

**ITEM 6:**

Consider an update to the Ichetucknee Springs State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 2459).

**LOCATION:**

Columbia and Suwannee counties

**APPLICANT:**

Florida Park Service (FPS)

**STAFF REMARKS:**

*Background*

Ichetucknee Springs State Park (ISSP) is in Columbia and Suwannee counties, five miles northwest of Fort White off U.S. Highway 27 and State Road 238. The park centers around the six-mile-long Ichetucknee River, a major tributary of the Santa Fe River. Ichetucknee Springs State Park was initially acquired on January 6, 1970. Currently, the park comprises 2,531.87 acres. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund holds fee simple title to the park and on September 4, 1970, leased the property to DRP under a 99-year lease (Lease number 2459).

The purpose of ISSP is to provide opportunities for resource-based outdoor recreation and nature appreciation for the enjoyment of Florida residents and visitors, while protecting and preserving representative examples of upland karst topography, aquatic cave environments, and water resources within the Ichetucknee and Santa Fe watersheds.

*Management Plan Overview*

The Florida Natural Areas Inventory has identified thirteen distinct natural community types at ISSP. They also identified six altered landcover types. The predominant natural communities are sandhill and upland mixed woodland. Fourteen species of imperiled plants and twenty-two species of imperiled animals have been identified at ISSP.

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 fifty-one archeological sites and three resource groups within the park. These sites represent diverse cultural resources that range from the Paleoindian era to the Spanish Colonial Aboriginal contact era and to the 19th and 20th Century mill and phosphate mine era. Additionally, there are five historic structures recorded in the park.

The recreational uses available at ISSP include swimming, tubing, snorkeling, scuba diving, canoeing, picnicking, fishing, and nature study. Swimming is most popular at the Ichetucknee headspring in the North Use Area. The North Use Area also serves as the launch point for tubing and paddling. Picnic tables and a few shelters are available in both the North and South use areas. An interpretive center is in the South Use Area.

Traditionally, the largest recreational use of the park has been tubing. Accommodating the emphasis on tubing and given the linear form of the park's primary natural resource, the park has maintained two distinct entrances and use areas: the north entrance and use area and the south entrance and use area. Existing recreational facilities at both use areas have been developed primarily for use during the tubing season. During most of the year, a concessionaire-operated

tram system connects the Midpoint Launch and the South Takeout, with a shuttle operating between the north and south ends. At peak use hours during the summer months, parking and user access related challenges occur at the north entrance and use area.

Outside of tubing season, the park remains popular for a variety of activities including paddling, nature walking, picnicking, and general nature study. Current development at the North Use Area provides access to activities other than tubing and is utilized year-round. A paddling concession operates near the upper launch. Existing development at the South Use Area is designed to facilitate the great influx of tubers and swimmers from May through September and experiences a significant drop in utilization from October through April.

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.

While the ten-year management plan serves as the basic statement of policy and future direction for each park, several annual work plans provide more specific guidance for Division of Recreation and Parks staff to accomplish many of the resource management goals and objectives of the park. Where such detailed planning is appropriate to the character and scale of the park's natural resources, annual work plans are developed for prescribed fire management, exotic plant management and imperiled species management. Annual or longer-term work plans are developed for natural community restoration and hydrological restoration.

#### *Public Involvement*

DRP solicited public input by conducting a public workshop and advisory group meeting on March 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. 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. DRP conducted an additional public forum in an interactive virtual format on December 15, 2020 to present new management strategies for river access and aquatic resource protection and to hear public comments regarding the proposed changes.

Suggestions received from the advisory group meeting resulted in the following modifications to the draft management plan:

- Language in the Imperiled Species section of the ISSP UMP was revised to include current designations and monitoring protocols for brown-headed nuthatch, Santa Fe crayfish, Suwannee cooter, and Florida gopher frog.
- Reference to successful volunteer efforts to remove defacement of karst in the Blue Hole cavern was added to the Natural Communities section for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.
- Explanations of water level monitoring and visitor access guidelines for low water conditions were added to the Land Use Component for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.
- Operational and existing facilities descriptions were revised to reflect current usage in the Land Use Component for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.
- Descriptions of historic structures and archaeological sites were updated to reflect the most current cultural resource records for both Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring state parks.

Additional revisions were made throughout the document to address editorial corrections, consistency of spelling and notations, and other minor corrections.

The DRP staff has recommended approval of the proposed management plan for ISSP as presented, with the following changes:

- Construct additional picnic facilities, expanded restrooms, bathhouse, and improved walkways.
- Safety improvements and renovations to access facilities along boardwalks and walkways to the existing river access points/tube launches at Midpoint and Dampier's Landing.
- Addition of up to six small picnic shelters is proposed in the vicinity of the restrooms, and swimming area.
- Redesign North Use Area to better integrate the picnic shelters, restrooms, and pedestrian access to the river access point.
- Develop new hiking trails parkwide to connect the North and South use areas.

Given the longitudinal data on submerged aquatic vegetation coverage and diversity, erosion, turbidity, water levels, and water quality – the best management action for protection of the upper Ichetucknee River is to:

- Remove all tubing from the upper river, i.e., from North Launch to Midpoint.
- Reallocate the current carrying capacity of 750 tubers per day to the lower river, i.e., Midpoint to South Takeout.
- Maintain the current carrying capacity of 2,250 tubers per day between Midpoint and South take out, i.e., total daily capacity of 3,000 persons south of Midpoint (*750 from upper + 2,250 on lower*).

### *Surplus Lands*

The evaluation by the DRP determined that no portion of the ISSP is recommended for a potential surplus designation.

### *State Land Management Review Team*

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in October 2017. The review team found that the property is managed in accordance with the purposes for which it was acquired and the management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan. Four consensus recommendations were offered:

- 1) The team recommended FPS work with the St. Johns River Water Management District to help promote the highest level of spring flow protection for the Ichetucknee system, and all priority springs, including ensuring access for manatees, through the MFL process.
- 2) The team recommended the FPS add appropriate fencing as needed at Rose Sink and McCormick tracts to protect the resources.
- 3) The team recommended the FPS coordinate with FWC and USFWS to define the status of the Ichetucknee as a manatee warm water refugia/sanctuary in light of increasing numbers of manatees using this system.
- 4) The team recommended the FPS consider reallocating the 750 tubers from upper launch to the midpoint launch in order to reduce the substantial impacts on vegetation, water clarity, and wildlife habitat in the sensitive upper river.

The 2017 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the management plan.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

- APPROVE**
- APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_
- DEFER**
- WITHDRAW**
- NOT APPROVE**
- OTHER:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Ichetucknee Springs State Park

### Land management plan short term goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Measure
II	Protect water quality and quantity in the park, restore hydrology to the extent feasible, and maintain the restored condition.	B	Restore natural hydrological conditions and function to approximately 10 acres of spring-run stream natural community.	7	Examine the feasibility of conducting experimental plantings of submerged aquatic vegetation at sites affected by post-2000 die offs.	Experiments designed.
III	Restore and maintain natural communities/habitats of the park.	A	Within 10 years have 1460 acres of the park maintained within optimal fire return interval.	3	Establish new perimeter and internal firebreaks at the McCormick and Saylor Sink parcels	Number of miles established.
III	Restore and maintain natural communities/habitats of the park.	B	Conduct habitat/natural community restoration activities on 225 acres of upland pine and upland mixed woodland natural communities.	2	Assess the 125-acre restoration area and implement groundcover restoration where necessary.	Number of acres with restoration underway.
III	Restore and maintain natural communities/habitats of the park.	B	Conduct habitat/natural community restoration activities on 225 acres of upland pine and upland mixed woodland natural communities.	3	Map the remnant longleaf pines within the fire-suppressed upland pine and upland mixed woodland communities.	Mapping complete.

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Measure
III	Restore and maintain natural communities/habitats of the park.	C	Conduct habitat/natural community improvement activities on 25 acres of sandhill community.	n/a	n/a	Number of acres improved or with improvements underway.
III	Restore and maintain natural communities/habitats of the park.	C	Conduct habitat/natural community improvement activities on 25 acres of sandhill community.	1	Chemically treat and remove off-site hardwoods from zone 2D or 2F.	Number of acres treated.
III	Restore and maintain natural communities/habitats of the park.	C	Conduct habitat/natural community improvement activities on 25 acres of sandhill community.	2	Plant longleaf pine seedlings in zone 2D or 2F.	Planting complete.
IV	Maintain, improve, or restore imperiled species populations and habitats in the park.	B	Monitor and document 2 selected imperiled plant species in the park.	1	Develop monitoring protocol for harvest lice.	Protocol developed.
V	Remove exotic and invasive plants and animals from the park and conduct needed maintenance-control.	A	Annually treat 10 acres of exotic plant species in the park.	3	Survey, map and develop control plans for invasive exotic plants within the Rose Sink, Saylor Sink, and McCormick properties.	Plans developed.

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Measure
V	Remove exotic and invasive plants and animals from the park and conduct needed maintenance-control.	B	Develop and implement measures to prevent the accidental introduction or further spread of invasive exotics in the park.	n/a	n/a	Measures developed and implemented.
V	Remove exotic and invasive plants and animals from the park and conduct needed maintenance-control.	B	Develop and implement measures to prevent the accidental introduction or further spread of invasive exotics in the park.	2	Develop and implement a protocol for equipment use in the park designed to prevent the accidental introduction or spread of exotics.	Protocol developed and implemented.
VI	Protect, preserve, and maintain the cultural resources of the park.	A	Assess and evaluate 25 of 55 recorded cultural resources in the park.	1	Complete 25 assessments/evaluations of archaeological sites. Prioritize preservation and stabilization.	Assessments complete.
VI	Protect, preserve, and maintain the cultural resources of the park.	B	Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological sites.	1	Ensure all known sites are recorded or updated in the Florida Master Site File.	Number of sites recorded or updated.

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Action	Details of Action	Measure
VI	Protect, preserve, and maintain the cultural resources of the park.	B	Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological sites.	3	Develop and adopt a Scope of Collections Statement.	Document completed.
VII	Provide public access and recreational opportunities in the park.	B	Expand the park's recreational carrying capacity by 40 users per day.	n/a	n/a	Number of recreation/visitors.
VII	Provide public access and recreational opportunities in the park.	D	Develop 1 new interpretive, educational, and recreational program.	n/a	n/a	Number Interpretive/education programs
VIII	Develop and maintain the capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the goals and objectives of this management plan.	B	Continue to implement the park's transition plan to ensure facilities are accessible in accordance with the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.	n/a	n/a	Plan implemented.

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised Sept\_2019\_MWE.



**Lead Agency:** Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Recreation and Parks

**Common Name of Property:** Ichetucknee Springs State Park

**Location:** Columbia and Suwannee counties

**Acreage:** 2,531.87 acres

**Acreage Breakdown**

<b>Natural Communities</b>	<b>Acres</b>
Mesic Flatwoods	3.58
Mesic Hammock	7.28
Sandhill	835.33
Sinkhole	0.43
Upland Hardwood Forest	323.39
Upland Mixed Woodland	960.06
Alluvial Forest	57.77
Dome Swamp	2.77
Floodplain Marsh	11.14
Floodplain Swamp	65.67
Sinkhole Lake	1.11
Blackwater Stream	0.53
Spring-Run Stream	27.49
Clearing/Regeneration	1.09
Developed	55.77
Impoundment/Artificial Pond	0.25
Pine Plantation	118.03
Borrow Area	17.11
Spoil Area	16.74
Utility Corridor	15.11

**Lease/Management Agreement Number:** 2459

**Use:** Single Use

**Management Responsibilities**

**Agency:** Dept. of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks

**Responsibility:** Public Outdoor Recreation and Conservation

**Designated Land Use:** Public outdoor recreation and conservation is the designated single use of the property.

**Sublease:** None

**Encumbrances:** Three powerline easements cross the Ichetucknee River near the South Takeout parking area. These easements were established decades prior to acquisition as a state park. An easement management plan developed in conjunction with Duke Power addresses maintenance, vegetation growth, and resource management needs for this utility corridor.

## Unique Features

**Overview:** Ichetucknee Springs State Park is located in Columbia and Suwannee counties, five miles northwest of Fort White off U.S. Highway 27 and State Road 238. The park centers around the six-mile long Ichetucknee River. The park was initially acquired on January 6, 1970. Currently, the park comprises 2,531.87 acres.

The purpose of Ichetucknee Springs State Park is to provide opportunities for resource-based outdoor recreation and nature appreciation for the enjoyment of Florida residents and visitors, while protecting and preserving representative examples of upland karst topography, aquatic cave environments, and water resources within the Ichetucknee and Santa Fe watersheds. Under the unit classification system, the park is classified as a state park.

**Natural:** The park encompasses 3.5 miles of the Ichetucknee River, a pristine spring-run stream including eight major springs as well as numerous seeps, before flowing into the Santa Fe River. The most prominent aquatic karst features are two picturesque first-magnitude springs – the Ichetucknee Headspring and Blue Hole. The park’s upland areas protect large tracts of upland forests, sandhill, floodplain forest, and marsh, which are critical aquifer recharge areas within the regional springshed and form a remarkable landscape for hiking, wildlife observation, and interpretation of the Gulf Coastal Lowlands environment. The Ichetucknee Trace tracts of the park protect three distinct hydrogeologic features, including Rose, McCormick, and Saylor sinks, remarkable for deep karst depressions, swallets, and prominent limestone outcroppings.

**Archaeological/Historic:** The park preserves various archaeological and historic sites spanning the Weeden Island period through Spanish Mission occupation to 20th century tobacco homesteads.

## Management Goals, Objectives and Actions

Measurable objectives and actions have been identified for each of the Division’s management goals for Ichetucknee Springs State Park. Please refer to the Implementation Schedule and Cost Estimates in the Implementation Component of this plan for a consolidated spreadsheet of the recommended actions, measures of progress, target year for completion and estimated costs to fulfill the management goals and objectives of this park.

While the Division of Recreation and Parks utilizes the ten-year management plan to serve as the basic statement of policy and future direction for each park, a number of annual work plans provide more specific guidance for DRP staff to accomplish many of the resource management goals and objectives of the park. Where such detailed planning is appropriate to the character and scale of the park’s natural resources, annual work plans are developed for prescribed fire management, exotic plant management and imperiled species

management. Annual or longer-term work plans are developed for natural community restoration and hydrological restoration.

The work plans provide the DRP with crucial flexibility in its efforts to generate and implement adaptive resource management practices in the state park system. The work plans are reviewed and updated annually. Through this process, the resource management strategies of the DRP are systematically evaluated to determine their effectiveness. The process and the information collected is used to refine techniques, methodologies and strategies, and ensures that each park's prescribed management actions are monitored and reported as required by Chapters 253.034 and 259.037, Florida Statutes. The goals, objectives and actions identified in this management plan will serve as the basis for developing annual work plans for the park. Since the plan is based on conditions that exist at the time the plan is developed, the annual work plans will provide the flexibility needed to adapt to future conditions as they change during the ten-year management planning cycle. As the park's annual work plans are implemented through the ten-year cycle, it may become necessary to adjust the management plan's priority schedules and cost estimates to reflect these changing conditions.

## **Natural Resource Management**

### **Hydrological Management**

**Goal: Protect water quality and quantity in the park, restore hydrology to the extent feasible and maintain the restored condition.**

- *Objective: Conduct/obtain an assessment of the park's hydrological restoration needs.*
- *Objective: Restore natural hydrological conditions and functions to approximately 10 acres of spring-run stream natural community.*
- *Objective: Evaluate impacts of visitor use on the Ichetucknee River system and mitigate as needed.*

### **Natural Communities Management**

**Goal: Restore and maintain the natural communities/habitats of the park.**

- *Objective: Within 10 years, have 1,460 acres of the park maintained within the optimum fire return interval.*
- *Objective: Conduct habitat/natural community restoration activities on 225 acres of upland pine and upland mixed woodland natural communities.*
- *Objective: Conduct habitat/natural community improvement activities on 25 acres of sandhill community.*

### **Imperiled Species Management**

**Goal: Maintain, improve or restore imperiled species populations and habitats in the park.**

- *Objective: Monitor and document seven selected imperiled animal species in the park.*
- *Objective: Compile and convert imperiled species distribution and abundance data into electronic format in a geospatial database.*
- *Objective: Monitor and document two selected imperiled plant species in the park.*

### **Exotic Species Management**

**Goal: Remove exotic and invasive plants and animals from the park and conduct needed maintenance control.**

- *Objective: Annually treat 10 acres of exotic plant species in the park.*
- *Objective: Develop and implement measures to prevent the accidental introduction or further spread of invasive exotic plants in the park.*
- *Objective: Implement control measures on a minimum of three nuisance and exotic animal species in the park.*

## **Cultural Resource Management**

### **Cultural Resource Management**

**Goal: Protect, preserve and maintain the cultural resources of the park.**

- *Objective: Assess and evaluate 25 of 55 recorded cultural resources in the park.*
- *Objective: Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological sites.*
- *Objective: Bring 6 of 58 recorded cultural resources into good condition.*

Listing, projected timeframes, and estimated costs of natural and cultural resource management goals, objectives, and actions included in the implementation spreadsheet of the Implementation Component.

**Acquisition Needs/Acreage:** Approximately 8,500 acres has been identified as desirable for addition to Ichetucknee Springs State Park. The majority of the additional land lies to the northwest of the park and contains significant examples of longleaf pine and xeric oak sandhill community. If acquired, the area will offer additional protected territory for listed species, such as the Sherman's fox squirrel and the Southeastern American kestrel, and other species. Several aquatic caves exist within the area, which have been demonstrated to share hydrological connections with the park's springs. The recommended additions north of the park have a significant and demonstrated relationship with the spring system. Potential agricultural or urban development near the park may alter long-term resource conservation and restoration goals. Acquisition of these recommended areas will help to protect

surface and groundwater flows into the Ichetucknee Springs and River. Lands immediately adjacent to the park on the east, south, and west boundaries are considered significant for each of the identified reasons. These areas also contain resource elements that will complement the recreational opportunities currently found within Ichetucknee Springs State Park.

**Surplus Lands/Acreage:** No lands are considered surplus to the management needs or public interests of this state park.

**Public Involvement:** DRP provided opportunities for public input by conducting a public hearing and an advisory group meeting to present the draft management plan to the public. These meetings were held on Wednesday, March 29 and Thursday, March 30, 2017, respectively. Meeting notices were published in the Florida Administrative Register, March 19, 2017, Volume 43, Issue 54, included on the Department Internet Calendar, posted in clear view at the park, and promoted locally. The purpose of the advisory group meeting is to provide the Advisory Group members an opportunity to discuss the draft management plan (see Addendum 2).

On Tuesday, December 15, 2020, the DRP conducted an additional public forum in a virtual format to present new management strategies for river access and aquatic resource protection and to hear public comments regarding the proposed changes included in the management plan update. This forum was publicly noticed, promoted among regional stakeholders and the general public, and recorded, with the digital recording made available online for public viewing after the live session.

## Summary of Significant Changes in the Management Plan Update

### Change in Land Use and Recreation Access Goals:

New and improved facilities have been proposed that are appropriate for this park and consistent with the DRP mission. These include:

- Construct additional picnic facilities, expanded restrooms, bathhouse, and improved walkways.
- Safety improvements and renovations to access facilities along boardwalks and walkways to the existing river access points/tube launches at Midpoint and Dampier's Landing.
- Addition of up to six small picnic shelters is proposed in the vicinity of the restrooms, and swimming area.
- Redesign North Use Area to better integrate the picnic shelters, restrooms, and pedestrian access to the river access point.
- Develop new hiking trails parkwide to connect the North and South use areas.

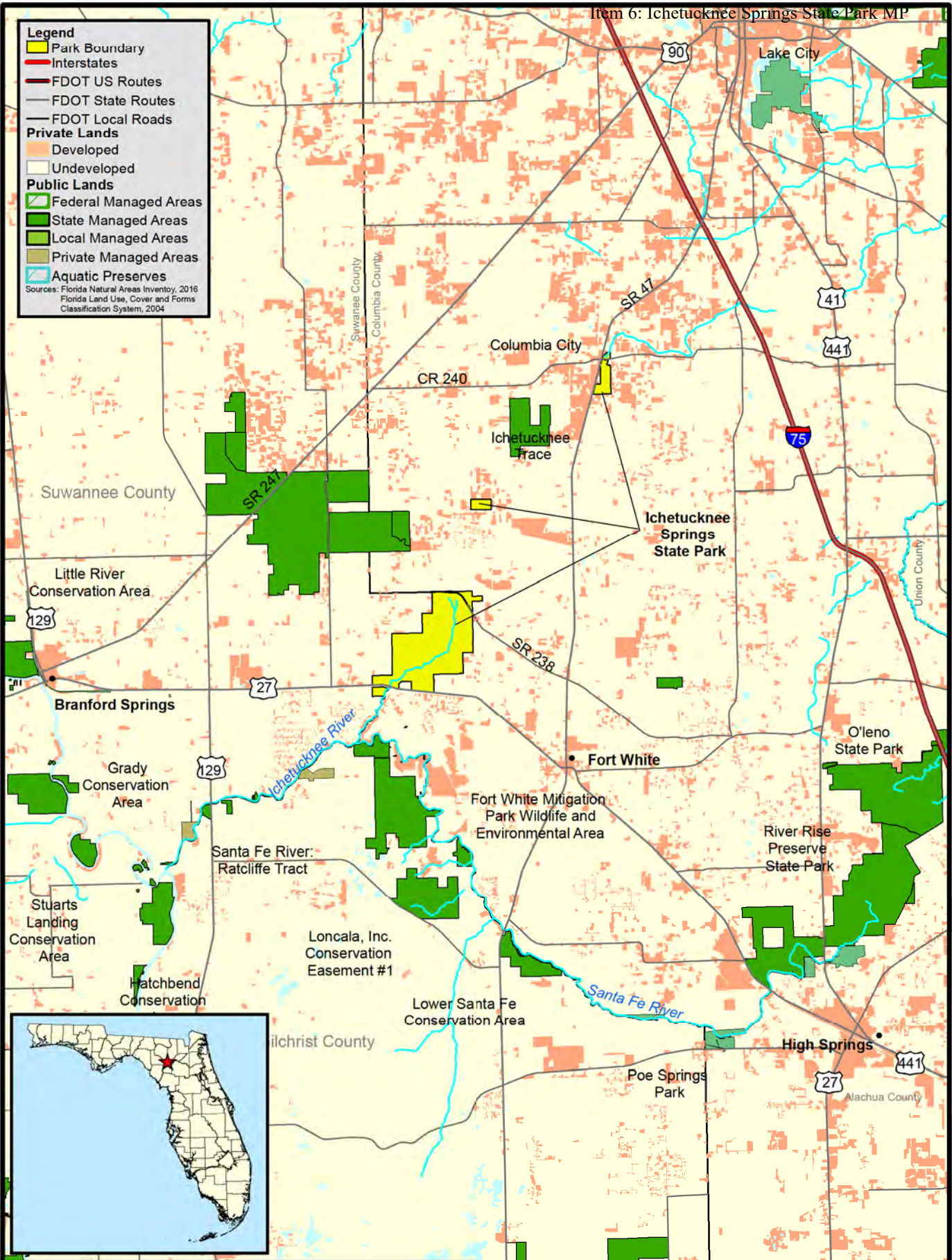
Given the longitudinal data on submerged aquatic vegetation coverage and diversity, erosion, turbidity, water levels, and water quality – the best management action for protection of the upper Ichetucknee River is to:

- Remove all tubing from the upper river, i.e., from North Launch to Midpoint.
- Reallocate the current carrying capacity of 750 tubers per day to the lower river, i.e., Midpoint to South Takeout.
- Maintain the current carrying capacity of 2,250 tubers per day between Midpoint and South Take-out, i.e., total daily capacity of 3,000 persons south of Midpoint (*750 from upper + 2,250 on lower*).

**Legend**

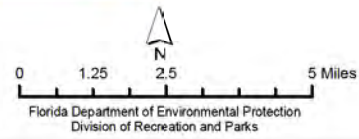
- Park Boundary
- Interstates
- FDOT US Routes
- FDOT State Routes
- FDOT Local Roads
- Private Lands**
- Developed
- Undeveloped
- Public Lands**
- Federal Managed Areas
- State Managed Areas
- Local Managed Areas
- Private Managed Areas
- Aquatic Preserves

Sources: Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2016  
Florida Land Use, Cover and Forms Classification System, 2004



**ICHETUCKNEE SPRINGS  
STATE PARK**

April 2021 ARC Meeting



**VICINITY MAP**

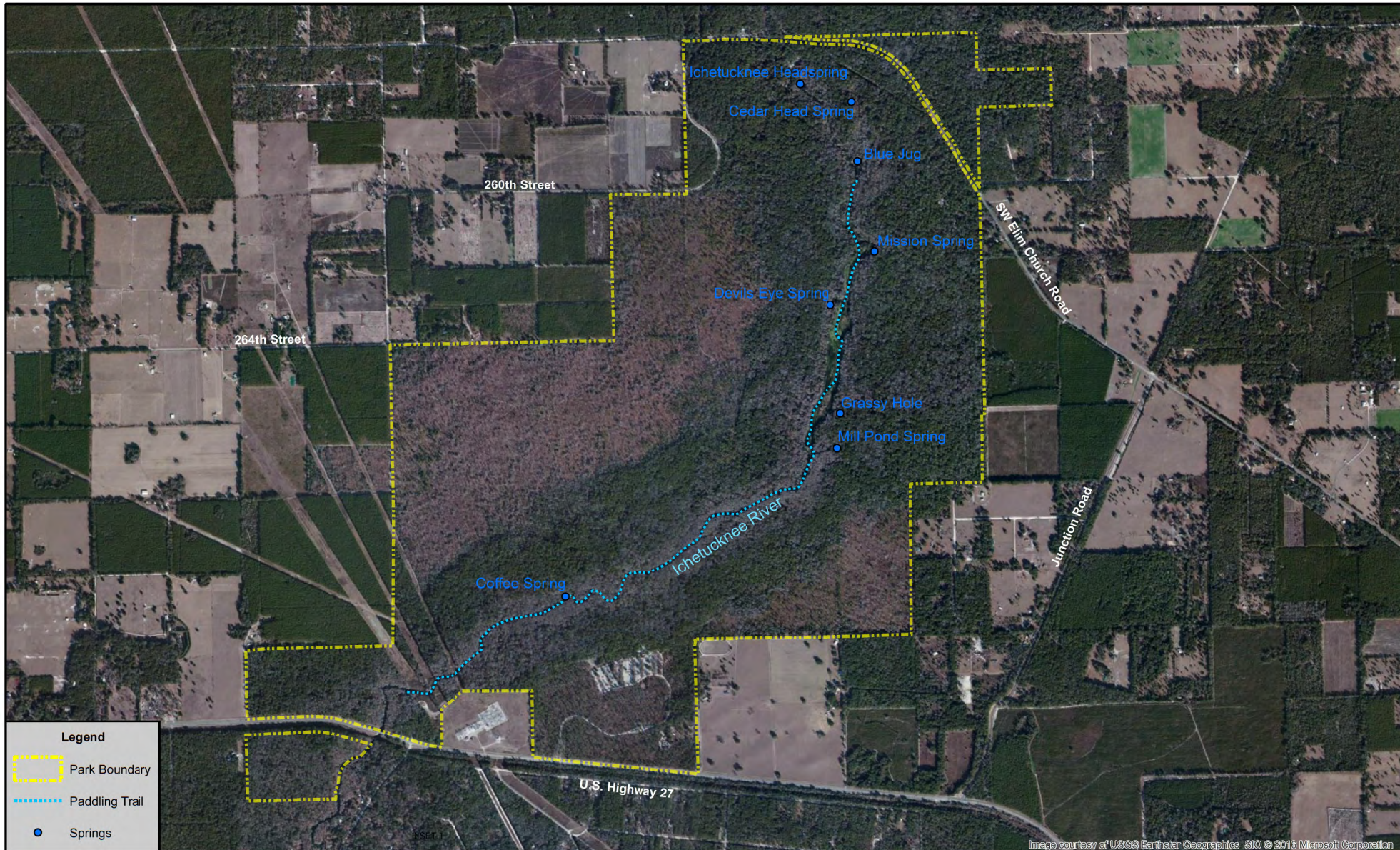
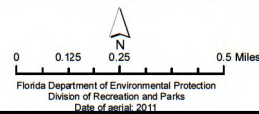


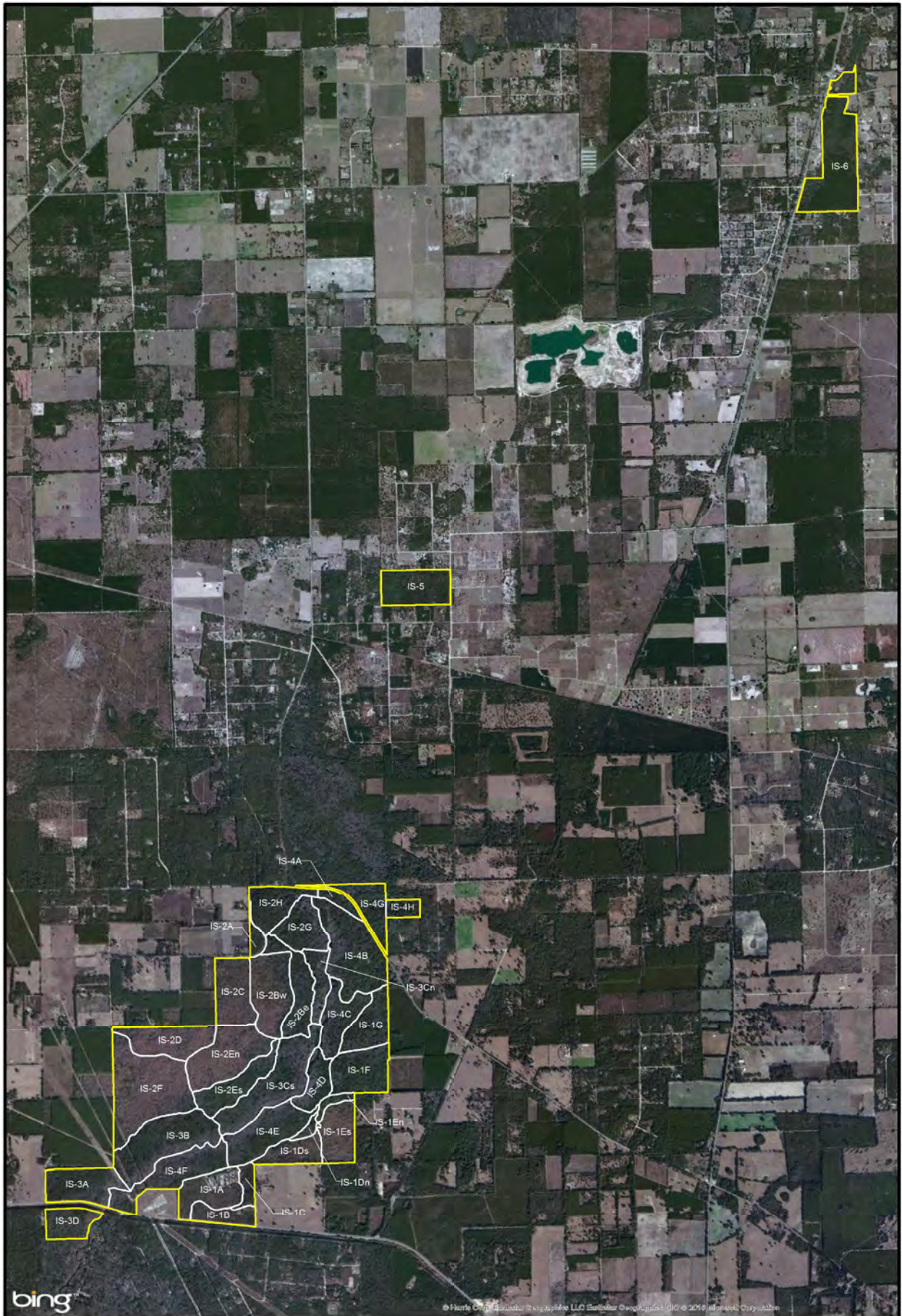
Image courtesy of USGS Earthstar Geographics SIO © 2016 Microsoft Corporation

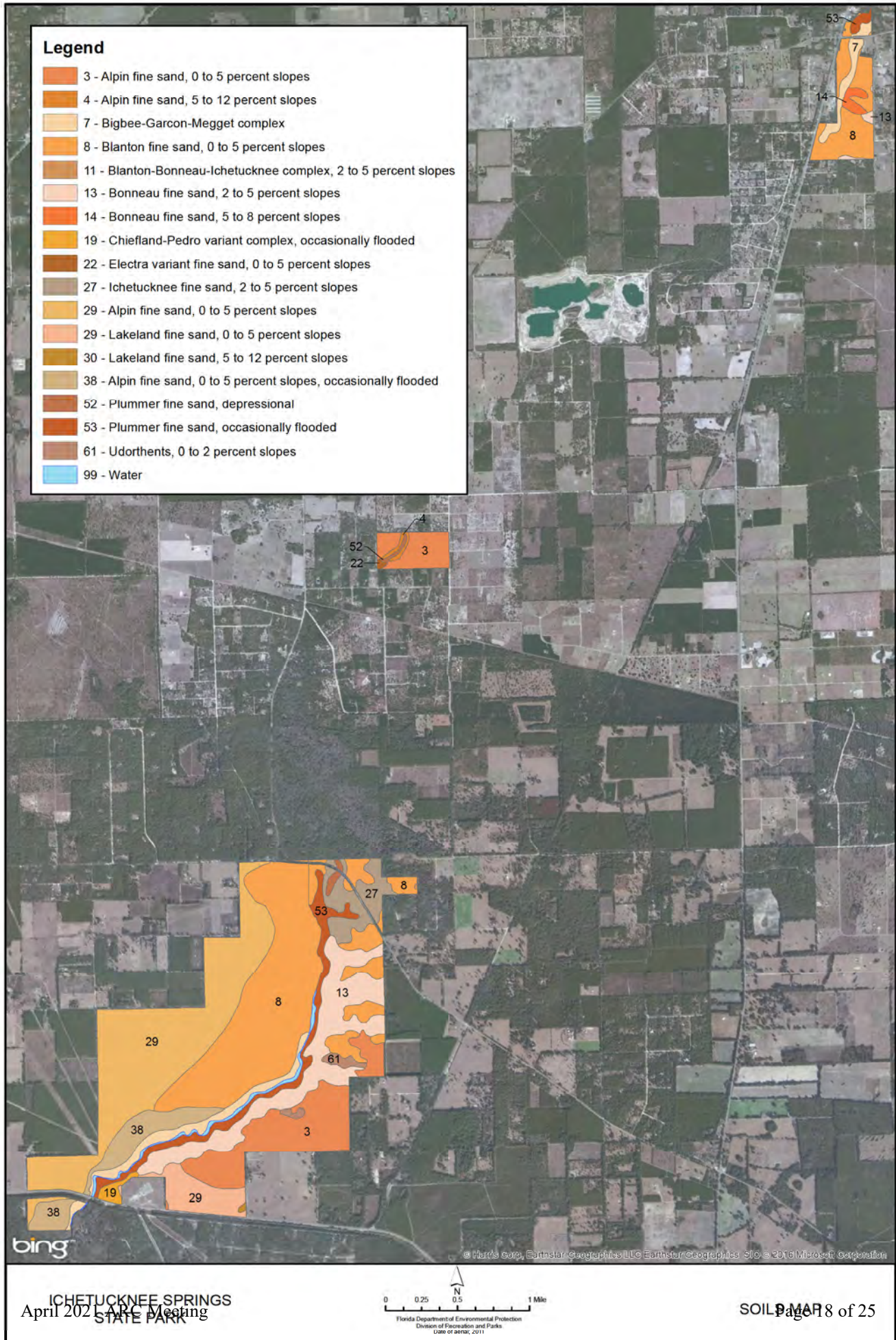
ICHETUCKNEE SPRINGS STATE PARK

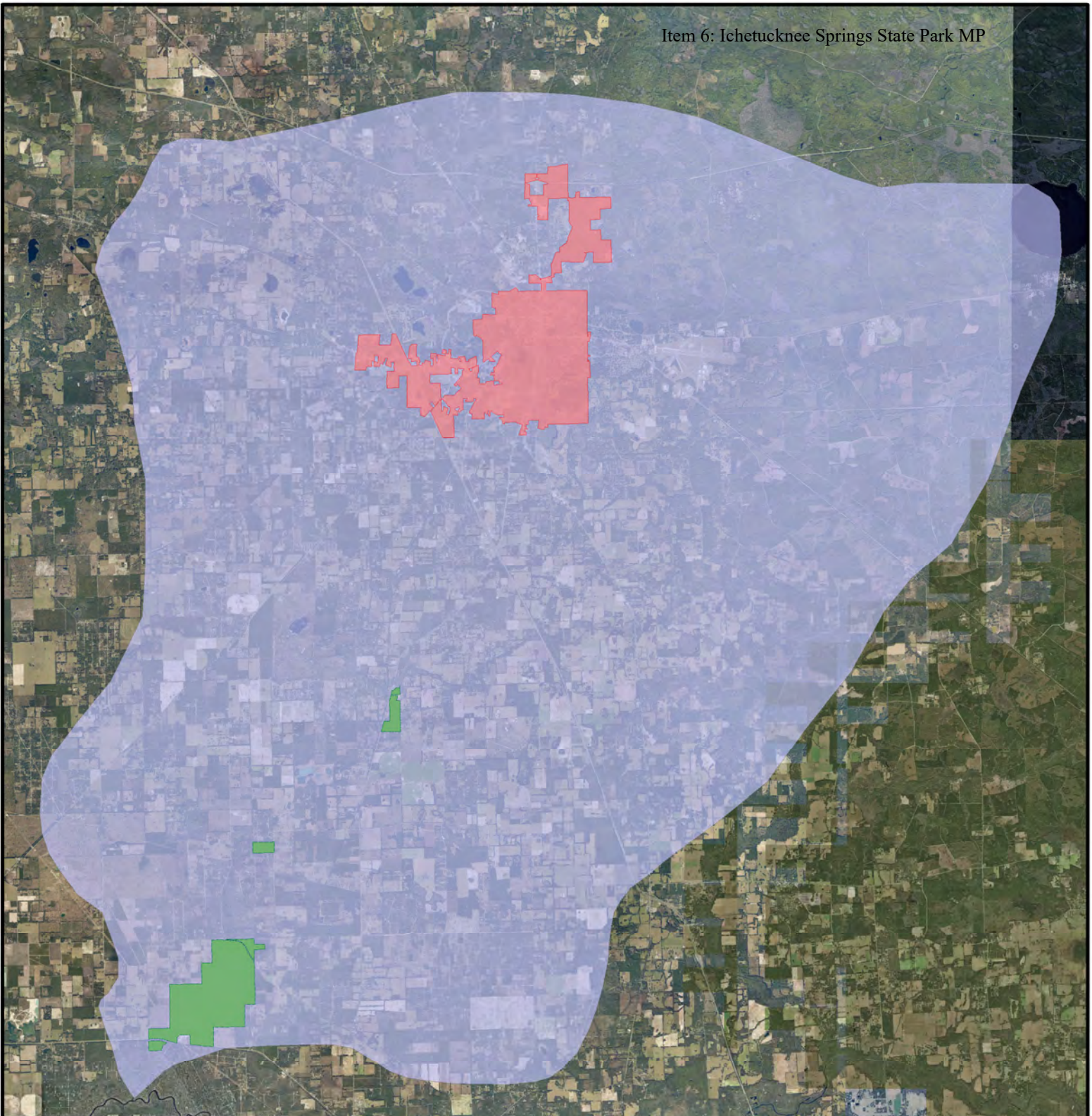


REFERENCE MAP






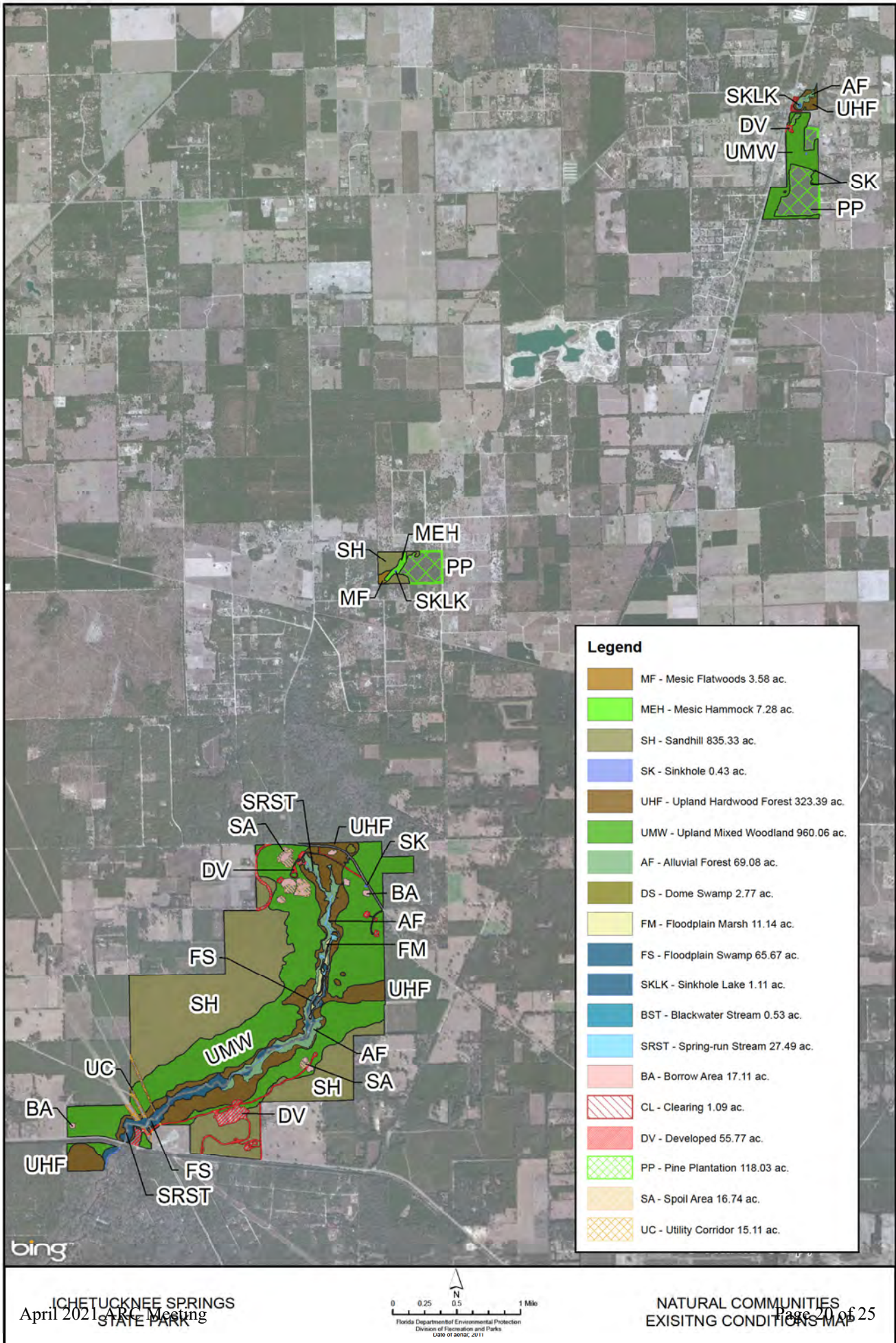


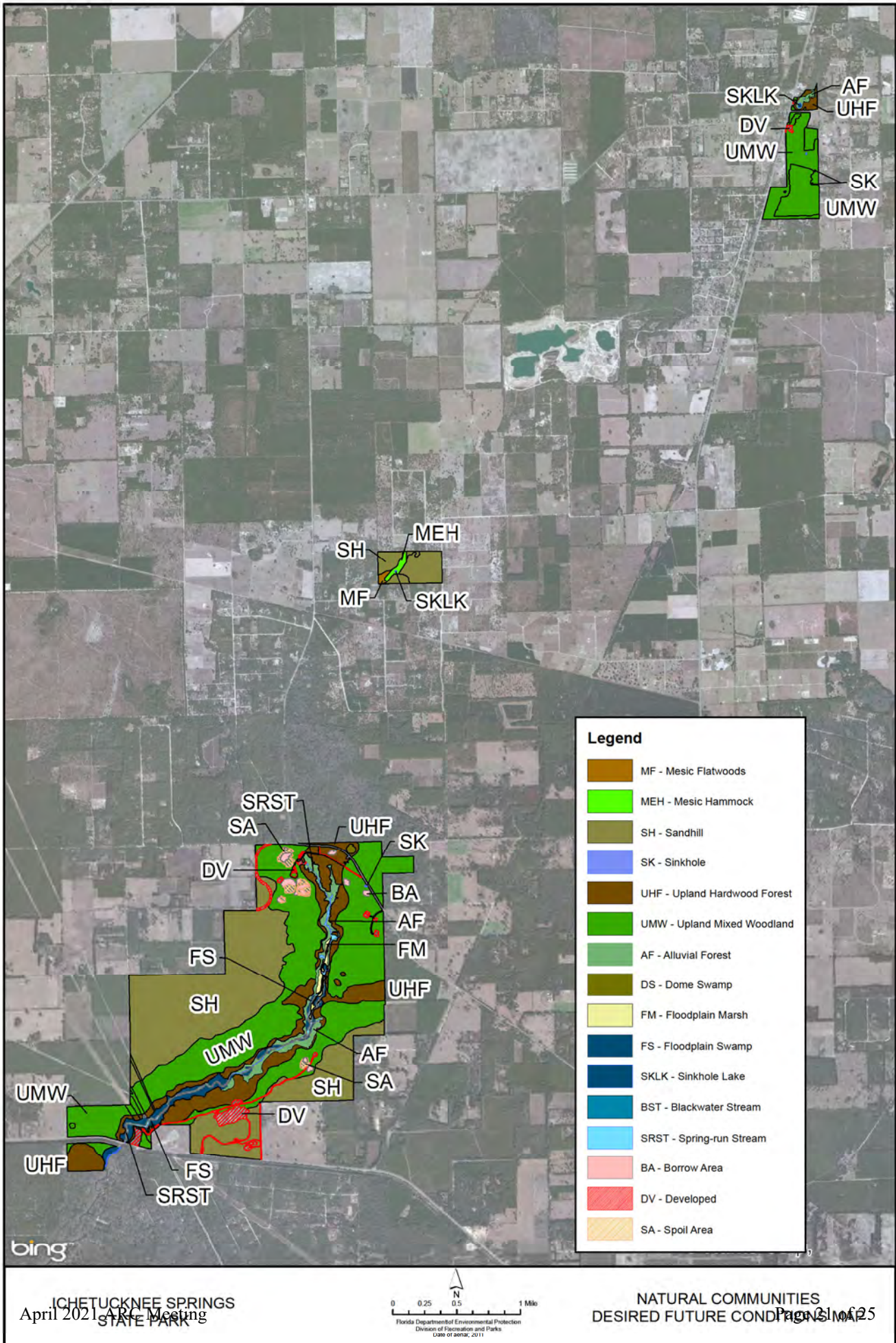


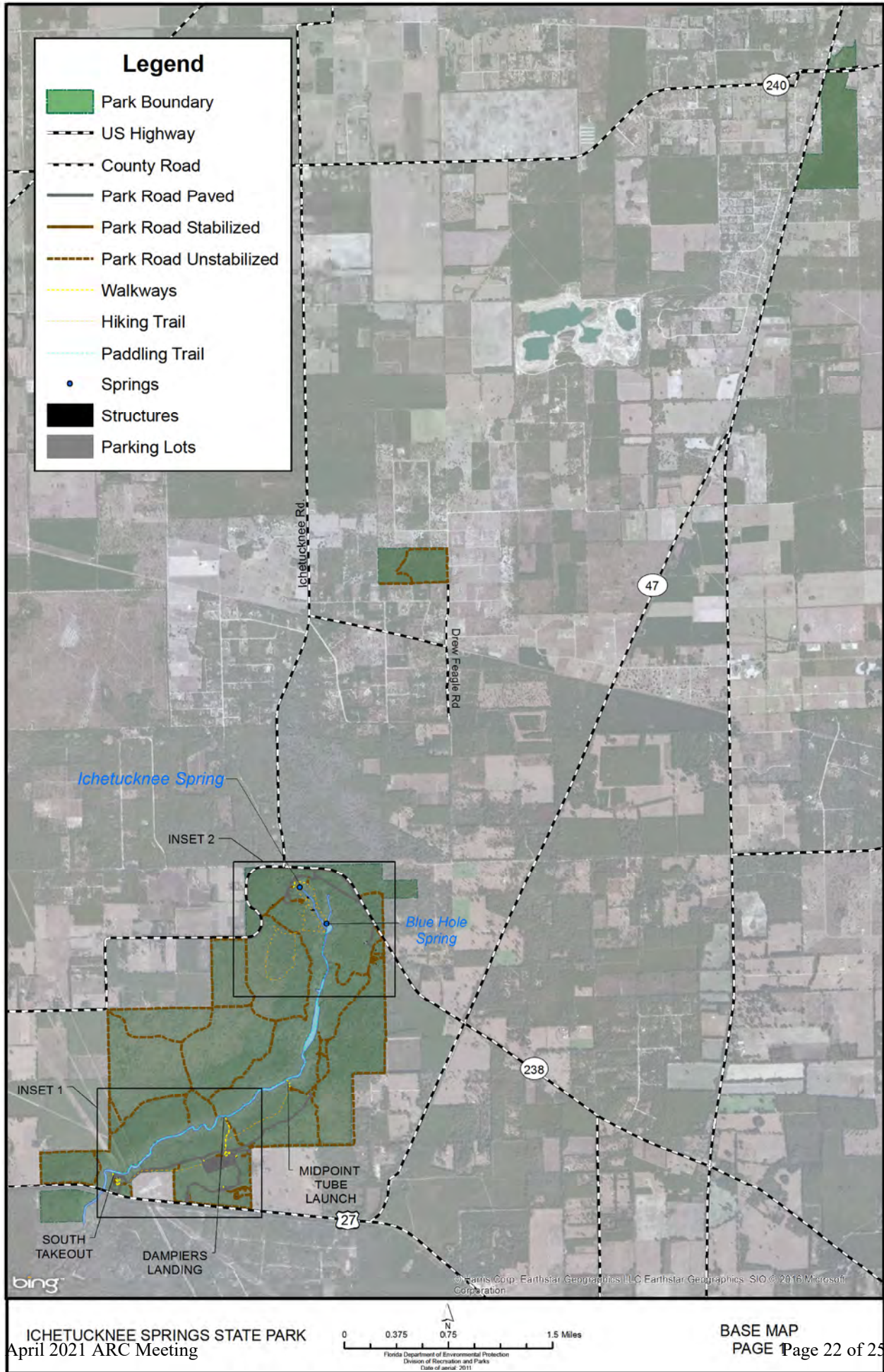


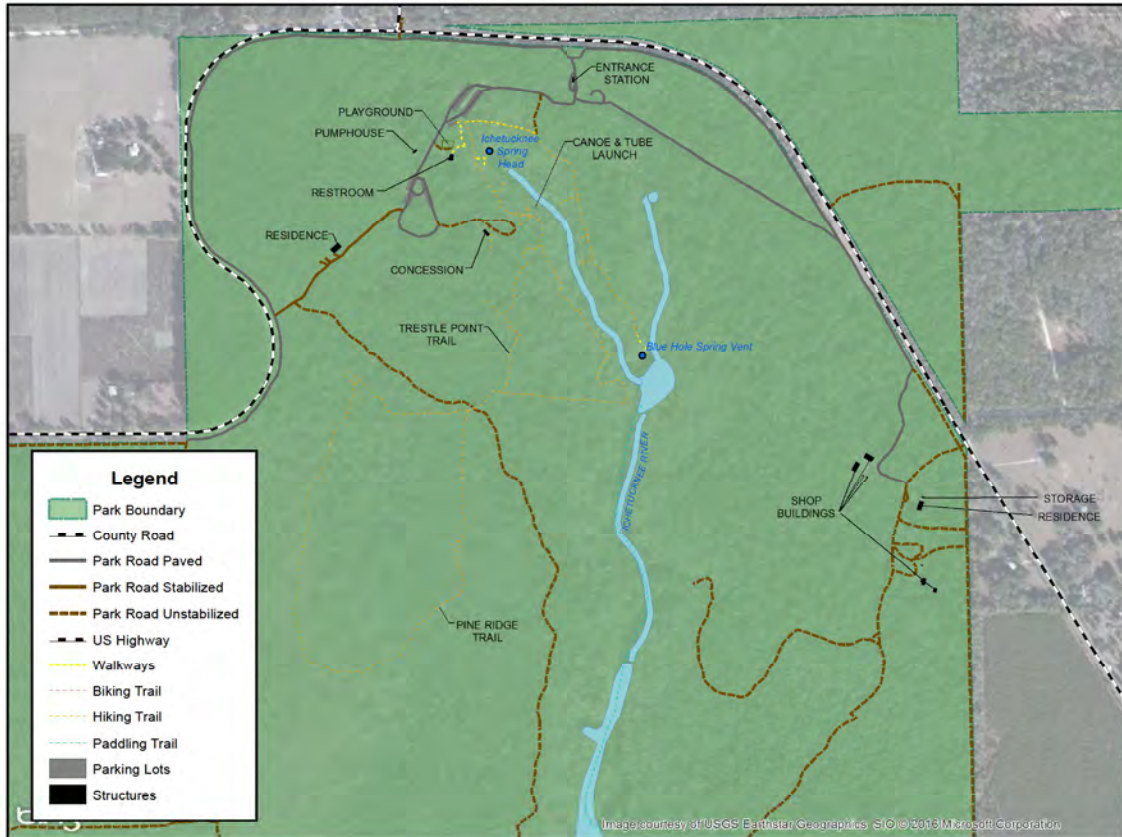
**Legend**

-  Springshed Boundary
-  Park Boundary
-  Lake City

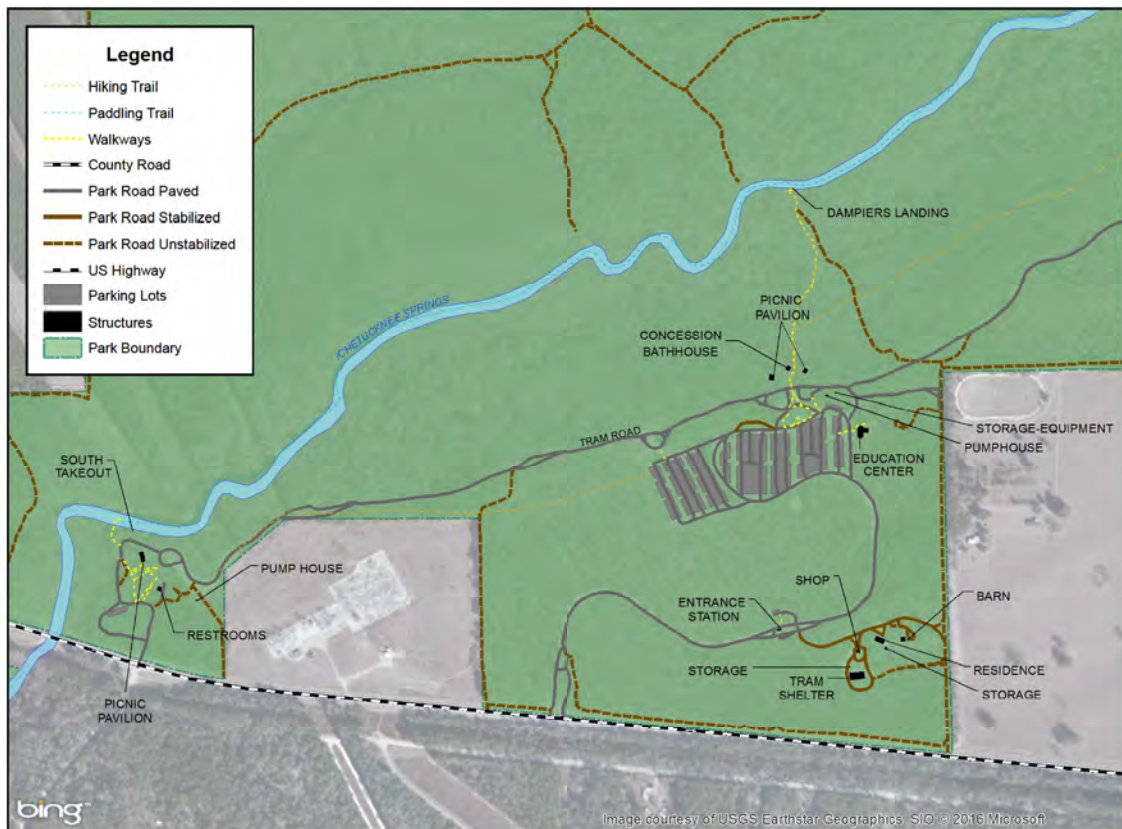




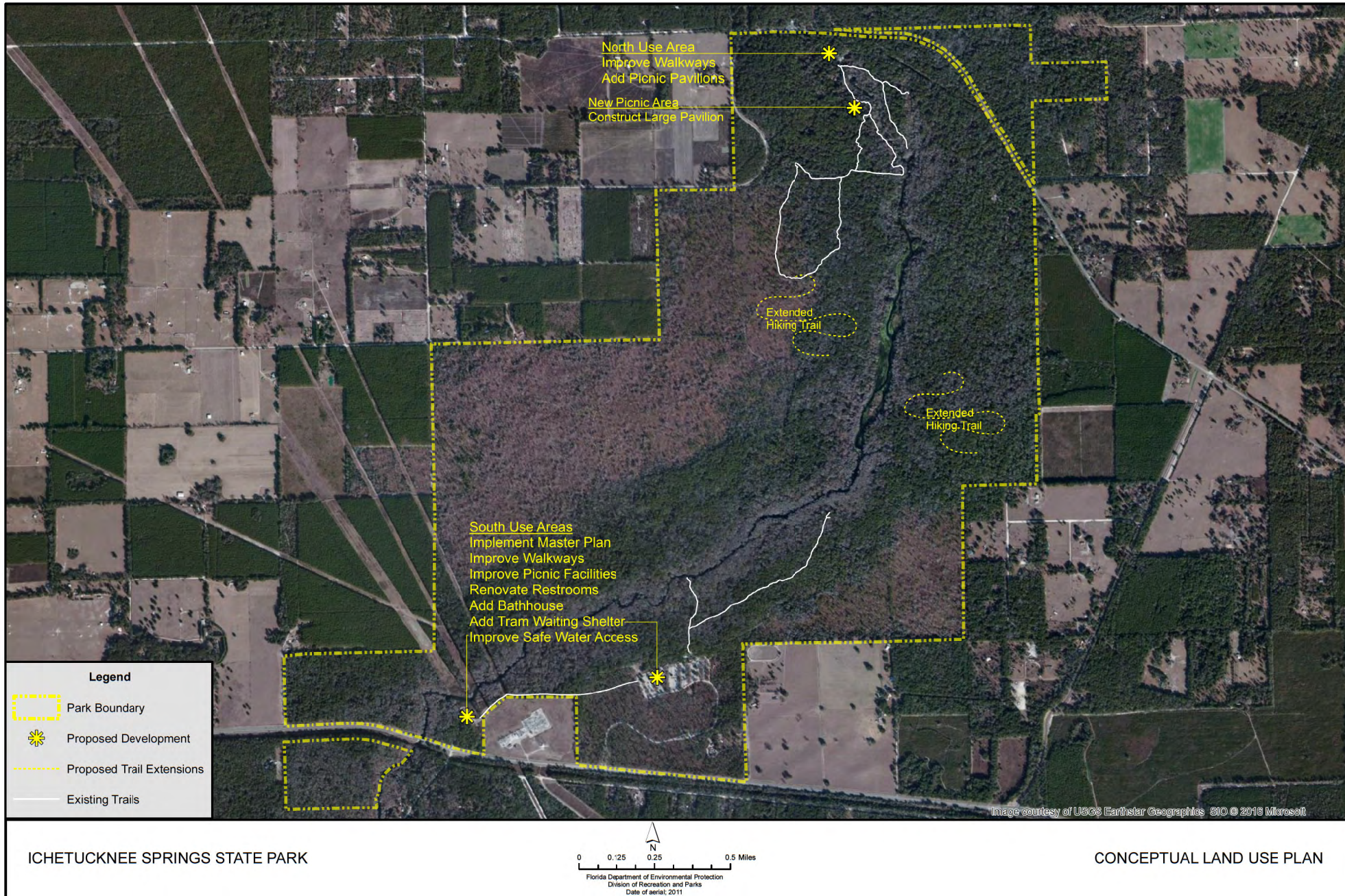




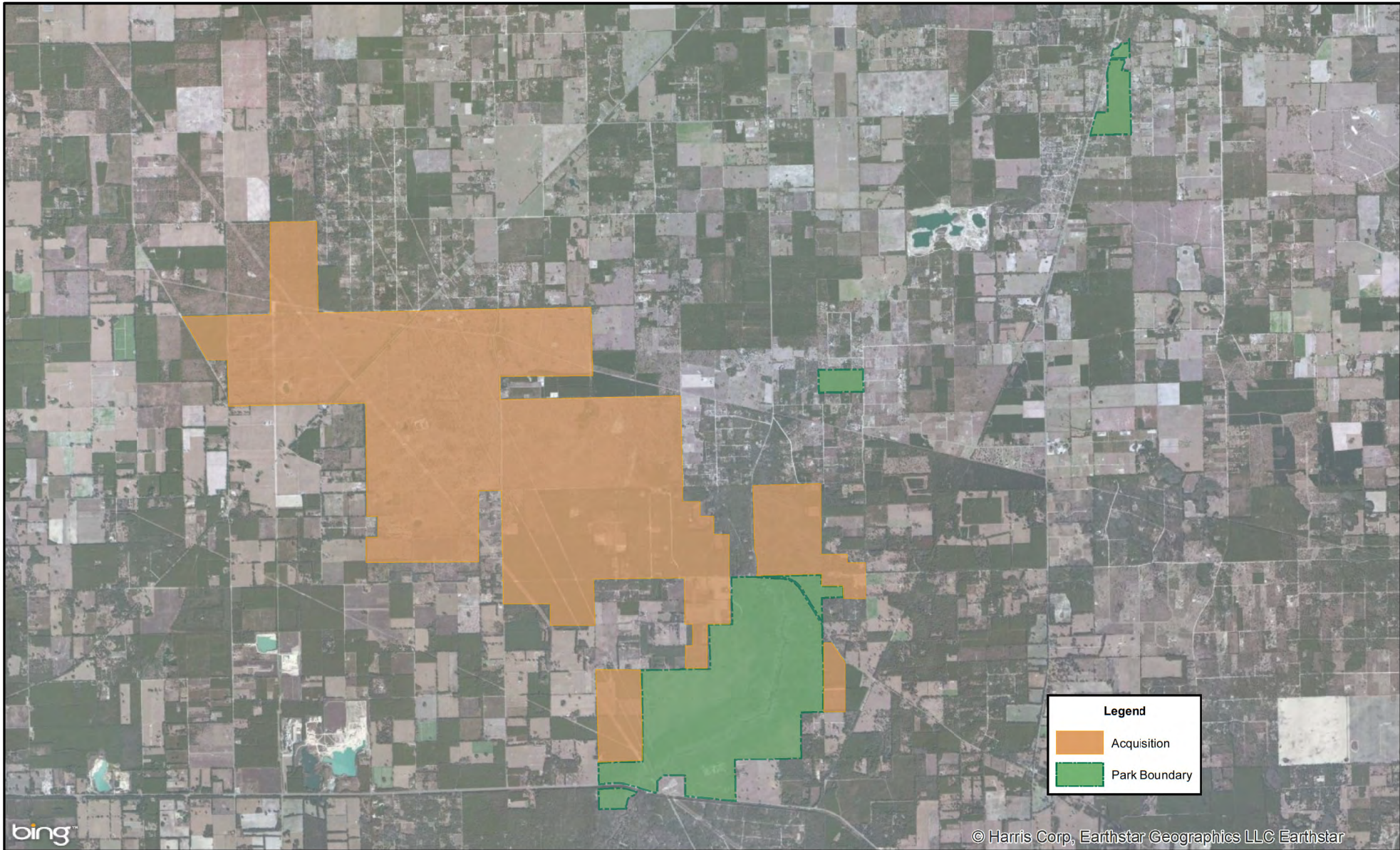
INSET 2



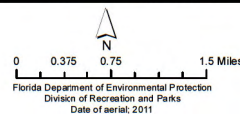
INSET 1







ICHETUCKNEE SPRINGS  
STATE PARK



OPTIMUM BOUNDARY MAP