

Charlotte Harbor Estuary

Substantially Complete

Charlotte, Lee, Sarasota

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1972
<i>Project Acres</i>	47,197
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	41,311
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$35,040,125
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	5,886
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$99,704,989

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Charlotte Harbor Estuary is one of the largest and most productive estuaries in Florida and supports a vital recreational and commercial fishery. The Charlotte Harbor Estuary project aims to protect the remaining natural areas around Charlotte Harbor, conserving flatwoods, scrub, and salt marshes that support bald eagles, sandhill cranes, scrub jays, and manatees. Conserving the flatwoods and prairies behind the mangrove swamps and salt marshes along Charlotte and Placida Harbors will protect the water quality of the estuary, habitat for the Florida manatee and other rare wildlife, and provide residents and visitors with opportunities for hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and other recreational pursuits.

General Description

The project includes the ecotone of flatwoods and dry prairies, estuarine tidal marshes, and mangrove swamps along Charlotte Harbor and Placida Harbor. Less than ten percent of the area is disturbed. The area influences important manatee habitat offshore and provides habitat for rare animals such as the bald eagle, scrub jay, indigo snake, and gopher tortoise.

The project protects the water quality of the Charlotte Harbor estuary, designated as a series of Outstanding Florida Waters, and its recreational and commercial fisheries. There are two shell midden archaeological sites known in the project and the Coral Creek Mound is a possibly significant archaeological site. The area is vulnerable to development pressures including dredging and filling, invasive exotic plants, and damage by off-road vehicles.

This project provides an essential addition to lands previously acquired through the Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) program. Most of the lands are wetlands, including mangrove, salt marsh, and salt flats, but there are some mesic flatwoods.

The nearly intact uplands of the Myakka Estuary are primarily mesic flatwoods similar to those in the Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods project, 15 miles to the south, but different in that they include scrub and the Florida scrub jay. The project provides habitat for nesting bald eagles and sandhill cranes and buffers

the tidal marsh and waters of the Myakka River and Sam Knight Creek. Manatees use the adjacent waters heavily all year. The Myakka River estuary and the coastal wetlands associated with this project will support valuable commercial and recreational fisheries. The Florida Site File records five archaeological sites in this project. The project is surrounded by development and its uplands will inevitably be developed if not purchased.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida manatee	G2G3T2/S2S3
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>aboriginal prickly apple</i>	G1/S1
Smalltooth sawfish	G1G3/S1S2
<i>beautiful pawpaw</i>	G2/S2
American mink, southern Florida population	G5T2Q/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>iguana hackberry</i>	G5/S1
<i>lowland loosestrife</i>	G3/S3
Wood stork	G4/S2

Public Use

This project qualifies as a forest and preserve. Wetlands will limit outdoor recreation to such activities as fishing, canoeing, picnicking, hiking, and natural-resource education. The Myakka Estuary area has potential for such public uses as hiking, picnicking, camping, and nature appreciation.

Acquisition Planning

1980

In 1980, the Charlotte Harbor project was added to the CARL Priority list. The project, which was started in 1972 under the EEL program, consisted of approximately 17,854 acres of which 15,582 acres had been acquired under EEL. The remaining 2,272 acres had a taxable value of \$1,931,820. Essential tracts included Atlantic Gulf Communities (acquired in 1995) and Mariner Properties (unwilling seller but for wetlands).

1986

In September 1986, the LASC approved adding 840 acres (Alligator Creek) to the project. Sponsored by Charlotte County, the addition had four landowners (Starnes, City of Punta Gorda, Lowe, and Punta Gorda Isles) that owned most of the addition).

1988

In June 1988, the LASC approved the modification of the project design that retained 16-17 parcels from the original project (2215 acres) and added ten parcels in nine ownerships (3141 acres) for a total of



5,356 acres with a taxable value of \$2,302,000. To date, 17,141 acres have been acquired at a cost of \$8,070,838.

1992

On November 20, 1992, the LAAC approved adding three parcels, totaling 188 acres with an estimated tax value of \$66,086, to the project boundary. The Southwest Florida Aquatic Preserve (60 acres), and the TPL, (128 acres) sponsored the addition.

1994

On March 9, 1994, the LAAC approved the addition of 892 acres located in Lee County to the project boundary. The landowners, Burnt Store Company, Inc, sponsored the amendment with an estimated taxable value of \$2,119,000.

1995

On July 14, 1995, the LAAC approved a 750-acre addition with a taxable value of \$953,918; the SWFWMD sponsored the addition.

1998

On October 15, 1998, the LAAC designated additional acreage of Cape Haze/Charlotte Harbor as essential—approximately 174 acres consisting of the Rotonda Properties out-parcels, and the Cole and Lemon Bay Partners parcels. The Council also designated an additional 1,390 acres of the Myakka Estuary as essential. Previously, essential parcels had included all acreage acquired up to January 26, 1995, and the Cayo Pelau, Lowe, Ansin, and Freeland ownerships. The essential acreage also includes approximately 100 acres adjacent to the Amberjack Scrub site, an FCT project that has been acquired.

1999

On December 9, 1999, the LAMAC transferred this project to the Substantially Complete group.

2001

On April 6, 2001, the ARC combined the Cape Haze/Charlotte Harbor project with the Charlotte Harbor project. The total project acreage became 32,909. To date, 28,133 acres have been acquired at a cost of \$29,337,199. The updated acreage and cost include EEL, CARL, and Donations.

On December 5, 2001, the ARC combined the Cape Haze/Charlotte Harbor project with the Myakka Estuary project and renamed the project Charlotte Harbor Estuary. The total project acreage became 46,709 acres. To date, 32,736 acres have been acquired at a cost of \$35,461,055. The updated acreage and cost include EEL, CARL, and Donations.

2009

On June 12, 2009, the ARC approved a 79-acre addition owned by Burnt Store Land Group, LLC.

2010

On February 19, 2010, the ARC approved removal of 13 sites with 466 individual parcels totaling 2,260 acres containing residential/commercial structures or infrastructure.

2011

On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project in the Substantially Complete category.



2015

On October 16, 2015, the ARC voted to add the 5-acre Lemon Bay Midden parcel (\$48,322 tax assessed value) to the project to protect an archeological site the site of a historic Indian encampment and very large pre-Columbian midden. The site straddles two adjacent waterfront parcels with more than 800 feet of frontage on Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserve.

2017

In calendar year 2017, a total of .27 acres in this project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.

2019

On June 14, 2019, the ARC approved an addition of 8-acres known as the Don Pedro parcel to the Charlotte Harbor Estuary. The proposal in Charlotte County and had a 2019 tax assessed value of \$825,590. This amendment will add to the main portion of Don Pedro Island State Park and would be managed as part of the park if acquired. It will provide additional habitat for wading birds and gopher tortoise and enhance the protection of the Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserve. The land within the approved boundary was designated essential. It would be managed by the Division of Recreation and Parks if acquired.

Coordination

SWFWMD was an acquisition partner in the purchase of the Rotonda ownership (Cape Haze). The TPL has been an intermediary in the state's acquisition of two large tracts within the Charlotte Harbor project.

In 1995, the SWFWMD negotiated the purchase (CARL program reimbursed half) of the Atlantic Gulf Communities Corporation's ownership land within the Charlotte Harbor (704 acres) and Myakka Estuary (9,264 acres) projects.

Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Charlotte Estuary project are to conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and threatened species; to conserve, protect, manage, or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, and forests, in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish, or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect; to provide areas, including recreational trails, for natural-resource- based recreation; and to preserve significant archaeological or historical sites.

Achieving this objective will help to protect the water quality of Charlotte Harbor, its important nursery areas for fish and shellfish, its important recreational and commercial fisheries, and its manatee habitat. It will also provide the public with an additional area for natural resource-based recreation.

The project should be managed under the single-use language change made October 1999. Managers should control access to the project; limit public motor vehicles to one or a few main roads; thoroughly inventory resources; restore hydrological disturbances; burn the fire-dependent pine flatwoods in a



pattern mimicking natural lightning-season fires, using natural firebreaks or existing roads for control; strictly limit timbering in old-growth stands; and monitor management activities to ensure that they are preserving resources.

Manager(s)

DRP will manage most of the project west of SR 775. FFS will manage the western portion of the Myakka Estuary portion of the project, with DRP managing the east side. ORCP would manage the Lemon Bay Midden added in 2015 as part of the Aquatic Preserve.

Management Prospectus

Conditions affecting intensity of management

The project is surrounded by rapidly developing areas. Development in the area may alter the flow of water and nutrients by dredging, filling, and shoreline armoring. Urbanization of surrounding lands is also increasing, thereby justifying the need for an increased patrol and law enforcement presence.

Initially the project lands will be “high need,” requiring management to control exotic plants and animals and reducing illegal activities, such as poaching and trash dumping. Thereafter, routine management activities will be at the “moderate need” level. Lands to be used, and developed, as a land base to provide access to Don Pedro Island State Park will be “high need” areas. West of the Myakka River, there are no known major disturbances and the level of management is expected to be typical for that of a state forest.

Management goals and implementation

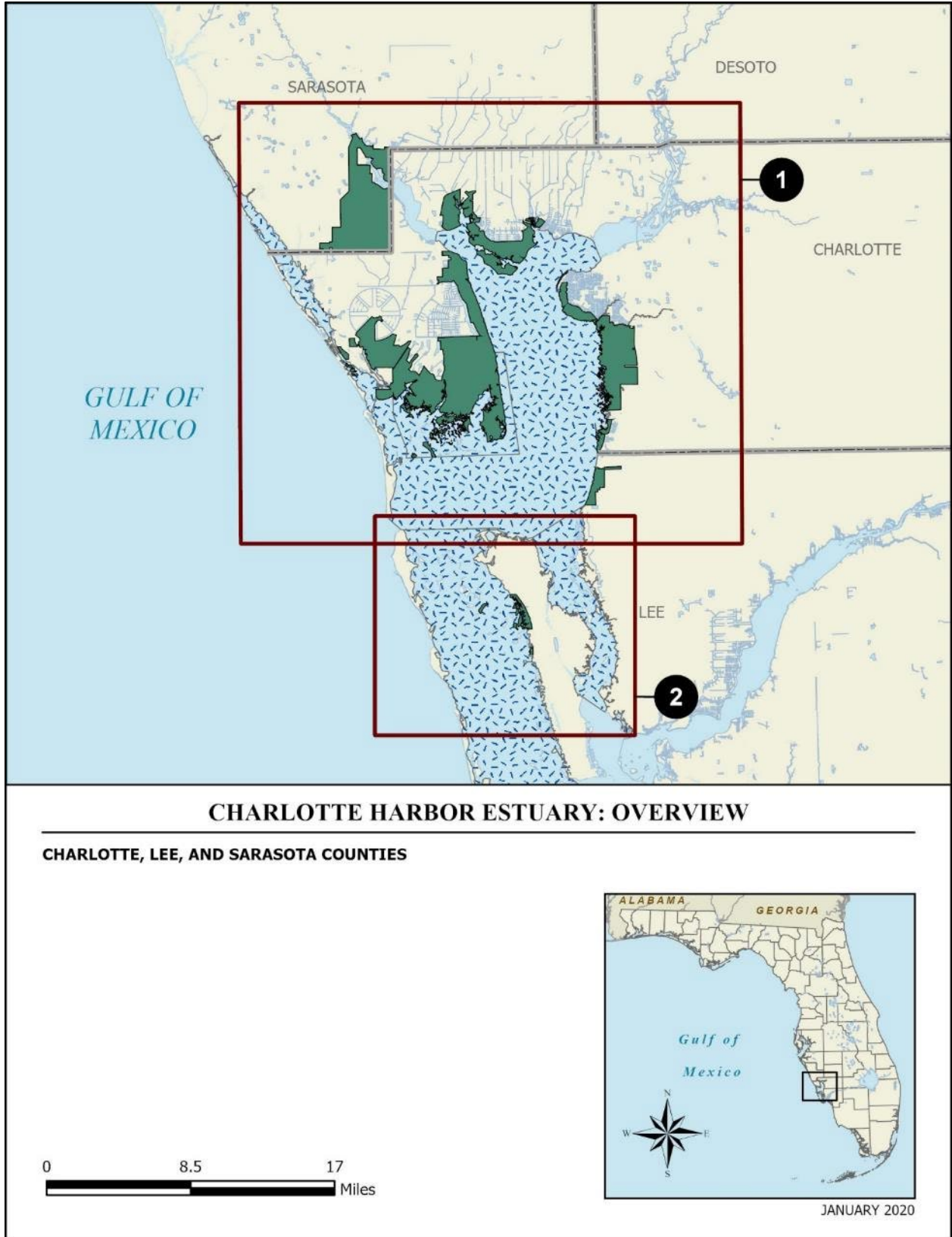
Within the first year of appropriate funding, management activities will concentrate on; property security, including fencing, posting, and patrols; public access, staff access for management activities such as prescribed fire and restoration projects, trash removal; and exotic plant and animal eradication. The DRP will provide appropriate resource based public access while protecting critical resources. The site will be biologically inventoried, and a management plan will be written within one year. Long range goals will be established by the management plan and will provide for ecological restoration and habitat maintenance. Prescribed and natural fires will be used to maintain the appropriate communities and associated wildlife populations. The resource inventory will be used to identify appropriate uses for the property, including management activities and public use. Areas disturbed by man and exotic plants will be restored to an “as natural as possible” condition. Infrastructure will be kept to a minimum and include only a sufficient number of structures to provide for management facilities, public access, and resource interpretation. After the core of the Myakka River forests are acquired, the FFS and DRP will provide public access for low-intensity, non-facilities-related outdoor recreation. FFS’s long-range plan is generally to restore disturbed areas to their original conditions, as far as possible, as well as protecting threatened and endangered species. An all-season burning program will use, whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines, and natural breaks to contain fires. Timber management will mostly involve improvement thinning and regeneration harvests.



Revenue-generating potential

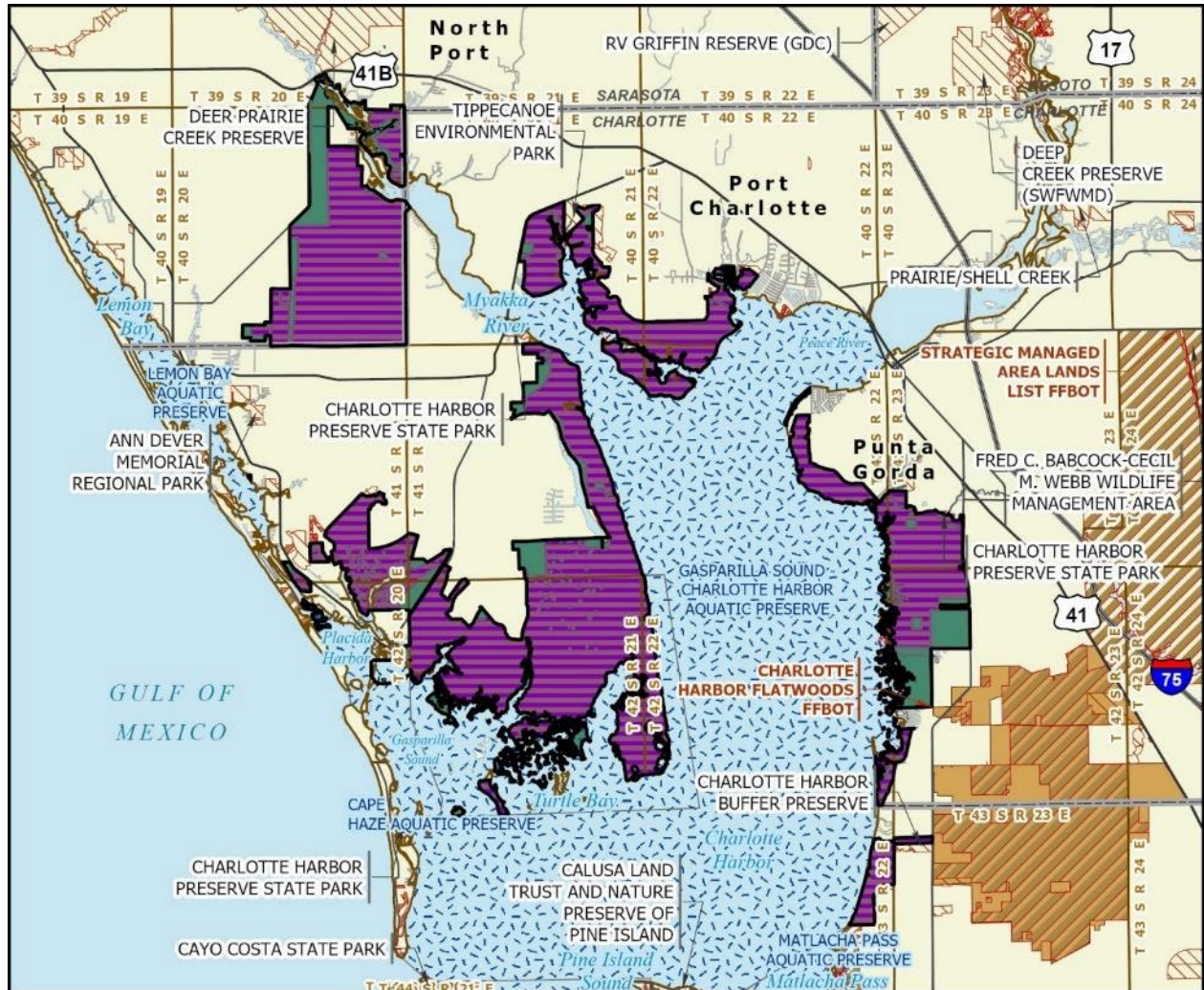
The forest land in the Myakka River estuary portion of the project has potential for a variable source of revenue from timber sales, but the revenue-generating potential for this project is expected to be low to moderate. The part of the project east of the river will provide indirect financial benefit to the state including enhanced water quality, fisheries, and public recreation opportunities. Limited revenue may be available through small timber sales to initially thin some stands and through some entrance and user permit fees in the future. Elsewhere, the project will benefit the state indirectly by enhancing water quality, fisheries and public recreation activities, and preserving natural and historical resources. Future user fees may also contribute limited revenue.





Map 1: FNAI, January 2020





CHARLOTTE HARBOR ESTUARY: MAP 1

CHARLOTTE AND SARASOTA COUNTIES

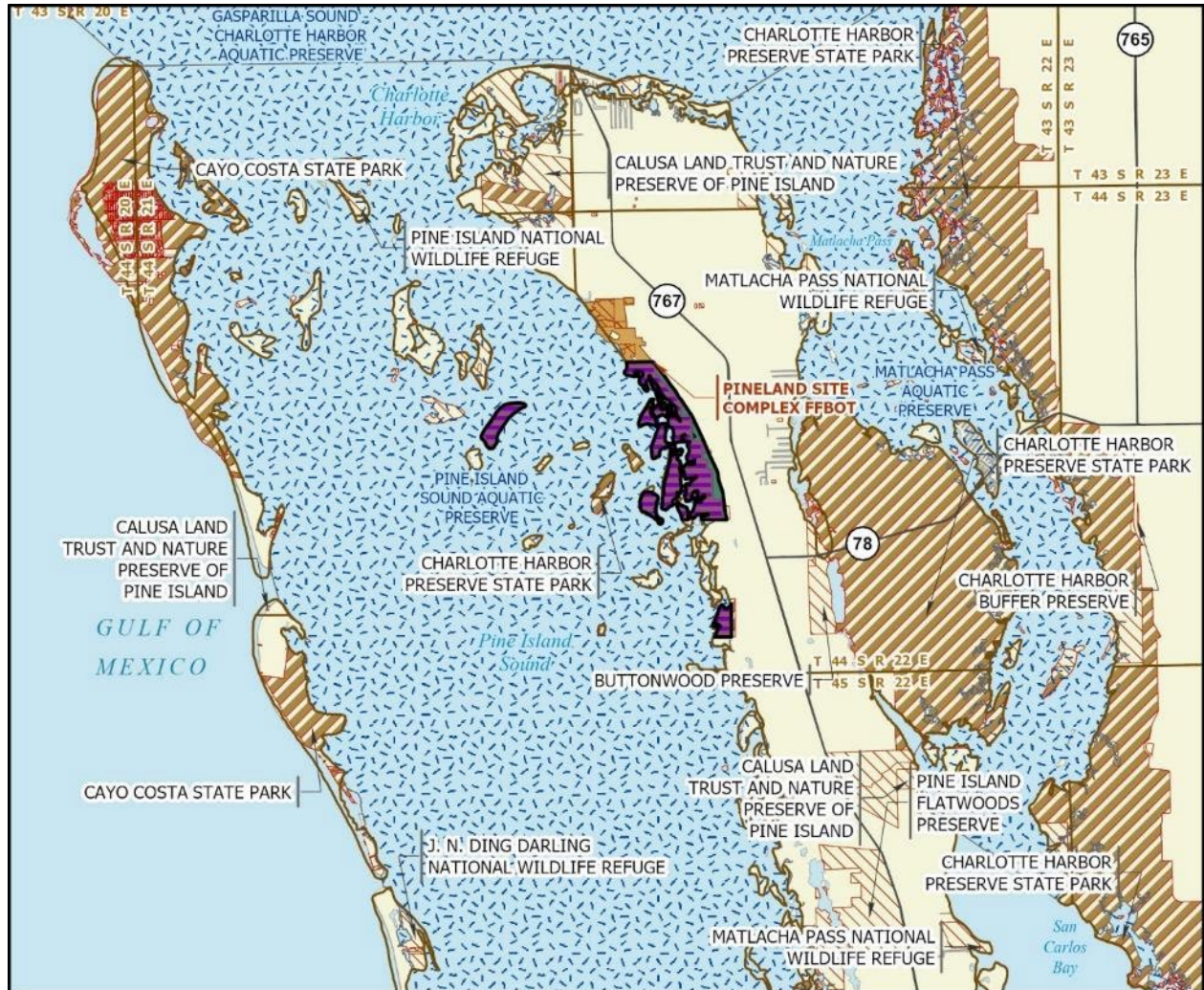
-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Aquatic Preserve



JANUARY 2020

Map 2: FNAI, January 2020





CHARLOTTE HARBOR ESTUARY: MAP 2

CHARLOTTE AND LEE COUNTIES

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Aquatic Preserve



JANUARY 2020

Map 3: FNAI, January 2020