

ITEM 19:

Consider a 10-year update to the Lafayette Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area Management Plan (Lease No. 4608).

LOCATION:

Lafayette County

APPLICANT:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

Background

The Lafayette Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area (LFWEA), located in Central Florida in southeastern Lafayette County, encompasses approximately 2,148 acres. Located within a landscape of pinelands, basin swamp, marshes, hardwood forest, and other public conservation lands and Florida Forever project lands, the LFWEA provides habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife species including the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and also provides an array of fish and wildlife based public outdoor recreational opportunities, all within close proximity to the Suwannee River. Wetland and mesic forests within this larger landscape also provide potential habitat for imperiled species such as the Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*), wood stork (*Mycteria americana*), and little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*). With the connection between Mallory Swamp and potentially, the Suwannee River, the LFWEA aids in conserving a corridor for wildlife movement that will become increasingly important over time.

The LFWEA is managed by the FWC for the conservation and protection of natural resources, historical resources, and the important natural communities on site that provide habitat for a wide range of imperiled and more common wildlife species.

The LFWEA is owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund (BOT). The FWC has lead management authority for all resources within the established boundary. Original acquisition of the area was approved by the BOT and the FWC for use as a gopher tortoise mitigation park in 2008.

The LFWEA is managed for the purpose of operating a Wildlife and Environmental Area, providing ecological diversity, managed habitats for both common and imperiled wildlife, and fish and wildlife-oriented outdoor recreational opportunities for the public.

Management Plan Overview

Through the services of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), FWC has mapped the natural and anthropogenic community types on LFWEA. FNAI has identified and mapped a total of 15 community types within the LFWEA. The primary vegetative communities found within the LFWEA are mesic flatwoods and dome swamp.

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 CRWMA has a very high mean wildlife value of 7.8.

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 conducted a reconnaissance survey of the LFWEA in 2017 and to date, the DHR Master Site File indicates there are 12 known archeological sites located on the area. These include three prehistoric camp sites, one historic battleground site (Fort Downing Battleground), one historic cemetery (Frazier Cemetery), four historic camp sites, two historic homestead sites, and one historic dump site. The FWC will submit subsequently located historic sites on LFWEA 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 LFWEA. To accomplish this, the FWC has worked with recreational stakeholders and the general public to develop a Recreation Master Plan for the LFWEA. 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 LFWEA 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 LFWEA.
- Provide access and use of the LFWEA to current cooperative managers and continue collaborative management and research efforts.

Public Involvement

The FWC conducted a Management Advisory Group Meeting on February 24, 2021, resulting in the top three ranked ideas:

- Continue prescribed fire burn plan.
- Continue public access and hunting opportunities, while minimizing impacts on the area.
- Continue to monitor and restore aquifer and utilize drainage well if possible.

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 April 15, 2021. There were no questions or comments made by the public during the testimony period.

Surplus Lands

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

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in February 2018. 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 recommendations were offered by the team:

- Delineate the boundaries of the Frazier Cemetery.
- Review the optimum boundary for parcels along McCall's Chapel Creek.

The 2018 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: _____

Lafayette Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area

Land Management Plan Short Term Goals

Goal	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Performance Measure
6.5	Public Access and Restoration Opportunities	A	Provide public access and recreational opportunity.	6.5.1	Develop a recreation assessment for the area.	Assessment developed.

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: Lafayette Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area (LFWEA)
 Location: Lafayette County, Florida
 Acreage Total: 2,148 acres
 Acreage Breakdown:

<u>Land Cover Classification</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Total Area</u>
Basin marsh	35.05	1.6%
Bottomland forest	52.80	2.5%
Canal/ditch	8.18	0.4%
Depression marsh	167.46	7.8%
Developed	1.07	0.1%
Dome swamp	347.94	16.2%
Floodplain swamp	133.34	6.2%
Mesic flatwoods	751.02	35.1%
Restoration mesic flatwoods	190.33	8.9%
Restoration sandhill	251.61	11.7%
Road	93.32	4.4%
Scrubby flatwoods	6.04	0.3%
Successional hardwood forest	13.57	0.6%
Upland hardwood forest	59.35	2.8%
Wet Flatwoods	31.04	1.4%

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

Lease/Management Agreement No.: 4608 (Appendix 12.1)

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

Designated Land Use: Wildlife and Environmental Area

Sublease (s): None

Encumbrances: List: Suwannee River Water Management District Access Agreement (#10074), Reservation of Oil, Gas, and Associated Hydrocarbon with International Paper Company, a reciprocal access agreement with an inholding landowner (Nell C. Hughes), and an unrecorded cemetery easement.
 Type Acquisition: Fish and Wildlife Habitat Program

Unique Features: Natural: Natural communities including mesic flatwoods and dome swamp.

Archaeological/Historical: 12 documented within the LFWEA.

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: 4,593 acres FWC Additions and Inholdings list; 10,253 acres remaining in the Lafayette Forest Florida Forever Project (Appendix 12.19).

Surplus Lands/Acreage: None

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

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ARC Approval Date _____ BTIITF Approval Date: _____

Comments: _____

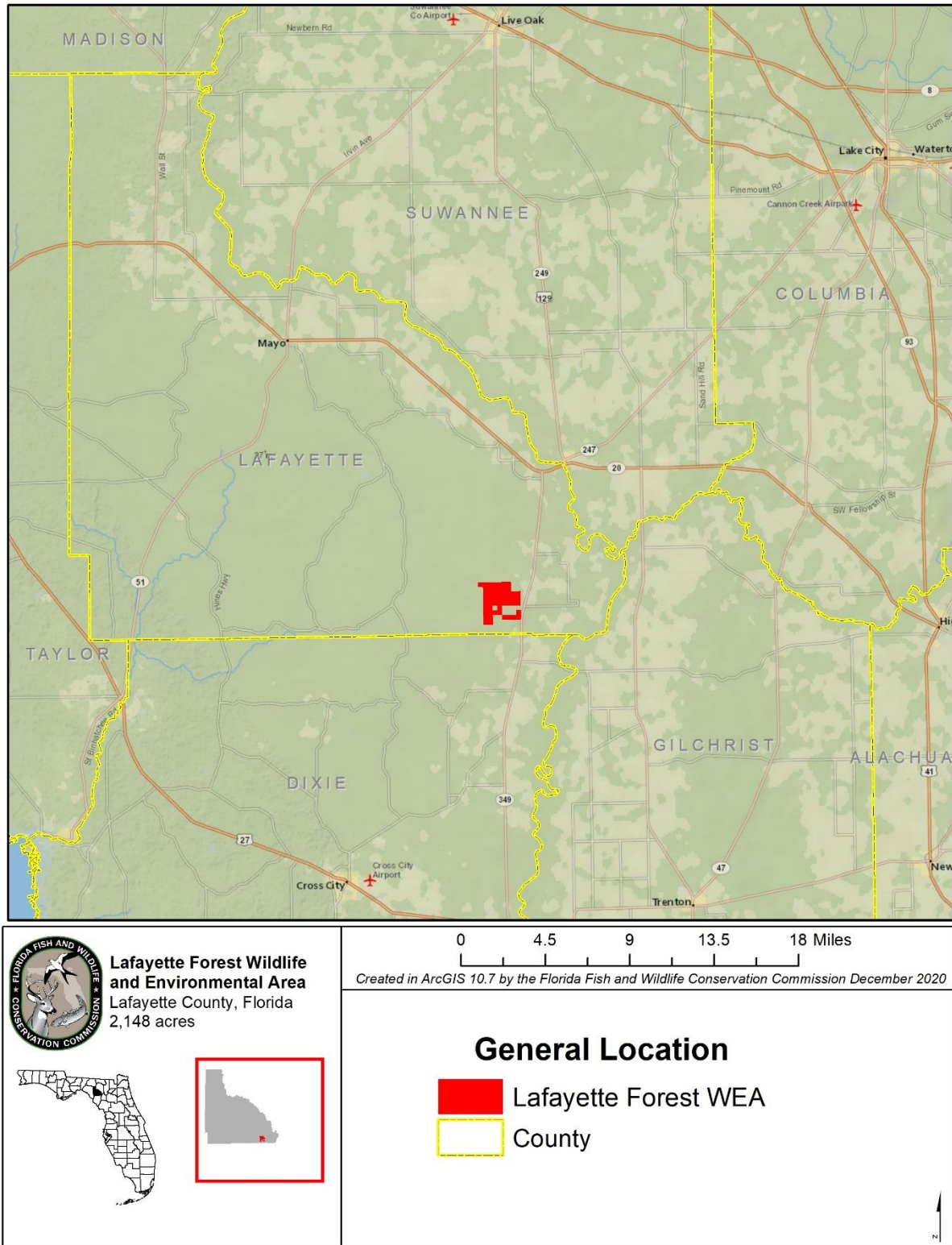


Figure 1. General Location of the LFWEA

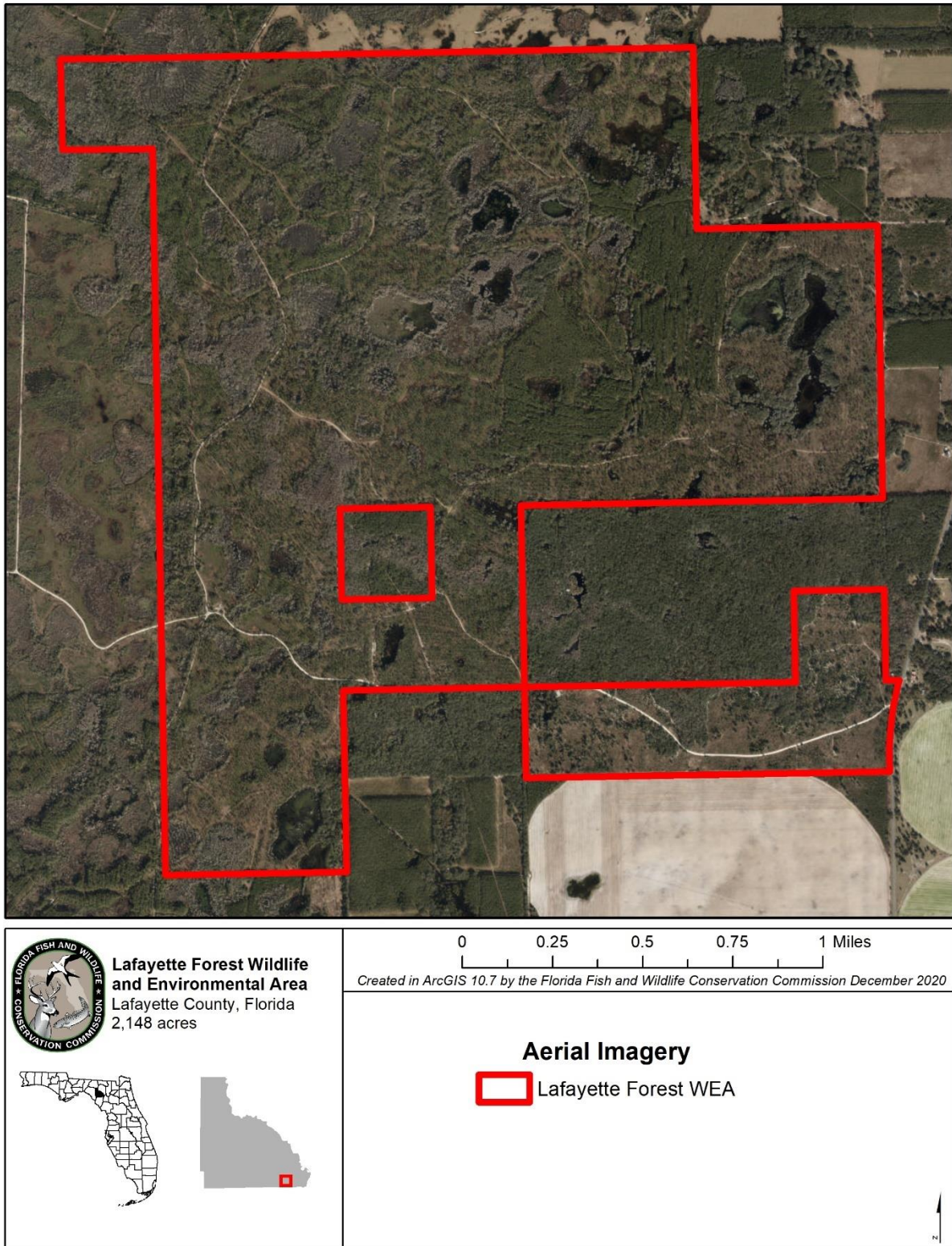


Figure 2. LFWEA Boundary and Aerial Imagery

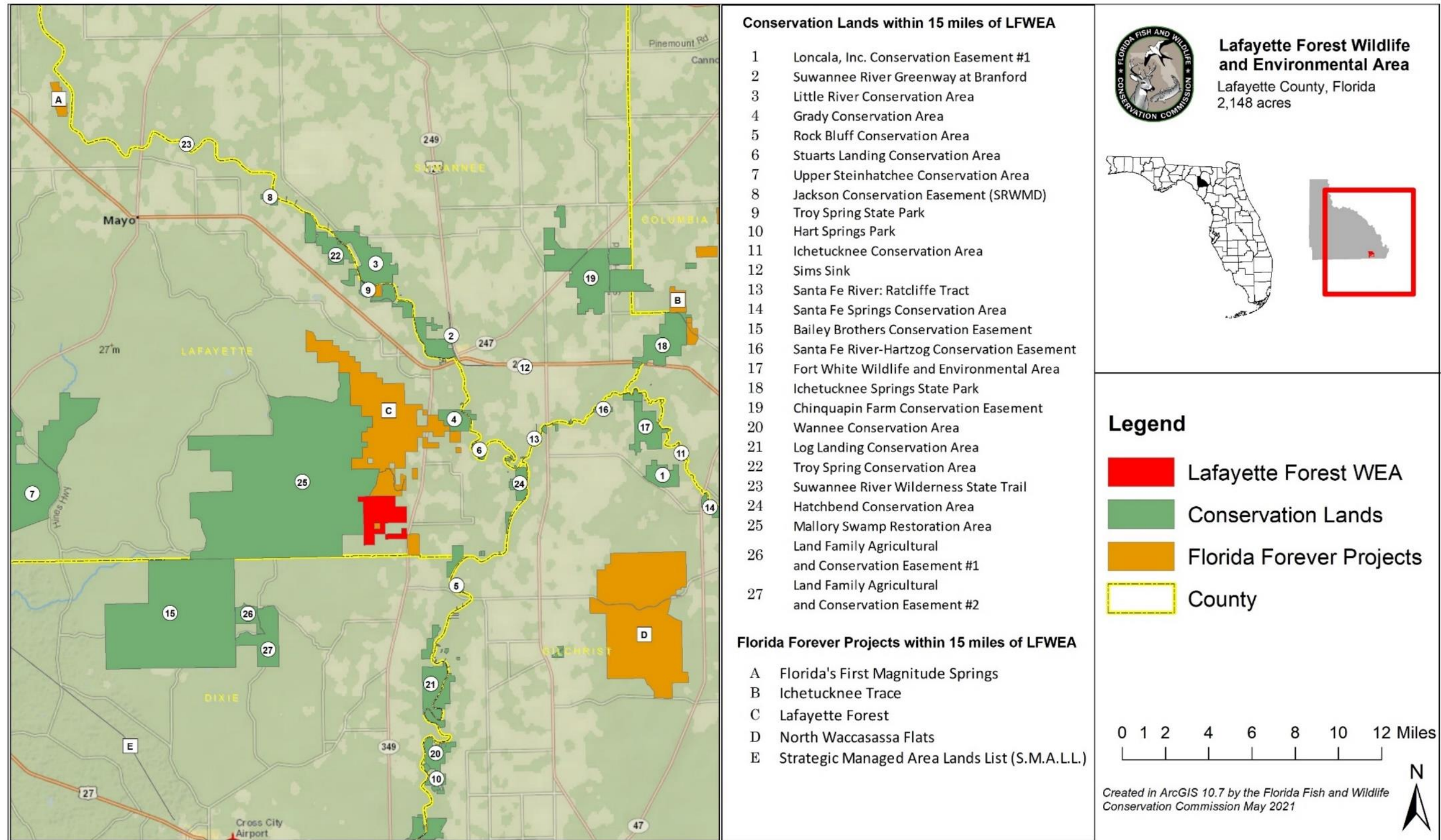


Figure 4. Nearby Conservation Lands and Florida Forever Projects

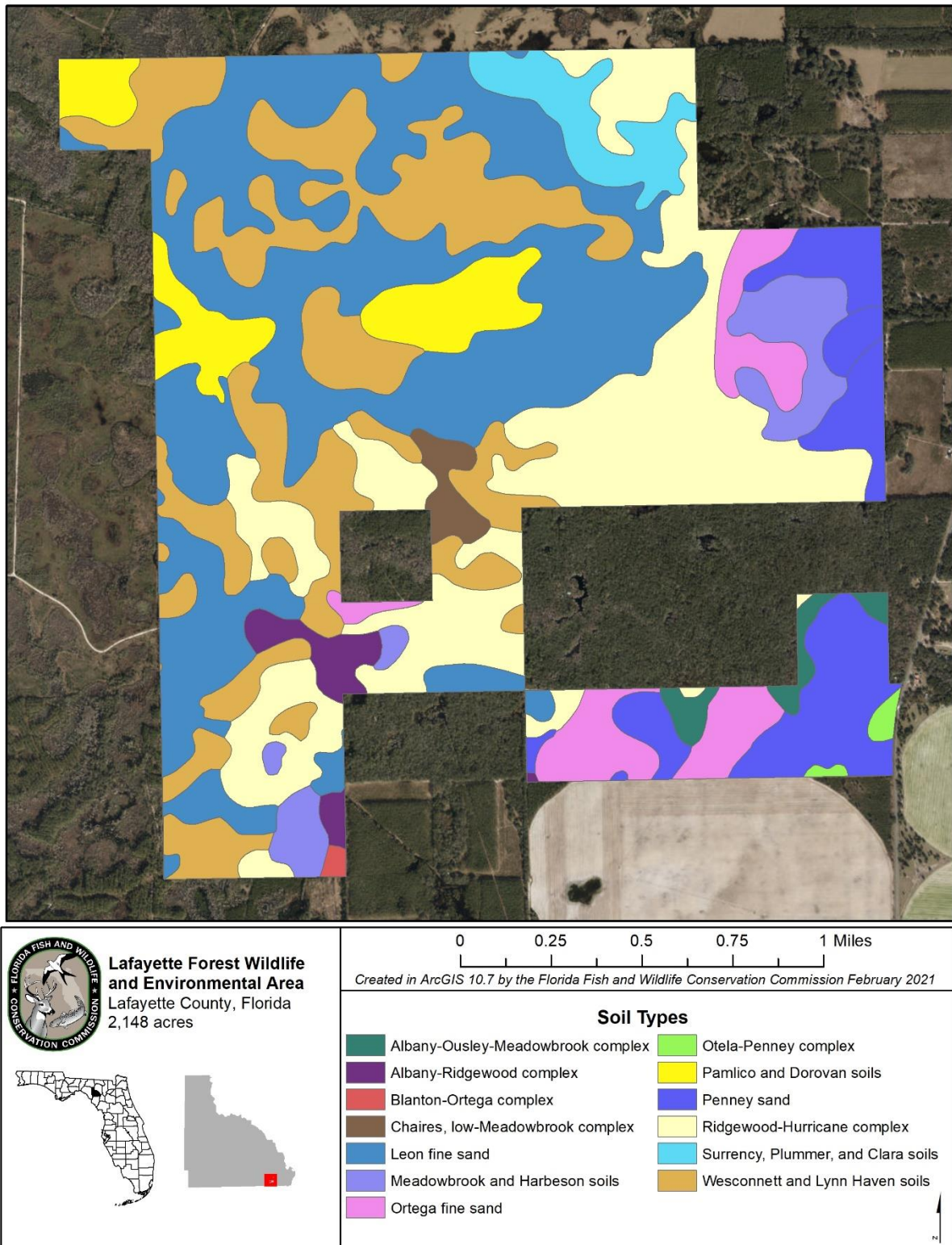


Figure 5. LFWEA Soil Types

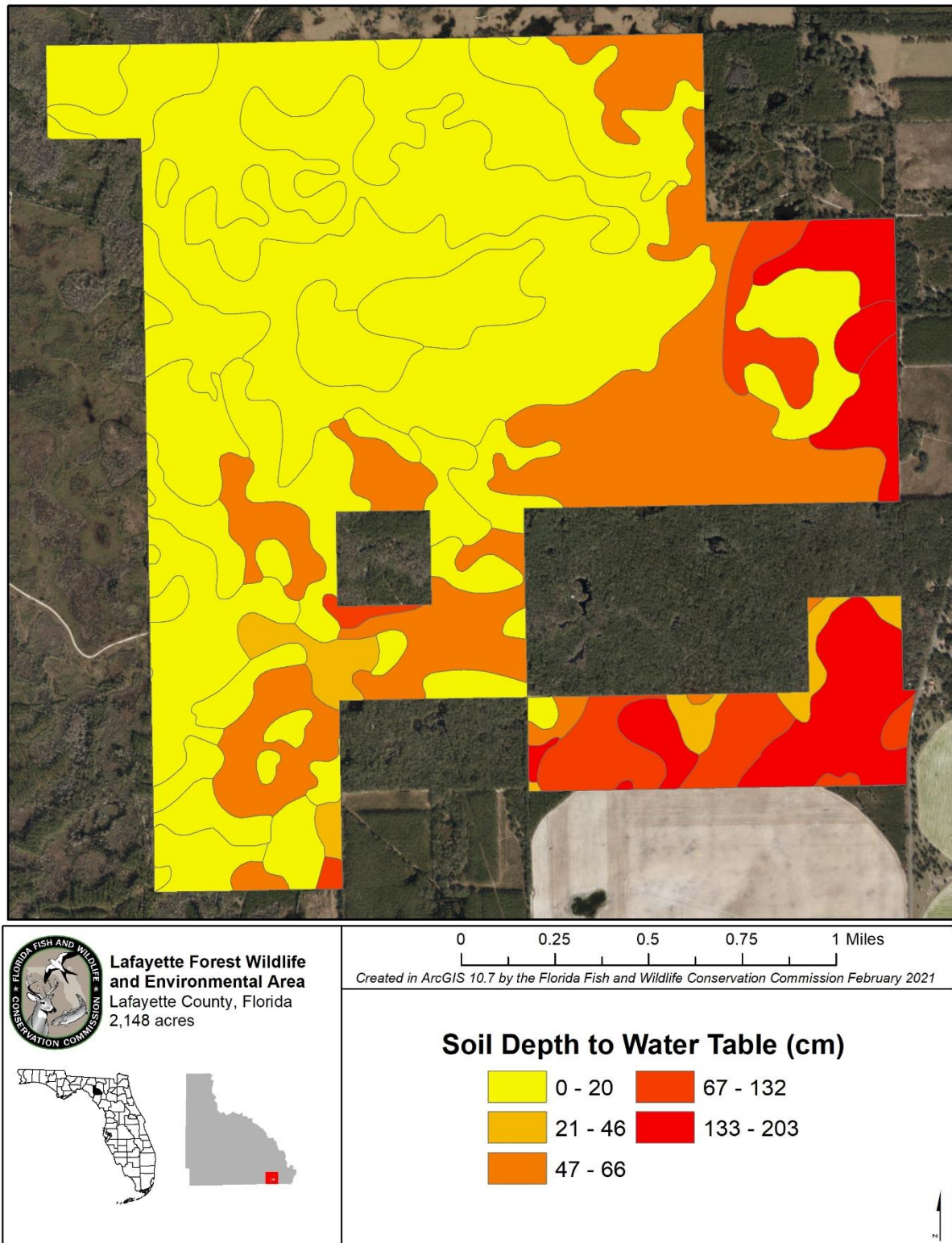


Figure 6. LFWEA Soil Depth to Water Table (cm)

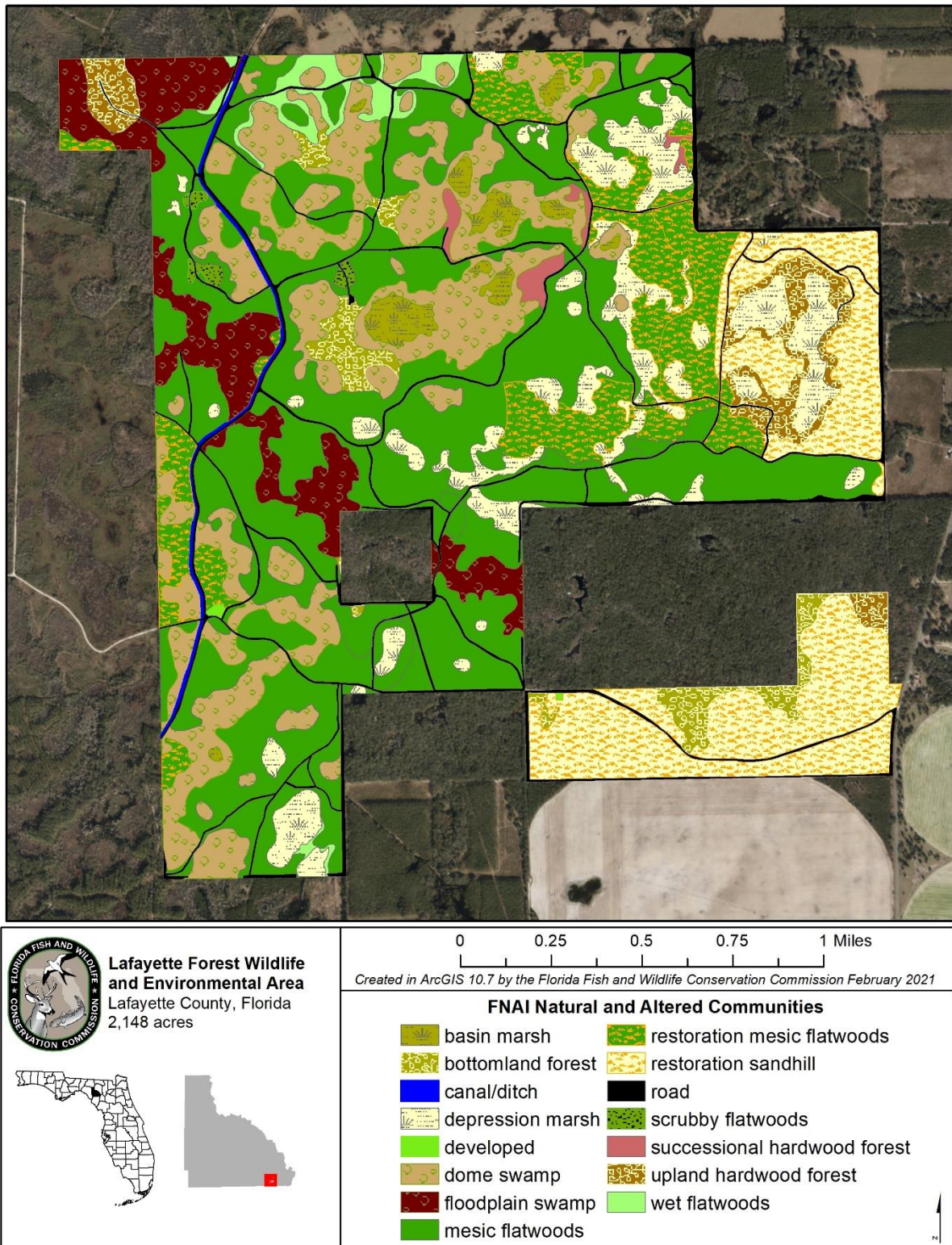


Figure 7. The FNAI Natural and Altered Communities Map for the LFWEA

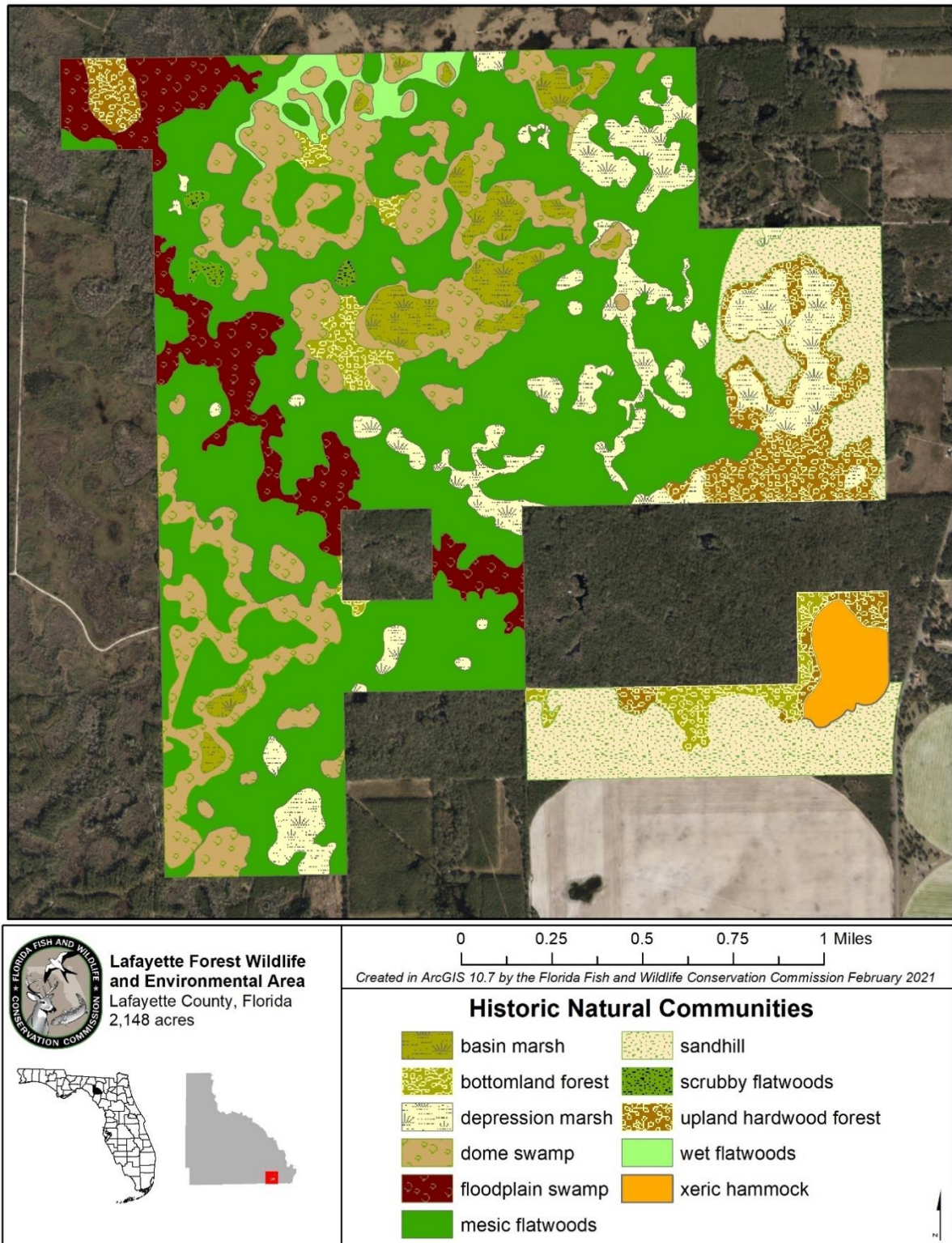


Figure 8. The FNAI Historic Natural Communities Map for the LFWEA

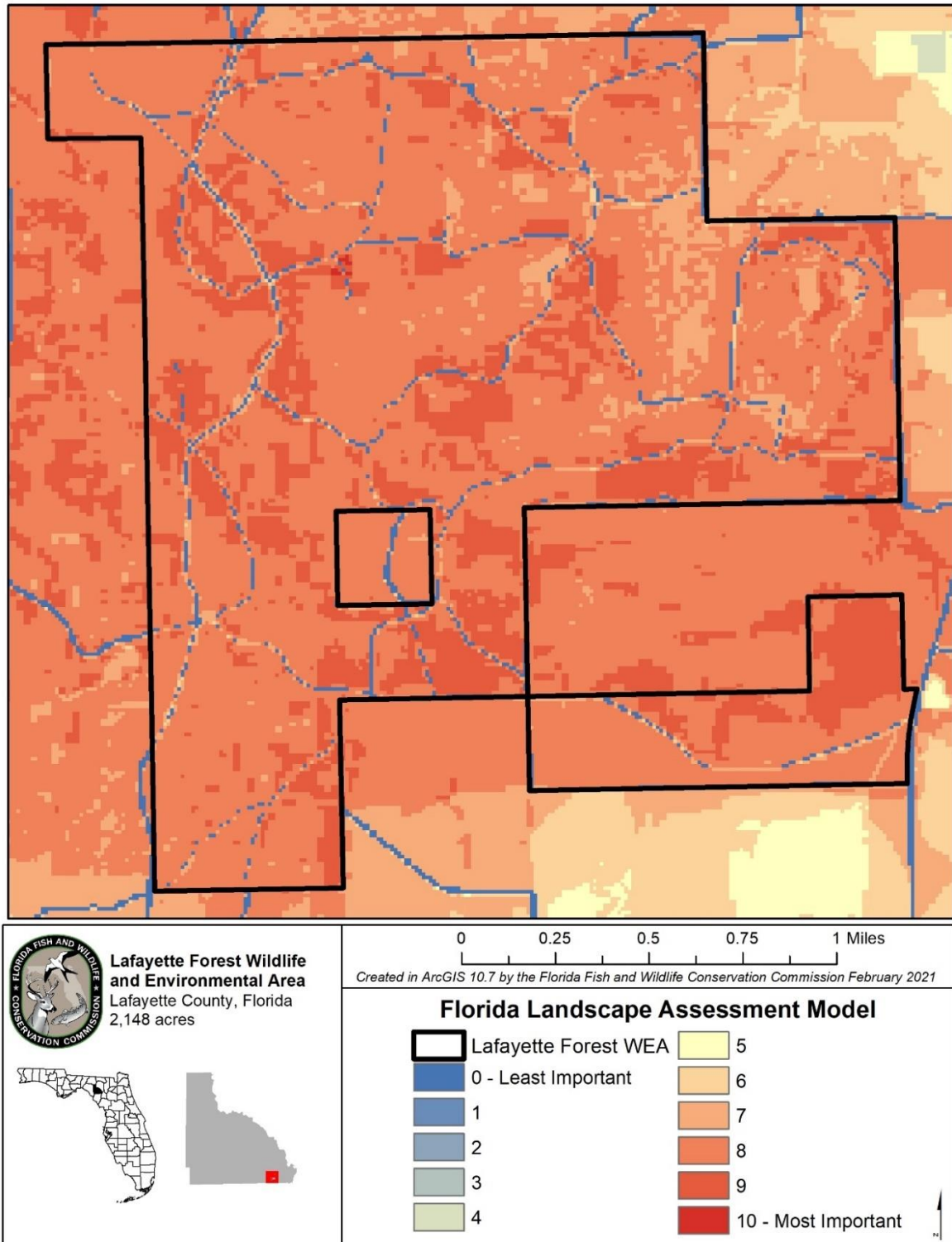


Figure 9. Florida Landscape Assessment Model

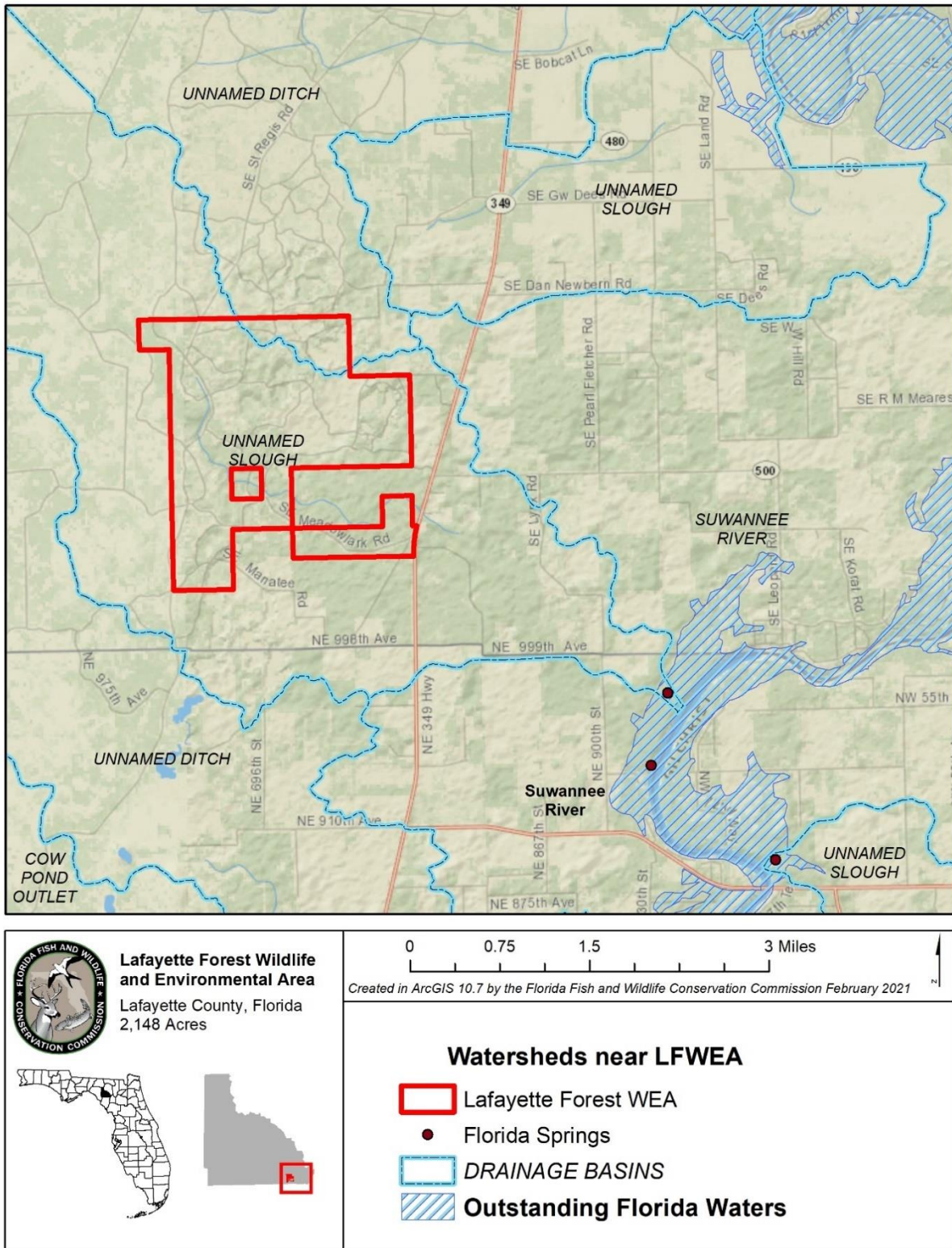


Figure 11. LFWEA Water Resources



Figure 12. Facility Locations on the LFWEA