

ITEM 18:

Consider a 10-year update to the Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Lease No. 4100).

LOCATION:

Marion and Putnam counties

APPLICANT:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

Background

Nestled between the Ocklawaha and St. Johns rivers, the Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area (CRWMA) is set within a much larger mosaic of public conservation lands that are interspersed with hardwood river swamps and pine flatwoods, punctuated with small depression ponds, hardwood hammocks and scattered pasture lands. These unique habitats provide floodplain, watershed and water quality protection for these rivers and the Cross-Florida Barge Canal. The CRWMA is managed to conserve habitat for an array of imperiled species, including gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), Florida sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) and other native fish and wildlife species. The CRWMA provides important protection for natural and cultural resources along with providing a diverse array of fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding and bicycling.

The FWC is currently assigned lead management authority for approximately 10,470 acres of the CRWMA. This lead managed area is composed of 5,200 acres of public property owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund and approximately 5,270 acres titled to the St. Johns River Water Management District.

The primary purposes for acquiring lands within the CRWMA under the Conservation and Recreation Lands Program were to expedite restoration and protection of the St. Johns and Ocklawaha river systems, protect endangered and threatened species and provide resource-based public outdoor recreational opportunities. The CRWMA is managed by the FWC for the purpose of operating a wildlife management area, providing ecological diversity, managing habitat for both common and imperiled wildlife and for providing the public with fish and wildlife-oriented outdoor recreational opportunities.

Management Plan Overview

Through the services of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), FWC has mapped the natural and anthropogenic community types on CRWMA. FNAI has identified and mapped a total of 23 community types within the CRWMA. The primary vegetative communities found within the CRWMA are floodplain swamp, mesic flatwoods and wet flatwoods. The St. Johns River flows along the east side of the CRWMA and attributes a great deal to the prominent natural communities and resources in the area.

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 (2020) indicates that the CRWMA has a very high mean wildlife value of 8.7.

The Division of Historical Resources (DHR) observations are broken down into five categories: archeological sites, resource groups, historical structures, historic bridges and historic cemeteries. The DHR Master Site File indicates nine known historical sites on the CRWMA. The FWC will submit subsequently located historic sites on CRWMA to DHR for inclusion in their Master Site File.

The FWC has adopted a comprehensive approach to the planning and administration of fish and wildlife resource based public outdoor recreational opportunities for the CRWMA. To accomplish this, the FWC has worked with recreational stakeholders and the general public to develop a Recreation Master Plan for the CRWMA. This plan will be used to further design and develop appropriate infrastructure that supports the recreational use of the area by the general public. The CRWMA Recreation Master Plan includes 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, 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 CRWMA.
- Provide access and use of the CRWMA to current cooperative managers and continue collaborative management and research efforts.

Public Involvement

The FWC conducted a Management Advisory Group Meeting on February 26, 2020, in Palatka, Florida, resulting in the top three ranked ideas:

- Acquire inholdings.
- Continue prescribed fire program.
- Continue regulated hunting.

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 July 8, 2020. There were no questions or comments made by the public during the testimony period.

Surplus Lands

The evaluation of CRWMA 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 CRWMA is recommended for potential surplus review.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in April 2019. 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. Four recommendations were offered by the team:

- Increase the use of growing season fire in the mesic and wet flatwoods.
- Increase communication with the Bombing Range managers.
- The restoration goals and delineation of the areas for the abandoned and improved pastures should be stated in the management plan.
- Inventory the wetlands for listed and invasive plant species.

The 2019 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan.

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

() APPROVE

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

Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area

Land Management Plan Short Term Goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Performance Measure
6.1	Habitat Restoration and Improvement	A	Improve extant habitat and restore disturbed area	6.1.1	Update prescribed burn plan	Burn plan updated
6.1	Habitat Restoration and Improvement	A	Improve extant habitat and restore disturbed area	6.1.2	Utilize OBVM monitoring to evaluate the actively managed natural communities and adjust management activities as needed	Monitoring activity evaluated and activities adjusted
6.2	Imperiled Species Habitat Maintenance, Enhancement, Restoration or Population Restoration	A	Maintain Improve or restore imperiled species populations and habitats	6.2.1	Update and implement WCPR strategy by 2022	WCPR updated and Implemented
6.5	Public Access and Recreation Opportunities	A	Provide public access and recreational opportunity	6.5.1	Develop a Recreation Assessment	Recreation assessment developed
6.6	Hydrological Preservation and Reservation	A	Protect water quality and quantity, restore hydrology to the extent feasible	6.6.1	Complete hydrological assessment	Hydrological assessment completed

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: Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area (CRWMA)

Location: Putnam and Marion Counties, Florida

Acreage Total: 10,470 acres

Acreage Breakdown:

<u>Land Cover Classification</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Total Area</u>
Basin swamp	102.90	0.8%
Baygall	3.01	<0.1%
Blackwater stream	6.96	<0.1%
Depression marsh	104.02	0.9%
Dome swamp	121.38	1.0%
Floodplain swamp	5,066.90	41.3%
Hydric hammock	814.31	6.6%
Mesic flatwoods	1,274.14	10.4%
Mesic hammock	777.43	6.3%
Pasture – improved	1,418.92	11.6%
Pine plantation	299.32	2.4%
Restoration mesic flatwoods	26.34	0.2%
Ruderal	923.35	7.5%
Scrubby flatwoods	26.38	0.2%
Wet flatwoods	1,283.24	10.5%
Wet Prairie	21.64	0.2%
Xeric hammock	2.06	<0.1%

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

Lease/Management Agreement No.: 4100 (Appendix 12.1) and St. Johns River Water Management Agreement 91034 (Appendix 12.2)

Use: Single _____ Management Responsibilities:
 Multiple X Agency FWC Responsibilities
LEAD, SUBLESSEE (Wildlife Management Area, resource protection, law enforcement)

Designated Land Use: Wildlife Management Area

Sublease (s): None

Encumbrances List: Apiary Agreement (#18181), Cattle Grazing Contract (#08191-A-1), and three housing agreements (#14216, 19096, and 14217)

Type Acquisition: Conservation and Recreation Lands Program and Save Our Rivers Program

Unique Features: Natural: Natural communities including floodplain swamp and mesic flatwoods

Archaeological/Historical: Nine documented within CRWMA.

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

Acquisition Needs/Acreage: 3,880 acres FWC Additions and Inholdings list; 57,849 acres remaining in the Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway Florida Forever Project (Appendix 12.17).

Surplus Lands/Acreage: None

Public Involvement: Management Advisory Group consensus building meeting and Public Hearing (Appendix 12.3 and 12.4)

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ARC Approval Date _____ BTIITF Approval Date: _____
Comments: _____

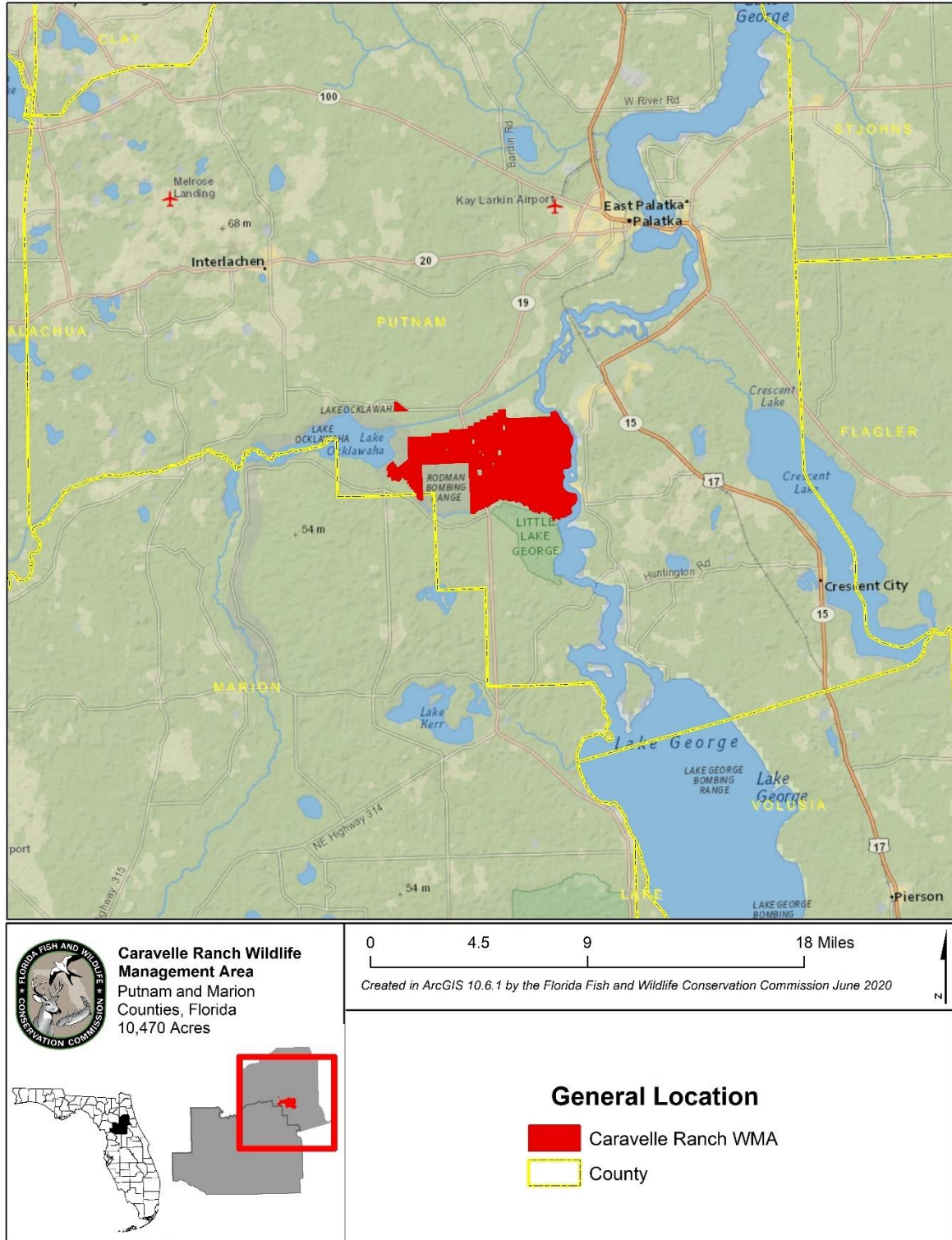


Figure 1. General Location of the CRWMA



Figure 2. Aerial Imagery

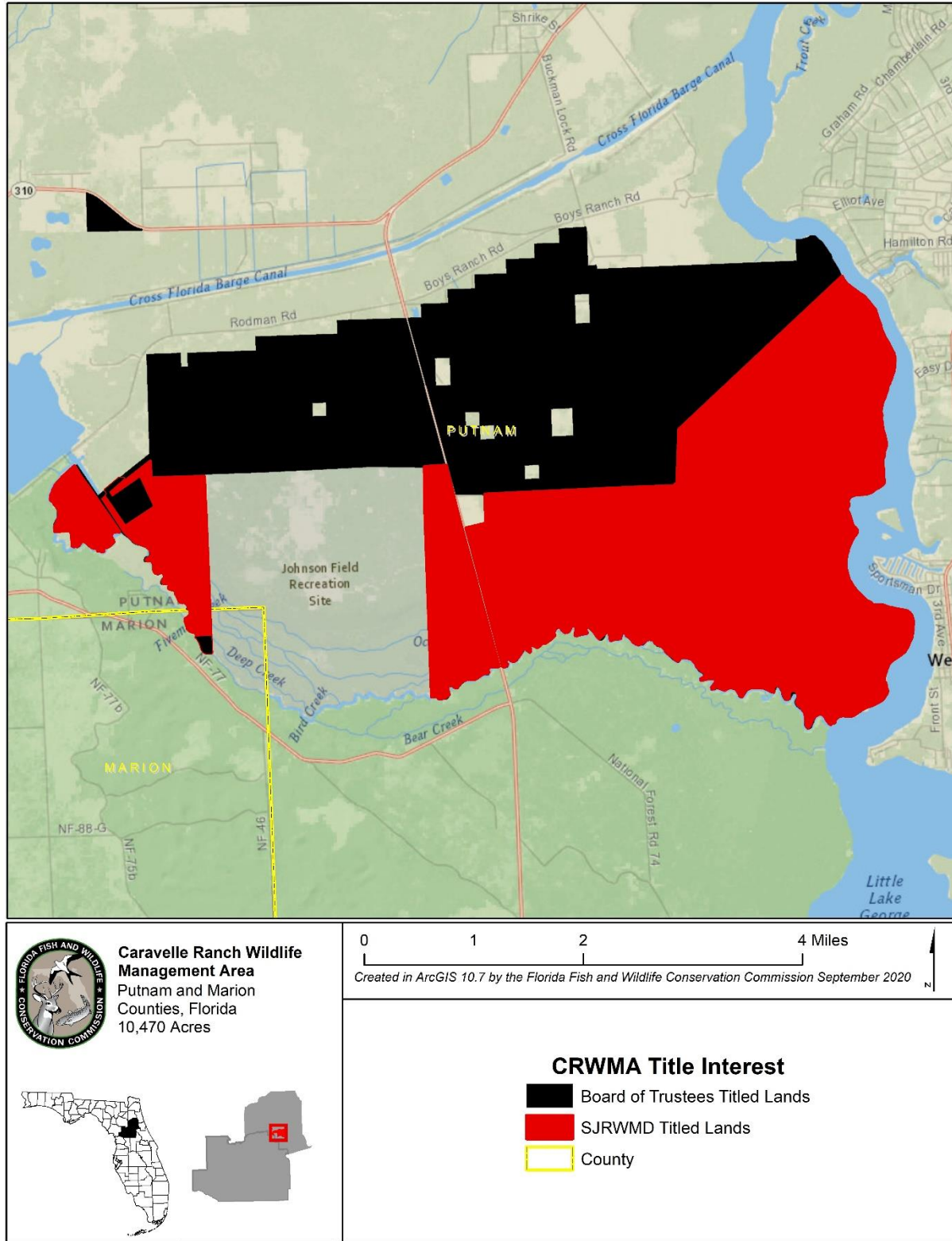


Figure 4. Title Interest for the CRWMA

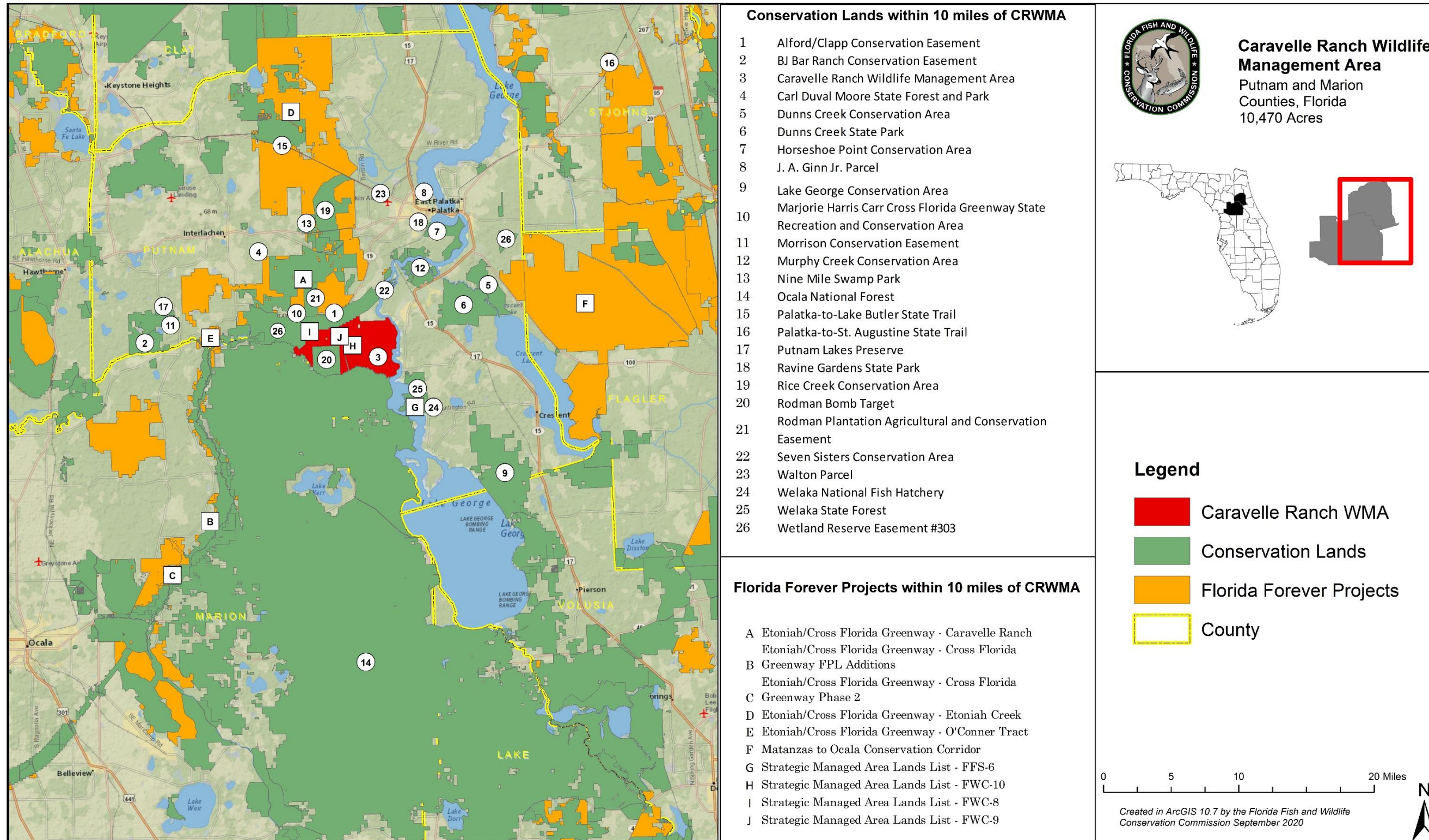


Figure 5. Conservation Lands and Florida Forever Projects near the CRWMA

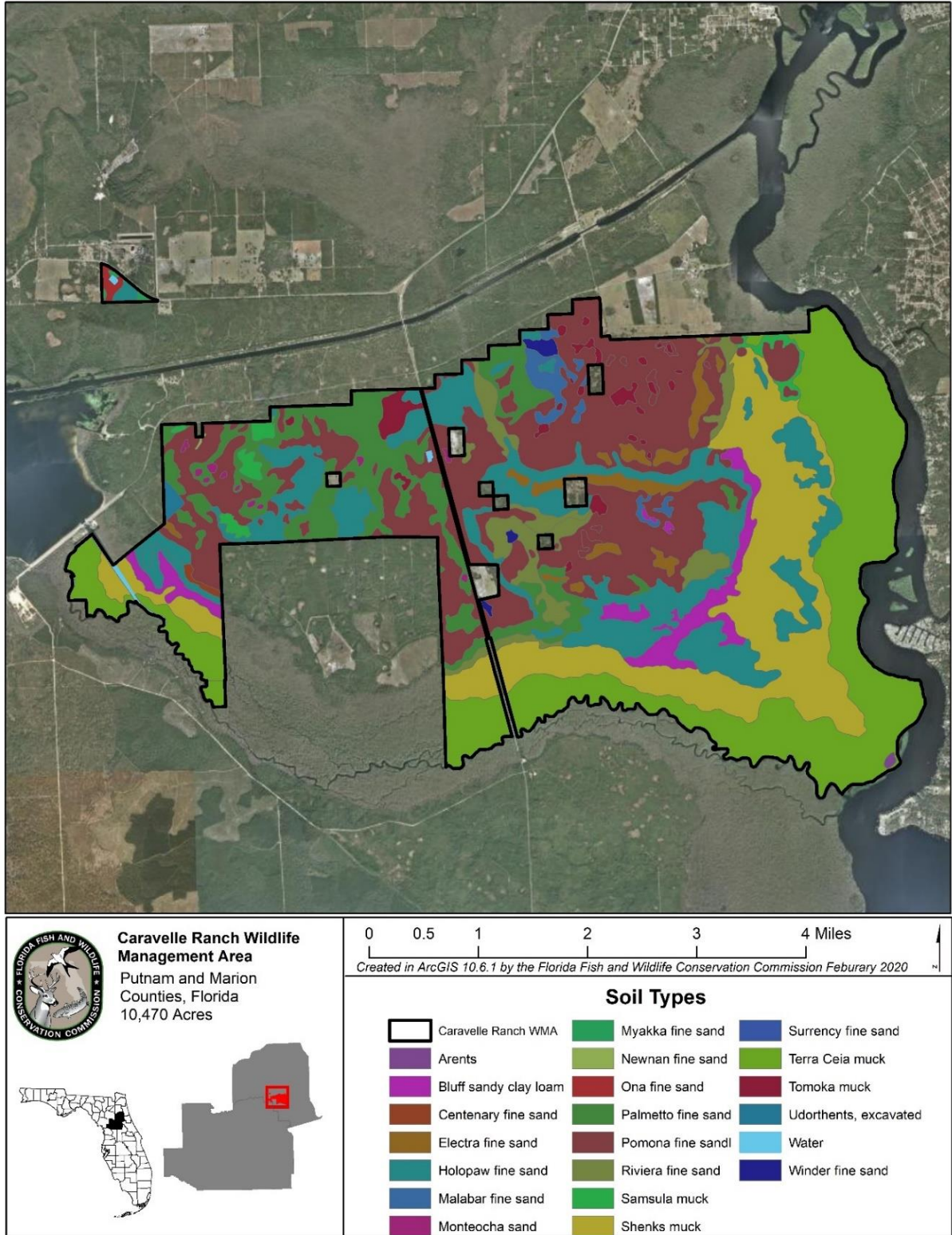


Figure 6. Soil Types on the CRWMA

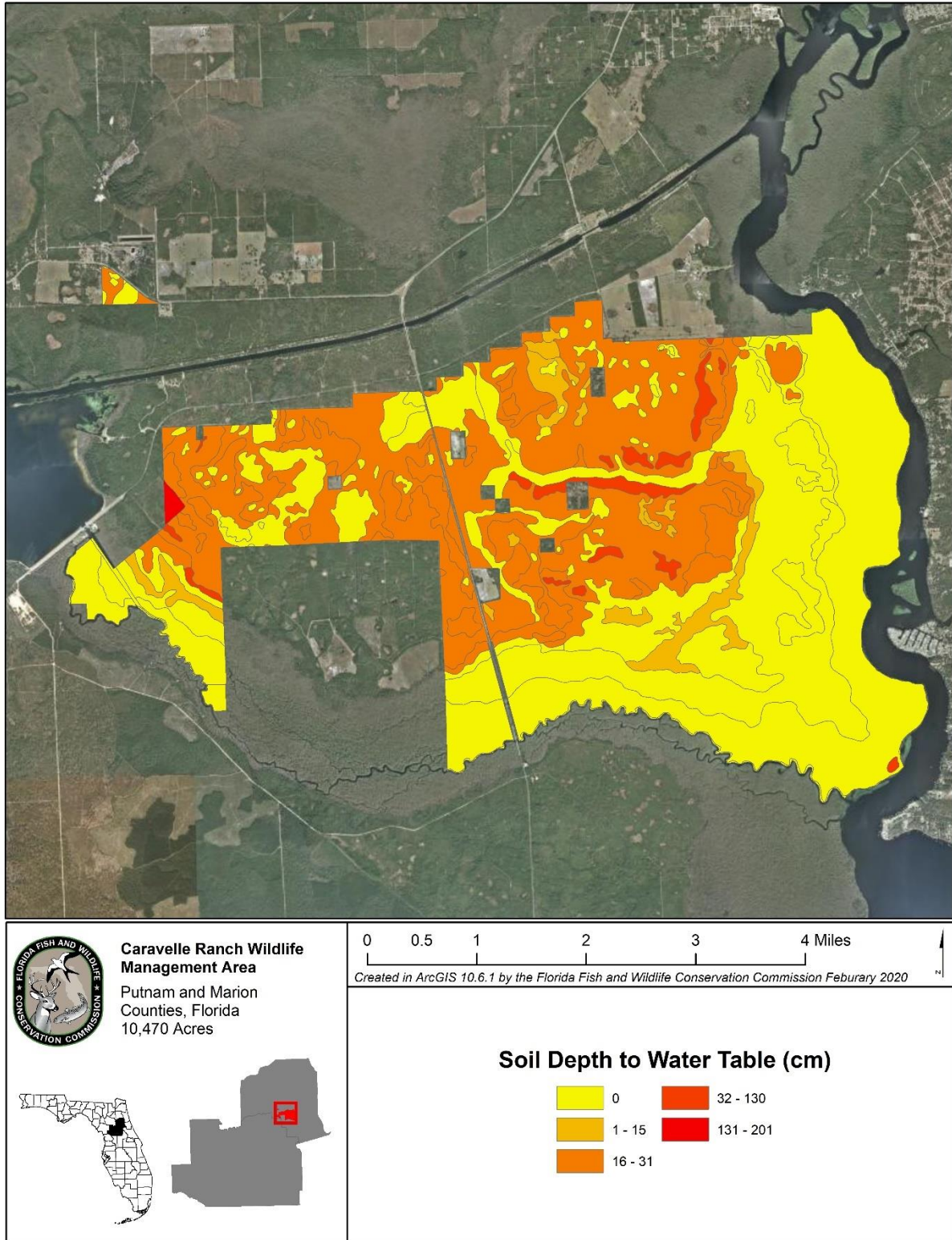


Figure 7. Soil Depth to Water Table (cm) on the CRWMA

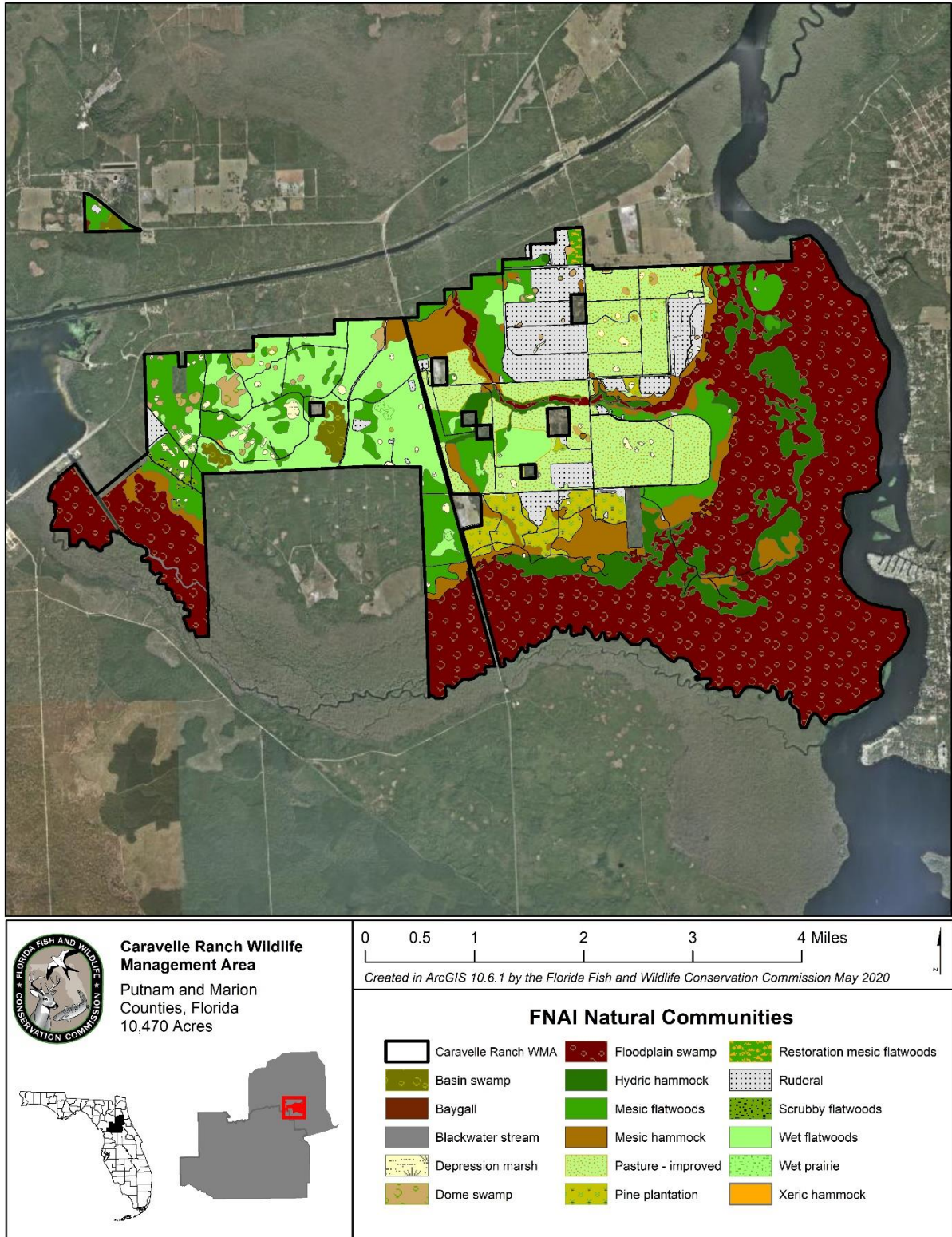


Figure 8. Natural and Anthropogenic Communities on the CRWMA

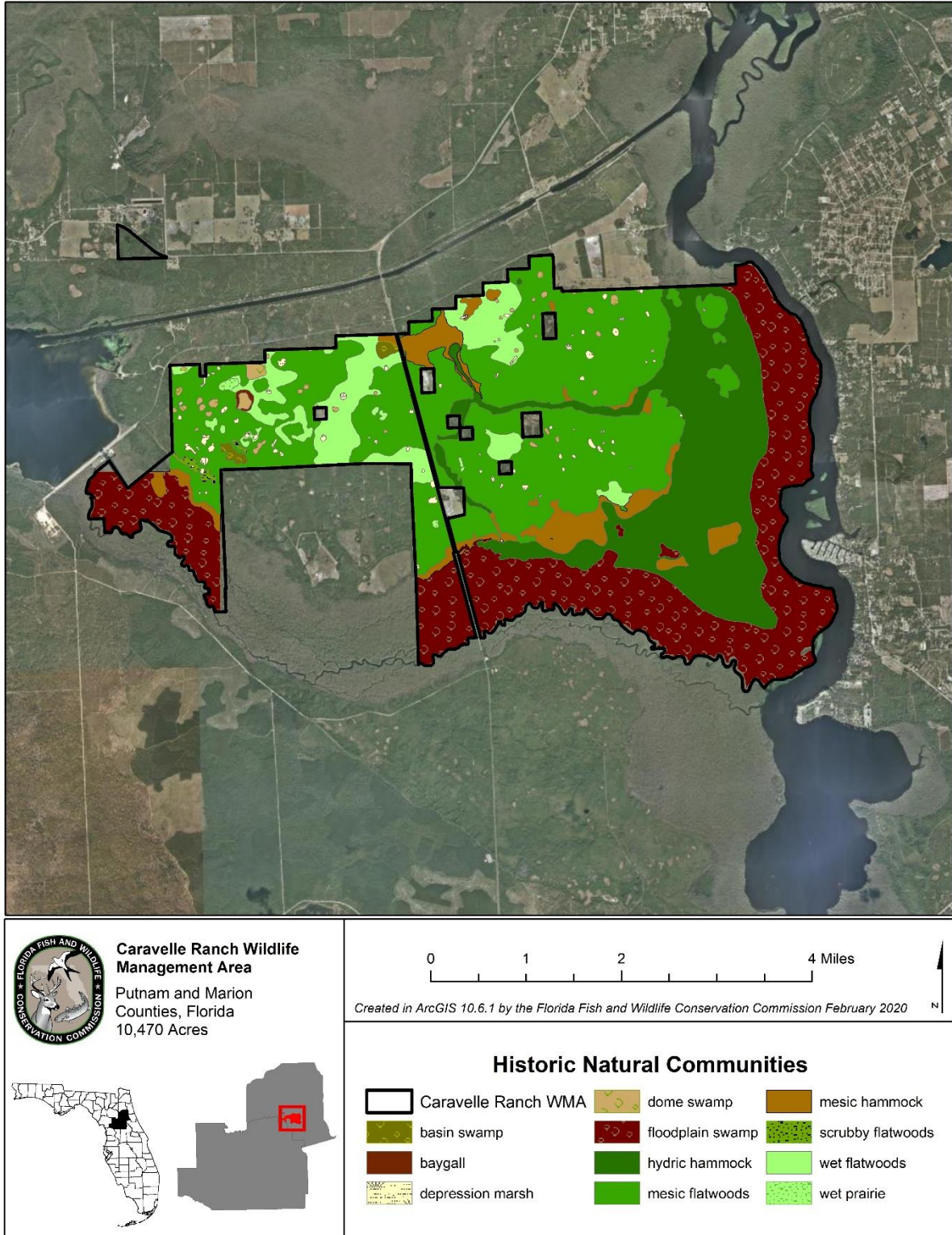


Figure 9. Historic Natural Communities on the CRWMA

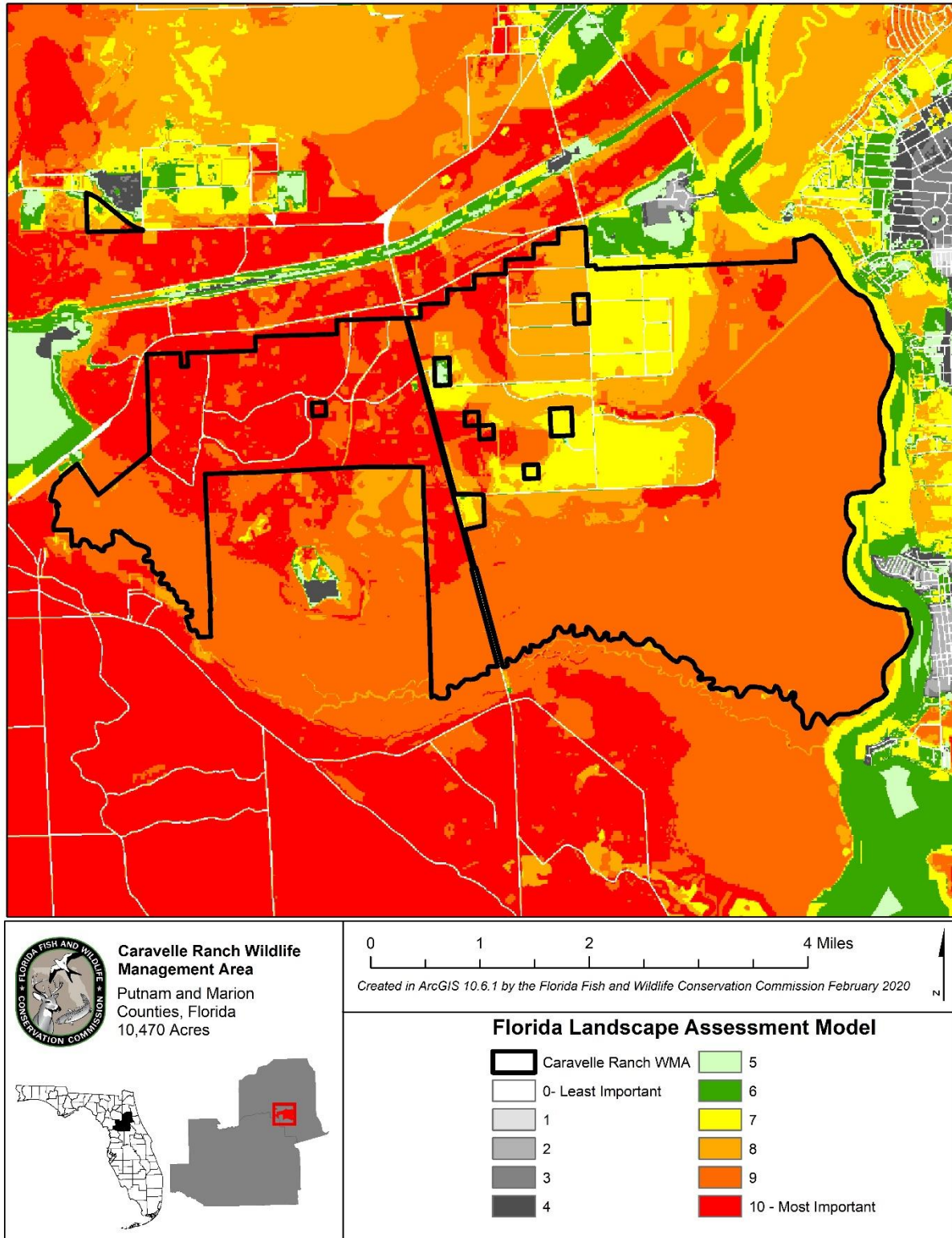


Figure 10. Florida Landscape Assessment Model



Figure 12. Watersheds near the CRWMA