

**ITEM 9:**

Consider the Orange Hammock Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Lease No. 4850).

**LOCATION:**

Sarasota County

**APPLICANT:**

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

**DSL STAFF REMARKS:**

*Background*

The Orange Hammock Wildlife Management Area (OHWMA) in Sarasota County consists of 5,776 acres in the Myakka Ranchlands. The OHWMA represents the largest undeveloped parcel of land in Sarasota County and the largest tract of land in the 7,564-acre Myakka Island Conservation Corridor. Over 90 percent of the area is composed of communities native to the landscape and in natural condition. The OHWMA's wetlands, sloughs, and natural floodplain provide crucial flood protection, which contributes significantly to the water retention/storage and aquifer recharge that are critical to the protection of the regional drinking water supply.

The OHWMA was acquired in May 2020 by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund (BOT). In January 2021, the FWC was granted lead management authority for all resources within the established boundary under Lease number 4850. The OHWMA is managed to conserve wildlife species, to restore natural communities, and to provide high-quality opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreation opportunities including horseback-riding, cycling, and hiking.

*Management Plan Overview*

Through the services of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), FWC has mapped the current and historic natural and altered community types on OHWMA. FNAI has identified and mapped a total of 16 community types within the OHWMA. The primary vegetative communities found within the OHWMA are mesic flatwoods, mesic hammock, and depression marsh.

The FWC has developed the Florida Landscape Assessment Model (FLAM) as a Geographic Information Systems-based assessment tool that incorporates a wide variety of landscape and wildlife species data. The FLAM evaluates the Florida landscape based upon important natural resources and habitat needs of wildlife to identify ecologically significant lands in the state, and to assess the potential impacts of management and land-use changes. The FLAM was developed to provide technical assistance to various local, regional, state and federal agencies and entities interested in wildlife needs and conservation in order to: (1) determine ways to avoid or minimize project impacts by evaluating alternative placements, alignments and transportation corridors during early planning stages, (2) assess direct, secondary and cumulative impacts to habitat and wildlife resources, and (3) identify appropriate parcels for public land acquisition for wetland and upland habitat mitigation purposes. The FLAM ranks habitat from a 0-10; a rank of 10 being of greatest value. The FLAM (2021) indicates that the OHWMA has a very high mean wildlife value of 7.7.

Currently, there are no cultural resources recorded on the OHWMA, however, there is a known cattle dipping vault on the area from the 1950's which has not yet been recorded in the FMSF. The FWC will consult with the DHR to determine the necessary actions for resource inventory and preservation if any potential resources are discovered. All identification, assessment, and preservation strategies will be developed in consultation with the DHR.

The FWC has adopted a comprehensive approach to the planning and administration of fish and wildlife resource based public outdoor recreational opportunities for the OHWMA. To accomplish this, the FWC will work with recreational stakeholders and the general public to develop a Recreation Master Plan for the OHWMA that will be used to further design and develop appropriate infrastructure that will support the recreational use of the area by the general public. This Recreation Master Plan will include planning for parking, trail design, and area resource interpretation.

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

Management goals presented in the draft plan include:

- Improve extant habitat and restore disturbed areas.
- Maintain, improve, or restore imperiled species populations and habitats.
- Monitor, maintain, improve, or restore game and non-game species populations and habitats.
- Remove exotic and invasive plants and animals and conduct needed maintenance and control.
- Provide public access and recreational opportunities.
- Protect water quality and quantity, restore hydrology to the extent feasible, and maintain the restored condition.
- Manage timber resources to improve or restore natural communities for the benefit of wildlife.
- Protect, preserve, and maintain historical resources.
- Develop the capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the goals and objectives of this management plan.
- Enhance fish and wildlife conservation, resource and operational management through development of an optimal boundary.
- Develop appropriate adaptation strategies in response to projected climate change effects and their potential impacts on fish and wildlife conservation, resources, and the operational management of the OHWMA.
- Provide access and use of the OHWMA to current cooperative managers and continue collaborative management and research efforts.

### *Public Involvement*

The FWC conducted a Management Advisory Group Meeting on March 31, 2021, resulting in the top three ranked ideas:

- Explore hydrological restoration opportunities.
- Enhance wildlife habitat
- Protect significant wildlife and native habitat.

Results of this meeting were used by the FWC to develop management goals and objectives and to identify opportunities and strategies for inclusion in this management plan.

A public hearing, as required by section 259.032(10), F.S., was held on May 4, 2021. Questions or comments made by the public during the testimony period addressed new recreational activities, potential cattle or apiary leases, and burn plans.

*Surplus Lands*

The evaluation of OHWMA by FWC has determined that all portions of the area are being managed and operated for the original purposes of acquisition and remain integral to the continued conservation of important fish and wildlife resources, and continue to provide good fish and wildlife resource based public outdoor recreational opportunities. Therefore, no portion of the OHWMA is recommended for potential surplus review.

*State Land Management Review Team*

This property has not been subject to a recent review by an inter-agency land management review team.

**DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the management plan.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

**APPROVE**

**APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DEFER**

**WITHDRAW**

**NOT APPROVE**

**OTHER:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Orange Hammock Wildlife Management Area

### Land Management Plan Short-term Goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Measures
5.4	Invasive Species Maintenance and control.	A	Remove invasive plants and animals and conduct needed maintenance and control.	5.4.1	Conduct systematic treatment of invasive plant species through contractual services.	Treatment of invasive plant species contracted.
5.5	Public Access and Recreational Opportunities.	A	Provide access and recreational opportunities.	5.5.1	Develop website and trail map.	Website and trail map developed.
5.7	Forest Resource Management.	A	Manage timber to improve or restore natural communities for the benefit of wildlife.	5.7.1	Corporate with the FFS or forestry consultant to complete a Timber Assessment.	Timber assessment completed.
5.8	Capital Facilities and Infrastructure.	A	Develop and maintain the capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the goals and objectives of this management plan.	5.8.1	Develop ten miles of trails	Ten miles of trails developed.

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised 2019.

**LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Lead Agency: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)  
 Common Name of Property: Orange Hammock Wildlife Management Area  
 Location: Sarasota County, Florida  
 Acreage Total: 5,776 acres  
 Acreage Breakdown:

<u>Land Cover Classification</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Total Area</u>
Artificial pond	8.27	0.14%
Basin marsh	472.34	8.18%
Canal/ditch	7.69	0.13%
Clearing	28.21	0.49%
Depression marsh	845.70	14.64%
Developed	2.82	0.05%
Dry prairie	451.78	7.82%
Mesic flatwoods	2,007.83	34.76%
Mesic hammock	942.73	16.32%
Pasture - improved	124.93	2.16%
Road	45.56	0.79%
Slough marsh	425.58	7.37%
Spoil area	29.11	0.50%
Successional hardwood forest	361.07	6.25%
Utility corridor	12.66	0.22%
Wet prairie	10.72	0.19%

\*GIS-calculated acreage for land cover classification varies slightly from actual total acreage.

Lease/Management Agreement No.: 4850 (Appendix 10.1)

Use: Single \_\_\_\_\_ Management Responsibilities:  
 Multiple X Agency FWC Responsibilities  
LEAD, LESSEE (Wildlife Management Area, resource protection, law enforcement)

Designated Land Use: Wildlife Management Area

Sublease (s): None

Encumbrances: List: Toledo Blade Rd. access easement & Florida Power and Light powerline easement

Type Acquisition: Fish and Wildlife Habitat Program

Unique Features: Natural: Relatively undisturbed mesic flatwoods, wetlands, sloughs, and marshes.

Archaeological/Historical: None documented within the OHWMA.

Management Needs: Habitat restoration and improvement; public access and recreational opportunities; hydrological preservation and restoration; non-native and invasive species maintenance and control; imperiled species habitat maintenance, enhancement, and restoration.

Acquisition Needs/Acreage: 4,909 acres FWC Additions and Inholdings list; 30,573 acres remaining in the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever Project (Figure 4).

Surplus Lands/Acreage: None

Public Involvement: Management Advisory Group consensus building meeting and Public Hearing (Appendices 10.3.1 & 10.3.2)

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ARC Approval Date \_\_\_\_\_ BTIITF Approval Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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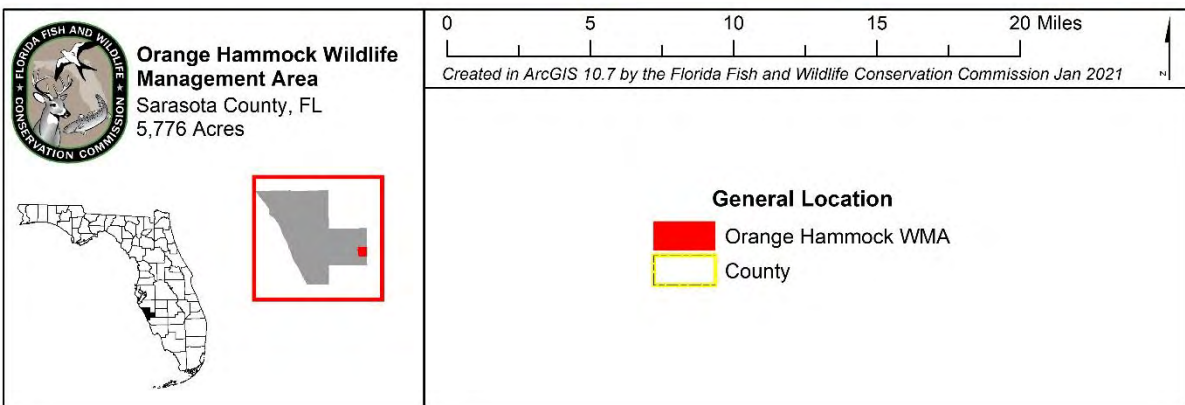
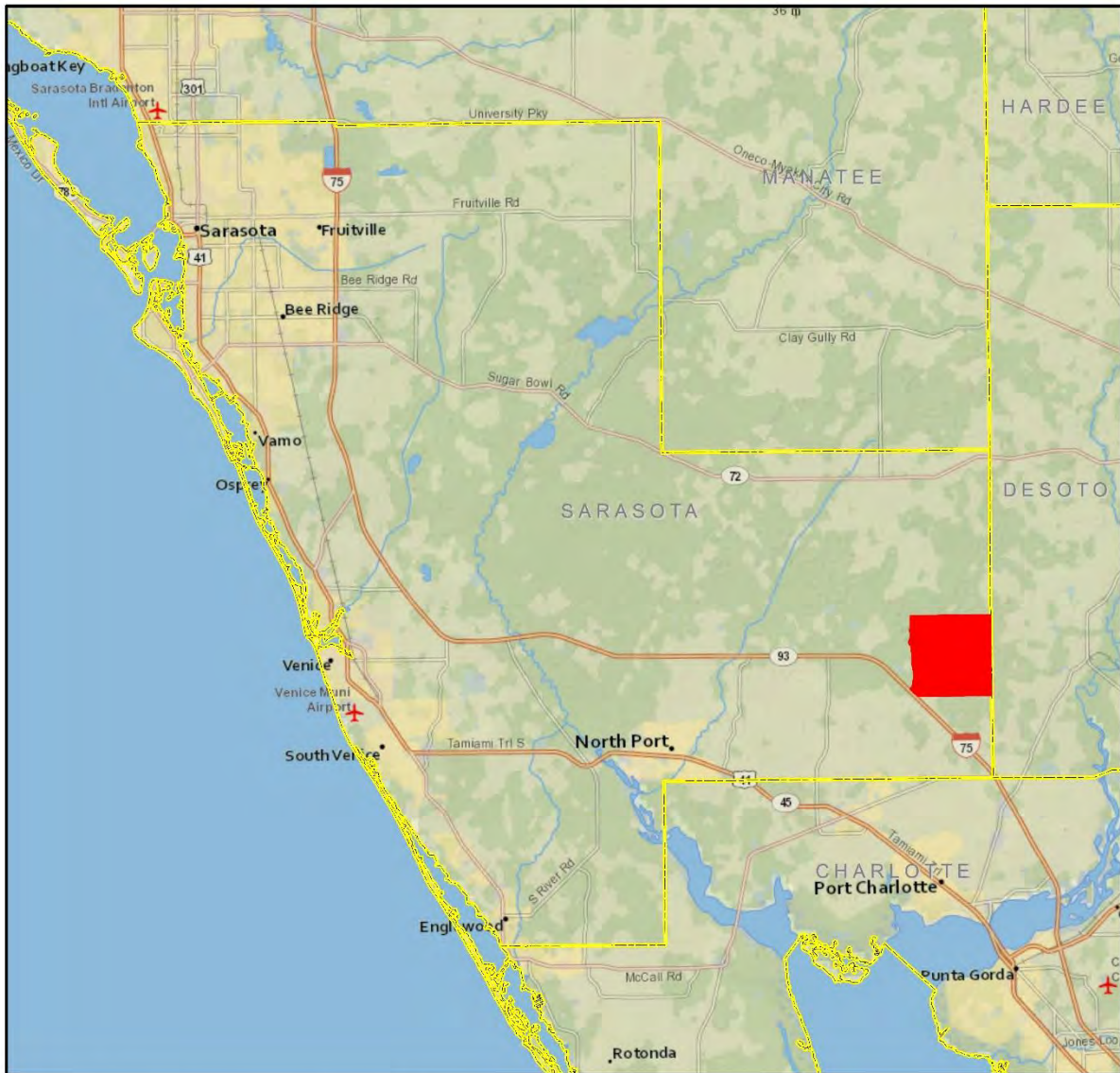


Figure 1: General Location Map for the OHWMA

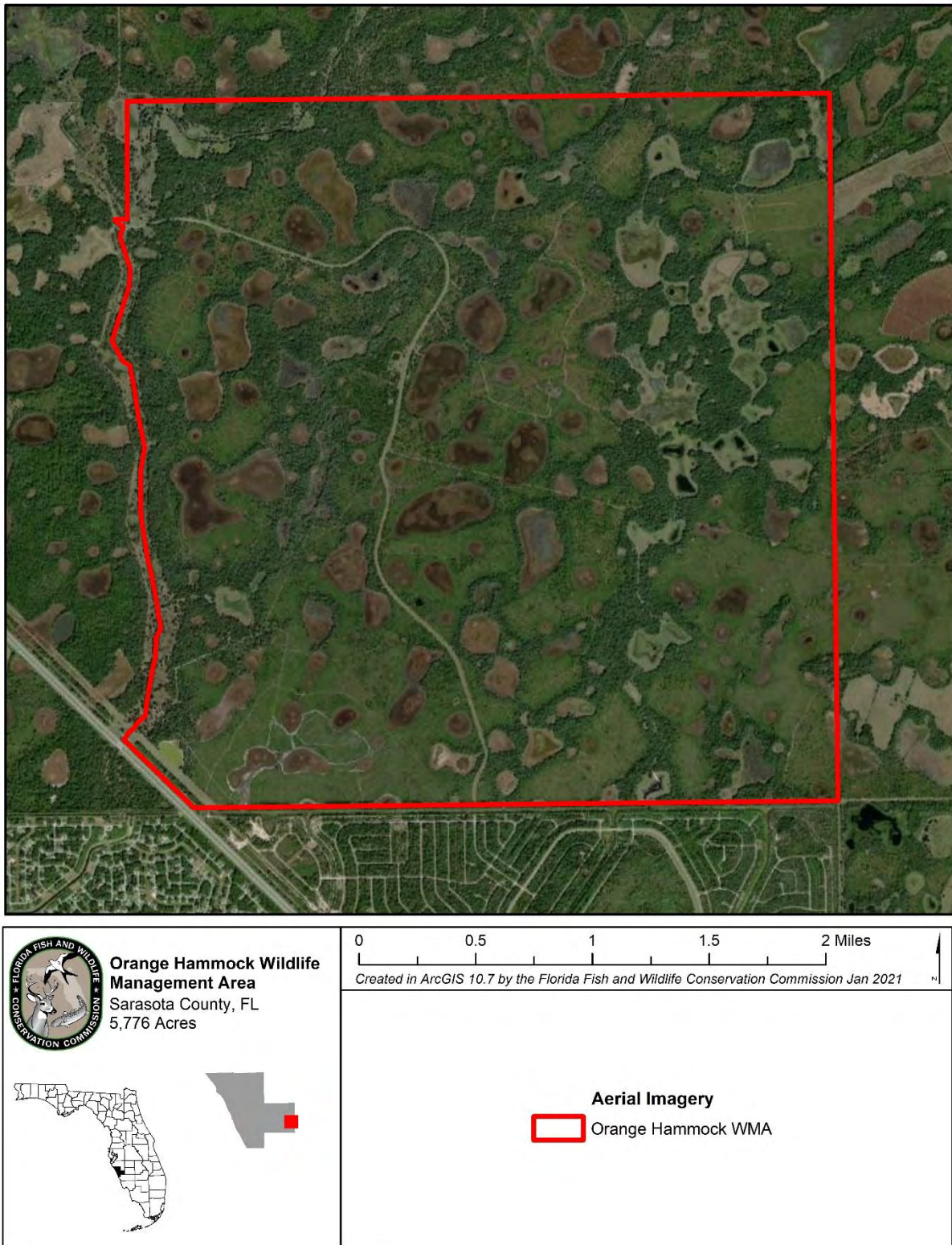


Figure 2: Aerial Boundary for the OHWMA

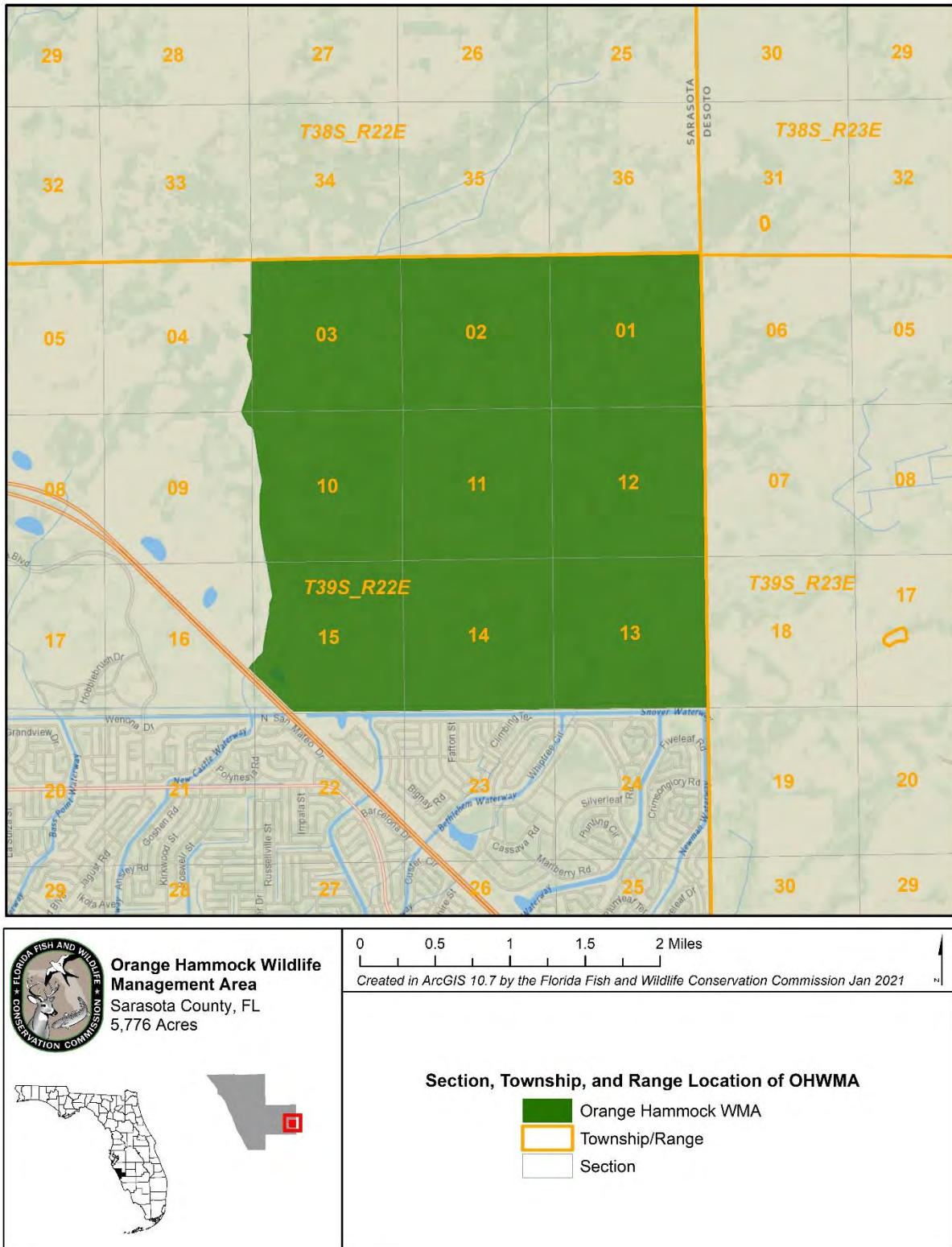


Figure 3: Township, Range, and Section for the OHWMA



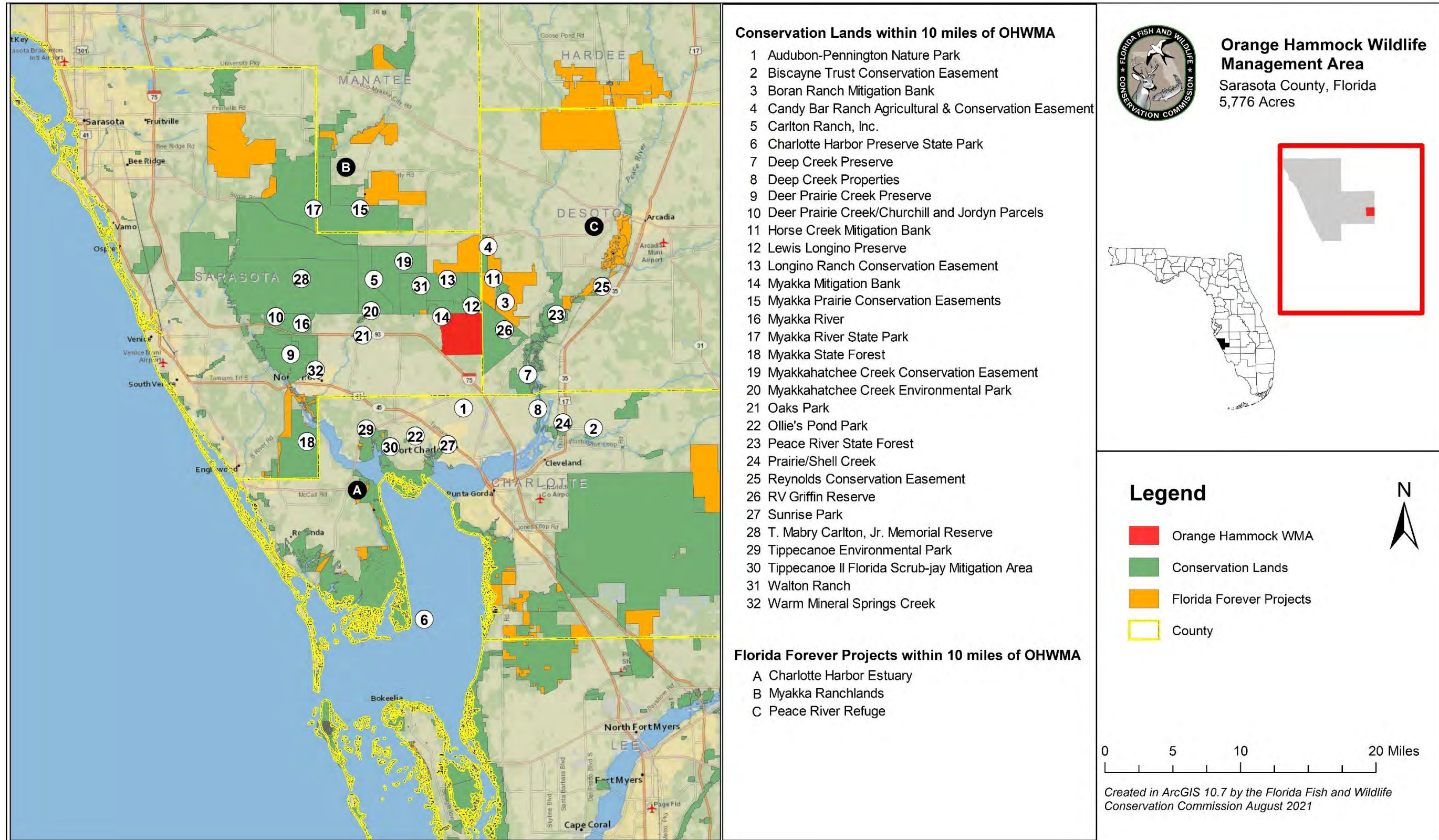


Figure 4: Conservation Lands and Florida Forever Projects Nearby the OHWMA

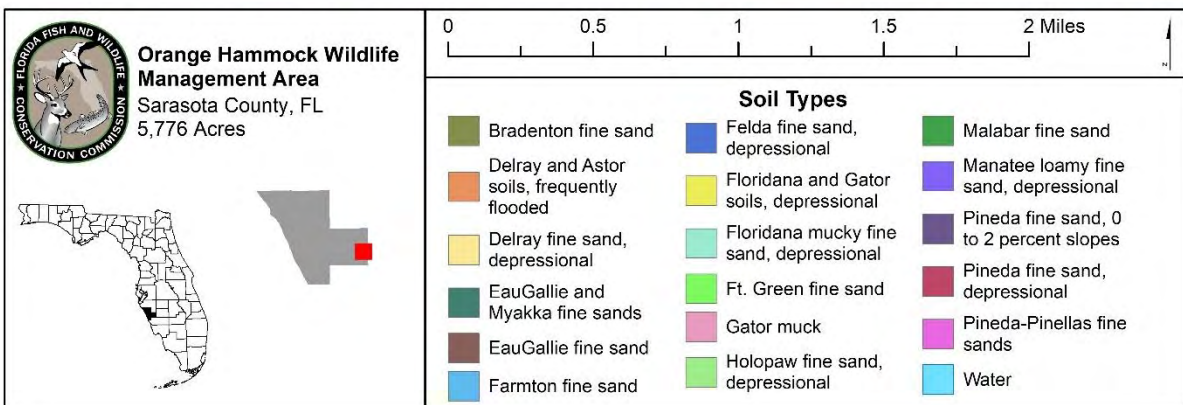
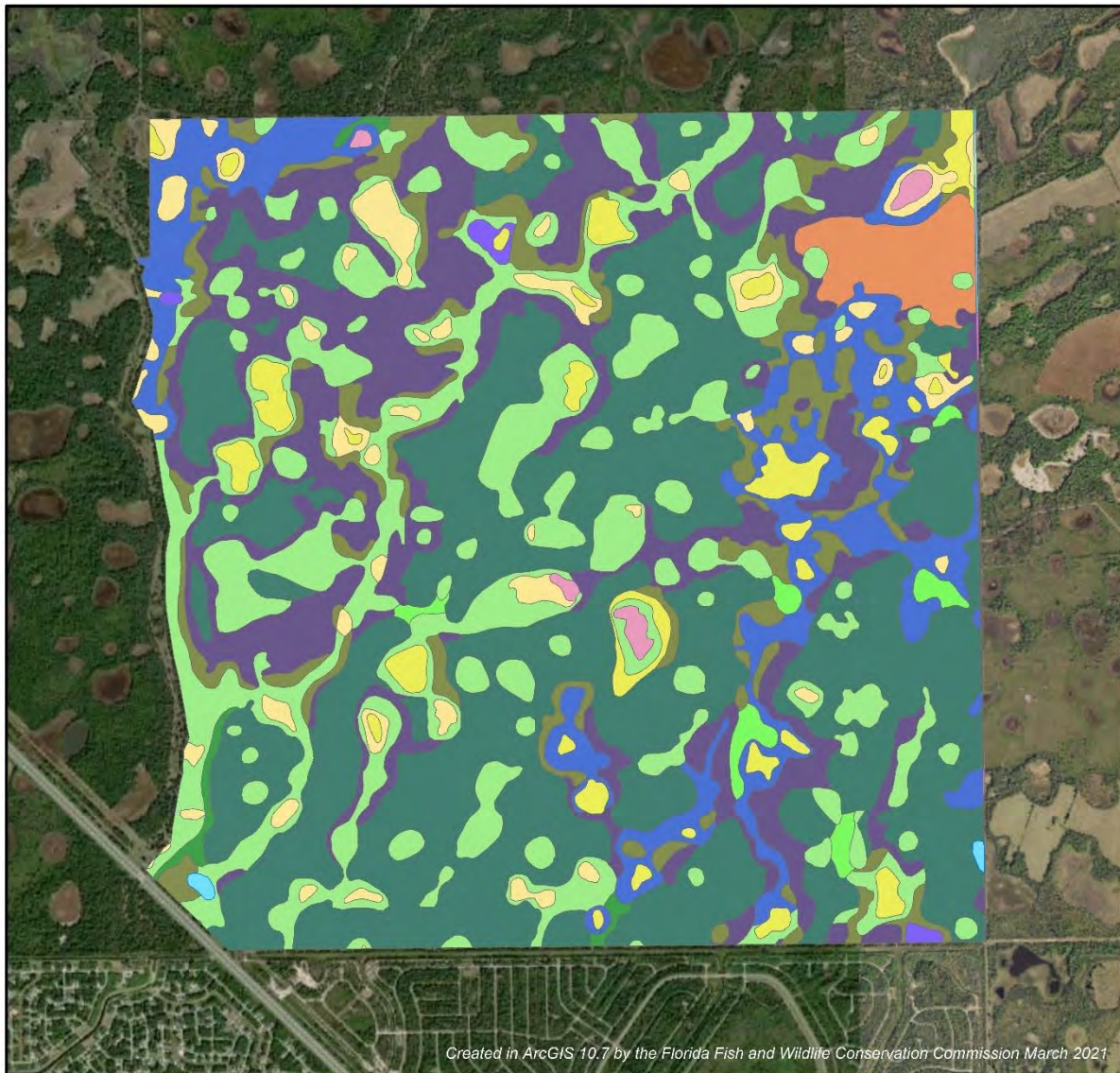


Figure 5: Soil Types on the OHWMA

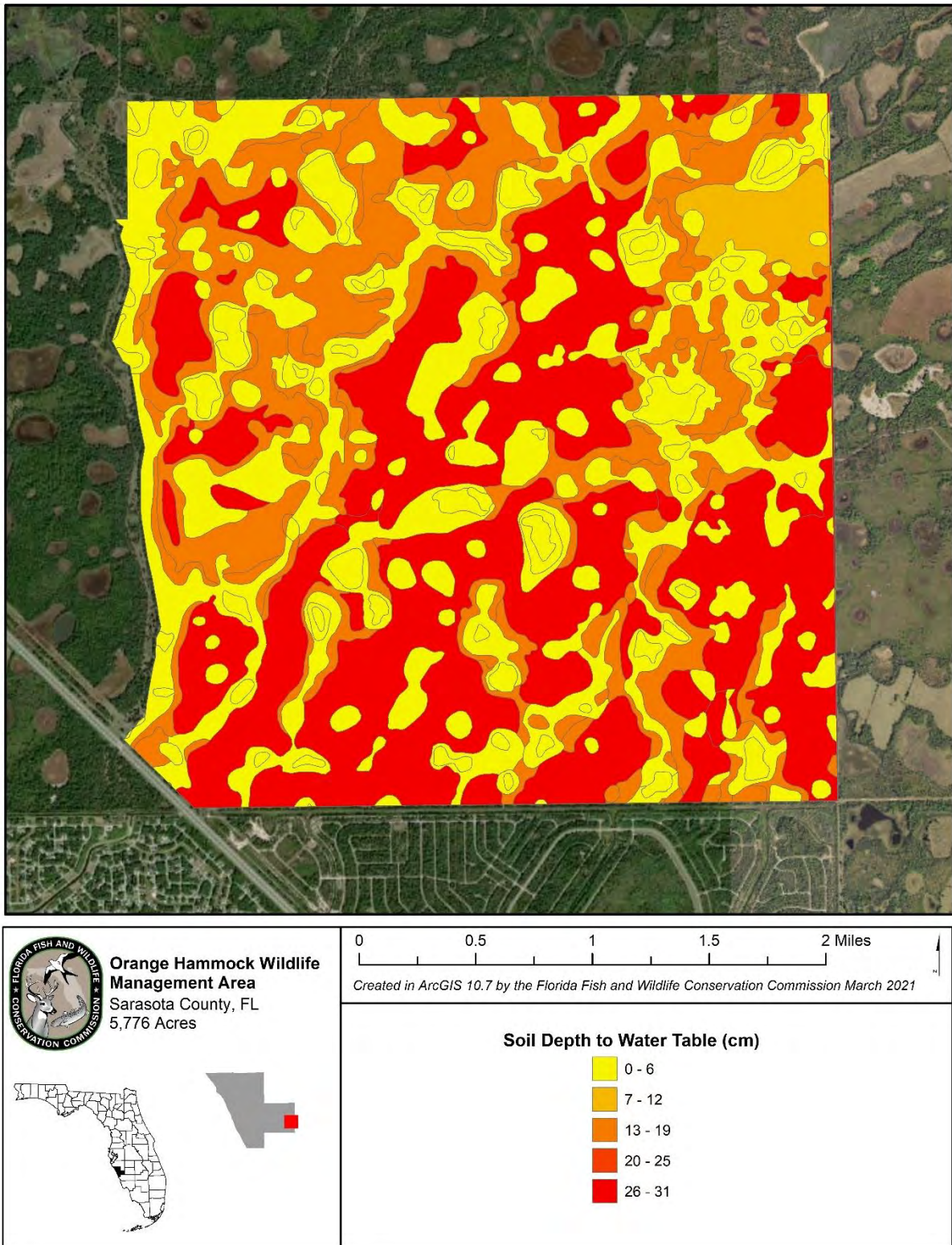


Figure 6: Soil Depth to Water Table on the OHWMA (cm)

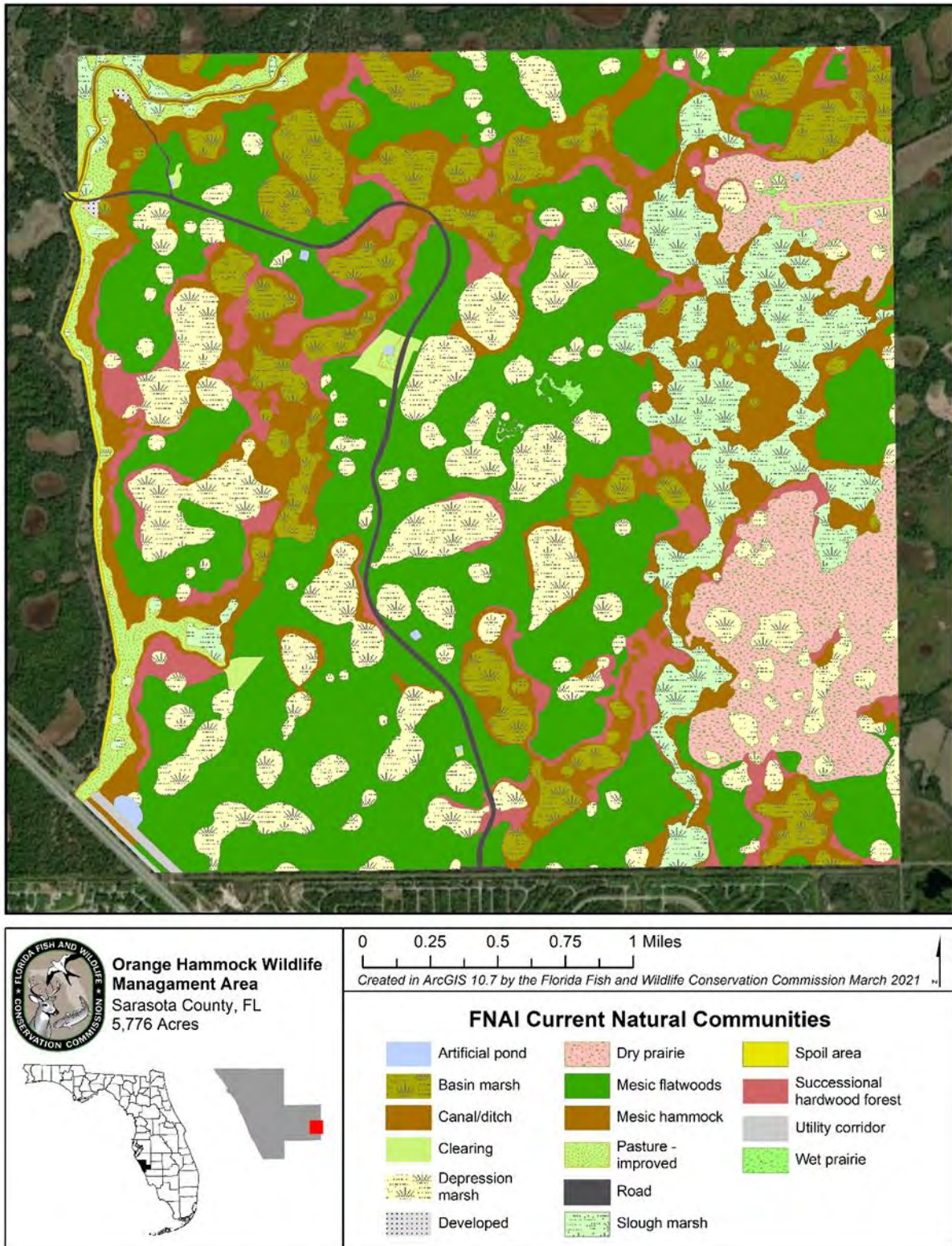


Figure 7: Natural and Altered Communities on the OHWMA

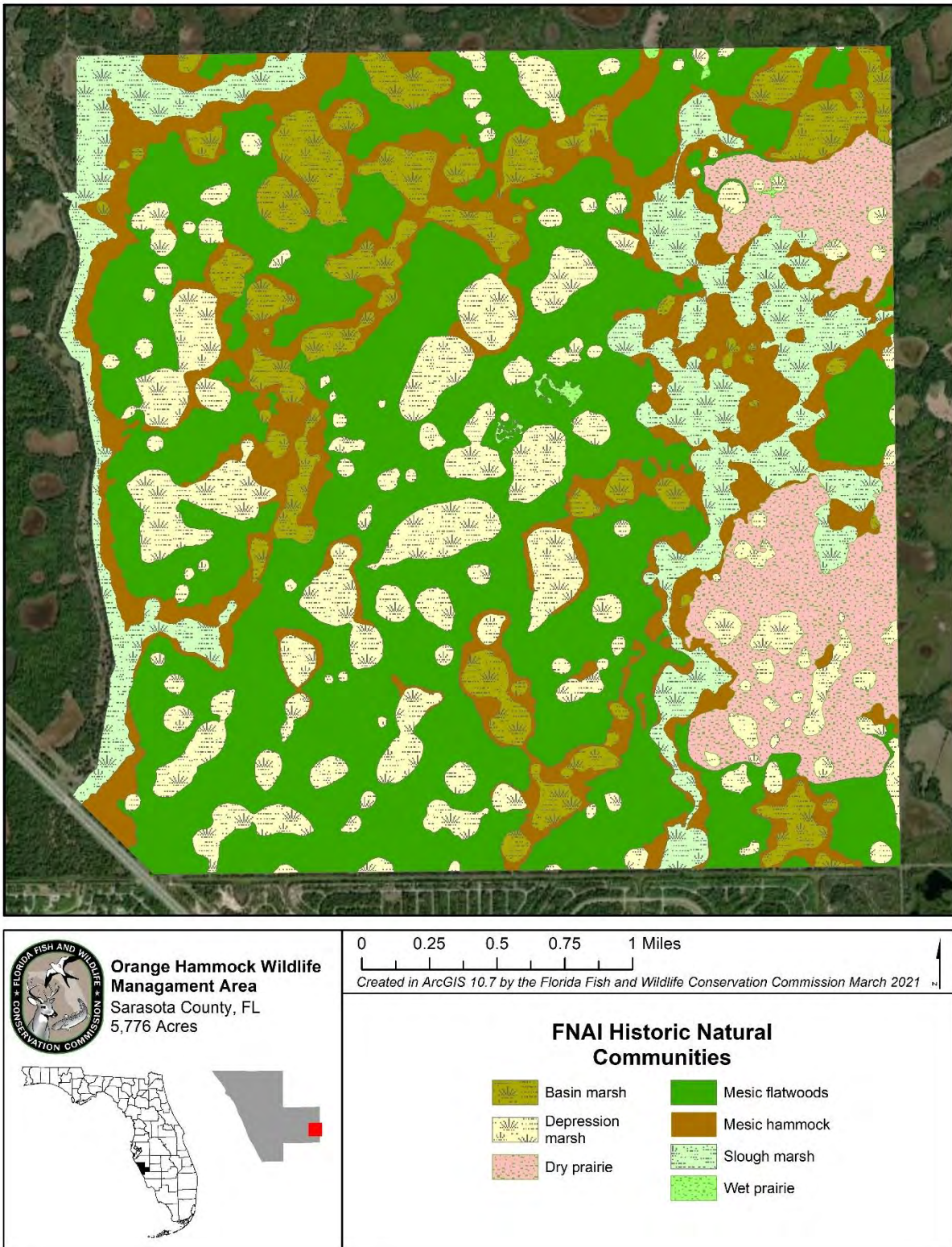


Figure 8: Historic Natural Communities on the OHWMA

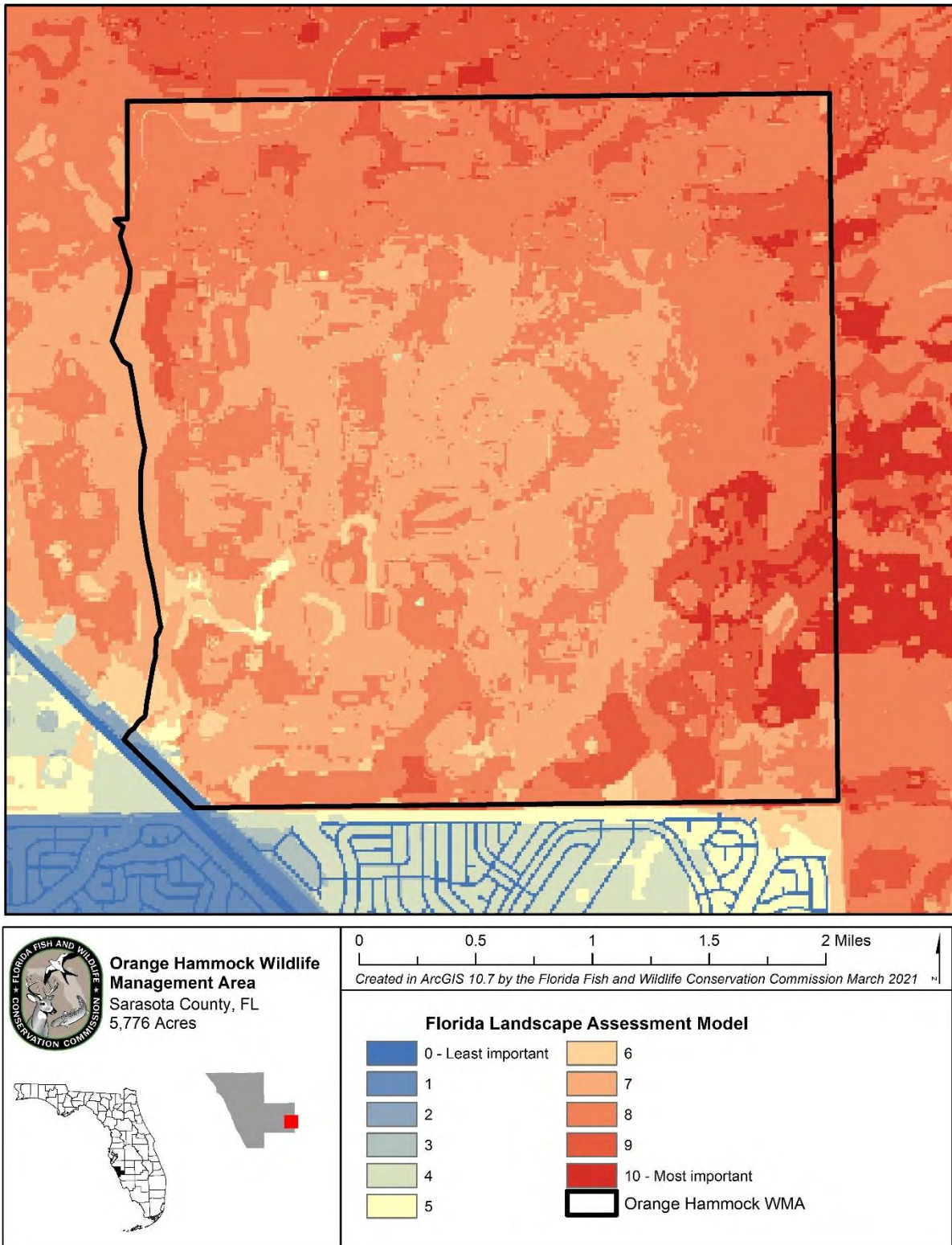


Figure 9: The Florida Landscape Assessment Model (FLAM) on the OHWMA

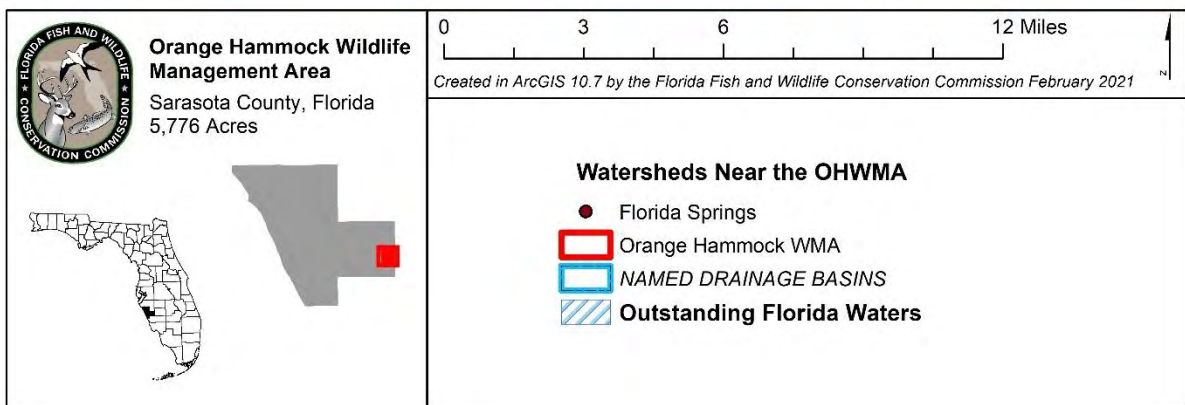
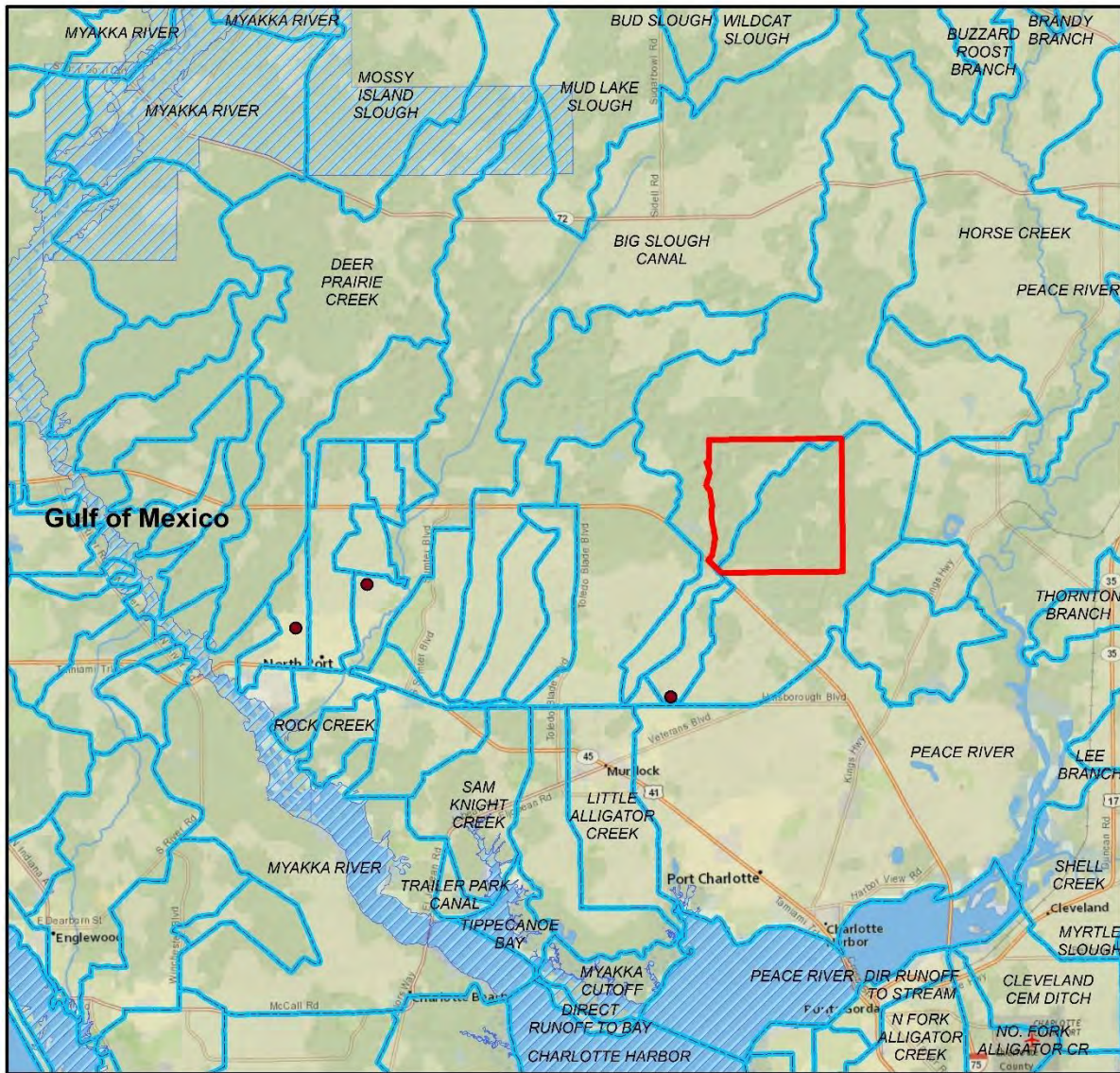


Figure 11: Water Resources on the OHWMA

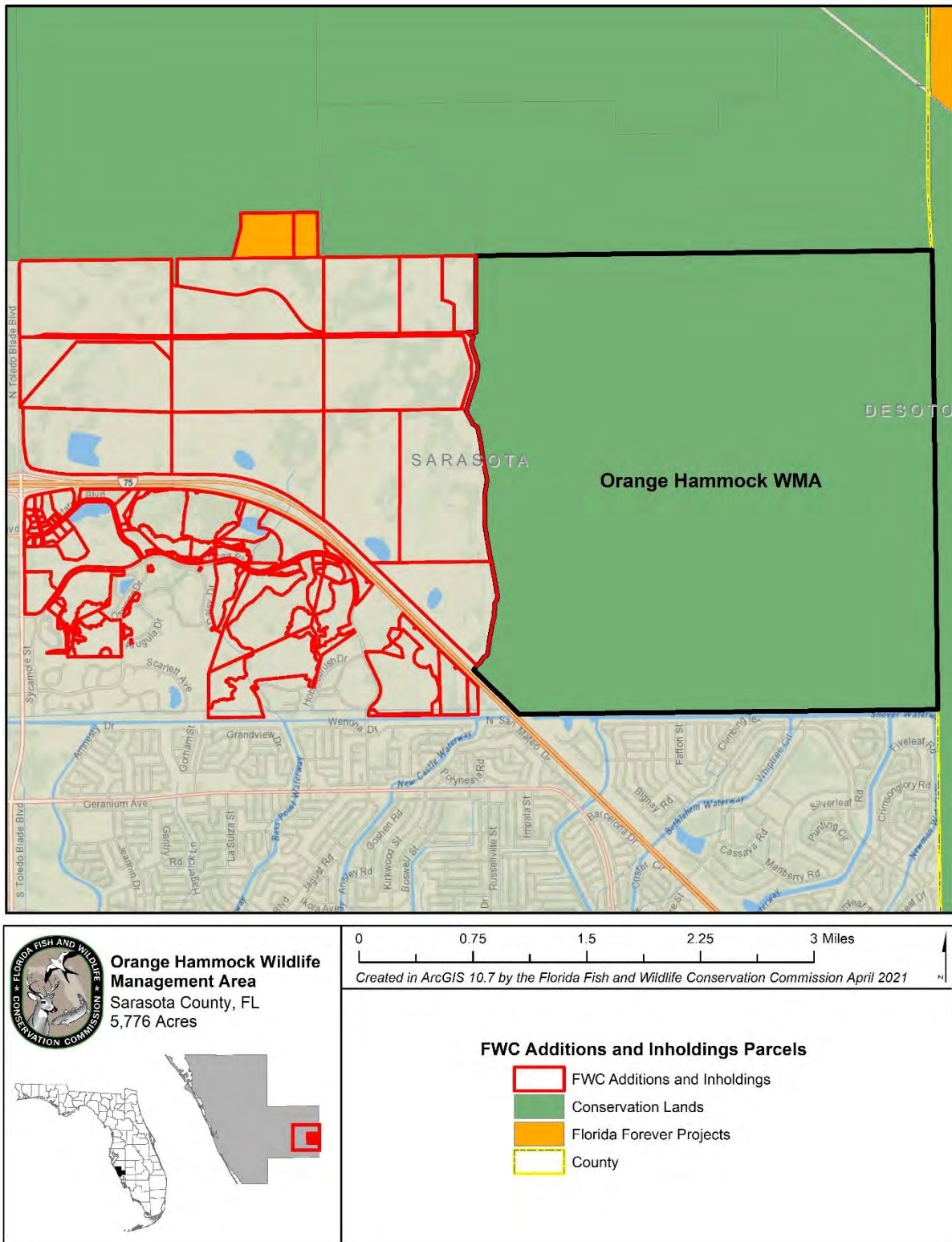


Figure 12: Proposed Additions and Inholdings for the OHWMA



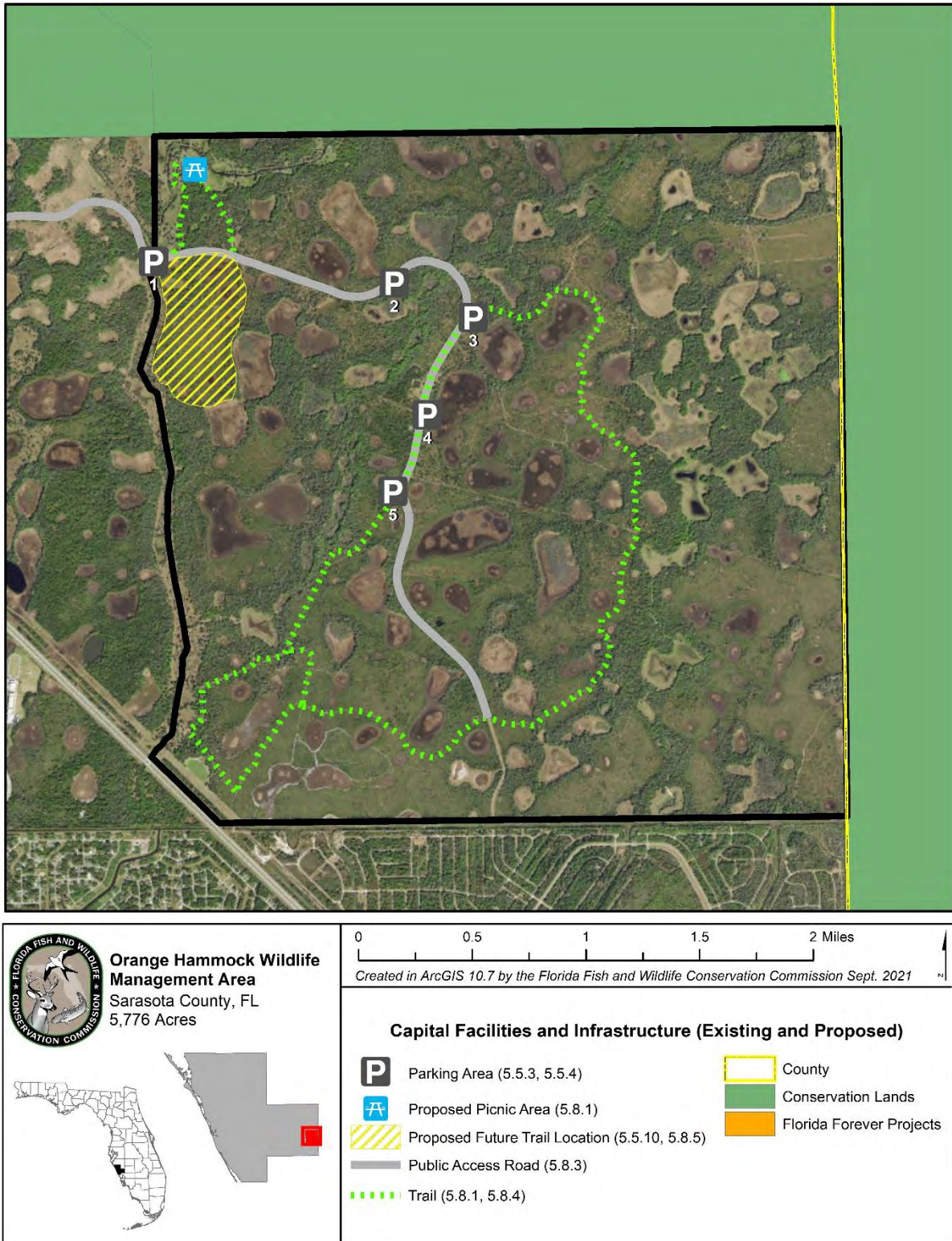


Figure 13: Capital Facilities and Infrastructure on the OHWMA