



NATURE COAST STATE TRAIL

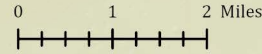
Park Chapter

STATE TRAIL SYSTEM

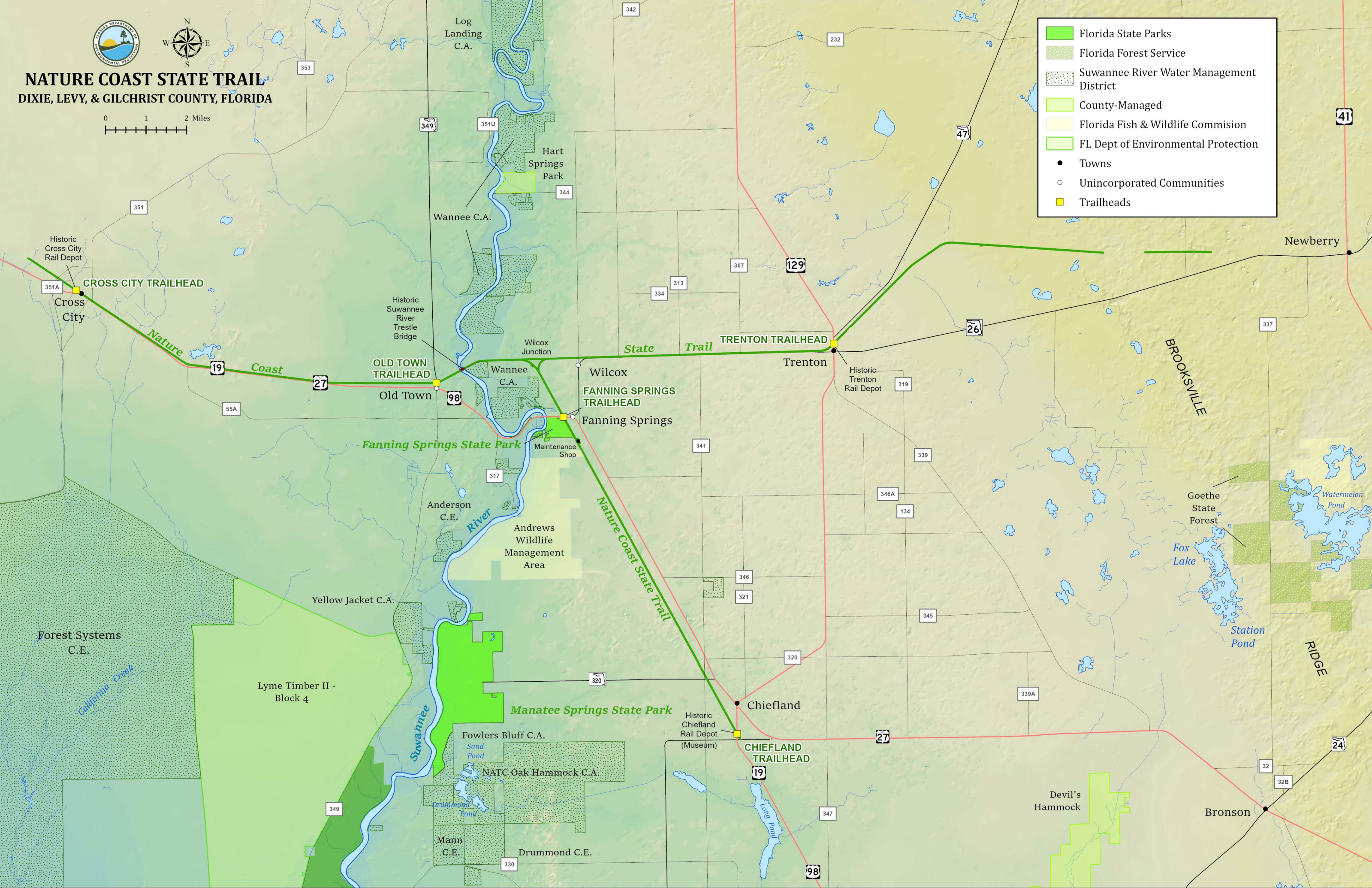


NATURE COAST STATE TRAIL

DIXIE, LEVY, & GILCHRIST COUNTY, FLORIDA



	Florida State Parks
	Florida Forest Service
	Suwannee River Water Management District
	County-Managed
	Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission
	FL Dept of Environmental Protection
	Towns
	Unincorporated Communities
	Trailheads



INTRODUCTION

LOCATION AND ACQUISITION HISTORY

The Nature Coast State Trail traverses Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy counties (see Vicinity Map). Access to the trail is available from multiple points. The Vicinity Map also reflects significant land and water resources existing near the trail. The following trailheads provide trail access and parking.

Cross City Trailhead:

N 29.636541, W -83.127876

Old Town Trailhead:

N 29.603678, W -82.980238

Trenton Trailhead:

N 29.615512, W -82.819250

Fanning Trailhead:

N 29.591591, W -82.930168

Chiefland Trailhead:

N 29.476730, W -82.859132

The Nature Coast State Trail was initially acquired on Dec. 18, 1996, from CSX Transportation, Inc. with Preservation 2000 funds. Currently, the trail comprises 656.27 acres. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) hold fee simple title to the trail and on April 30, 1998, the Trustees leased (Lease No. 4193) the property to the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) under a 50-year lease. The current lease will expire on April 29, 2048.

The Nature Coast State Trail is designated single-use to provide public outdoor recreation and conservation. There are no legislative or executive directives that constrain the use of this property (see Appendix). A legal description of the trail property can be made available upon request to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

SECONDARY AND INCOMPATIBLE USES

In accordance with 253.034(5) F.S., the potential of the trail to accommodate secondary management purposes was analyzed. These secondary purposes were considered within the context of DRP's statutory responsibilities and resource values. This analysis considered the trail's natural and cultural resources, management needs, aesthetic values, visitation and visitor experiences. It was determined that no secondary purposes could be accommodated in a manner that would not interfere with the primary purpose of resource-based outdoor recreation and conservation.

DRP has determined that uses such as water resource development projects, water supply projects, stormwater management projects, linear facilities and sustainable agriculture and forestry (other than those management activities specifically identified in this plan) would not be consistent with the management purposes of the trail.

In accordance with 253.034(5) F.S., the potential for generating revenue to enhance management was also analyzed. Visitor fees and charges are the principal source of revenue generated by the trail. It was determined that multiple-use management activities would not be appropriate as a means of generating revenues for land management. Generating revenue from consumptive uses or from activities that are not expressly related to resource management and conservation is under consideration.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARK

Park Purpose

Initially established to serve as a primary linkage network, the Nature Coast State Trail is a tri-county initiative that supports the vision of a regional trail network for the Suwannee River Valley. The Nature Coast State Trail serves nearby communities by connecting people and places, provides for economic development, and provides an opportunity for healthier lifestyles and sustainable modes of transportation.

Park Significance

- Utilizing the same historic route as the Atlantic Coastline Railroad in the 1900s, the Nature Coast State Trail provides long-distance cyclists 32 miles of paved multiple-use trail and 4.5 miles of equestrian trail, as well as a connection to the Suwannee River Wilderness State Trail and numerous state parks.
- Several scenic and cultural resources are preserved, including numerous historic bridges, three county depots and the railroad corridor itself.
- The historic Suwannee River railroad bridge provides an opportunity to occasionally observe the threatened Florida manatee, bald eagle, and Gulf sturgeon.
- Several rare and threatened species, such as gopher tortoises, may be observed along the trail which passes through Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

Central Park Theme

Crossing the fabled Suwannee River, the Nature Coast State Trail leisurely tours through Florida forests dotted with springs and small communities.

The Nature Coast State Trail is classified as a state trail in the DRP unit classification system. In the management of a state trail, primary consideration is given to providing opportunities for active recreation. Recreational user considerations are generally given priority over resource considerations. In areas where unique natural or cultural resources exist, however, resource considerations may become primary even at the loss of some recreational use. In general, emphasis is placed on active non-motorized recreation, although passive uses may be facilitated if suitable resources exist. Active uses typically involve cycling, running and walking, Program activity is concerned with promoting use of the trail for public recreation and interpretation. Development is aimed at enhancing the recreational appeal of the trail by providing basic facilities for access, user convenience and safety, and interpretation.

OTHER DESIGNATIONS

The unit is not within an Area of Critical State Concern as defined in section 380.05; Florida Statutes and is not presently under study for such designation. The trail is a component of the Florida Greenways and Trails System, administered by the DEP Office of Greenways and Trails.

All waters traversed by the trail have been designated as Outstanding Florida Waters, pursuant to Chapter 62-302, Florida Administrative Code. All the surface waters that the Nature Coast State Trail crosses have been classified as Class III (suitable for fish consumption and recreation) waters by DEP. The trail is not adjacent to an aquatic preserve as designated under the Florida Aquatic Preserve Act of 1975 (Section 258.35, Florida Statutes).

PARK ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Consistently met or exceeded goals for invasive species removal.
- Improved cultural resource monitoring and met annual goals.
- Continued support of events and partnership with area parks to represent the trail.
- Engaged in community outreach with area businesses and organizations to increase trail awareness.
- Installed new ADA accessible resting benches over the trail's 32 miles.
- Increased interpretive information at trailheads.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMPONENT

Nature Coast State Trail Management Zones			
Management Zone	Acreage	Managed with Prescribed Fire	Contains Known Cultural Resources
NC-01	25.5	N	N
NC-02	48.78	N	N
NC-03	64.95	N	N
NC-04	32.64	N	N
NC-05	11.3	N	Y
NC-06	44.69	N	Y
NC-07	35.01	N	N
NC-08	64.78	N	Y
NC-09	65.28	N	N
NC-10	55.5	N	N
NC-11	25.91	N	N
NC-12	34.66	N	Y
NC-13	40.29	N	N
NC-14	35.36	N	N
NC-15	44.94	N	N
NC-16	26.67	N	Y

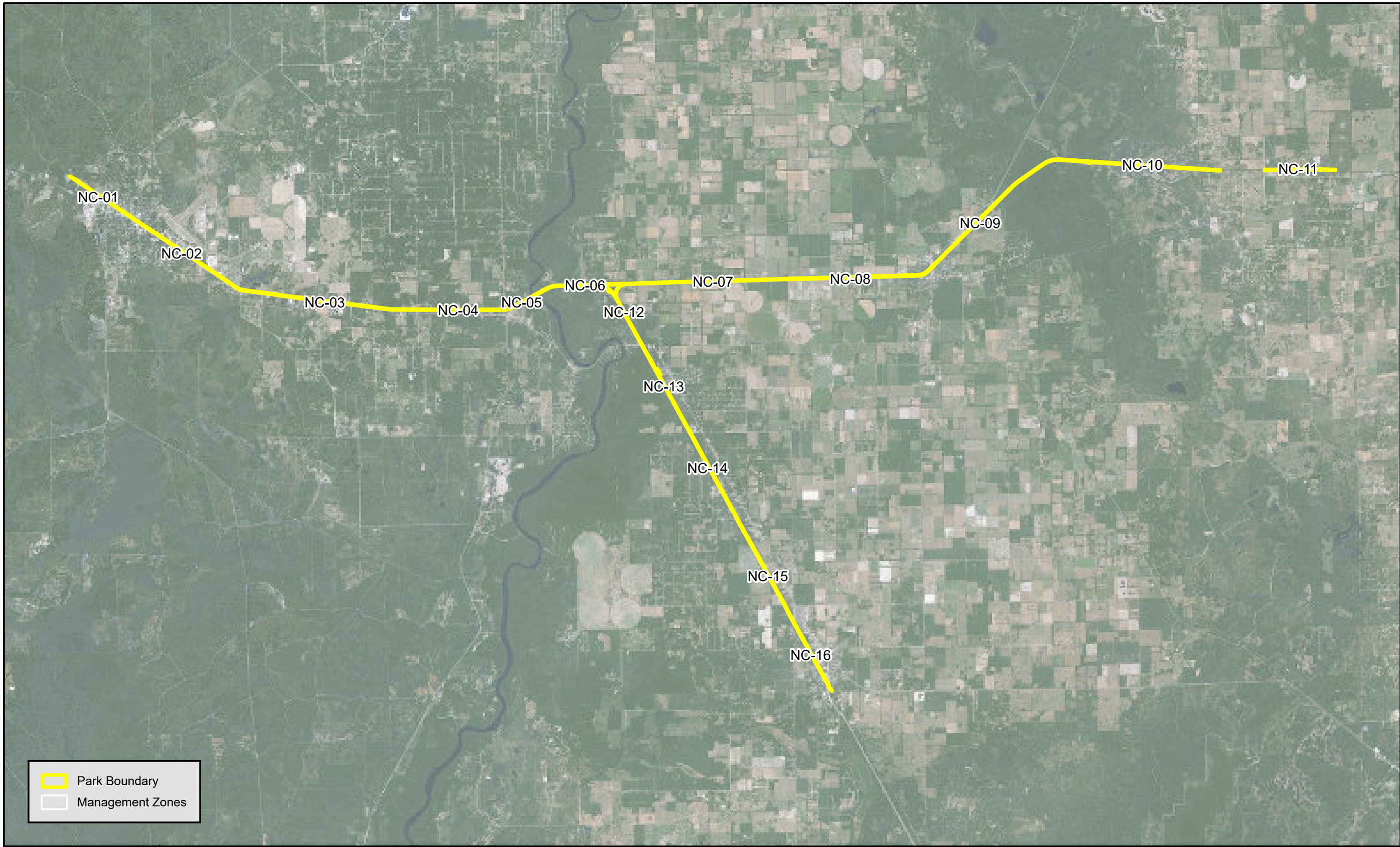
TOPOGRAPHY



The Nature Coast State Trail is located within the Coastal Lowlands Physiographic Zone of the state. These lowlands include narrow floodplains developed at the mouths of streams which cut across the low-lying terrain, alluvium or sandbars deposited along the valleys of the Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River during late Pleistocene times and the limestone of Tertiary Age exposed along the channels and elsewhere. The lower reach of each valley has been entrenched in the limestone bedrock. Sea levels on the coast are rising very gradually as a result of changes in global climatic patterns.

The trail was formerly a railroad grade and is generally flat. The lands surrounding the trail, however, drop from elevations of approximately 50 feet at Trenton, 45 feet at Cross City and 40 feet at Chiefland, to as low as 10 feet where the trail crosses the Suwannee River (National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929). At times the trail is raised on an artificial berm or cuts into localized rises.

SOILS

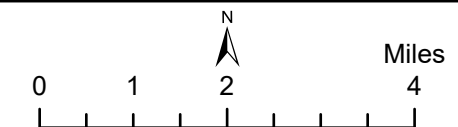
Soils underlying the Nature Coast State Trail are typically sandy and range from excessively drained to moderately well drained. Twenty-nine distinct soil units occur within the boundary of the property. The Appendix contains soil descriptions and aggregate information for the trail.



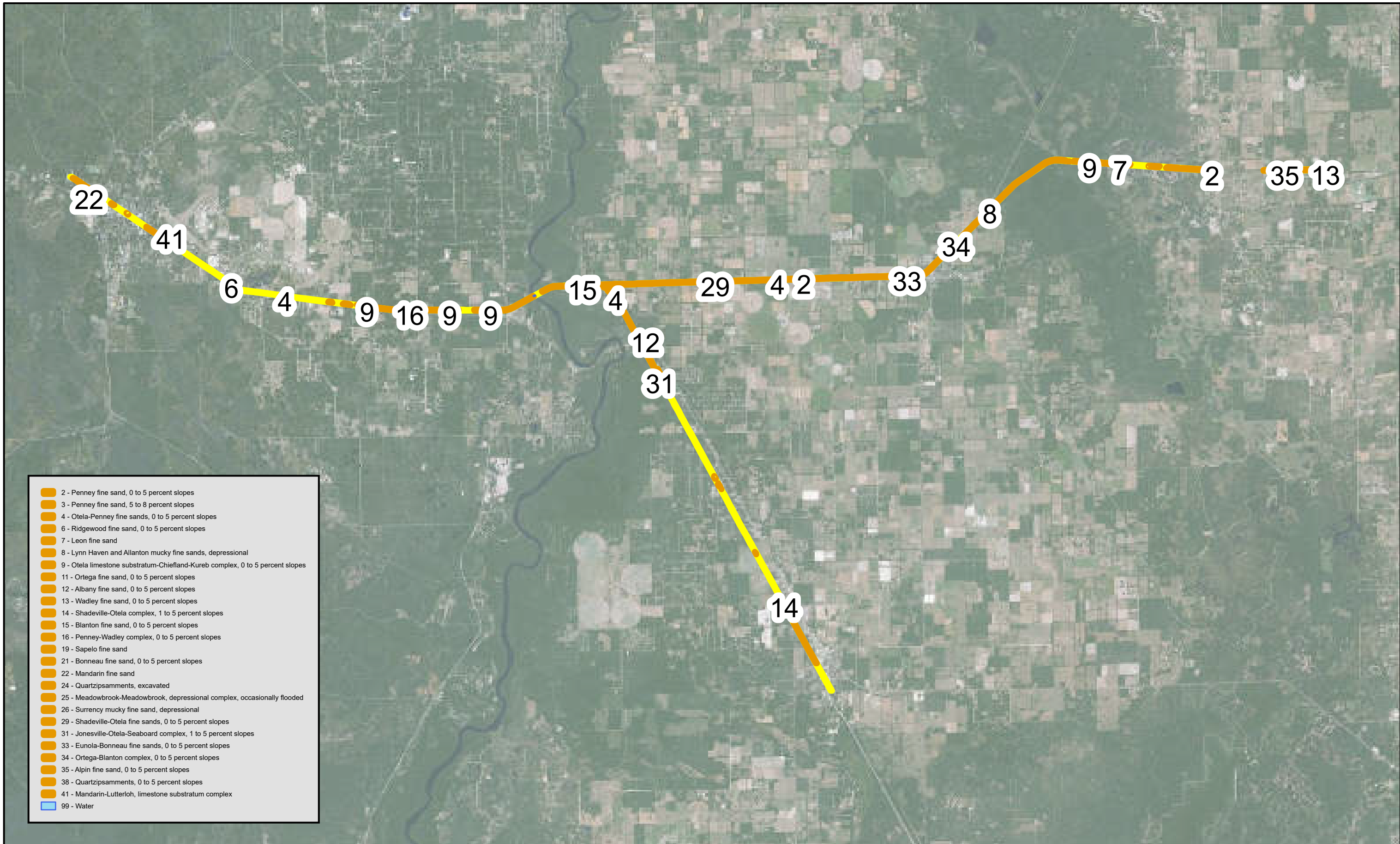
 Park Boundary
 Management Zones



NATURE COAST STATE TRAIL
Management Zones



Sources: ESRI; Florida Department of Environmental Protection
This graphical representation is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered authoritative for navigational, engineering, legal, and other uses.



- 2 - Penney fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 3 - Penney fine sand, 5 to 8 percent slopes
- 4 - Otela-Penney fine sands, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 6 - Ridgewood fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 7 - Leon fine sand
- 8 - Lynn Haven and Allanton mucky fine sands, depressional
- 9 - Otela limestone substratum-Chieffland-Kureb complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 11 - Ortega fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 12 - Albany fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 13 - Wadley fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 14 - Shadeville-Otela complex, 1 to 5 percent slopes
- 15 - Blanton fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 16 - Penney-Wadley complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 19 - Sapelo fine sand
- 21 - Bonneau fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 22 - Mandarin fine sand
- 24 - Quartzipsamments, excavated
- 25 - Meadowbrook-Meadowbrook, depressional complex, occasionally flooded
- 26 - Surrency mucky fine sand, depressional
- 29 - Shadeville-Otela fine sands, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 31 - Jonesville-Otela-Seaboard complex, 1 to 5 percent slopes
- 33 - Eunola-Bonneau fine sands, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 34 - Ortega-Blanton complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 35 - Alpin fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 38 - Quartzipsamments, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- 41 - Mandarin-Lutterloh, limestone substratum complex
- 99 - Water



NATURE COAST STATE TRAIL
Soils



Sources: ESRI; Florida Department of Environmental Protection
This graphical representation is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered authoritative for navigational, engineering, legal, and other uses.

HYDROLOGY

The paved portion of the Nature Coast State Trail runs from Fanning Springs in the east to Cross City to the west. The trail is bridged over the Suwannee River and passes through a large portion of floodplain swamp that borders this significant waterway. There are a few detention ponds and culvert systems adjacent to the trail just to the east of Cross City. These culverts and ponds collect stormwater from U.S. Highway 19/98 and, in some cases, drainage occurs toward a series of natural interconnected depression marshes called Long Pond. This pond at one time appears to have been a shallow lake.

Since the landscape and elevation of historic railbed corridor has been constructed, there are undoubtedly several areas along the trail where natural surface hydrology has been affected. Along much of its entire length, ditches unnaturally channelize and divert surface water, primarily rainfall, toward lower elevation areas, including the Suwannee River and associated floodplain wetlands.

Objective A: Conduct/obtain an assessment of the park's hydrological restoration needs.

- Action 1: Cooperate and seek guidance from state/federal agencies engaged in hydrological research and monitoring programs associated with wetlands along the trail corridor.
- Action 2: Provide timely response to any significant water quantity/quality issue within wetlands associated with the trail corridor.
- Action 3: If necessary, seek guidance and mitigate any wetland issue using best management practices.
- Action 4: Seek appropriate guidance to maintain culverts and bridges along the trail corridor.

DRP will continue its tradition of close cooperation with state and federal agencies that monitor waterways intersecting the trail. DRP will coordinate with agencies such as the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and DEP to determine if there are any declines in groundwater or surface water quality or quantity that might have occurred in watersheds through which the trail passes.

Restoration of the original hydrology along the trail route would likely entail removal of the railbed and restoration of the corridor to original grade, which is not feasible. However, if any projects could further mitigate and make the railbed corridor more transparent within the landscape, especially improvements to surface water sheetflow or increased water quality protection for wetlands from contaminants, DRP will use best management practices to help remediate.

Improving the hydrologic function of the surrounding watershed and surface water quality should be a high priority in the design of any hydrological improvement project.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES

There are limited intact or previously undisturbed natural resources. The property contains ruderal and developed areas. The historic use of the corridor as a railroad, and the current use as a trail, created two long, narrow vegetative communities. The natural communities of the trail are generally fragments, only functioning as a natural community in conjunction with the adjacent lands, much of

which are in private ownership. Due to their size, shape and position in the landscape, these remnant fragments are generally in poor condition.

Specific assessments of these remnant natural communities are provided below. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) report is provided in the Appendix.

Sandhill

Remnant sandhill vegetation is almost continuous along the trail from Fanning Springs to Chiefland. The outer edges of the corridor are successional sandhill and resemble an upland mixed forest. Smaller pockets of sandhill occur interspersed among other community types on the segment of the trail from Old Town to Cross City. Sandhill once stretched from Fanning Springs to Trenton but has been reduced to small patches of remnant groundcover with a fringe of upland mixed forest on the northern edge.

Upland Hardwood Forest

There are several pockets of moderately diverse upland hardwood forest on the west side of the Suwannee River extending west to Old Town. Most of the forested sections of the trail are successional sandhill or upland pine that resembles upland mixed forest.

Xeric Hammock

Xeric hammock is characterized as either a scrubby, dense, low canopy forest with little understory other than palmetto or a multiple-storied forest of tall trees with an open or closed canopy. Due to the lack of fire in the corridor, the sandhill could be succeeding to xeric hammock. Due to the linear configuration of the corridor, prescribed fire is impractical. However, consideration will be given to prescribed fire where feasible.

Depression Marsh

The trail crosses or is adjacent to several depression marshes just east of Cross City. However, very little of this community type is intact on the trail. Patches of depression marsh vegetation persist mostly in ditches along the corridor.

Alluvial Forest

The trail is supported by the Suwannee River Historic Railroad Bridge (GI 00229), where it crosses the relatively intact alluvial forest on the eastern side of the Suwannee River.

High and Low Impact Urban

There are several developed areas along the trail. These segments are primarily within the city limits of Cross City, Trenton, Fanning Springs and Chiefland. Developed areas of the property include the trail surface, historic depots and trailheads. Additionally, rest benches are located along the trail.

Utility Corridor

Sections of the corridor follow a Florida Power and Light/Duke Energy utility line. PEF is also the landowner of the historic railroad to the west of Cross City and south to Chiefland.

IMPERILED SPECIES

A portion of the property occurs within FNAI's Rare Species Potential Habitat model for the federally listed endangered Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) and southern hognose snake (*Heterodon simus*). The state listed plant species Chapman's Skeletongrass (*Gymnopogon chapmanianus*) was recorded in the vicinity of the Dixie County section of the Nature Coast State Trail. The Appendix contains comprehensive information known to FNAI, including endangered, threatened or species of special concern that have been documented in the Suwannee River. The trail crosses the Suwannee River along the Dixie and Gilchrist county lines. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) database indicates that listed species occurrence data are located within or adjacent to the Nature Coast State Trail. This includes "Bear Calls." FWC indicates the area of the extension is within a strategic habitat for the Florida mouse (*Podomys floridanus*), which is a species of critical concern.

The historic railroad berm and the nature of the sandy soils are suitable for the state threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). Gopher tortoises have been seen on the property. The highest density occurs between Fanning Springs and Chiefland. Due to the trail alignment on the historic railroad berm, the property does not lend itself to being a recipient location/mitigation area. Gopher tortoises are a threatened wildlife species and are protected by state law, Chapter 68A-27, F.A.C. Gopher tortoises will be relocated before any land clearing or development takes place, and all permit requirements will be satisfied. The Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) and the Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*) have been viewed from the historic Suwannee River railroad bridge. The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has also been viewed along the trail.

Due to the disturbed nature of the site and its narrow linear configuration, there is limited likelihood for extensive imperiled species habitats to be onsite. Any imperiled species habitats will be protected. If species are observed, steps to protect them will be implemented.

Objective A: Develop a baseline imperiled species occurrence inventory list.

Objective B: Develop and implement monitoring protocols for eight selected imperiled species.

- Action 1 - Map occurrences of imperiled species.
- Action 2 - Report identified species to partner agencies.
- Action 3 - Enforce speed limits along the Nature Coast State Trail to reduce the chance of harming imperiled species and other wildlife.
- Action 4 - Provide information in kiosks on how observers may report wildlife violations to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Based on information available, portions of this property appear to be located on or very near Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs) that are important for several rare species within the area. Habitat for listed species such as the Eastern indigo snake and southern hognose snake will be carefully managed so they can continue to flourish. DRP will consult and coordinate with appropriate federal, state and local agencies for management of designated species. Specifically, data collected by FWC and FNAI as part of their ongoing research and monitoring programs will be reviewed periodically to inform management of decisions that may have an impact on designated species along the trail. Further plant and animal studies may be conducted along the trail to verify the presence of additional designated species. Mapping and documentation of designated species populations will continue to prevent

inadvertent disturbances and to monitor population trends. Volunteer opportunities exist for collection of GPS data on sighting of species to assist inventories maintained by FWC and FNAI.

Disturbances to gopher tortoises and their burrows will be avoided. If unavoidable, any disturbance shall be duly permitted. Speed limits on the trail are enforced for the safety of the visitors and to reduce the chance of harming wildlife.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Due to the highly disturbed nature of the trail and the close proximity to private lands, roads and the utility corridor along the length of the trail, the complete eradication of the invasive plants is unlikely.

Invasive plant species such as mimosa, air potato, Japanese climbing fern and camphor trees occur throughout the trail. The highest densities of invasive plants, with the exception of patches of cogongrass, are within and just outside the Trenton city limits, near the Lancaster Correctional Institution, the Anderson Materials Concrete Plant walls just north of Old Fannin Road, and the four-way stop signs at Northwest 160th Street in Levy County. Portions of the trail in and near Cross City also have high densities of invasives. The segments of the trail that are adjacent to high quality natural areas such as Fanning Springs State Park and Andrews Wildlife Management Area are the highest priorities for invasive species management. Other equally high priorities include the control of extremely noxious weeds such as cogongrass, which is abundant on the section of the trail from Trenton to Fanning Springs, especially where the trail parallels the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) right-of-way. Another species that has the potential to spread rapidly is the paper mulberry, which is most prevalent in Cross City. It occurs in scattered locations throughout the trail.

Feral animals, including cats and hogs, have been seen onsite. Neither feral cats nor hogs are compatible with human activities. Foraging activities of wild hogs are also ecologically destructive to vegetative communities. Fire ants, which cause both medical and environmental harm, are also found on the property. Their venomous stings can trigger a wide range of effects on people, and they have been reported to reduce populations of ground nesting rodents, birds and snakes.

Objective A: Conduct a baseline study of the entire property to determine the presence, location and density of invasive plants and animals.

Objective B: Annually treat invasive plant species as determined by baseline study.

- Action 1 - Monitor populations of invasive plants, especially during the growing season, to evaluate the efficacy of control efforts and identify subsequent needs following initial treatments.
- Action 2 - Spot treat (mechanical/chemical treatments) Florida Invasive Species Council (FISC) Category I and Category II invasive plant species as needed. Facilitate removal of young plants during the growing season to maximize the benefit of eliminating plants prior to the production of fruits and seeds.
- Action 3 – Record the total number of infested acres treated annually.
- Action 4 - Coordinate with adjacent landowners to minimize planting of invasive vegetation.
- Action 5 - Reduce and eliminate illegal dumping on the extension.
- Action 6 - Implement maintenance protocols to prevent populations from becoming re-established in the existing natural communities.

Objective C: Implement control measures on invasive and nuisance animal species as determined by baseline study.

- Action 1 - Work with neighbors to ensure dogs are secured on their property or on a leash.
- Action 2 – Record the total annual number of invasive/nuisance animal species and employ at least one control method per species.

Controlling invasives before maturation and fruit/seed development is critical. Successful elimination of invasive plant species within the trail corridor will partly depend on control of invasive plants on adjacent lands. According to the FISC, Category I plants (those that are altering and displacing native plant communities) will require constant vigilance to prevent their spreading to other areas of the trail corridor. Invasive plants, commonly spread along the corridor, are removed through both mechanical and chemical means to prevent further disbursement. Where possible, volunteers trained in invasives identification and removal will be enlisted to help control the spread of non-native species. Partnerships with adjacent private and public landowners should be pursued, particularly in the case of highly invasive species. Florida Power and Light/Duke Energy uses herbicide spray on invasives along their property that parallels much of the Nature Coast State Trail.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Archaeological, Historical and Cultural Resources

As part of responsible management required by state and federal laws, land managers and those involved in the decision-making process should be aware of the types of archaeological, cultural and historical resources in their stewardship and should be knowledgeable of the best management practices for these sites. The Division of Historical Resources (DHR) was contacted during the management plan update process. DHR reviewed the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) and provided management with a list of recorded resources within the project boundary and in the vicinity of the Nature Coast State Trail. Due to the former land use as a railroad, there is a low probability of significant, undisturbed sites located in the railroad boundary. Since the Office of Greenways and Trails contacted DHR, management has recorded the Suwannee River Historic railroad bridge with the FMSF. Management will continue working to record additional known undocumented resources and does not propose additional actions to identify unknown resources.

The list below includes both documented and undocumented (known) resources. Sites evaluated by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are indicated. Some of the significant resources include:

Dixie County

- Suwannee River Historic Railroad Bridge (DI00261).
- Cross City Depot (undocumented resource).
- Historic railroad corridor (undocumented resource), will be recorded as ACL Railroad (Nature Coast State Trail).

Gilchrist County

- Kentucky Lake site (GI00081): Potentially eligible for NRHP (Aug. 4, 2004).
- 8499 SW CR 334-A (GI00100): Ineligible for NRHP (March 23, 2007).
- ACL Railroad (Nature Coast State Trail), alternate name Trenton Railroad (GI00114).

- State Road 26/Wade Avenue (GI00115): Ineligible for NRHP (March 3, 2007).
- Trenton Historic District (GI00117): Potentially eligible for NRHP.
- Main Street in Trenton/U.S. 129/FL 49 (GI000126): Ineligible for NRHP (March 21, 2007).
- Trenton Depot (GI00137).
- Suwannee River Historic Railroad Bridge (GI 00229).

Levy County

- Chiefland Railroad Depot (LV00541).
- Historic Railroad Corridor (undocumented resource), will be recorded as ACL Railroad.

The Kentucky Lake site (GI00081) is a multiple-component site that contains components from the pre-Civil War, U.S. Army and Native American eras. Interpretation associated with Fort Fanning Historic Site could be appropriate for future educational kiosks.

The Suwannee River Historic Railroad Bridge (DI00261/GI00229) was designed/engineered by the American Bridge Company (AB). Operating as a part of U.S. Steel Corporation from 1901 to 1987, AB had significant roles in the establishment of the railroad networks throughout the world. Other AB projects include, but are not limited to, West Virginia's New River Gorge Bridge, Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and Tampa Bay's Sunshine Skyway, as well as the Woolworth Building, Chrysler Building, Empire State Building, Sears Tower and John Hancock Building. The earlier constructed Suwannee River Historic Railroad Bridge exhibits a similar style to the Santa Lucia Bridge constructed in Uruguay in 1924. Historically, the 1,335-foot-long bridge operated with a 150-foot plate girder swing span. The swing span was manually rotated with a key placed in the gear above the round pier. Sometimes, horses or donkeys were used to help open the bridge.

The historic and cultural resources described are some of the highlights of the trail and are considered "scenic resources."

Objective A: Update the existing baseline report of all archeological and historical sites/resources on the property to identify the resources that are in a degraded condition.

Objective B: Ensure that a total of 13 known sites are recorded with the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) as determined by the baseline report.

- Action 1 - Report three known, unrecorded sites to the FMSF.

Objective C: Monitor 10 previously recorded sites and send updates to the FMSF as needed.

- Action 1 - Ensure that the trail manager has participated in the Archaeological Resources Monitoring (ARM) training for state land managers.

Objective D: Bring recorded sites into good condition as determined by the baseline report above.

- Action 1 - Identify funding and complete the Suwannee River Historic railroad bridge abutment repairs.
- Action 2 - Treat depots for termites and other pests.
- Action 3 - Work with local law enforcement to protect historic structures from vandalism.
- Action 4 - As needs arise, conduct necessary maintenance on historic structures.

LAND USE COMPONENT

VISITATION

The Nature Coast State Trail is a popular long-distance biking destination in Florida's Big Bend region. The trail allows long-distance cyclists to explore and travel between Cross City, Old Town, Fanning Springs, Chiefland and Trenton, as well as the rural areas and conservation lands between them. At shorter distances, walking, jogging, roller-blading and other non-motorized activities are popular with visitors.

The architectural and historical centerpiece of the Nature Coast State Trail is the historic Suwannee River trestle bridge. Historic railroad depots in Cross City, Chiefland and Trenton, in conjunction with the Suwannee River trestle bridge, harbor significant interpretive potential. Visitor access to these depots is varied, as the rail depot in Chiefland serves as the city's dedicated chamber of commerce and the Trenton Railroad Depot is occasionally opened for special events by the city of Trenton but remains otherwise closed to the public. The rail depot in Cross City is not currently open to the public.

The Trenton trailhead is situated in the heart of the town's central business district, while the Cross City trailhead is situated adjacent to heavily trafficked U.S. Highway 19/98 on the northern end of the town. Wilcox Junction, the point at which the western, southern and eastern "spokes" of the trail converge, also offers potential to attract trail users if further developed. Remnant railroad tracks remain in the area and the dispersal point for the three "spokes" of the trail presents substantial interpretive and wayfinding value. Equestrian visitors may utilize an unpaved equestrian trail that parallels the paved trail along a 4.5-mile span between Fanning Springs and the Old Town trailhead. The pervious parking lot at the trailhead is expansive enough to allow for equestrian trailer parking.

Trends

Historical visitation data for Nature Coast State Trail exhibits seasonal trends. Generally, increased levels of visitation have occurred in months with cooler temperatures, especially January through April when visitation ranges from 10,000 to 18,000 visitors per month. Between May and August, monthly visitation totals a few thousand visitors. August has historically been characterized by a visitation uptick; special trail events or festivals may occur in August.

EXISTING FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The availability of facilities along the trail varies widely by use area. Restrooms and picnic pavilions are available at the Cross City, Chiefland and Trenton trailheads, while unpaved parking areas at the Fanning Springs and Old Town trailheads do not have visitor facilities or amenities of any significance. Paved parking lots are provided at the Chiefland and Trenton trailheads, while a grass parking lot is provided at the Cross City trailhead, each providing approximately 10-15 parking spaces. There are also various informal local access points with connections to adjacent properties. Some of these access points incorporate makeshift parking areas.

The trail connects three historic railroad depots, while the primary maintenance shop that serves the trail is situated just south of its intersection with U.S. Highway 19/98 in Fanning Springs. The Cross City and Trenton railroad depots are included in the DRP property inventory. The Chiefland railroad depot is owned by the city of Chiefland.

Facilities Inventory

<i>Cross City Trailhead</i>	
Pavilion	1
Restroom	1
Grass Parking Area (15 spaces)	1
<i>Old Town Trailhead</i>	
Stabilized Pervious Parking Lot (Equestrian Parking Area)	1
<i>Fanning Springs Trailhead</i>	
Stabilized Pervious Parking Lot (15 spaces)	1
Maintenance Shop	1
Equestrian Trail Mileage	4.5
<i>Chiefland Trailhead</i>	
Paved Parking Lot (10 spaces)	1
Restroom	1
Pavilion	1
Maintenance Complex	1
<i>Trenton Trailhead</i>	
Historic Railroad Depot	1
Restroom	1
Pavilion	1
Paved Parking Area (15 spaces)	1

CONCEPTUAL LAND USE PLAN

Detailed Conceptual Land Use Plan Objectives

Below are detailed descriptions of land planning proposals and considerations, organized according to use areas or other types of specific sites along the trail.

General Trail Needs

Objectives: Update interpretive elements and increase visitor safety while improving the visitor experience.

Action Items:

- *Develop interpretive elements that tie into a trail-wide interpretive theme.*
- *Provide informational/intersection signage.*
- *Improve vegetative buffering.*
- *Comply with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).*
- *Install 911 emergency system.*

The Nature Coast State Trail offers significant interpretive opportunities. Interpretation along the trail is currently relegated to paper trail pamphlets that are offered at various kiosks at select trailheads. Formalized trail map and historical interpretive elements are primary needs at all five trailheads. The

railroad bed, historic depots and historic Suwannee River trestle bridge would be significantly enhanced by the installation of interpretive signage at all access points, the historic bridge and Wilcox Junction. A unified interpretive theme should be developed and implemented.

Broader access concerns exist regarding the full length of the trail. Makeshift trail connections to adjacent private properties are widespread along the Nature Coast State Trail, while multiple at-grade highway and secondary road crossings make intersection signage critical for cyclist and pedestrian safety. Vegetated buffering should be improved where most appropriate.

The MUTCD ensures uniformity of traffic control devices by setting minimum standards and providing guidance for safe and efficient transportation. All improvements or developments made to the trail should be followed with the proper MUTCD-compliant signage.

A 911 emergency system should be implemented. Installation of the system would involve the placement of decals or mile markers along the trail to identify the exact location of multiple “station numbers” assigned to the trail. The use of station numbers will enable 911 call takers to know the exact location (using geographic coordinates) of trail users in need of emergency response services. Call takers will immediately know which units to dispatch and the best way for emergency responders to reach the incident.

Cross City Trailhead

Objective: Update park infrastructure and interpretive elements to enhance the visitor experience.

Action Items:

- *Restore and interpret Cross City Depot.*
- *Pave the parking lot.*
- *Acquire property and remove structure.*

An interpretive exhibit design plan should be developed for the historic Cross City Railroad Depot, which is currently an acquisition target for the city, with plans to restore the depot into a tourism center. The DRP fully supports the effort, and both parties, as well as trail visitors, would greatly benefit from the restoration and reopening plans, as well as enhanced interpretation.

The improvement of the railroad depot should accompany the conversion of the Cross City parking area into a formalized, paved parking lot. Additionally, a vacant structure stands between the Cross City trailhead and U.S. Highway 19/98. DRP should consider purchasing this small property and removing the structure (for additional details, see the Optimum Boundary section below).

Old Town Trailhead

Objective: Include interpretive and safety elements.

Action Items:

- *Provide interpretive/directional signage.*
- *Consider paving the parking area.*

Interpretive and directional signage should be installed at this trailhead. There are no signs directing visitors to the informal parking area or orienting their location with respect to the rest of the trail. Visitors should be provided directional signs from State Road 349, a sign delineating the parking area, and a trail map providing an overview of where visitors are on the trail.

Stabilized or paved delineated, parallel parking spaces should be provided along Northeast 81st Avenue adjacent to the trail. Several paved or stabilized walkways may be considered to avoid eroding the surrounding vegetation.

Fanning Springs Trailhead

Objective: Update park infrastructure and interpretive elements.

The Fanning Springs trailhead is situated along a heavily trafficked stretch of U.S. Highway 19/98, just north of the entrance to Fanning Springs State Park. The previous parking area shares an ingress/egress connection to U.S Highway 19/98 with a neighboring local restaurant, making it less apparent that the parking lot serves the Nature Coast State Trail. DRP should consider improvements to the parking surface, as well as the installation of more apparent signage and improvements to traffic flow. Interpretation, including trail maps and explanation of the historical railroad line, is also needed.

Wilcox Junction

Objective: Update infrastructure, landscaping, and interpretive elements.

Wilcox Junction is a key interpretive opportunity, as signage and a map kiosk could potentially display distances to the five trailheads to the east, southeast and west.

Previous planning efforts have also identified needed repairs to Flying Dog Bridge near Wilcox Junction. If repairs are still needed, they should be completed within this next 10-year planning cycle.

Low-impact landscaping should be considered to improve the surrounding area's appearance and adequately buffer the trail from adjacent development and roads.

Chiefland Trailhead

Objective: Increase wayfinding capabilities by updating and adding interpretive elements.

The Chiefland trailhead is the most developed location on the Nature Coast State Trail, as the use area features amenities and structures maintained by the city of Chiefland. However, a shortage of interpretation and wayfinding is present at this location as well. An interpretive kiosk is present on the property and, like other trailheads, should feature a formalized trail map with the exact location of visitors in comparison to other trailheads and amenities in the vicinity.

Trenton Trailhead

Objective: Update trail infrastructure and improve interpretive elements.

Action Items:

- *Extend paved trail.*
- *Protect trail features/facilities.*

Currently, the paved portion of the Nature Coast State Trail terminates at an intersection with North Main Street in downtown Trenton, while DRP boundaries extend eastward toward Newberry. Optimum boundary parcels have been identified even further east, including parcels that will allow the trail to eventually extend to Newberry and then to Gainesville (for additional details, see the Optimum Boundary section below). Paving and formalizing the Nature Coast State Trail east of Trenton should be prioritized, as this may spur a desire for a continuation to Gainesville.

The Trenton Rail Depot is the centerpiece of the city's small downtown park along South Main Street. The depot is currently opened only on special occasions by the city of Trenton. DRP should partner with Gilchrist County and the city of Trenton to further develop the rail depot. Development into a museum or visitor center may provide the town with an economic boost. This depot renovation could emulate the rail depot within the city of Inverness, along the Withlacoochee State Trail.

Vandalism at railroad depots and along the historic trestle bridge is apparent and observable. The restrooms in the Trenton Railroad Depot are locked after nightfall. Signs mounted to the doors cite vandalism as the reason for restricted hours. Measures to improve oversight and security of trail features and facilities should be considered.

OPTIMUM BOUNDARY

Conservation lands and Florida Forever Board of Trustees (BOT) Projects surround the Nature Coast State Trail. The trail traverses over the prominent Suwannee River while agricultural lands scatter the vicinity.

Optimum boundary considerations for the Nature Coast State Trail relate to extensions and connections northwest toward the Big Bend area and northeast toward north-central Florida. Trail extensions are dependent on Florida Forever BOT Strategic Managed Area Lands List (SMALL) parcels and Land Trail Priority corridors. Any extension of the trail is contingent on acquisition and management from other entities so as to not result in direct DRP management (see Optimum Boundary Map for additional details).

A heavily damaged and dilapidated structure stands between the Cross City trailhead and U.S. Highway 19/98 . The structure is highly unsightly and has fallen into disrepair. Removing this structure would complement the formalization of the parking area and the renovation of the railroad depot. DRP should consider purchasing this 0.21-acre vacant parcel, demolishing the structure and improving the landscape's appearance.


The eastern paved portion of the trail terminates along North Main Street in downtown Trenton, with paving recommended further east toward Newberry. This Land Trail Priority Nature Coast Trail Corridor proposes connections to disjunct sections along the eastern stretches of the trail's boundary. This addition will aid in connecting other state trails and local projects, including the Newberry to High Springs Corridor. This proposed addition totals 63 acres.

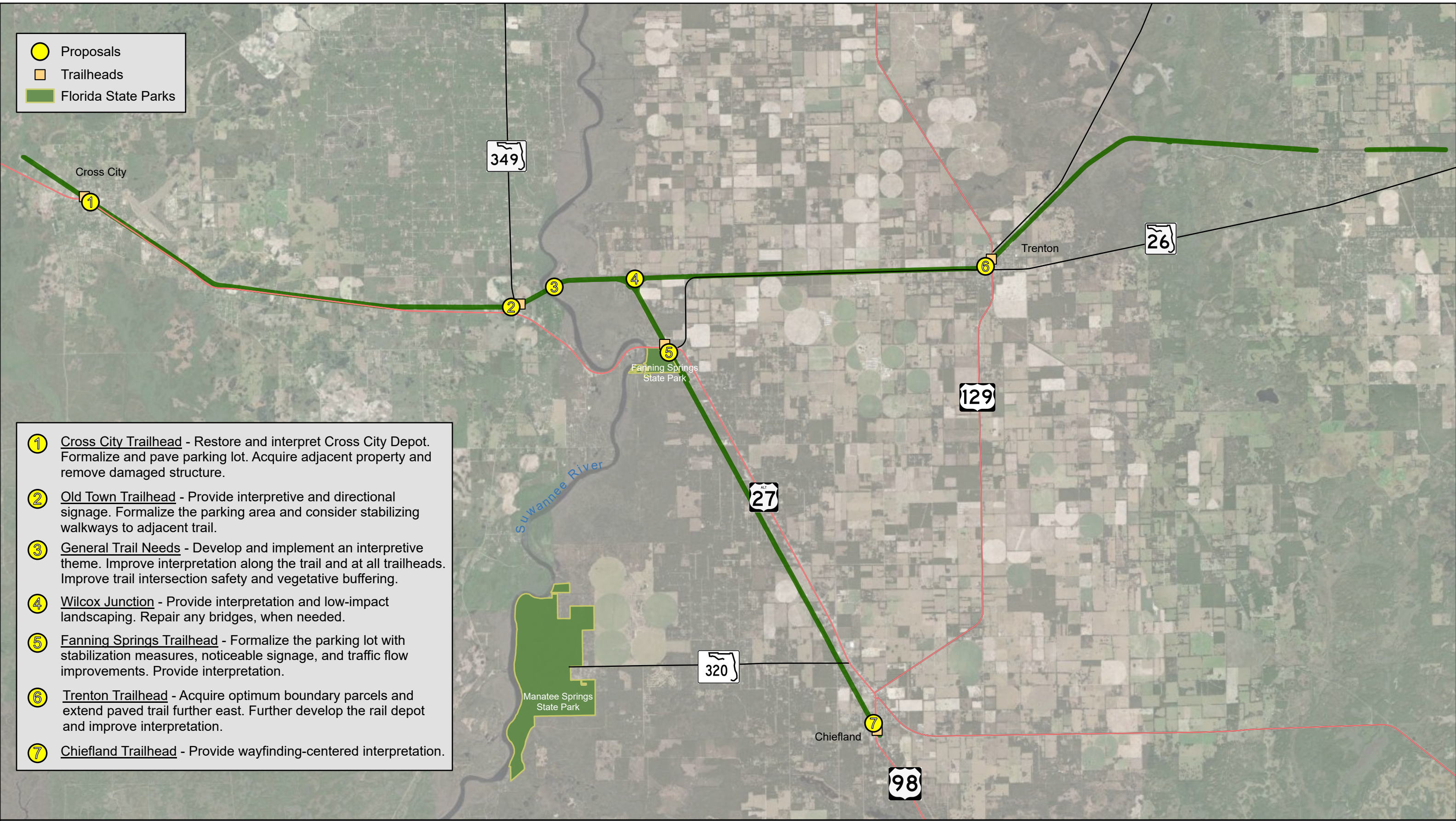
Eventually, the Newberry to High Springs Corridor, a SMALL Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) project, will improve recreational connectivity by providing a corridor to the Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail and numerous other conservation lands in the vicinity. This 817-acre connection will function as an ecological greenway and close gaps within the OGT Trails Priority System, allowing for continuous cycling to High Springs to the northeast and Gainesville to the east.

To the south, the Land Trail Priority Nature Coast Regional Connector Trail will also provide a continuous connection from Chiefland to Dunnellon. This extension may require engagement with Duke Energy. If this engagement yields an opportunity to extend the trail, connections to the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway and the Withlacoochee State Trail are possible.

Beyond the western terminus of the trail, another SMALL project and Land Trail Priority, the Georgia to Cross City Corridor, exhibits the potential to extend the trail from Cross City to Perry. Acquisition of this Land Trail Priority would also extend the trail to Monticello. This addition would traverse open rural highway with very sparse development. This corridor totals 871 acres and provides connections to several small towns and scenic conservation lands.

Acquiring these trail corridors will support a regional trail system, connecting people across the state to the Tallahassee-Nature Coast-Peace River Greenway, the Heart of Florida Loop, and the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop.

-  Proposals
-  Trailheads
-  Florida State Parks



- 1** Cross City Trailhead - Restore and interpret Cross City Depot. Formalize and pave parking lot. Acquire adjacent property and remove damaged structure.
- 2** Old Town Trailhead - Provide interpretive and directional signage. Formalize the parking area and consider stabilizing walkways to adjacent trail.
- 3** General Trail Needs - Develop and implement an interpretive theme. Improve interpretation along the trail and at all trailheads. Improve trail intersection safety and vegetative buffering.
- 4** Wilcox Junction - Provide interpretation and low-impact landscaping. Repair any bridges, when needed.
- 5** Fanning Springs Trailhead - Formalize the parking lot with stabilization measures, noticeable signage, and traffic flow improvements. Provide interpretation.
- 6** Trenton Trailhead - Acquire optimum boundary parcels and extend paved trail further east. Further develop the rail depot and improve interpretation.
- 7** Chiefland Trailhead - Provide wayfinding-centered interpretation.



Nature Coast State Trail

Conceptual Land Use Plan





- Existing Trail Boundary
- Other Existing State Trails
- Other Existing Conservation Lands

- Proposed Non-DRP Conservation
- Optimum Boundary (Proposed Additions)
- Florida Forever BOT Projects



Nature Coast State Trail

Optimum Boundary

