

ITEM 18:

Consider an update to the Half Moon Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Lease No. 3789).

LOCATION:

Sumter County

APPLICANT:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

DSL STAFF REMARKS:*Background*

The Half Moon Wildlife Management Area (HMWMA) is a 9,554-acre composite of wetlands, hammocks, flatwoods, and improved pasture. The Withlacoochee River borders the area to the west and the privately-owned Ventura Ranch borders the HMWMA on the east. Mill Creek and Gum Slough, scenic spring-fed tributaries of the Withlacoochee River, cross the area. The HMWMA's scrubby flatwoods have historically been home to a small population of threatened Florida scrub-jays. The Carlton Half Moon Ranch project qualified for purchase by the State under the "other lands" criteria of the CARL program. On August 15, 1989, the State of Florida acquired Half Moon Ranch from W. Albert and Barbara C. Carlton. The original 4,458-acre tract, now commonly referred to as the HMWMA, was the largest single acquisition of the 11,500-acre Carlton Half Moon Ranch CARL project. An additional 878 acres (Seven Springs/Smith Tract) were purchased in 1992, followed by the Potter property (122 acres) acquired in 1996; both were purchased under the CARL Program. In 2008 the SWFWMD purchased the Phebus tract (35 acres). Currently, the entire HMWMA encompasses 9,554 acres, which includes 4,021 acres leased from the SWFWMD which was purchased under the SOR Program. Title is held by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) and the SWFWMD. The FWC is the designated lead managing agency for the HMWMA under Lease No. 3426.

The HMWMA is managed by the FWC for the conservation of imperiled and more common wildlife and for fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreation. The area is managed to conserve the important natural communities on site that provide habitat for a wide range of imperiled and more common wildlife species. The HMWMA is managed to conserve and restore natural wildlife habitat, and to provide high-quality opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreation opportunities including horseback-riding, bicycling, and hiking.

Management Plan Overview

Through the services of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), FWC has mapped the natural and anthropogenic community types on HMWMA. Through this work, FNAI has identified and mapped a total of 25 community types within the HMWMA. The largest natural community types consist of mesic hammock and mesic flatwoods.

The FWC has developed the Florida Landscape Assessment Model (FLAM) as a Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-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 as a way 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 TLWMA has a very high mean wildlife value of 8.4. The WCPR Strategy includes monitoring and management actions for imperiled and focal species. During the previous planning period, FWC conducted five imperiled and locally important species, including striped newt, gopher frog, Bachman's sparrow, Florida scrub-jay, and gopher tortoise. The FWC also monitored nine kestrel nest boxes. These imperiled species projects, along with other ongoing imperiled species management activities, will continue to be implemented in accordance with the HMWMA WCPR Species Management Strategy.

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 14 known historic sites on the HMWMA. The FWC will submit subsequently located historic sites on HMWEA 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 HMWMA. To accomplish this, the FWC has worked with recreational stakeholders and the general public to develop a Recreation Master Plan for the HMWMA. 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 HMWMA 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, 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 HMWMA.
- Provide access and use of the HMWMA to current cooperative managers and continue collaborative management and research efforts.

Public Involvement

The FWC conducted a Management Advisory Group Meeting on October 30, 2019, in Newberry, Florida, resulting in the top three ranked ideas:

- Continue restoration and maintenance of natural communities, including mesic and wet flatwoods.
- Monitor and control invasive species, including feral hogs.
- Continue prescribed fire program with increased growing season burns.

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 Chapter 259.032(10), Florida Statutes, was held on December 11, 2019 in Lake Panasoffkee, Florida. The questions and comments made by the public during the testimony period primarily related to exotic species and the boundary of the river.

Surplus Lands

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

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in October 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. Three consensus recommendations were offered:

- The team recommended the FWC include more details about desired future conditions, maybe providing more detail about OBVM process in the management plan.

- The team recommended the FWC provide additional protection (hog exclusion) from cultural sites (cemetery).
- The team recommended that FWC place an interpretive sign where the trail intersects the southern groundcover restoration area.

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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE

APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____

DEFER

WITHDRAW

NOT APPROVE

OTHER: _____

Half Moon Wildlife Management Area
Land Management Plan Short Term Goals

Section	Section Description	Goal	Item Number	Item Description
6.6	Hydrological Preservation and Restoration	Protect water quality and quantity, restore hydrology to the extent feasible, and maintain the restored condition.	6.6.1	Repair or replace one culvert on the north end of the HMWMA near the Smith property.

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised 2020-MWE.

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lead Agency: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Common Name of Property: Half Moon Wildlife and Environmental Area (HMWMA)

Location: Sumter County, Florida

Acreage Total: 9,554 acres

Acreage Breakdown:

<u>Land Cover Classification</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Total Area</u>
Artificial pond	4.11	0.04%
Basin marsh	4.25	0.04%
Basin swamp	529.57	5.51%
Baygall	4.07	0.04%
Blackwater stream	177.16	1.84%
Depression marsh	1022.45	10.63%
Developed	4.08	0.04%
Dome swamp	91.29	0.95%
Floodplain forest	766.19	7.97%
Floodplain swamp	1905.73	19.82%
Hydric hammock	567.67	5.90%
Mesic flatwoods	1257.17	13.07%
Mesic hammock	1444.42	15.02%
Pasture - improved	783.91	8.15%
Pasture - semi-improved	263.82	2.74%
Pine plantation	19.77	0.21%
Restoration mesic flatwoods	121.73	1.27%
Road	118.70	1.23%
Sandhill	47.97	0.50%
Scrubby flatwoods	120.88	1.26%
Spoil area	3.22	0.03%
Spring-run stream	14.34	0.15%
Wet flatwoods	110.72	1.15%
Wildlife food plot	38.00	0.40%
Xeric hammock	195.51	2.03%

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

Lease/Management Agreement No.: 3789 (Appendix 12.1)

Use: Single _____

Multiple X

Management Responsibilities:

Agency FWC

Responsibilities

LEAD, SUBLESSEE (Wildlife Management Area, resource protection, law enforcement)

Designated Land Use: Wildlife Management Area

Sublease (s): None

Encumbrances: Cattle lease, mineral rights, access easement

Type Acquisition: Fish and Wildlife Habitat Program

Unique Features: Natural: Natural communities, Withlacoochee River, Gum Slough, Mill Creek

Archaeological/Historical: Fourteen historical resources documented within the HMWMA.

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: 30,947 acres FWC Additions and Inholdings list.

Surplus Lands/Acreage: None

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

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ARC Approval Date _____ BTIITF Approval Date: _____

Comments: _____

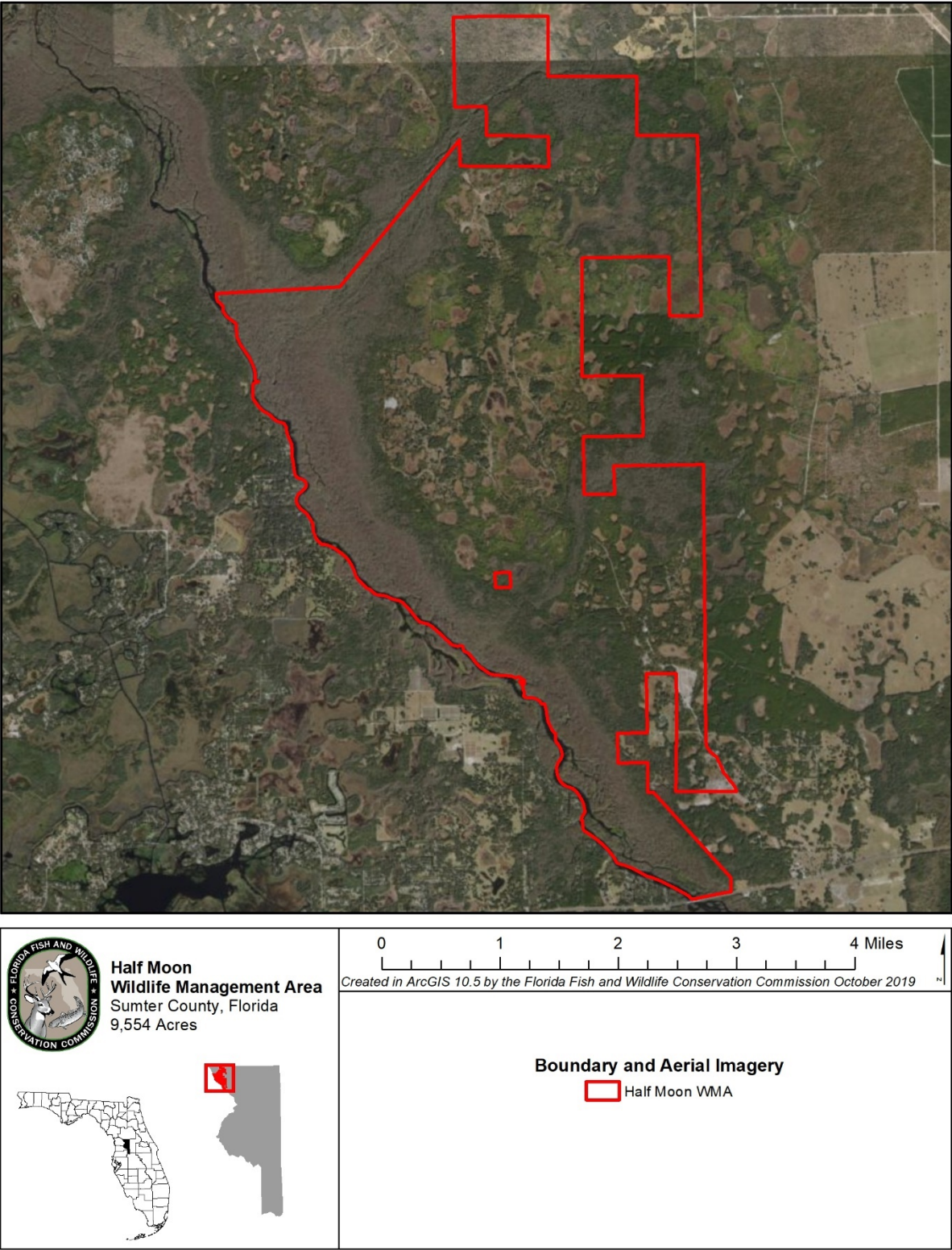


Figure 2: Boundary and Aerial Image of the HMWMA

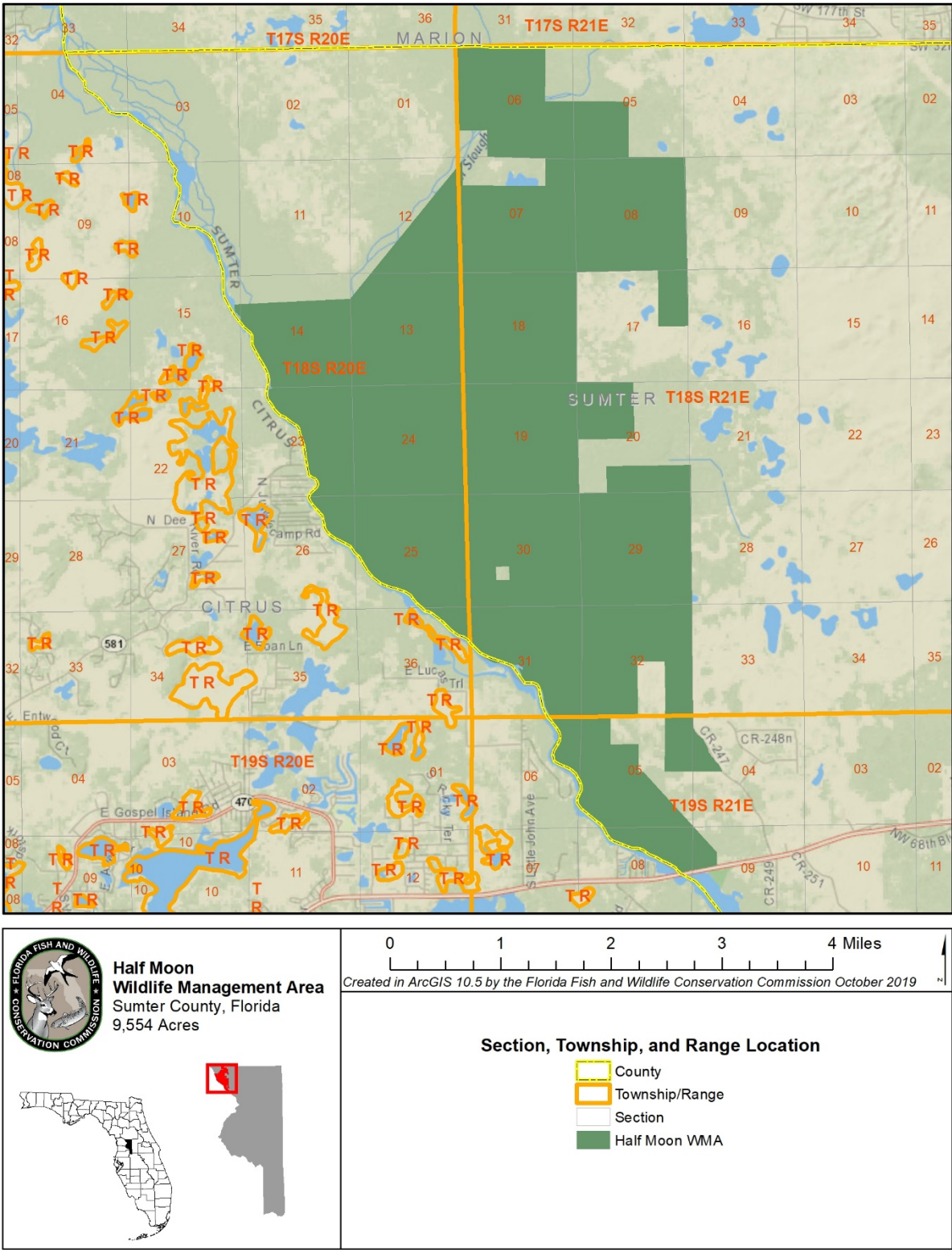


Figure 3: Section, Township, and Range Location of the HMWMA

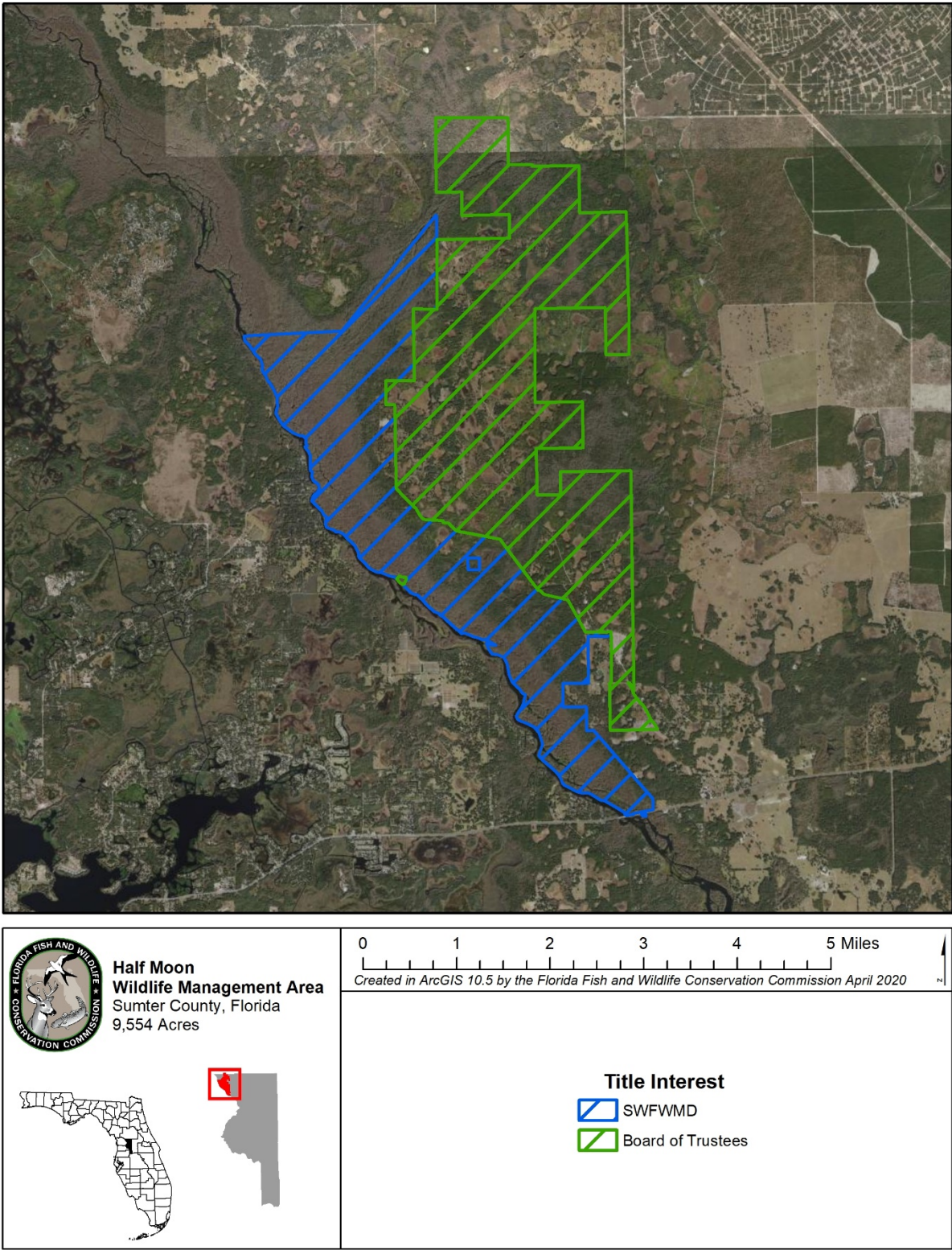


Figure 4: Half Moon WMA Title Interest

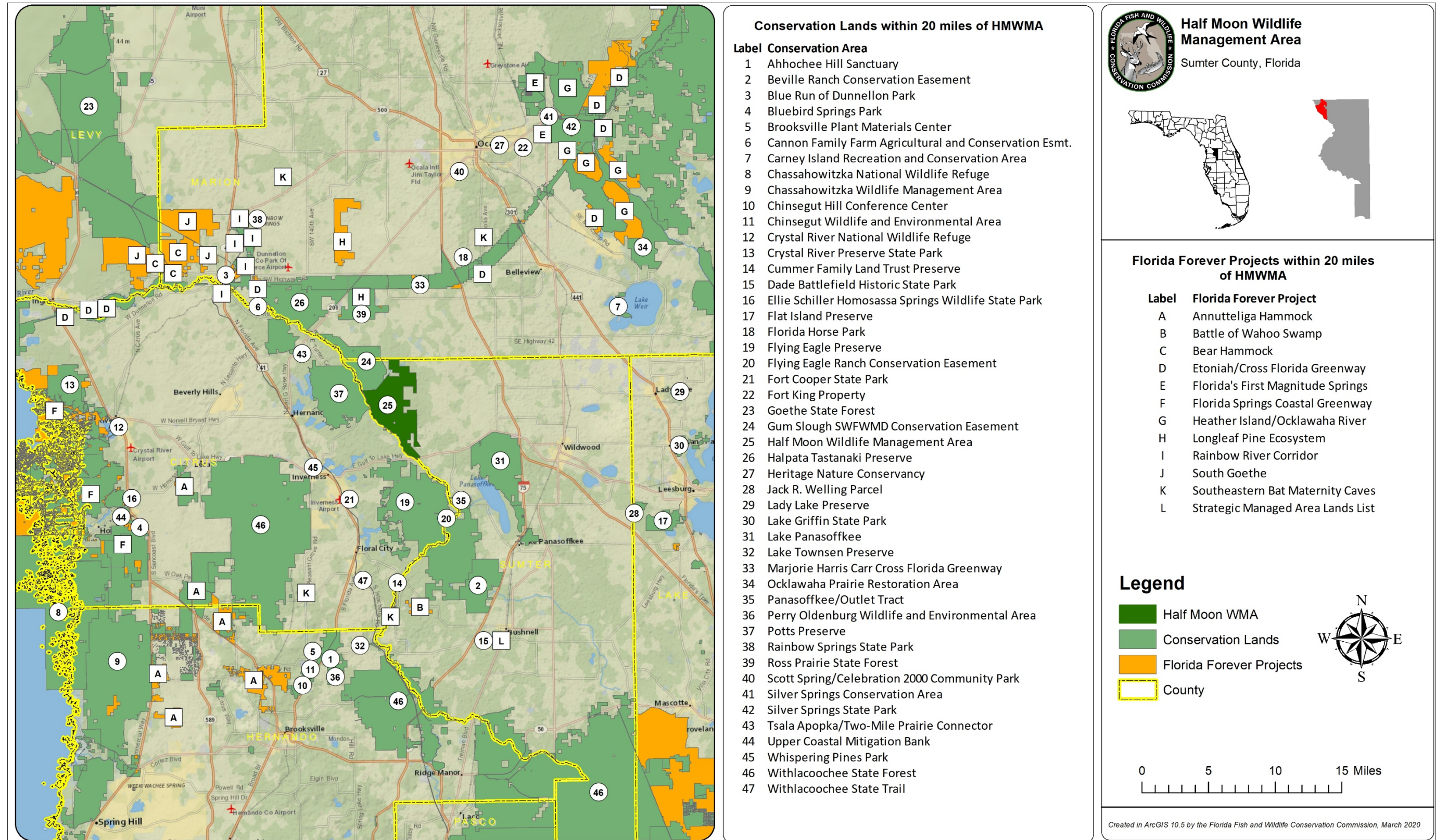


Figure 5: Nearby Conservation Lands and Florida Forever Projects

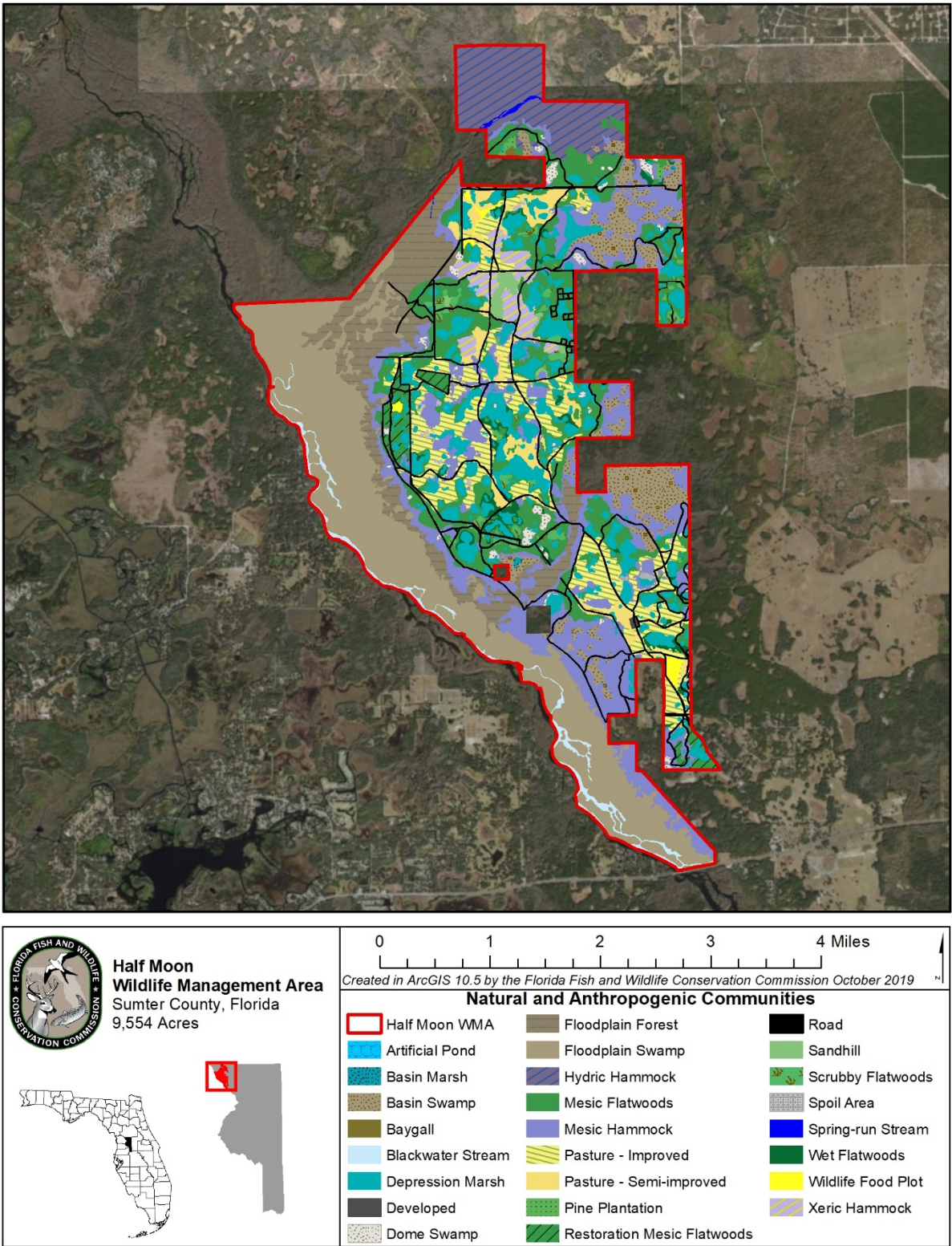


Figure 8: FNAI Natural Communities

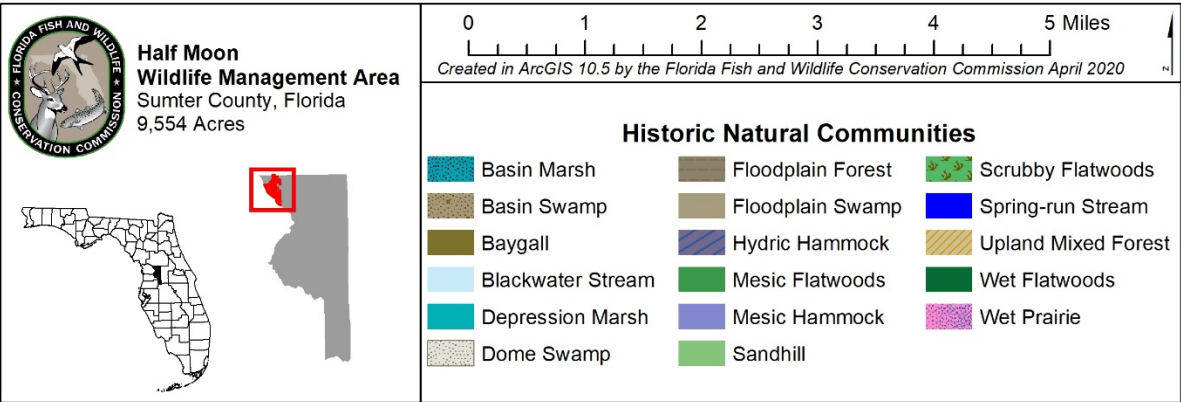
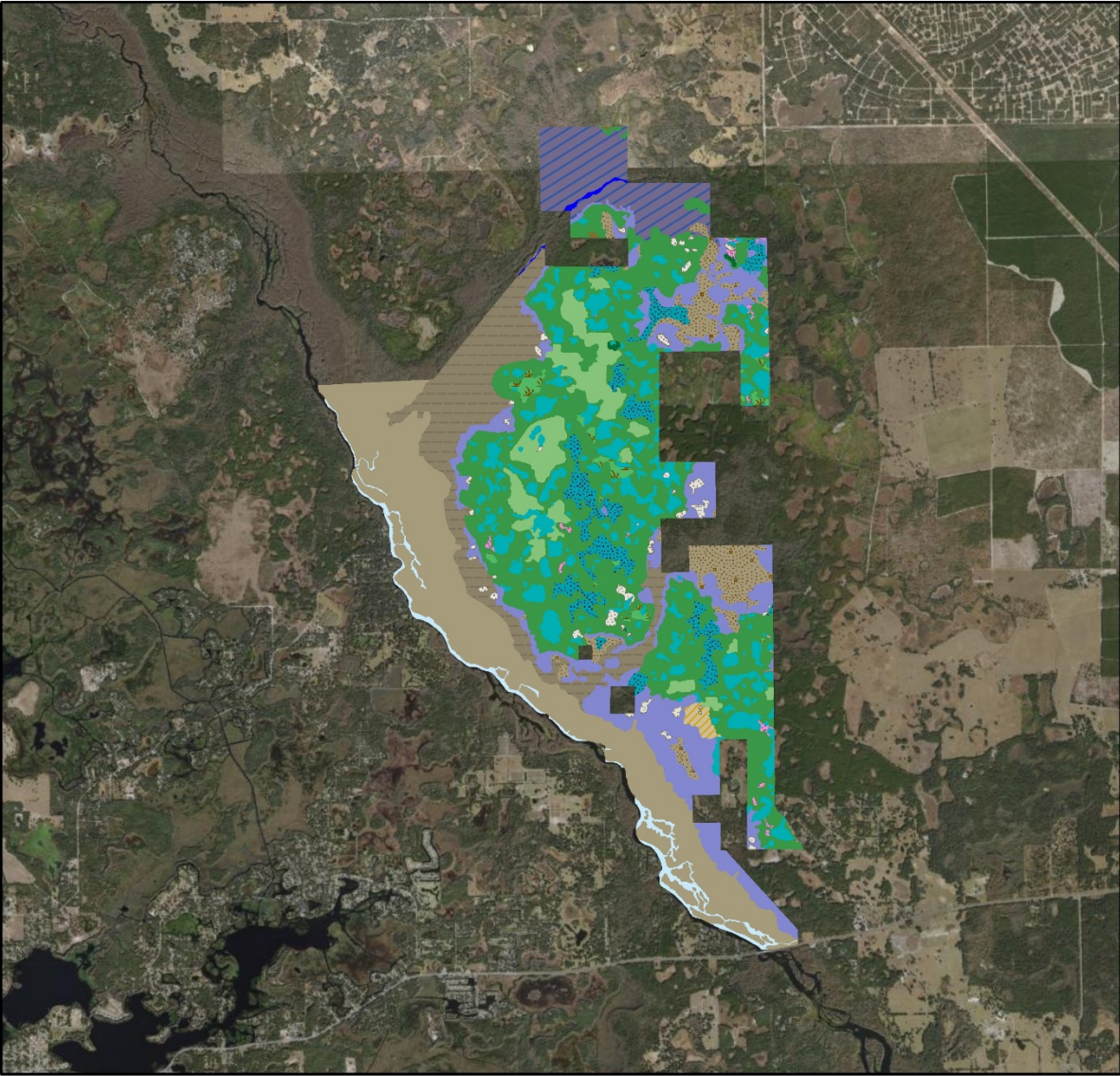


Figure 9: HMWMA Historic Natural Communities

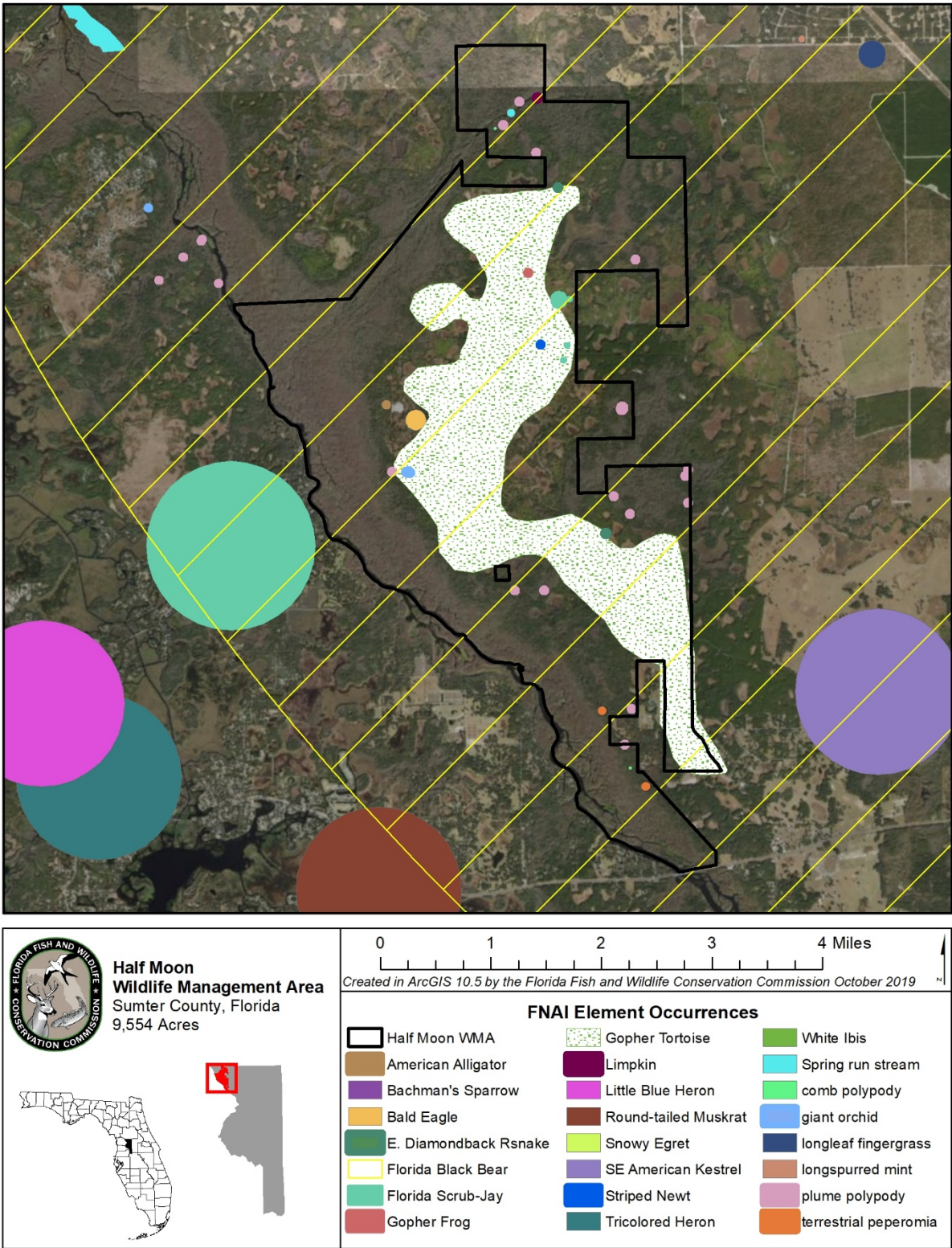


Figure 11: FNAI Element Occurrences in the Vicinity of the HMWMA

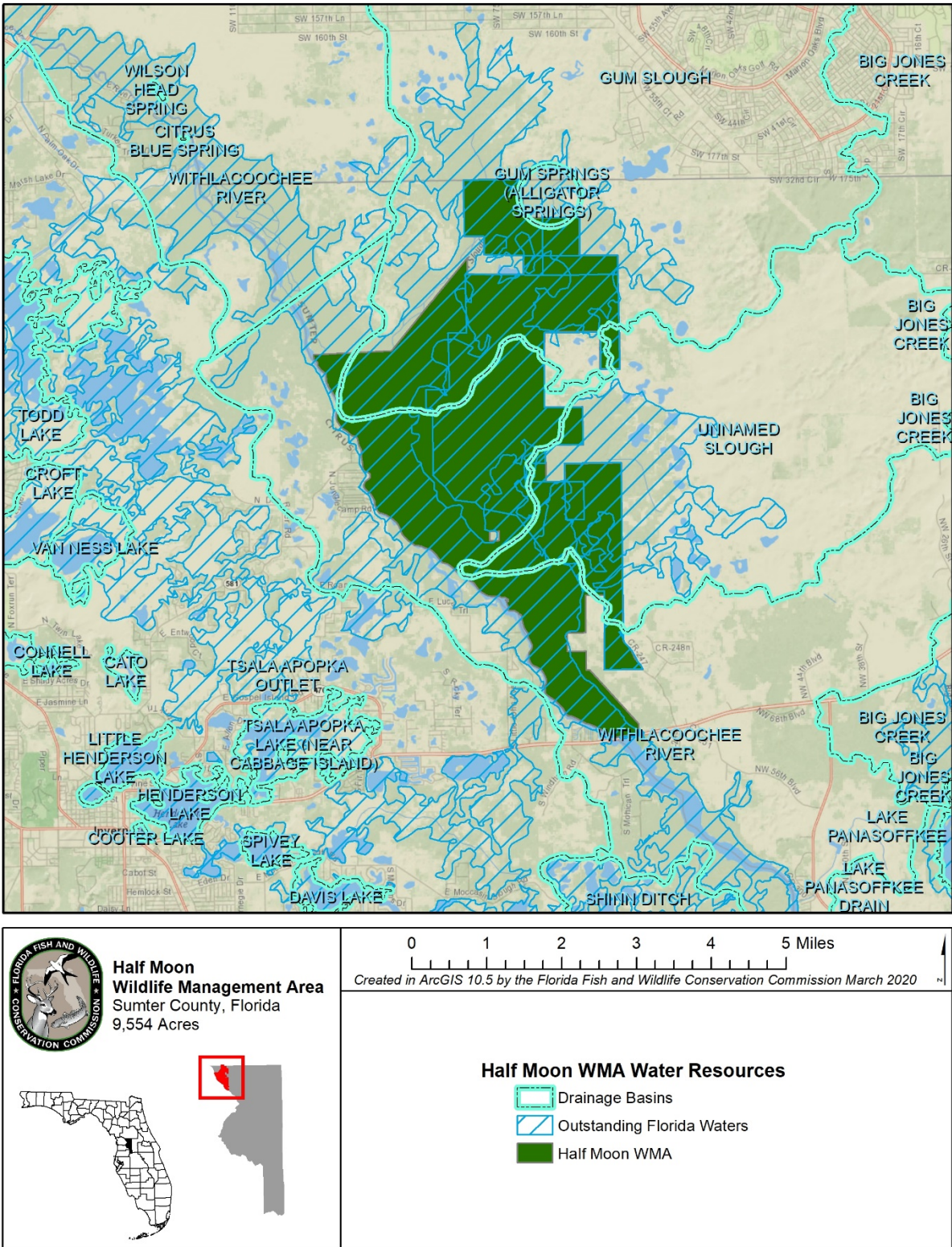


Figure 12: HMWMA Water Resources

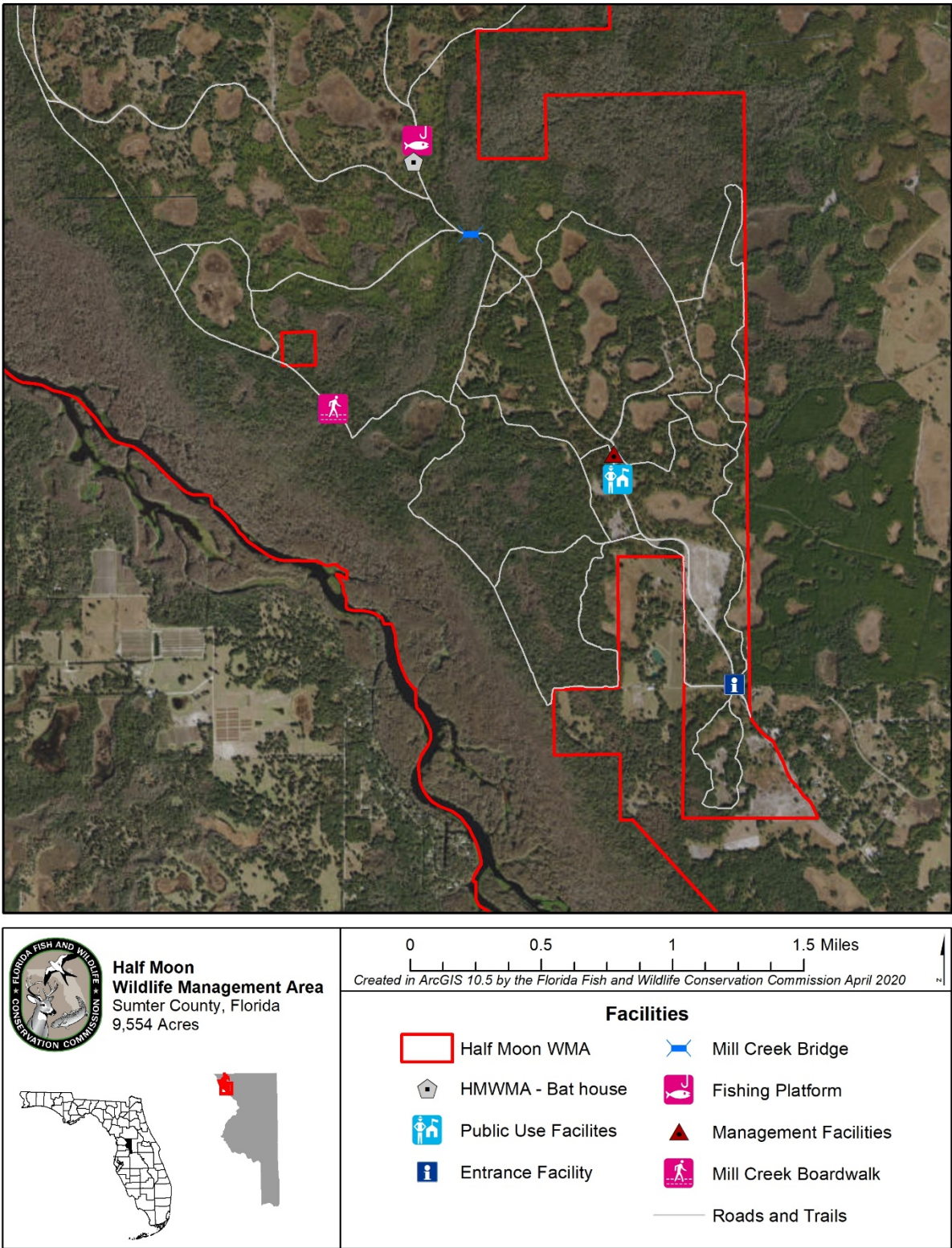


Figure 13: HMWMA Facilities

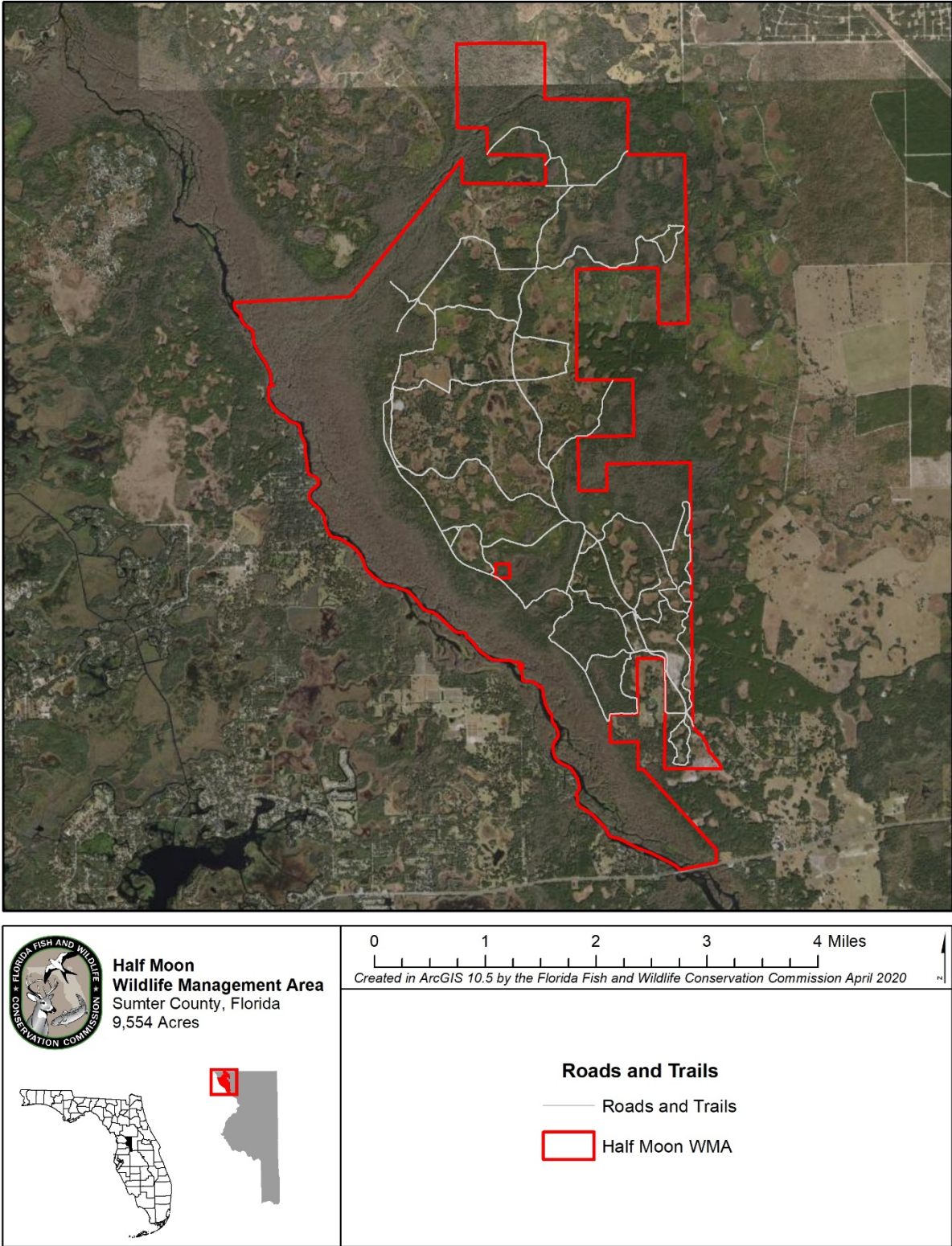


Figure 14: HMWMA Roads and Trails

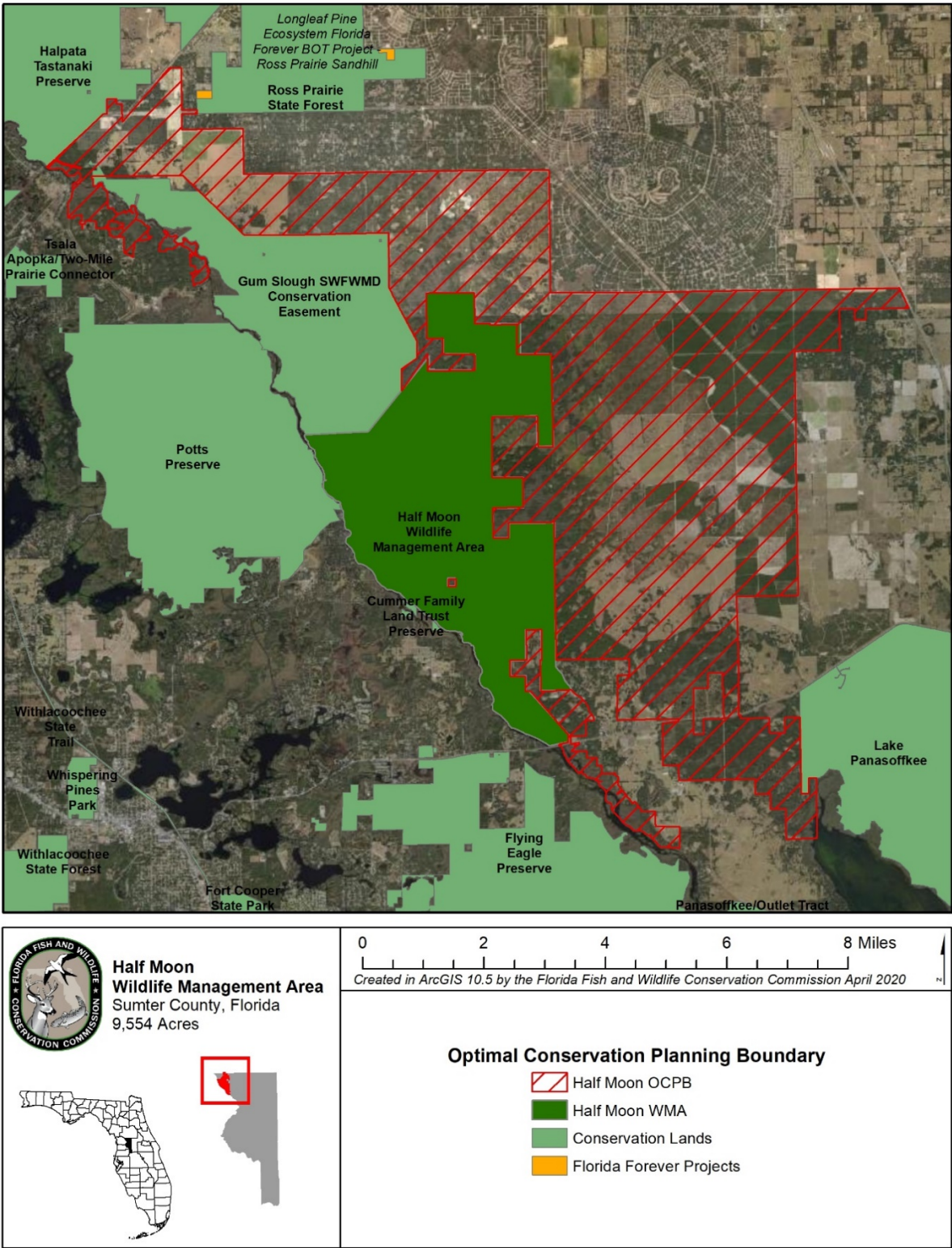


Figure 15: HMWMA Optimal Conservation Planning Boundary



Figure 16: HMWMA Management Plan Goal and Objective Locations