

Tenoroc Public Use Area
Management Plan Amendment, January 2020
Polk County, Florida



Introduction: In Polk County, two miles northeast of Lakeland, the Tenoroc Public Use (TPUA), formerly known as the Tenoroc Fish Management Area, forms a continuous linkage of lakes and marshes, open grasslands, and wooded hills between the Green Swamp and the Peace River. The TPUA habitats contribute clean water to the Peace River, create an important refuge for wildlife, and serve as a destination for anglers, birdwatchers, hikers, and horseback riders. The TPUA demonstrates the results of intensive management and restoration and nature's regenerative powers.

Pit lakes and steep-sided spoil mounds, the result of phosphate mining in the 1960s and 1970s, have been transformed into quality fishing lakes and wooded hills for hiking and horseback riding. The odds of catching a quality bass and experiencing a peaceful fishing trip are high.

Also, TPUA is one of the gateways to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, and its diverse habitats provide productive year-round wildlife viewing opportunities. Over ten miles of hiking trails offer both easy ambles on level ground and more-challenging hikes on uneven terrain. In addition, a shooting center accommodating archery, air gun, rifle, pistol and shotgun shooters is located near the entrance to the area.

The TPUA is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to enhance fish and wildlife habitat and sustain ecological processes that contribute to the conservation of biological diversity and the extant fish and wildlife populations of the area. In conjunction with this emphasis, it is the FWC's intent to provide quality fish- and wildlife-based public outdoor recreational opportunities on the TPUA.

Location: The TPUA occupies approximately 8,386 acres northeast of Lakeland, in Polk County, Florida. It is easily accessible from Tampa to the west and Orlando to the east via Interstate 4 and from nearby cities within Polk County by means of several state highways and county roads. The city limits of Lakeland and Auburndale are adjacent to the TPUA along its southwestern, western, northern, and eastern boundaries; portions of the TPUA property are within the Lakeland city limits. Most of the remaining property boundaries are adjacent to unincorporated areas of residential or industrial development. There are two additional designated Fish Management Areas directly adjacent to the TPUA: the Polk County-owned 321-acre Saddle Creek Park, and the meandering 2,272-acre Lake Parker.

Acquisition History: In September 1982, Borden, Inc., donated 6,065 acres of its Tenoroc Mine to the State of Florida for conservation and recreation purposes. The original Lease Number 3570 from the Board of Trustees for this land (originally called the Tenoroc Recreation Area) was co-signed on June 24, 1984, by the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) of the former Florida Department of Natural Resources (now DEP), the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (now FWC), and Division of Forestry (DOF; now

the Florida Forest Service [FFS]) of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS). Due to budgetary cutbacks in 1992, the DRP obtained permission to terminate its management activities and responsibilities at the TPUA. Subsequently, both the FWC and FFS agreed to a “management release” by the DRP and the property was renamed the Tenoroc Fish Management Area. Temporary authority was given to both agencies to continue management of the property until a new lease was issued. This new lease from the Board of Trustees, number 3977, signed on May 23, 1993 for a fifty-year (50-year) term, designated the FWC the “Lead Agency” and the FFS, as a “Cooperating Agency.” In 1999, the FWC acquired 976 acres referred to as the Bridgewater Tract as an addition to the TPUA through the FWC Preservation 2000 Inholdings and Additions Acquisition Program. Additional land acquisitions were made using funds from the Non-mandatory Reclamation Trust Fund, and, through a land exchange with the City of Lakeland, and via a donation from the Williams Acquisition Holding Company, Inc. Lease number 3977 has been amended five times since 1993 to add these additional land conservation properties to TPUA.

Management Authority

The FWC is a designated lead managing agency for TPUA, with the FFS as the cooperating agency, under the authority granted by Lease Number 3977 from the Board of Trustees agent, DSL. Further management authority derives from Article IV, Section 9 of the Florida Constitution as well as the guidance and directives of Chapters 253, 259, 327, 370, 373, 375, 378, 379, 403, 487, 597 and 870 of the Florida Statutes. These constitutional provisions and laws provide FWC the authority to protect, conserve, and manage the State’s fish and wildlife resources.

Subsequent to Lease 3977 Amendment 4 of March 2013, FWC additionally shares co-lead management authority with DEP’s Division of Water Resource Management for all resources within the established boundary.

Land Cover and Vegetation

Due to its history of phosphate mining, most of TPUA is a highly altered area, with very little natural community components. Virtually all of the native habitats that originally existed at TPUA were severely impacted and extensively altered by the phosphate mining and mining operations that occurred in this portion of Polk County beginning in the 1940s. For these reasons, to date, FWC and DEP have elected to not have the TPUA mapped for historic natural communities by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). The FWC received Geographic Information System (GIS) land cover data, as well as current natural and altered community descriptions for TPUA from FNAI for inclusion in this management plan in June 2017.

The FWC’s standard comprehensive resource management approach for conservation lands generally focuses on the restoration of the form and function of Florida’s natural

communities and serves as the basis for overall resource management goals. The FWC and DEP will continue to evaluate and determine to what extent, if any, this approach to can be implemented for TPUA. The practicable implementation of FWC's concept on TPUA is substantially limited as a result of the extensive alteration of the area's landscape from past mining activities.

Eighteen natural and altered land cover communities have been identified by FNAI (Figure 7, Table 3). Native and invasive exotic plant species lists have been compiled for these land cover categories (Tables 4 - 5). Two imperiled plant species are known to exist on TPUA; Garberia (*Garberia heterophylla*) and scrub pinweed (*Lechea cernua*) are both listed as State Threatened by the DACS.

Management Plan: The TPUA management plan was approved on October 19th, 2018 and an update to this plan is due in October 2028. However, at this time, the FWC is submitting this management plan amendment, to outline and request facility changes and improvements that the FWC and the FFS plan to perform on the area. Below are details for two improvements occurring on the area. Project 1 outlines new facilities that the FFS is proposing to build on the area and Project 2 outlines a location change for a facility the FWC had proposed in the current management plan.

Management Activities:

Project 1: The FFS, Lakeland District is proposing a new forestry site on the TPUA. All construction, maintenance and utility costs related to the proposed facilities would be the responsibility of the FFS. Details of this project are further depicted in Figures 1 and 2. The FFS, with the support of the FWC and DEP's Division of Water Resources Management, are proposing this forestry site be located at the former resident trailer site on Tenoroc Mine Road, located just outside the gate to the TPUA. This location would provide the FFS with quick ingress/egress for fire response, with little or no impact to the daily FWC operations.

The FFS is proposing the following improvements:

- The construction of a modular which would provide an office facility for three rangers
- A metal pole barn
- A small storage shed
- Upgrading the existing power supply
- Installation of water culverts and road material to improve the existing driveway off the paved public roadway
- Installation of new gate(s) and fencing around the property
- Potentially installing a new septic system, as needed

Location of these improvements are provided in Figures 1 and 2. These improvements will provide the FFS with needed office and storage space for staff and equipment. These improvements will have no impacts on habitat management activities or continued management of the TPUA. The FWC and FFS will continue to work with the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources regarding any potential ground disturbing activities.

Project 2: Additionally, the current approved management plan has an objective in section 6.9 to construct an entrance station on the TPUA. In the management plan this site was to be located near the maintenance facilities on the area, however, the FWC has determined a more appropriate site for the entrance station. Further depicted in Figures 1 and 3, the new site, upon approval from the Acquisition and Restoration Council, will be located near the Tenoroc shooting range facilities off of Tenoroc Mile Road.

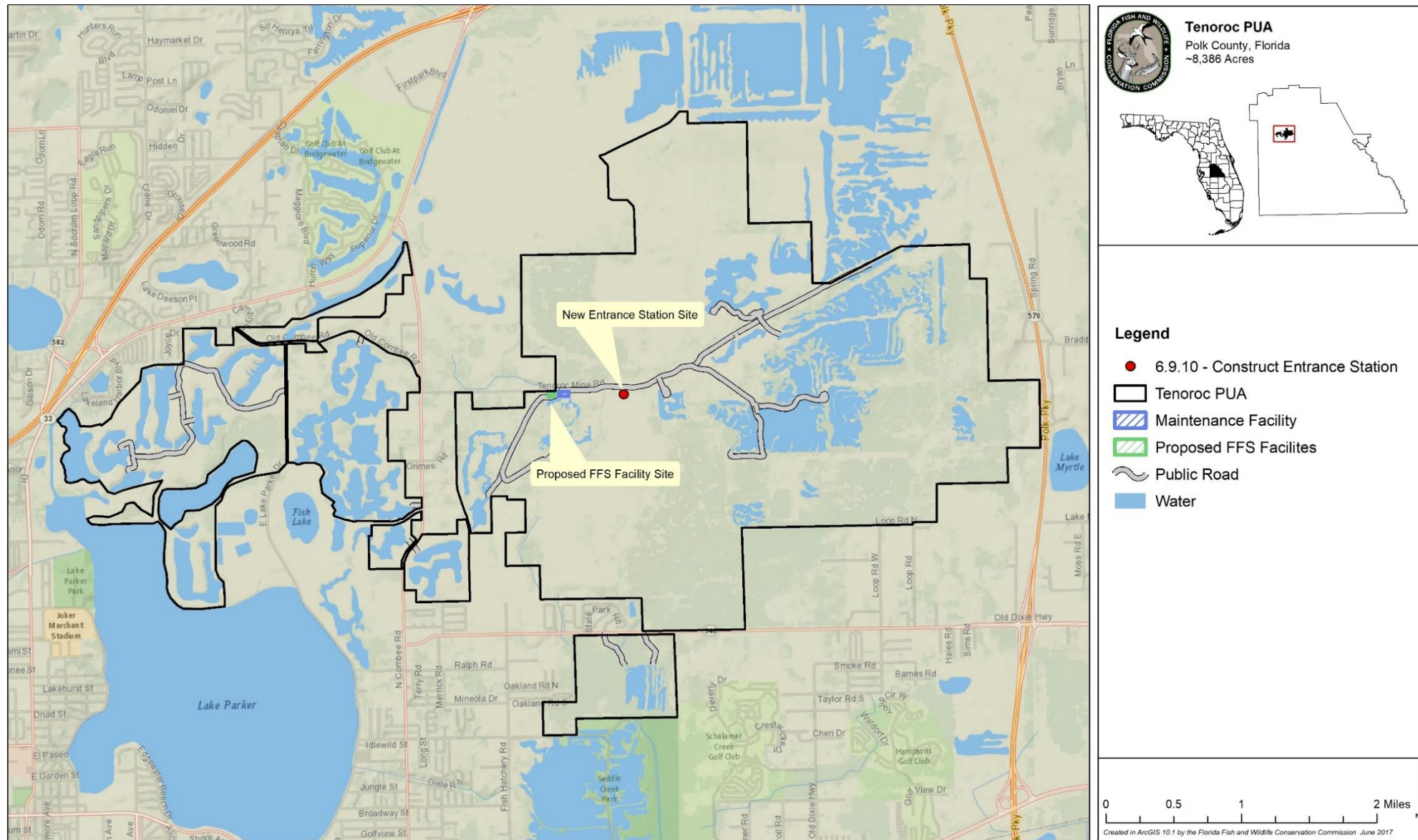


Figure 1. Facility Improvements on the TPUA

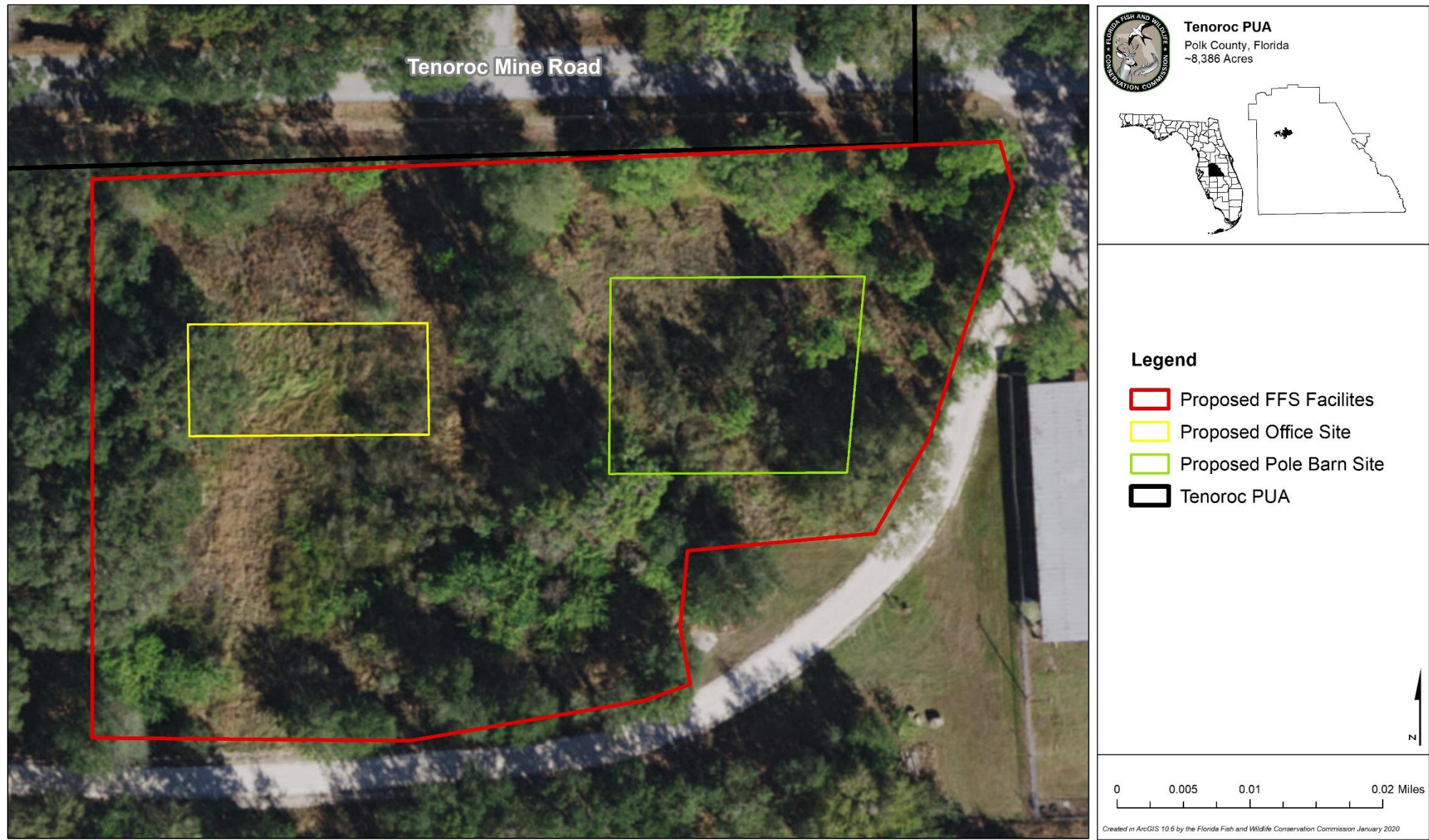


Figure 2. Proposed FFS Facility Footprint on the TPUA

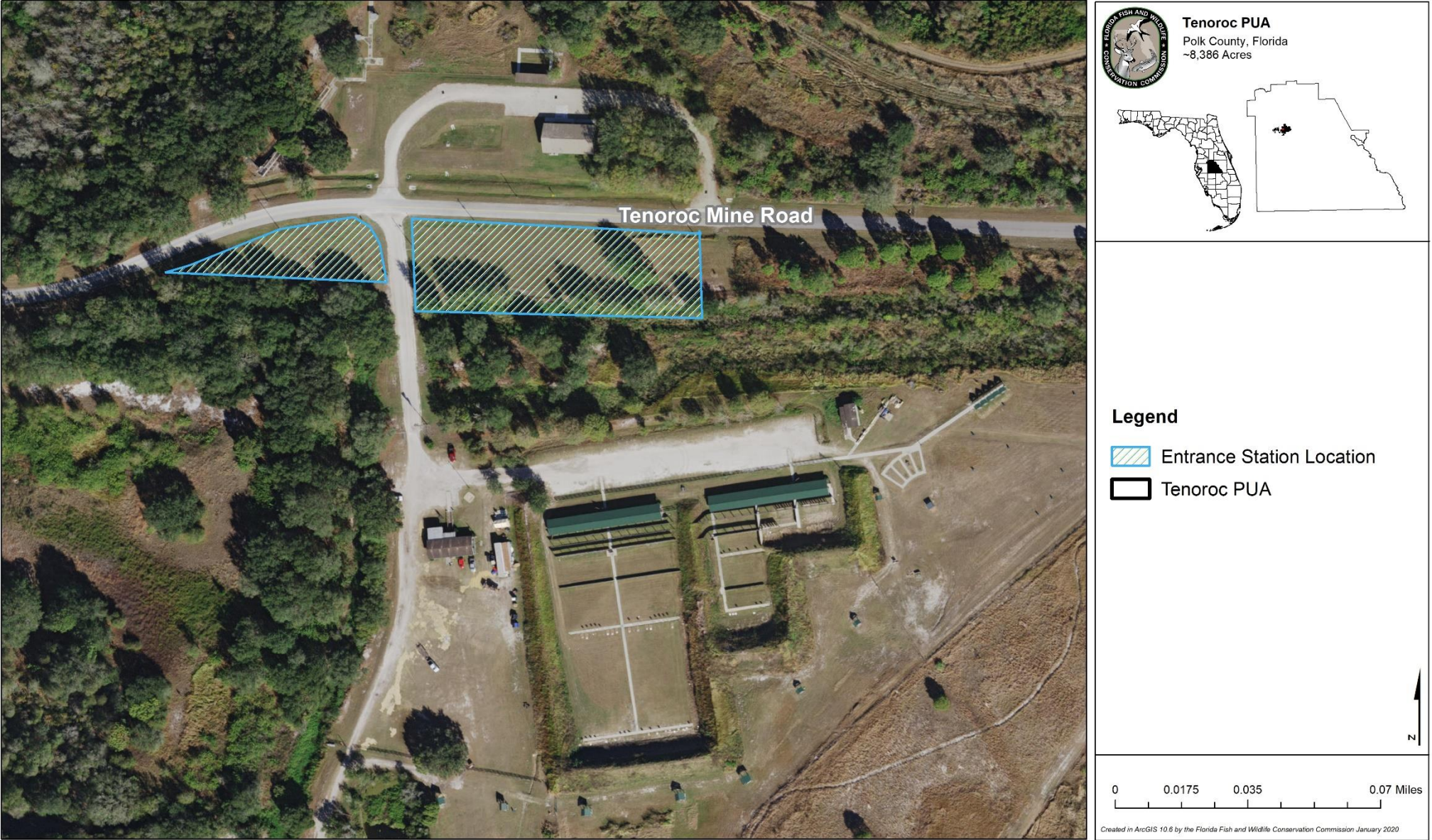


Figure 3. New Entrance Station Location on the TPUA