

ITEM 17:

Consider an update to the Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Lease No. 2785).

LOCATION:

Osceola County

APPLICANT:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

Background

The Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area (TLWMA) consists of approximately 65,333 acres in Osceola County, Florida. The TLWMA lies in the southern half of Osceola County, west of U.S. Highway 441 and north of State Road 60. Florida's Turnpike bisects the TLWMA to the north and east of Lakes Kissimmee, Jackson and Marian. Three Lakes Ranch, Inc., the original tract acquired under this project, was purchased under the Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) Program. Through the EEL program, the State acquired endangered or environmentally unique natural lands for use as natural resource preserves and/or recreation areas. Since the majority of the TLWMA was acquired under the EEL program, it is managed in accordance with the original EEL management objectives established for the Prairie Lakes EEL Project. The FWC is the designated lead managing agency for the HMWMA under Lease No. 2785 from the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees).

The TLWMA is being managed as a multiple-use conservation land. Multiple-use management strategies incorporate uses related to wildlife, fisheries, forest management and natural resource based public outdoor recreation. Wildlife-based public outdoor educational and recreational opportunities are provided that are compatible with the original purposes for acquisition of the TLWMA. Current and anticipated resource uses of the property are diverse. Hunting continues to be a popular recreational activity on the TLWMA. The area also offers excellent opportunities for bird watching, especially for red-cockaded woodpeckers, Bachman's sparrows and wading birds. The diversity of vegetation not only harbors a variety of bird species but also provides good opportunities for mammalian wildlife viewing.

Management Plan Overview

Through the services of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), FWC has mapped the natural and anthropogenic community types on TLWMA. FNAI has identified 21 natural community and five anthropogenic community types within the TLWMA. The largest natural community types consist of mesic flatwoods and dry prairie.

The FWC has developed the Florida Landscape Assessment Model (FLAM) as a Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-based assessment tool that incorporates a wide variety of landscape and wildlife species data. The FLAM evaluates the Florida landscape based upon important natural resources and habitat needs of wildlife to identify ecologically significant lands in the state, and to assess the potential impacts of management and land-use changes. The FLAM was developed to provide technical assistance to various local, regional, state and federal agencies and entities interested in wildlife needs and conservation in order to: (1) determine ways to avoid

or minimize project impacts by evaluating alternative placements, alignments and transportation corridors during early planning stages, (2) assess direct, secondary and cumulative impacts to habitat and wildlife resources, and (3) identify appropriate parcels for public land acquisition for wetland and upland habitat mitigation purposes. The FLAM ranks habitat from a 0-10; a rank of 10 being of greatest value. The FLAM (2020) indicates that the TLWMA has a very high mean wildlife value of 9.3. The WCPR Strategy includes monitoring and management actions for imperiled and focal species. During the previous planning period, FWC conducted imperiled and locally important species surveys for red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW), Florida grasshopper, gopher frog, gopher tortoise, Bachman's sparrow, brown-headed nuthatch, Florida scrub-jay, Northern bobwhite and Southern bald eagle (nests). Surveys were also conducted for Eastern black rail, Eastern spotted skunk, butterflies and multiple bat species. The FWC monitored all existing nest boxes including eight southeastern American kestrel nest boxes, 47 Eastern bluebird nest boxes, 34 wood duck nest boxes and six bat houses during the previous planning period.

The Division of Historical Resources (DHR) observations are broken down into five categories: archeological sites, resource groups, historical structures, historic bridges and historic cemeteries. The DHR Master Site File indicates 22 known historic sites and three structures on the TLWMA. The FWC will submit subsequently located historic sites on TLWEA to DHR for inclusion in their Master Site File.

The FWC has adopted a comprehensive approach to the planning and administration of fish and wildlife resource based public outdoor recreational opportunities for the TLWMA. To accomplish this, the FWC has worked with recreational stakeholders and the general public to develop a Recreation Master Plan for the TLWMA. This plan will be used to further design and develop appropriate infrastructure that supports the recreational use of the area by the general public. The TLWMA Recreation Master Plan includes planning for parking, trail design, and area resource interpretation.

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

Management goals presented in the draft plan include:

- Improve extant habitat and restore disturbed areas.
- Maintain, improve, or restore imperiled species populations and habitats.
- Monitor, maintain, improve, or restore game and non-game species populations and habitats.
- Remove exotic and invasive plants and animals and conduct needed maintenance and control.
- Provide public access and recreational opportunities.
- Protect water quality and quantity, restore hydrology to the extent feasible, and maintain the restored condition.
- Manage timber resources to improve or restore natural communities for the benefit of wildlife.
- Protect, preserve, and maintain historical resources.

- Develop the capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the goals and objectives of this management plan.
- Enhance fish and wildlife conservation, resource and operational management through development of an optimal boundary.
- Develop appropriate adaptation strategies in response to projected climate change effects and their potential impacts on fish and wildlife conservation, resources, and the operational management of the TLWMA.
- Provide access and use of the TLWMA to current cooperative managers and continue collaborative management and research efforts.

Public Involvement

The FWC conducted a Management Advisory Group Meeting on September 18, 2019, in Newberry, Florida, resulting in the top three ranked ideas:

- Describe, develop, fund, and implement the exotic plant control strategy, including working with adjacent landowners.
- Continue prescribed fire.
- Continue to monitor for imperiled and locally important plant and wildlife species.

Results of this meeting were used by the FWC to develop management goals and objectives and to identify opportunities and strategies for inclusion in this Management Plan.

A public hearing, required by Chapter 259.032(10), Florida Statutes, was held on November 5, 2019 in Kissimmee, Florida. The questions and comments made by the public during the testimony period, primarily related to prescribed fire and exotic species.

Surplus Lands

The evaluation of TLWMA by FWC has determined that all portions of the area are being managed and operated for the original purposes of acquisition and remain integral to the continued conservation of important fish and wildlife resources, and continue to provide good fish and wildlife resource based public outdoor recreational opportunities. Therefore, no portion of the TLWMA is recommended for potential surplus review.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in August 2019. 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. One consensus recommendation was offered:

- The team recommended the FWC coordinate with SFWMD for management of the Kissimmee River Public Use Area or get an access easement so the land can be managed.

The 2019 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: _____

Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area
Land Management Plan Short Term Goals

Section	Section Description	Goal	Item Number	Item Description
6.7	Forest Resource Management	Manage timber resources to improve or restore natural communities for the benefit of wildlife.	6.7.1	Coordinate with the FFS on obtaining an updated Timber Assessment for the area.
6.9	Capital Facilities and Infrastructure	Develop the capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the goals and objectives of this Management Plan.	6.9.1	Construct Lake Jackson viewing platform and floating dock.

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised 2020-MWE.

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lead Agency: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Common Name of Property: Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area

Location: Osceola County, Florida

Acreage Total: 65,333 acres

Acreage Breakdown:

<u>Land Cover Classification</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Total Area</u>
Basin marsh	2,968.78	4.6%
Basin swamp	4.5	<0.1%
Baygall	808.75	1.2%
Blackwater stream	43.4	0.07%
Depression marsh	2,321.85	3.6%
Dome swamp	7,878.94	12.2%
Dry prairie	15,538.93	24%
Floodplain marsh	457.41	0.7%
Hydric hammock	128.35	0.2%
Mesic flatwoods	15,671.64	24.2%
Mesic hammock	3,065.07	4.7%
Pasture - improved	2,057.97	3.2%
Pasture - semi-improved	364.53	0.6%
Pine plantation	360.74	0.6%
Prairie/flatwoods lake	1,093.82	1.7%
Restoration dry prairie	516.21	0.8%
Restoration mesic flatwoods	535.46	0.8%
Restoration wet prairie	11.47	0.02%
Ruderal	1,820.72	2.8%
Sandhill	202.15	0.3%
Scrub	751.32	1.2%
Scrubby flatwoods	1,230.88	1.9%
Successional hardwood forest	34.62	0.05%
Wet flatwoods	214.49	0.3%
Wet prairie	6,676.76	10.3%
Xeric hammock	89.46	0.1%

*GIS-calculated acreage for land cover classification varies slightly from actual total acreage.

Lease/Management Agreement No.: 2785 (Appendix 12.1)

Use: Single

Multiple X

Management Responsibilities:

Agency FWC

Responsibilities

LEAD, SUBLESSEE (Wildlife Management Area, resource protection, law enforcement)

Designated Land Use: Wildlife Management Area

Sublease (s):None

Encumbrances: List: Cattle lease agreement (Appendix 12.2), apiary contract (Appendix 12.10), communication tower access and operation (Appendix 12.1), Well Monitoring License Agreement (Appendix 12.3) and automated weather station tower (Appendix 12.1).

Type Acquisition: Fish and Wildlife Habitat Program

Unique Features: Natural: Natural communities including wetlands and pine and hardwood uplands

Archaeological/Historical: 22 historical sites and 3 structures documented within Three Lakes WMA.

Management Needs: Habitat restoration and improvement; public access and recreational opportunities; hydrological preservation and restoration; exotic and invasive species maintenance and control; imperiled species habitat maintenance, enhancement and restoration.

Acquisition Needs/Acreage: 68,500 acres FWC Additions and Inholdings list; 41,872 acres remaining in the Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch Florida Forever Project; 27,500 acres remaining in the Osceola Pine Savannas Ranch Florida Forever Project; 12,515 acres remaining in the Ranch Reserve Florida Forever Project (Figure 16).

Surplus Lands/Acreage: None

Public Involvement: Management Advisory Group consensus building meeting and Public Hearing (Appendix 12.4 and 12.5)

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ARC Approval Date _____ BTIITF Approval Date: _____

Comments: _____



Figure 2. TLWMA - Aerial Imagery

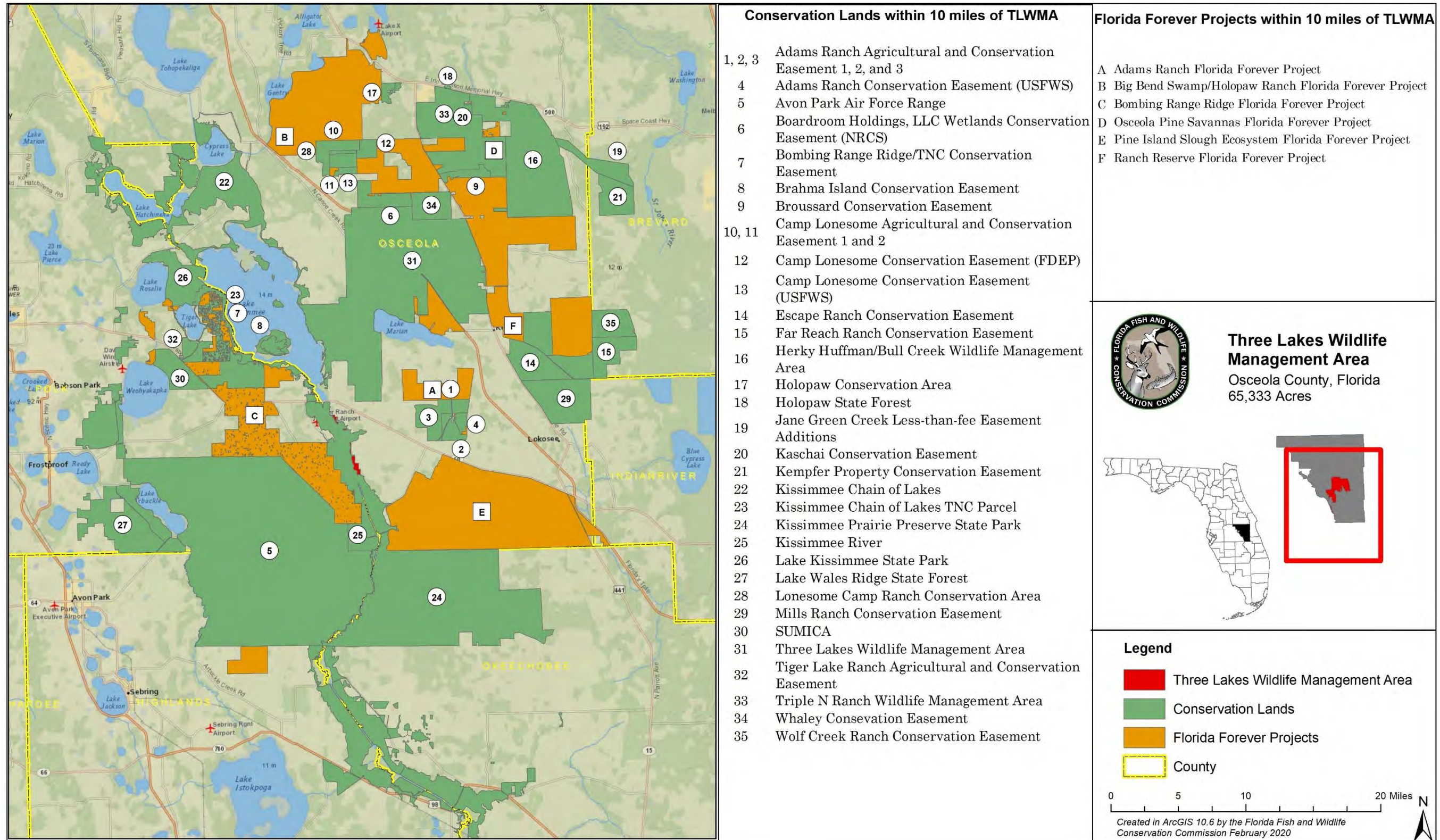


Figure 4. Conservation Lands and Florida Forever Projects near the TLWMA

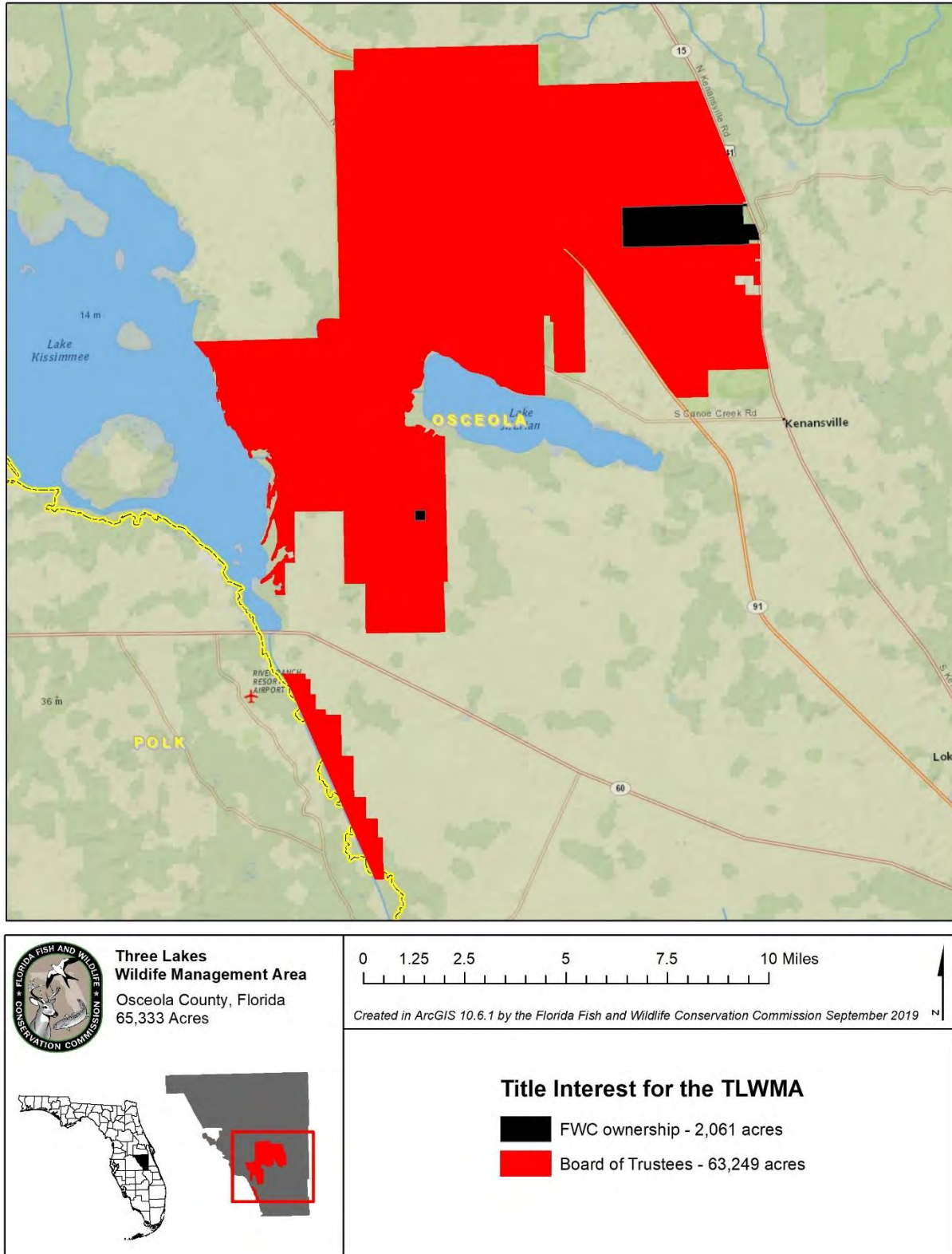


Figure 5. Title Interest for the TLWMA

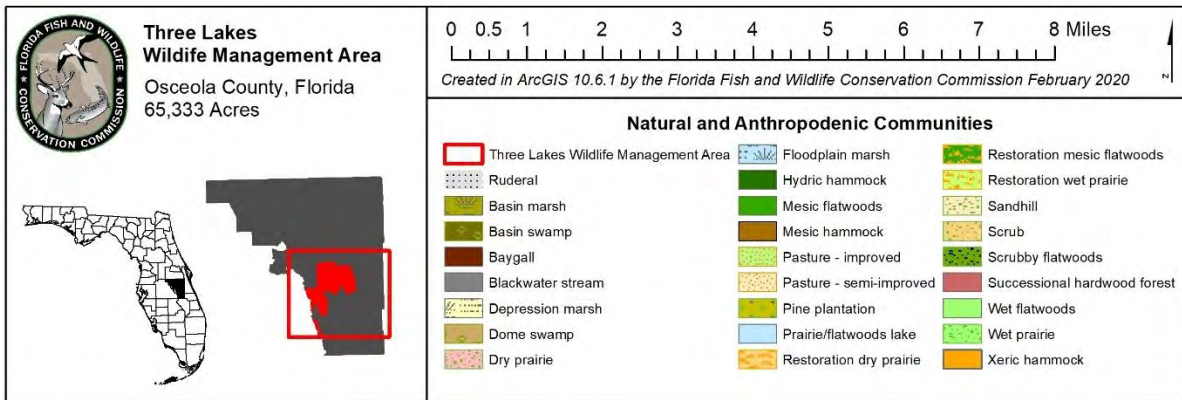
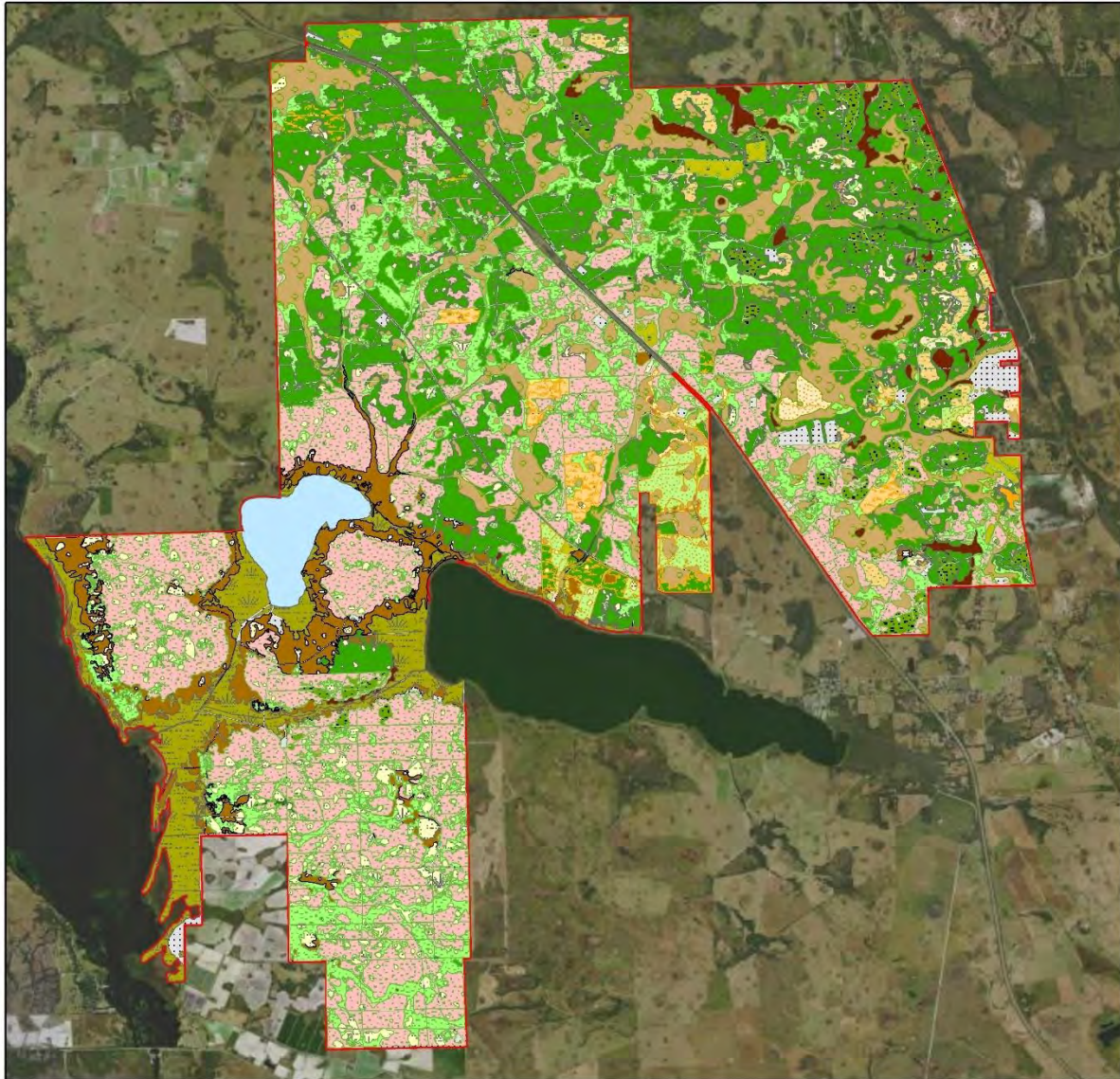


Figure 9. Natural and Anthropogenic Communities at the TLWMA

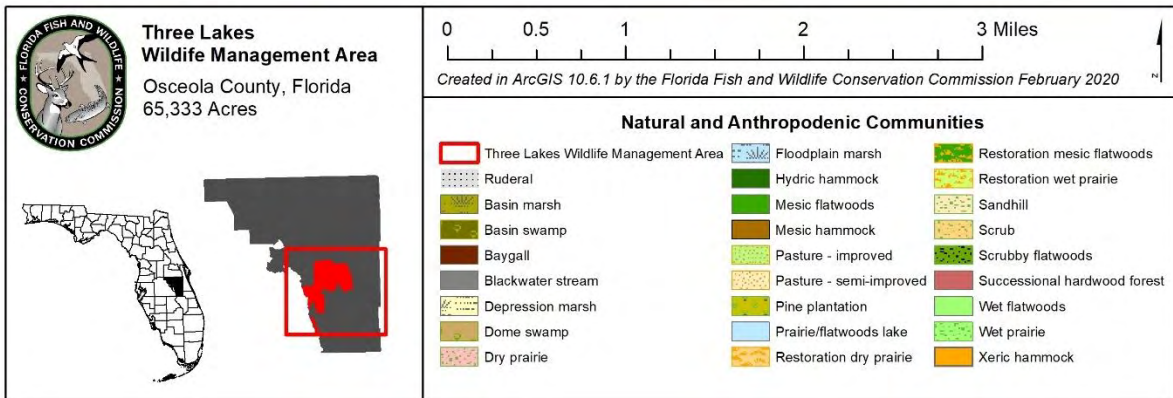
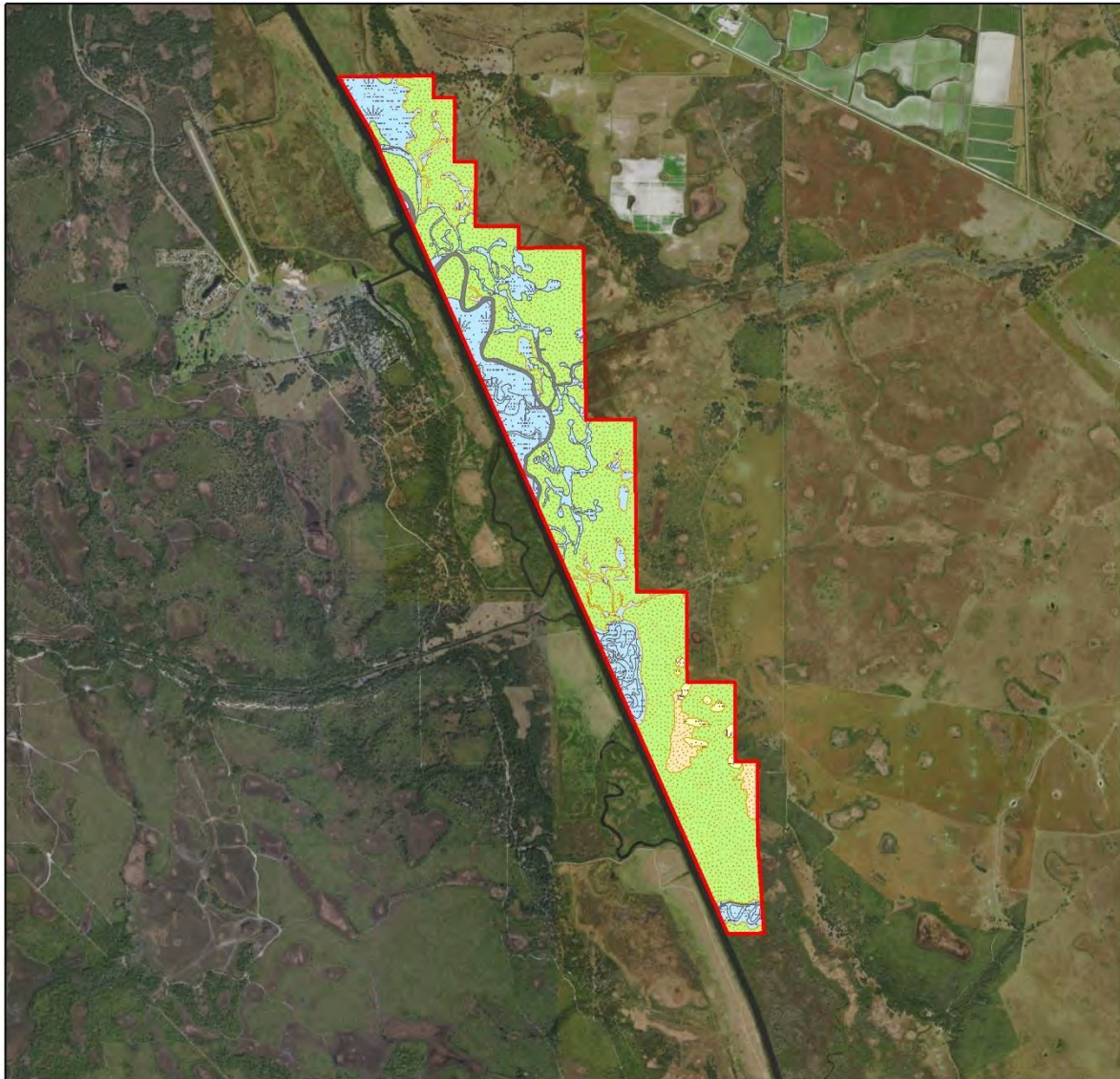


Figure 10. Natural and Anthropogenic Communities at the KRPWA portion of the TLWMA

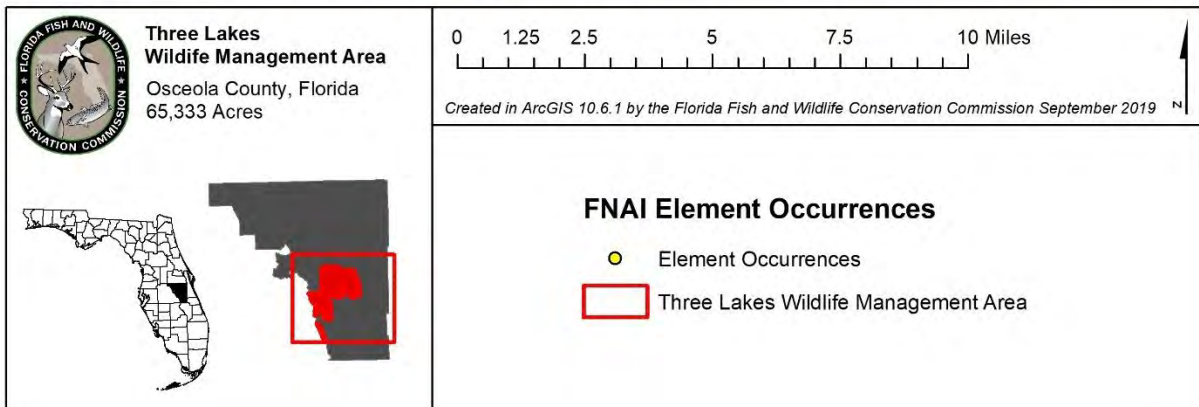


Figure 12. FNAI Element Occurrences Surrounding the TLWMA

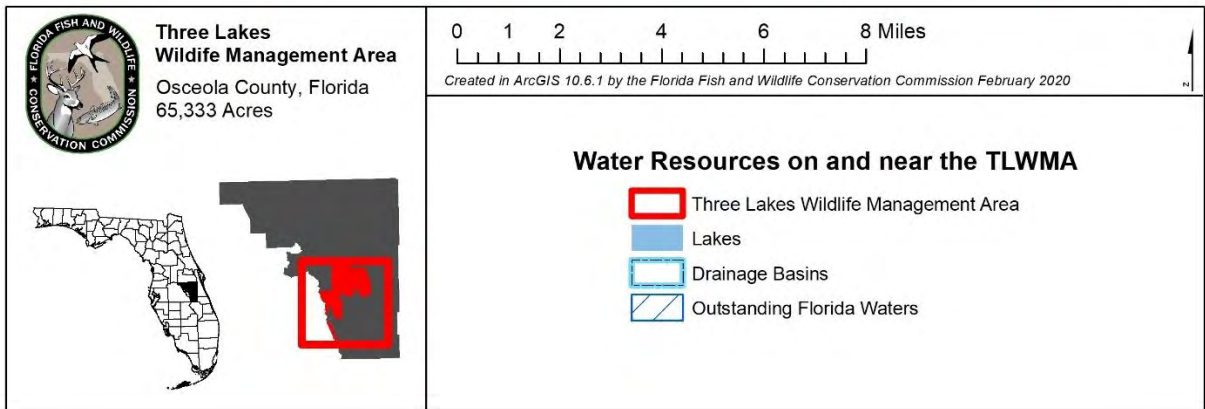


Figure 13. The TLWMA Water Resources

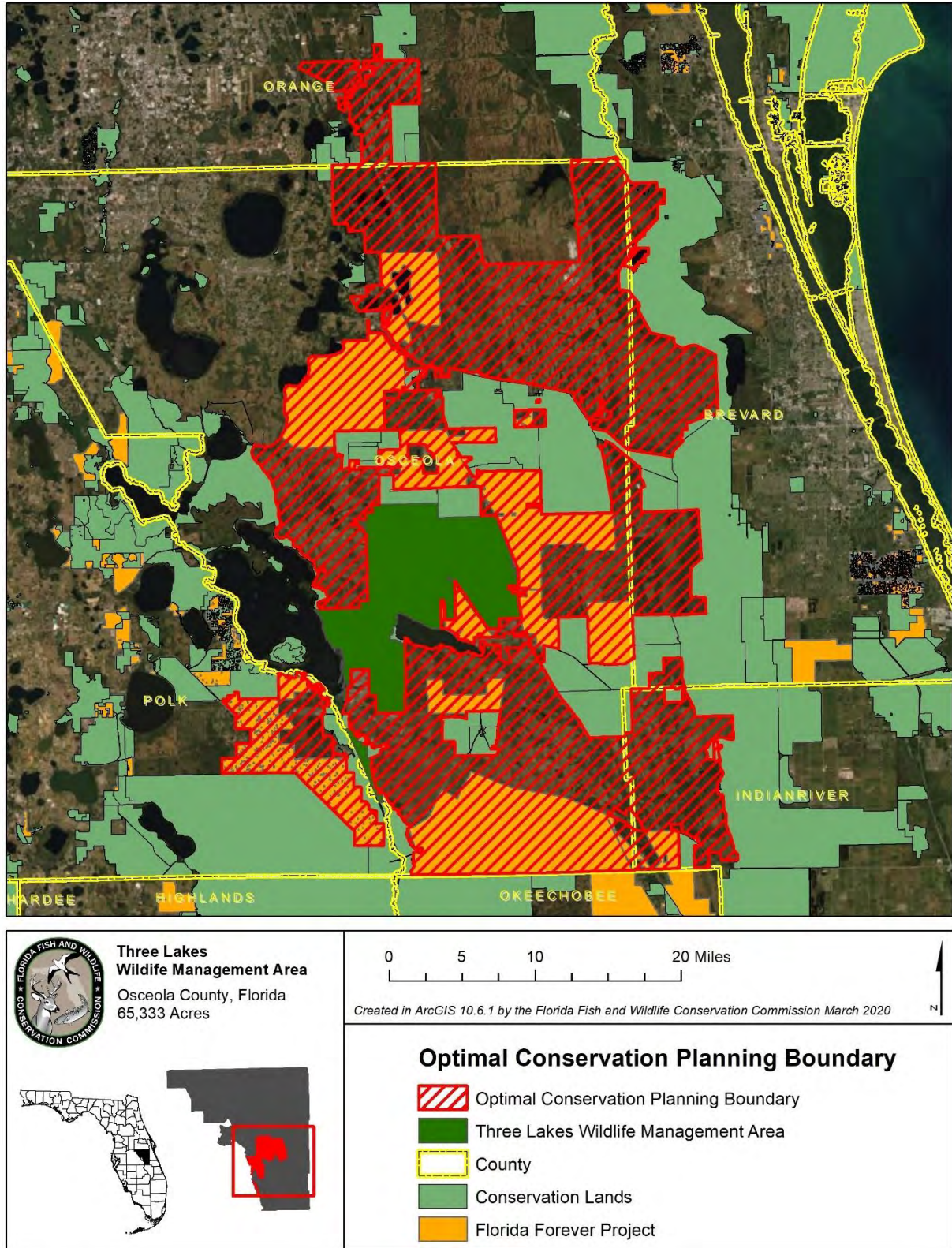


Figure 14. Optimal Conservation Planning Boundary for the TLWMA

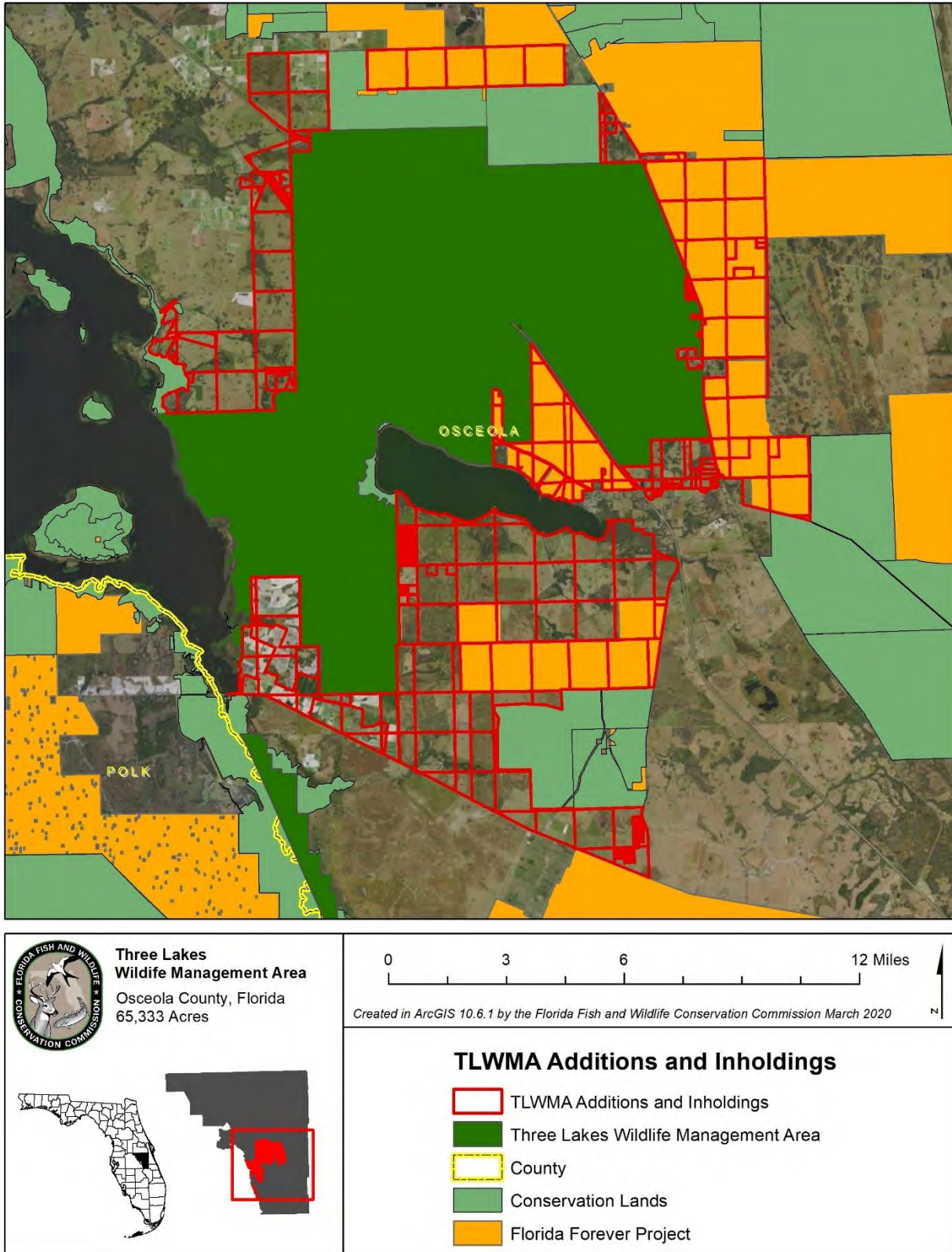


Figure 15. FWC Additions and Inholdings for the TLWMA

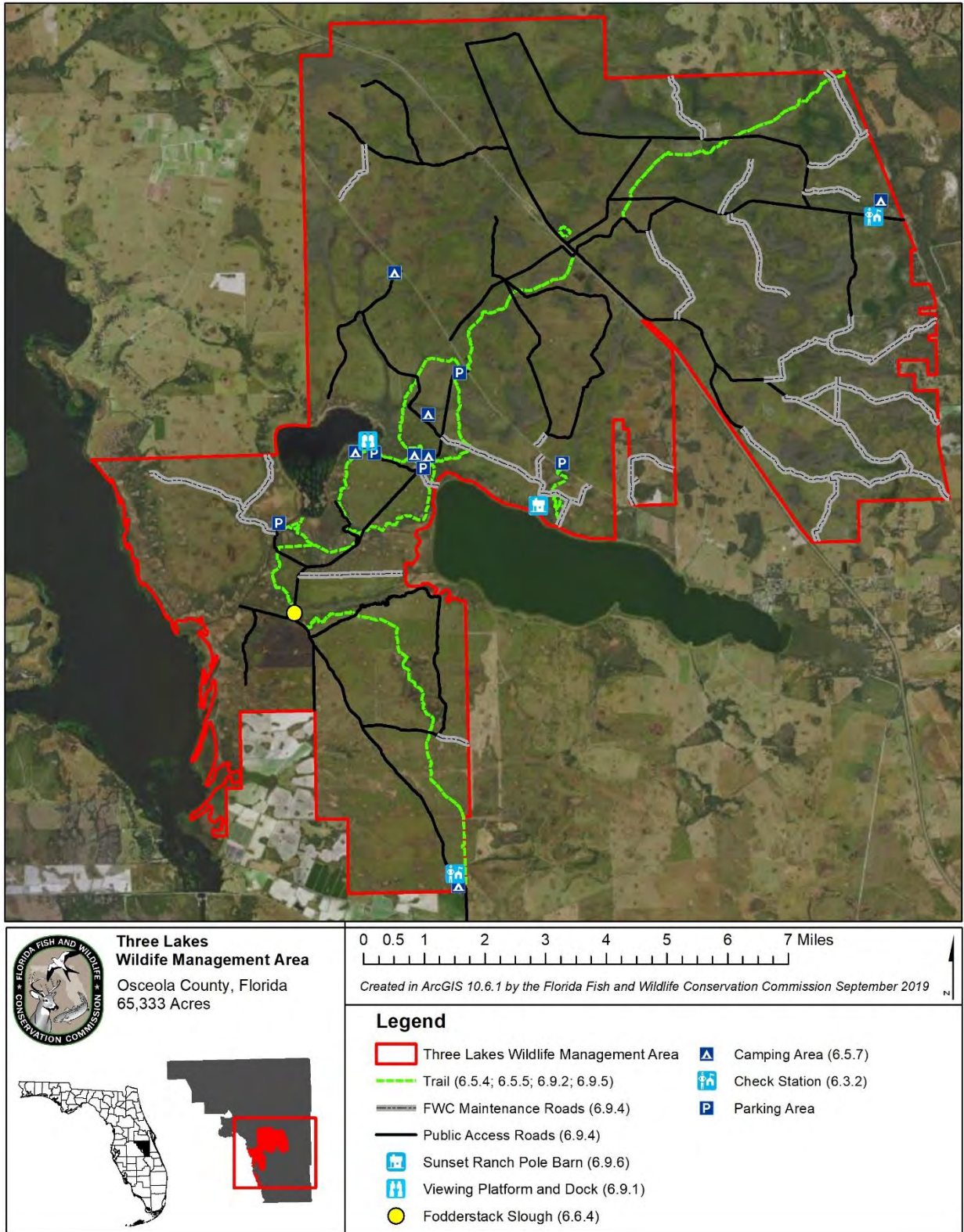


Figure 16. Project Locations