

**Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park**  
**DEP Advisory Group Meeting Staff Report**

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The Preliminary Advisory Group meeting to develop the proposed unit management plan for Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park was held at Gilchrist Blue Spring State and Park and the High Springs Civic Center on Tuesday, October 2nd, 2018, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Todd Gray, Brett Crawford, Jason O'Donoghue, Mitch Sapp and Thomas Weller were not in attendance. William Irby represented William McKinstry, Patty Street represented Michael Roth, Matthew Barker represented Matthew Pollock. All other appointed Advisory Group members were present as well as Doug Jipson from Rum 138 and Mike Costello a local resident. Attending staff were Clif Maxwell, Brian Fugate, Gabby Paxton, Dan Pearson, Rick Owen, Anne Barkdoll, and Sine Murray.

Ms. Murray began the meeting with an overview of the meeting objectives and background on the acquisition of the property. Each stakeholder introduced themselves and the organization or interest they represented. Mr. Maxwell provided participants an overview of the Florida Park Service mission. Ms. Murray provided an overview of the planning process for Florida State Parks and a summary of the public comments received during the two preliminary public workshops held in November of 2017.

Ms. Murray reviewed the day's activities and prepared the group for the park tour. Each advisory group member received a worksheet. Advisory group members were asked to record the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) they observed during the tour. During the tour, Advisory Group members heard from Park Manager, Gabby Paxton and biologist Rick Owen on the resource management and operational activities that have occurred at the park since the property was acquired. Park Planner, Sine Murray, biologist, Anne Barkdoll, and district chiefs, Clif Maxwell and Brian Fugate also contributed information about the park. The former owner of Gilchrist Blue Spring, Kim Davis, provided historical background about the use of Naked Spring. There was discussion and questions about the park's resources from the advisory group members throughout the tour. Discussion also revolved around possible strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats at various points of interest in the park.

After the tour, the meeting moved to the High Springs Civic Center. Ms. Murray led a group discussion on the potential strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats that were identified by the advisory group members. A summary of this discussion is presented in Figure 1.

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**Figure 1. SWOT Analysis Gilchrist Blue Spring State Park**

<b>INTERNAL</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beautiful bottomland forest</li> <li>Not developed</li> <li>Crystal clear water</li> <li>Upland buffer along CR340</li> <li>Parking area contained</li> <li>Diversity of ecosystems</li> <li>“Old Florida” feel</li> <li>Diversity of recreation</li> <li>Some existing facilities</li> <li>Good camping</li> <li>Active stakeholders</li> <li>Access to institutional knowledge</li> <li>Connected to conservation lands</li> <li>Close to urban areas</li> <li>Development pressure is low</li> <li>Six known springs</li> <li>Good spring run streams</li> <li>Historical/current research</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited staff</li> <li>Limited funding</li> <li>Long dirt road</li> <li>Current layout of facilities</li> <li>Fragile ecosystem</li> <li>Only one bathroom</li> <li>Older septic system</li> <li>Lack of universal accessibility</li> <li>Current condition of facilities</li> <li>No CSO/volunteers</li> <li>No public launch for paddlers</li> <li>No brochure/map of park</li> <li>No marked hiking trails</li> <li>Too much activity in one space</li> <li>High intensity powerline</li> </ul>
<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate public on springshed</li> <li>Rerouting the boardwalk</li> <li>Special events</li> <li>Sandhill restoration</li> <li>Ecology/History Interpretation</li> <li>Keep it Pristine</li> <li>Upgrade/Move facilities</li> <li>Restore spring</li> <li>Public/Private partnerships</li> <li>Swimming/water activities</li> <li>Accessible hiking/Playground</li> <li>Provide 2 types of camping</li> <li>Family friendly</li> <li>Ranger guided tours</li> <li>Snorkel tours</li> <li>Improve water quality/erosion</li> <li>Protection of river shoreline</li> <li>Birding</li> <li>Park boundary expansion</li> <li>Help local economy</li> <li>Promote Ecotourism</li> <li>Outdoor laboratory</li> <li>Establish greenway corridor</li> <li>Research visitor use capacity</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing land use patterns</li> <li>Nitrate levels in groundwater</li> <li>Erosion of spring bowl</li> <li>Declining groundwater levels</li> <li>Increased human impact</li> <li>Development and industry</li> <li>Concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO)</li> <li>Herbicides/Pesticides in water</li> <li>Proximity to water</li> <li>Decline of the Sana Fe River</li> <li>Decline of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV)</li> <li>Park infrastructure development</li> <li>Exotic species</li> <li>Changes in recreation (i.e. bigger RVs)</li> <li>Traffic congestion</li> <li>Overcrowding</li> <li>Overmarketing</li> </ul>

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After the SWOT group discussion, Ms. Murray provided the group an overview of park purpose and significance statements. Ms. Murray explained that purpose and significance statements create a foundation for resource management, land use, recreation and interpretative programs at each park. Ms. Murray then provided examples of purpose and significance statements and asked each group to define a single Park Purpose statement and a few significance statements (no more than five) for Gilchrist Blue Springs. Each group then selected a spokesperson and presented their Park Purpose and Significance Statements to the larger group.

**Group 1**

Park Purpose:

To preserve and protect the unique springs, karst features biodiverse and fragile spring-run streams, and the Santa Fe River shoreline and natural communities. To provide education and recreation experiences while preserving the "Old Florida" Atmosphere.

Park Significance Statements:

- 1) The park protects several 2<sup>nd</sup> magnitude springs and a 1200 ft. spring run stream and provides habitat for the imperiled Suwannee alligator snapping turtle and the West Indian Manatee.
- 2) The park protects a mile of floodplain swamp and bottomland forest along the Santa Fe River.

**Group 2**

Park Purpose:

To protect the natural spring ecosystem while promoting balanced resource-based recreation and environmental education

Park Significance Statements:

- 1.) This park surrounds a significant 2<sup>nd</sup> magnitude group of springs that discharges crystal clear water down a long run to the Santa Fe River and a notable habitat for turtles with a local tradition of recreation.

**Group 3**

Park Purpose

To protect and preserve the world class crystal clear spring shed ecosystem and provide a diverse outdoor experience.

Park Significance Statements:

- 1.) Home to one of the most significant spring runs n the Santa Fe Basin
- 2.) Home to 12 distinct natural ecosystems
- 3.) Provides opportunities for education and preservation of natural florida

# Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park

## DEP Advisory Group Meeting Staff Report

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### Group 4

#### Park Purpose:

To preserve and restore the Gilchrist Blue Spring system and natural communities while providing on going outdoor recreational opportunities in a sustainable fashion.

#### Park Significance Statements:

- 1.) The park presents an opportunity to expand interpretation and education about spring ecosystems in cooperation with local community
- 2.) Park contains numerous second magnitude and smaller springs with unique spring runs.

The groups were then asked to consider land use strategies that would support their park purpose statement and protect what they identified as the significant resources of the park. Ms. Murray provided an overview of five potential recreation opportunity zones representing a range of potential land-use designations (see Figure 2). The groups were instructed that each designation selected should guide the visitor experience, maintain the desired natural resource condition, and help to identify appropriate facilities and recreational activities. Groups were asked to identify each potential zone on a park map (see attached) and then describe the desired future condition, the potential visitor experience and potential activities and facilities for each zone identified. Each group then selected a spokesperson and presented their land use plan to the larger group:

**Figure 2. Recreation Opportunity Zones**

Wilderness	Undeveloped	Natural	Developed	Urban
 <p style="font-size: small;">Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park</p>	 <p style="font-size: small;">Torreya State Park</p>	 <p style="font-size: small;">Wakulla Springs State Park</p>	 <p style="font-size: small;">Faver-Dykes State Park</p>	 <p style="font-size: small;">Ybor City Museum State Park</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designated wilderness landscape</li> <li>- Permit required for access</li> <li>- Solitude and tranquility dominant</li> <li>- Reliance on first aid knowledge and outdoor skills</li> <li>- Leave no trace</li> <li>- No obvious evidence of management activities</li> <li>- Socialization outside group is close to non-existent</li> <li>- No support facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimal public access facilities provided</li> <li>- Solitude and tranquility likely</li> <li>- Reliance on first aid knowledge and outdoor skills</li> <li>- Leave no trace</li> <li>- Little evidence of management presence</li> <li>- Socialization outside group possible</li> <li>- Users likely to stay overnight</li> <li>- Support facilities rare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curated natural experience</li> <li>- Public access confined to prevent excessive impacts to resources</li> <li>- Solitude and tranquility unlikely</li> <li>- Leave no trace</li> <li>- Obvious evidence of management presence</li> <li>- Socialization outside group likely</li> <li>- Activities limited to day use</li> <li>- Occasional support facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed open space with comfortable traditional park amenities</li> <li>- Socialization likely</li> <li>- Motorized users common</li> <li>- Trash cans and restrooms present</li> <li>- Obvious management presence</li> <li>- Balance between overnight and day use activities</li> <li>- Grouping of support facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extensive development in an urban environment</li> <li>- Continuous interaction with other users</li> <li>- Numerous amenities</li> <li>- Focus on cultural resources and historic interpretation</li> <li>- Extensive management presence</li> <li>- Emphasis on day use activities</li> <li>- Support facilities adjacent to visitor facilities</li> </ul>

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Group 1\*

	Undeveloped	Natural	Developed
Desired Future Condition			
Desired Visitor Experience			
Activities			
Facilities			

*\* This group discussed and completed a map*

Group 2

	A- Developed	B- Natural	C - Undeveloped
Desired Future Condition	Aesthetically appropriate restrooms, public buildings	Maintain in natural state as much as possible Litter control Erosion control Visitor/Activity routing Enforcement + education "Compliance through interpretation"	Marked and maintained trails only Litter control UTV trails as needed for maintenance/staff use only
Desired Visitor Experience	Modern Amenities	Old natural Florida "feel" Access to aquatics Experience unique to this site	"Primitive"
Activities	Camping/Hook-ups Parking Picnic pavilions	Swimming Snorkel Paddle et al. Picnic Hike Tubing Sunbathe	Hiking Birding Guided walks-ranger
Facilities	Restrooms Parking lot Pavilions ? Other venues	Snorkel Trail Boardwalk Trails	Trails

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Group 3

	Undeveloped	Natural	Developed
Desired Future Condition		Sandhill restoration Spring run	
Desired Visitor Experience	Minimal public access Protection of natural resources Leave no trace No evidence of management	Curated natural experience Public access combined Leave no trace Limited management	Heavy public use Obvious management presence.
Activities		Wildlife observation	Swimming Diving Camping Picnicking
Facilities		Boardwalk to river Snorkel trail Hiking trail	Bathhouses RV campground Roadways Concession Visitor Center Tent primitive camping Picnic Pavilions

Group 4

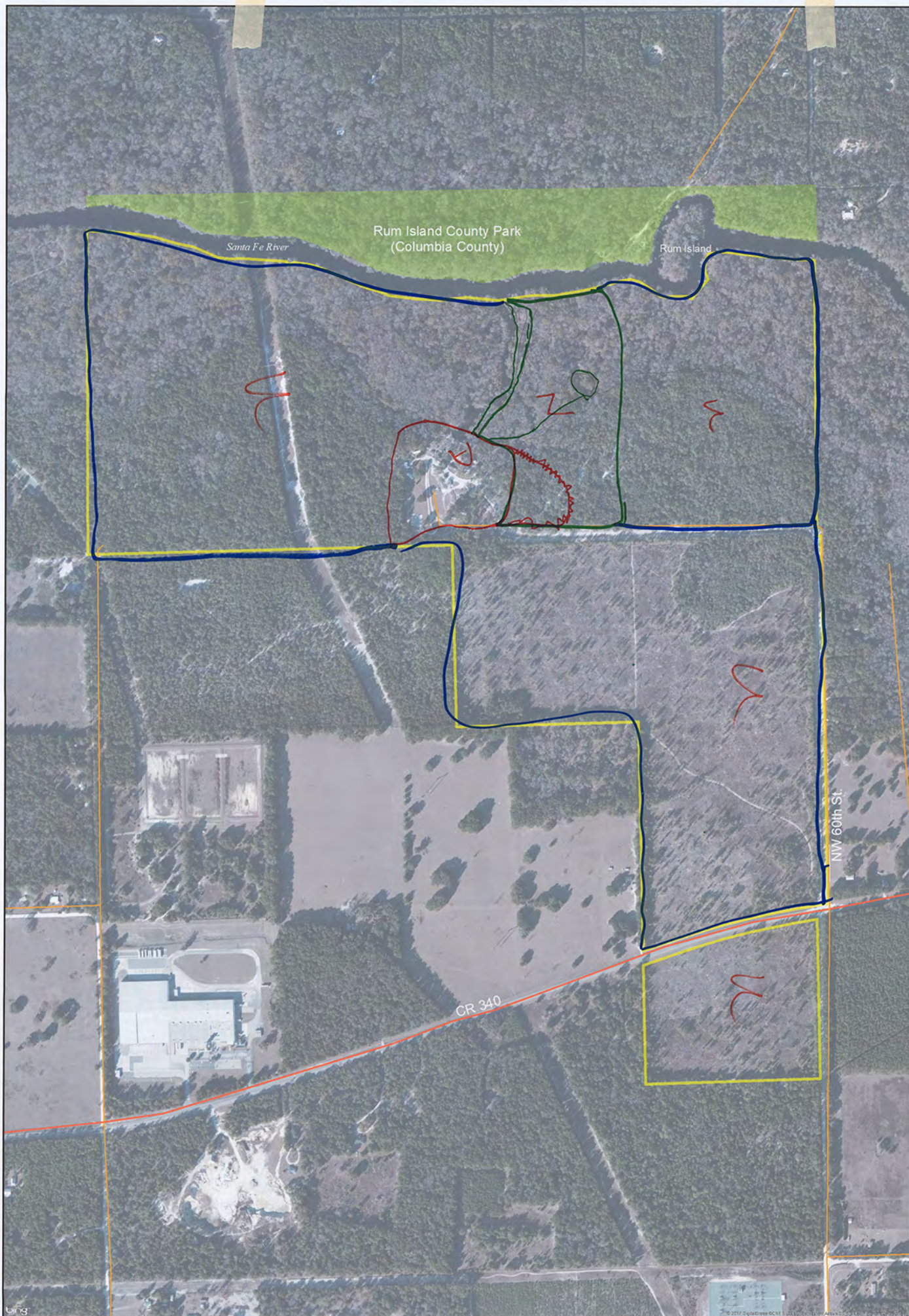
	Undeveloped	Natural	Developed
Desired Future Condition	Undisturbed	Restoration Passive Visitor Use	
Desired Visitor Experience	Limited Use Passing Through Guided Education	Day Use	High Use Interactive
Activities	Hiking Nature Study Paddling		Swimming Diving Camping
Facilities	Trail/Boardwalk	Trailhead Parking	Restrooms Campsites Concessions

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After the land use exercise was complete, Ms. Murray explained that the input gathered from the meeting would be carefully considered by DRP as the initial unit management plan for the park is developed. Ms. Murray then asked for feedback on the day's events and if the group had any additional comments or concerns. Mike Costello reiterated a comment that he had made earlier in the day about the need to limit boat wakes on the Santa Fe River. Bob Knight expressed his overall concern about the health of springs in the region. He suggested that the Florida Park Service should address the need for enhanced springs protection and protection of the Santa Fe River with the leadership of DEP and the state legislature. He suggested that swimming and other water dependent recreation be limited to Blue Spring and Blue Spring Run based on a reasonably protective carrying capacity. He also suggested that water-dependent recreation including paddling should be prohibited in the other springs on the property, including Naked, Little Blue, and Johnson. He stated that these critical management measures will allow some continuing recreational impacts to one spring while putting the other springs on a path to recovery from physical disturbances caused by wading and swimming. He commented that The Florida Springs Institute, in cooperation with DEP, will continue to conduct ecological monitoring in the state park to assess the recovery of these ancillary springs. He also suggested that an education center or research facility might be appropriate for Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park. Doug Jipson expressed his commitment to conservation and that it will be important to reach out to younger stakeholders since they are the next generation of park visitors and that it will be up to them to protect these resources for the future.

Regarding next steps, Ms. Murray indicated that DRP staff would develop the initial draft management plan by the end of the year. Ms. Murray stated that DRP anticipates scheduling a second round of public workshops and the second advisory group meeting in the first few months of 2019. Ms. Murray thanked everyone for their participation and the meeting adjourned.



Rum Island County Park  
(Columbia County)

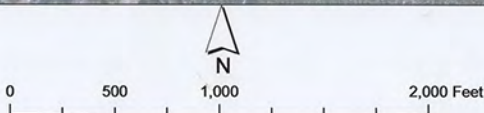
Santa Fe River

Rum Island

NW 60th St.

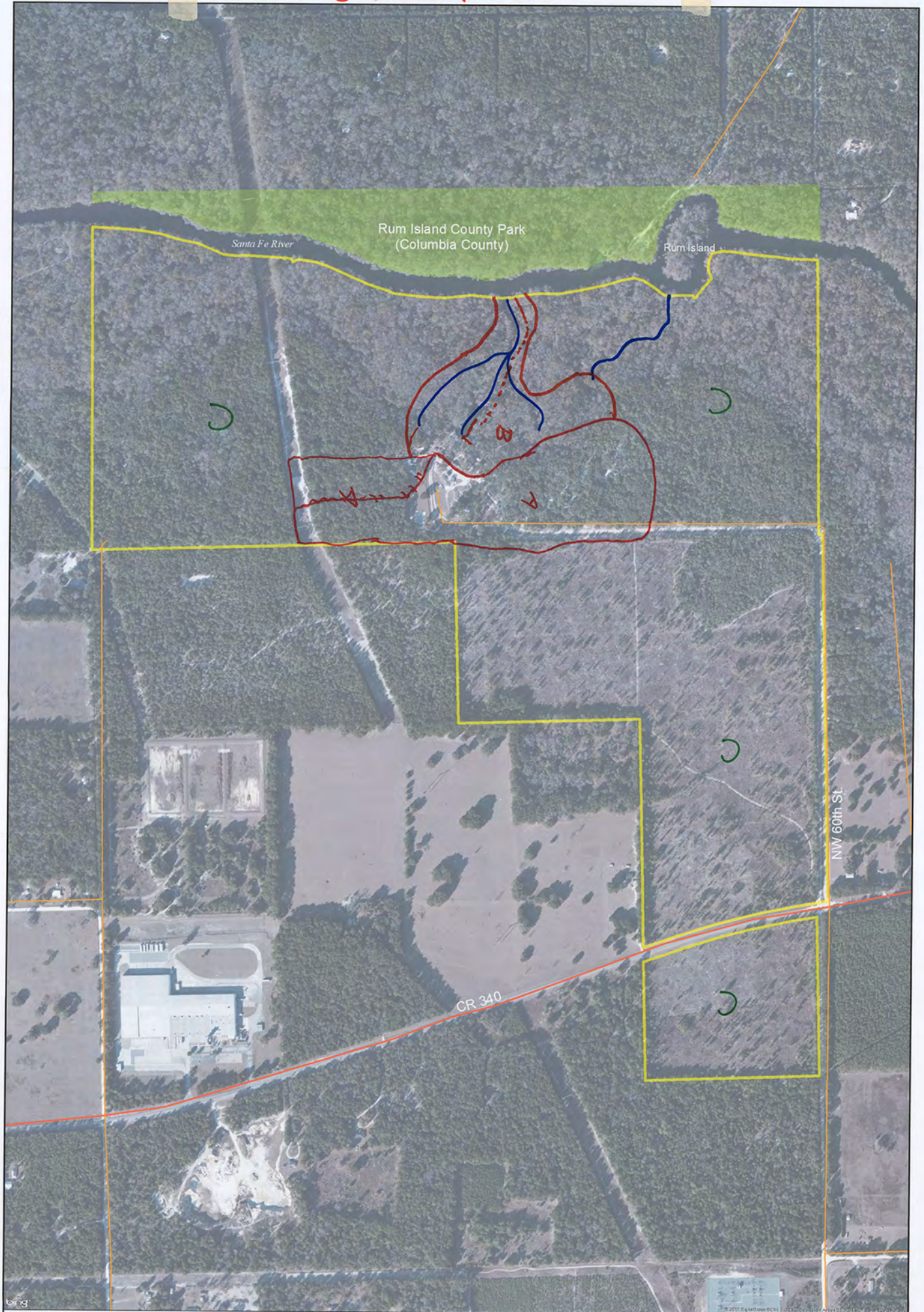
CR 340

GILCHRIST BLUE SPRING  
STATE PARK

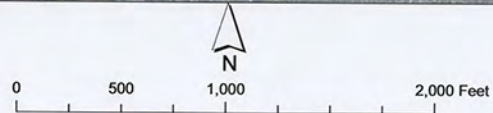




GROUP 2

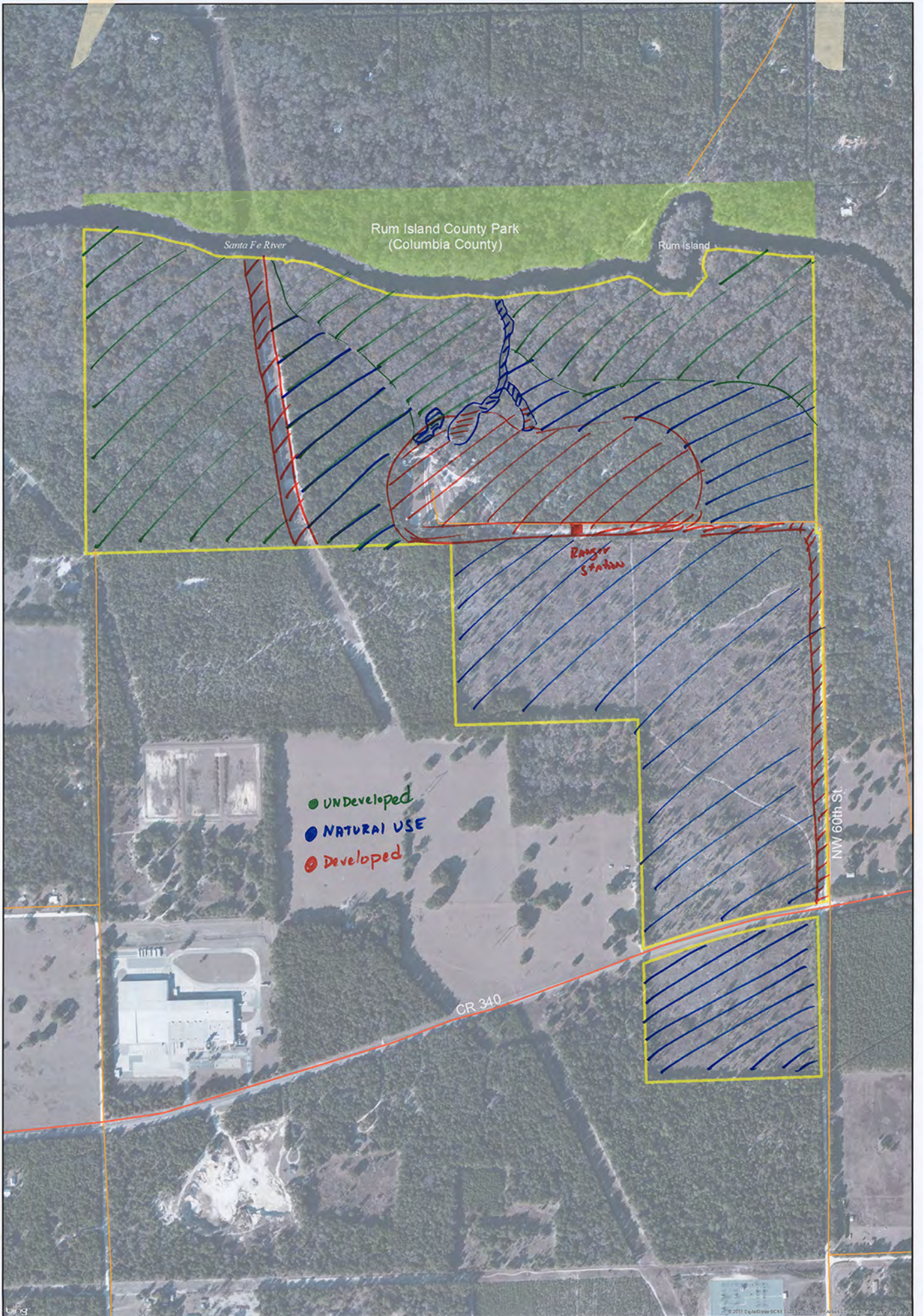


GILCHRIST BLUE SPRING  
STATE PARK

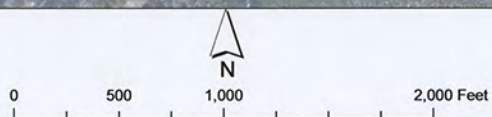


# GROUP 2

	Zone A-DEVELOPED	Zone B-NATURAL	Zone UNDEVELOPED
Overall Desired Natural Resource Condition	Aesthetically Appropriate → Restrooms, Public Bldgs.	Maintain in Natural State as much as possible- Litter control/ Erosion Control/ Visitor/activity Routing Enforcement + Education → "Compliance Through Interpretation"	Marked + Maintained Trails only. Litter Control/ UTV Trails as needed → Mgmt/Staff ONLY!
Overall Desired Visitor Experience	Modern Amenities — Proximity?	Old/Natural FL "Feel" Access to Aquatics Experience unique to this site	"Primitive"
Activities	Camping/ Hook-ups Parking Pavilions/Picnic	Swimming Snorkel Paddle et. al. Picnic Hike Tubing Sunbathe	Hiking Birding (Guided walks Ranger)
Facilities	Restrooms Parking Lot Pavilions ? other Venues	snorkel trail? Boardwalk? Trails	Trails



GILCHRIST BLUE SPRING  
STATE PARK



UNDEVELOPED

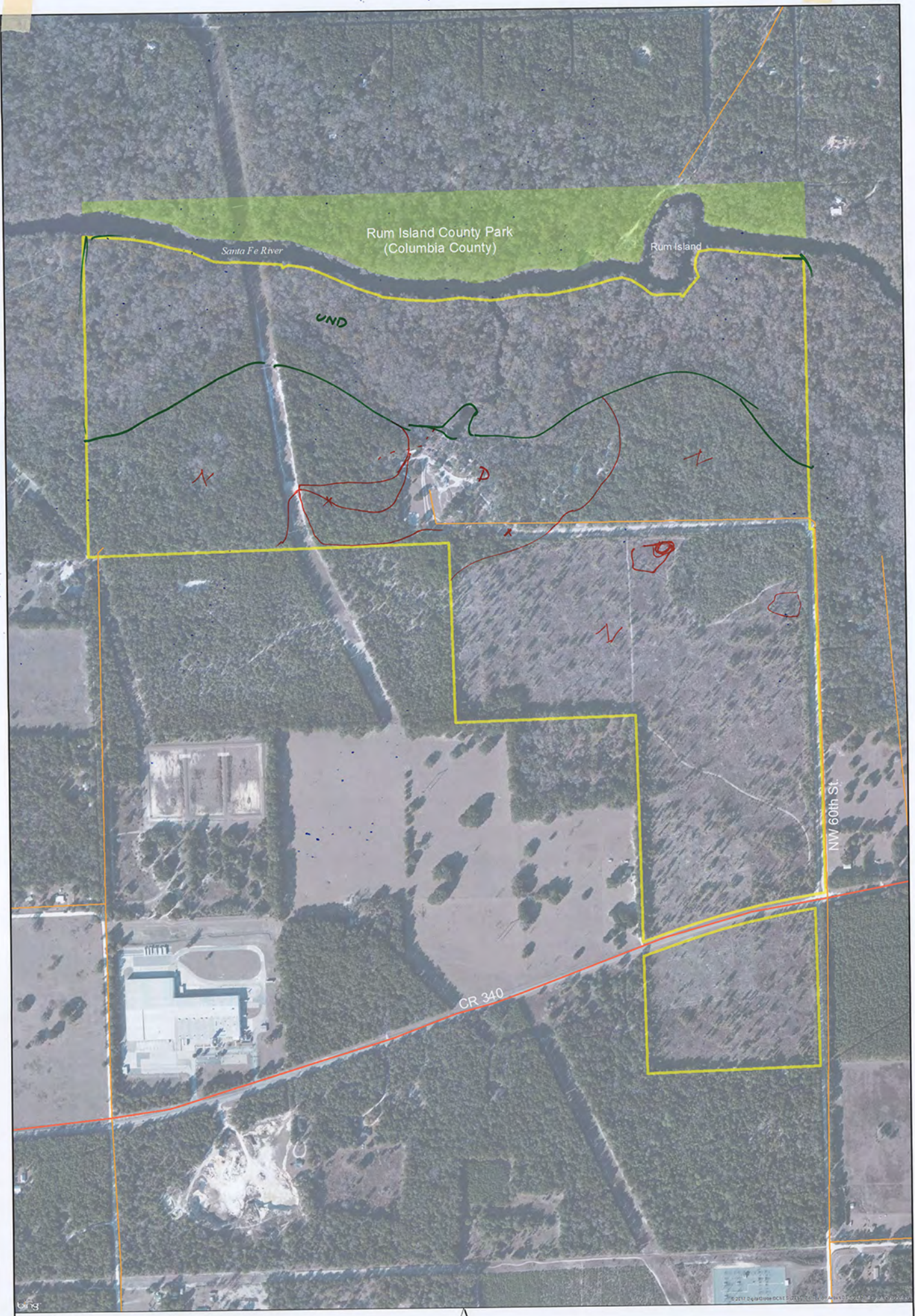
NATURAL

DEVELOPED

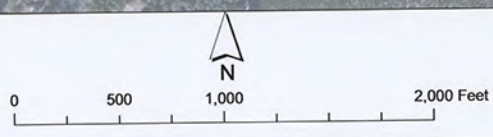
Minimal Public Access  
Protection of  
Natural Resources  
Leave NO TRACE  
NO evidence of management

Curated Natural  
Experience  
Public Access  
COMBINED  
Spring RUN  
Boardwalk to  
River  
SNORKLE TRAIL  
Hiking Trail  
Sandhill Restoration  
WILDLIFE OBSERVATION  
Leave NO TRACE  
Limited management

Heavy Public use  
Bath houses  
CONCESSION  
RV-CAMPground  
Roadways  
Picnic/Pavilions  
Visitor Center  
Tent Primitive Camping  
OBVIOUS management Presence.



**GILCHRIST BLUE SPRING  
STATE PARK**



	UND	NAT	DEV
DFC	UNDISTURBED	- RESTO - PASS VISTUSE	
DVE	- LIMITED USE - PASSING THROUGH - GUIDED EDUCATION	DAY USE	- HIGH USE - INTERACTIVE
ACT	- HIKING - NAT. STUDY - PADDLING	- <del>CAMPING</del> PRIM	- SWIMMING, DIVING - CAMPING
FAC	- TRAIL/ BOARDWALK	- TRAILHEAD - PARKING - <del>CAMPING</del>	- RESTROOMS - CAMPSITES - CONCESSIONS

# OPPORTUNITIES

EDUCATE PUBLIC  
ON SPRINGS HD

REROUTE THE BOARDWALK  
FOR ACCESS TO  
SPRING RUN / FLOODPLAIN

SPECIAL EVENTS

SANDHILL RESTORATION

INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY  
ECOLOGY

KEEP IT PRISTINE

MAKE FACILITIES / RESTORE  
SPRING

PARTNERSHIPS PUBLIC / PRIVATE  
SWIMMING

ACCESSIBLE HIKING / PLAYGROUND

# OPPORTUNITIES

PROVIDE ~~THE~~ TWO TYPES  
OF CAMPING

FAMILY FRIENDLY

RANGER GUIDED TOURS

SNORKEL TRAILS

IMPROVE WATER QUALITY  
EROSION

RESEARCH LAND USE CHANGES

UPGRADE EX. SEPTIC  
INFRASTRUCTURE / FACILITIES

DEMONSTRATE GREEN BUILDING  
TECHNICS

POTENTIAL TO EXPAND PARK  
BOUNDARY.

RIVER FRONTAGE / PROTECTION  
"NO WAKE ZONE"

WATER ACTIVITIES

BIRDING

# STRENGTHS

BEAUTIFUL BOTTOMLAND FOREST

NOT DEVELOPED

CRYSTAL CLEAR WATER

UPLAND BUFFER TO CR 340

PARKING AREA CONTAINED

DIVERSITY OF ECOSYSTEMS

"OLD FLORIDA" FEEL

DIVERSITY OF REC. OPPORT.

SOME FACILITIES EXIST.

GOOD CAMPING

ACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS

TALK TO KIM

# STRENGTHS

CONNECTIVITY TO OTHER  
(STATE) CONSERVATION LANDS

SIX KNOWN SPRINGS

GOOD SPRING RUN STREAMS

HISTORY / CURRENT

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
(ECOLOGICAL / CULTURAL)

SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

LOCATION TO URBAN AREAS

DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE IS LOW



# THREATS

CHANGING LAND USE  
FROM SILVACULTURE  
TO ROW CROPS

NITRATE LEVELS IN  
GROUNDWATER

EROSION OF SPRING BANK  
GROUNDWATER LEVEL DECLINE  
INCREASED HUMAN IMPACT

DEVELOPMENT / INDUSTRY

CAFO / ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

<sup>HERBICIDES / CHEMICALS</sup>  
PESTICIDES IN WATER

PROXIMITY TO URBAN AREAS

~~THE~~ DECLINE IN THE SANTA FE

SAV DECLINE

INFRASTRUCTURE / DEVELOPMENT

# THREATS

EXOTIC SPECIES  
PLANTS ANIMALS

CHANGES IN TYPES OF  
POPULAR RECREATION  
"BIGGER RV'S"

TRAFFIC

OVERCROWDING  
OVER MARKETING.

## WEAKNESSES

LONG DIRT ROAD

CURRENT LAYOUT  
CONDITION OF SPRINGS  
SHORELINES

FRAGILE ~~WATER~~ ECOSYSTEM

ONLY ONE BATHHOUSE

OLDER SEPTIC SYSTEM  
NO SEWER

ACCESSIBILITY TO PICNIC  
SPRINGS, ETC.

CONDITION OF INFRASTRUCTURE  
FACILITIES

LIMITED STAFF  
LIMITED FUNDING

NO CSO/VOLUNTEERS

NO ~~PRIVATE~~ LAUNCH FOR  
PRIVATE PADDLES

## WEAKNESSES

NO ~~WATER~~ BROCHURE / MAP  
OF PARK

NO MARKED HIKING TRAILS

TOO MUCH IN ACTIVITY IN  
ONE SPACE

HIGH INTENSITY POWERLINE