

Flagler County Blueway

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Flagler County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2003</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>4,260</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>1,422</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>2,838</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$396,876,097</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Flagler County Blueway project will increase the protection of Florida’s biodiversity through the preservation of natural ecological communities that provide wildlife habitat for rare species such as the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) and gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The project will provide valuable urban open space and opportunities for public resource-based recreation in a rapidly growing area of the state.

General Description

The Flagler County Blueway project stretches from near Pellicer Creek down south to the Flagler County line. The project follows the Intracoastal Waterway and includes most undeveloped and available land east of I-95 in Flagler County.

The Flagler County Blueway project has multiple parcels in the Matanzas River ecosystem watershed, which includes the Intracoastal Waterway. The size of private lands in this project vary greatly in size, from 10 to 1,056 acres and vary in type and quality of habitats. The project extends from the headwaters of Pellicer Creek and the Princess Place Preserve in the north, past the Graham Swamp Conservation Area, to Bulow Creek State Park, just south of the Flagler County line. Project lands are primarily west of the Intracoastal Waterway, with a smaller acreage on the eastern shore of the Intracoastal Waterway. Other nearby conservation lands in addition to those mentioned above include the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park, Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve, Tomoka Marsh Aquatic Preserve, Tomoka State Park and Washington Oaks Gardens State Park.

Approximately 48 percent of the project are uplands. Scrub is 132 acres of the project area, with mesic flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods totaling 883 acres. Coastal uplands include 1,063 acres





of coastal strand and maritime hammock. These uplands are important flyway resting and feeding areas for migratory birds, and occur primarily on islands, and along the edge of the estuarine tidal marsh. Pine plantation, agricultural use (mostly pasture) and otherwise disturbed and developed lands comprise 1,901 acres of the project. Freshwater wetlands are mostly forested, including basin swamp, baygall, hydric hammock and perhaps a small area of dome swamp, for a total of 2,815 acres. Some hydric hammocks are of particularly good quality. One of the basin swamps is a southern extension of the Graham Swamp Conservation Area and is the largest natural area in the project. About 51 acres are depression marsh. Functional wetlands are 45 percent (3,692 acres) of the project area and help conserve areas for aquifer recharge (8 percent, or 672 acres of project area), and protect fragile coastal resources (28 percent, or 2,300 acres of project area). The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) states 84 percent (6,963 acres) of the project would provide surface water protection. There are 1,222 acres of estuarine tidal marsh, mostly along the Intracoastal Waterway, Matanzas River and Smith Creek. There are 218 acres classified as open water. FNAI states 25 percent (2,075 acres) of the project area contains under-represented natural communities.

Imperiled or rare animal species documented by FNAI to occur on the project include the gopher tortoise and MacGillivray’s seaside sparrow (*Ammodramus maritimus macgillivrii*). The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has been reported to nest near the project area. The West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) occurs nearby in the Intracoastal Waterway. Many other vertebrate species are expected to occupy habitat within the project area. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), approximately 42 percent (3,486 acres) of the project area is within Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas. According to FNAI, another 31 percent (2,583 acres) of the project is a habitat conservation priority for rare species with the greatest conservation need.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4

Public Use

There are usable uplands within the project that will accommodate resource-based recreation activities, but the degree of ownership acquired will determine the degree of public access and use. Portions of the project include tidal marshes with numerous small creeks and hammock islands. Other areas have creeks associated with them. Boating, canoeing and kayaking can be





accommodated on many of these creeks and there are opportunities to create a water-borne trail system that might accommodate limited facilities, especially for canoes and kayaks.

Where road access or connectivity with existing public lands exists, there are opportunities for upland activities such as short nature hikes, primitive camping, picnicking and shoreline fishing. The Flagler County Blueway project has tracts of land adjacent to or very near the following managed areas: Bulow Creek State Park, Faver-Dykes State Park, Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area, Graham Swamp Conservation Area, Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, North Peninsula State Park, Pellicer Creek Corridor Conservation Area, Princess Place Preserve, Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve and Washington Oaks Gardens State Park.

Acquisition Planning

1994

On December 15, 1994, the St. Johns River Water Management District established the 105.39-acre Matanzas Shores conservation easement, all of which was inside the project boundary when the project was started.

2003

On December 5, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Flagler County Blueway project to Group B of the 2004 Florida Forever Priority List. While fee simple acquisition is preferred, there may be parcels that are not available in fee simple but lend themselves to conservation easements or other less-than-fee approaches. Sponsored by Flagler County, this project consisted of approximately 5,015 acres and multiple owners with a 2002 taxable value of \$20,502,164.

2004

On June 3, 2004, ARC moved this project to Group A of the 2004 Florida Forever Priority List.

2006

On October 13, 2006, ARC approved a project redesign that included a reduction of the project boundary by 606 acres and approved the addition of 4.5 acres. All parcels removed had been developed or become isolated since the original boundary was identified.

In 2006, ARC approved a fee simple, 20-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by Flagler County, consisted of one parcel and landowner (Kitteridge Investments) and had a 2002 taxable value of \$6,800. The addition is considered important, but not critical to the project. If acquired, it will be managed by Flagler County as part of Princess Place Preserve.





2008

In October 2008, 59.19 acres of the Emerald Coast Development Partners, LLC ownership were purchased for \$790,000 (\$395,000 from Florida Forever funds and \$395,000 from Flagler County). Flagler County will manage this site as part of the Betty Steflik Memorial Preserve (320 acres).

2011

On October 14, 2011, ARC recommended a 182-acre reduction to the project boundary because of residential development/commercial buildings/infrastructure.

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category.

2021

On August 13, 2021, ARC approved a reduction of 19.26 acres in Flagler County from the project boundary.

Coordination

St. Johns River Water Management District and Flagler County are considered partners on this project.

Manager(s)

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) and FWC are to be cooperating managers for this project, while Flagler County will manage the Emerald Coast parcel.

Management Prospectus

FFS and FWC will share all management responsibilities for Flagler County Blueway under a unified management concept. Under unified management, both agencies will identify mutually acceptable goals that further the long-term protection of the site's plant and wildlife resources, promote sound stewardship of land, timber and water resources, and provide the public with access and quality recreational opportunities.

The project has the capability to provide needed protection for fish and wildlife habitat in a manner that is compatible with sound silvicultural practices. More importantly, the project could serve an important biogeographical function by providing physical linkages and connections to several other publicly owned lands in the Flagler County area.

Project goals include protection of biodiversity, and provision of natural resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities, so programs would be developed to manage





ecosystems for multiple use. Multiple use means 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 used to best serve the people of the state, making judicious use of the land for some or all these resources and considering the relative values of the various resources.

Conserving and protecting the unique coastal maritime community, xeric oak scrub community and imperiled or rare species should be an important management goal for the project. A broad-scale management program will be developed to manage and/or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, wildlife populations, forests and water resources, and promote recreation and environmental education in the natural environment.

Timber stands would be managed using even age and/or uneven aged methods to maintain a broad diversity of age classes ranging from young stands to areas with old growth characteristics. This would provide habitat for the full spectrum of species found in the natural environment and enhance and maintain biodiversity.

The project area is near many users who enjoy fishing, hiking, hunting, kayaking and wildlife viewing. There is also potential for equestrian use, off- road biking and multi-use trails through the proposed project.

Qualifications for State Designation

Some tracts in this project adjoin and provide connectivity among federal, state and local conservation lands. This project is significant as an ecological greenway.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The disjunct nature of parcels comprising the Flagler County Blueway creates a special management consideration to be addressed by the unified managers. FFS and FWC will need to devise a strategy to deploy manpower, equipment and other management resources in a coordinated and efficient manner. Some portions of Flagler County Blueway are low-need areas that will require up-front implementation of resource management, including the frequent use of prescribed fire where appropriate. About 23 percent of the project area has been subjected to ground cover disturbance due to past silviculture, consequently, additional effort will be required to accomplish objectives for restoring to a desired future condition.

FFS and FWC propose to work cooperatively to assess site management needs and develop a conceptual management plan for the site. Examples of situations requiring cooperative effort include restoring mesic and wet flatwoods previously managed for timber production, removing or thinning off-site timber species to promote the regeneration of native ground covers and





appropriate tree species, and reforesting recently harvested areas. The managing agencies will conduct a historic vegetation analysis to assist in determining appropriate desired future conditions and identify appropriate restoration methods and tools. This effort will help conserve habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. Other unified management priorities will include protecting maritime hammock communities, restoring sensitive wetlands, and the identification, control, and follow-up monitoring of exotic species. Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*), a Category I exotic (most adversely affecting Florida's ecology), is an established shrub in the project area and deserves aggressive control.

The principal land management activities slated for less disturbed natural communities include introducing prescribed fire and control of human uses in certain management units. Restoration methods will also include thinning of dense pine stands to decrease canopy cover and facilitate restoring native groundcovers. Biotic surveys would be conducted as part of early unified management activities. With imperiled or rare species expected to occur within the project, resource inventories would be an initial priority under the unified management approach. Environmentally sensitive areas such as erosion-prone sites, listed species habitats, outstanding natural areas and wetlands, would be identified during the initial resource inventory to implement appropriate protective measures for each specific area. Such inventories are vital to unified management planning efforts directed at facility and infrastructure development, and design and implementation of recreational use programs.

Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security and Protection of Infrastructure

During the first year after acquisition, both agencies operating under the unified management approach will emphasize site security, posting boundaries, public access for low-intensity outdoor recreation, fire management, resource inventory and removal of refuse. Both managing agencies will participate in the joint development of a conceptual management plan specifying area management goals and objectives. Both managing agencies will meet frequently to coordinate task assignments and to cooperate with, and seek the assistance of, other state agencies, local governments and other appropriate participants affecting management of the project site. Goals for the long term emphasize multiple use management and the conservation of the site's natural resources including timber, fish and wildlife, and water. These goals would include restoring habitat and hydrology, and conservation and protection of listed species of flora and fauna.

Following completion of plant community inventory and historic vegetation analysis, quantified vegetation management objectives would be developed pursuant to an objective-based vegetation management process. Where practical, disturbed sites would be restored to





conditions expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems, including re-establishment of species expected to occur naturally on specific sites. Management would emphasize enhancement of abundance, and spatial distribution of imperiled or rare species. Essential roads would be stabilized to provide all-weather public access and management operations. Programs providing multiple recreational uses would also be implemented.

Both agencies will work towards the development of a fire management plan that will apply prescribed burning in a manner that maximizes natural resource protection and enhancement. Most of this project area has not been burned by prescribed fire in recent years. Whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks will be utilized to contain, and control prescribed and natural fires. Growing season prescribed burning would be used where appropriate to best achieve management objectives. Where appropriate, practical and in pursuit of natural resource management objectives, timber resources will be managed using acceptable silvicultural practices. Thinning of timber, introduction of prescribed fire and sustainable forestry management practices could provide silvicultural products, ecological and recreational benefits. It is also possible that recreational trails on the parcels could function as back up fire lines, provide access for prescribed burning equipment and provide an opportunity for wildlife viewing. Archaeological and historic sites would be managed in coordination with the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources whom lists 16 such sites as occurring in the project area.

Both agencies will work towards development of a road plan identifying roads to be used for vehicular access by the public, and roads that are required for administrative use. Unnecessary roads, fire lanes and hydrological disturbances would be abandoned or restored as practical. The road plan would ensure that the public has appropriate access and that sensitive resources are protected. Other existing infrastructure necessary for management would be protected to the extent possible. Infrastructure development would be the minimum required to serve the needs of the public, including provision of facilities, and would include provisions for the facilities necessary for security and management of the project area. The Emerald Coast parcel, already purchased, will be separately managed by Flagler County.

Revenue-generating Potential

Timber sales would be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions, under a multiple-use management concept. FNAI indicates that 27 percent (2,260 acres) of the project area is available as priorities 2, 3 and 5 for sustainable forestry. FNAI's estimate is that 1.34 percent (111 acres) of forest provides aquifer recharge. Management would seek revenue-generating potential by improving wildlife diversity and resource-based





recreation in such areas. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of fishing licenses, wildlife management area permits and daily use permit fees. Some revenues might be realized in the future from other recreational user fees, and ecotourism activities, if such projects could be economically developed. Fifteen percent of all gross revenues will be returned to the county from which those funds were generated. Both agencies have agreed to a unified management framework whereby all management funds, site generated revenues and management expenditures are to be evenly divided between FFS and FWC.

Cooperators in Management Activities

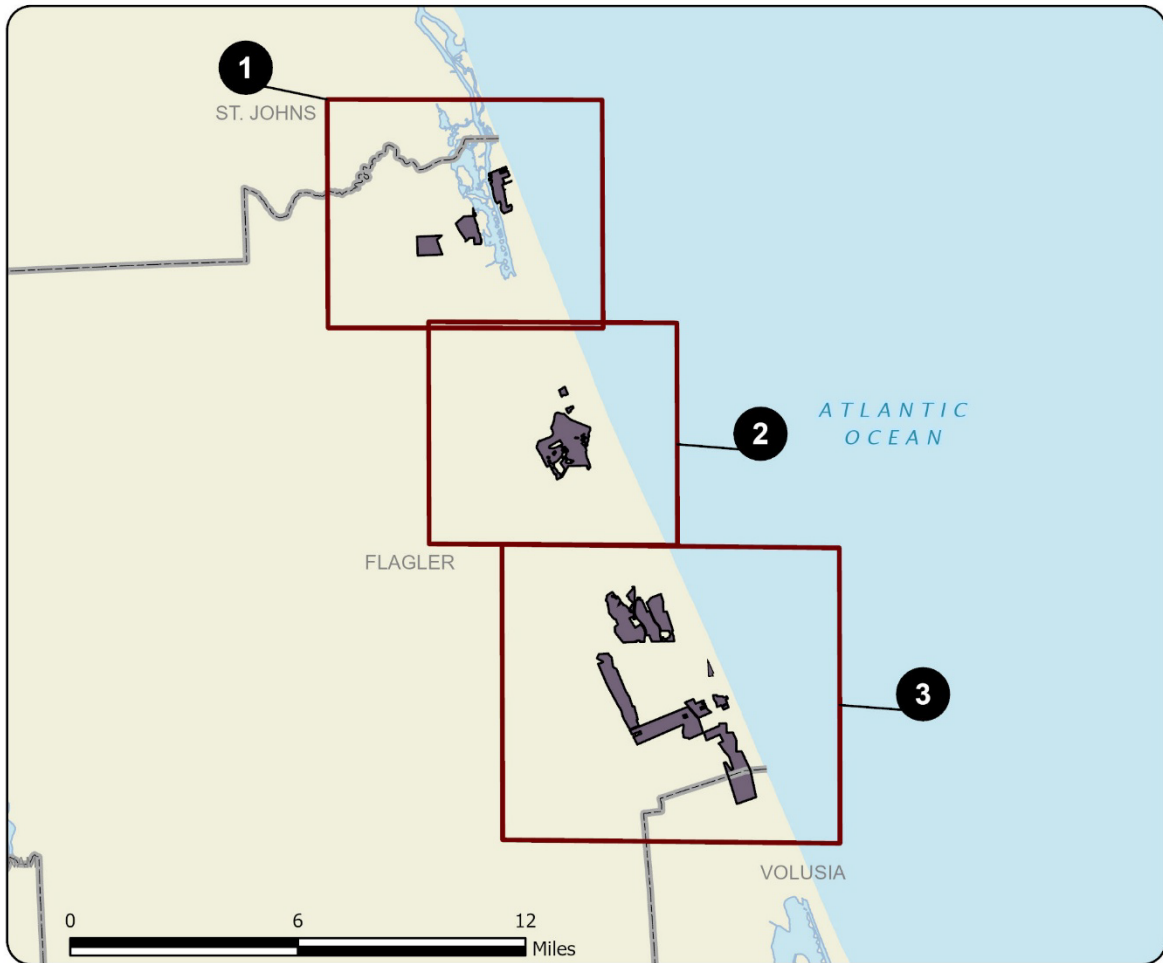
The unified managers (FFS and FWC) should cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies, including St. Johns River Water Management District, to manage the project area. The project should be designated as both a state forest and a wildlife management area.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS and FWC</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) Program	CARL
Salary	Not Provided	Not Provided
OPS	Not Provided	Not Provided
Expense	\$988,553	\$85,164
OCO	\$375,896	\$208,493
TOTAL	\$1,364,449	\$293,657

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

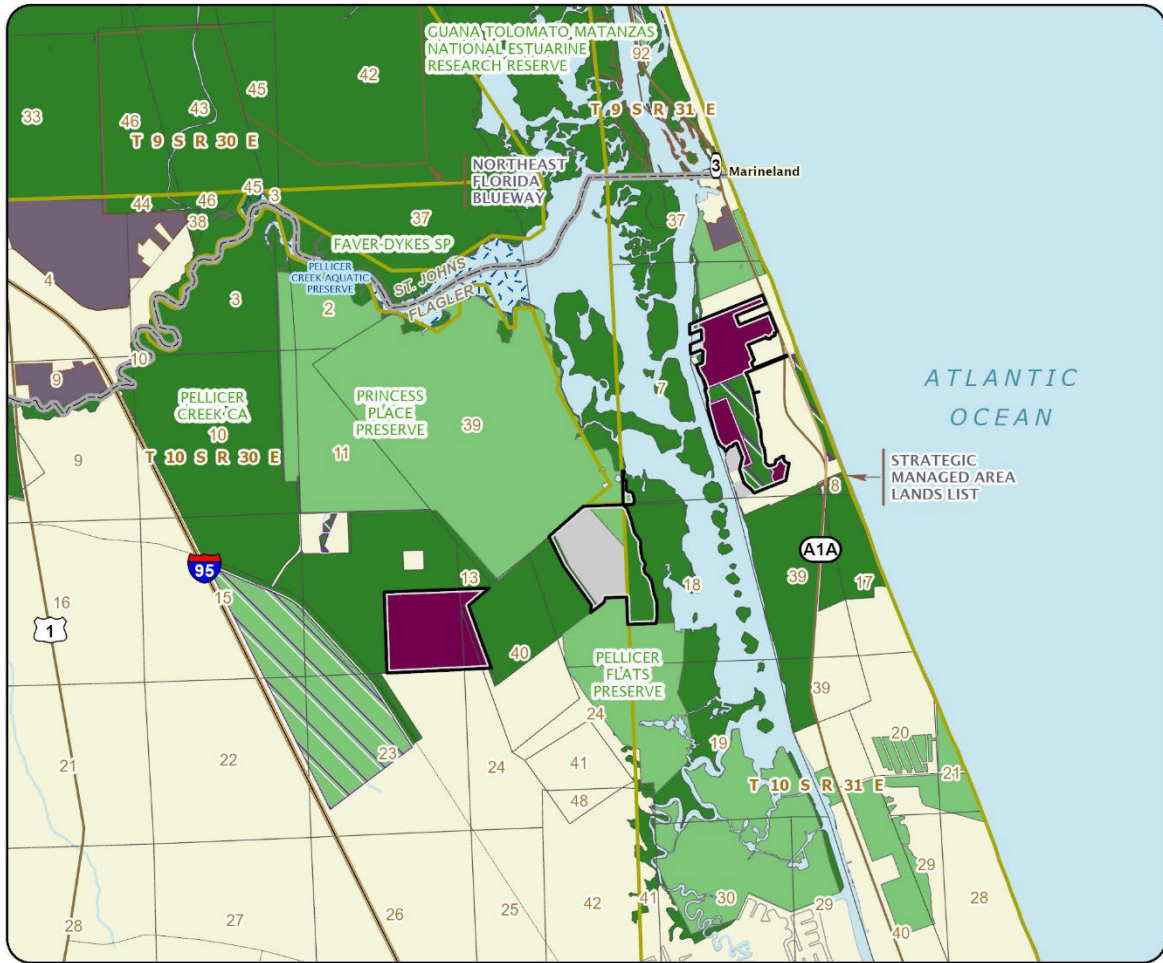




FLAGLER COUNTY BLUEWAY: OVERVIEW

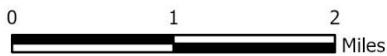
FLAGLER AND VOLUSIA COUNTIES

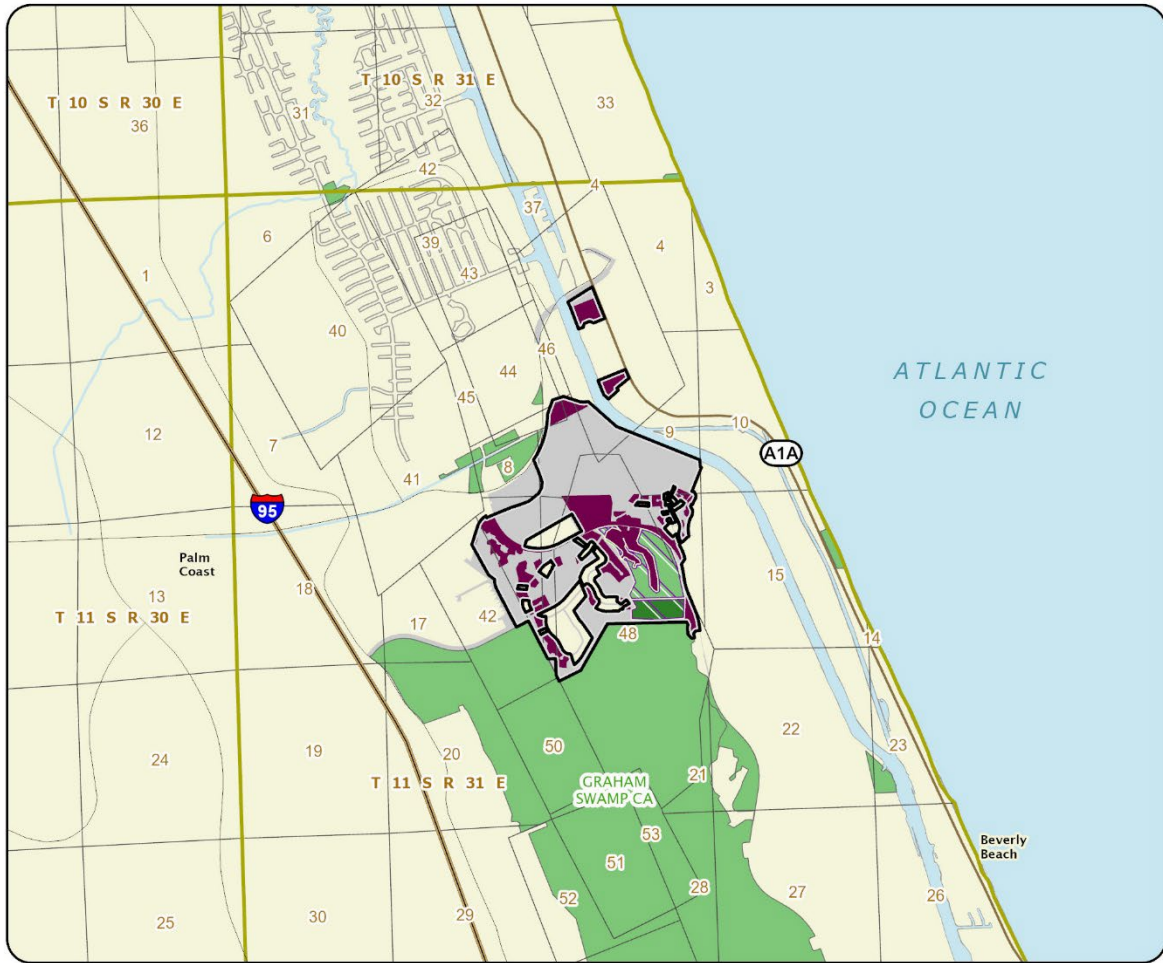




FLAGLER COUNTY BLUEWAY: MAP 1

FLAGLER COUNTY

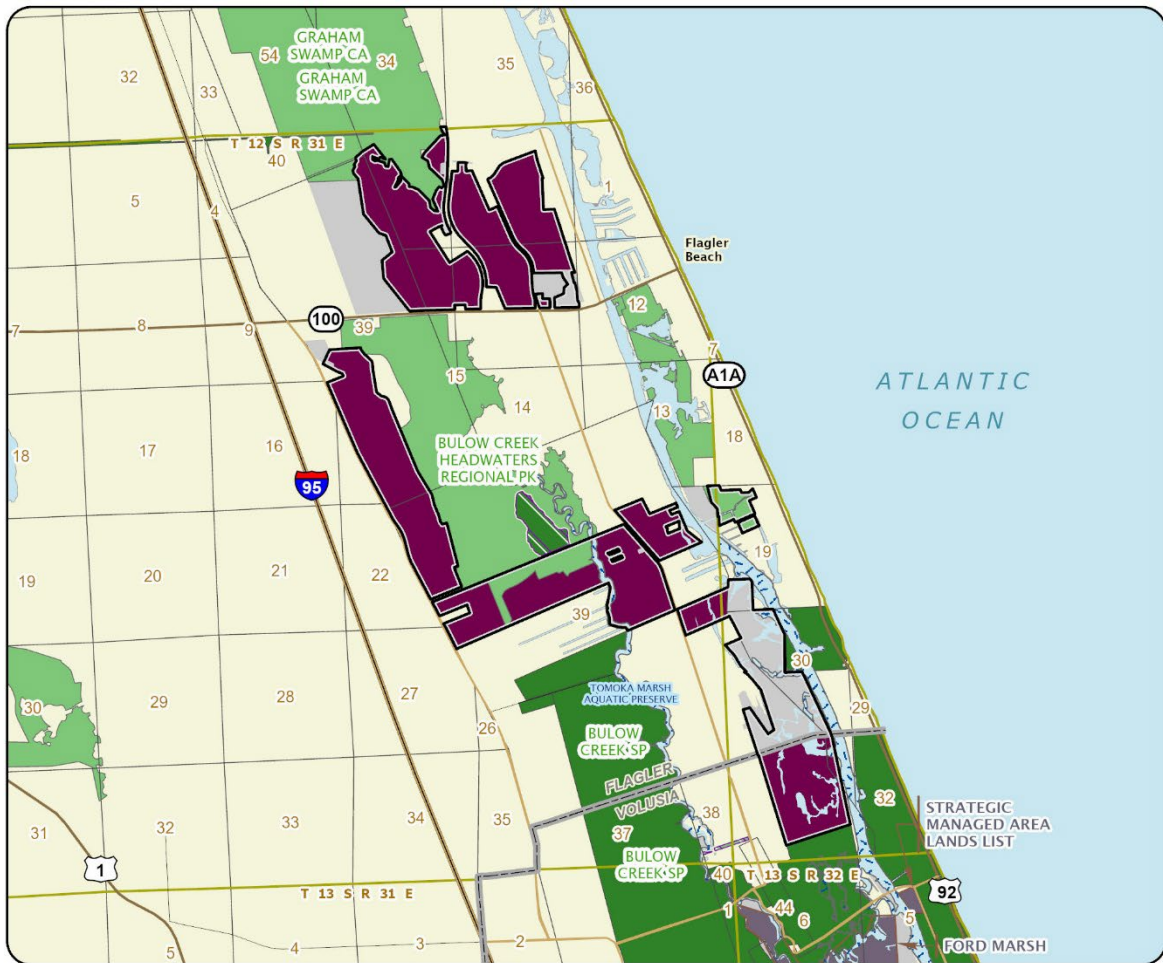




FLAGLER COUNTY BLUEWAY: MAP 2

FLAGLER COUNTY





FLAGLER COUNTY BLUEWAY: MAP 3

FLAGLER AND VOLUSIA COUNTIES

