



SUWANNEE RIVER WILDERNESS TRAIL

Trail Chapter

NORTHEAST DISTRICT TRAIL SYSTEM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Trail Chapter

Introduction	1
Location and Acquisition History	1
Secondary and Incompatible Uses	1
Purpose and Significance of the Park	2
Other Designations	3
Park Accomplishments	3
Special Management Considerations	3
 Land Use Component	4
Visitation	4
Existing Facilities and Infrastructure	4
Conceptual Land Use Plan	5
Optimum Boundary	8

Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Planning Region: Trail System

County: Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, and Suwannee

Lease/Management Agreement Number: SRWMD Lease Agreements

Overview: The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail provides paddlers necessary and convenient access and amenities for extended excursions along the scenic Suwannee River. The trail and its hubs provide for short day trips or overnight stays to allow for visitors to experience a cross section of Florida's natural beauty.

Total Acreage: 74.03

Altered Landcovers	Acres
Developed	74.03

Acquisition: The Peacock Slough River Camp comprised of 9.89 acres, is owned in fee simple by the Suwannee River Water Management District. On July 3, 2008, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of the Suwannee River State Park.

The Adams River Camp comprised of 7.90 acres, is owned in fee simple by the Suwannee River Water Management District. On July 3, 2008, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of the Ichetucknee Springs State Park.

The Dowling Park River Camp comprised of 47.16 acres, is owned in fee simple by the Suwannee River Water Management District. On May 13, 2009, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of the Suwannee River State Park.

The Holton Creek River Camp comprised of 3.88 acres, is owned in fee simple by the Suwannee River Water Management District. On September 7, 2007, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of the Suwannee River State Park.

The Woods Ferry River Camp comprised of 5.20 acres, is owned in fee simple by the Suwannee River Water Management District. On June 17, 2005, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park.

Land Use Component

Conceptual Land Use

General River Camp Needs

- Replace and repair all wooden staircases.
- Upgrade or replace all restrooms and shower buildings.

River Camp Partnership

- Consult with other entities to designate an additional river camp.

Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Optimum Boundary

Several Florida Forever B.O.T. Projects are located along the Suwannee River and acquiring a few acres of these has the potential to provide another river camp location, specifically the projects located near state parks. A Florida's First Magnitude Springs project near Fanning Springs State Park would make an ideal location. New parcels for river camps should only be sought and acquired if the resources are available and management for these sites is feasible.



SUWANNEE RIVER VALLEY & SUWANNEE RIVER WILDERNESS TRAIL



SURROUNDING LAND COVER

Forests

Agricultural Areas

Wetlands

Suwannee River Wilderness Trail Camps

Other River Camps

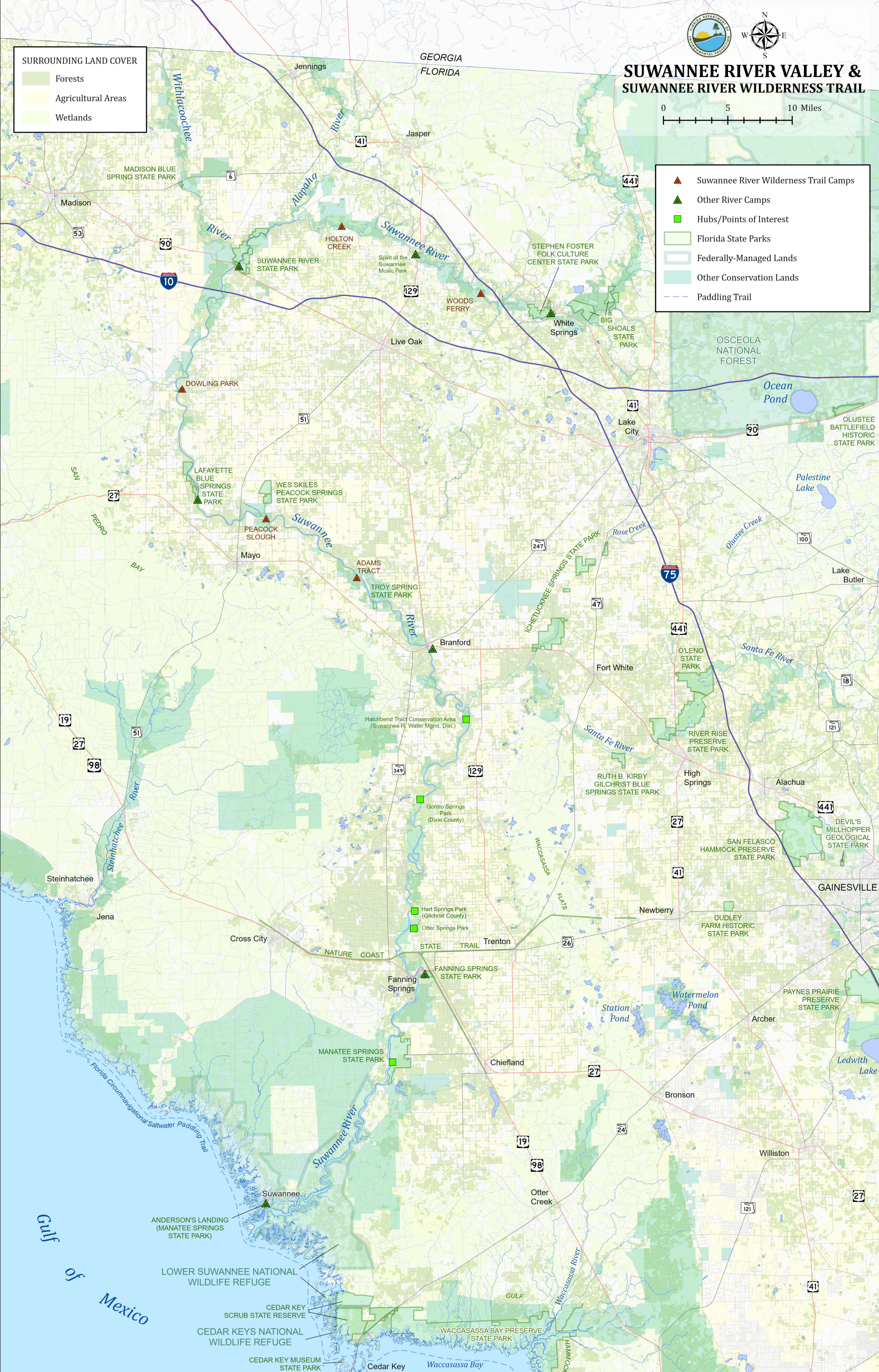
Hubs/Points of Interest

Florida State Parks

Federally-Managed Lands

Other Conservation Lands

Paddling Trail





River Camps



Hubs



Florida State Parks



Towns



Suwannee R. Water Mgmt. Dist.



U.S. Forest Service

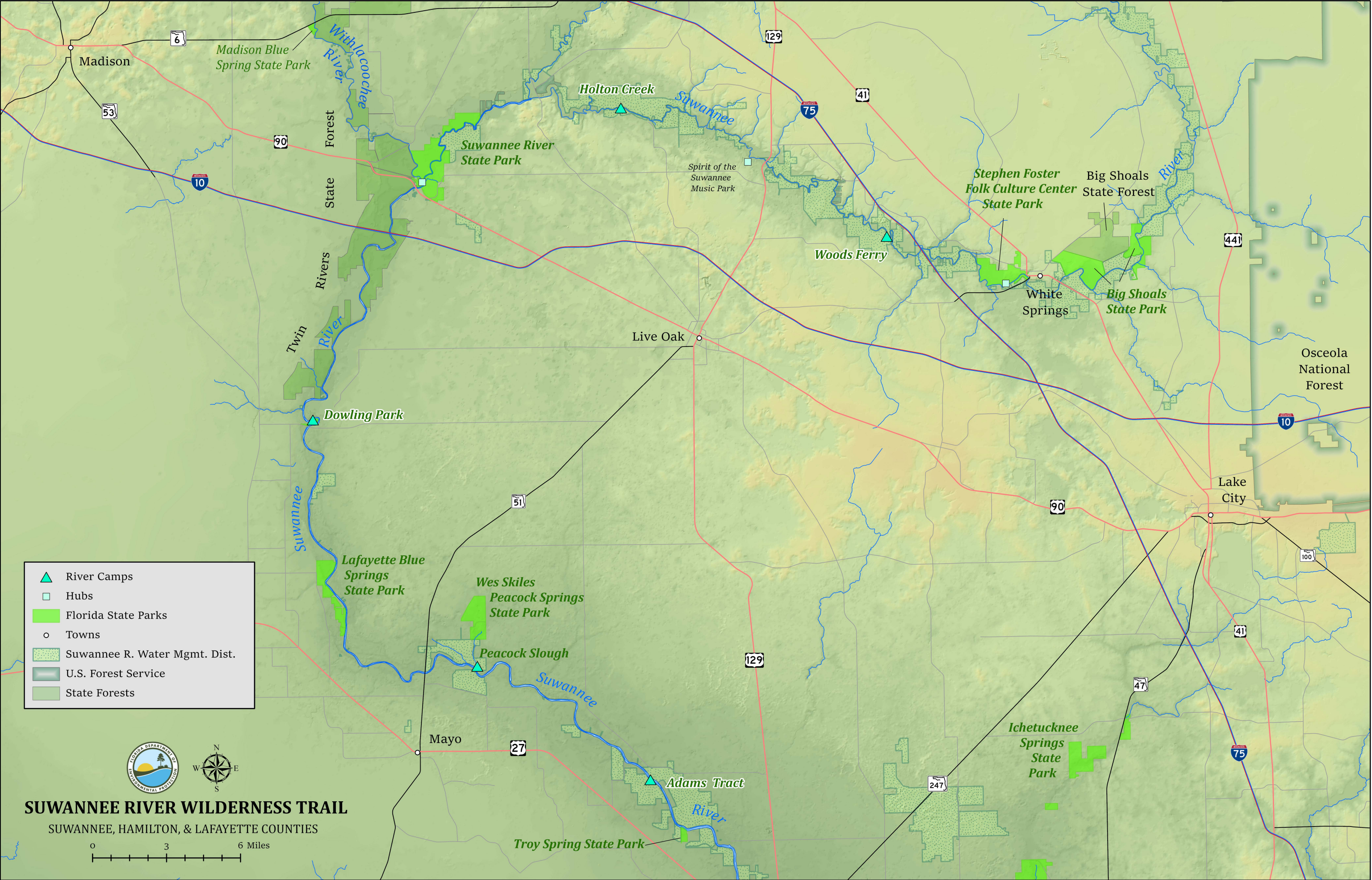
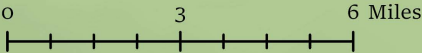


State Forests



SUWANNEE RIVER WILDERNESS TRAIL

SUWANNEE, HAMILTON, & LAFAYETTE COUNTIES



INTRODUCTION

LOCATION AND ACQUISITION HISTORY

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is located in Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, and Suwannee counties. The Northeast District Trail Network Map also reflects significant land and water resources existing near the trail. Access to the trail is from multiple locations along the Suwannee River. Five river camps are managed by the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) along the Suwannee River:

- The Peacock Slough River Camp, comprised of 9.89 acres, is owned in fee simple by the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD). On July 3, 2008, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of Suwannee River State Park. The lease agreement between the SRWMD and DRP expires Jan. 22, 2067.
- The Adams River Camp, comprised of 7.9 acres, is owned in fee simple by the SRWMD. On July 3, 2008, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of Ichetucknee Springs State Park. The lease agreement between the SRWMD and DRP expires Feb. 16, 2070.
- The Dowling Park River Camp, comprised of 47.16 acres, is owned in fee simple by the SRWMD. On May 13, 2009, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of Suwannee River State Park. The lease agreement between the SRWMD and DRP expires Jan. 22, 2068.
- The Holton Creek River Camp, comprised of 3.88 acres, is owned in fee simple by the SRWMD. On Sept. 7, 2007, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of Suwannee River State Park. The lease agreement between the SRWMD and DRP expires Sept. 6, 2027.
- The Woods Ferry River Camp, comprised of 5.2 acres, is owned in fee simple by the SRWMD. On June 17, 2005, DRP agreed to manage the camp as part of Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park. The lease agreement between the SRWMD and DRP expires June 16, 2025.

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is designated single-use to provide public outdoor recreation and conservation. There are no legislative or executive directives that constrain the use of this property (See appendix). A legal description of the trail property can be made available upon request to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

SECONDARY AND INCOMPATIBLE USES

In accordance with 253.034(5) F.S., the potential of the trail to accommodate secondary management purposes was analyzed. These secondary purposes were considered within the context of DRP's statutory responsibilities and resource values. This analysis considered the trail's natural and cultural resources, management needs, aesthetic values, visitation, and visitor experiences. It was determined that no secondary purposes could be accommodated in a manner that would not interfere with the primary purpose of resource-based outdoor recreation and conservation.

DRP has determined that uses such as water resource development projects, water supply projects, stormwater management projects, linear facilities and sustainable agriculture and forestry (other than

those management activities specifically identified in this plan) would not be consistent with the management purposes of the trail.

In accordance with 253.034(5) F.S., the potential for generating revenue to enhance management was also analyzed. Visitor fees and charges are the principal source of revenue generated by the trail. It was determined that multiple-use management activities would not be appropriate as a means of generating revenues for land management. Instead, techniques such as entrance fees, concessions and similar measures will be employed on a case-by-case basis as a means of supplementing trail management funding. Generating revenue from consumptive uses or from activities that are not expressly related to resource management and conservation is not under consideration.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARK

Park Purpose

The purpose of the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is to provide paddlers with necessary and convenient access and amenities for extended excursions along the scenic Suwannee River. The trail and its hubs provide for short day trips or overnight stays to allow for visitors to experience a cross section of Florida's natural beauty.

Park Significance

- The 170-mile-long Suwannee River Wilderness Trail follows a portion of the Suwannee River, one of the largest and most scenic rivers in Florida, that stretches from southern Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico. "Paddling" should be included in the name of the trail to emphasize its purpose and the experience provided.
- The river is known for its steep limestone banks and the highest concentration of freshwater springs in the country.
- The availability of river camps, state park cabins and campgrounds, and other private campgrounds at approximately 10-to-15-mile intervals provides the opportunity for an overnight paddling experience.
- Wind through Florida history as the river passes Native American and Spanish sites, the Old Bellamy Road, remains of the *Madison* steamboat, historic bridges and trestles, and other cultural points of interest.

Central Park Theme

The meandering waters and scenic camps of the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail invite paddlers for a relaxing journey along one of Florida's most famous and picturesque rivers.

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is classified as a state trail in the DRP unit classification system. In the management of state trails, primary consideration is given to providing opportunities for active recreational pursuits. Thus, user considerations are generally given priority over resource considerations. In areas where exceptional natural or cultural resources are included, however, resource

considerations may become paramount even at the loss of some recreational use. Emphasis is placed on active recreational pursuits, although passive uses may be provided if suitable resources exist. Program activity is concerned with promoting use of the site for public recreation and with interpreting the trail and its surrounding area for public enjoyment. Development is aimed at enhancing the recreational appeal of the trail by providing basic facilities for access, user convenience and safety, and interpretation.

OTHER DESIGNATIONS

The unit is not within an Area of Critical State Concern as defined in section 380.05; Florida Statutes and is not presently under study for such designation. The park is a component of the Florida Greenways and Trails System, administered by the DEP Office of Greenways and Trails.

All waters include along the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail have been designated as Outstanding Florida Waters, pursuant to Chapter 62-302, Florida Administrative Code. Surface waters along the trail within the Suwannee River basin are also classified as Class III (suitable for fish consumption and recreation) waters by the Department. The river camps are not within or adjacent to an aquatic preserve as designated under the Florida Aquatic Preserve Act of 1975 (Section 258.35, Florida Statutes).

PARK ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Trimmed service roads to Peacock Slough, Adams Tract and Holton Creek.
2. Removed several hazardous dead trees from Adams Tract, Holton Creek and Dowling Park.
3. Repaired decks and steps at Holton Creek and Dowling Park.
4. Repaired deck at Peacock Slough.
5. Replaced several air conditioning units in the restrooms of all the river camps.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Arthropod Control Plan

All DRP lands are designated as “environmentally sensitive and biologically highly productive” in accordance with Ch. 388 and Ch. 388.4111 Florida Statutes. If a local mosquito control district proposes a treatment plan, the DRP works with the local mosquito control district to achieve consensus. By policy of DEP since 1987, aerial adulticiding is not allowed, but larviciding and ground adulticiding (truck spraying in public use areas) is typically allowed. The DRP does not authorize new physical alterations of marshes through ditching or water control structures.

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail does not have an Arthropod Control Plan. Mosquito control plans temporarily may be set aside under declared threats to public or animal health, or during a Governor’s Emergency Declaration.

LAND USE COMPONENT

VISITATION

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail consists of a string of disjunct “river camps” managed by the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) and partnerships with other conservation agencies along a westward-arcing bend in the Suwannee River. From north to south, the DRP-managed river camps include Woods Ferry, Holton Creek, Dowling Park, Peacock Slough, Adams Tract and Anderson’s Landing. This extensive network of river camps, amenity hubs and accessible parks utilize the 171-mile Suwannee River to provide connections for an array of outdoor recreational opportunities.

Along the paddling trail, an abundance of wildlife viewing opportunities exist, especially in the late fall, winter and early spring, when manatees frequent the multitude of springs that feed the Suwannee River. With a continuous flow into the Withlacoochee and Santa Fe rivers, visitors can travel farther north toward Georgia or east toward the Atlantic coast. Providing for single- and multi-day excursions, the trail allows visitors to observe the natural and historical features along the Suwannee River Valley while also providing access to significant points of interest, including many nearby state parks and trails.

Trends

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail’s annual visitation remains consistent. The trail receives the most visitation in the spring months, as the incoming warmer weather helps trail users enjoy their experience. The string of river camps is most heavily utilized in the early spring and late summer.

Economic Impact

The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail recorded 16,314 visitors in FY 2022/2023. By DRP estimates, the FY 2022/2023 visitors contributed \$2,078,020 in direct economic impact, the equivalent of adding 29 jobs to the local economy (FDEP 2023).

EXISTING FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Five disjunct river camps are currently included within the unit boundaries. Woods Ferry River Camp is located just west of Interstate 75 in Suwannee County, on the east bank of the river. Holton Creek River Camp is located about 8 miles east of Suwannee River State Park. Dowling Park River Camp is in a sharp bend in the Suwannee, just outside of the unincorporated community of Dowling Park. Peacock Slough River Camp is located about 2 miles south of the main entrance of Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park, and Adams Tract River Camp is located about 8 miles southwest of Peacock Springs State Park. Each camp features five screened sleeping platforms, five semi-primitive campsites and one bathhouse.

Each of the river campsites is approximately 10 miles from established parks and campgrounds on the river. Each platform sleeps up to eight people, has a ceiling fan and an electrical outlet, hammock hooks for at least three hammocks, and a small seat and table. Just outside, each platform has a spigot with potable water, a fire ring and a picnic table. In addition to the five screened sleeping platforms, each river camp also has primitive campsites, hot showers, restrooms, grills, picnic tables and a pavilion.

Facilities Inventory

<i>Woods Ferry River Camp</i>	
Primitive Sites	5
Screened Camping Platforms	5
Bathhouse	1
<i>Holton Creek River Camp</i>	
Primitive Sites	5
Screened Camping Platforms	5
Bathhouse	1
<i>Dowling Park River Camp</i>	
Primitive Sites	5
Screened Camping Platforms	5
Bathhouse	1
<i>Peacock Slough River Camp</i>	
Primitive Sites	5
Screened Camping Platforms	5
Bathhouse	1
<i>Adams Tract River Camp</i>	
Primitive Sites	5
Screened Camping Platforms	5
Bathhouse	1

CONCEPTUAL LAND USE PLAN

General River Camp Needs

Objective: Maintain and replace all infrastructure as needed.

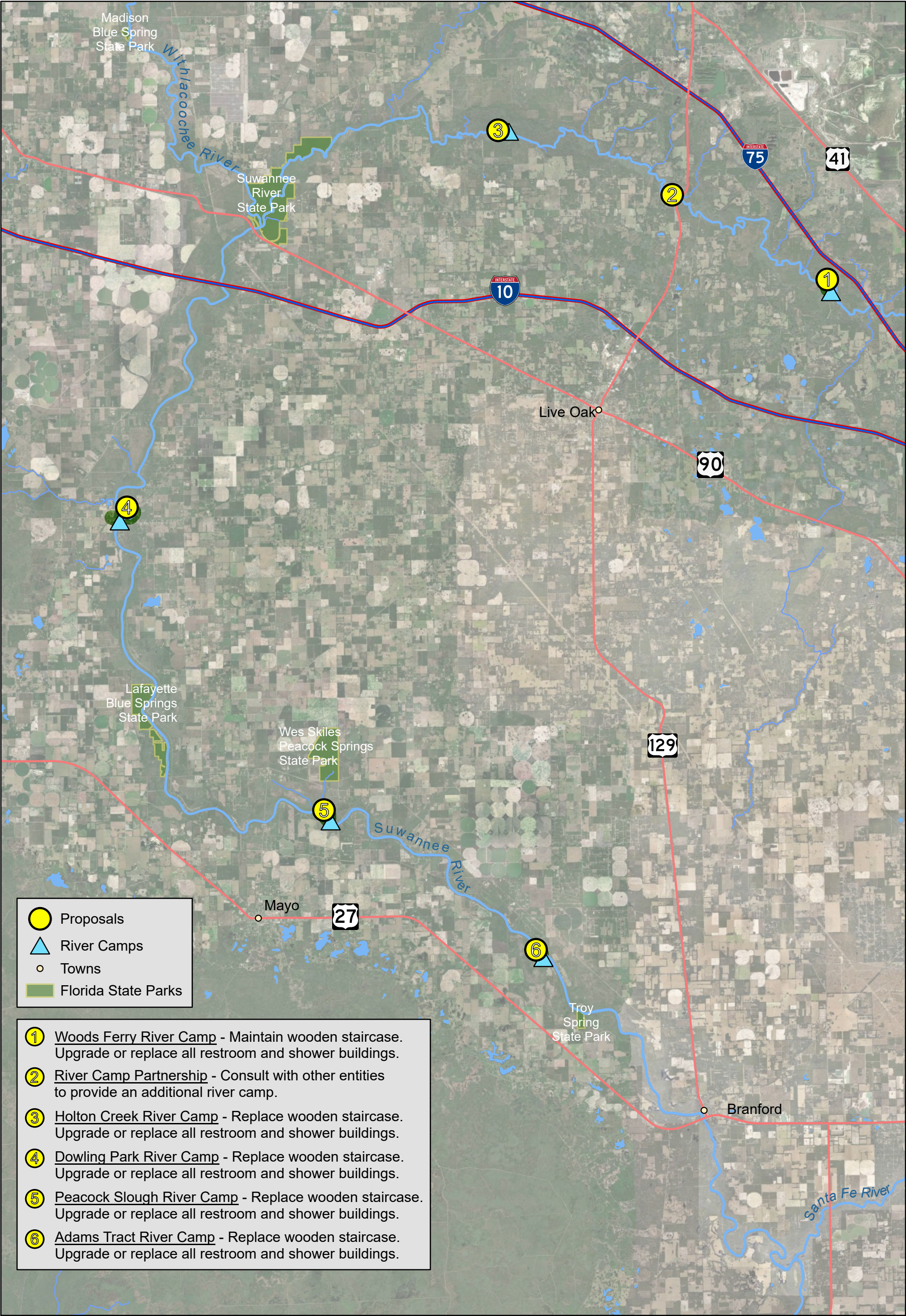
Actions:

- Replace and repair all wooden staircases.
- Upgrade or replace all restrooms and shower buildings.

The perpetually fluctuating volume and depth of the Suwannee River triggers widespread maintenance issues to wooden infrastructure within the floodplain. All wooden stairs along the trail should be replaced with stairs made from a durable construction material like metal, aluminum or lumber rock. This new material should be resilient to rising water levels and easy to maintain. 4

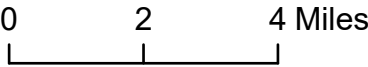
The Bureau of Design and Construction currently has a project to repair the Woods Ferry river camp's overlooks, boardwalks, and stairs. In the next 10-year planning cycle, the reconstructed boardwalk and platform should be maintained and repaired as needed.

At each river camp, the restroom and shower buildings warrant an upgrade or replacement due to periodic flooding and prolonged use. To reduce the number of structures and enhance routine maintenance operations, a combined ADA compliant restroom and shower unit should be installed. These units should remain portable to allow staff to remove them during severe flooding or storm events.



Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Conceptual Land Use Plan



River Camp Partnership

Objective: Consult with other entities to designate an additional river camp.

The Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park is located halfway between the Woods Ferry and Holton Creek river camps and hosts numerous events each month. Although camping is provided at the music park, oftentimes camping is not available for paddlers during these concerts and festivals. The music park provides an ideal central location for a designated paddling campsite as it is within the approximate 14-mile stretch between the two designated river camps. DRP should consult and collaborate with the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park and surrounding entities to provide an additional river camp. An additional river camp should only be sought if the resources are available, and management of these sites is feasible.

OPTIMUM BOUNDARY

Conservation lands primarily border the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. There are numerous agricultural operations in the vicinity, although the wilderness trail is well buffered from them. The trail is surrounded by numerous other water features including springs, lakes and other rivers, providing an expansive scenic recreational opportunity. Toward the southern end of the trail, in the Gulf of Mexico, the trail terminates into the Big Bend segment of the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail and is surrounded by the prominent Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

A priority for the paddling trail will be to add additional river camp sites and close the large gap between Adams Tract and Anderson's Landing. Another river campsite should be sought between Dowling Park and Fanning Springs. Small-scale Florida Forever Board of Trustees (BOT) projects and adjacent state parks should be considered when seeking an additional river camp location.

Several Florida Forever BOT projects are located along the Suwannee River. Acquiring a few acres of these has the potential to provide another river camp location, specifically the projects located near state parks. Florida's First Magnitude Springs project near Fanning Springs State Park would make an ideal location.

When investigating ideal locations for river camps, the proximity of park staff management and Suwannee River Water Management District maintenance should be considered. New parcels for river camps should only be sought and acquired if the resources are available and management of these sites is feasible. A cooperative partnership with external agencies or landowners may be suitable for adequate management and maintenance of any newly acquired river campsites.