

ITEM 20:

Consider a 10-year update to the Blue Spring State Park Management Plan (Lease No. 2622).

LOCATION:

Volusia County

APPLICANT:

Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP)

STAFF REMARKS:

Background

Blue Spring State Park (BSSP) protects over 2,643 acres of natural communities that include a mosaic of hydric hammocks, mesic flatwoods, and mesic hammocks. The park is home to a first magnitude spring, Blue Spring, which provides refuge for hundreds of manatees during the colder winter months in Florida. BSSP was initially acquired on August 14, 1972, using funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF). Currently, the park comprises 2,643.9 acres. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) hold fee simple title to the park and on November 21, 1972, the Trustees leased (Lease No. 2622) the property to DRP under a 99-year lease.

BSSP is classified as a state park in the DRP's unit classification system. In the management of a state park, a balance is sought between the goals of maintaining and enhancing natural conditions and providing various recreational opportunities. Natural resource management activities are aimed at management of natural systems. Development in the park is directed towards providing public access to and within the park, and providing recreational facilities, in a reasonable balance, that are both convenient and safe. Emphasis is on interpretation of the park's natural, aesthetic, and educational attributes.

Management Plan Overview

The Florida Natural Areas Inventory has identified 21 distinct natural community types and five altered landcover types at BSSP. The predominant natural community is floodplain swamp followed by floodplain marsh. Six species of imperiled plants and 21 species of imperiled animals have been identified at BSSP.

The Division of Historical Resources maintains a Master Site File that documents many of Florida's archaeological and historical features. Twenty archaeological and historical sites have been identified at BSSP.

Popular recreational uses at the park include swimming, camping, picnicking, and hiking. The park's concession operation offers tube rentals, food service, and merchandise sales at the Upper Spring Run Area. The concession operation also offers canoe, kayak, and tube rentals along with boat tours along the St. John's River at the Lower River Day Use Area. Visitation tends to increase for manatee season from November to March. After manatee season, the spring run opens for swimming from April to October. BSSP provides exceptional outdoor laboratories for students and scientists because of the seasonal abundance of the Florida Manatee, the wealth of archaeological sites, and the great diversity of natural communities and wildlife.

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, Florida Statutes, the Division of State Lands began compiling the short-term goals from each land management plan approved since July 1, 2016. The management plan identified objectives under the following short-term goals: protect water quality and quantity in the park, restore hydrology, and maintain, restore and maintain natural communities, maintain, improve, or restore imperiled species populations and habitats, remove exotic and invasive plants and animals from the park and conduct needed maintenance control, protect, preserve and maintain the cultural resources, and provide public access and recreational opportunities.

While the 10-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 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.

Public Involvement

DRP solicited public input by conducting an advisory group and public workshop meeting on June 21, 2022. The purpose of the advisory group meeting was to provide the members the opportunity to review and discuss the management plan. Based on the results of these meetings, staff recommendations to the draft plan include making editorial revisions to the plan.

Surplus Lands

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

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in October 2018. 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 DRP update the timber assessment since it has been over 10 years from previous assessment and there is a need for timber management.
- 2) The team recommended DRP seek funding to aid in invasive plant management.
- 3) The team recommended DRP continue spring vent and run erosion solutions. Make it a priority to see funding for bank stability.

The 2018 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:** _____



BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Purpose and Significance of the Park

Park Interpretive Themes

Park History

Blue Spring State Park was initially acquired on August 14, 1972 with funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) and the Preservation 2000 (P2000) program. The park is currently 2,643.90 acres.

Park Significance

With a rich history, Blue Spring State Park provides refuge for hundreds of manatees during the Florida winters and the park's vast acres of scrub provides habitat for the imperiled Florida Scrub jay. Bits of the past Florida history can be found within the park including the The Thursby House, the original house of one of Florida's first European settlers in the area, Mr. Louis Thursby. The house itself sits upon one of the many archeological shell midden sites representing the history of the Native Americans who once lived in the area.





BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

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Executive Summary

Purpose and Significance of the Park

Park Interpretive Themes

Central Park Theme

Both a hub for aquatic exploration and a vital manatee sanctuary, Blue Spring State Park exemplifies the balance between enjoying and protecting our fragile springs.

Primary Interpretive Themes

Wildlife Sanctuary - Although Blue Spring State Park is best known as a haven for record numbers of manatees each winter, it is also home for many of Florida's threatened and endemic species year round.

Aquatic Recreation - Demonstrating the gorgeousness and fragility of the park's scenery, Blue Spring offers responsible aquatic activities on both and below the water.

History - Once a hustling and bustling fulcrum of steamboat activity, Blue Spring welcomed 19th century tourists and tradesman looking to travel along the St. Johns River.





BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

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Park Quick Facts

Management Authority

- **Agency:** Department of Environmental Protection - Division of Recreation and Parks
- **Acreage :** 2,643.90
- **Location:** Volusia County
- **Lease Management Agreement Number(s):** 2622
- **Use:** Single
- **Responsibility:** Public Outdoor Recreation and Conservation
- **Sublease:** None
- **Encumbrances:** See Appendix 1 for details
- **Public Involvement:** See Appendix 2 for details
- **Optimum Boundary:** Approximately 0.28 acres





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Executive Summary

Natural Community Composition

Percent of Total Acreage

Natural Communities	Acreage	Percentage
Floodplain Swamp	452.69	17.12%
Floodplain Marsh	336.1	12.71%
Scrub	333.59	12.61%
Mesic Hammock	232.12	8.74%
Blackwater Stream	202.33	7.65%
Hydric Hammock	191.88	7.26%
Xeric Hammock	164.05	6.2%
Upland Hardwood Forest	162.93	6.16%
Mesic Flatwood	139.88	5.59%
Scrubby Flatwood	109.52	4.14%
Altered Landcover	87.69	3.31%
Successional Hardwood Forest	58.49	2.21%
Wet Flatwood	56.12	2.12%
Bottomland Forest	48.65	1.84%
River Floodplain Lake	43.65	1.65%
Depression Marsh	23.71	0.89%
Baygall	5.32	0.20%
Spring—Run Stream	4.47	0.16%
Shell Mound	3.63	0.13%
Sinkhole	1.1	0.04%
Sandhill	0.63	0.02%
Aquatic Cove	0.17	<0.0%
Seepage Stream	0.16	<0.0%
Total Acreage	2,643.90	100%



BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Park Accomplishments: 2005 — 2022

Ten-Year Planning Period Objectives

Previous Accomplishments

Since the 2005 approved management plan, significant resource management and protection accomplishments have occurred. Over 2,000 exotic armored catfish have been removed from the spring, and a collaborative partnership with FWC was established to address erosion along the spring run embankments. A volunteer program was also created to monitor manatees during the park's swimming season, between April and November.

Future Objectives

Moving forward throughout the next 10 years of this Unit Management Plan, Blue Spring State Park will continue resource management efforts by performing prescribed fire to dependent natural communities, annually treating 10 acres of exotic plant species, and implementing control measures on all exotic fish within the spring run and feral hogs. Natural community restoration will take place on Scrub, Floodplain Marsh, and Scrubby Flatwoods. To enhance the visitor experience, improvements will be made to all use areas including: relocating the park entrance to prevent car stacking and general congestion issues, concession improvements at both the Upper and Lower Day Use Areas, formalizing French Landing with parking spots, a small fishing dock, and upgrading the current boat ramp, and the addition of up to 10 new campsites, a mix of volunteer site, glamping or tent in sites.





BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Natural Communities Management

Natural Community Restoration

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

Objective: Maintain 450 acres of the park within the optimum fire return interval
 With six fire type natural communities including scrubby flatwoods and depression marshes, plans include to burn between 194—398 acres annually.

Objective: Conduct natural community restoration on 10 acres of scrub

Mechanical treatment will be accomplished by roller chopping and mowing scrub to maintain optimal habitat for the Florida Scrub - jay.

Objective: Conduct natural community restoration on 150 acres of Floodplain Marsh

Floodplain Marsh restoration will take place by performing prescribed burring every two to four years and controlling woody vegetation.

Objective: Conduct natural community restoration on 50 acres of Scrubby Flatwood

Scrubby Flatwood restoration will take place in two steps with a combination of mechanical treatment followed by prescribed fire.

Natural Community Improvement

Objective: Conduct natural community improvement on 2 acres of Mesic Hammock / Spring run

Monitoring of the spring run bank will be done twice a year for erosion due to lack of vegetation. Staff will assess where new vegetation is needed to reduce the effects of ongoing erosion along the boardwalk. The park will also continue to work with FWC on a current spring run bank stabilization project.

Objective: Conduct natural community restoration on .17 acres of Aquatic Cave

The park will work with FDEP divers to conduct an initial photographic survey of the graffiti within the spring boil, with the potential of making it an annual survey.



BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Imperiled Species & Exotics

Imperiled Species Management

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

Objective: *Monitor and document 3 selected imperiled animal species*

Monitoring protocols will be developed for the imperiled gopher tortoise, Florida scrub-jay, and Florida manatee.

The park provides habitat for 26 imperiled plants and animals including:

- American alligator
- Florida Scrub Jay
- Manatee
- Snowy egret
- Shell mound prickly-pear
- Florida pine snake
- Curtiss's milkweed
- Florida gopher frog

Exotic and Nuisance Species Management

Goal: Remove invasive species from the park and conduct maintenance control.

Objective: *Annually treat 10 acres of exotic plant species in the park*

An annual work plan will be developed to remove 10 acres of exotics within the park. Blue Spring will work with FWC IPMS to remove the aquatic invasive such as water lettuce and water hyacinth.

Objective: *Implement control measures on 3 exotic animal species in the park*

Control measures will be focused on removing all exotic fish species from the park, including sailfin catfish, blue tilapia, and brown hoplo. Trapping and removal of feral hogs and domestic animals like cats and dogs within the park boundaries will take place in coordination with local animal control services.



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Management Goals & Objectives

Hydrological & Cultural Resources

Hydrological Management

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

Objective: Assess the park's hydrological restoration needs

Continued monitoring of river intrusion during the winter months will provide data on manatee distribution within the winter month in the spring –run. This data will be shared with other state and federal agencies.

Objective: Improve natural conditions and functions to 206 acres of Freshwater Marsh

Plans to install either a low water crossing or culvert crossing in the floodplain swamp between management zones will allow for improved pedestrian access and vehicle access for park staff.

Cultural Resource Management

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

During this unit management plan, the cultural resource objectives include assessing and evaluating 18 out of 20 cultural resources in the park, completing three Historic Structure Reports, and ensuring all known sites are recorded and updated within the Florida Master Site File. Priority for preservation at two main park structures, the Thursby House and Fatio Road Barn. All currently known locations for cultural resources will be visited and updated every two year. Additionally, all reliable documentation will be compiled for all recorded historic and archeological resources within the park boundary. Some steps include: compiling a history of the Starke family, developing and adopt a Scope of Collections Statement, and adopting a Statement of Interpretation. A structural assessment will be conducted on the Thursby House to determine the need for stabilization. A maintance plan should be developed to ensure repairs as needed. Lastly, Blue Spring State Park will work with the University of Florida's Archeological Field School to further research park mounds and middens at three specific locations.



BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

Draft Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Recreational Use & Infrastructure

Recreation and Facilities Management

Goal: Develop and maintain use areas and support infrastructure

Objective: *Improve 8 use areas*

Lower River Day Area

- Manatee Staging Area
- Capital Improvements
- Environmental Education Building
- Boating Area Improvements

Upper Spring Run Area

- Capital Improvements
- Boardwalk Expansion
- Restroom Renovations

Campground

- Additional Campsites (10)
- Utility Upgrade
- Additional Dump Station

Park Entrance

- Relocate Park Entrance
- Develop Traffic Plan

French Landing

- Develop Master Plan
- Stabilize Park Road
- Boat Ramp & Fishing Dock
- Interpretive Kiosk

Support Area

- Expand Shop Building
- Improve staff access
- Volunteer site or residence
- Relocate Shop Building

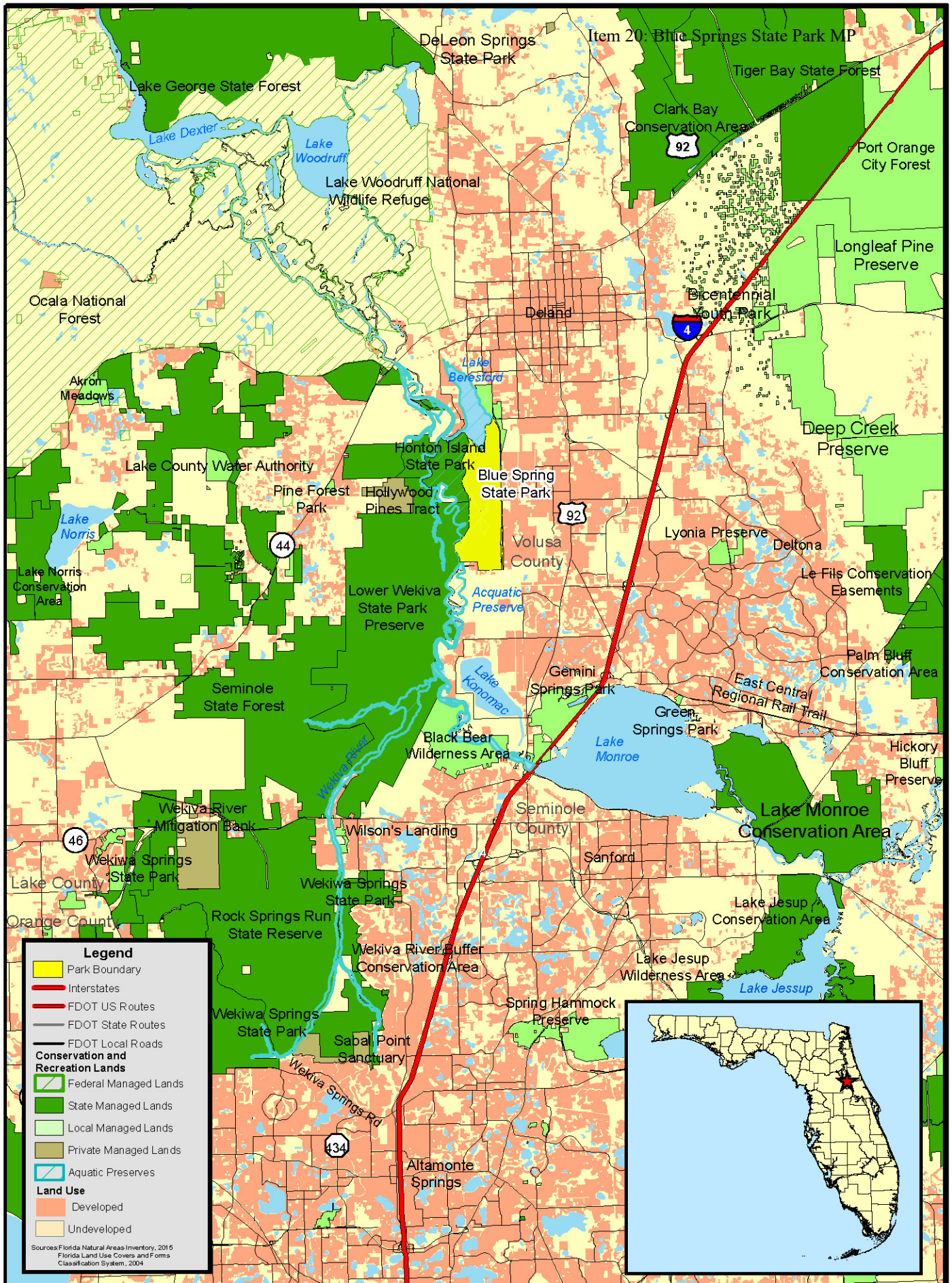
Pine Island Trail

- Boardwalk Extension

Parkwide

- Connect infrastructure to local sewer connection

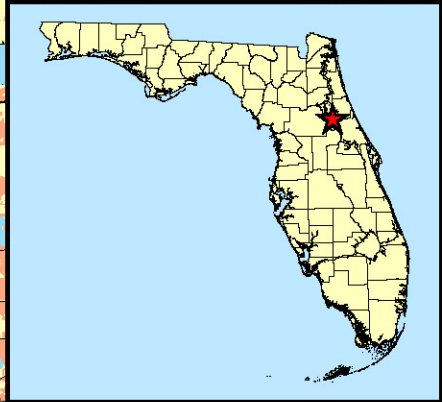


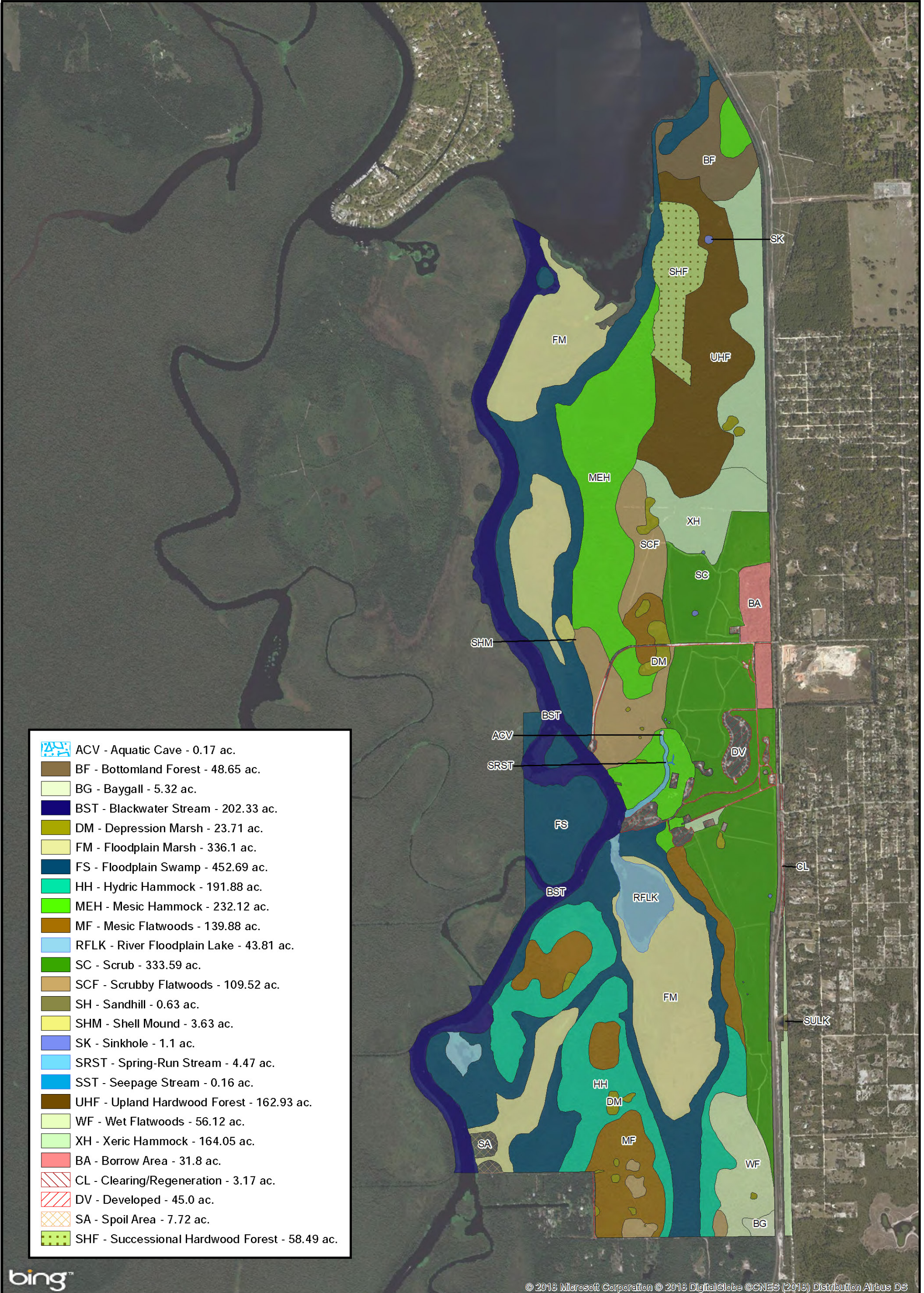


Legend

- Park Boundary
- Interstates
- FDOT US Routes
- FDOT State Routes
- FDOT Local Roads
- Conservation and Recreation Lands**
- Federal Managed Lands
- State Managed Lands
- Local Managed Lands
- Private Managed Lands
- Aquatic Preserves
- Land Use**
- Developed
- Undeveloped

Sources: Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2015
Florida Land Use Covers and Forms Classification System, 2004

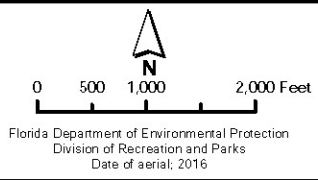


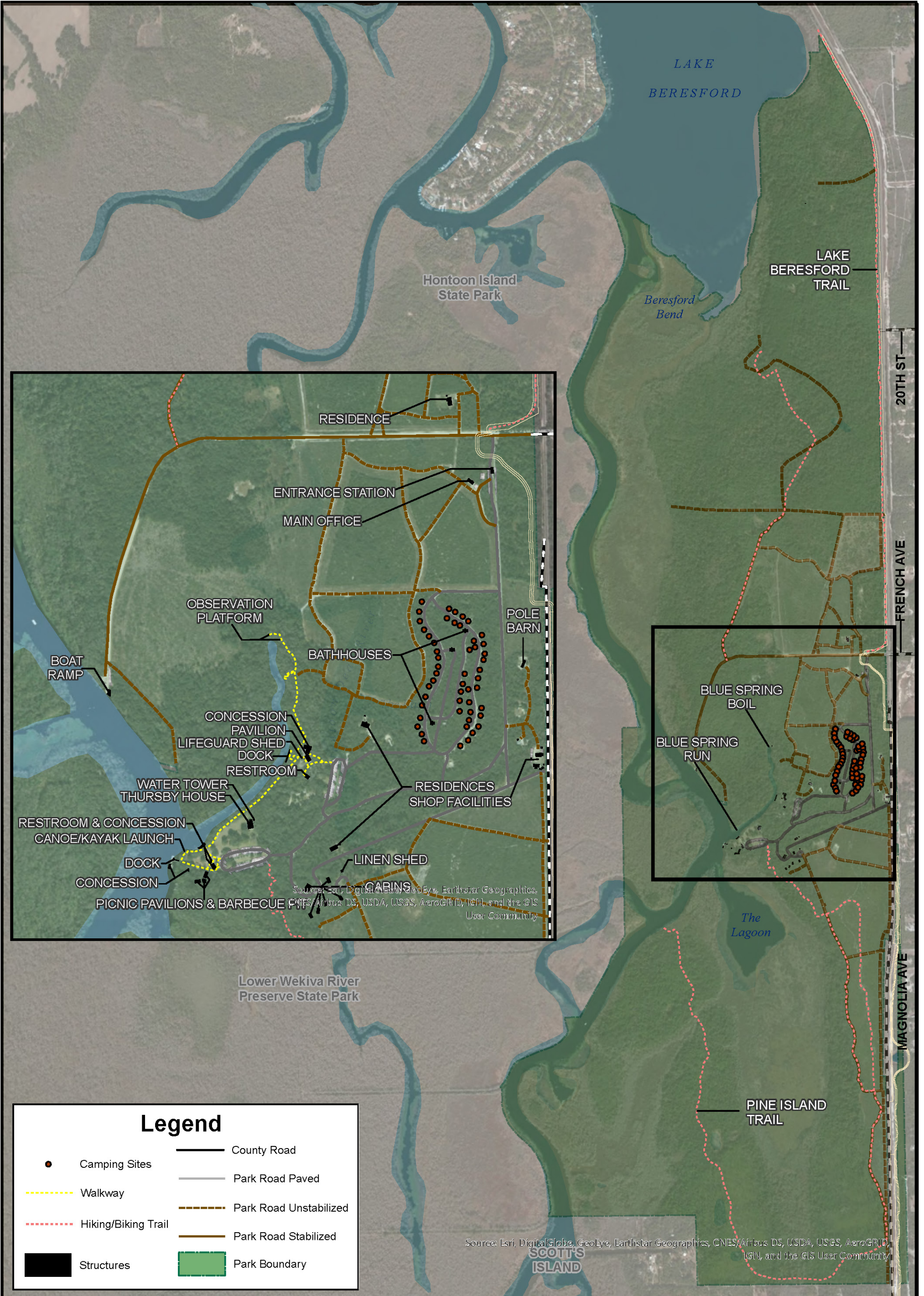


- ACV - Aquatic Cave - 0.17 ac.
- BF - Bottomland Forest - 48.65 ac.
- BG - Baygall - 5.32 ac.
- BST - Blackwater Stream - 202.33 ac.
- DM - Depression Marsh - 23.71 ac.
- FM - Floodplain Marsh - 336.1 ac.
- FS - Floodplain Swamp - 452.69 ac.
- HH - Hydric Hammock - 191.88 ac.
- MEH - Mesic Hammock - 232.12 ac.
- MF - Mesic Flatwoods - 139.88 ac.
- RFLK - River Floodplain Lake - 43.81 ac.
- SC - Scrub - 333.59 ac.
- SCF - Scrubby Flatwoods - 109.52 ac.
- SH - Sandhill - 0.63 ac.
- SHM - Shell Mound - 3.63 ac.
- SK - Sinkhole - 1.1 ac.
- SRST - Spring-Run Stream - 4.47 ac.
- SST - Seepage Stream - 0.16 ac.
- UHF - Upland Hardwood Forest - 162.93 ac.
- WF - Wet Flatwoods - 56.12 ac.
- XH - Xeric Hammock - 164.05 ac.
- BA - Borrow Area - 31.8 ac.
- CL - Clearing/Regeneration - 3.17 ac.
- DV - Developed - 45.0 ac.
- SA - Spoil Area - 7.72 ac.
- SHF - Successional Hardwood Forest - 58.49 ac.



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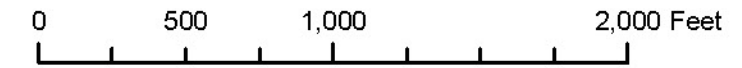






BLUE SPRING STATE PARK

Conceptual Land Use Plan



- Park Boundary
- Structures
- Spring Run
- Park Road
- Park Trails
- Campsites
- Proposed Developments

- 1** Park Entrance - Relocate park entrance to alleviate current issues of cars stacking along West French Avenue and general congestion and develop new traffic plan.
- 2** Support Area - Expand current shop building to a larger footprint, and improve staff access to area by stabilizing leading road. Add residence or volunteer site within the open field adjacent to support area. Relocation of the shop will be considered
- 3** Campground - Add up to 10 new campsites a mixture of RV , tents, glamping, and volunteer sites. Upgrade utilities within entire campground and add a new dump station at the southern end of campground.
- 4** Pine Island Trail - Develop new boardwalk from existing Pine Island Trail, approximately 200 feet, for new viewing opportunities of the lagoon.
- 5** Lower River Use Area - Develop manatee staging area along spring run. Add new dock with up to 10 boat slips for outside boaters along river. Add new floating dock for paddling launch. Add small Environmental Education Building.
- 6** Upper Spring Run - Renovate main concession building, formalize outdoor/indoor seating, meeting space, and new storage areas for tube rentals. Expand boardwalk along spring run, and replace/renovate current restroom.
- 7** Inholding - Acquire park inholding, approximately .28 acres
- 8** French Landing - Develop master plan to formalize area. Stabilize road leading to French Landing. Upgrade boat ramp and add small fishing dock. Add one interpretive kiosk

