

St. Johns River Blueway

Climate Change Lands

St. Johns County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2002</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>24,726</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>10,497</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>14,229</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$285,717,294</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The St. Johns River Blueway project will preserve the last remaining undeveloped shoreline of the St. Johns River and several of its tributaries. The project will also expand access to natural resource-based recreation opportunities including boating, canoeing, hiking, camping and bicycling for northeast Florida visitors. The project contains multiple recorded archaeological and historical resources.

General Description

The St. Johns River Blueway project runs along the eastern shore of the St. Johns River between Green Cove Springs and Palatka and bounds the Bayard Conservation Area on the west bank of the St. Johns River. It also includes Hog Island, the last remaining unprotected and largely undeveloped island on the St. Johns River near the outlet of Lake George. Hog Island consists of two separate tracts: a ± 203-acre island and two mainland parcels containing a dock (totaling 1 acre) in nearby Georgetown that provides boat access to the island. Hog Island is proposed for fee simple acquisition to be managed by the North Florida Land Trust (NFLT).

The project area includes considerable forested wetlands by the river and around six tributary creeks, mesic flatwoods, freshwater marsh and a portion of disturbed uplands. Hog Island predominantly contains floodplain swamp, mesic hammock, mesic flatwoods and xeric hammock. Hog Island also includes three documented archaeological sites of pre-Columbian origin. Further evaluation of the Hog Island Shell Midden has the potential to yield important data relating to the emergence of ceramic technology between 2000-1200 BCE, trade and exchange networks, along with paleoenvironmental adaptation and change. Hog Island is located within the boundary of the U.S. Navy's Pincastle Range Complex-Lake George Range,





one of the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) project opportunity areas. Hog Island is located within Priority 5 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Pineland scurfpea*</i>	G1/S1
<i>Canby's wild indigo*</i>	G3T1/S1
<i>Curtiss' loosestrife*</i>	G2/S2
<i>Variable-leaf crownbeard*</i>	G2/S2
Creek siltsnail	G2/S2
<i>Thorne's beaksedge*</i>	G3/S1S2
<i>Bartram's ixia*</i>	G2G3/S2S3
<i>Piedmont roseling*</i>	G5/S1S2
<i>Florida mountain-mint*</i>	G3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3

**Plant species are in italics*

Public Use

Both fee and less-than-fee acquisition approaches are recommended in the proposal. The resource-based recreation potential for the project is considered low to high, depending on what title rights and uplands can be obtained.

The project area is predominantly wetland or floodplain adjacent to the St. Johns River and its tributary creeks. These public waterways have boating and canoeing opportunities. Upland sites along the waterways could provide public access for boating, opportunities for environmental education, wildlife viewing, hiking, bicycling, camping and picnicking. Recreational opportunities on Hog Island could include hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding, fishing, wildlife viewing and environmental education.

Acquisition Planning

1989

In 1989, Michael Adams acquired the Saturiwa Swamp Conservation Area (94.4 acres), all of which would be in the project boundary when the project was created.

1990

On December 1, 1990, St. Johns County acquired the Watson Island parcel (62.36 acres).





2002

On December 5, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the St. Johns River Blueway project to Group A of the 2003 Florida Forever Priority List. This fee simple and less-than-fee acquisition, sponsored by St. Johns County, consisted of approximately 27,997 acres and 290 landowners. Six entities own more than 15,000 of the acres in the project: Rayonier, Meldrim, SJ Land Associates LLC, Klaerich, Ringhaver and Plum Creek Timberlands LP.

2005

On June 16, 2005, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT) approved buying 231.8 acres (Warner). BOT also acquired 736 acres (Lambert) in August 2005.

2010

On June 11, 2010, ARC placed this project in the Climate Change Lands category.

2011

On December 9, 2011, ARC recommended a 1,656-acre reduction to the project, removing residential development, commercial buildings and infrastructure from the boundary.

2014

On December 2, 2014, St. Johns County granted the Deep Creek conservation easement (316 acres) to the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), of which 112 acres are within the project boundary.

2016

On August 16, 2016, the 5,237-acre Meldrim ownership was acquired as a perpetual conservation easement for \$5,991,803.

On November 29, 2016, NFLT acquired Sixmile Creek Preserve (284 acres), of which 275 acres are within the project boundary.

2018

On July 26, 2018, SJRWMD and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) established a conservation easement on the St. Johns Mitigation Bank (3,580 acres), of which 637 acres are within the project boundary.

On September 25, 2018, St. Johns County acquired McCullough Creek Conservation Area (1,391 acres) from Jacksonville Port Authority, of which 1,376 acres are within the project boundary.





On November 8, 2018, the St. Johns Mitigation Bank was approved.

2020

On December 11, 2020, ARC approved an addition of 112 acres in Clay County to the project boundary.

2025

On April 11, 2025, ARC approved the addition of the Hog Island project (204 acres) in Putnam County to the project boundary.

In May 2025, ARC approved the addition of five parcels (Woodpecker Trail) totaling approximately 272 acres in Putnam County to the project boundary.

In August 2025, ARC removed approximately 2,272 acres from the project boundary that were deemed unsuitable for state acquisition.

Coordination

Portions of the project may be acquired in partnership with St. Johns County. SJRWMD is also interested in the acquisition of the project. The U.S. Navy has been identified as a potential funding partner through the REPI program for the Hog Island parcels.

Management Policy Statement

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) proposes managing the project under multiple use management for the state forest system. Management would be designed to accomplish the goals and measures for this project. These goals and measures are referenced later in this prospectus. The primary land management goal for FFS is to restore, maintain and protect in perpetuity all native ecosystems; to integrate compatible human use; and to ensure long-term viability of populations and species considered rare. This ecosystem approach will guide FFS management activities on this project.

NFLT would be managing the Hog Island parcels based and writing/implementing the management plan contingent upon identifying management funding. Portions of Hog Island may be managed or co-managed with other organizations and agencies.

Manager(s)

FFS has proposed managing part of the site as an addition to Watson Island State Forest and the remainder of the site as a new state forest. FFS Bunnell District personnel will manage the site and coordinate public access and use. NFLT has proposed managing Hog Island for multiple-use activities.





Management Prospectus: FFS

Qualifications for State Designation

The project's location, size and diversity make it desirable for use and management as a state forest. State forest designation requires that certain criteria be met, such as public access and acreage available for many types of recreational activities. Designation as a state forest is contingent upon acquiring property rights that are consistent with these criteria.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Much of the project's upland areas have been disturbed and will require various levels of restoration. Natural communities that have been converted to pine plantation will require removal of off-site species and reforestation with native species. Protecting and restoring wetland communities will be a priority for FFS. Restoration efforts will concentrate on removing and filling ditches and corrections of other hydrological alterations. Public use will be limited to activities that are compatible with any sensitive resources.

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

Once the project area is acquired and assigned to FFS, public access will be provided for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on resource inventory, restoring and reforesting areas where harvesting has occurred, hydrologic restoration, site security, and public and fire management access. Inventories of the site's natural resources and threatened and endangered flora and fauna will be conducted to provide a basis for the formulation of a management plan.

Revenue-generating Potential

Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition of the timber resource on the property, the revenue-generating potential of this project is expected to be low to medium. It is anticipated that management funding will come from the Conservation and Recreational Lands Trust Fund.

Cooperators in Management Activities

FFS will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate.





Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Land Acquisition Trust Fund	not provided
Salary	\$173,346	not provided
OPS	\$0	not provided
Expense	\$125,000	not provided
OCO	\$361,000	not provided
FCO	\$0	not provided
TOTAL	\$659,346	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

Hog Island Management Prospectus: NFLT

Manager

NFLT would be primarily managing the Hog Island property and writing/implementing the management plan contingent upon identifying management funding. Portions of the property may be managed or co-managed with other organizations and agencies.

Purpose and Scope

Management goals will center on the multiple-use concept, as defined in sections 589.04(3) and 253.034(2)(a), Florida Statutes. The management will focus on maintaining or improving environmentally significant natural resources as well as protecting water quality, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. The infrastructure also factors into the management goals. Key management objectives are as follows:

- Maintain, enhance or restore existing natural communities.
- Inventory natural features of the site, including flora, fauna and natural communities.
- Protect populations of significant and listed plant and animal species.
- Develop and implement a prescribed fire management plan.
- Protect water resources from adverse impacts.
- Effectively and responsibly manage cultural resources.
- Promote public outdoor recreation and environmental education consistent with preserving the historic and natural resources of the site.
- Upkeep and maintenance of the infrastructure.
- Periodically review, evaluate and modify the management of the property as needed.





Qualifications for State Designation

Hog Island is in southern Putnam County in the St. Johns River where the river exits Lake George. The island lies between the Ocala National Forest and Drayton Island. The project also includes a mainland tract that provides access and a mainland base for management operations. The mainland tract (1 acre) is located on the St. Johns River about 1.3 miles to the northeast of Hog Island.

Hog Island is an important part of the broader conservation network along this portion of the St. Johns River. Most of the lands surrounding Lake George are in conservation, Ocala National Forest on the west side and Lake George Conservation Area, Lake George Forest and Wildlife Management Area, and Lake George State Forest on the east side. Hog Island has 16,000 feet of shoreline and buffers the Ocala National Forest from development on nearby Drayton Island and the community of Georgetown on the eastern shore of the St. Johns River.

The primary natural communities on the island are sand pine scrub, mixed hardwood wetlands and mixed hardwood coniferous swamps. The island is also known bald eagle habitat.

Much of the island is undeveloped but there are improvements that will factor into the management. Improvements on the island include two houses, two docks (one at each home site), a helicopter landing pad, various outbuildings near the home sights and a dirt road in the interior of the island. The mainland tract includes a three-bay steel building for boat and equipment storage, a caretaker's residence and a dock with two boat slips and barge mooring. The mainland tract serves as the access for management of the island.

Hog Island is situated within a Department of Defense-controlled area, designated by the Federal Aviation Administration as a "Restricted Area." It lies approximately 20 miles from three military ranges that form the Pinecastle Range Complex, which includes two land ranges (Pinecastle Range and Rodman Range) and one freshwater range (Lake George Range).

Additionally, Hog Island falls within Range Compatibility Zone II (RCZ-II). This zone defines the area of aircraft armed overflight, marking the point at which an aircraft commits to a target attack. Specifically, RCZ-II applies to air-to-ground operations, beginning when an aircraft with ordnance engages the cockpit arming switch. While less restrictive than RCZ-I, this zone encompasses areas that could be affected by ordnance if inadvertently released after arming.

The conservation of Hog Island not only contributes to broader environmental preservation efforts but also plays a critical role in providing a protective buffer between the public and military operations. By maintaining this buffer, the property enhances safety, minimizes potential conflicts, and supports the Navy's operational security and mission readiness. The purpose of this Management Prospectus is to provide a brief outline of management activities suitable for the property.





Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Current onsite conditions and restoration/recreation goals will affect the intensity of management of the site. An in-depth assessment will need to be conducted to ground-truth existing natural communities and assess historic disturbance to determine appropriate future desired conditions. Implementation of an appropriate prescribed fire regime will impact management intensity. Public access and integration of compatible resource-based recreation opportunities will also affect management intensity. These considerations and others will be included in the site assessment and incorporated into the 10-year management plan.

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

Monitoring of the island for trespass will be coordinated with the Putnam County Sheriff's Marine Unit and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission officers that patrol this section of the St. Johns River. In addition, a law enforcement officer may be sought to reside at the caretaker's residence on the mainland parcel. Security cameras may be installed on the island that will alert law enforcement officers of trespass.

Revenue-generating Potential

The most likely revenue-generating potential will be derived from the residences on the island. The houses could be rented to on-site security and research organizations for use as field stations or as day rentals for special occasions such as weddings or retreats, or for short-term use.

Potential Multiple-Use Activities

The primary objective of the site will be to preserve, maintain, and restore the natural and cultural resources onsite while providing appropriate access and passive recreation opportunities to the public. Cooperators in management activities may include local governments, state agencies, SJRWMD and U.S. Forest Service to further resource management, recreational and educational opportunities. Potential multiple-use activities of the island include:

Research Projects: Opportunity for scientific study for the purpose of obtaining information which expands the knowledge of and assists in restoration and management of this ecosystem may exist. Research should be conducted through cooperation with governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions where feasible.

Cultural Resources: Efforts should be made to locate and document historical and archaeological resources onsite. Management will include a full archaeological assessment and annual monitoring of known sites. After proper identification, a management plan will be created in consultation with the Division of Cultural Resources.

Timber Management: All timber resources will be managed to promote and improve overall forest health.





Recreation: Recreation activities will be evaluated to minimize the degradation or alteration of natural resources and habitats onsite. Recreational activities on the site may include hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding, fishing, wildlife viewing and environmental education. Initiation of more intense management activities or construction of amenities will not take place until more thorough site assessments are completed, and funding sources are identified.

Cooperators in Management Activities

Contactors will be engaged to perform the grounds maintenance and infrastructure maintenance. Cooperators in management activities will be sought and may include volunteer groups, non-profit organizations, local governments, state agencies, SJRWMD and U.S. Forest Service.

Anticipated Costs of Management

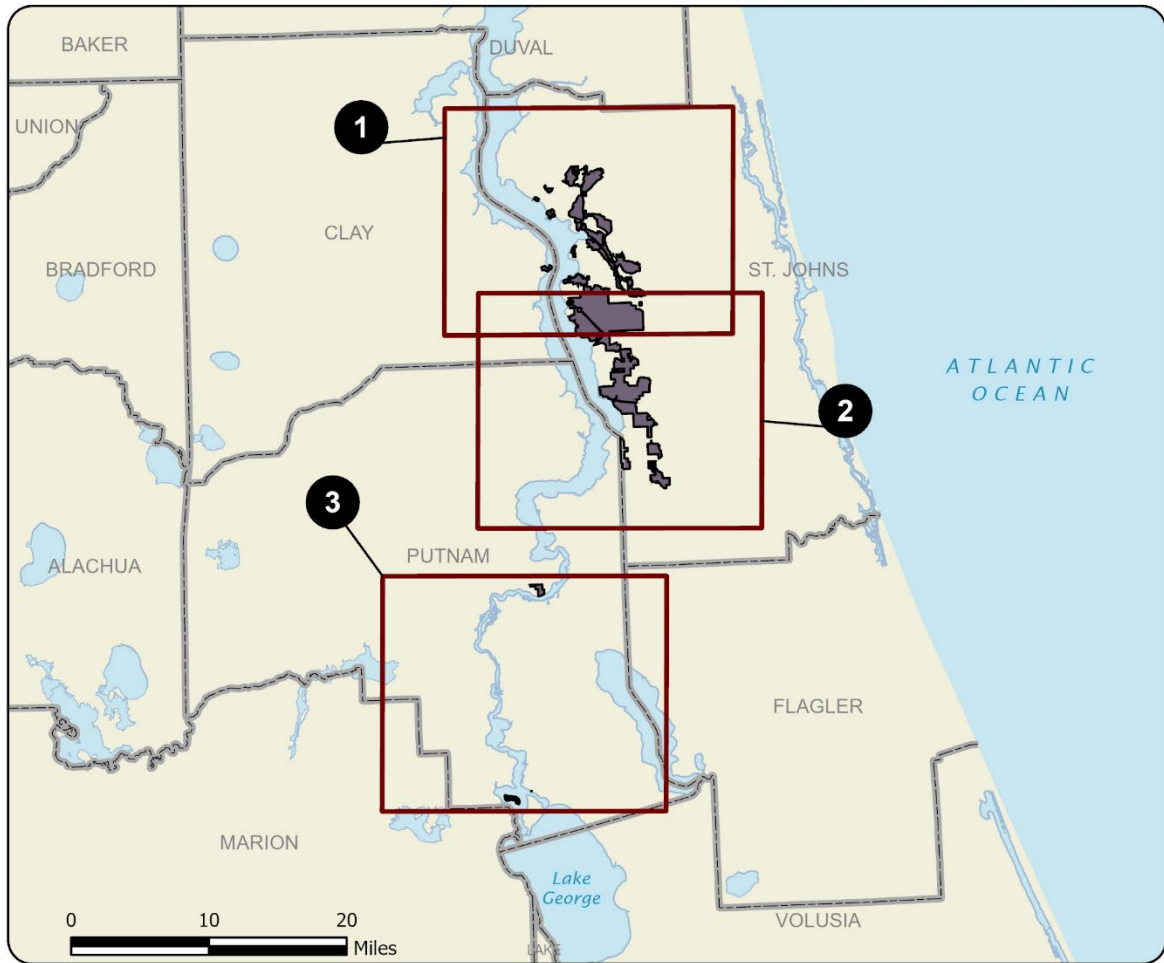
The anticipated management costs for the initial phase of management are listed below. This initial phase of management would be to keep the island secure and maintained in its current condition until a management plan is approved and implemented. Sources of revenue for the initial phase of management will be from donations, grants, cooperative-assistance funding and in-kind contributions.

Management Cost Summary

<u>NFLT</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds: Donations, grants, cooperative assistance funding, in-kind contributions		""
Salary	not provided	not provided
OPS (# of OPS)	1; \$10,000	\$15,000
Resource Management	\$1,000	\$5,000
Capital Improvements	\$10,000	\$12,000
Visitor Services/Recreation	\$2,500	\$2,500
Support	\$15,000	\$4,000
Administration	\$2,500	\$2,500
TOTAL	\$41,000	\$41,000

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

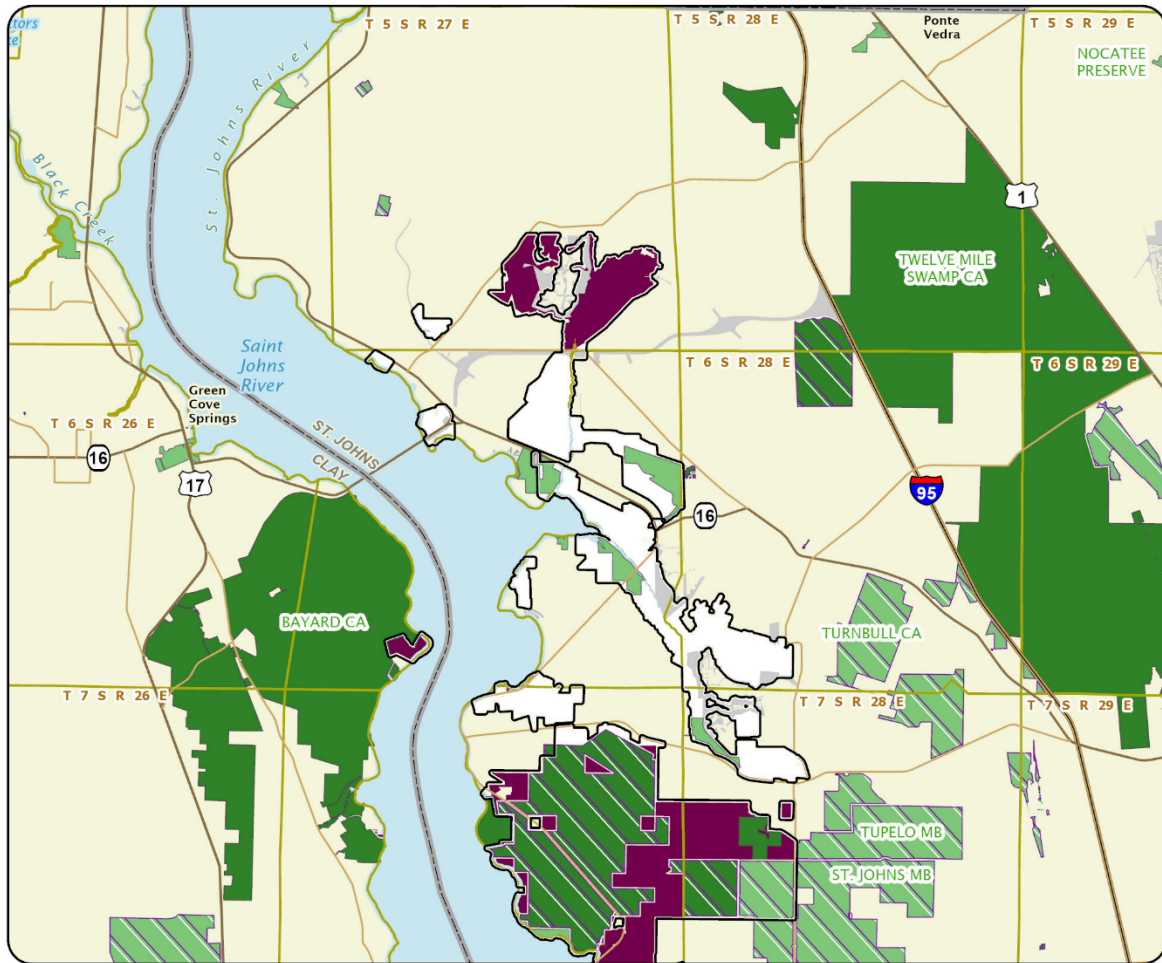




ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: OVERVIEW

PUTNAM AND ST. JOHNS COUNTIES

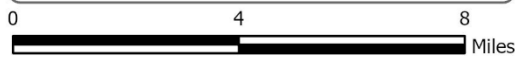


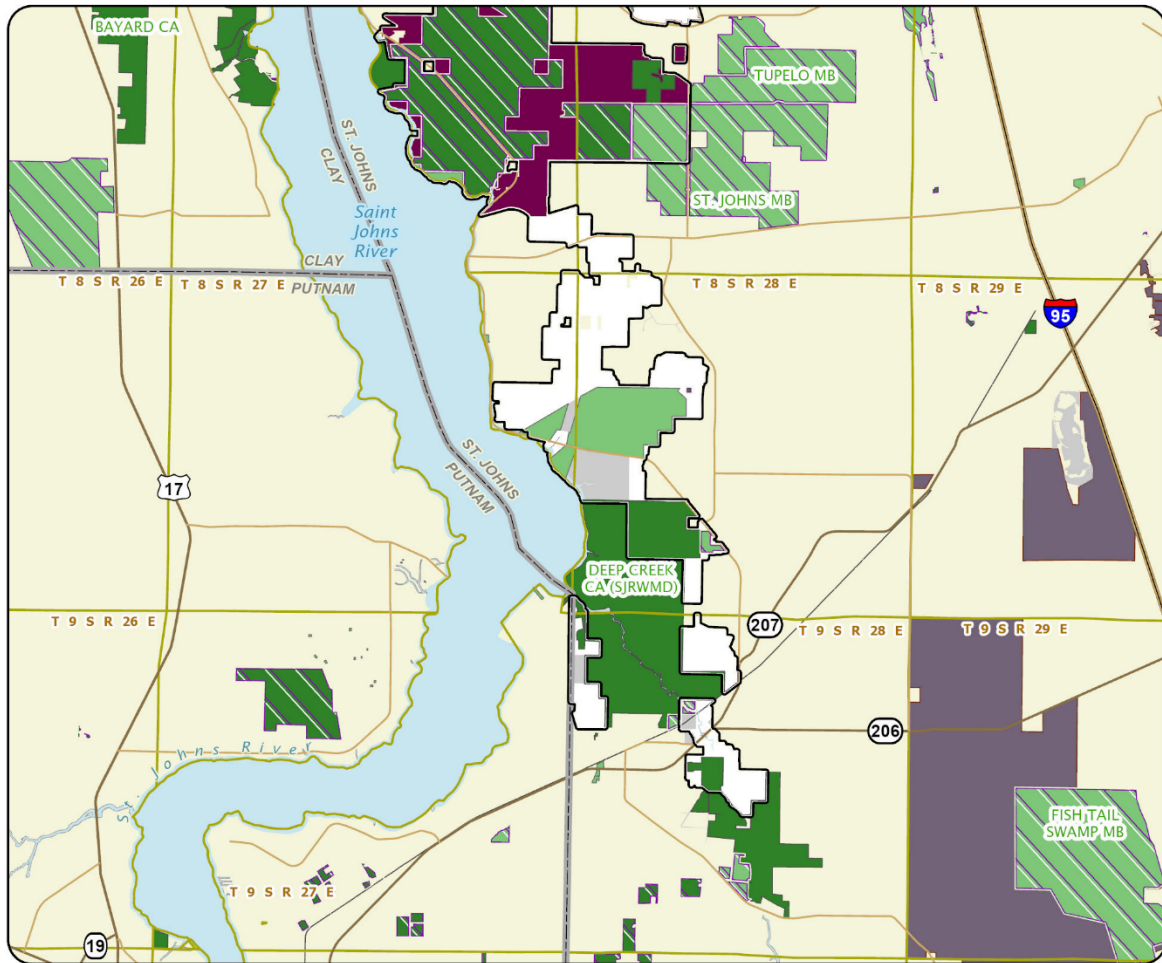


ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: MAP 1

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

- Florida Forever Project Boundary*
 - Essential Parcels Remaining
 - Other Florida Forever Projects
 - State Conservation Lands
 - Other Conservation Lands
 - Other Public Lands
 - Less-Than-Fee Acquisition
- *Project boundary has been generalized for map clarity.

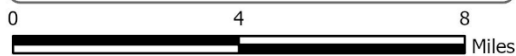


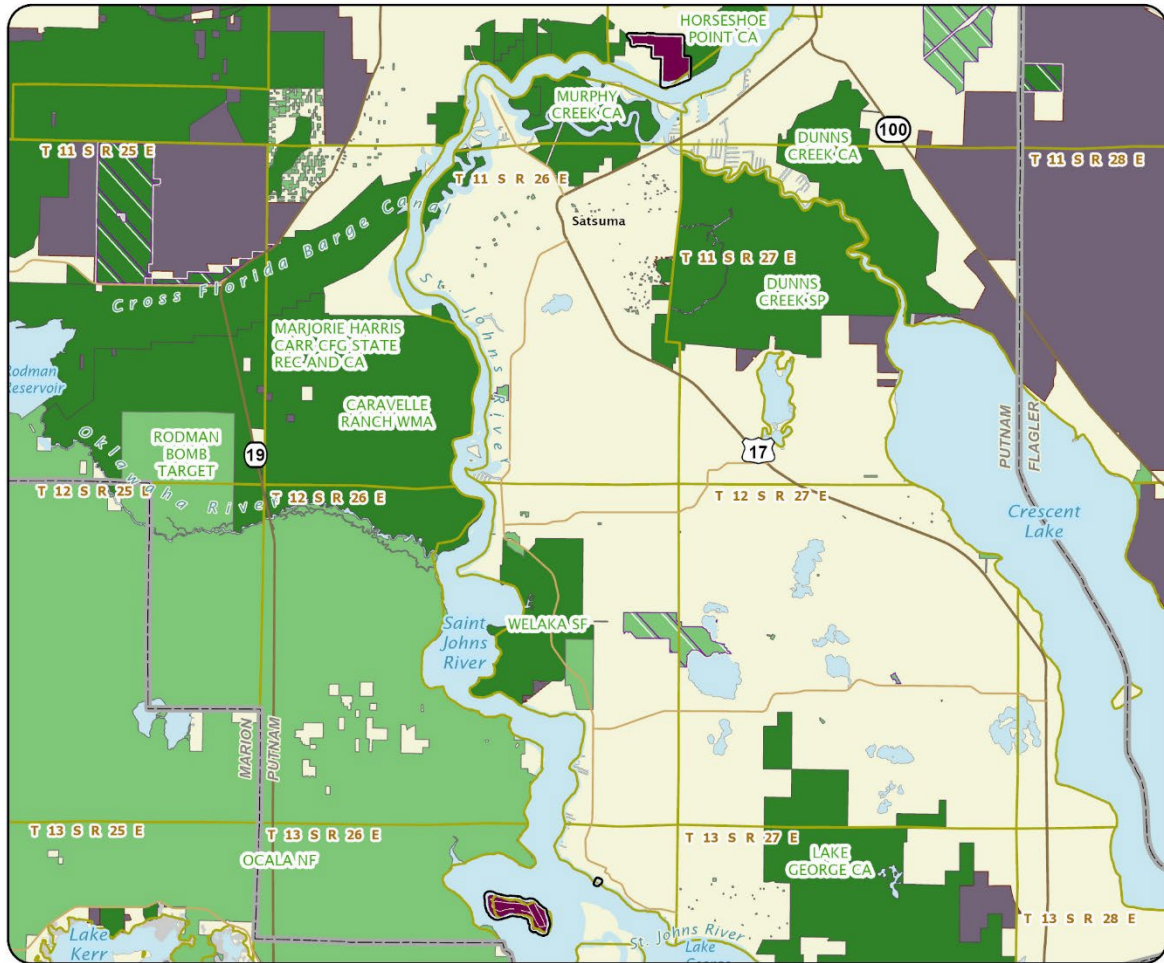


ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: MAP 2

ST. JOHNS COUNTY








- Florida Forever Project Boundary*
 - Essential Parcels Remaining
 - Other Florida Forever Projects
 - State Conservation Lands
 - Other Conservation Lands
 - Other Public Lands
 - Less-Than-Fee Acquisition
- *Project boundary has been generalized for map clarity.





ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: MAP 3

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

-  Florida Forever Project Boundary*
 -  Essential Parcels Remaining
 -  Other Florida Forever Projects
 -  State Conservation Lands
 -  Other Conservation Lands
 -  Other Public Lands
 -  Less-Than-Fee Acquisition
- *Project boundary has been generalized for map clarity.

