

# Northeast Florida Blueway

Climate Change Lands

Duval, Flagler and St. Johns Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2001
<i>Project Acres</i>	31,961
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	24,682
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	7,279
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$1,184,439,155

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Northeast Florida Blueway project will protect and maintain shoreline plant communities on the Tolomato and Matanzas rivers, benefiting the endangered Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) by connecting existing natural areas and greenspace to form a conservation lands corridor along portions of both rivers and the Intracoastal waterway. The project will support recreational trail connectivity and contribute to ongoing efforts to protect and restore the region's land and water.

## General Description

This project is composed of uplands and wetlands along both sides of the Intracoastal Waterway, the Tolomato and Matanzas rivers, and selected tributaries, ranging from the Duval County line south to the Flagler County line. Marshlands, open water and small islands of shrub and hammock vegetation make up 92 percent of the existing public lands. It is adjacent to the following managed areas: Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, Faver-Dykes State Park, Guana River Wildlife Management Area, Deep Creek State Forest and Ft. Matanzas National Monument.

## FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
<b>Florida manatee</b>	G2G3T2/S2S3
<b>Gopher tortoise</b>	G3/S3
<b>Florida black bear</b>	G5T4/S4
<b><i>Tampa vervain</i></b>	G2/S2
<b><i>pondspice</i></b>	G3?/S2
<b><i>coastal vervain</i></b>	G3/S3
<b><i>Piedmont roseling</i></b>	G5/S1S2
<b>Wood stork</b>	G4/S2
<b>Eastern diamondback rattlesnake</b>	G3/S3
<b><i>Florida milkvetch</i></b>	G3G4/S2S3
<b><i>yellow hibiscus</i></b>	G4G5/S2
<b>American oystercatcher</b>	G5/S2



## Public Use

This project would support primitive camping opportunities with canoeing and kayaking taking place within the waterway and associated creeks. Some of the larger parcels may have potential for archaeological interpretation and nature study. The Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of Recreation and Parks proposes to manage the St. Johns County portion north of Faver-Dykes State Park and south of a haul road between U.S. Highway 1 and a spoil site on the Matanzas River. This section of the project contains about 5,000 acres and would expand the quality and quantity of recreational activity at Faver-Dykes State Park, including bicycling, hiking, horseback riding, camping, environmental education and picnicking.

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) proposes to manage the remainder of the project under a multiple-use management regime consistent with the state forest system. A portion of the project will become part of the Deep Creek State Forest, managed for multiple uses including, but not limited to, timber management and restoration, low-impact recreational opportunities, and protecting archaeological and historic sites.

## Acquisition Planning

### **1985**

In 1985, the Duval Audubon Society acquired Palm Island Sanctuary (16.66 acres) by donation, all of which would be inside the project boundary when the project was started.

### **1999**

On November 1, 1999, the city of Jacksonville acquired 93 acres to create Dutton Island Park and Preserve, all of which would be inside the project boundary when the project was started.

### **2000**

On July 28, 2000, the city of Jacksonville acquired Whitehall parcel (234.7 acres) to create Castaway Island Preserve, all of which would be inside the project boundary when the project was started.

On September 11, 2000, the city of Jacksonville acquired Bender parcel (25.5 acres) to expand Castaway Island Preserve, all of which would be inside the project boundary when the project was started.

On December 8, 2000, the city of Jacksonville acquired Moontide parcel (49.14 acres) to expand Castaway Island Preserve, all of which would be inside the project boundary when the project was started.

### **2001**

On January 25, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Northeast Florida Blueway – Phase I project to Group A of the 2001 Florida Forever Priority List. This fee-simple proposal, located in Duval County and known as Pablo Creek, was sponsored by the city of Jacksonville (Preservation Project Jacksonville). It consisted of approximately 6,943 acres.

On August 9, 2001, the city of Jacksonville Beach and the city of Jacksonville acquired Cradle Creek Preserve (28.9 acres), all of which is in the project boundary.





On December 6, 2001, ARC approved Phase II, also known as Tolomato and Matanzas Rivers, to the project boundary. The fee-simple addition in St. Johns County consisted of approximately 27,929 acres. St. Johns County sponsored this addition.

### **2002**

On April 5, 2002, the city of Atlantic Beach and the city of Jacksonville acquired 31.27 acres to expand Dutton Island Park and Preserve, all of which is in the project boundary.

In June 2002, Northeast Florida Blueway Phase I and Phase II were combined to form the Northeast Florida Blueway Florida Forever project.

### **2003**

On August 14, 2003, the city of Jacksonville acquired 176 acres to expand Dutton Island Park and Preserve, all of which is in the project boundary.

On August 15, 2003, ARC approved two additions to the project boundary. DEP's Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection sponsored a 20.26-acre addition in St. Johns County. St. Johns County sponsored a 70-acre addition in Flagler County.

### **2005**

On July 8, 2005, the city of Jacksonville Beach acquired (6.15 acres) to expand Cradle Creek Preserve.

On December 5, 2005, the city of Jacksonville acquired 8.28 acres to expand Dutton Island Park and Preserve, all of which is in the project boundary.

### **2006**

On October 13, 2006, ARC approved a redesign of the project boundary. A total of 2,000 acres no longer suitable for conservation were removed from the project, 180 acres in Duval County and 1,820 acres in St. Johns County, reducing the total project size to 32,564 acres. The updated total includes lands in public ownership and acres acquired. Previous project area estimates did not include lands in public ownership.

### **2007**

On March 29, 2007, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT) acquired Lastinger parcel (2.45 acres).

On April 5, 2007, BOT acquired 1.11 acres.

### **2008**

On September 15, 2008, St. Johns County acquired Moses Creek Regional Offsite Mitigation Area (454.87 acres), of which approximately 201.32 acres are in the project boundary.

### **2009**

On April 30, 2009, the city of Atlantic Beach acquired River Branch Preserve (278.68 acres) with a conservation easement held by the North Florida Land Trust (NFLT).

### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Climate Change Lands category of projects.





**2012**

On December 31, 2012, NFLT acquired JLC Suncoast (28.88 acres), of which approximately 22.88 acres are in the project boundary.

**2013**

On August 26, 2013, the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) established the Hamilton Trust conservation easement (3.74 acres), of which approximately 2.31 acres are in the project boundary.

**2015**

On April 23, 2015, St. Johns County granted a conservation easement to SJRWMD on the Moses Creek Regional Offsite Mitigation Area.

**2023**

In October 2023, ARC approved the removal of 613 acres from the project boundary.

**2024**

In September 2024, ARC approved the addition of 18 parcels totaling approximately 24.77 acres in St. Johns County.

**Coordination**

The city of Jacksonville, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, St. Johns County, Florida Communities Trust and SJRWMD may be partners on portions of the project. The Trust for Public Land will be the intermediary for negotiations.

**Management Policy Statement**

This project would be managed to conserve and protect environmentally unique and irreplaceable lands that contain native, relatively unaltered flora and fauna representing a natural area unique to, or scarce within, a region of the state or a larger geographic area; to conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and threatened species; to conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests, to enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources; and to preserve significant archaeological or historical sites.

**Manager(s)**

The city of Jacksonville will manage the portion of the project within Duval County. DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks proposes to manage the portion of the Northeast Florida Blueway – Phase II project, approximately 5,000 acres, lying north of Faver-Dykes State Park, south of a haul road from U.S. 1 to a spoil site on the Matanzas River, east of U.S. 1 and west of the Matanzas River. FFS proposes to manage the Rayonier parcel north of the spoil haul road (approximately 4,000 acres) plus two additional parcels, one adjoining Deep Creek State Forest and an adjoining Florida Natural Areas Inventory Addition (approximately 2,500 acres).





## **Management Prospectus**

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The lands approved in Phase I of this project are rapidly disappearing as Duval County grows. The Preservation Project, the city of Jacksonville's land acquisition program, seeks to protect and preserve the existing habitat and waterway as it exists today. It is the goal of the city of Jacksonville to manage this project to conserve, protect or restore important ecosystems while providing opportunities for natural resource-based recreation. The city of Jacksonville proposes to manage the lands in accordance with the standards of ARC.

Phase II of the project is of a size and diversity that makes it desirable for use and management as a state forest. Management by FFS as a state forest is contingent upon acquiring fee simple title to the parcels of interest to FFS. The portion of the project of interest for management by DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks is largely disturbed land that has been managed for silviculture. While much restoration work will be required over time, the quality of the property when restored will make it suitable for state park purposes.

### **Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

Initial management efforts of Phase I by the city of Jacksonville will concentrate on site security, resource inventory, removing trash and having limited public access to the property. Steps will be taken to ensure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously protecting sensitive resources. Intensive restoration will be needed on the portion of Phase II managed by DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks to restore natural communities disturbed by timber operations. The intensity of restoration will be dictated by the study of the site. Any immediate action, such as prescribed burning, would increase the early intensity of management. The lands bordering the Guana River are in relatively good shape and will not require intensive management.

The portions of Phase II managed by FFS can be restored with the help of carefully prescribed fires and hydrologic restoration. The use of fire must be carefully applied because of the fuel load and type of fuel in this forest system. An inventory of the forest roads in this area would determine which stay open for public use, which would be used for management and which would be closed.

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

The city of Jacksonville's land acquisition program, Preservation Project Jacksonville, will be responsible for developing and implementing the management plans for Phase I. The Preservation Project set aside \$950,000 to hire a program manager to develop and implement management plans.

As properties are acquired, the city of Jacksonville will first inventory natural resources and develop a plan to protect and restore resources, including removing invasive and exotic species, before developing access plans. DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks plans that, upon fee title acquisition, public access will be provided for passive outdoor recreation within its portion of Phase II. First year management will





concentrate on site security, natural and cultural resource protection, and developing a plan for long-term public use and resource management.

FFS timetable for management of the remainder of Phase II also provides initial public access for diverse, low-intensity outdoor recreation. Management would be carried out by FFS Bunnell District until additional personnel were available for resource management and restoration activity. Initial and intermediate management will concentrate on site security, public and resource management access, prescribed fire, reforestation and removing trash.

### **Revenue-generating Potential**

The portion of Phase II to be added to Faver-Dykes State Park will not initially generate any significant revenue for DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks. After acquiring and adding the land to Faver-Dykes State Park, it will likely be several years before significant public use facilities are developed. The amount of revenue generated will depend on the nature and extent of public use and facilities developed. FFS plans to conduct timber sales as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystems. These sales will primarily be from merchantable pine stands and provide a variable revenue depending on a variety of factors. The condition of the timber stands on the property is such that the revenue-generating potential is expected to be moderate.

### **Cooperators in Management Activities**

Although not required, the city of Jacksonville commits to submitting management plans for city-managed properties in the Northeast Florida Blueway project to ARC for review and comment, even though properties may have been acquired with other sources. Doing so will ensure that the Preservation Project takes a system-wide approach to managing Northeast Florida Blueway project properties.

In Phase II, DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks will consult other federal, state and local government agencies, as appropriate, to further resource management, recreational and educational opportunities and develop the property for state park purposes. FFS plans to cooperate with, and seek the assistance of, local government entities, interested parties and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory as appropriate. FFS also intends to coordinate the recreational use of the Rayonier parcel with DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks because of the potential for a recreation trail on the eastern portion of the property. FFS will work with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in game and non-game management and related public use of the property.

Other agencies that own lands within the Northeast Florida Blueway project include the U.S. Navy, the National Park Service, the Florida Inland Navigation District, the cities of Jacksonville Beach and Atlantic Beach, the Jacksonville Electric Authority and SJRWMD. It is hoped that the Northeast Florida Blueway project boundary will be the catalyst for a voluntary, joint management approach to publicly owned lands within the corridor.





Management Cost Summary

<u>DRP</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$0	\$29,000
OPS	\$25,000	\$8,000
Expense	\$18,000	\$12,000
OCO	\$28,000	\$0
FCO	\$20,000	\$0
TOTAL	\$91,000	\$49,000

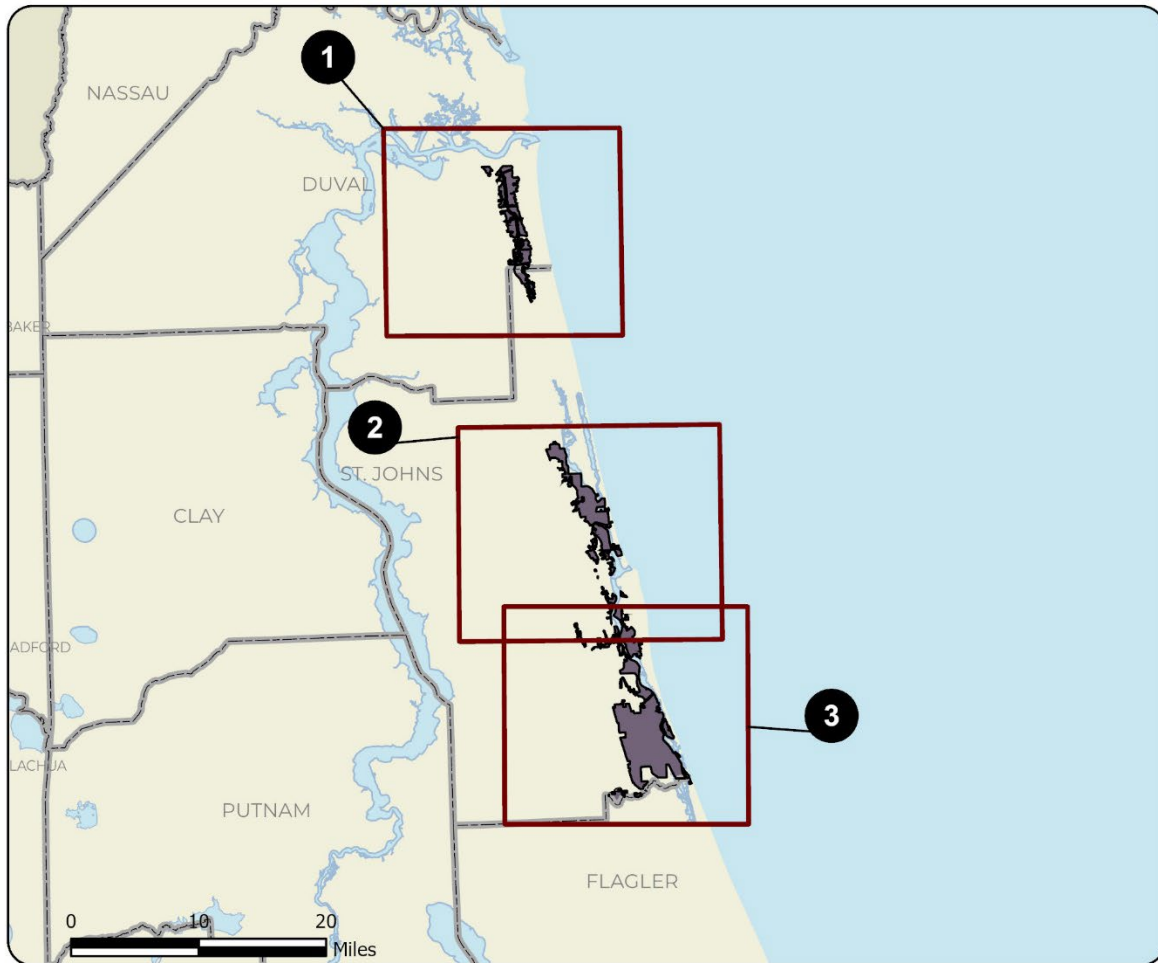
Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	not provided
Salary (3 FTEs)	\$79,518	not provided
OPS	not provided	not provided
Expense	\$215,000	not provided
OCO	\$37,800	not provided
TOTAL	\$332,318	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



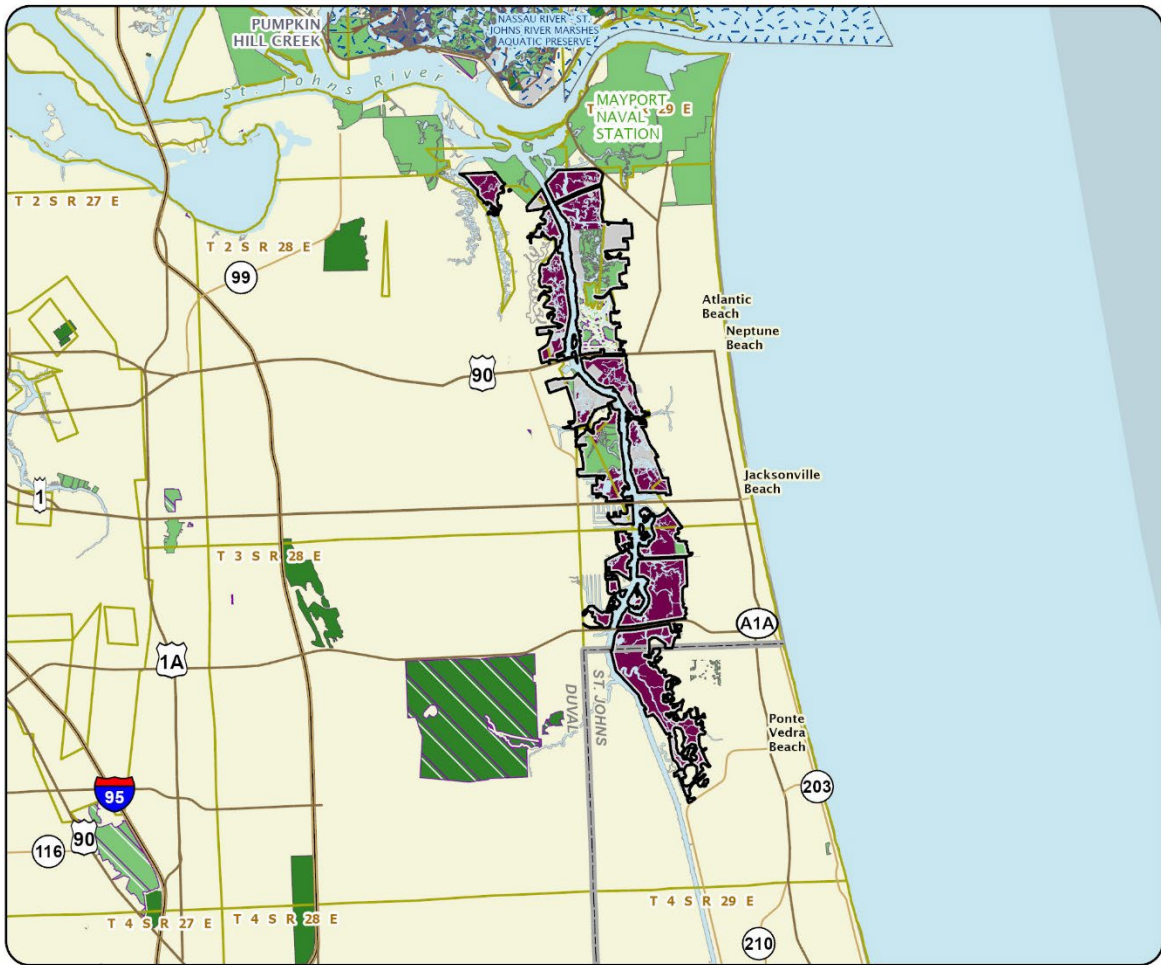


### NORTHEAST FLORIDA BLUEWAY: OVERVIEW

#### DUVAL AND ST. JOHNS COUNTIES



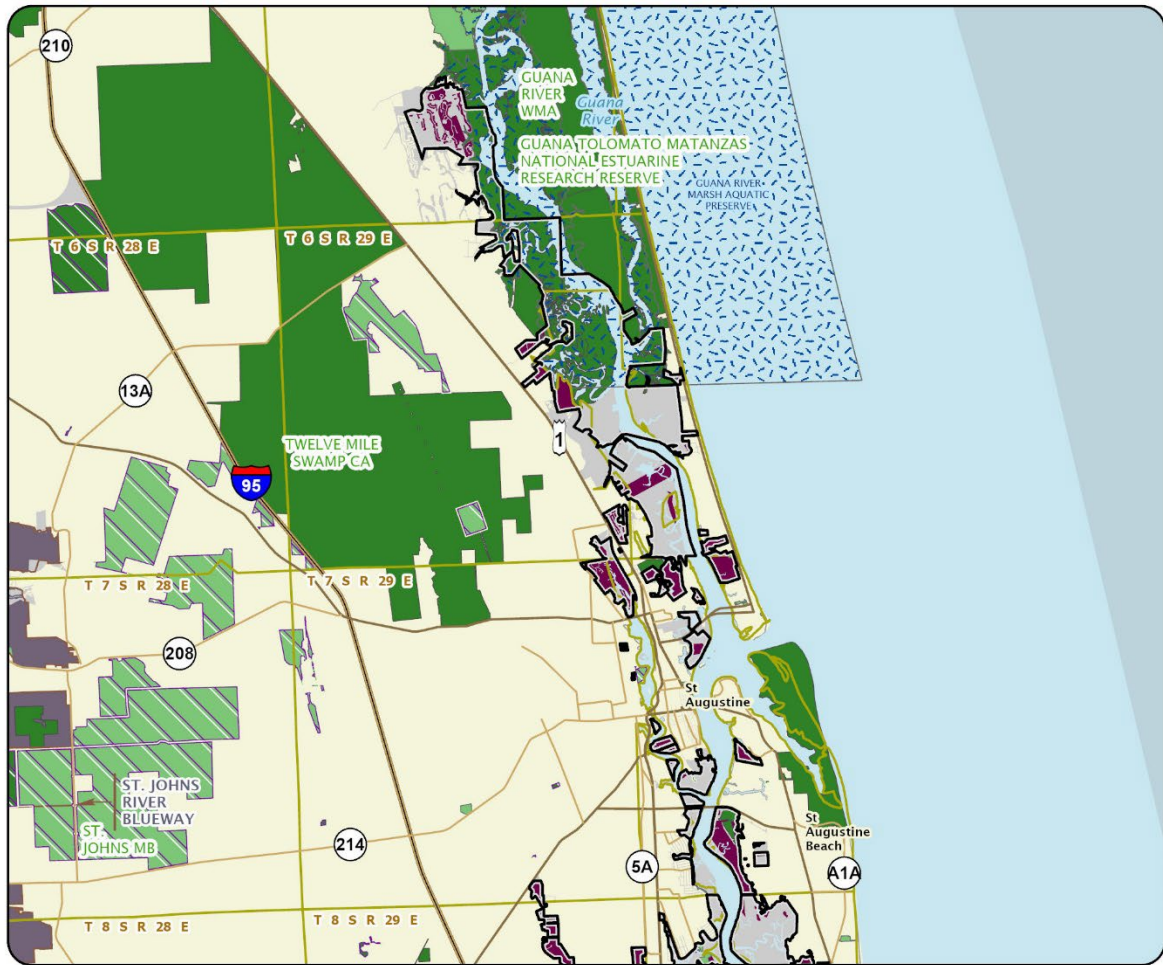




**NORTHEAST FLORIDA BLUEWAY: MAP 1**

**DUVAL AND ST. JOHNS COUNTIES**

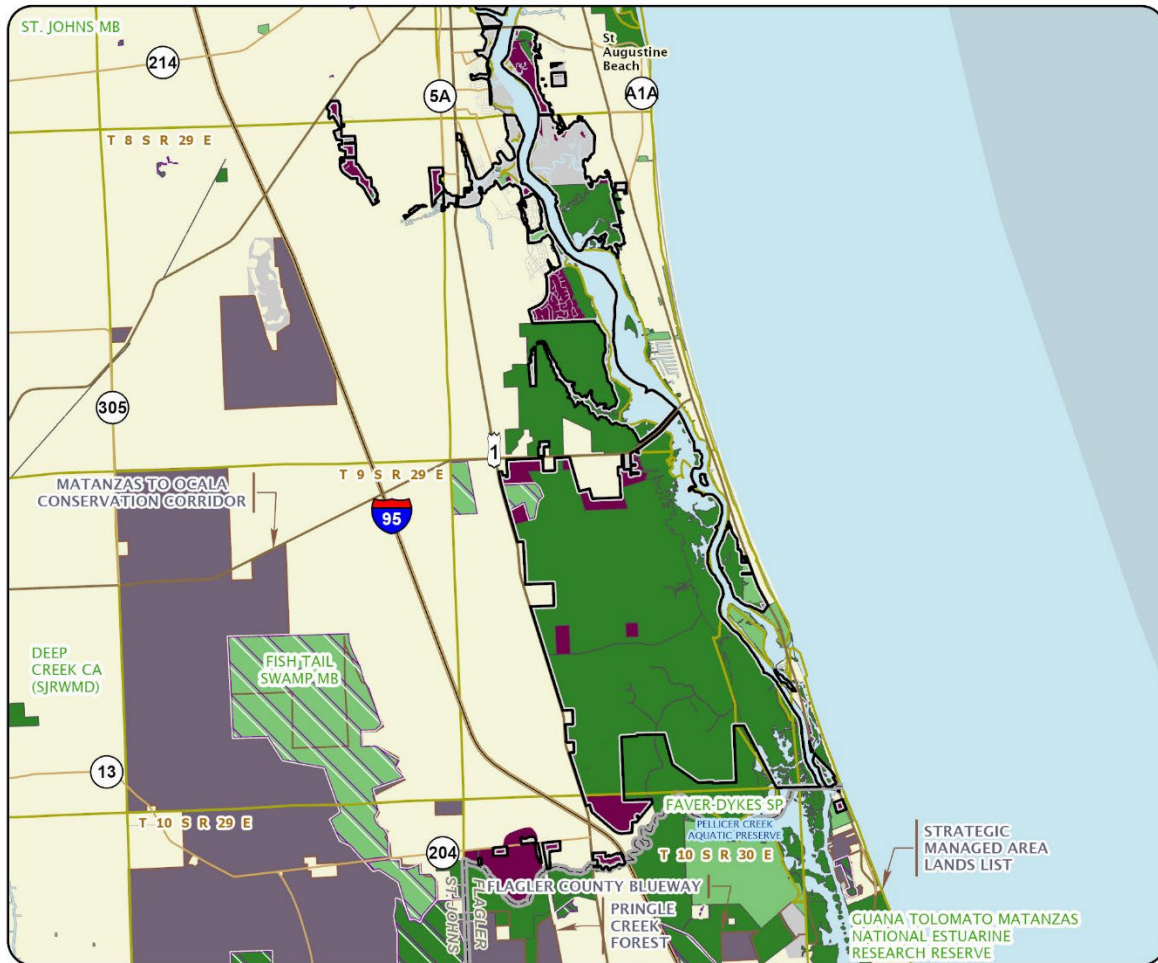




NORTHEAST FLORIDA BLUEWAY: MAP 2

ST. JOHNS COUNTY





**NORTHEAST FLORIDA BLUEWAY: MAP 3**

**FLAGLER AND ST. JOHNS COUNTIES**

