

ITEM 8:

Consider a 10-year update to the Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 4288).

LOCATION:

APPLICANT:

Florida Park Service (FPS)

STAFF REMARKS:

Background

Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park (ARPSP) in Martin County consists of approximately 4,886 acres. The park was initially acquired on November 4, 1998, with funds from the CARL/P2000 program and with assistance from South Florida Water Management District and Martin County. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund holds fee simple title to the park and on February 14, 2000, leased the property to the Division of Recreation and Parks under a 50-year lease (Lease No. 4288).

ARPSP protects over 4,800 acres of natural communities that include a mosaic of mesic flatwoods interspersed with depression marshes. The preserve designation prioritizes the maintenance and restoration of natural conditions and facilitates a wilderness-based visitor experience, which can be at a premium in the urban environment of southeast Florida. An extensive trail network allows visitors to immerse themselves in this pristine natural environment.

Management Plan Overview

The Florida Natural Areas Inventory has identified ten distinct natural community types at ARPSP. They also identified four altered landcover types. The predominant natural communities are mesic flatwoods and depression marsh. Five species of imperiled plants and seven species of imperiled animals have been identified at ARPSP.

To date, cultural resource sites are known within the park. ARPSP was included in the Archaeological Resources Sensitivity Modeling in Florida State Parks Districts 4 and 5 conducted by the Alliance for Integrated Spatial Technologies (Collins et al. 2014). Based on the preliminary results, 1.73% of the park (83.87 acres) is located within high sensitivity areas and 32.23% of the park (1,562.88 acres) is located within medium sensitivity areas.

The park has not yet opened to the public due to the lack of a formal entrance and public access road. Current access is on a limited basis upon request. Once the proposed entrance road is constructed, the park will be available for passive recreation such as hiking, horseback riding, picnicking, wildlife observation and birding. Due to the park having limited public access, there are a few recreation and support facilities at the Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park. These include approximately 30 miles of hiking trails, honor box, ranger residence, equipment shed, shop building, pole barn, stables, and a shed.

To improve and expand visitor use at the park, plans include a formalized park entrance and day use area that will serve as the main source of recreation for visitors. This area will

also include interpretive panels, various picnicking spots, restrooms and will serve as a hike in site for the newly developed primitive camping sites. Another proposed recreational development is a paddling launch that will allow for self-guided tours down the St. Lucie River.

The Florida Legislature requires that all land management plans include long and short-term (ST) goals. These goals must be measurable objectives, and ST goals must be achievable within a two-year planning period. Pursuant to changes to Section 253.034, F.S., the Division of State Lands tracks the status of ST goals in each land management plan approved since July 1, 2016. The ST goals from this management plan are included as part of this item.

While the ten-year management plan serves as the basic statement of policy and future direction for each park, several annual work plans provide more specific guidance for Division of Recreation and Parks staff to accomplish many of the resource management goals and objectives of the park. Where such detailed planning is appropriate to the character and scale of the park's natural resources, annual work plans are developed for prescribed fire management, exotic plant management and imperiled species management. Annual or longer-term work plans are developed for natural community restoration and hydrological restoration.

Public Involvement

DRP solicited public input by conducting a public workshop and advisory group meeting on March 16 and 17, 2021. The purpose of the workshop was to present the management plan to the public. The purpose of the advisory group meeting was to provide the Advisory Group members the opportunity to review and discuss the management plan.

Suggestions received from the advisory group meeting resulted in the following modifications to the draft management plan:

- Additions to the Imperiled Species and Exotics Plant List.
- Revisions to Addendum 5.

Additional revisions were made throughout the document to address editorial corrections, consistency of spelling and notations, and other minor corrections.

Surplus Lands

The evaluation by the DRP determined that no portion of the ARPSP is recommended for a potential surplus designation.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in March 2016. The review team found that the property is managed in accordance with the purposes for which it was acquired and the management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan.

Two consensus recommendations were offered:

- 1) The team recommends that park staff consider thinning flatwoods natural communities, where basal areas are currently 60-100 or greater.
- 2) The team recommends that park staff pursue funding or cooperative opportunities to conduct a hydrologic assessment of the park.

The 2016 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

- APPROVE**
- APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** _____
- DEFER**
- WITHDRAW**
- NOT APPROVE**
- OTHER:** _____

Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park

Land Management Plan Short Term Goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Measure
III	Restore and maintain the natural communities.	B	Conduct natural community restoration activities on 434 acres of abandoned pasture.	1	Backfill drainage ditches	Plan developed and updated
IV	Maintain, improve, or restore imperiled species populations and habitats.	B	Monitor and document 2 selected imperiled animal species.	1	Implement monitoring protocols for 2 imperiled animal species.	Number of Protocols developed
VII	Provide public access and recreational opportunities.	B	Develop new interpretive, educational and recreational programs.	n/a	n/a	Number of interpretive / education programs.

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised Sept_2019_MWE.



ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Purpose and Significance of the Park

Park Interpretive Themes

Park History

Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park was initially acquired on November 4, 1998 with funds from the CARL/P2000 program and with assistance from South Florida Water Management District and Martin County. The park is currently 4,886.08 acres.

Park Significance

The interconnected wetland ecosystem found at the park, including nearly 1,000 acres of depression marsh, acts as a filtering system for stormwater before the water reaches the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon. This system allows cleaner water to reach the estuarine ecosystem, which improves water quality and sustains high-quality habitat for imperiled species. The rare slough natural community found at the park contributes to these important ecosystem services as it serves key functions for water quality and habitat preservation. This park is an island of wilderness in the sea of surrounding urban areas.





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Purpose and Significance of the Park

Park Interpretive Themes

Central Park Theme

Bearing the scars of drainage ditches carved out decades ago, the gently sloping wetlands of Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park now offers healing and peaceful seclusion from the modern world for the people and wildlife of the St. Lucie River.

Primary Interpretive Themes

Habitat Fragmentation — Atlantic Ridge Preserve is an example of how land management practices prevalent throughout Florida's history have disrupted the vital flow of water that connects all our communities and led to the fragmentation of natural systems.

Wetlands — The wetlands of Atlantic Ridge Preserve hold and filter water as it falls on the landscape making them an invaluable contributor to Florida's waterways and refuges for diverse wildlife.

Remoteness — Atlantic Ridge remains largely undeveloped in order to accommodate restoration initiatives. Those who utilize the park's extensive trail network are able to feel transplanted from a highly urbanized area to a serene wilderness area.





ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

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Executive Summary

Park Quick Facts

Natural Community Composition

- ◆ **Agency:** Department of Environmental Protection - Division of Recreation and Parks
- ◆ **Acreage :** 4,886.08
- ◆ **Location:** Martin County
- ◆ **Lease Management Agreement Number(s):** 4288
- ◆ **Use:** Single
- ◆ **Responsibility:** Public Outdoor Recreation and Conservation
- ◆ **Sublease:** None
- ◆ **Encumbrances:** See Appendix 1 for details
- ◆ **Public Involvement:** See Appendix 2 for details
- ◆ **Optimum Boundary:** Approximately 8,335 acres

Natural Communities	Acreage	Percentage
Mesic Flatwoods	2,845.48	58.24%
Depression Marsh	954.46	19.53%
Altered Landcovers	634.32	13%
Wet Flatwoods	185.49	3.80%
Hydric Hammock	98.54	2.02%
Basin Swamp	85.31	1.75%
Flatwood / Prairie Lake/Marsh Lake	44.62	<1%
Blackwater Stream	11.91	<1%
Mesic Hammock	7.62	<1%
Slough	5.95	<1%
Dome Swamp	2.39	<1%
Total Acreage	4,886.08	100%



ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

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Executive Summary

Park Accomplishments: 2005 — 2020

Ten-Year Planning Period Objectives

Previous Accomplishments

Since the 2005 Unit Management Plan for Atlantic Ridge Preserve the park has made significant accomplishments in terms of resource management and continued protection of the park. Over 2.5 miles of fire lines were created toward the southern portion of the park, the removal of an average of 108 feral hogs per year. Additionally, within the last 10 years the park burned an average of 881 acres within its fire program per year.

Future Objectives

Moving forward throughout the next 10 years of this Unit Management Plan, the park plans to continue resource management efforts by restoring the property back to its original hydrological state by backfilling most of all the ditches in the park and begin the process of reintroducing native vegetation to those areas, and the continued removal of feral hogs. To improve visitor use, the park will be making additions to 5 use area.





ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Hydrological & Natural Communities

Background

Before Atlantic Ridge Preserve was a state park, it was used by farmers for cattle ranching. To maximize space for grazing, the area was cross ditched to drain the wetlands during the wet season. This cross ditching, primarily at the northern end of the park drastically changed the overall hydrology, lowering the water table and allowing for non native vegetation to encroach on areas once dominated by upland flatwoods and depression marshes.

Objective: Restore natural hydrological conditions and functions to approximately 3,000 acre of 7 natural communities

To restore the natural hydrological conditions, steps include developing a restoration plan to backfill and plug over 20 miles of drainage ditches. Once this is accomplished, the overall hydrology will be monitored and evaluated to then restore natural vegetation with planting and prescribed fire if needed. Full restoration of the park to its natural landscape will require this extensive restoration project to be carefully implemented.





ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Prescribed Fire & Exotic Species

Natural Community Restoration

Goal: Restore and maintain the natural communities / habitats of the park.

Objective: Maintain 4,613 acres within optimum fire return interval.

The park has 3 main natural communities that are fire dependent: wet flatwoods, mesic flatwoods and depression marsh. These natural communities should be burned on an interval basis depending on their natural community type. With a total annual target acreage of 1,067- 3,375 acres burned annually.

Exotic Species Management

Goal: Remove exotic and invasive species and conduct needed maintenance.

Objective: Annually treat 977-1,628 gross acres of exotic plant species in the park.

Various exotics including Old world climbing fern, earleaf acacia, Brazilian pepper and downy rouse myrtle are found within the park. Plans to remove these non natives include continuous treatment and survey. Removal will be done from park staff and contractors.





ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

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Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Imperiled Species

Imperiled Species Management

Goal: Maintain, improve or restore imperiled species populations and habitat in the park.

Objective: *Monitor and document 2 selected imperiled plant species.*

Throughout this plan, there will be regional efforts to reintroduce the red cockaded woodpecker, and continued efforts to monitor and document both the Florida scrub jay and gopher tortoise within the park.

The park also has several other imperiled plant and animal species including:

- Catesby's/ pine lily
- Rose pogonia
- American alligator
- Little blue heron
- Tricolored heron
- Woodstork
- Florida manatee
- Gopher tortoise





ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Recreational Use & Infrastructure

Recreation and Facilities Management

Goal: Develop and maintain use areas and support infrastructure

Objective: Construct 5 new use areas

To improve and expand visitor use at the park, plans include to formalize a park entrance and a day use area that will serve as the main source of recreation for visitors. This area will also include interpretive panels, various picnicking spots, restrooms and will serve as a hike in site for the newly developed primitive camping sites. Another proposed recreational development at Atlantic Ridge is a paddling launch that will allow for self guided tours down the St. Lucie River.

Park Entrance

- Develop formalized park entrance

Day Use Area

- Stabilize Parking
- Interpretive Panels
- Picnicking
- Trailhead

Primitive Camping Area

- Develop primitive camping area (s)

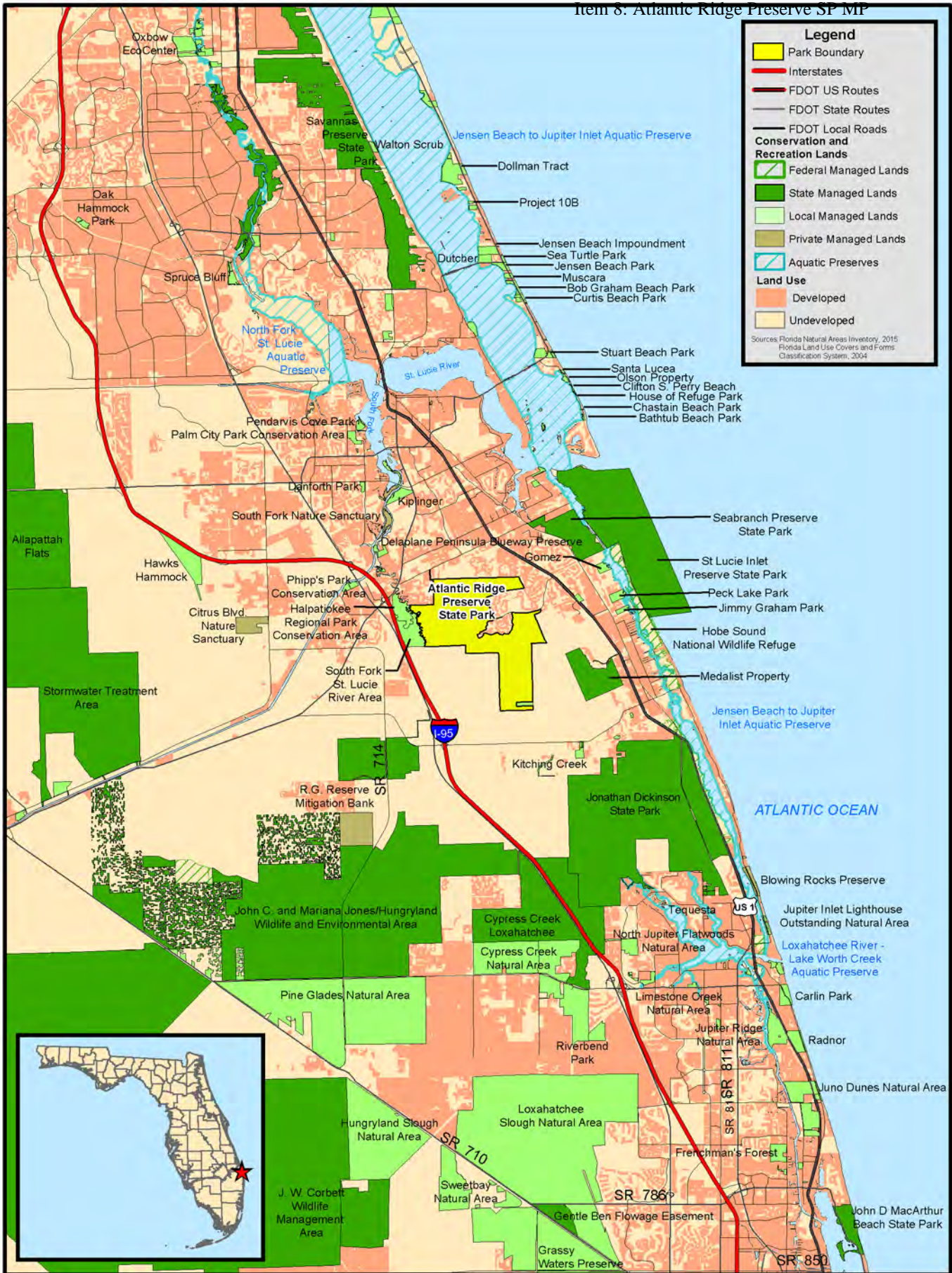
Support Area

- Paddling Launch

Trailhead

- Up to 6 parking spots
- Restroom





Legend

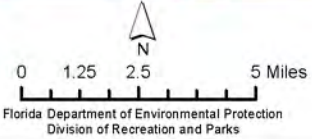
- Park Boundary
- Interstates
- FDOT US Routes
- FDOT State Routes
- FDOT Local Roads
- Conservation and Recreation Lands**
- Federal Managed Lands
- State Managed Lands
- Local Managed Lands
- Private Managed Lands
- Aquatic Preserves
- Land Use**
- Developed
- Undeveloped

Sources: Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2015
Florida Land Use Covers and Forms
Classification System, 2004

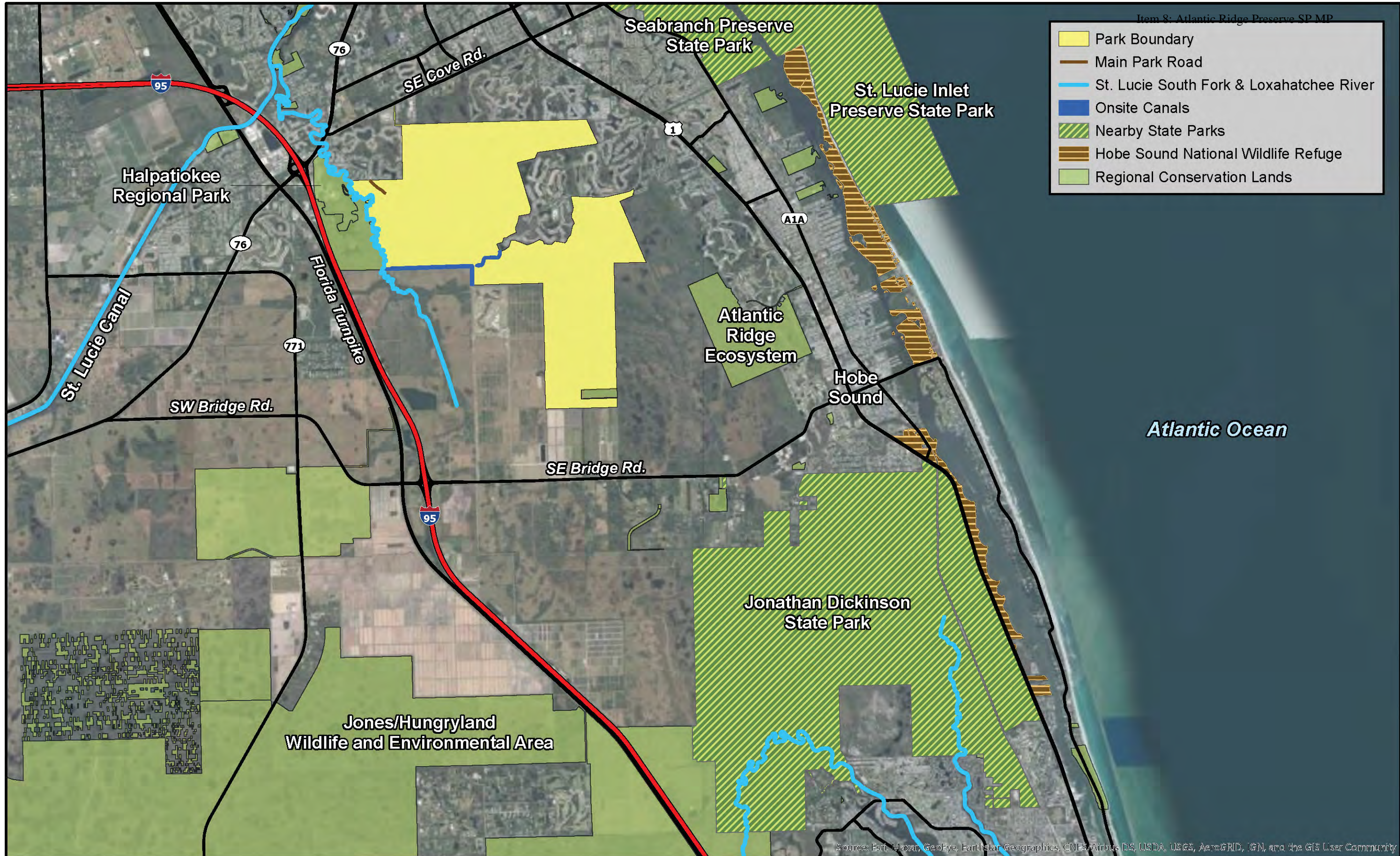


ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

VICINITY MAP

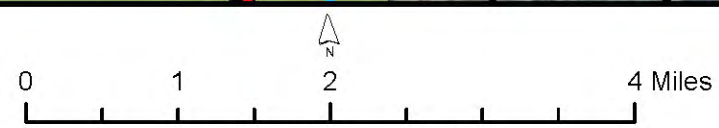


-  Park Boundary
-  Main Park Road
-  St. Lucie South Fork & Loxahatchee River
-  Onsite Canals
-  Nearby State Parks
-  Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge
-  Regional Conservation Lands

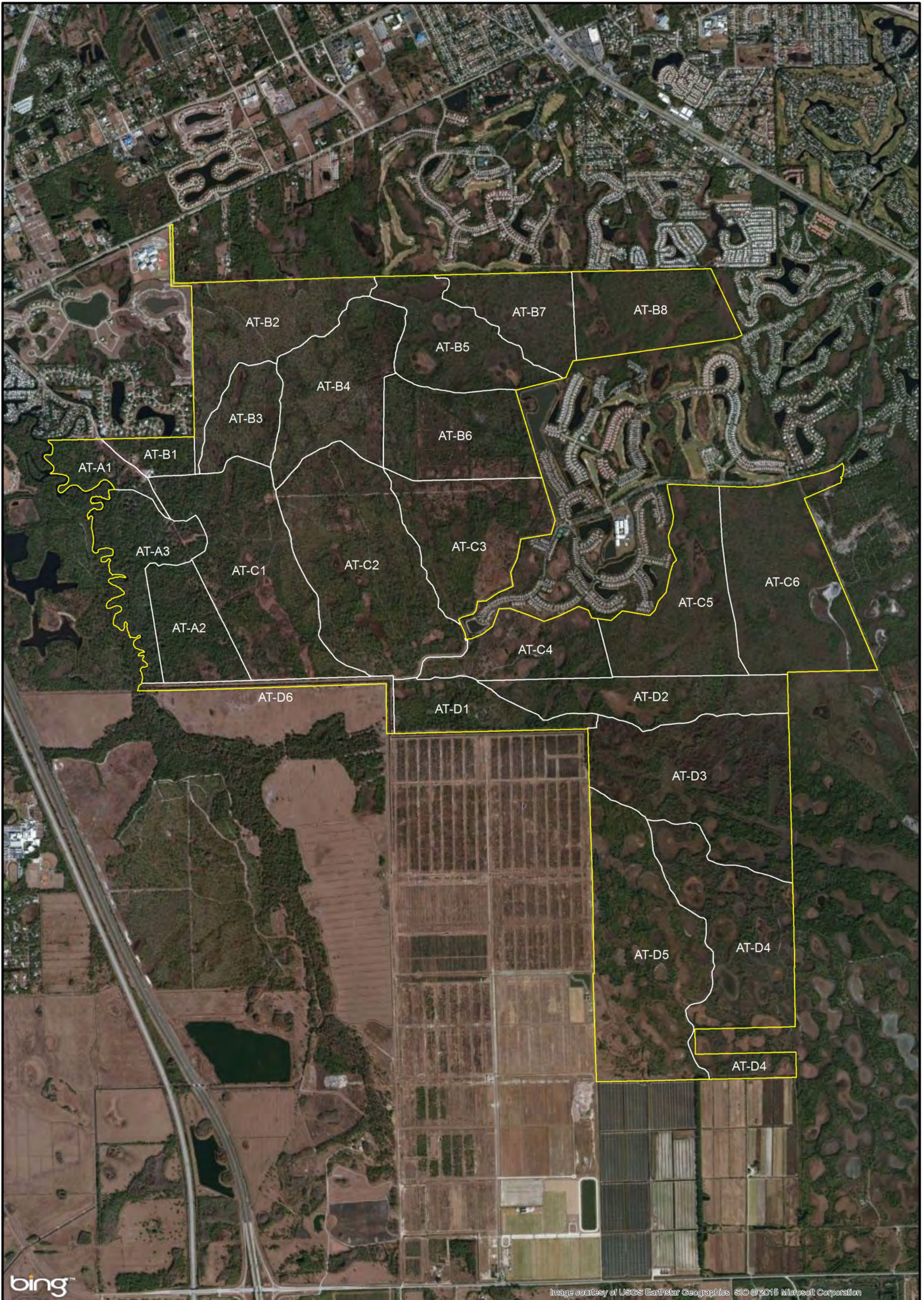


Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park



Reference Map



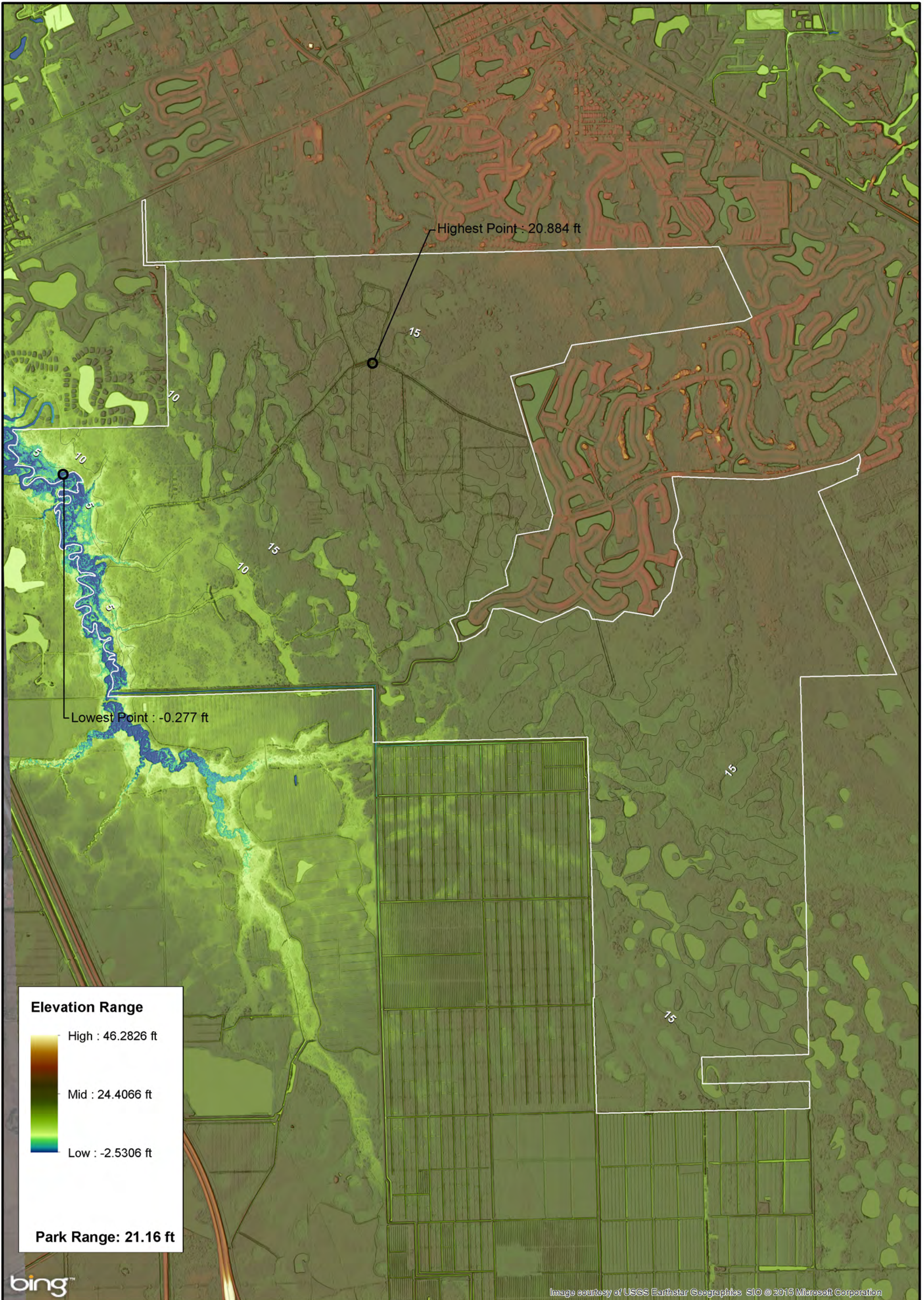
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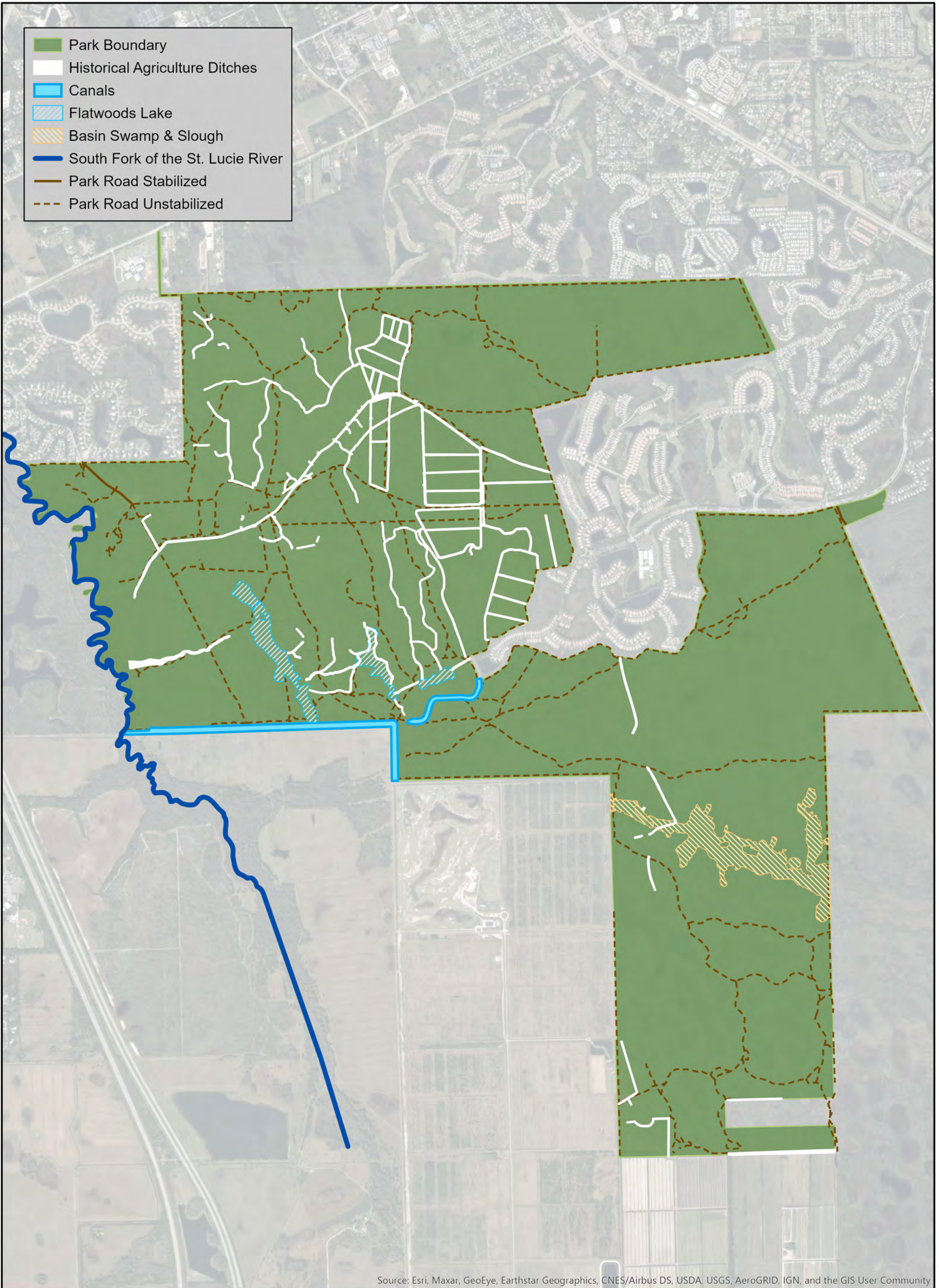
Image courtesy of USGS Earthstar Geographics. SIO © 2016 Microsoft Corporation

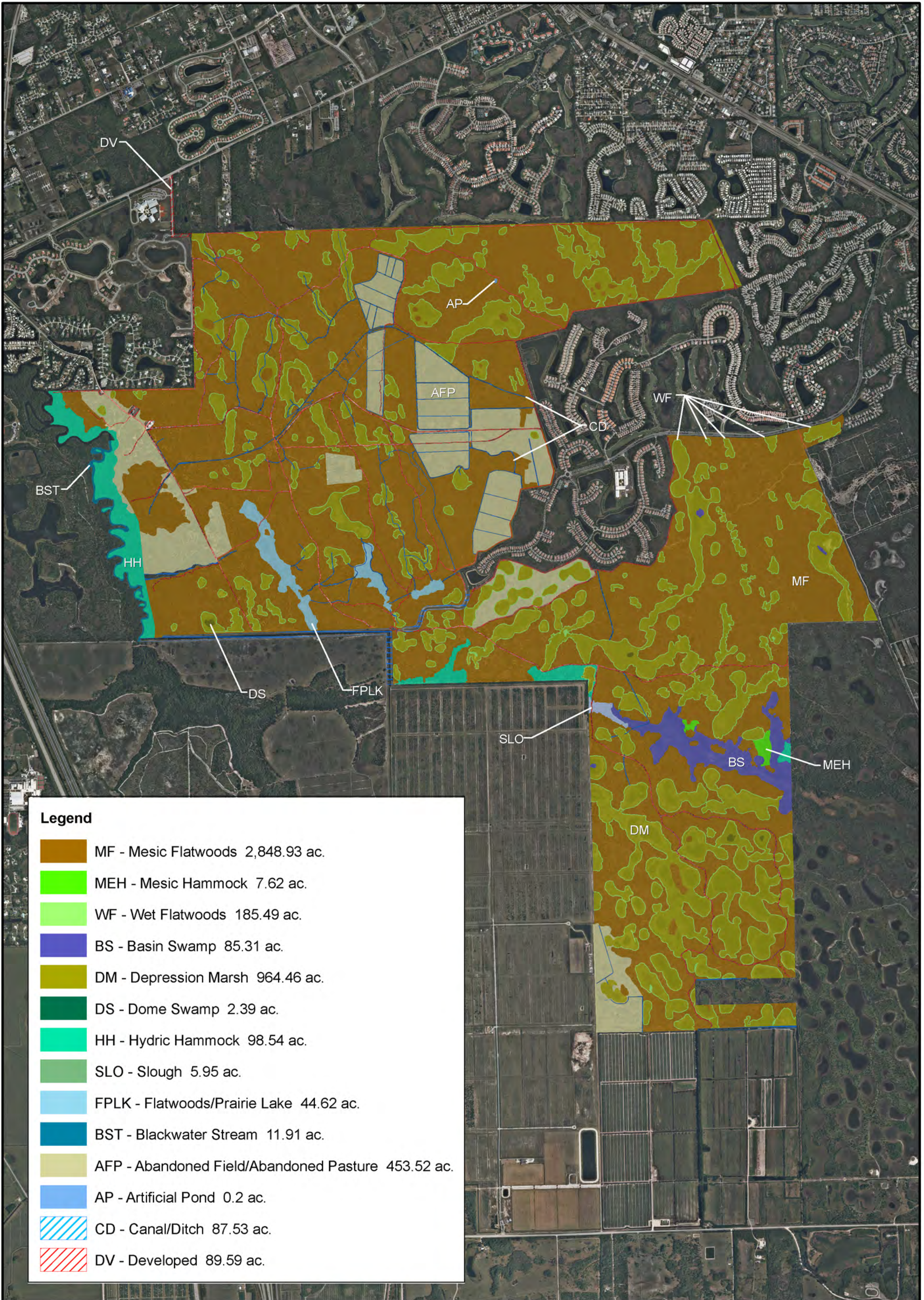
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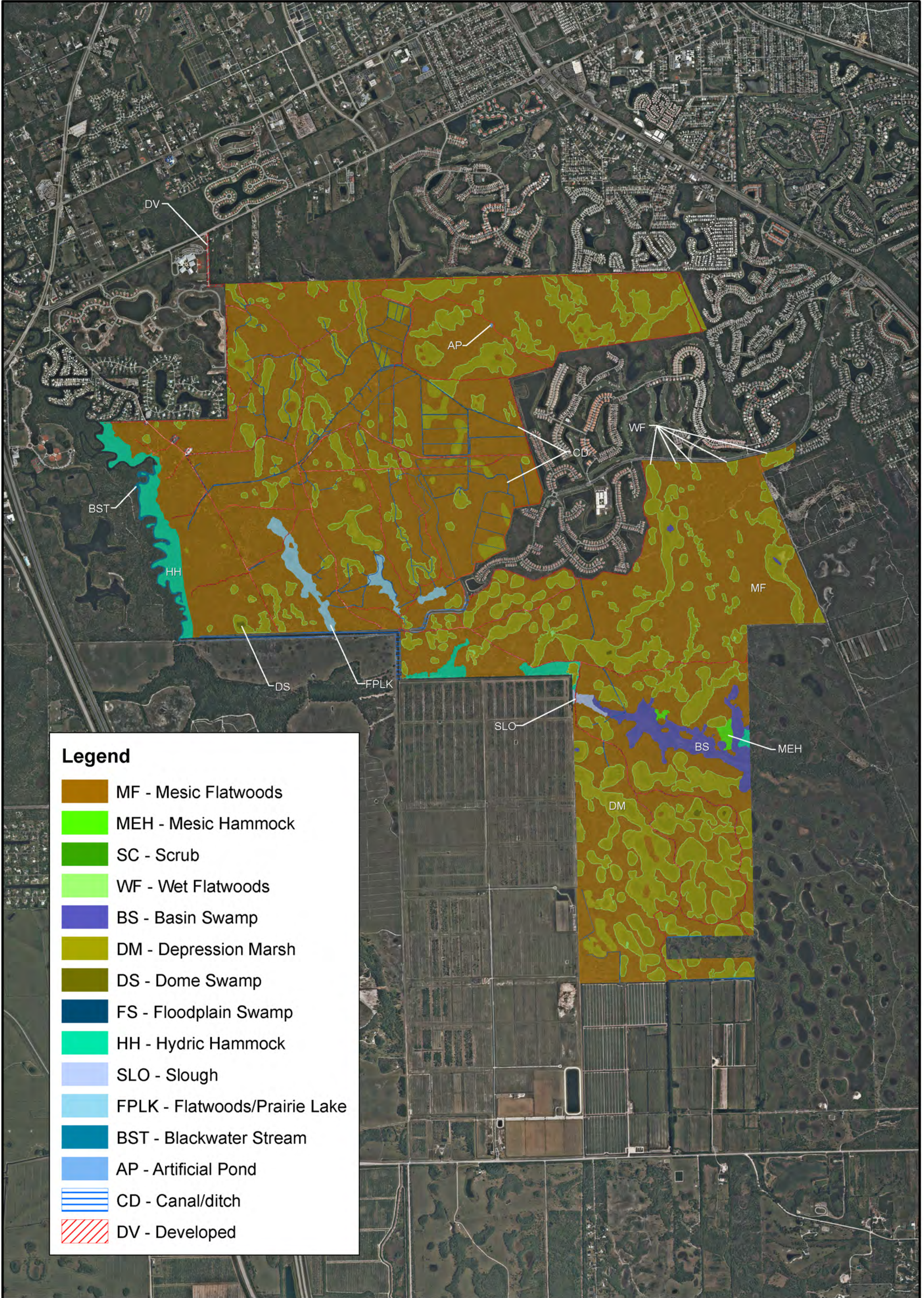
0 1,000 2,000 4,000 Feet

MANAGEMENT ZONES MAP



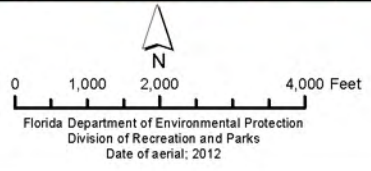


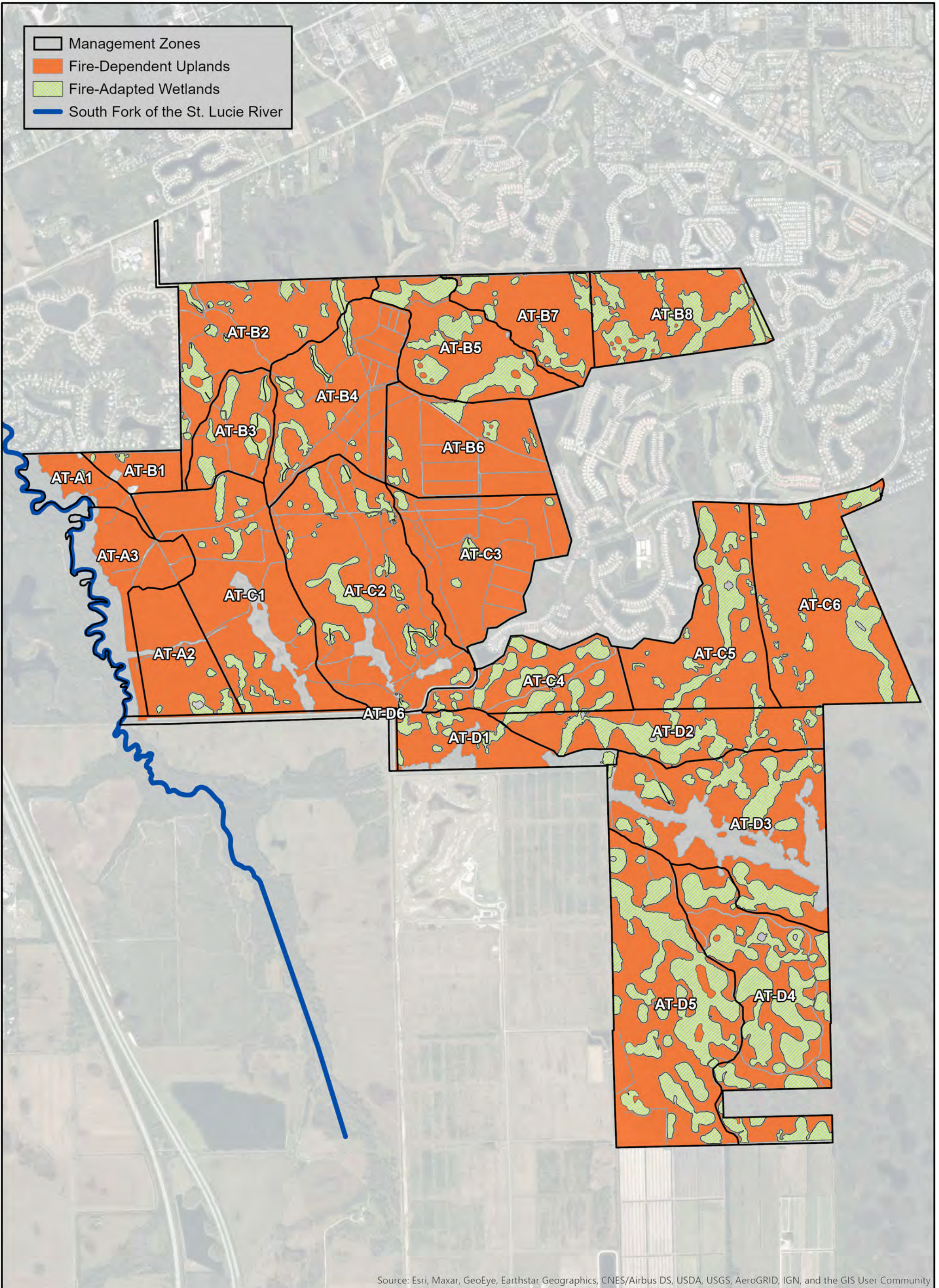




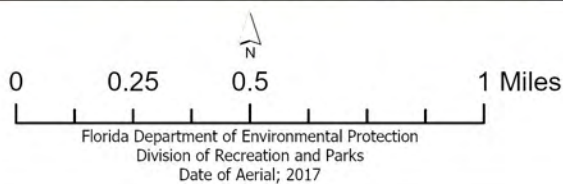
Legend

- MF - Mesic Flatwoods
- MEH - Mesic Hammock
- SC - Scrub
- WF - Wet Flatwoods
- BS - Basin Swamp
- DM - Depression Marsh
- DS - Dome Swamp
- FS - Floodplain Swamp
- HH - Hydric Hammock
- SLO - Slough
- FPLK - Flatwoods/Prairie Lake
- BST - Blackwater Stream
- AP - Artificial Pond
- CD - Canal/ditch
- DV - Developed





Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community



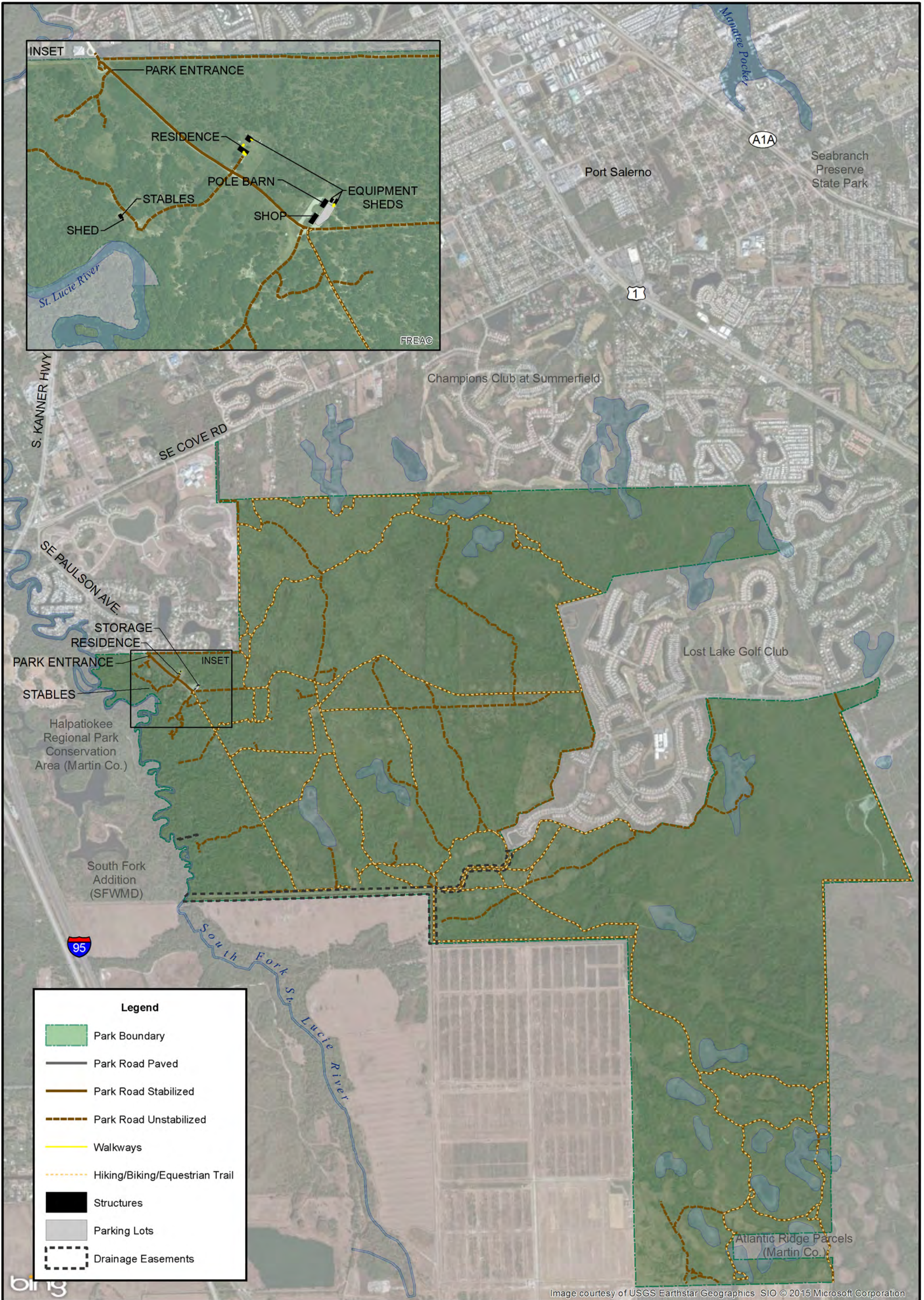
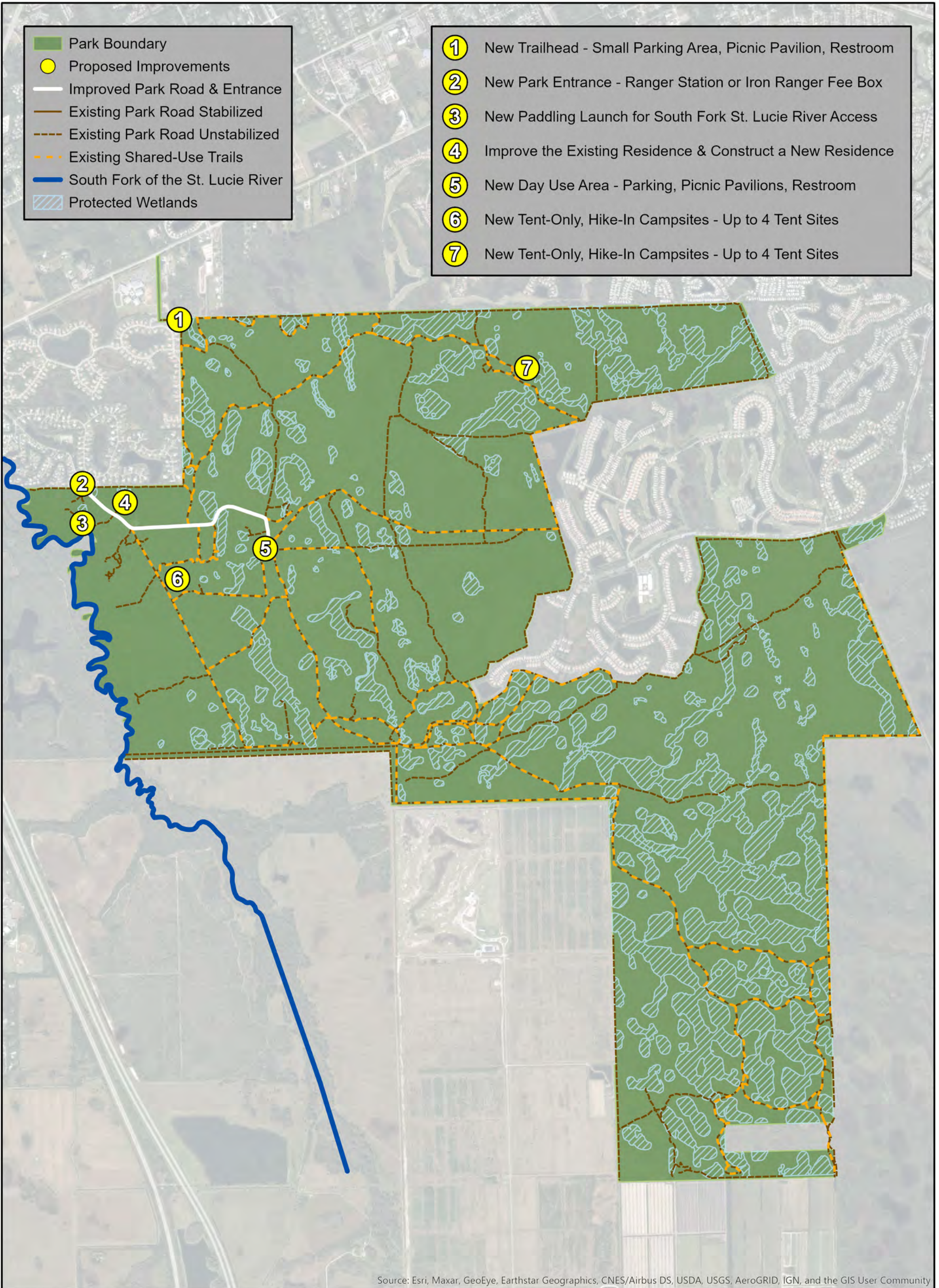


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ATLANTIC RIDGE PRESERVE STATE PARK

BASE MAP

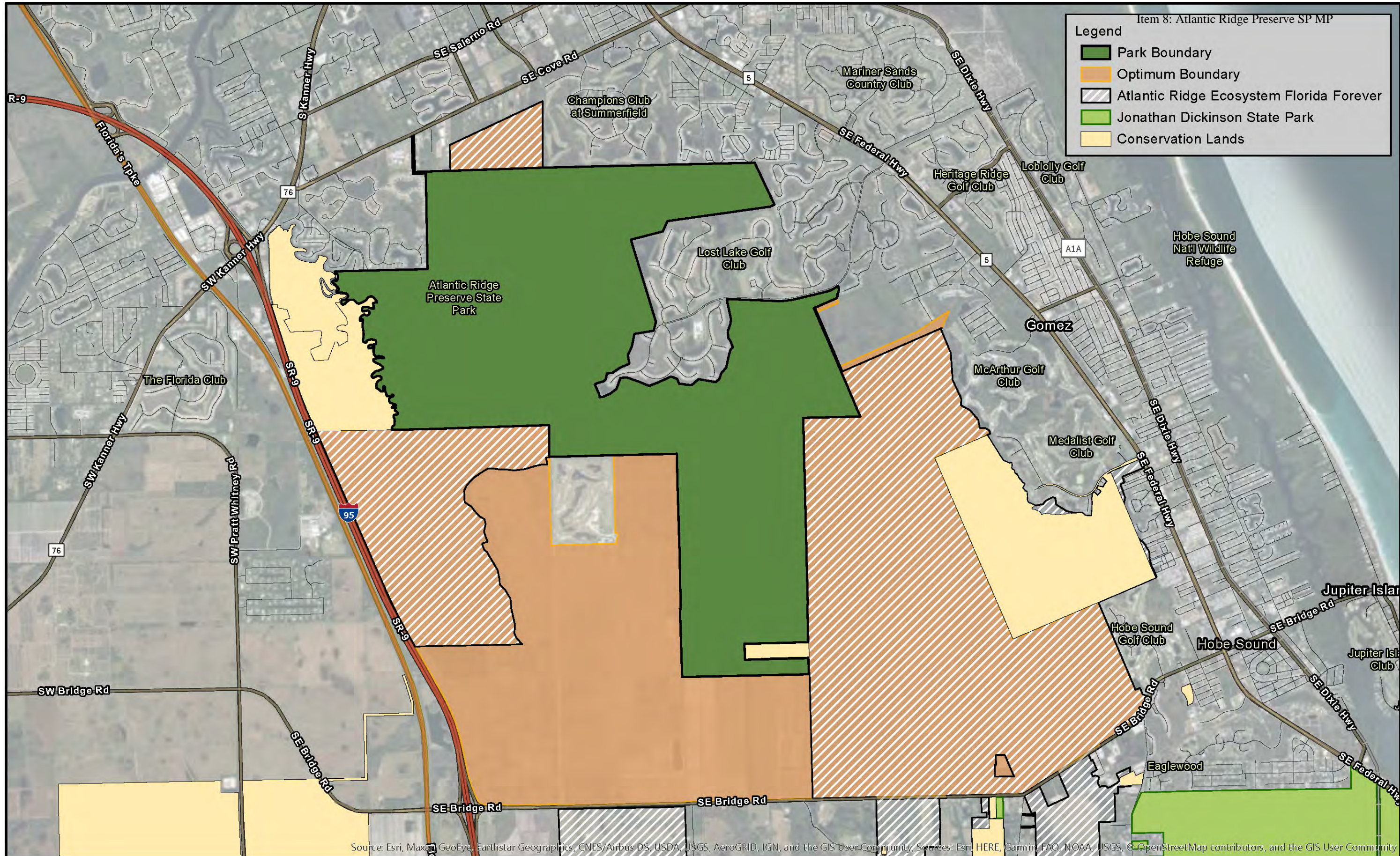


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Item 8: Atlantic Ridge Preserve SP MP

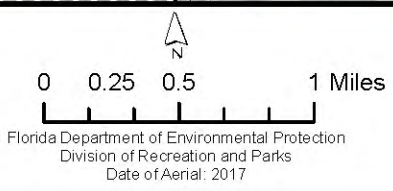
Legend

- Park Boundary
- Optimum Boundary
- Atlantic Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever
- Jonathan Dickinson State Park
- Conservation Lands



Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community. Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park



Optimum Boundary Map