

Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves

Critical Natural Lands

Alachua, Citrus, Jackson, Marion and Sumter Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1994
<i>Project Acres</i>	602
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	19
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	583
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$8,837,505

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves project will conserve seven caves and surrounding lands to ensure the survival of both bats and other species that rely on these caves for protection and breeding. Caves where the southeastern bat (*Myotis austroriparius*) rears its young also protect a variety of imperiled animals such as the federally endangered gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) and a multitude of cave-dwelling invertebrates. Because these caves are easily damaged by vandals, the project would limit access to the caves and help to preserve a portion of this unique, lightless world.

General Description

Every spring, adult female southeastern bats leave their colonies and move to certain caves, where they bear and raise their young. For the species to survive, these maternity roosts must be protected from human disturbance. The seven caves in this project are used as maternity roosts by these bats. The caves also harbor several other rare and imperiled species, including the federally endangered gray bat and rare cave-dwelling crayfish and amphipods. The Gerome's Cave site has an outstanding example of upland hardwood forest, the Jennings's Cave site has intact sandhill and the Sneads Cave site supports good floodplain forest and floodplain swamp. Three archaeological sites are known to be located at Gerome's Cave. Vandalism is the greatest threat to the caves.



Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gray bat	G3G4/SX
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Georgia blind salamander	G1G2/S1S2
Florida cave isopod	G1G2/S1S2
Light-fleeing cave crayfish	G1G2/S1S2
North Florida spider cave crayfish	G1G2/S1S2
Dougherty Plain cave crayfish	G2G3/S2
Florida cave amphipod	G2G3/S2S3
Hobbs's Cave amphipod	G2G3/S2S3
<i>False rue-anemone*</i>	G5/S1
Tricolored bat	G3G4/S2S3
Southeastern myotis	G4/S3

**Plant species are in italics*

Public Use

The caves will be managed as wildlife and environmental areas. They are generally not suitable for recreation, but some could have nature trails. Grant’s Cave, a less-than-fee parcel, also qualifies as a wildlife and environmental area. Any public use will be negotiated with the landowner, but this cave is probably not suitable for public recreation.

Acquisition Planning

Overall, acquisition efforts should concentrate on purchasing occupied caves first: Sneads Cave - occupied; Catacombs — occupied; Sumter County Cave— vacant; Sweet Gum Cave — vacant; Gerome’s Cave — vacant; Jennings’s Cave — vacant.

1996

On December 5, 1996, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council transferred Grant’s Cave, consisting of two ownerships, to the Less-Than-Fee category.

2002

On June 6, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) combined the Less-Than-Fee project to the Group B Full Fee project. It included the following:

- 1) Sweet Gum Cave (Citrus County) — consists of approximately 10 acres, one parcel and one owner.
- 2) Gerome’s Cave (Jackson County) — consists of approximately 160 acres, five parcels and four owners.
- 3) Sneads Cave (Jackson County) — consists of approximately 80 acres, one parcel and one owner.





- 4) Catacombs Cave (Marion County) — consists of approximately 10 acres, two parcels and two owners.
- 5) Jennings’ Cave (Marion County) — consists of approximately 89 acres, 79 parcels and 70 owners.
- 6) Sumter County Cave (Sumter County) — consists of approximately 362 acres, four parcels and three owners.

2003

On December 5, 2003, ARC moved the project to Group A.

2011

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Critical Natural Lands category.

2025

In April 2025, ARC approved the addition of one parcel totaling approximately 4 acres in Jackson County to the project boundary.

Coordination

The Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD) will be an acquisition partner on the Gerome’s Cave site. There are no acquisition partners for less-than-fee parcels.

Management Policy Statement

The primary goal of management of the Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves project is to conserve and protect significant habitat for native, rare and imperiled species.

Manager(s)

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will manage the full fee acquisitions, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of State Lands will monitor the less-than-fee acquisitions.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

The sensitive wildlife resources of the Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves (southeastern bats and other rare cave-dwelling animals) qualify them as wildlife and environmental areas.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The caves will require protection from vandalism. Natural communities around some of the cave entrances will require restoration.





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

Initial management activities will concentrate on securing each cave site with chain link fencing, posting signs and removing trash and debris from the caves and surrounding areas. Each cave also will be monitored to determine its current usage by bats and to inventory each site’s natural resources. Current management is based on both current and previous monitoring information. A management plan will be developed outlining long-term management strategies for the project on a cave-by-cave basis. Management considerations will include (but are not limited to) site protection, biological monitoring, educational and recreational opportunities and habitat restoration or enhancement.

Revenue-generating Potential

No significant revenue is currently being generated. However, future management activities may include educational and recreational opportunities that could generate revenue.

Cooperators in Management Activities

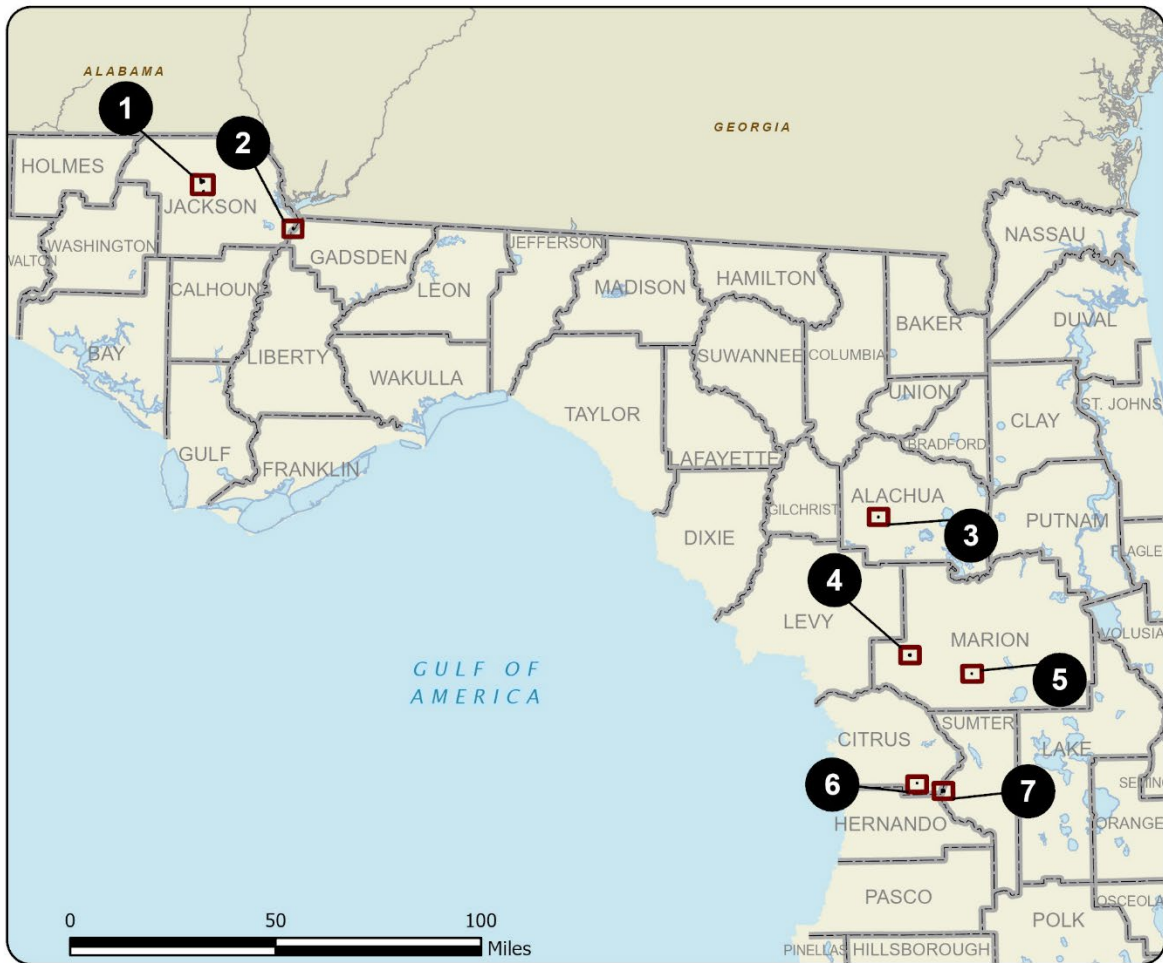
No other local, state, or federal agencies are currently participating in the management of this project. NFWFMD proposes to cooperate in the management of Gerome’s Cave in Jackson County.

Management Cost Summary

<u>Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) Program	CARL
Salary	\$0	\$0
OPS	\$14,784	\$14,784
Expense	\$4,725	\$4,725
OCO	\$30,240	\$0
TOTAL	\$49,749	\$19,509

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



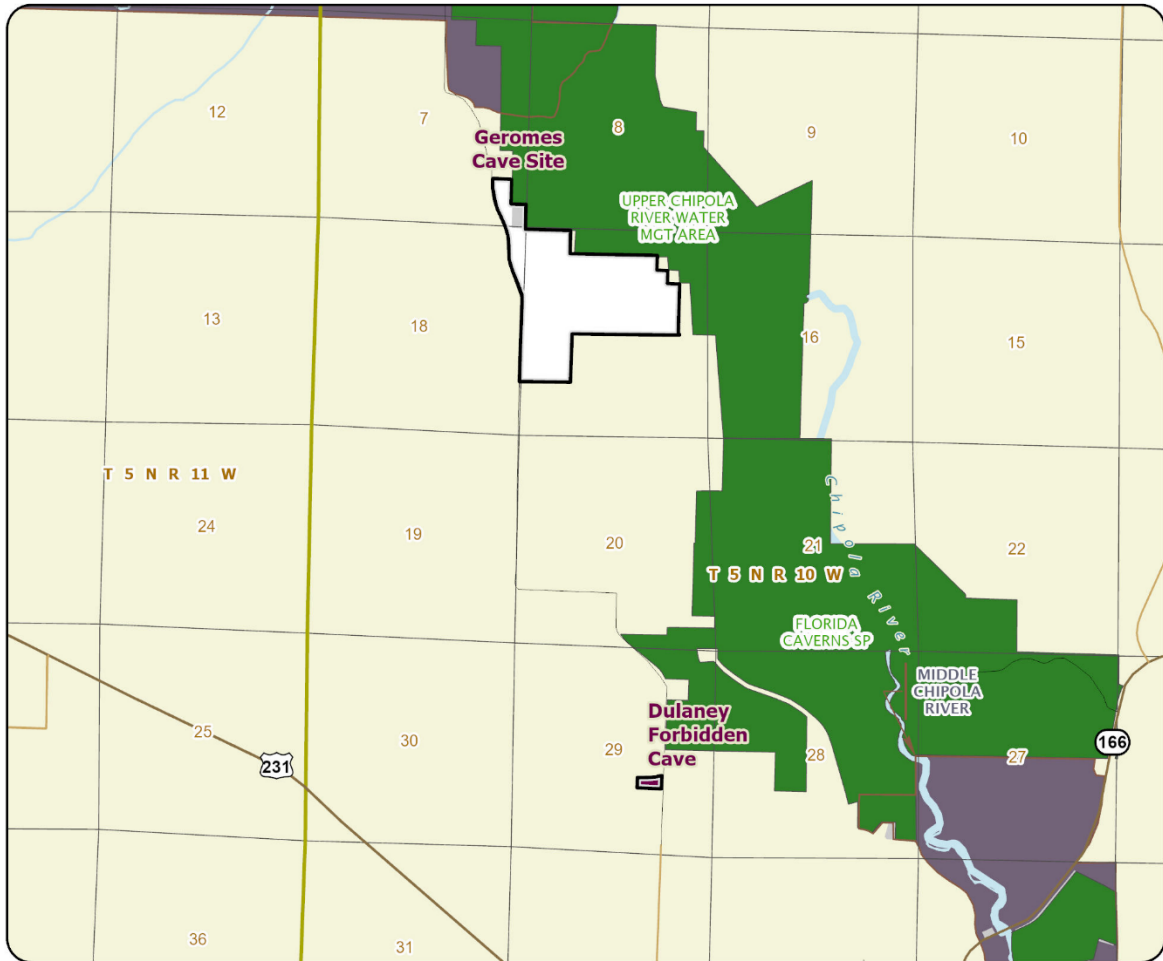


SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: OVERVIEW

ALACHUA, CITRUS, JACKSON, MARION, AND SUMTER COUNTIES

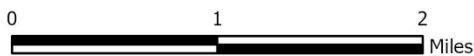
- Map 1 Dulaney Forbidden Cave Site
- Map 1 Geromes Cave Site
- Map 2 Sneads Cave Site
- Map 3 Grants Cave Site
- Map 4 Jennings Cave Site
- Map 5 Catacombs Cave Site
- Map 6 Sweet Gum Cave Site
- Map 7 Sumter County Cave Site

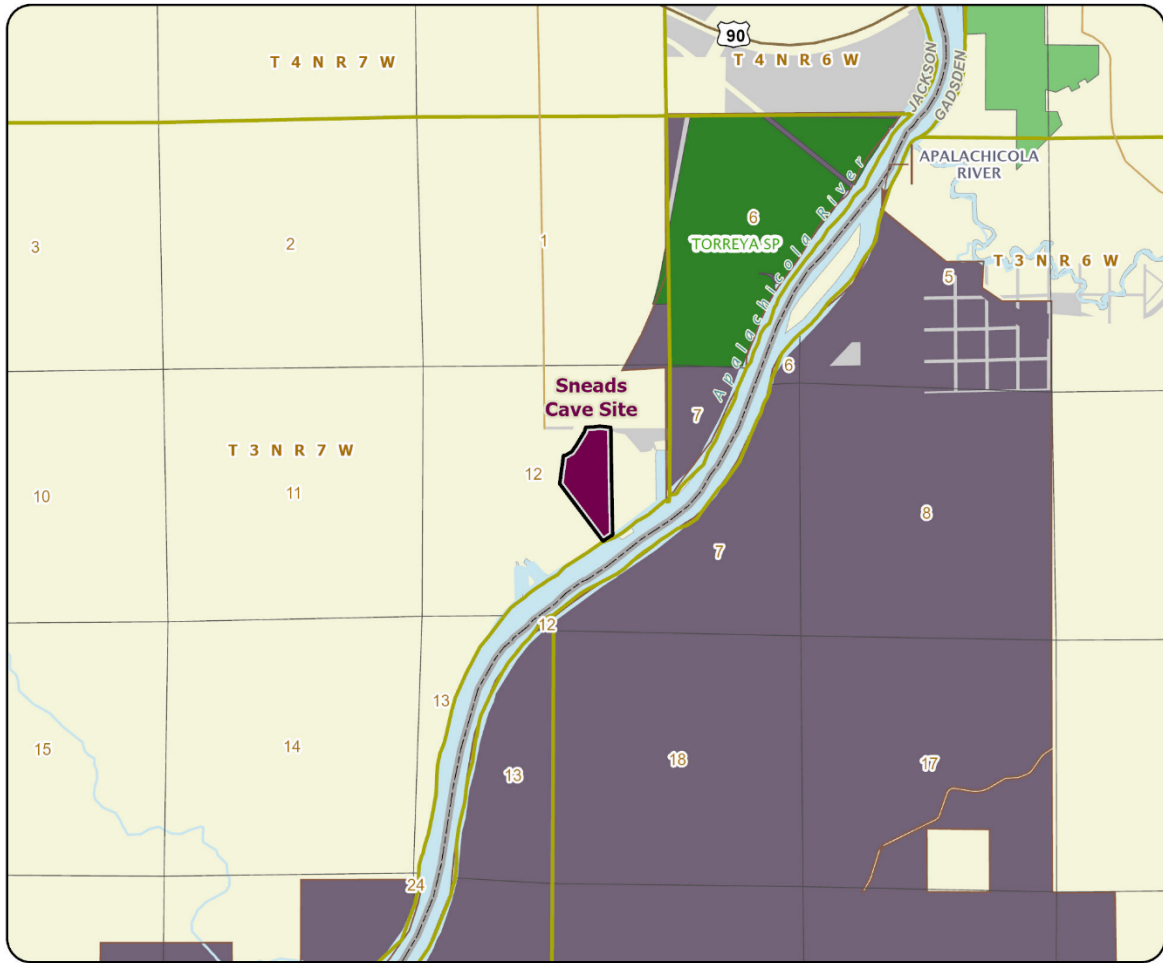




SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 1

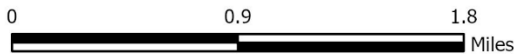
JACKSON COUNTY

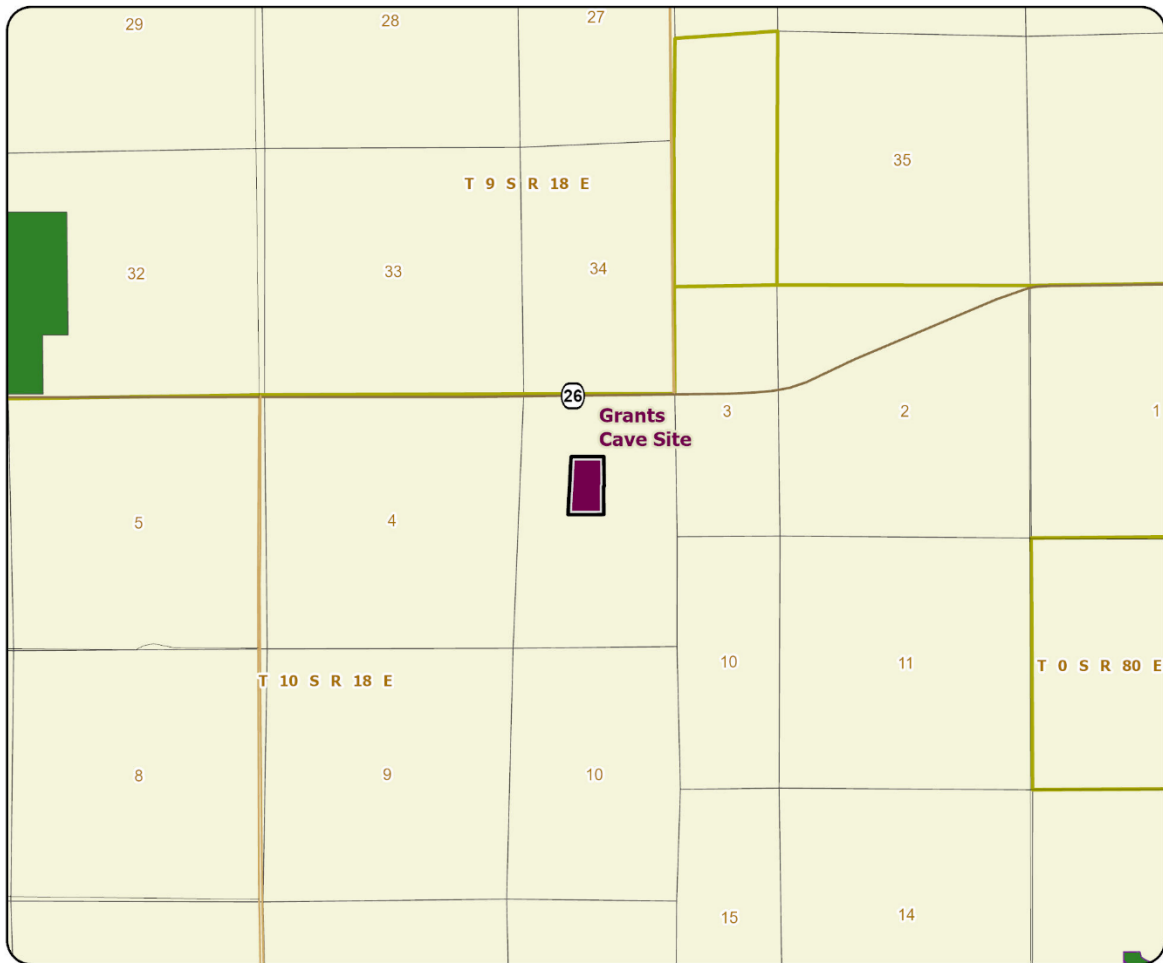




SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 2





JACKSON COUNTY

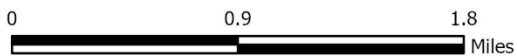


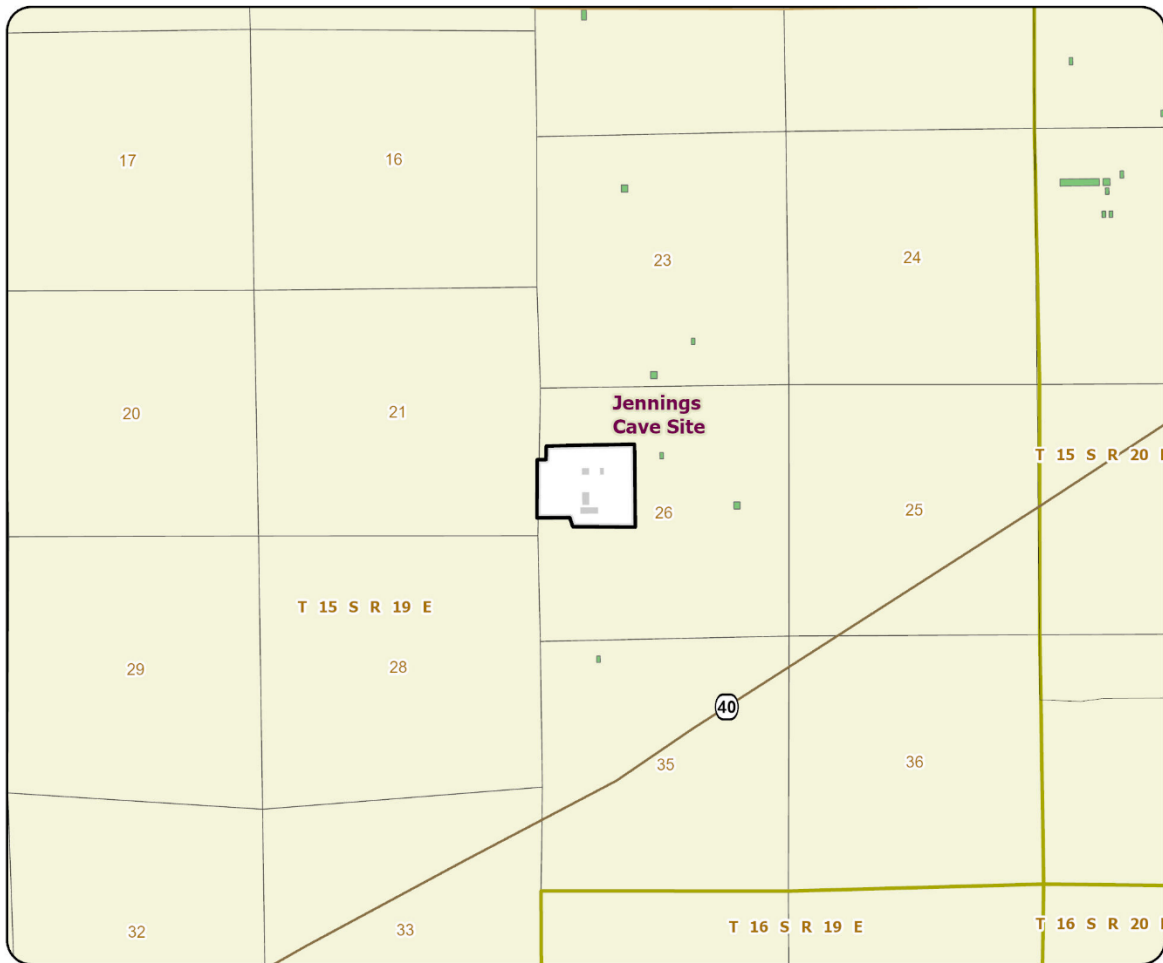


SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 3

ALACHUA COUNTY

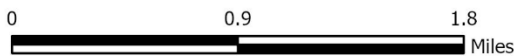
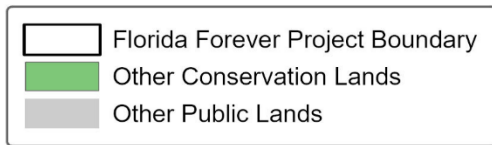
-  Florida Forever Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcels Remaining
-  State Conservation Lands
-  Less-Than-Fee Acquisition

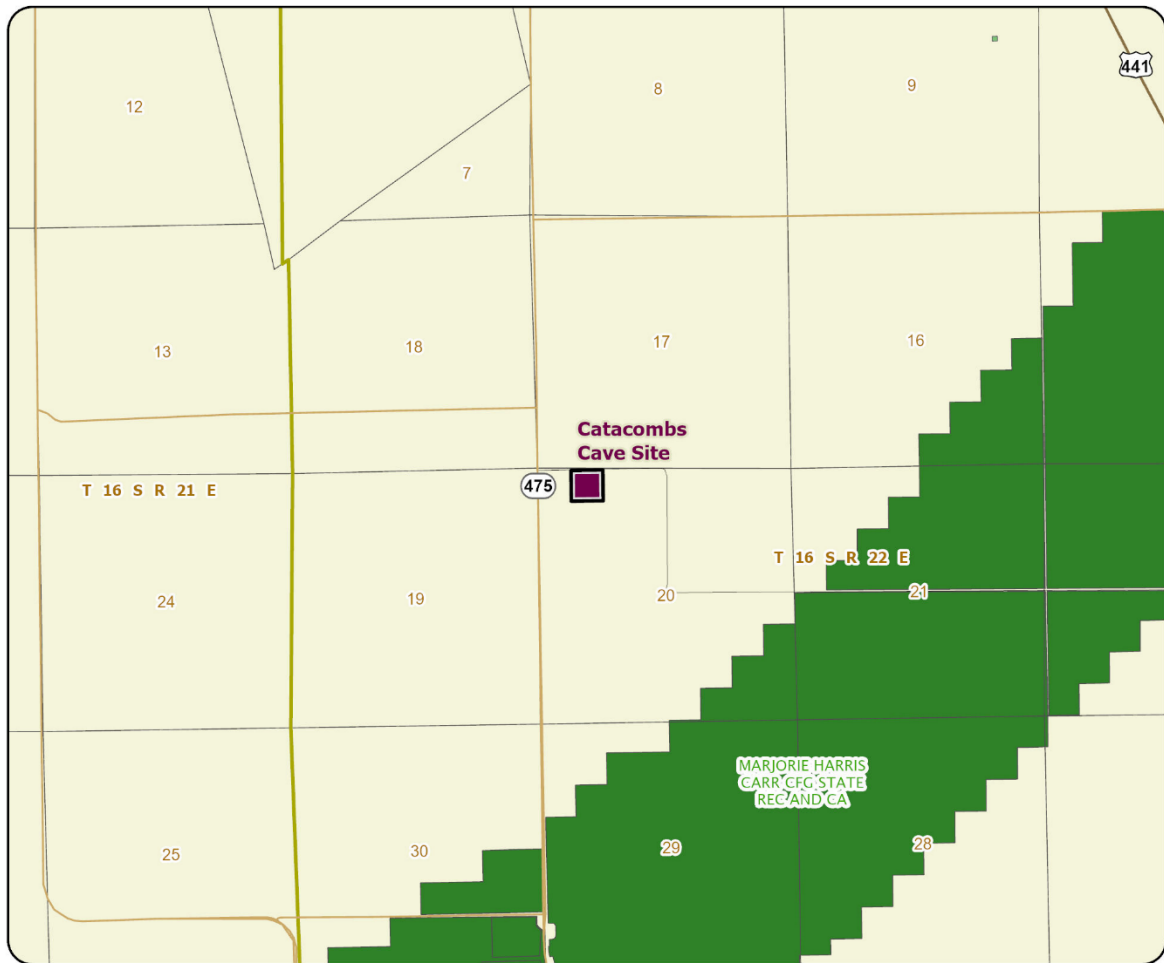




SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 4

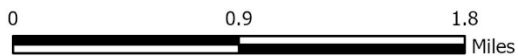
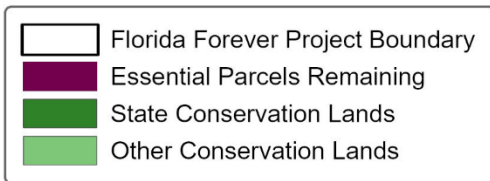
MARION COUNTY

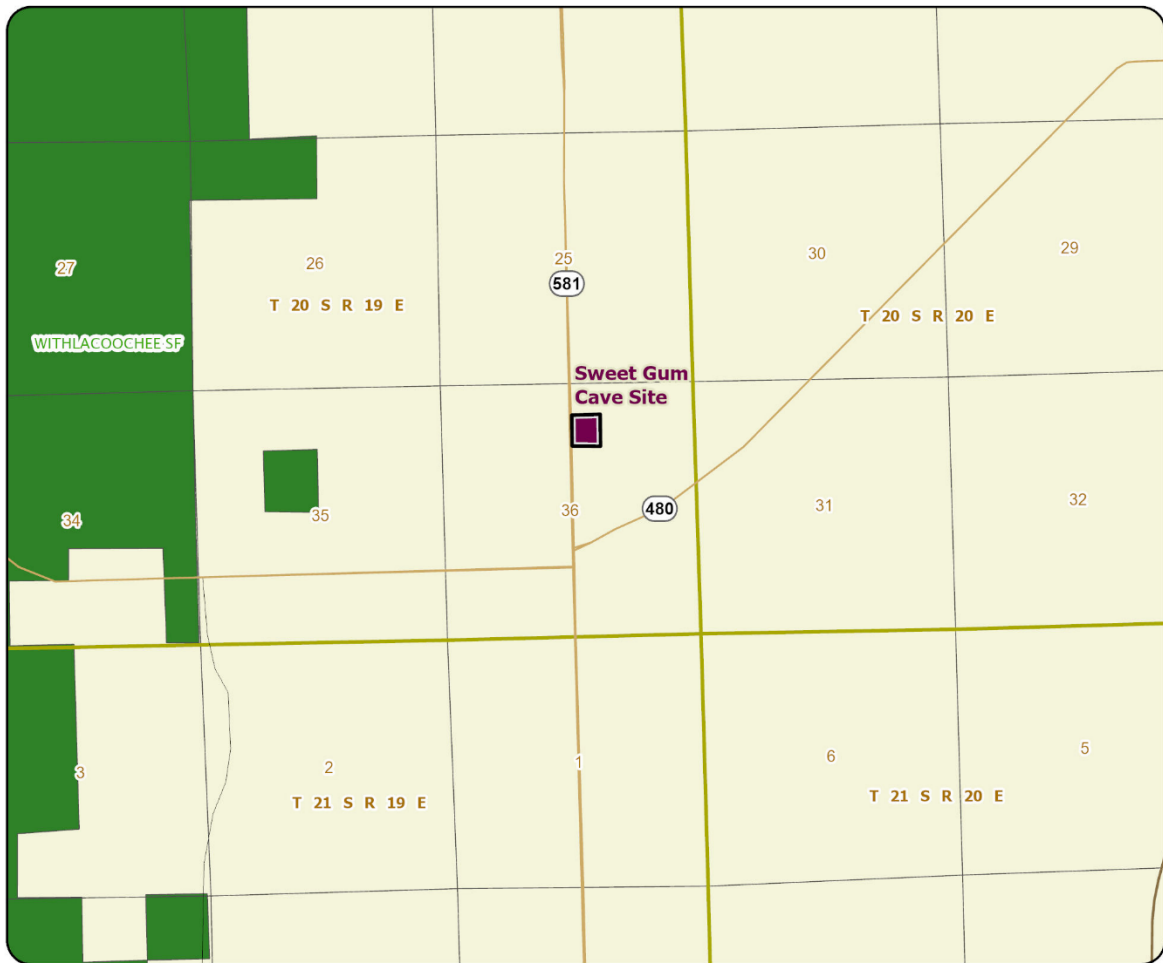




SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 5

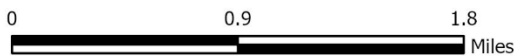
MARION COUNTY

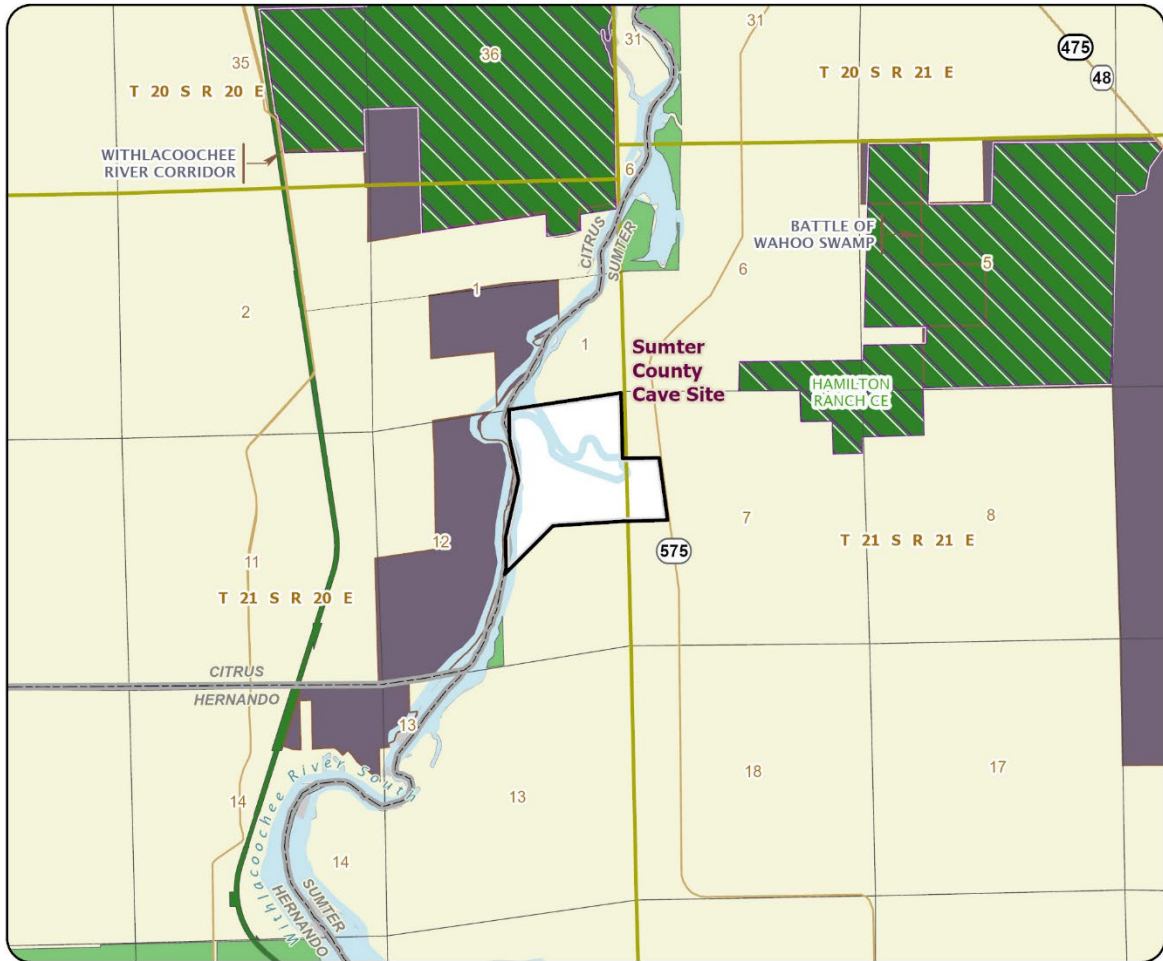




SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 6

CITRUS COUNTY





SOUTHEASTERN BAT MATERNITY CAVES: MAP 7

SUMTER COUNTY

