

ITEM 5:

Consider a 10-year update to the Silver Springs Conservation Area Management Plan (Lease No. 4519)

LOCATION:

Marion County

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

Background

The Silver Springs Conservation Area (SSCA) is located in central Marion County along an eastern portion of the Ocala City limits. The SSCA consists of approximately 330 acres adjacent to the Silver Springs State Park across Baseline Road. The SSCA is located within a Marion County's Primary Springs Protection Zone and is located near the Silver River designated as a State Aquatic Preserve located within the adjacent Silver Springs State Park. Current public access to the property is through the park entrance on the southern boundary, and three service entrances occur on the eastern boundary (north gate, east gate and southeast gate). The service and maintenance entrances are located along State Road 35 in the northeast corner (North Gate), 0.2 miles north of the entrance to Silver Springs State Park (east gate) and on the southeast corner of the property (southeast gate). The SSCA is mostly fenced consistent with County Park standard fencing. Some sections of fence abut the property along the southern and western boundaries that have been erected by adjacent property owners. The SSCA was acquired as part of the Florida First Magnitude Springs Florida Forever Project in 2005. The SSCA property is owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund and leased to Marion County under Lease 4519.

Management Plan Overview

The SSCA has been utilized for passive recreation since 2006. The purpose of the SSCA is to protect the region's water resources (specifically Silver Springs) while providing passive recreational use and public access with minimal impacts. The site will be improved to continue public access and to stress the importance and connectivity of the site to the protection of one of Florida's first magnitude springs and provide recreational links to regional trail facilities and parks. The trail design was intended to take advantage of existing trails and roads with educational signage opportunities describing the natural systems of the Conservation Area, and its ecological value to the region's water resources. Other facilities, including the entrance roadway and parking, shall demonstrate minimal impacts to the ecological structure and function of the site.

Existing recreational facilities at SSCA include a short entrance road and signage, small parking loop, trailhead, and approximately 4.5 miles of existing hiking trails. Proposed recreational facilities include more defined parking to accommodate up to 20 spaces, with one space for a school bus. A picnic area with covered pavilion is proposed at the trailhead. The SSCA is included in the Marion County Outdoor and Recreation Plan as a critical link to existing and proposed parks and regional trail facilities. Connection to Silver Springs State Park and regional trails is proposed by way of the future Downtown Ocala Connector Trail. This trail will begin in Downtown Ocala to the west and enter through the main entrance of SSCA. The trail will follow through to the east side of the property directly across State Road 35 to the entrance of the State Park and connecting with the Silver Springs Bikeway.

The SSCA is currently undeveloped forest land consisting of natural communities: sandhill, depression marsh and successional hardwood forest (an altered land cover). Unpaved roads and trails occur throughout the property.

The Division of Historical Resources maintains a Master Site File that documents many of Florida's archaeological and historical features. A review of information obtained from the Florida Master Site File disclosed there are no previously identified archaeological or historic sites within the SSCA. While there are no previously identified archaeological or historic sites within the SSCA, there are known sites immediately adjacent to the property, as well as the extensive archaeological and historic remains within the nearby Silver Springs State Park. This suggests that the SSCA has the potential to contain cultural resources, but the property has never been formally surveyed.

The Florida Legislature requires that all land management plans include long and short-term (ST) goals. These goals must be measurable objectives, and ST goals must be achievable within a two-year planning period. Pursuant to changes to Section 253.034, F.S., the Division of State Lands tracks the status of ST goals in each land management plan approved since July 1, 2016. The ST goals from this management plan are included as part of this item.

Public Involvement

Marion County solicited public input by conducting an advisory group and public workshop meeting on September 12th, 2019 and October 1st, 2019, respectively. The purpose was to present the management plan to the public. The purpose of the advisory group meeting was to provide the Advisory Group members the opportunity to review and discuss the management plan. The draft management plan was available to the public through the Marion County website.

Surplus Lands

The evaluation of this site has determined that no portion of the property is to be declared surplus.

State Land Management Review Team

This property has not been subject to a recent review by an inter-agency land management review team.

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE

APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____

DEFER

WITHDRAW

NOT APPROVE

OTHER:

Silver Springs Conservation Area
Land management plan short term goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action
I	Administration and Law Enforcement	A	Administration and Law Enforcement	N/A	N/A
III	Resource Management	A	Continue exotic/invasive plant surveys and eradication efforts.	1	Focus on perimeters near adjacent home sites and species listed in Table 2-3.
III	Resource Management	A	Continue exotic/invasive plant surveys and eradication efforts.	2	Successional hardwood forest.
III	Resource Management	B	Continue trash removal	N/A	N/A
III	Resource Management	C	Update the prescribed fire management plan.	N/A	N/A
III	Resource Management	D	Continue prescribed fire program.	N/A	N/A

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action
III	Resource Management	E	Develop and implement environmental monitoring plan for:	1	Listed plant and animal species.
III	Resource Management	E	Develop and implement environmental monitoring plan for:	2	Exotic/invasive species.
III	Resource Management	F	Develop restoration plans that address hardwood removal.	1	Sandhill and successional hardwood forest.
III	Resource Management	F	Develop restoration plans that address hardwood removal.	1a	Prescribed fire
III	Resource Management	F	Develop restoration plans that address hardwood removal.	1b	Chemical or mechanical removal to facilities prescribed fire.
VII	Support and Maintenance	A	Maintain existing trails that are to be utilized as service roads and trails.	N/A	N/A

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action
VII	Support and Maintenance	B	Maintain perimeter and interior fire lines.	N/A	N/A
VII	Support and Maintenance	C	Maintain public use facilities.	1	Entrance and trail signage.
VII	Support and Maintenance	C	Maintain public use facilities.	2	Trails
VII	Support and Maintenance	C	Maintain public use facilities.	3	Parking areas.
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	A	Maintain perimeter and MU fire lines.	N/A	N/A
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	B	Install/rehabilitate perimeter fencing in selected areas if needed.	N/A	N/A

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	C	Maintain/expand public use and recreational facilities.	N/A	N/A
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	1	Paved Downtown/Ocala connector trail.
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	2	Public information kiosks.
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	2a	Sandhill restoration.
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	2b	Sinkhole/karst aquifer recharge importance.
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	2c	Prescribed fire importance.

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	2d	Listed species (gopher tortoise).
VIII	Tasks/Capital Improvements Physical Assets	D	Develop plans for:	2e	Bear habitat information.

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised Sept_2019_MWE.

Executive Summary

The Silver Springs Conservation Area, (Conservation Area), formerly known as the Seldin-Korman Tract, was purchased by the State of Florida in May 2005 as part of the Florida Forever Program through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Bureau of Land Acquisition. This 330-acre property was one of the largest intact, undeveloped privately-owned tract of land adjacent to Silver Springs State Park. The property was acquired for the express goals of preserving and protecting land around the spring and Floridan Aquifer from the effects of commercial, residential, and agricultural runoff; clear-cutting and mining; and unsupervised recreation (Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund [TIITF], May 2005).

The State of Florida subsequently entered into a lease with Marion County in 2006 for management of the Conservation Area property with the requirement that a management plan be prepared and approved by the State of Florida. This document is the second 10-year Land Management Plan (LMP) prepared for Conservation Area for the State of Florida.

A key component of the plan is for the subject property to be developed, managed, and maintained as a passive park. Because of its adjacency to Silver Springs State Park and other notable conservation lands and parks in the region, the Conservation Area is an important connector in the Marion County Parks and Recreation Master Plan trail system.

Upland and wetland communities on the site include sandhill, sinkhole, successional hardwood forest, and depression marsh. Most of the site contains well-drained soils and karst geology, therefore, protection of groundwater recharge is the top priority. These natural communities support a diverse array of plant and animal species and are relatively undisturbed by historical land uses. Most of the site is disturbed by varying degrees of fire suppression and historical timbering. Partnerships with other entities will be explored to continue prescribed fire and other management tools for the duration of this plan. Because of the urban interface, the management team has had very few ideal weather conditions to apply prescribed fires. Exotic invasive species eradication efforts have been ongoing since 2007 and will continue.

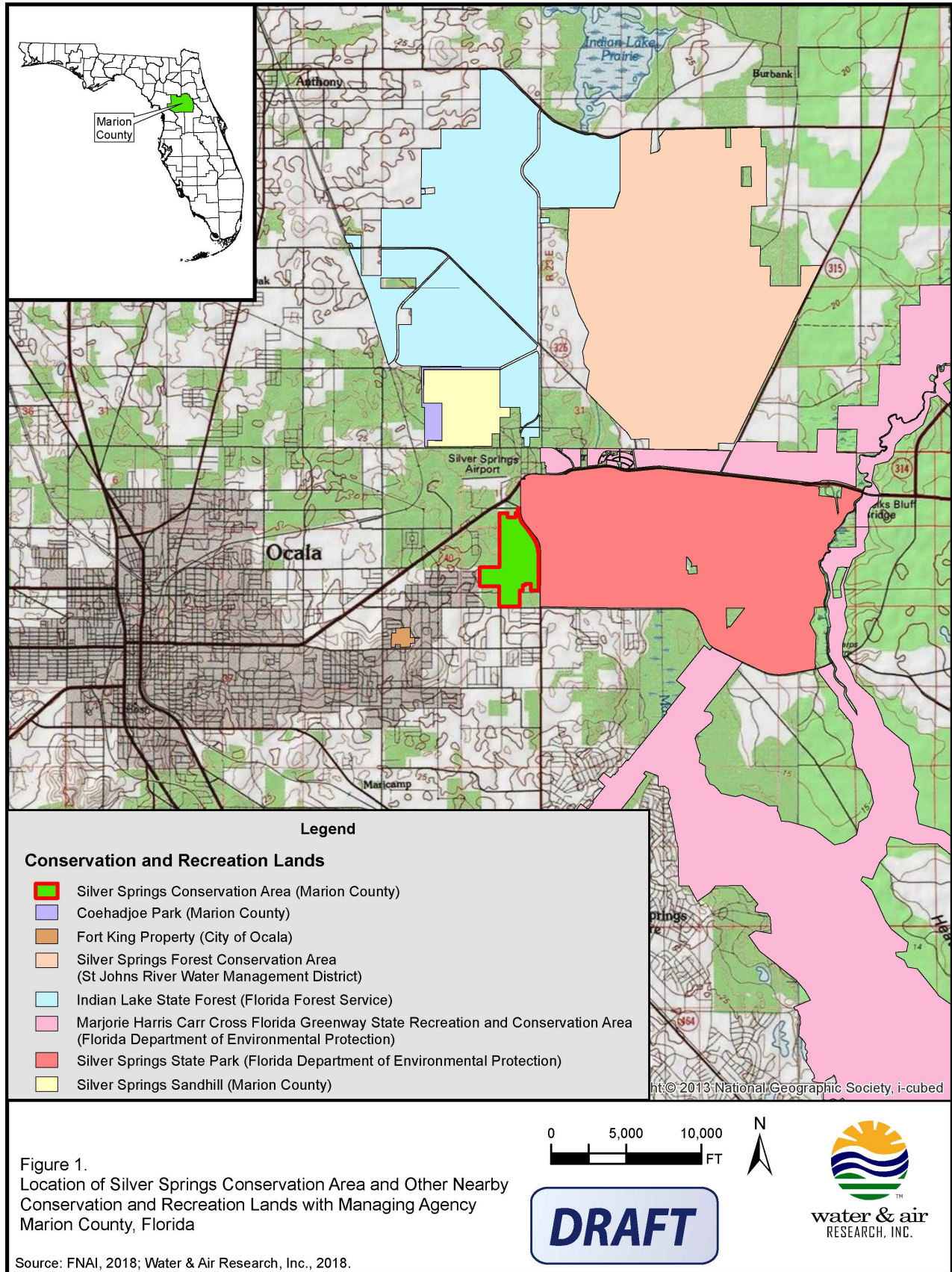
Recreation use is projected to increase in the near future with the implementation of the proposed components of the Marion County Recreation Master Plan. This plan will recommend expansion of the trail system on the Conservation Area to link the Downtown Connector Trail to Silver Springs State Park. This will require a short multiuse paved trail designed to allow biking through the site, connecting to the other biking facilities.

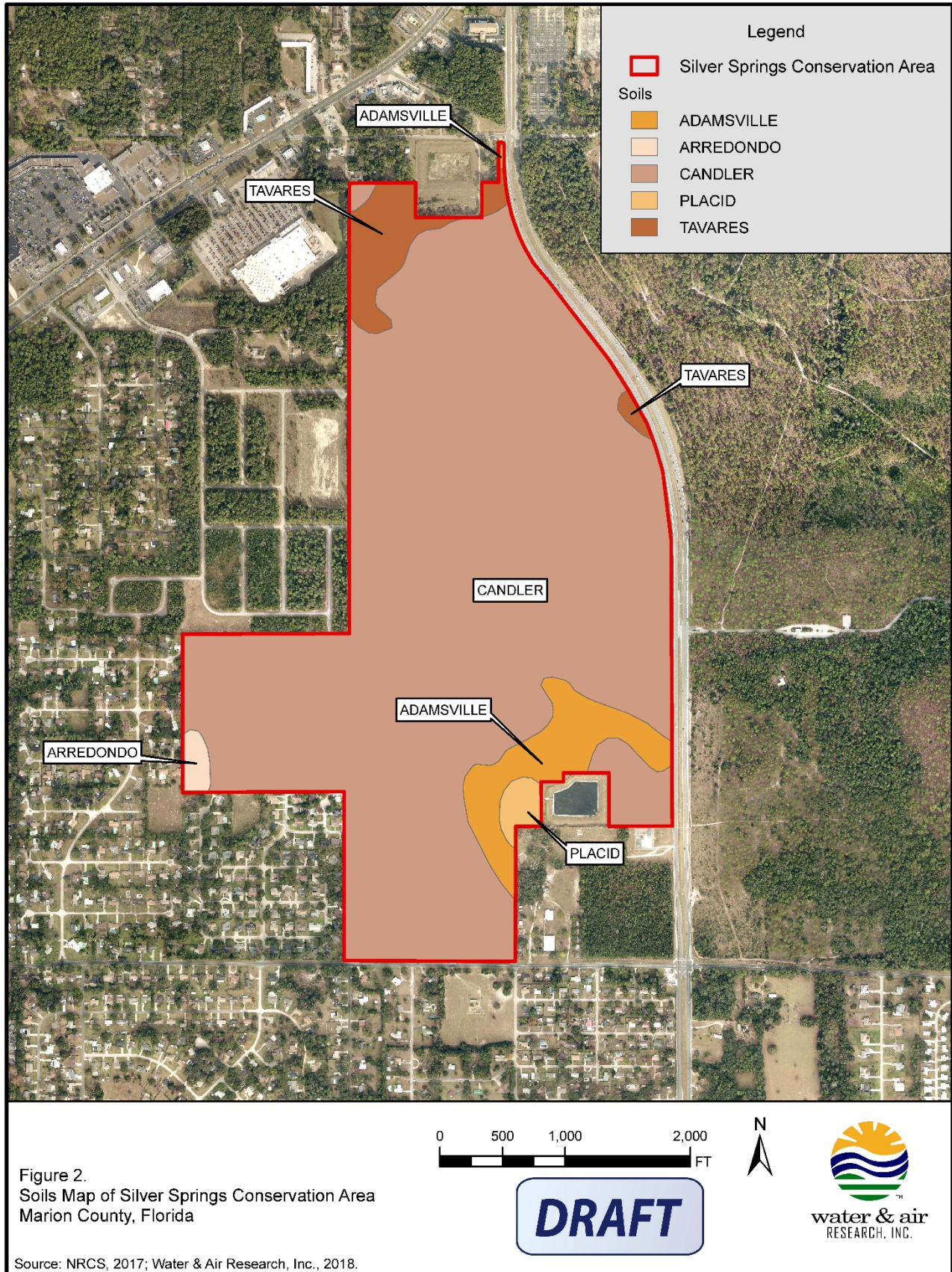
Management tasks accomplished over the duration of the last LMP include:

- 40 acres of prescribed fire in Fire Management Unit (MU) 2
- Exotic invasive plant and animal species surveys have been conducted twice per year.
- Exotic invasive plant species that have been observed are all under maintenance status and continued monitoring and maintenance has been an ongoing task.
- Most of the trails recommended in the 2007 LMP were established and have been regularly maintained, some proposed neighborhood trail connections have yet to be established.
- Entrance and way-finding signage has been added or upgraded.

Silver Springs Conservation Area Unit Management Plan – FINAL DRAFT

This LMP addresses the items on the Management Plan Compliance Checklist found at the beginning of this document, per Florida Statutes and the Florida Administrative Code provided by the FDEP, Office of Environmental Services, Division of State Lands, and is organized accordingly.





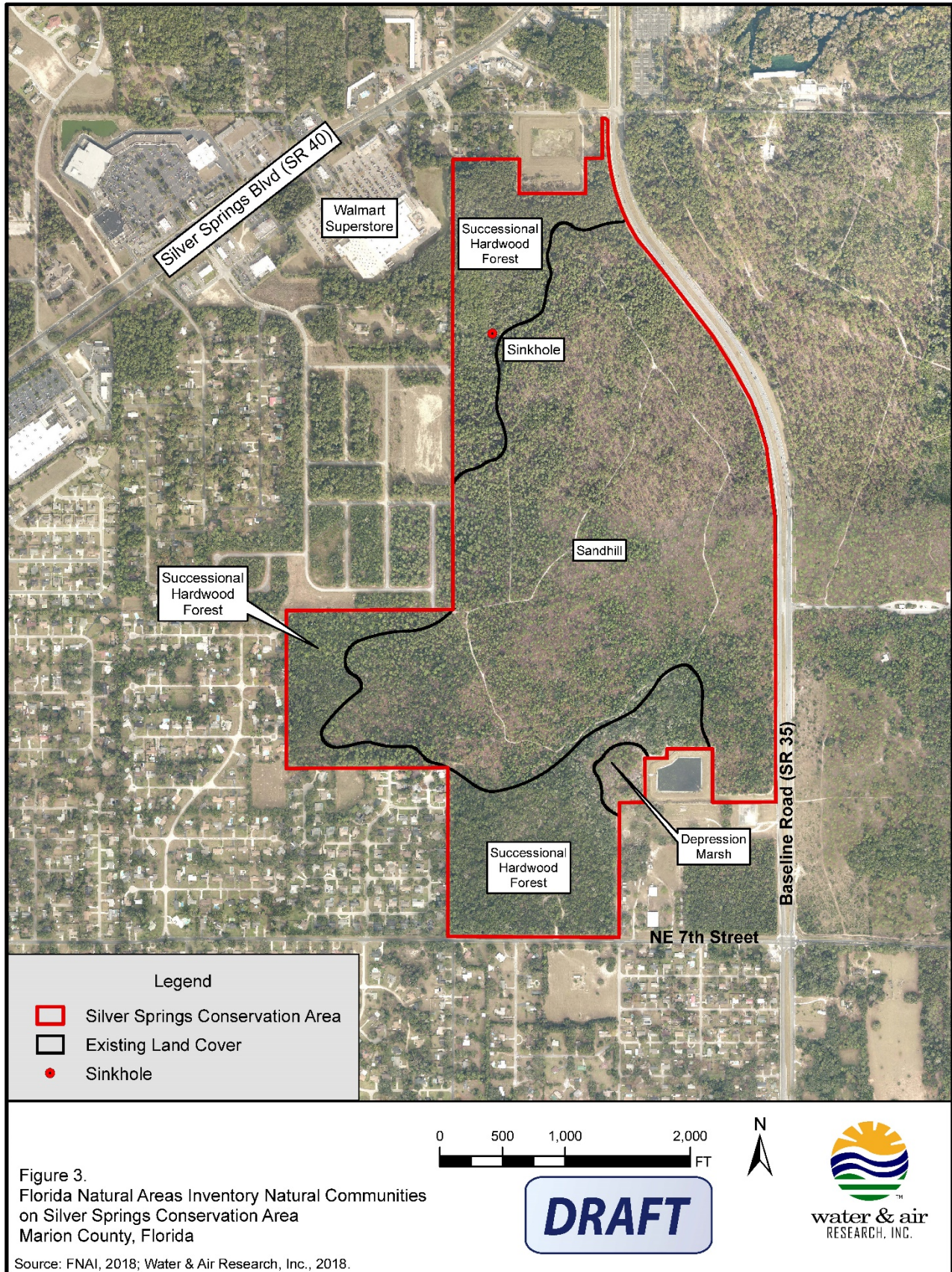


Figure 3.
Florida Natural Areas Inventory Natural Communities
on Silver Springs Conservation Area
Marion County, Florida

Source: FNAI, 2018; Water & Air Research, Inc., 2018.

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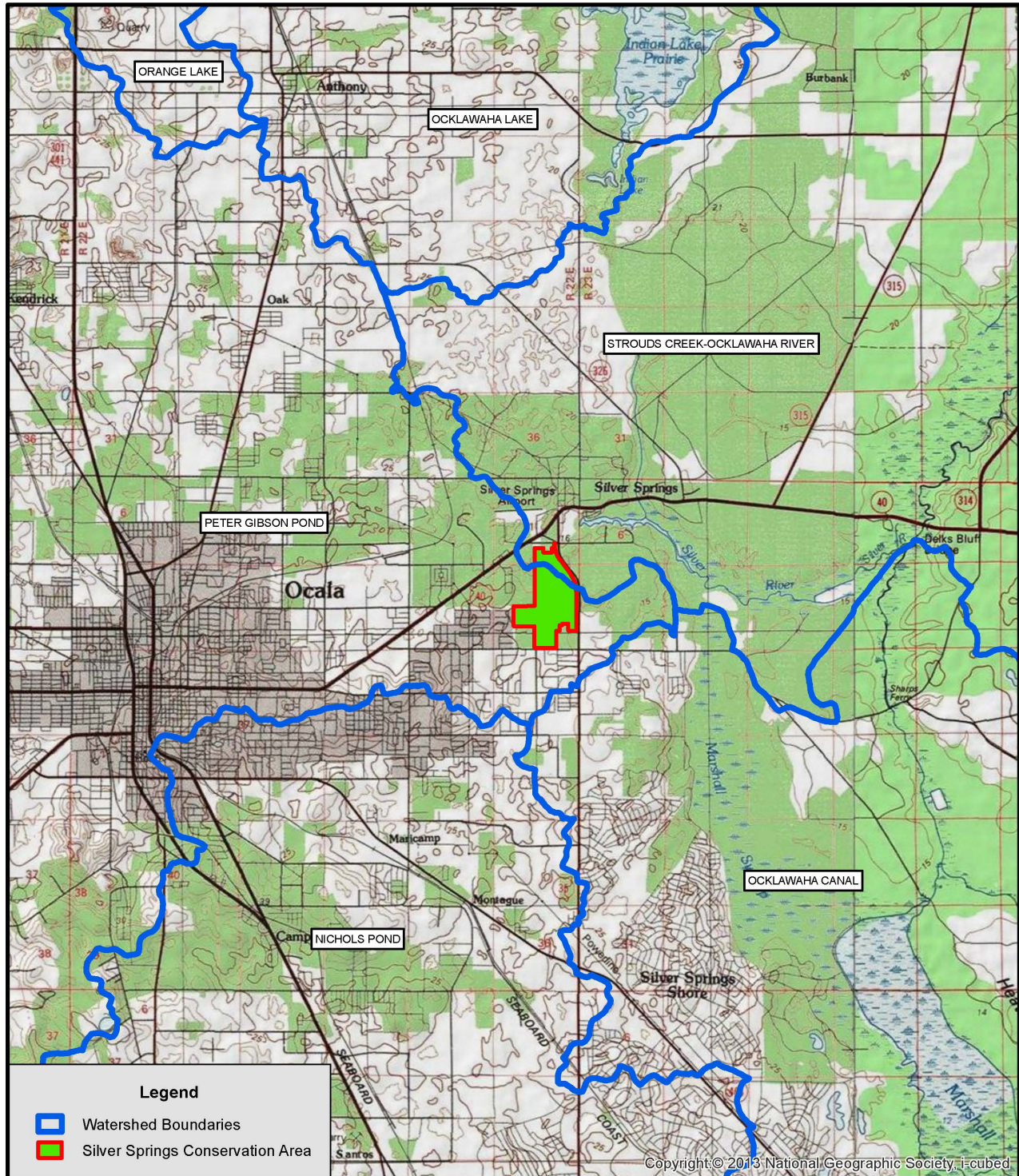
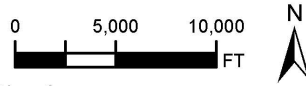


Figure 4.
Watershed Boundary Map in the Vicinity of Silver Springs Conservation Area
Marion County, Florida



DRAFT

Source: U.S.G.S., 2005; Water & Air Research, Inc., 2018.

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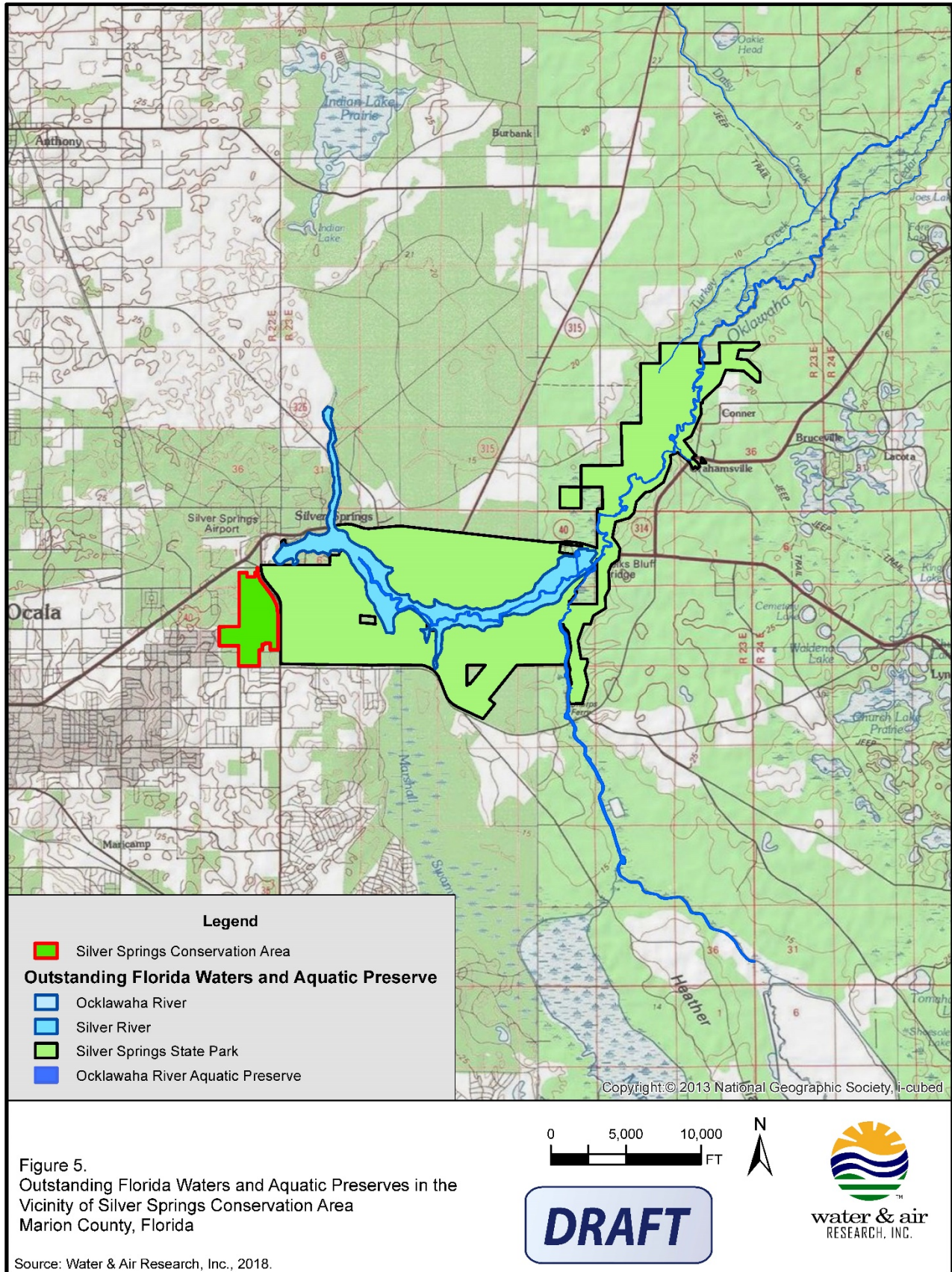
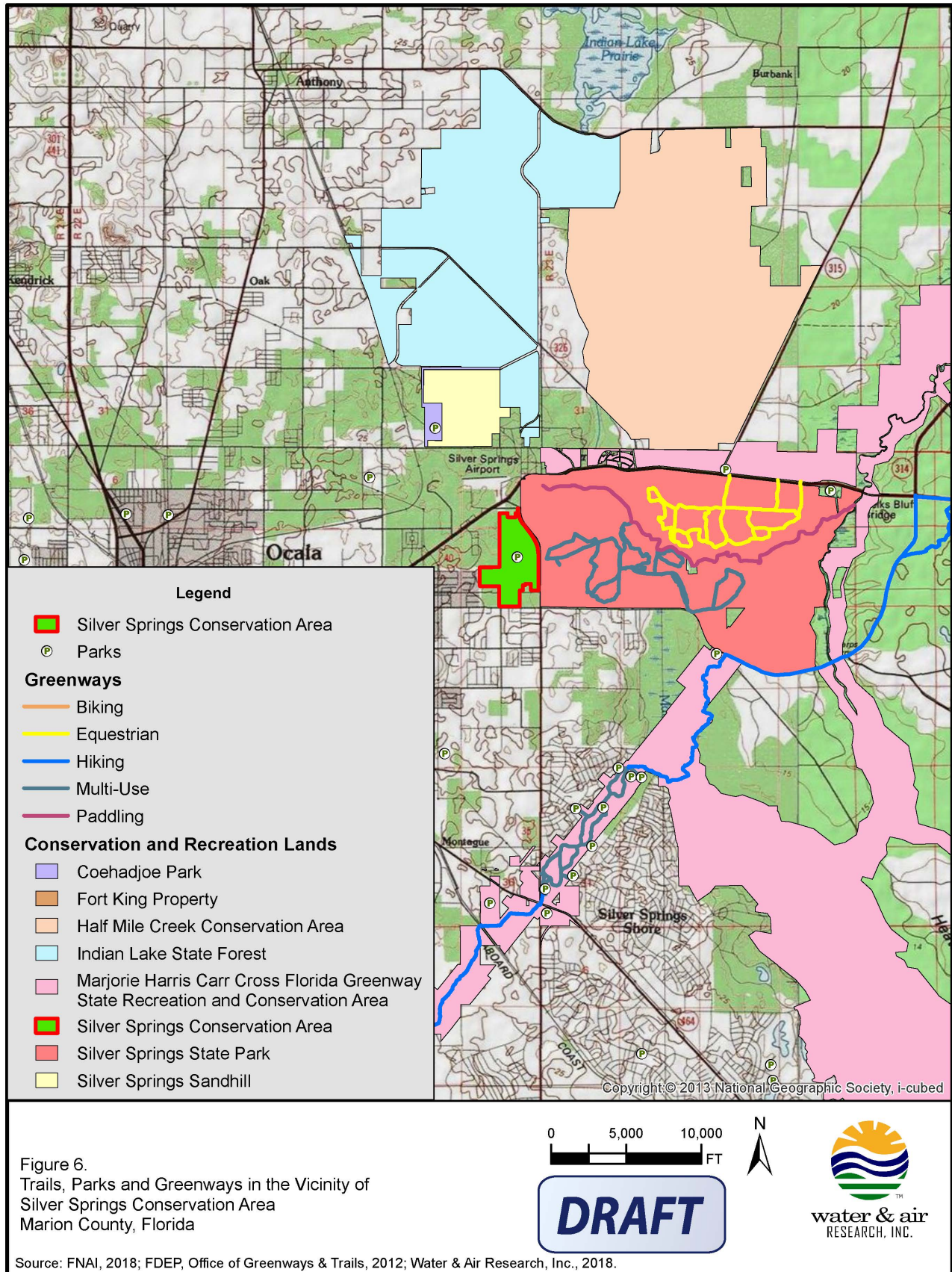


Figure 5. Outstanding Florida Waters and Aquatic Preserves in the Vicinity of Silver Springs Conservation Area Marion County, Florida

Source: Water & Air Research, Inc., 2018.

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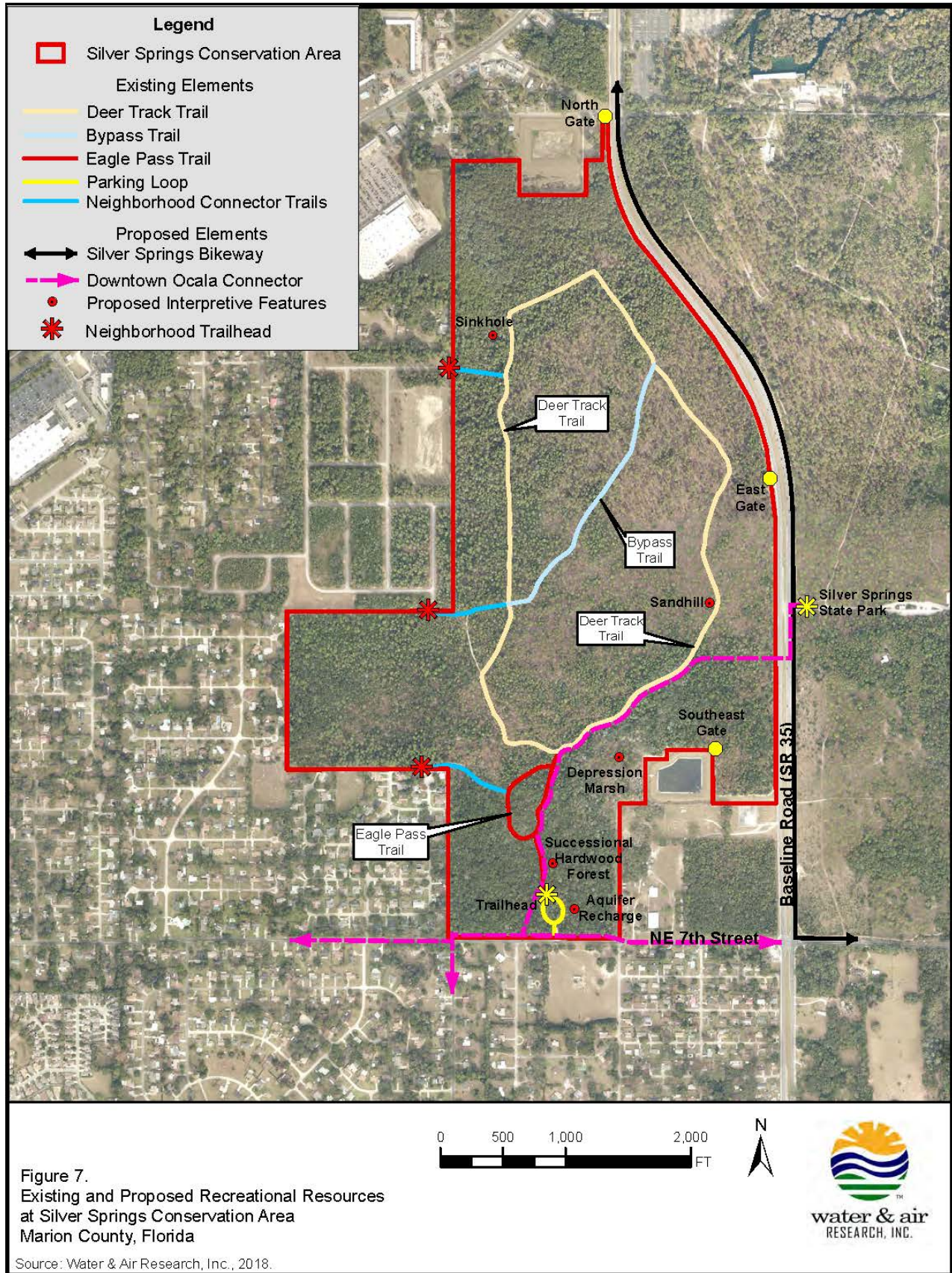


Figure 7.
Existing and Proposed Recreational Resources
at Silver Springs Conservation Area
Marion County, Florida

Source: Water & Air Research, Inc., 2018.

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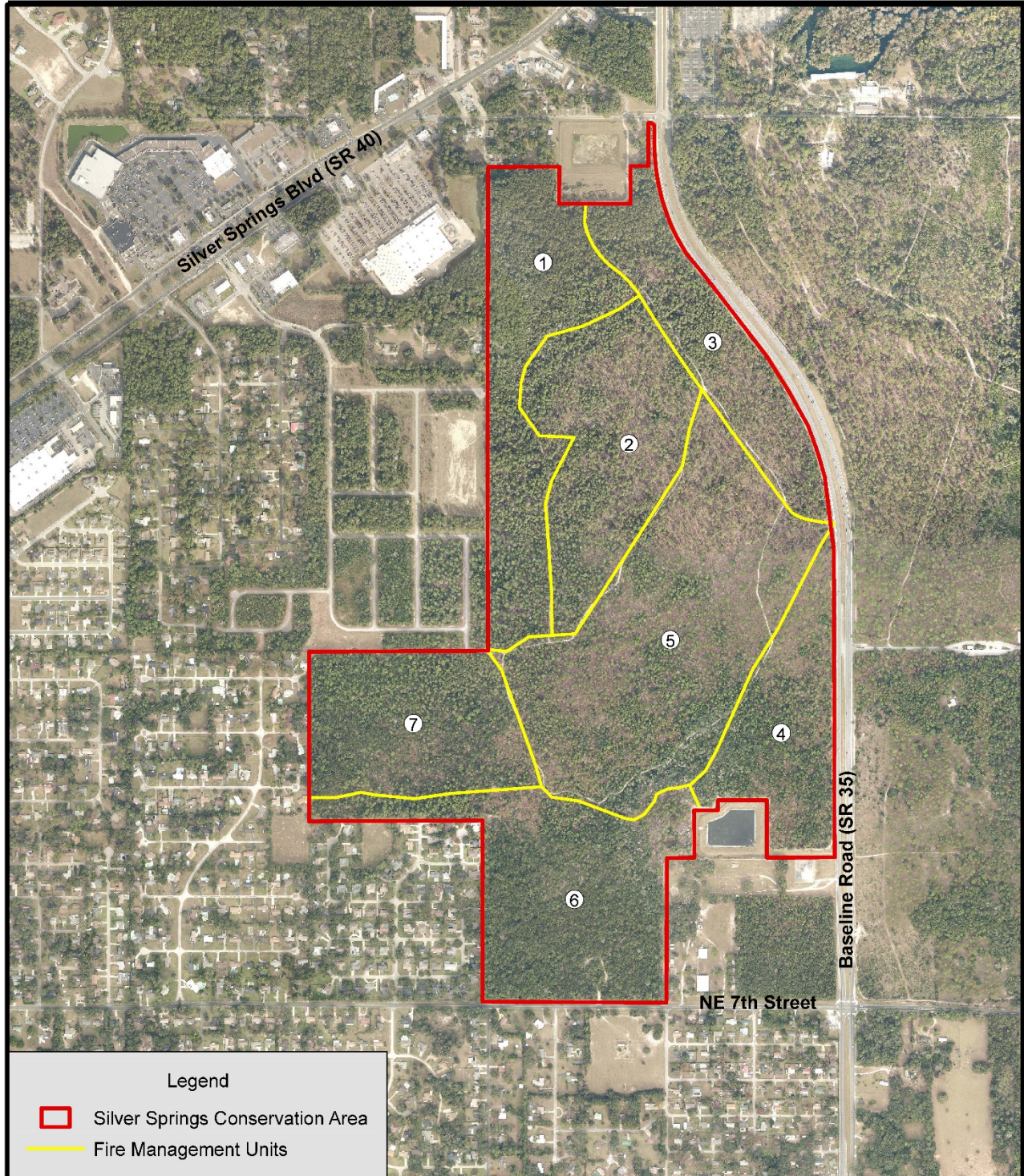


Figure 8.
Fire Management Units at Silver Springs Conservation Area
Marion County, Florida

Source: Water & Air Research, Inc., 2018.



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