

**Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Forest Service**

**Land Management Plan Amendment**  
**to the**  
**John M. Bethea State Forest Ten-Year Land Management Plan**

September 29, 2020

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) is requesting ARC approval of a Land Management Plan Amendment to the John M. Bethea State Forest (JMBSF) Ten-Year Land Management Plan. The FFS plans to construct a new recreation area and an addition to an existing Equestrian Trailhead. The FFS-managed JMBSF is an approximately 37,700-acre, multiple-use state forest, located in Baker County. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida (BOT) and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) both hold an undivided 50% interest to the affected portion of the state forest.

The Equestrian Trailhead, located in the southeastern portion of the state forest within the Ellis Bay Tract, currently has a parking area with one (1) 7.5-mile multi-use trail. Two (2) primitive campsites are planned adjacent to the parking lot with minimal natural resource impacts. An elevated tent pad, fire ring, picnic table and campsite sign post is planned for each campsite. The existing overstory was planted with slash pine in 1993 and has been thinned. The groundcover consists mostly of broom sedge, palmetto, gallberry, shiny blueberry, fetterbush, wax myrtle and staggerbush. There is expected to be no impact to standing overstory trees and less than 1,500 square feet of impact to groundcover. The location of these sites will allow for equestrian users who wish to utilize their horse trailer with sleeping quarters and still be close to the campsite amenities.

The new River Road Recreation Area, located in the Moccasin Bay Tract, is on the eastern side of the state forest. This recreation area is designed to provide recreation opportunities such as primitive camping, fishing, canoeing, kayaking and wildlife observation. Components of this plan include the addition of a day use parking lot, creating four (4) primitive campsites, widening the road corridor, and constructing a boardwalk hiking trail.

The River Road day use parking lot provides access to the Saint Marys River from the trail and proposed boardwalk. To construct this parking lot, a quarter of an acre of planted pine trees will be cleared to widen the existing area by 40 feet. Lime rock will be added, and a perimeter parking lot fence will be installed. The addition of the four (4) primitive campsites includes building a 250-foot road into and around the campsite area with each campsite having its own parking. Each primitive campsite will have an elevated tent pad, fire ring, picnic table and campsite sign post. The expected impacted area is 1.2 acres with less than 0.2 acre of resources impacted composed of small midstory trees. The proposed widening of River Road an additional 20 feet will improve access for silviculture, land management and the public. A few scattered, naturally regenerated pine trees on the south side of this road will be removed; the total area impacted is approximately 1.2 acres. The final project for the proposed recreation developments is to construct an elevated boardwalk measuring 330 feet long by 4 feet wide that will take users to the edge of the Saint Marys River. Existing overstory in this bottomland forest ecological community consists of

sweetgum, loblolly pine, sweet bay, water oak, live oak, red maple, swamp tupelo, bald cypress and loblolly bay. Groundcover consists mostly of leaf litter, but species present include mixed ferns, grasses, titi, wax myrtle and palmetto. No large overstory trees are expected to be removed as the boardwalk will meander around large trees. Some small trees will be removed in the direct path of the boardwalk to keep from removing the larger ones. Total area impacted is less than 2,500 square feet.

FFS staff and a certified archaeological resource monitor (ARM) surveyed the proposed site areas for threatened or endangered species and possible historical and/or archaeological evidence. They concluded no known archeological sites occur in the project area, as well as, no evidence of threatened or endangered species were observed at the project site vicinity.

The recreational improvements included within this amendment were presented at our annual liaison committee meeting on October 22, 2019, and by consensus, the committee members approved the subject recreation improvements. FFS additionally consulted with the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), the Division of Historic Resources (DHR), and SJRWMD regarding the proposed activities; there are no resource conflicts or permits required. Consulting agency (FNAI, DHR, SJRWMD) response letters are included with this request, as are applicable maps and photos of the proposed sites.



1018 Thomasville Road  
Suite 200-C  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
850-224-8207  
fax 850-681-9364  
www.fnai.org

To: Todd Knapp

From: Dan, Hipes, Director, FNAI

Date: August 10, 2020

RE: Proposed Recreation Development at John Bethea State Forest

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We have reviewed the materials for the proposed recreation development at John Bethea State Forest. There are no records in the FNAI database for rare species in the vicinity of the project sites (equestrian trailhead, and River Road campsite, River Road corridor, River Road boardwalk). The plan appears to avoid disturbance to natural systems. We see no conflicts with any resources of concern.

Thank you for the review request.



Florida Resources  
and Environmental  
Analysis Center

Institute of Science  
and Public Affairs

The Florida State University

*Tracking Florida's Biodiversity*



## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

**RON DESANTIS**  
Governor

**LAUREL M. LEE**  
Secretary of State

Mr. Todd Knapp  
Florida Forest Service  
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
3125 Conner Boulevard  
Suite I-266, Mail Stop C-25  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650

August 21, 2020

RE: DHR Project File No.: 2020-4901  
Project: Developing two primitive campsites for an existing recreation area the Equestrian Trailhead  
Developing the new River Road Recreation Area. This recreation area includes creating: a parking lot,  
Four primitive campsites with individual parking spots, road corridor widening, and hiking trail boardwalk.  
John M. Bethea State Forest, Baker County

Dear Mr. Knapp:

Our office reviewed the referenced projects in accordance with Chapter 267, Florida Statutes, and implementing state regulations, for possible effects on historic properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), or otherwise of historical, architectural or archaeological value.

It is the opinion of this agency that ground disturbing activities, especially those such as tree removal, ditching and other major projects be monitored by someone who has completed our Archaeological Resource Management (ARM) training program. Once a project is complete, the monitor should submit the appropriate monitoring forms to this agency. In the event that unmarked human remains are encountered during permitted activities, all work shall stop immediately and the proper authorities notified in accordance with Section 872.05, Florida Statutes.

For any questions concerning our comments, please contact Robin Jackson, Historic Preservationist, Compliance and Review, by electronic mail at [robin.jackson@dos.myflorida.com](mailto:robin.jackson@dos.myflorida.com), or at 850.245.6496, or 800.847.7278.

Sincerely,

Timothy A. Parsons, Ph.D.  
Director, Division of Historical Resources and  
State Historic Preservation Officer





# St. Johns River

## Water Management District

Ann B. Shortelle, Ph.D., Executive Director

4049 Reid Street • P.O. Box 1429 • Palatka, FL 32178-1429 • 386-329-4500 • [www.sjrwmd.com](http://www.sjrwmd.com)

August 20, 2020

Dear Mr. Knapp,

St. Johns River Water Management District (District) staff have reviewed the materials you provided for the proposed recreation developments at John Bethaea State Forest. The District has no objections to these improvements. The District will not require any permits for this work. Thank you for extending the opportunity to review these plans on this partnership property.

Sincerely,

**Brian**

**Emanuel**

Digitally signed by Brian Emanuel  
DN: cn=Brian Emanuel, o, ou,  
email=bemanuel@sjrwmd.com,  
c=US  
Date: 2020.08.21 10:03:39 -04'00'

Brian Emanuel, Chief

Bureau of Land Resources

St. Johns River Water Management District

CC: Erich Marzolf, PhD, Director

Division of Water and Land Resources

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#### GOVERNING BOARD

Douglas Burnett, CHAIRMAN  
ST. AUGUSTINE

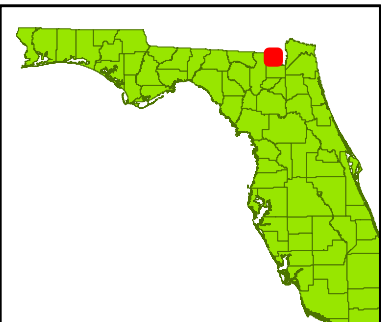
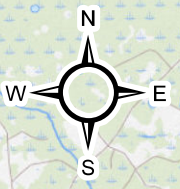
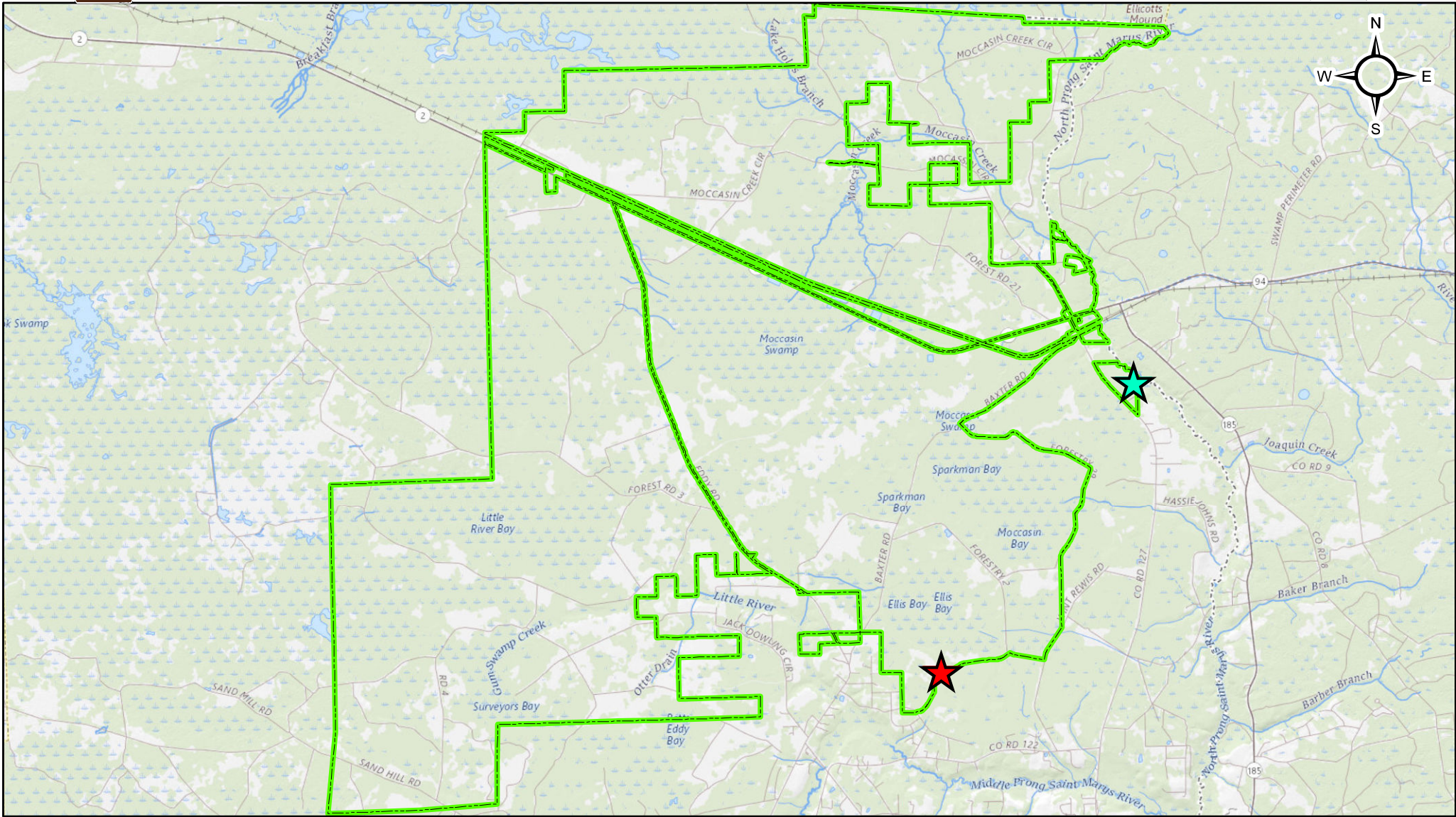
Ron Howse, TREASURER  
COCOA

Douglas C. Bournique  
VERO BEACH

Susan Dolan  
SANFORD



# John M. Bethea State Forest - Recreation Development Proposal



**DISCLAIMER**  
 This map is the product of the Florida Forest Service. No warranties are provided for data therein, its use, or its interpretation.



**Section, Township & Range:**  
 River Road Recreation Area - Sections 8, 9, & 17 of 1 North 21 East  
 Equestrian Trailhead Campsites - Section 36 of 1 North 20 East

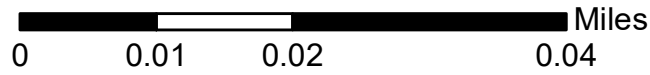
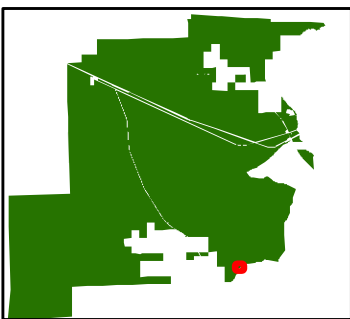
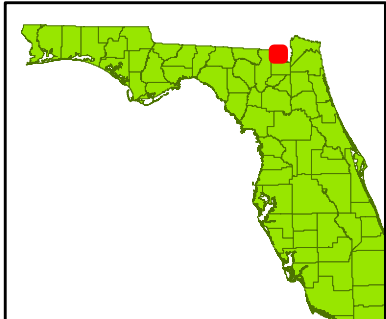
**Legend**

- Equestrian Trailhead Campsites
- River Road Recreation Area
- Forest Boundary





# John M. Bethea State Forest - Equestrian Trailhead Campsites Detail



**Section, Township & Range:**  
Section 36 of 1 North 20 East

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Created By: Ethan Darnell 4/21/2020

### Legend

	Proposed Campsites		Forest Roads
	Forest Boundary		Primary
			Secondary
			Service
			Tertiary





John M. Bethea State Forest - Equestrian Trailhead Campsite Development Plan Pictures

Campsite #1



*Equestrian Campsite #1 North View*



*Equestrian Campsite #1 East View*





John M. Bethea State Forest - Equestrian Trailhead Campsite Development Plan Pictures

Campsite #1



*Equestrian Campsite #1 South View*



*Equestrian Campsite #1 West View*





John M. Bethea State Forest - Equestrian Trailhead Campsite Development Plan Pictures

Campsite #2



*Equestrian Campsite #2 North View*

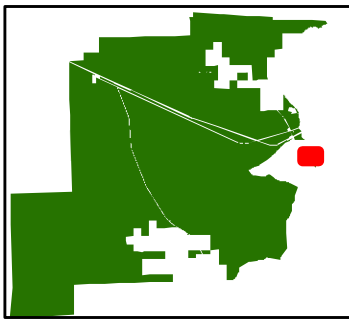
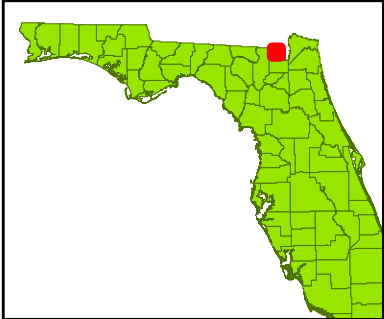
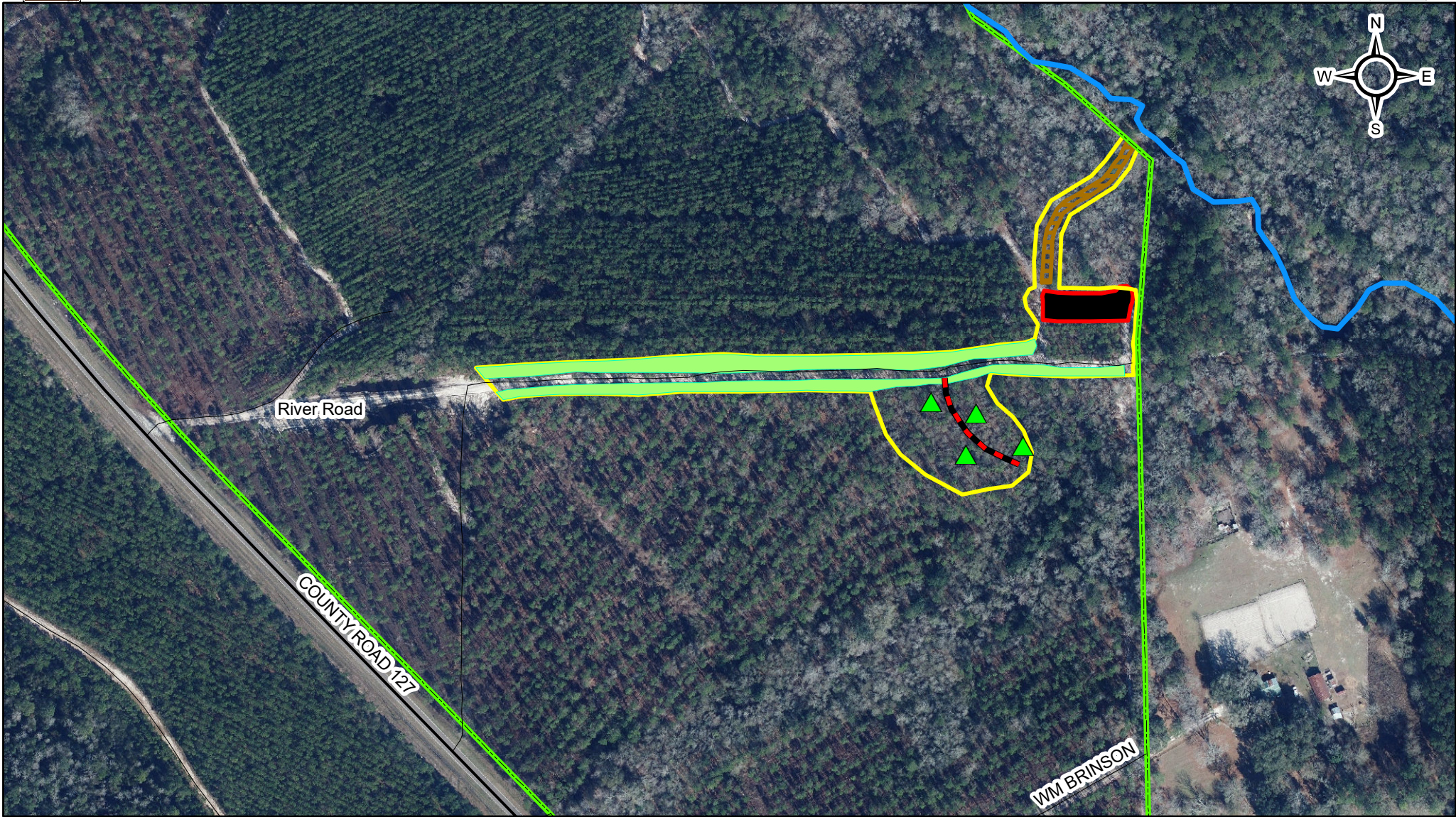


*Equestrian Campsite #2 East View*





# John M. Bethea State Forest - River Road Recreation Development Detail

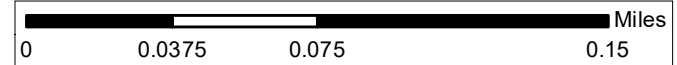


Section, Township & Range:  
 Sections 8, 9 & 17 of 1 North 21 East  
**Total Project Area: 3.74 Acres**

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 warranties are provided for data  
 therein, its use, or its interpretation.



Created By: Ethan Damell 4/21/2020



Legend	
	Project Area
	St Marys River
	Forest Boundary
	River Road Parking Lot
	Campsite Spur Road
	Proposed Campsites
	Road Corridor Widening
	Trail and Future Boardwalk





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Parking Lot Recreation Development Pictures



*Ingress to Proposed Parking Lot; South Road Loop*



*Ingress to Proposed Parking Lot; East Road Loop*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Parking Lot Recreation Development Pictures



*Proposed Parking Lot Location; Facing West*



*Main Area of Proposed Parking Lot; West End of Lot*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Parking Lot Recreation Development Pictures



*Parking Lot Cardinal Direction North*



*Parking Lot Cardinal Direction East*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Parking Lot Recreation Development Pictures



*Parking Lot Cardinal Direction South*



*Parking Lot Cardinal Direction West*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*River Road Campsite Spur Road Entrance*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*River Road Campsite Spur Road Path; Facing from River Road*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*River Road Campsite Cardinal Direction North*



*River Road Campsite Cardinal Direction East*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*River Road Campsite Cardinal Direction South*



*River Road Campsite Cardinal Direction West*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Corridor Widening Plan Pictures



*River Road Corridor Widening Beginning Point; Facing West from County Road 127*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Corridor Widening Plan Pictures



*River Road Corridor Cardinal Direction North*



*River Road Corridor Cardinal Direction East*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Corridor Widening Plan Pictures



*River Road Corridor Cardinal Direction South*



*River Road Corridor Cardinal Direction West*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*River Road Boardwalk Ingress*



*River Road Boardwalk Ingress*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*Proposed Path of River Road Boardwalk; Facing River from Ingress Point*





## John M. Bethea State Forest – River Road Boardwalk Development Plan Pictures



*Proposed Path River Road Boardwalk; Halfway Point Facing River*



Proposed Boardwalk Layout Location John M. Bethea State Forest



*Last 75-100 Feet to the river*



Proposed Boardwalk Layout Location John M. Bethea State Forest



*Red line shows where boardwalk will end; small swale on the river's edge is covered with high water in this photo, normal water levels would show a dry ridge here*