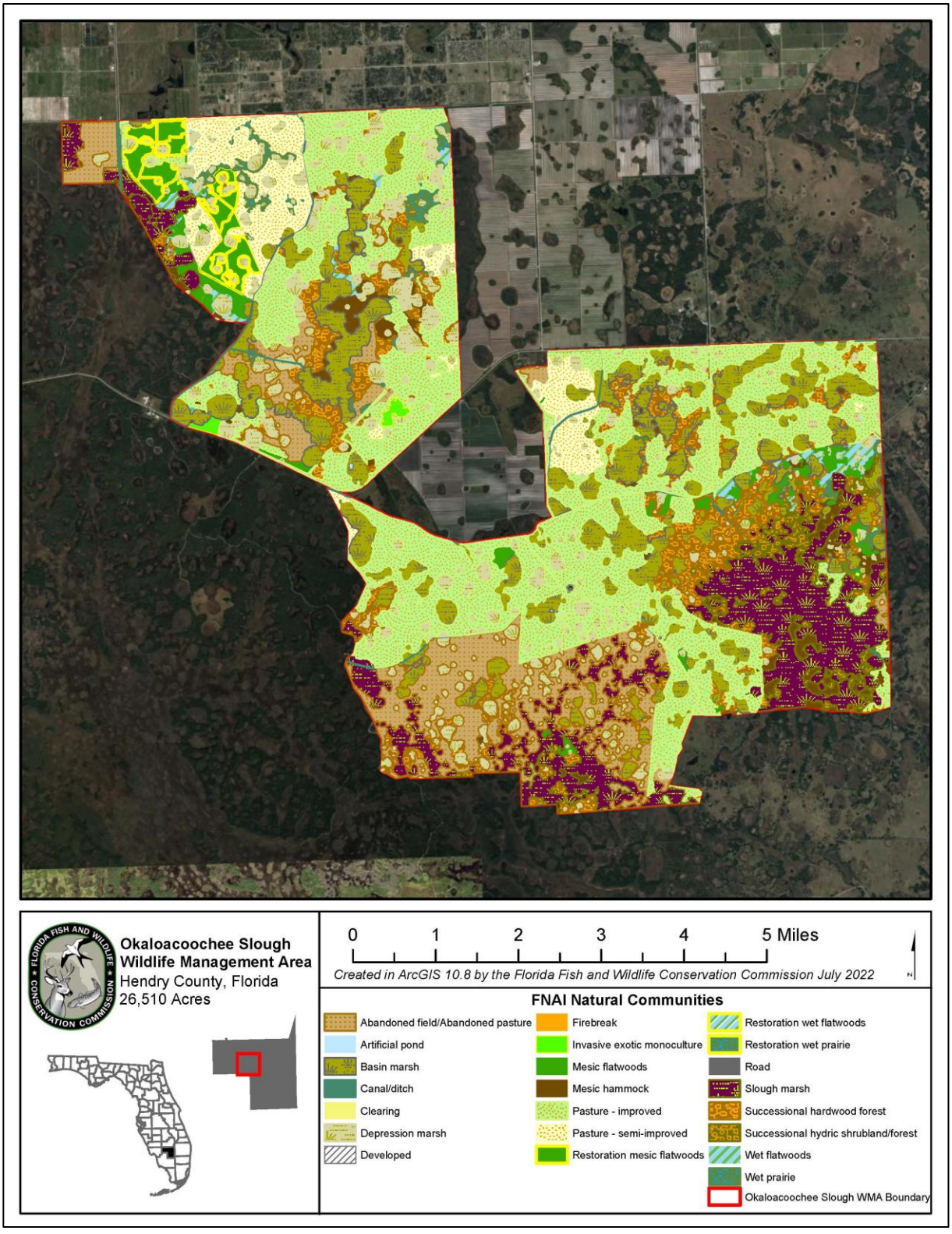


Figure 7. FNAI Natural and Altered Communities

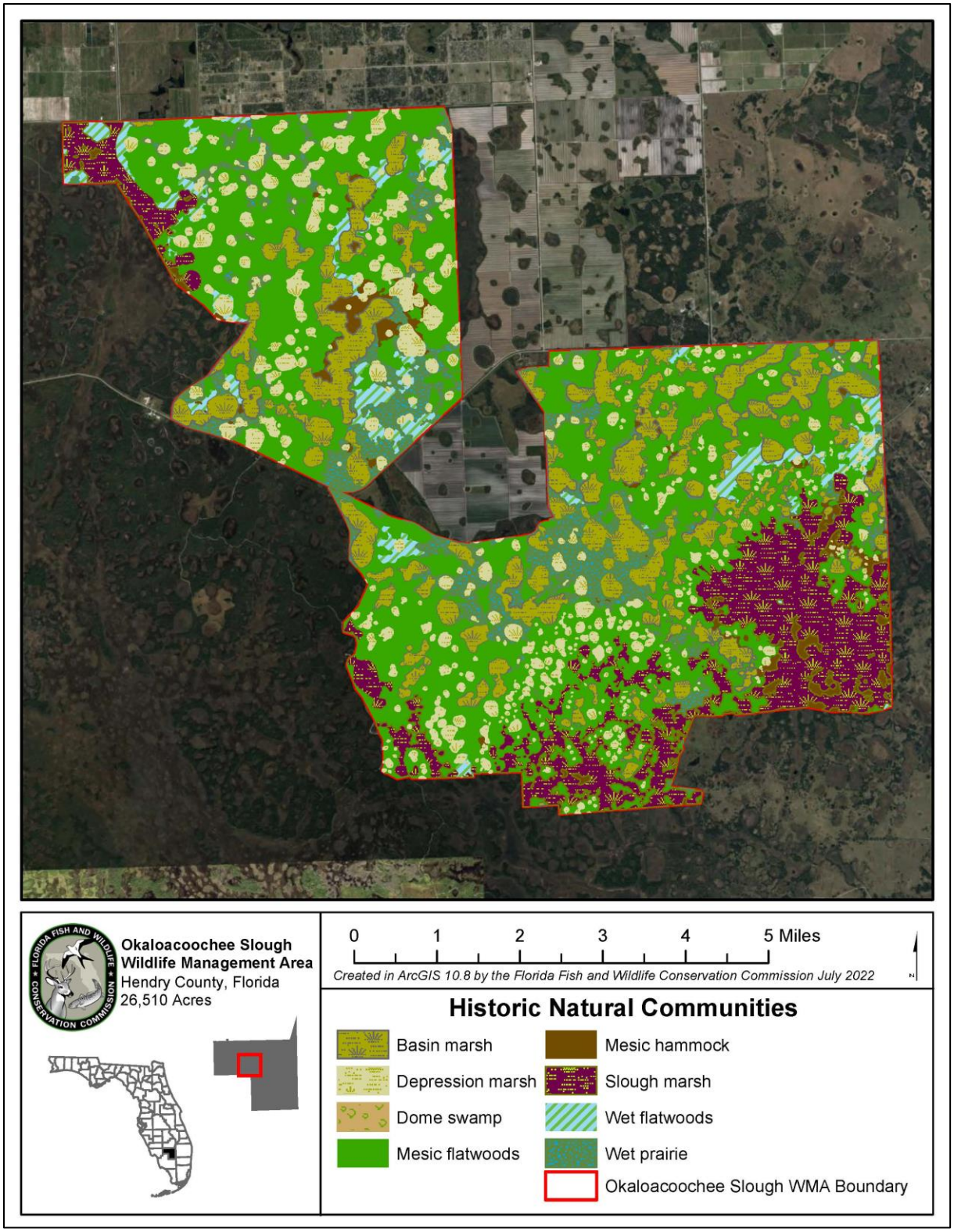


Figure 8. FNAI Historic Natural Communities

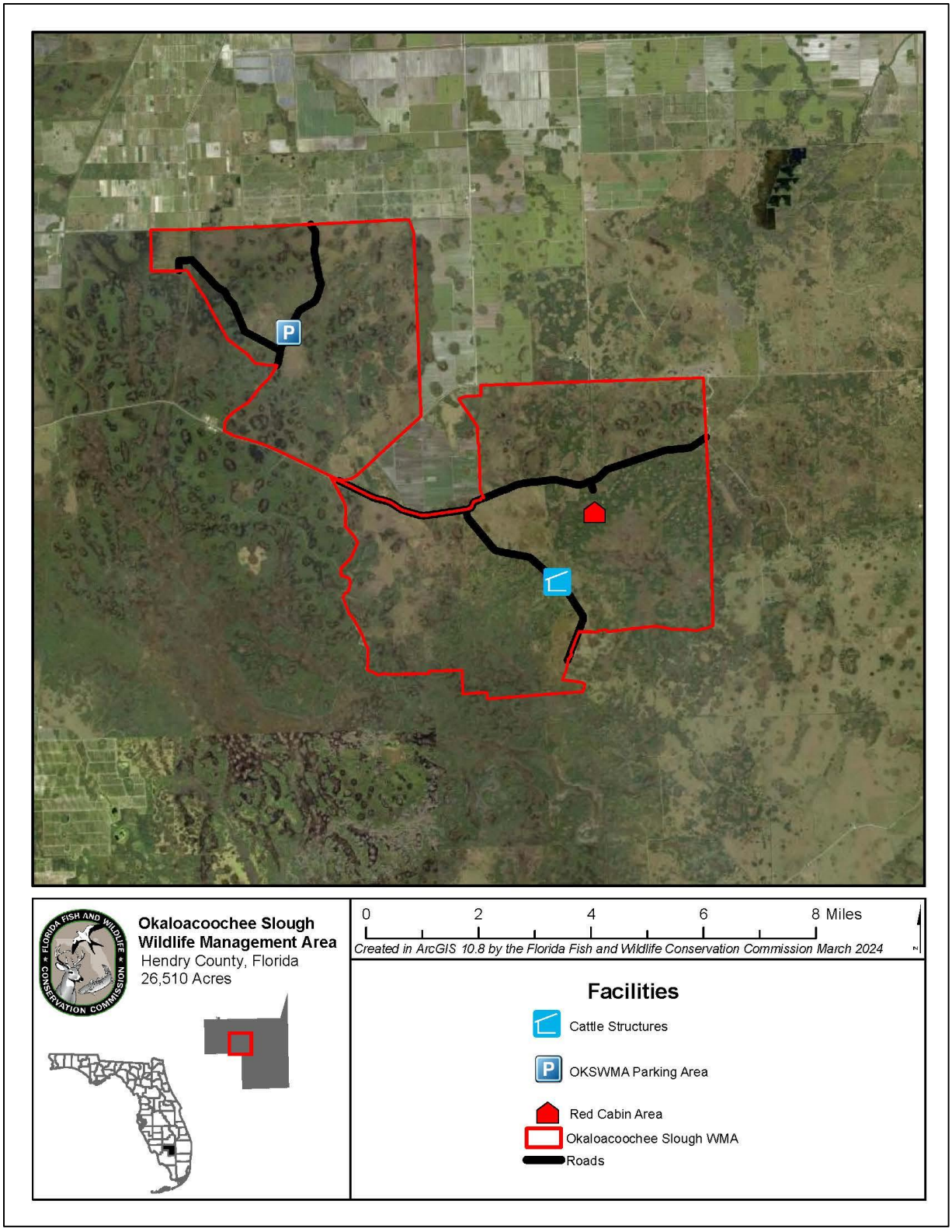


Figure 9. Facilities on the OKSWMA

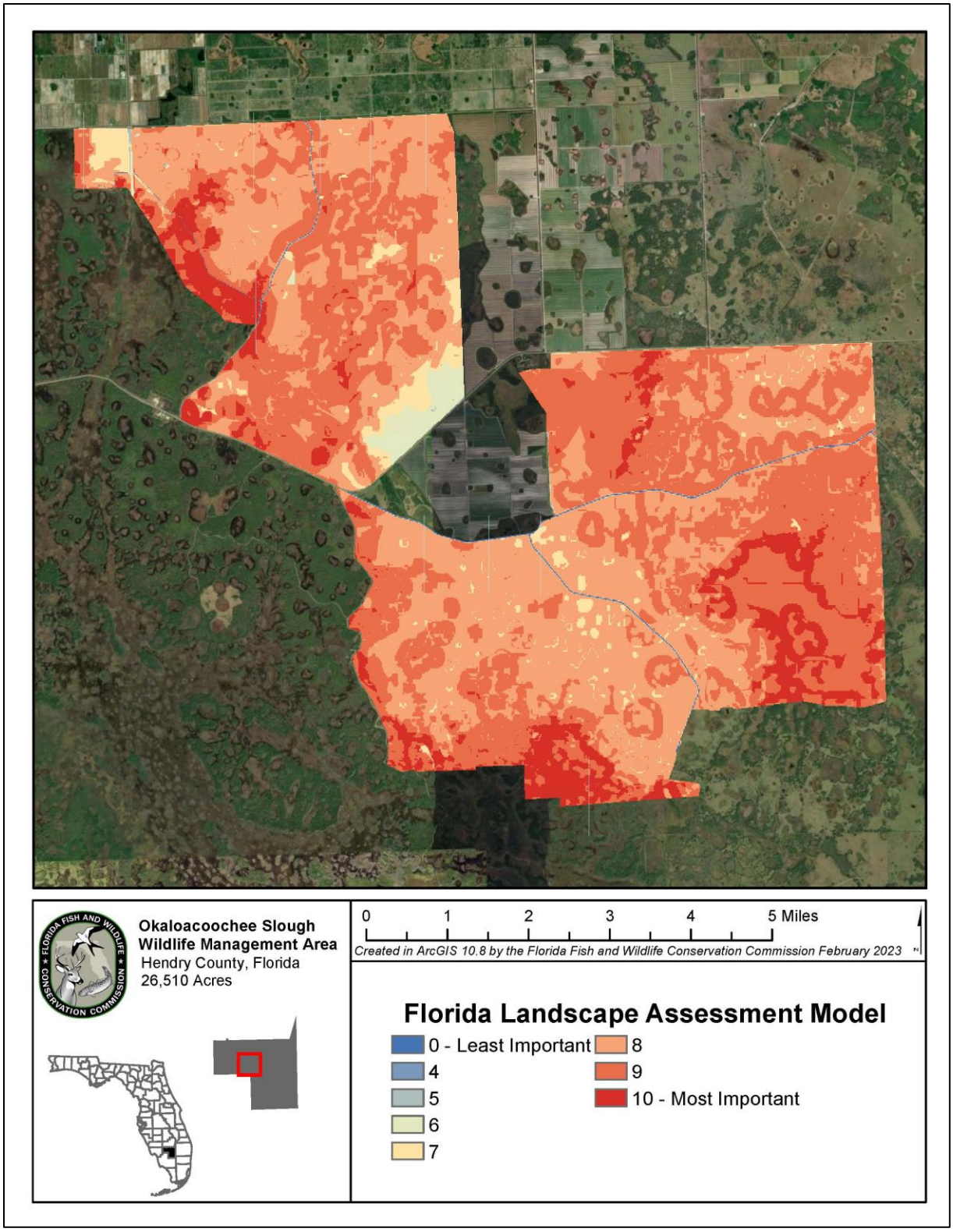


Figure 10. FLAM Values on the OKSWMA

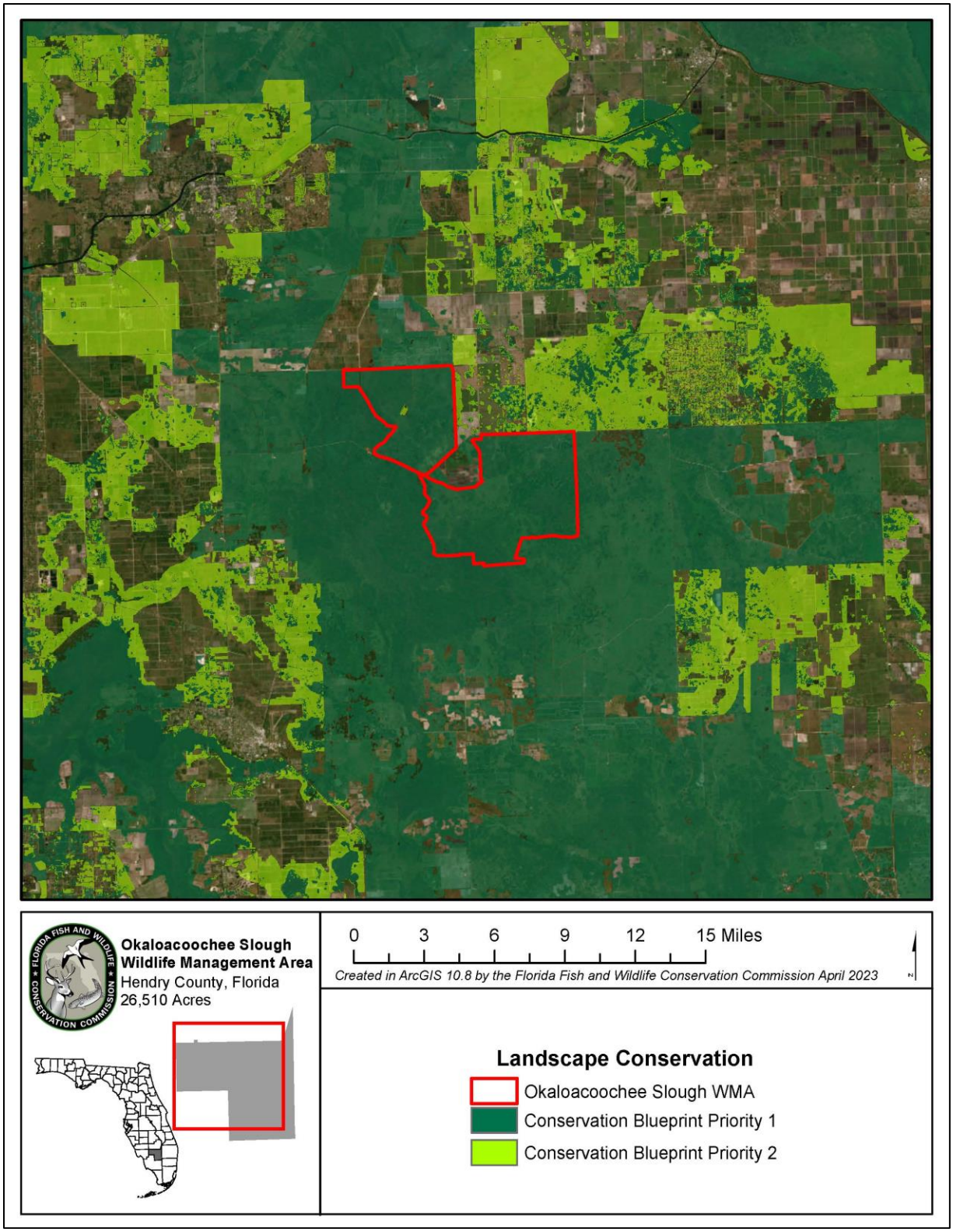


Figure 11. Landscape Conservation Blueprint

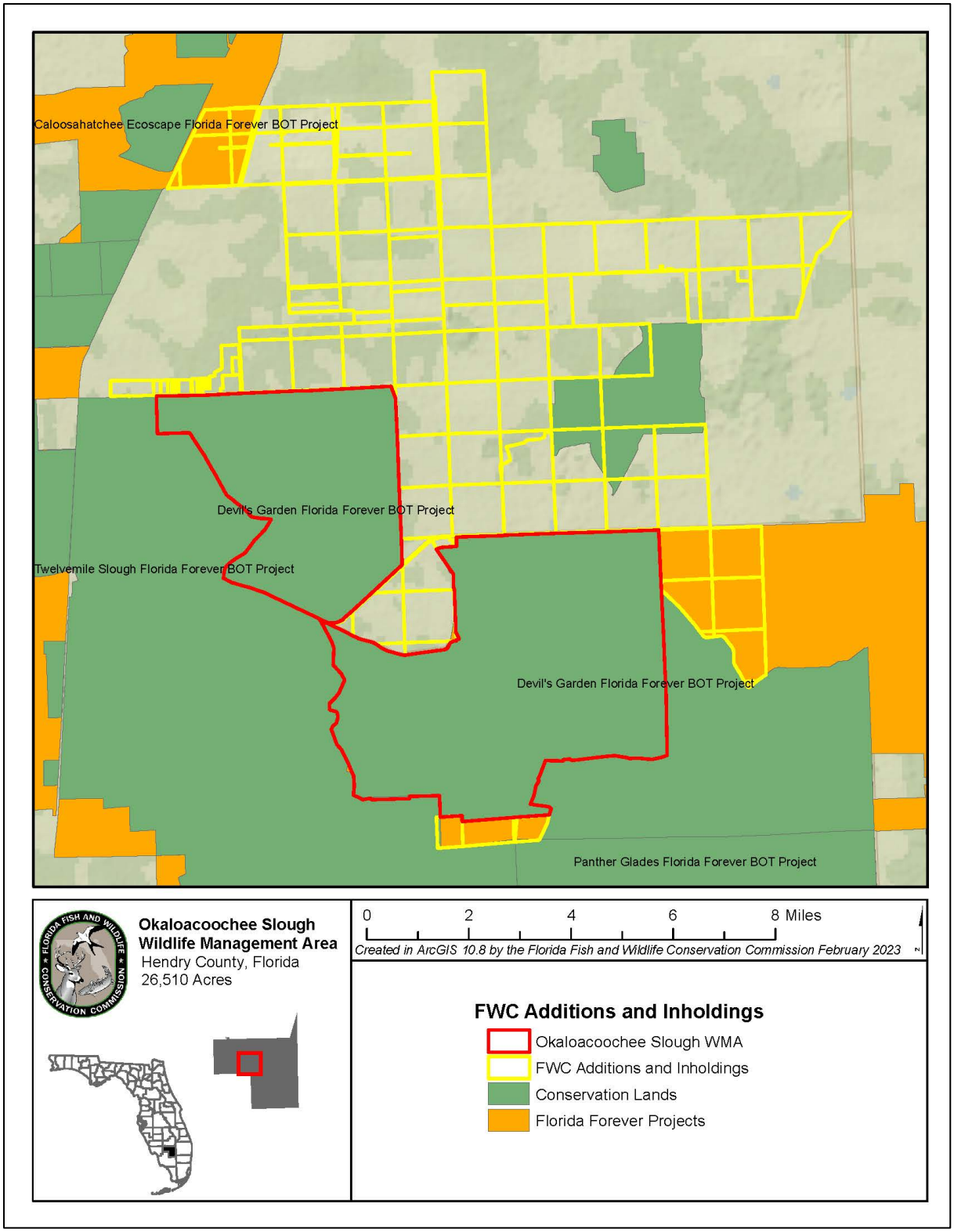


Figure 12. FWC Additions and Inholdings

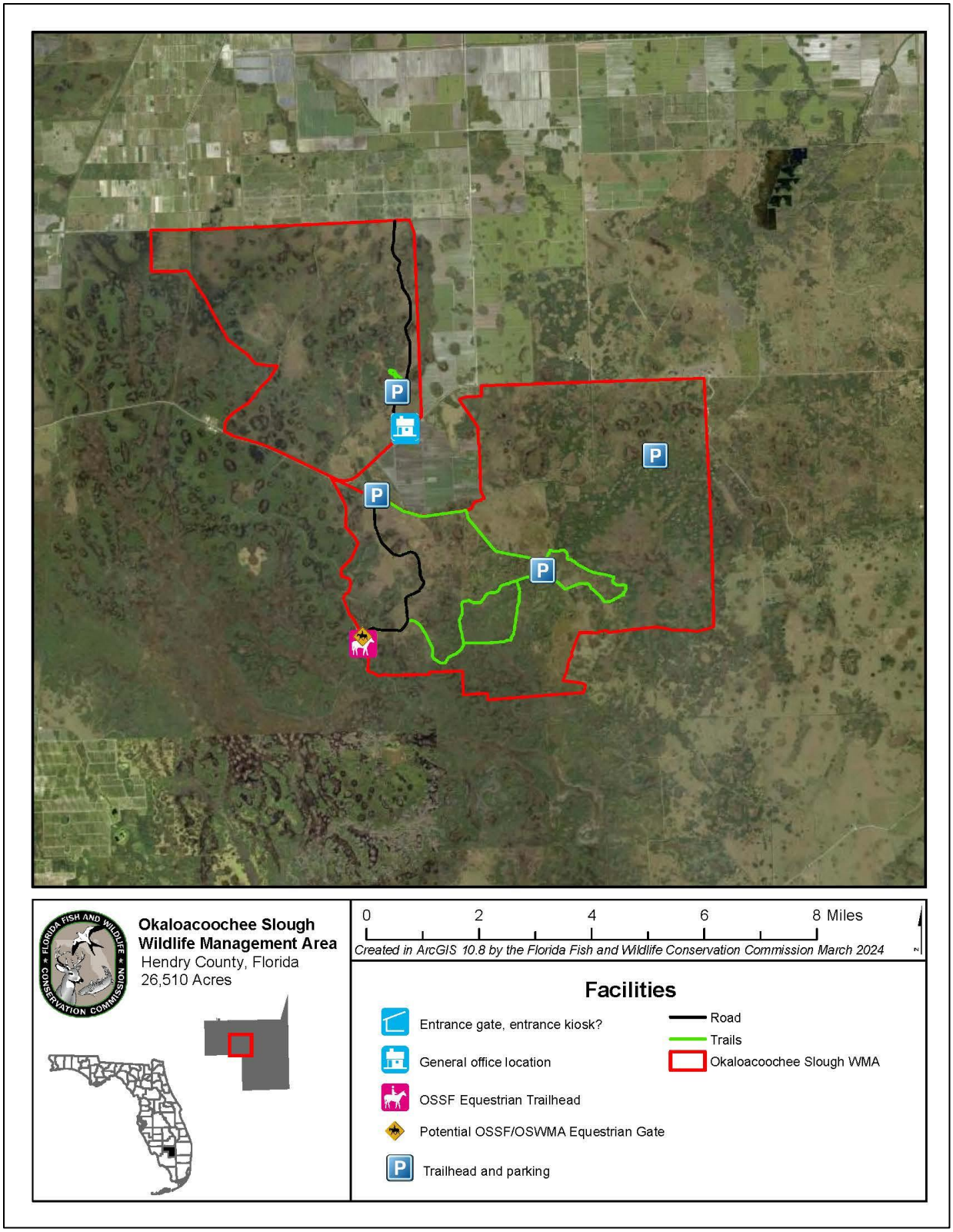


Figure 13. Proposed Facilities on the OKSWMA