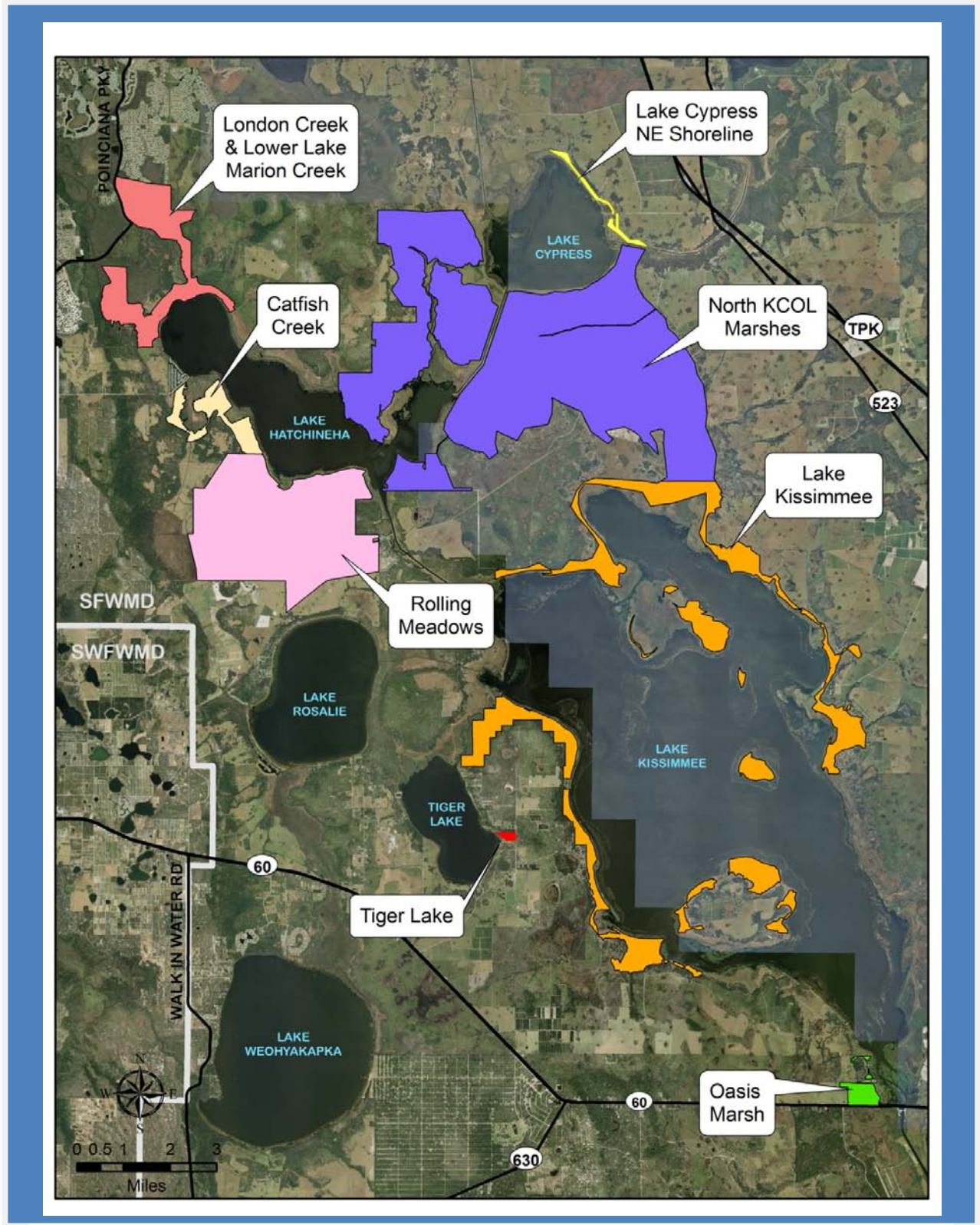


Kissimmee Chain of Lakes



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Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (KCOL)

Polk and Osceola Counties

Area within planning boundary footprint	~38,591 acres
District fee-simple ownership	~ 29,230 acres
Other public fee-simple ownership	~ 1,330 acres
Area under other protective restriction (conservation easement, platted preserve area, etc.)	~ 8,031 acres

Site Overview

The District began purchasing lands within the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes beginning in 1990 through the Save Our Rivers program when scientists and engineers from the District and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers working on the Kissimmee River Restoration Project determined that not enough water would be available in the upper Chain of Lakes to provide year round base flow for the restored river. It was estimated that an additional 100,000 acre-feet of water storage was required to provide longer durations and seasonal variability of flow to restored river in the lower basin.

The recommended solution was to raise the top of the existing lake regulation schedule from 52.5’ to 54.0’. It was necessary to acquire real estate interests on land around lakes Kissimmee, Cypress, Tiger, and Hatchineha in eastern Polk and southwestern Osceola counties.

Most of the acquired lowlands had been used for many years as improved cattle pasture, but the District has been gradually restoring these areas to marsh and wet prairie. These natural grasslands are well suited to accommodating cattle, wildlife, and the recreating public. Consequently, the district has been able to maintain much of the area in agricultural production, while simultaneously improving thousands of acres of lakeshore habitat, and vastly increasing the area available for public recreation.

In 2010, the FWC established hunting and public use regulations over the area. Since 2004, the District has built 2 shelters, 15 campsites, 2 airboat crossings, and a large boat ramp facility to accommodate public use in the area.

The US fish and Wildlife Service, and its partners, are in the process acquiring land rights in and around the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and Kissimmee River area. This new wildlife refuge is intended to acquire 150,000 acres in a combination of fee-simple interests and less-than-fee protective easements. The highest priorities for acquisition

by the Service were identified largely based on connectivity to the existing inventory of public and protected land.

Assessment Units

Lake Cypress NE Shore

A very narrow strip of land, generally only 100-300 feet wide, that lies between the sovereign lake bottom and the 54.0’ contour.

North KCOL Floodplain Marshes

This area includes all of the lowland marshes surrounding the confluence of Lake Cypress, Lake Hatchineha, and Lower Reedy Creek. Many of the lowlands have benefited from hydrologic restoration and management activities designed to re-establish native marsh and wet prairie communities.

London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek

This area covers the floodplain swamp that surrounds the mouths of Lake Marion Creek and London Creek to the north of Port Hatchineha.

Catfish Creek

This area covers the floodplain between Port Hatchineha and Rolling Meadows.

Rolling Meadows

This area is being restored to a wetland mosaic as mitigation for wetland impacts. A portion of the property has been leased to the Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek Preserve State Park.

Tiger Lake

Most of the shoreline of Tiger Lake has been secured through the acquisition of flowage easements. However, 5 individual parcels were acquired in fee-simple. This assessment focuses on those five parcels.

Lake Kissimmee Shore

This area was acquired to secure the rights necessary to increase water levels from 52.5’ to 54.0’. This area also includes fee-simple lands on the islands within Lake Kissimmee.

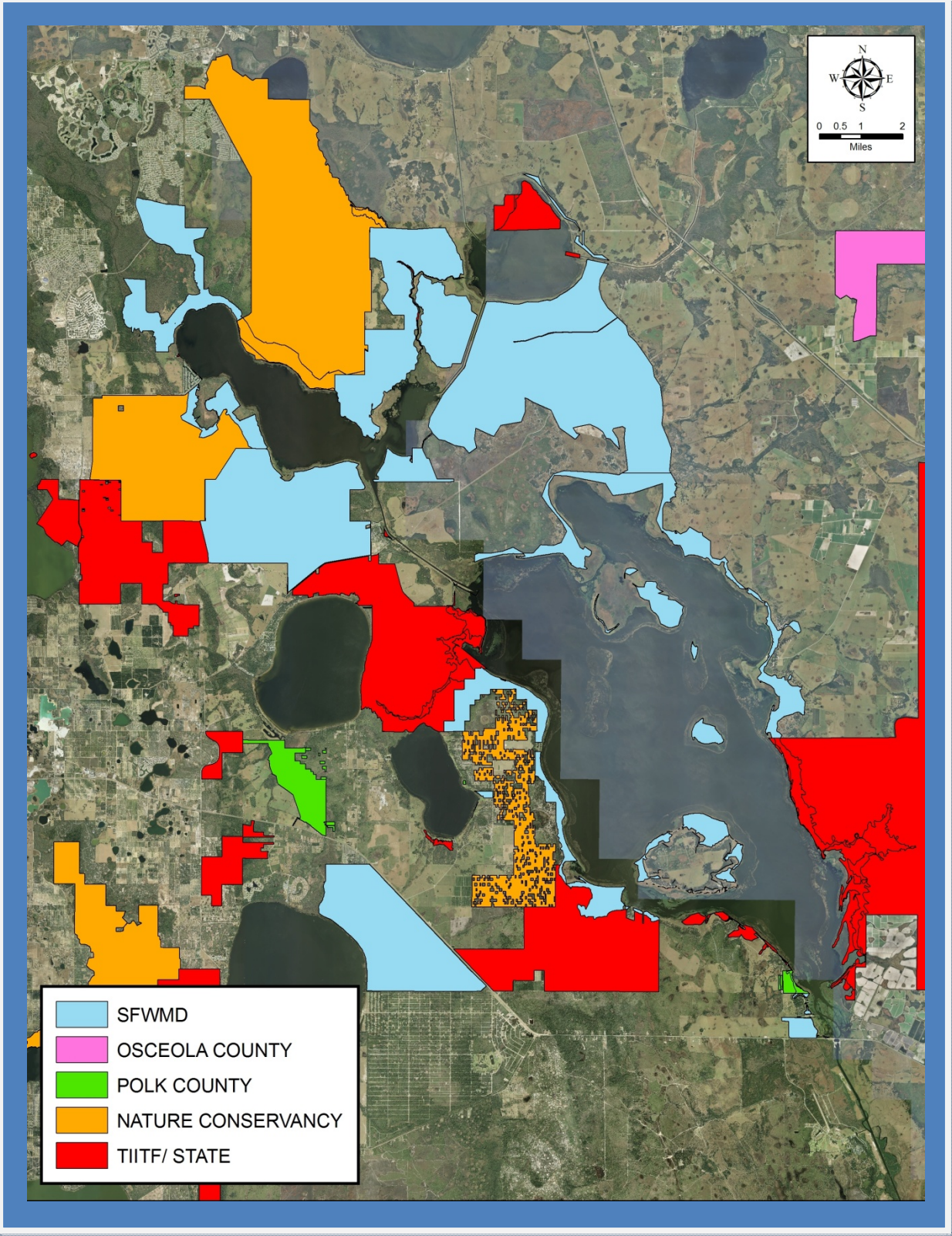
Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Area
FWC Hunting and Public Use Map



Kissimmee Chain of Lakes
in the 1940s, prior to the construction of the
C-37 and C-38 canals



Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Area Public Land
(based on county ownership records)



Kissimmee chain of Lakes

Assessment Unit: Lake Cypress NE Shore

Core Mission Values

This narrow strip of land (ranging between 100 and 300 feet wide) lies between that sovereign lake bottom and the 54.0' contour. The District acquired the parcels to obtain the rights necessary to increase water stages to make the Kissimmee River restoration possible. The land provides a buffer for stormwater runoff to the lake shore that may prove particularly beneficial if the use of the adjacent land is intensified in the future.

Other Resource Value

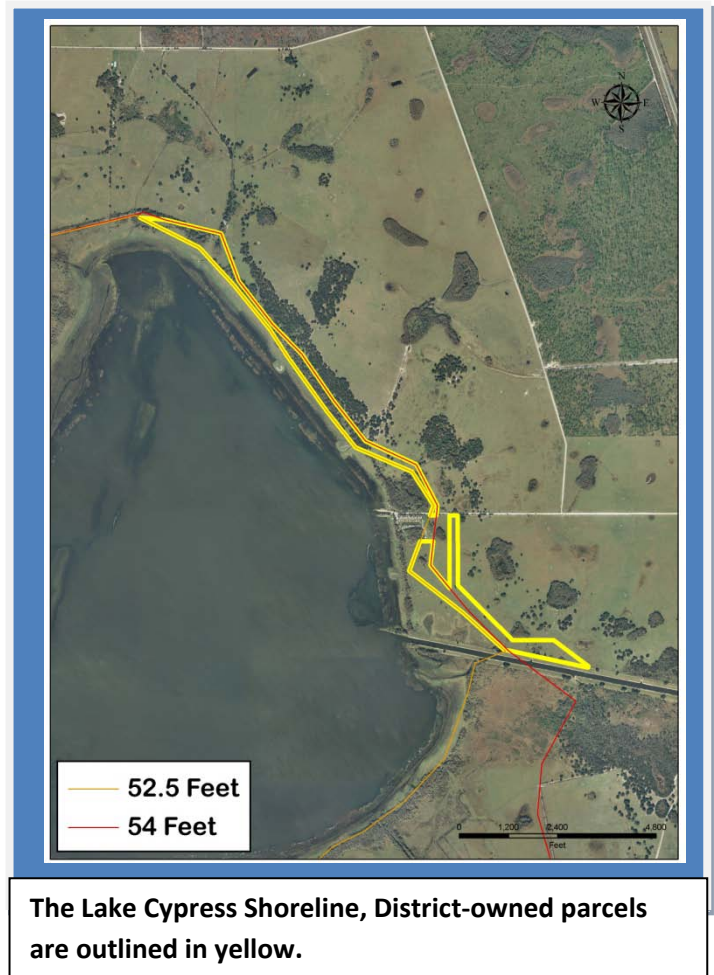
The site is a transitional plant community that proceeds inland from a low shoreline to a mixed cypress and hardwood community. The grassy shoreline does not have a great diversity of plants, but it is used heavily by wildlife to forage, to travel through, and to nest. Whooping cranes, sandhill cranes, wood storks, snail kites, ospreys, and many other wading birds and raptors utilize these shoreline communities in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes.

Management Issues

Access to this strip of land must typically be made by airboat.

Public Use and Recreation Value

The shoreline of Lake Cypress is managed under public use rules established and enforced by FWC. The Lake is a popular location for boating, fishing, airboating, and hunting. A county managed boat ramp and private campground lie between the northern and southern portions of this strip.



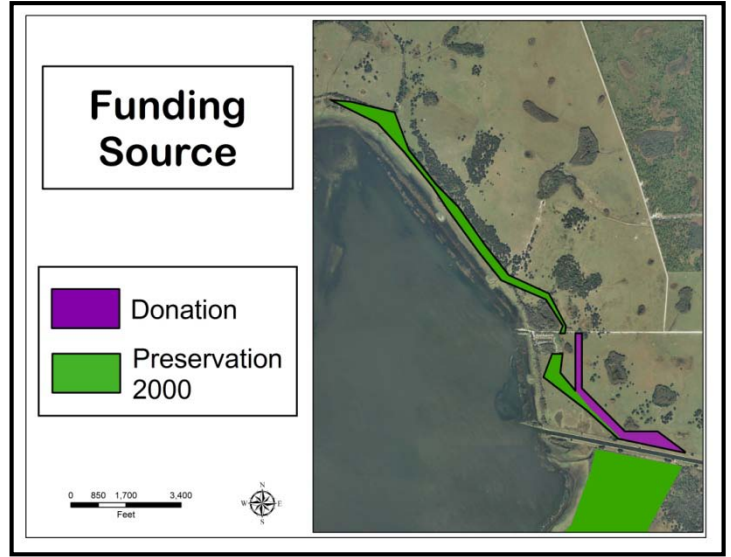
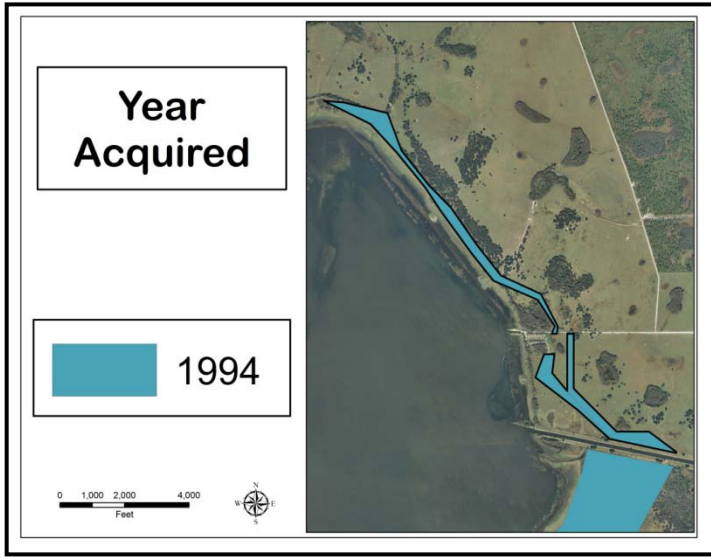
The Lake Cypress Shoreline, District-owned parcels are outlined in yellow.

Lake Cypress, NE Shore Photos

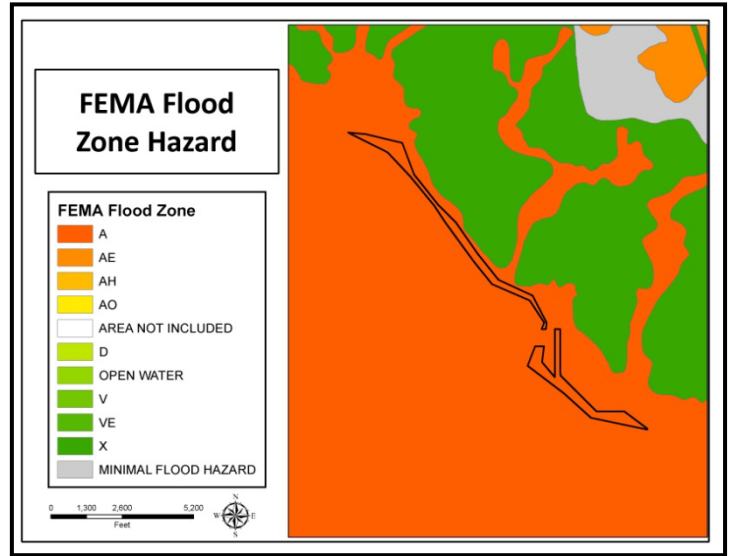
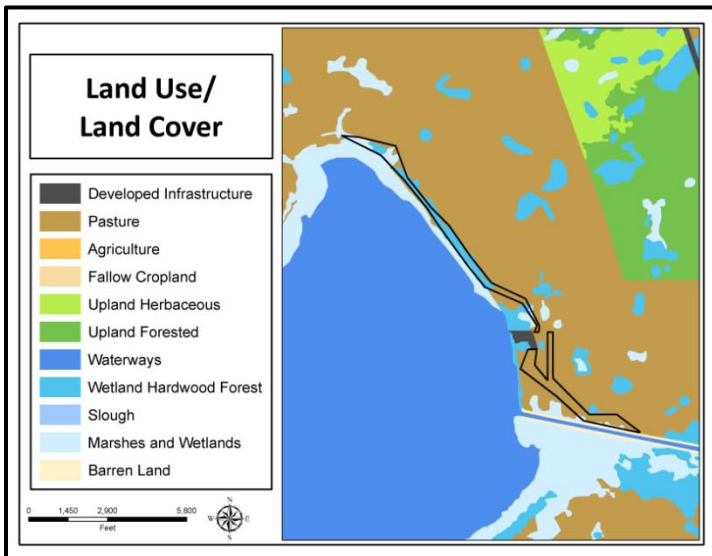


(Top left), an oblique photo showing the mixed strip of cypress and hardwoods behind the shoreline marsh (28° 05' 30"N, 81° 18' 37"W), (top right) the Osceola County boat ramp adjacent to District land, (middle photos) wading birds along the shoreline marsh, and (bottom) views looking inland from the Lake.

Lake Cypress: Land Acquisition



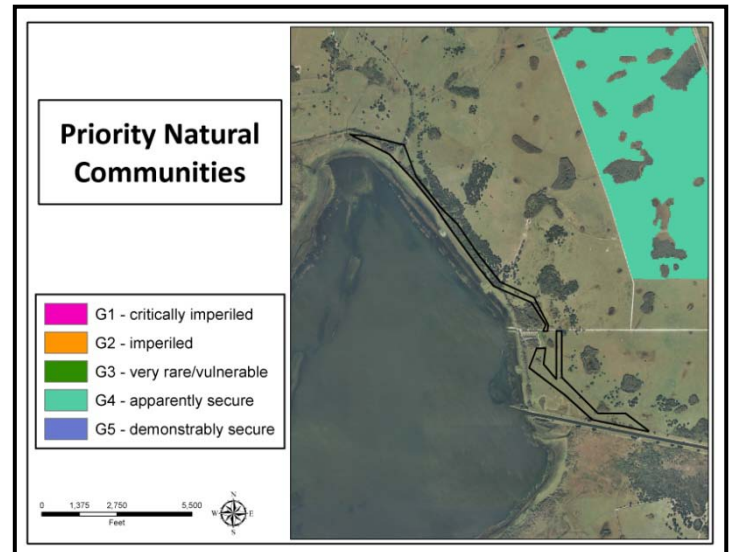
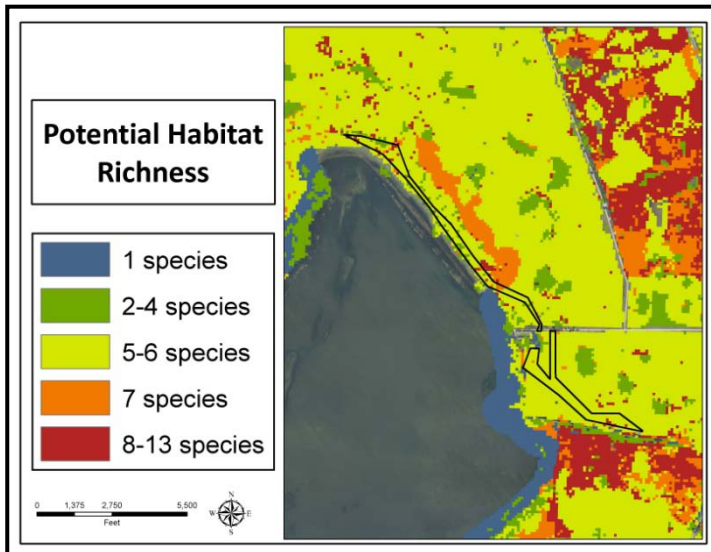
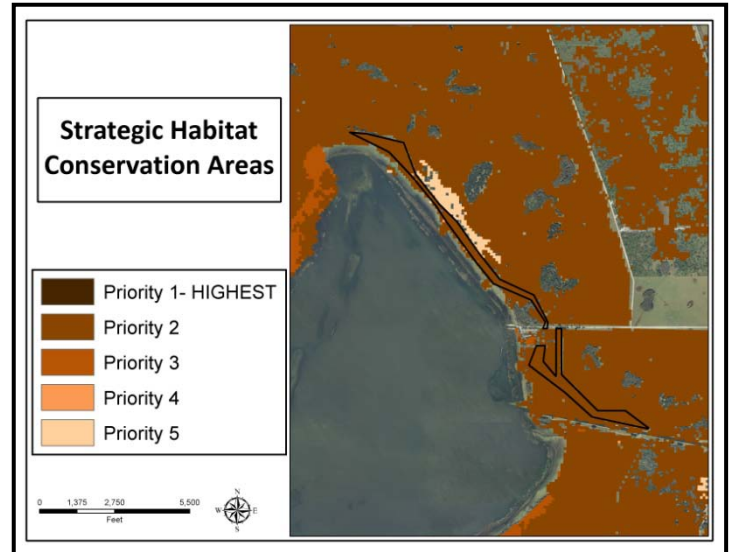
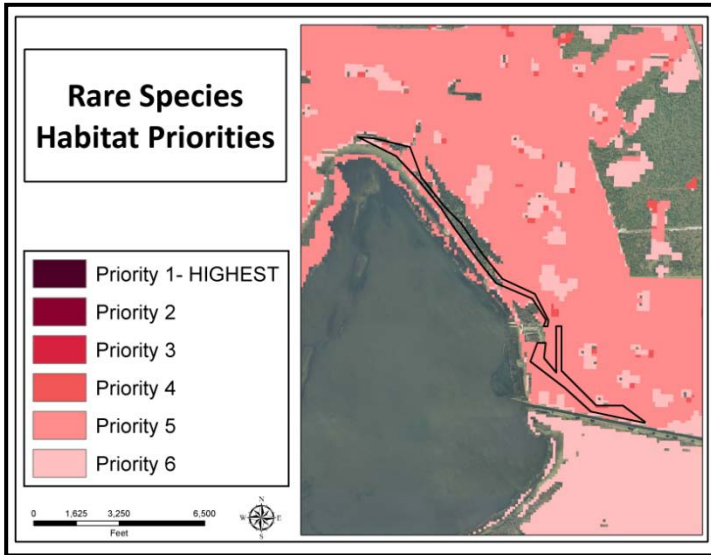
Lake Cypress: Land Character



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Lake Cypress: Land Character (Continued)



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**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes,
Assessment Unit: North KCOL Marshes**

Core Mission Value

These areas are broad low grasslands that had been used for cattle grazing for many years. Like the other lands within the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, these lands fell within the 52.5' and 54.0' contours that were necessary to acquire in order to complete the Kissimmee River restoration. Since acquisition, District land managers have been gradually removing the agricultural infrastructure to restore the hydrology of this large marsh and wet prairie system. This has involved removing shoreline berms and filling agricultural ditches. Additionally, these areas are being carefully maintained through prescribed fire and vegetation management to aid the re-establishment of native wetland species. The full benefit of this work will be realized when the new water stages in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes has been implemented.

Other Resource Value

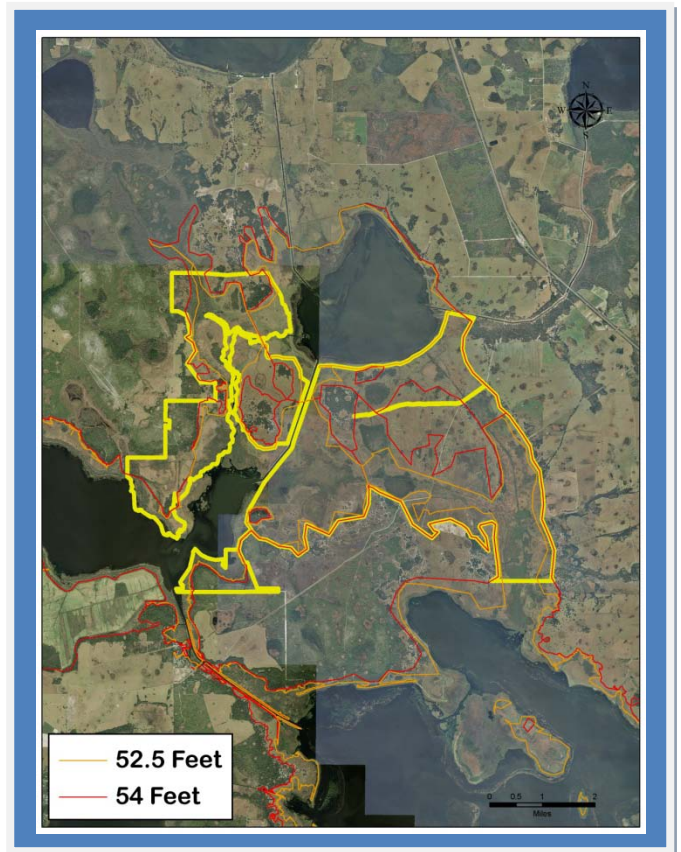
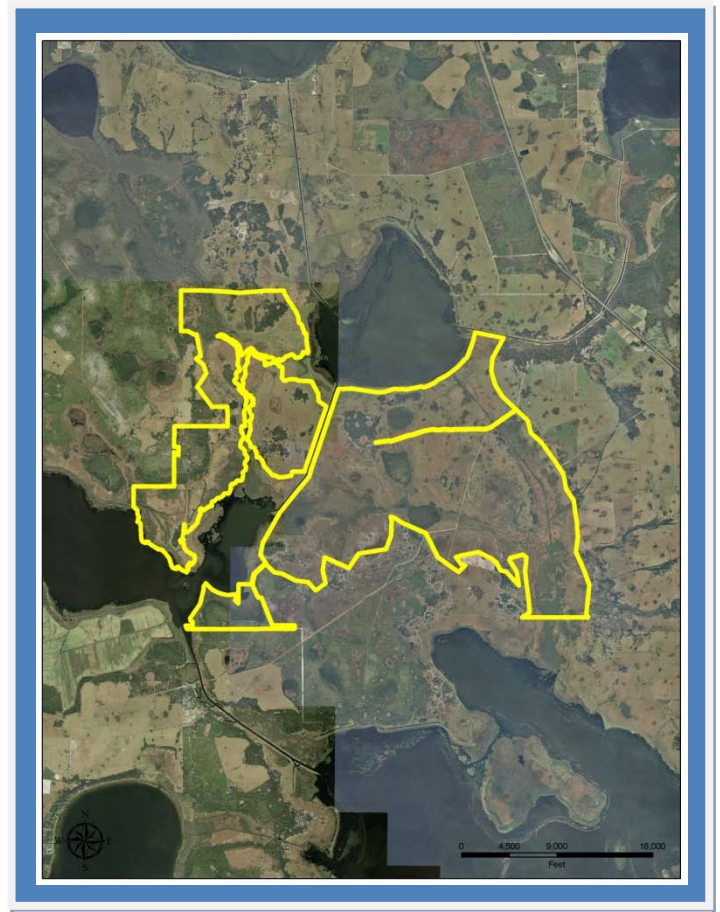
Together, these marshes are an important landscape-scale feature for a wide variety of wildlife. The boomerang shape of Lake Hatchineha wraps around the Disney Wilderness Preserve to the north. Consequently, the area functions as a single large diverse natural system.

Current Use, Management Issues

The site is being restored to its natural state and condition. Much of the area is still being leased for cattle grazing. The site supports cattle as it transitions from improved pasture to native range.

Public Use and Recreation Value

These areas are not easily accessible, the center of the area being about five miles from each of the nearest three boat ramps. Nonetheless, the seclusion and remoteness in itself provides a unique recreation experience to boaters, airboaters, hunters, birdwatchers, and anyone else who is willing to make the trip. Several camp sites and shelters are provided in the upland hammock islands.



**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, North KCOL
Marshes, Restoration**



When the District began acquisition efforts in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, the shoreline marshes had been drained and had been used as improved pasture for cattle. Much of the area was drained by agricultural ditches (left, 28° 02' 21"N, 81° 19' 13"W) or separated from the lake waters by protective berms (right).



Restoration has involved plugging the drainage ditches (left), removing exotics, reestablishing hydrologic connectivity within the lake by flattening the protective berms (right) and reestablishing the regular application of fire. The restoration plans included the installation of 54 earthen ditch plugs to stop the drainage from the excessive flow of water from leaving the site. The full ecological benefit of this restoration work will be realized when the forthcoming higher lake stages will be implemented.

**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, North KCOL
Marshes, Photos**



Reintroducing fire to the hydrologically restored shoreline marshes and prairies.



One of several oak hammocks in the area (left), and the lower Reedy Creek which runs through the area (above).

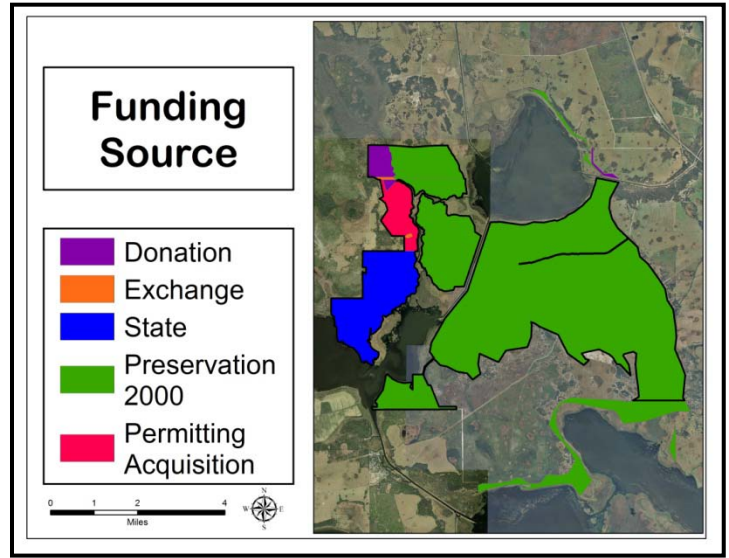
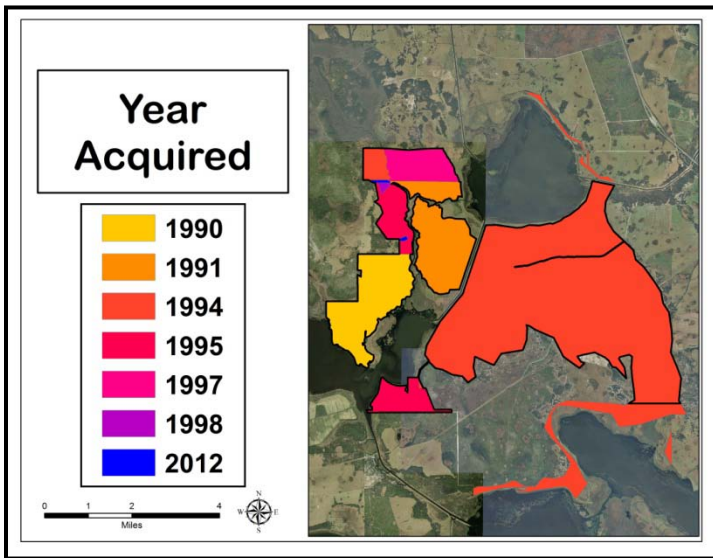


The shoreline marshes and prairies between Lake Hatchineha and Lake Cypress (Left, 28° 02' 43"N, 81° 20' 52"W); lower Reedy Creek meanders through the marshes and prairies at bottom right.

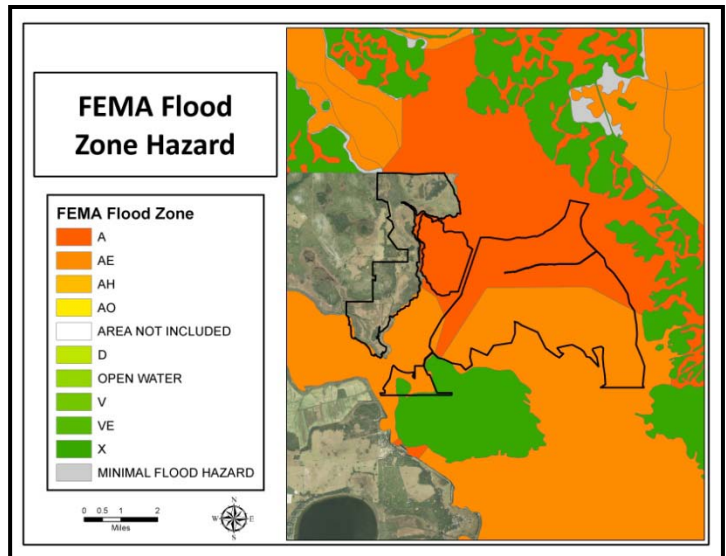
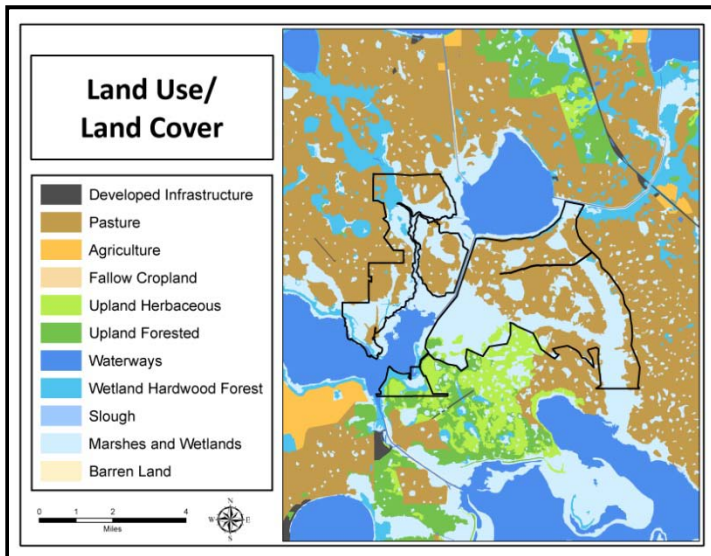


Public Use within the Northern Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (clockwise from upper left) airboating is a popular activity; camping along Lake Hatchineha; picnic shelter near an oak hammock; a fire ring at a District campsite; and airboat volunteers at a lakes cleanup event.

North KCOL Marshes: Land Acquisition



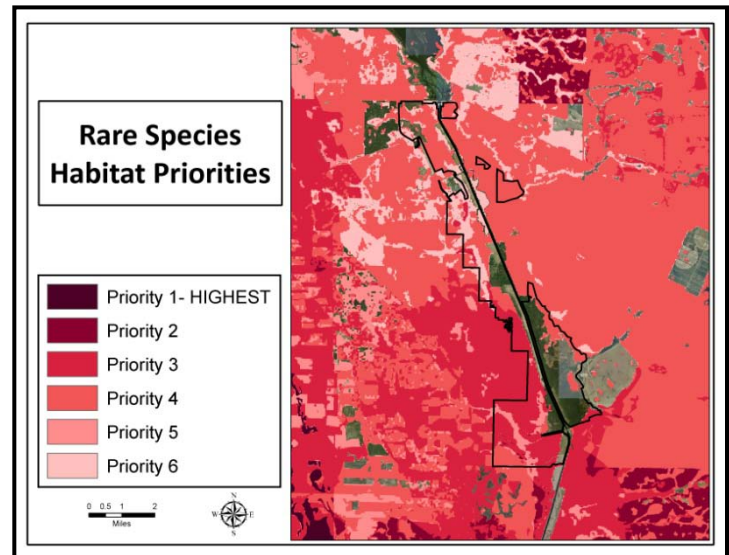
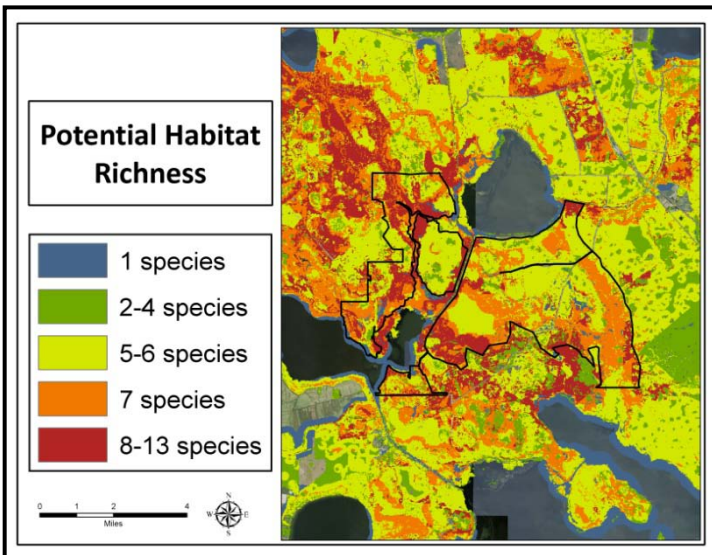
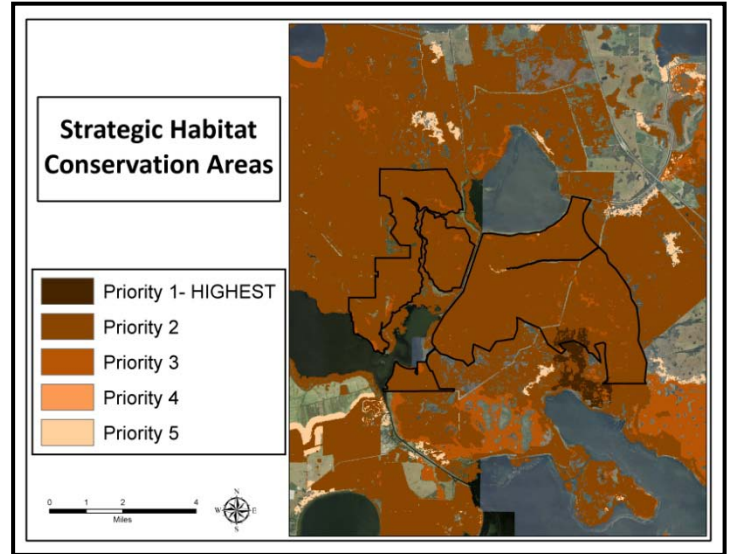
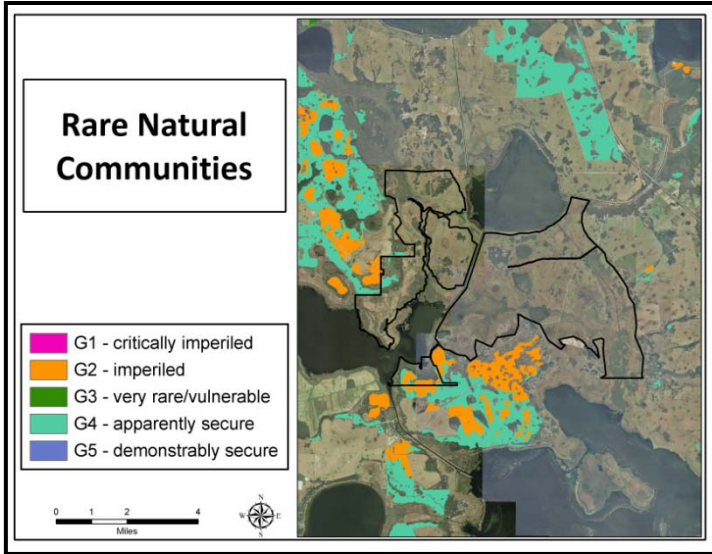
North KCOL Marshes: Land Character



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**North KCOL Marshes: Land Character
(Continued)**



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Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Assessment Unit: London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek

These areas consist of the floodplain swamps that surround the mouths of Lake Marion Creek and London Creek, where they flow into Lake Hatchineha.

Core Mission Value

The parcels near Lake Hatchineha were acquired to support the higher water stages in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes to provide adequate flow to the restored sections of the Kissimmee River. The parcels that lie upstream on London Creek were regulatory acquisitions as mitigation for wetland impacts by nearby land development.

Other Resource Value

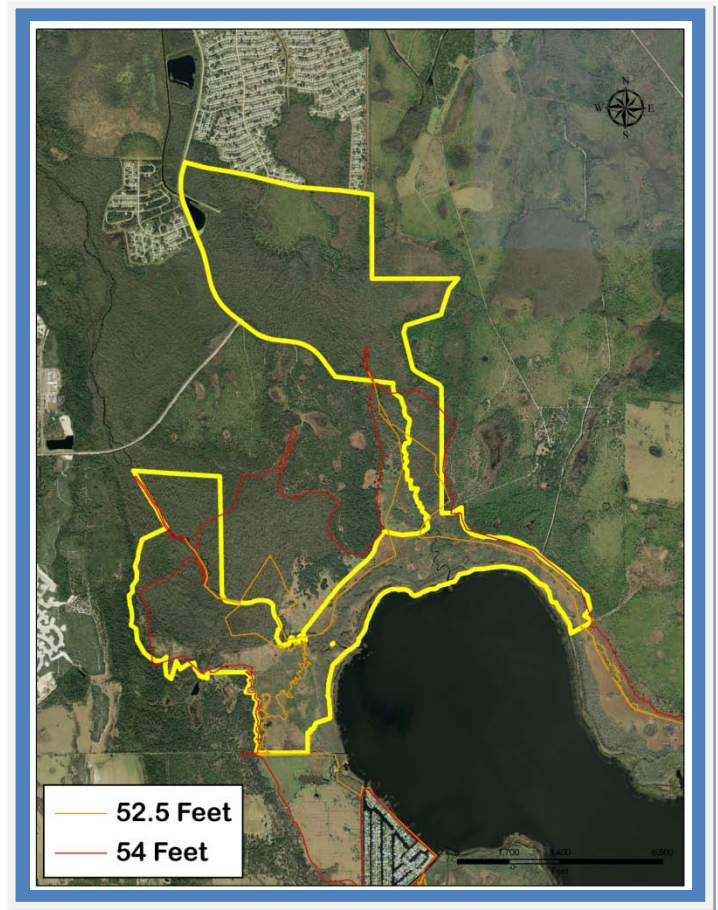
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the land to the southwest of the site as a conservation focal area to support the establishment of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge. This designation was based in part on the potential to build on the existing public lands in the area to preserve a single large tract of natural lands stretching from Catfish Creek state park in the west to Reedy Creek in the east.

Current Use, Management Issues

Access to the site is primarily by airboat, although automobiles may readily access the upland areas in the upper reaches of London Creek.

Public Use and Recreation Value

The boat ramp facility at Port Hatchineha supports easy access to these sites by boat or canoe. This area contains very few uplands and consequently does not support developed public use facilities.



Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek, Photos



Boating and fishing are popular activities along the shore of Lake Hatchineha



The mouth of Lake Marion Creek in winter after most of the cypress have dropped their needles



The shoreline of Lake Hatchineha at London Creek



Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek, Photos



An upland hammock at London Creek



The shoreline of Lake Hatchineha at London Creek



The shoreline cypress at London Creek along Lake Hatchineha



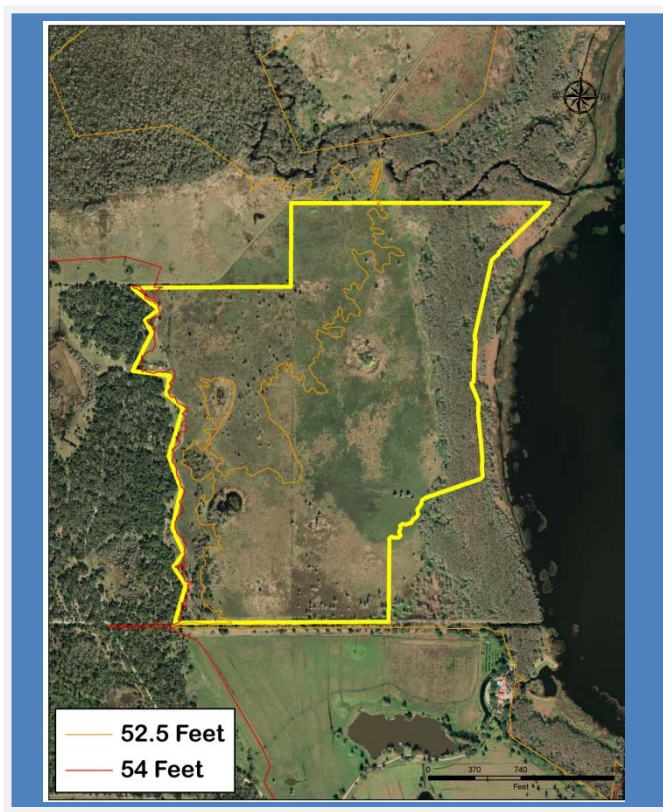
A prescribed fire at London Creek

London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek Individual Parcel Assessment

Pasture Parcels

There are two parcels of land, one to the south of Lake Marion Creek and one between Lake Marion Creek and London Creek that does not share the same natural character as the rest of the site. They are degraded improved pastures that were acquired as part of the tracts that contained the natural river floodplain and the cypress dominated shoreline of northwestern Lake Hatchineha.

The southern parcel has no access by motor vehicle, while access to the northern parcel may be had by following a two mile long meandering dirt trail from the corner of Marigold Avenue and Poinciana Parkway. There is no public access and the area is likely to be seasonally inundated following the implementation of higher managed water stages in Lake Hatchineha.



The vacant pasture area that lies behind the shoreline and floodplain cypress next to the mouth of London Creek (28° 03' 23"N. 81° 27' 05"W)

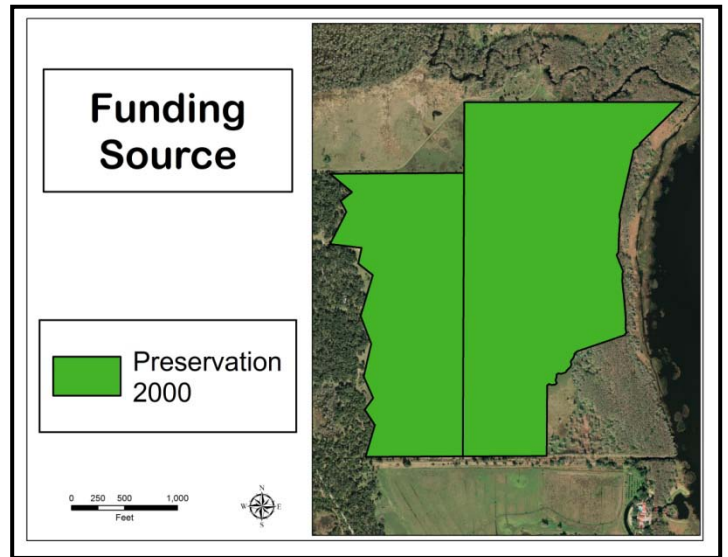
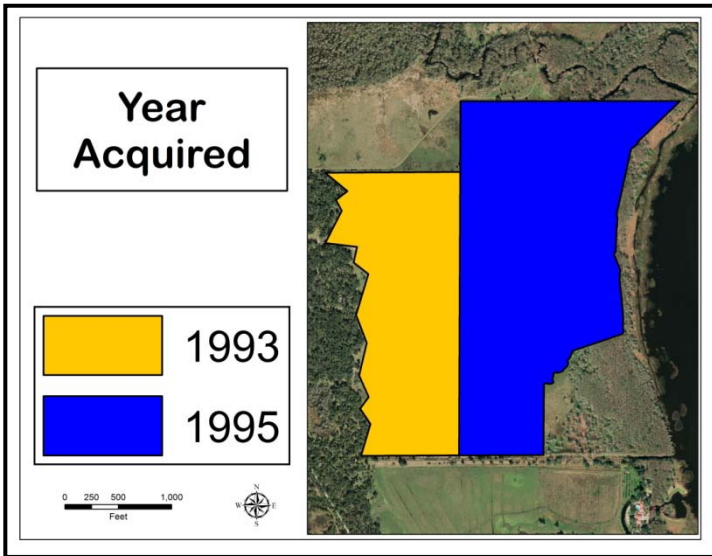


The vacant pasture that lies south of the mouth of Lake Marion Creek (28° 02' 31"N, 81° 27' 49"W)

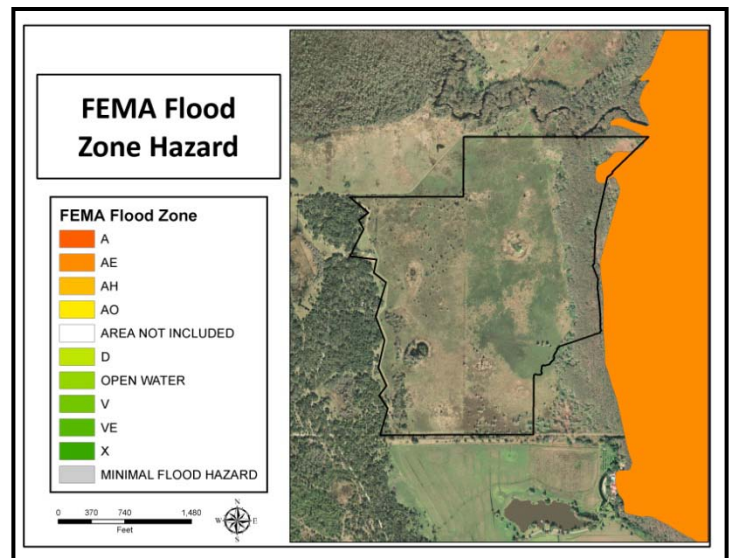
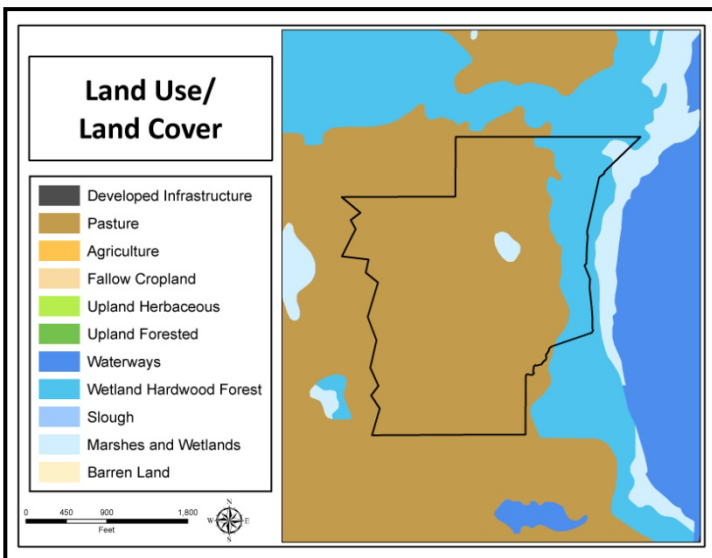


A typical ground view of the vacant pasture, with the floodplain cypress in the background

London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek: Land Acquisition



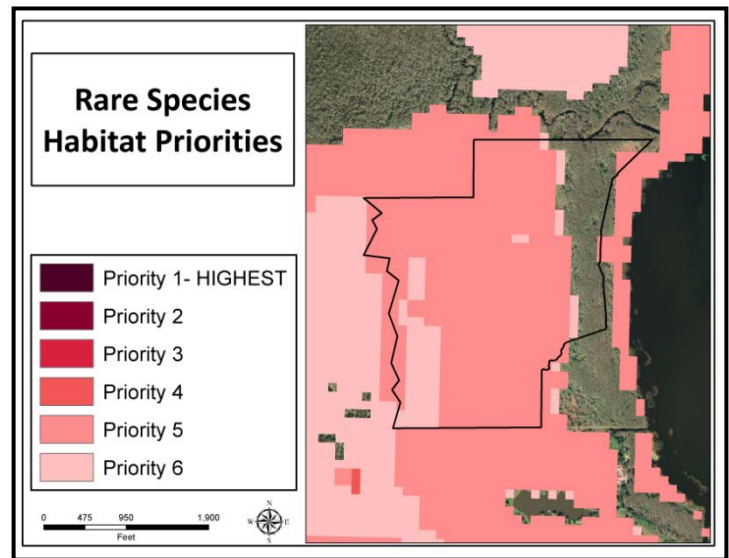
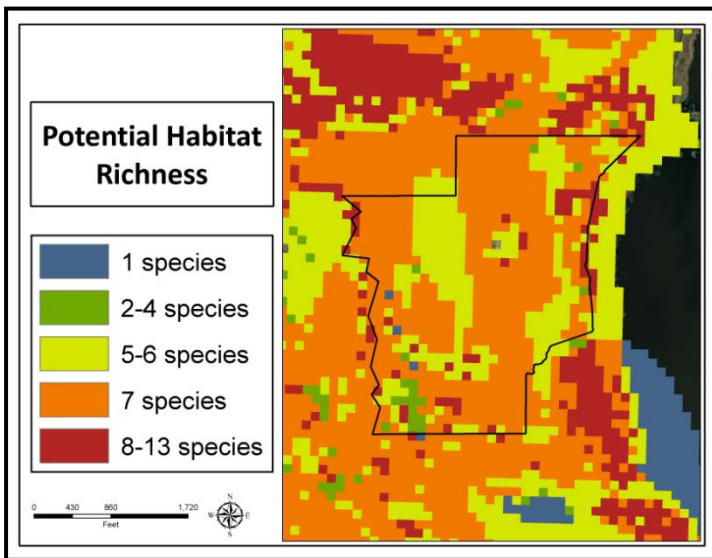
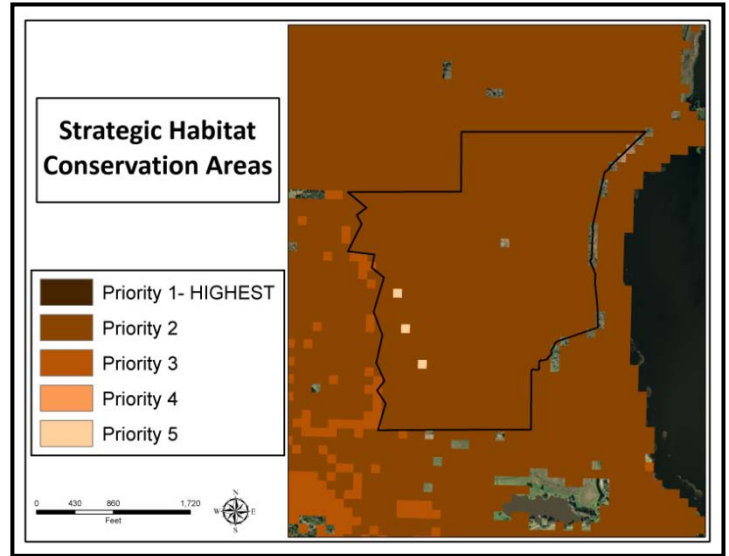
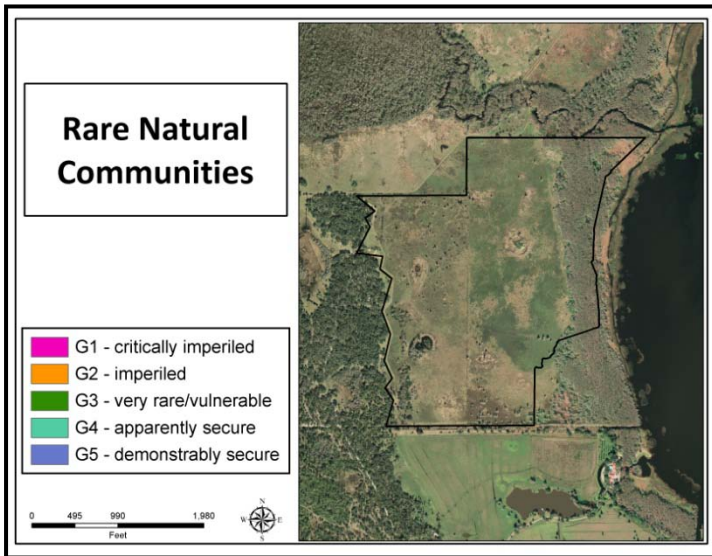
London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek: Land Character



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London Creek and Lower Lake Marion Creek:
Land Character (Continued)



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**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes,
Assessment Unit: Catfish Creek**

Core Mission Value

These areas are low shoreline marshes and cypress that transition to hammocks and fallow pasture. Like the other lands within the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, these lands fell within the 52.5' and 54.0' contours and were necessary to acquire in order to supply water for the Kissimmee River restoration. The land provides a buffer for stormwater runoff to the lake shore that may prove beneficial if the use of the adjacent land is intensified in the future.

Other Resource Value

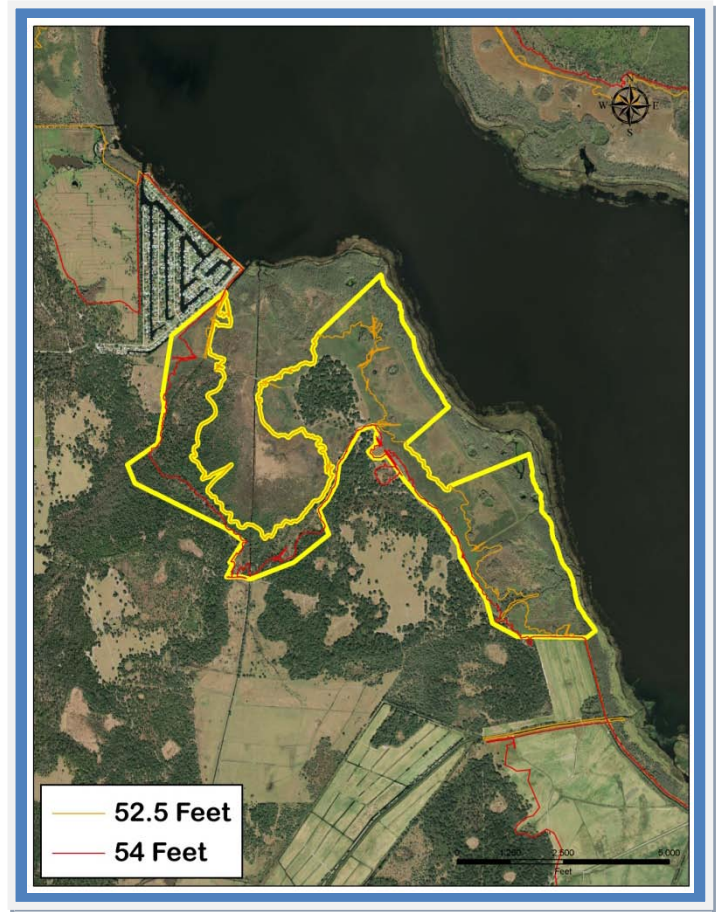
This area serves as a wildlife corridor between the Catfish Creek State Park / Rolling Meadows / Lake Kissimmee State Park complex to the south and west, and the Lake Marion Creek / Reedy Creek lands to the north. The Nature Conservancy own an interest in the land adjacent to the west.

Current Use, Management Issues

The site is being managed as a natural area. Vehicular access to the site is possible, but difficult. Access is either by airboat or by a long, winding, and deteriorating maintenance trail that comes up from the closest secondary road several miles to the south.

Public Use and Recreation Value

The site is easily accessible by canoe / kayak or by airboat. The District maintains two tent campsites. The area is open to hunting at certain times of the year under FWC public use regulations.



The Catfish Creek Assessment Unit, District-owned parcels are outlined in yellow. All property within the yellow boundary was purchased in 1994 with Preservation 2000 funds.

**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Catfish Creek,
Photos**



An aerial view of the cypress-fringed mouth of Catfish Creek (top left 28° 00' 45"N, 81° 25' 28"W) and the principal oak hammock on the site (above left 28° 01' 19"N, 81° 26' 37"W, and at right)



The cypress and marsh shoreline along the Catfish Creek property on Lake Hatchineha

**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Catfish Creek,
Photos**

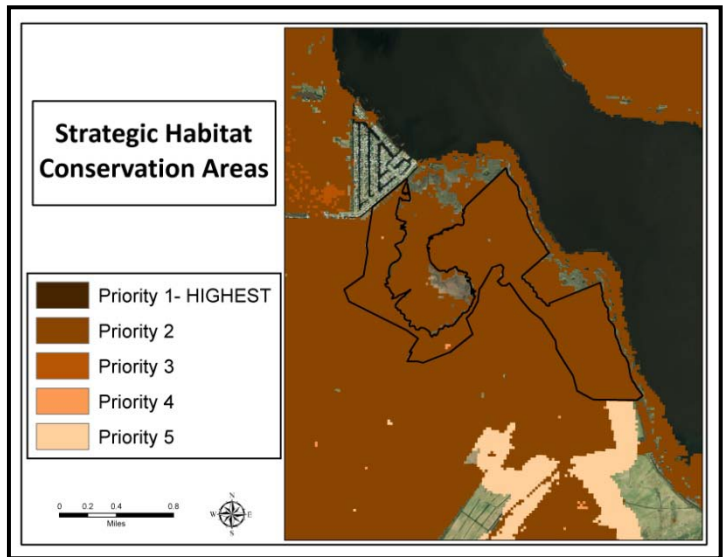
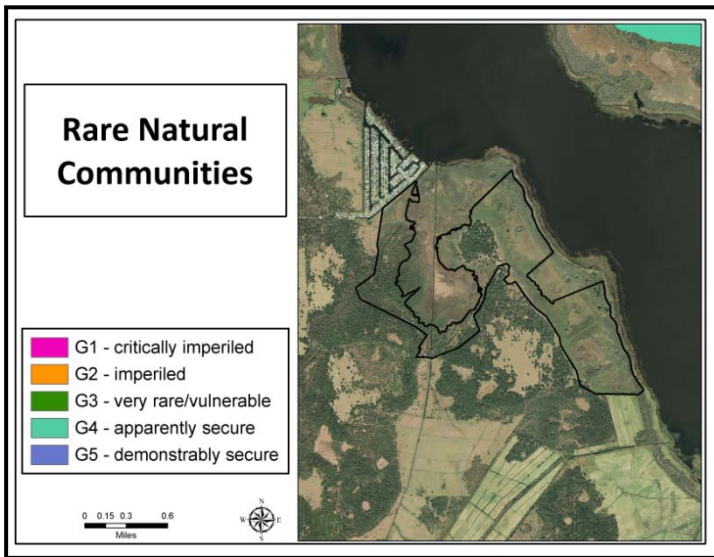
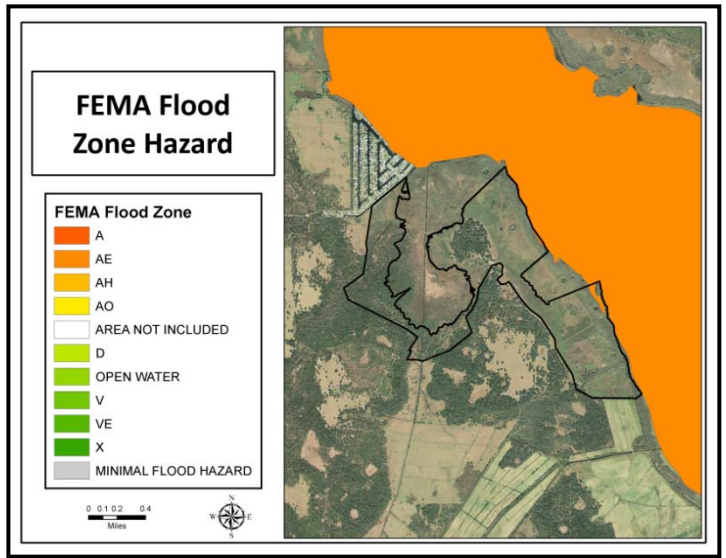
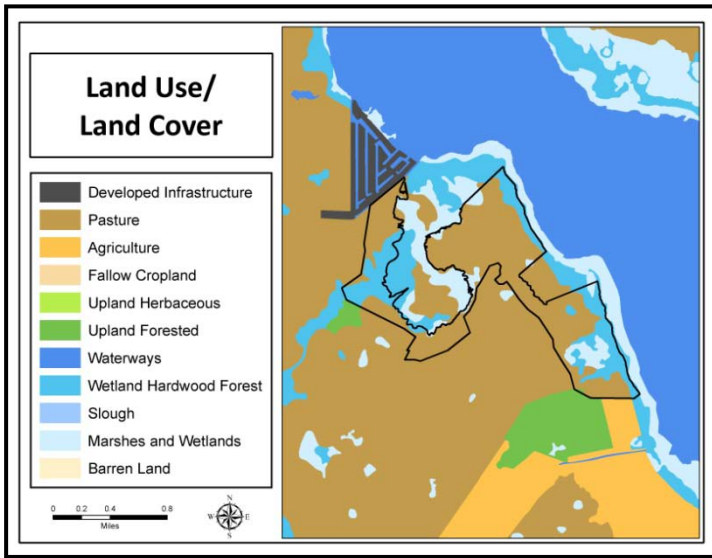


A flight of wading birds over the shoreline marsh adjacent to one of the two tent campsites



One of the two tent campsites on the Catfish Creek property

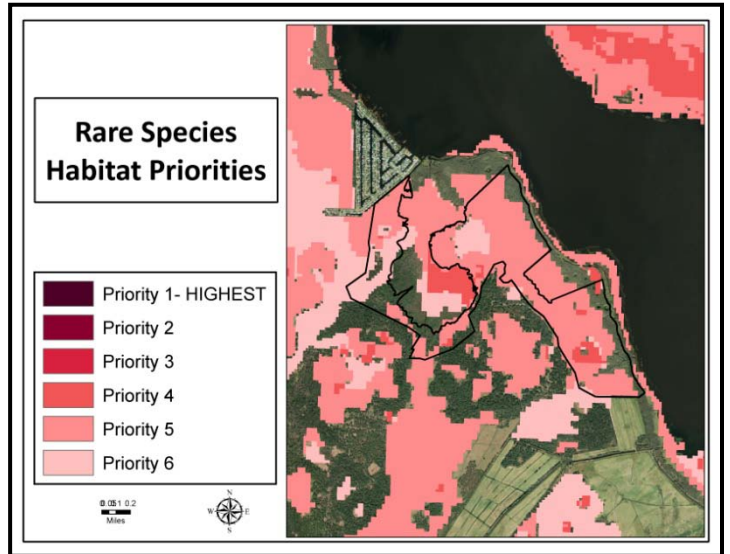
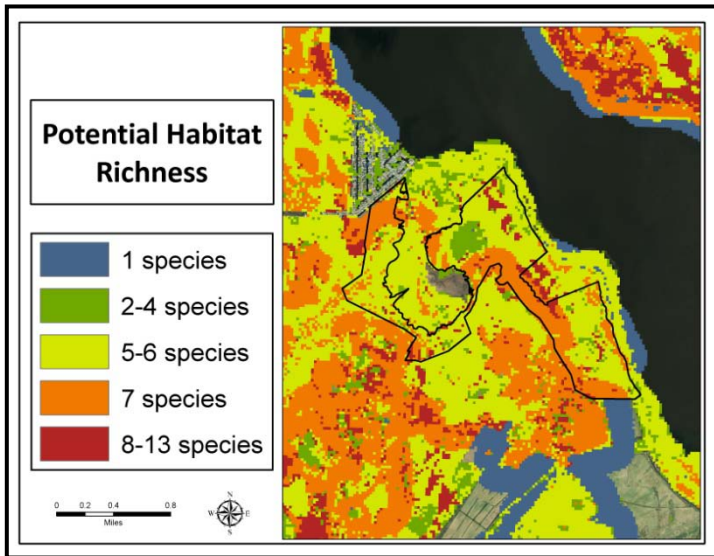
Catfish Creek: Land Character



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Catfish Creek: Land Character (Continued)



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**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes,
Assessment Unit: Rolling Meadows**

Prior to the acquisition of this site by the District, it was a large sod operation that had been making use of the rich organic soils of a broad floodplain marsh that was historically present on site.

Core Mission Value

Most of the site fell below the 54.0' contour and were necessary to acquire in order to supply water for the Kissimmee River restoration. The site further supports the natural systems management function of the District by being a large-scale mitigation funded restoration project. The site supports water supply by supporting the higher stages in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, and by restoring the hydrology and removing the drainage to a large marsh system. The site supports water quality concerns by removing a nutrient heavy use from the upper Kissimmee/Okeechobee watershed

Other Resource Value

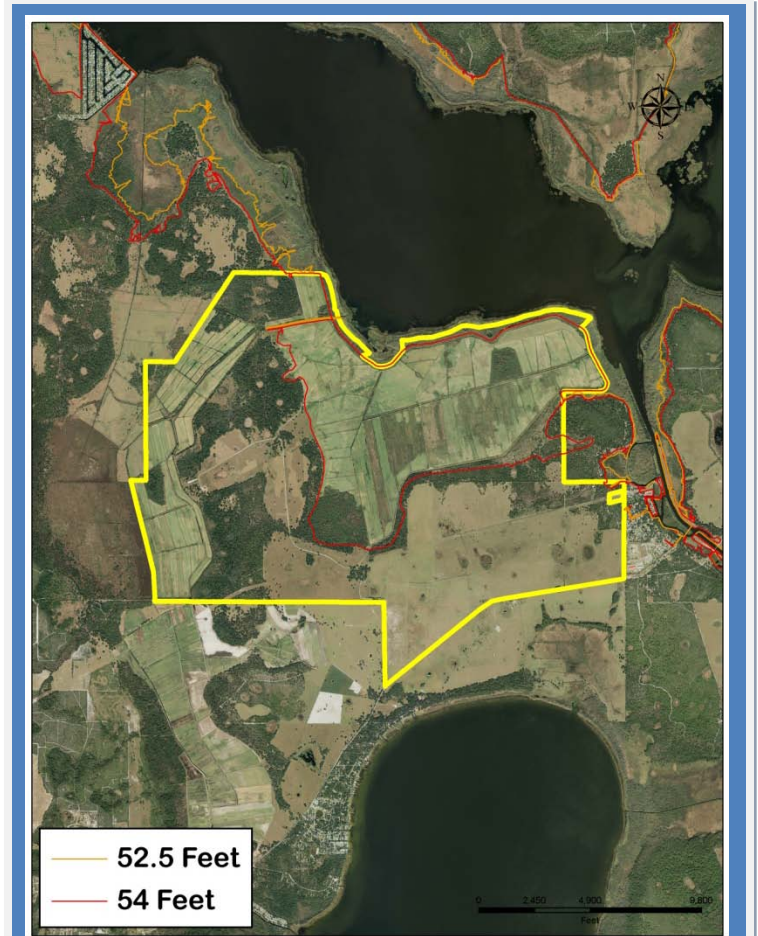
The District leases 3,815 acres to DEP (designated as Parcel A in the map, below at right) as an addition to Catfish Creek State Park which provides a direct land link to their Lake Kissimmee state park which supports continuity of land management activities, as well as serving as a wildlife corridor between these two large state properties.

Current Use, Management Issues

The site is being restored to its natural state and condition. Funding for much of this work has been provided through wetland mitigation from the STOPR group of central Florida municipalities and utilities. The District manages 1,972 acres of land within the property. (designated as Parcel B in the map, below at right)

Public Use and Recreation Value

The site was opened under public use rules by the FWC for hunting for the 2012-2013 season. It is anticipated that the site will be closed during the mitigation restoration phase until mitigation success has been achieved.



The Rolling Meadows Assessment Unit, District-owned parcel is outlined in yellow. Property was purchased in 2002 with Preservation 2000 funds.



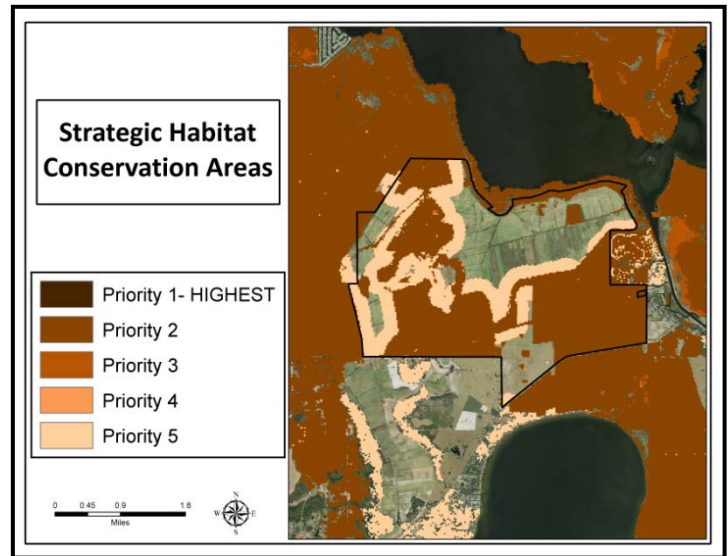
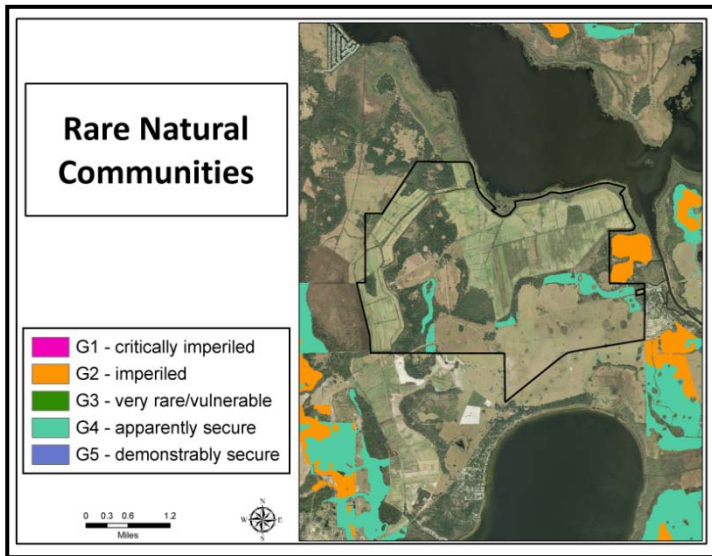
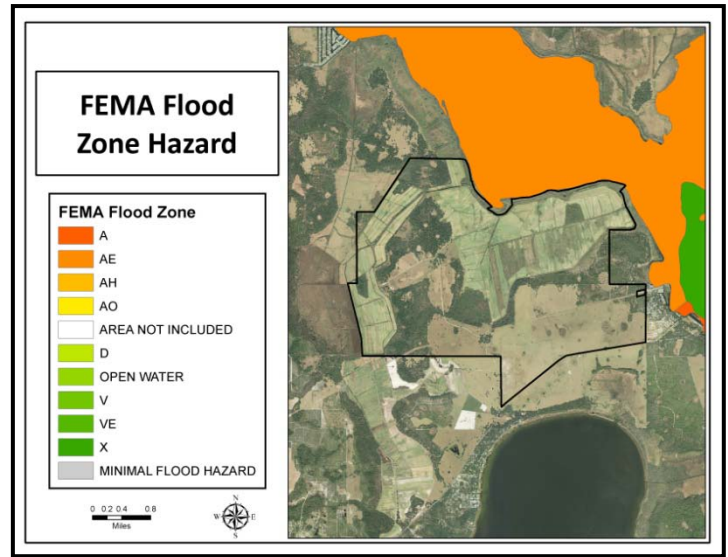
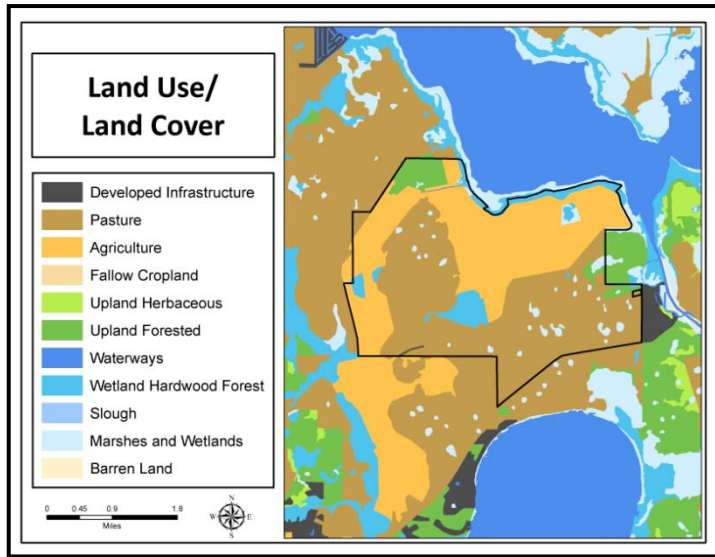
**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Rolling Meadows,
Photos**



The rolling meadows site while it was in sod production (left 27° 59' 41"N, 81° 22' 57"W), and in 2012 (right) after a breach in the perimeter levee returned much of the historic hydrology. The interior of the site (below).



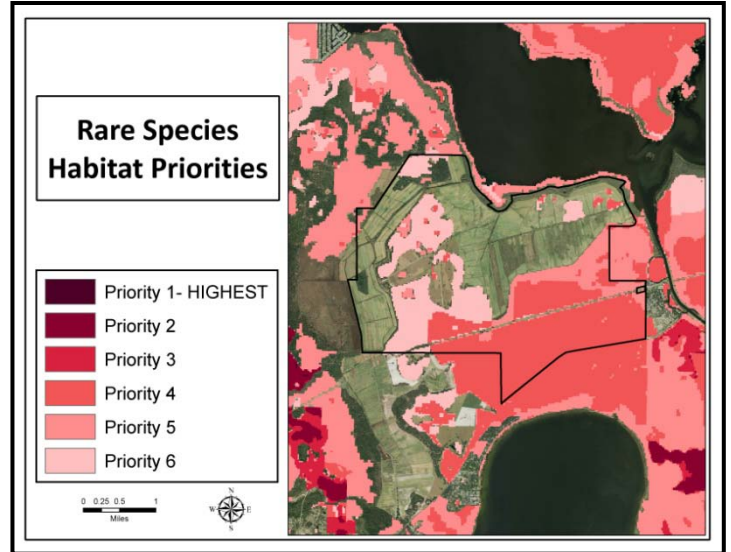
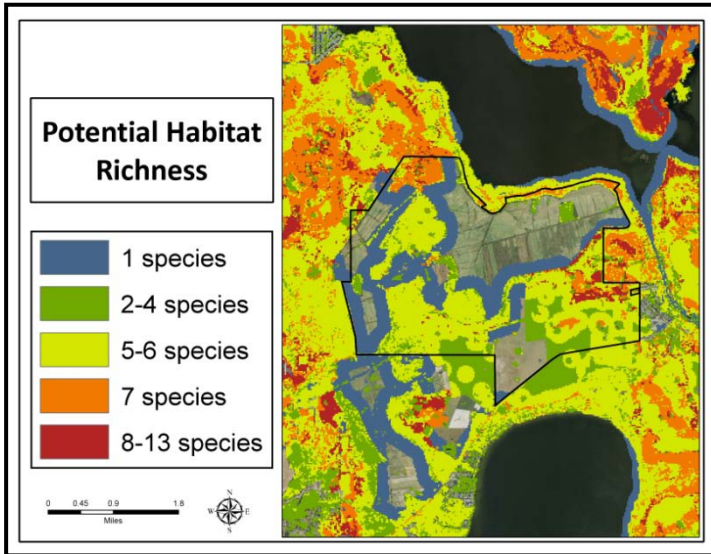
Rolling Meadows: Land Character



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Rolling Meadows: Land Character
(Continued)



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**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes,
Assessment Unit: Tiger Lake**

Prior to the acquisition of this site by the District, the area had three improved residential lots on the south side, and one wooded residential lot on the north side.

Core Mission Value

The District acquired a flowage easement around most of Tiger Lake (see map below, at right) to support the goal of raising water stages for the benefit of the Kissimmee River Restoration. There were several parcels where the fee simple interest was acquired. The acquisition of the fee-simple interest satisfied the needs of the restoration project, but it is likely that the acquisition of a flowage easement, consistent with the rest of Tiger Lake, would have been adequate as well.

Other Resource Value

There are some native trees that remain on the improved lot, and the northern wooded lot is a mixed pine / cypress / hardwood community.

Current Use, Management Issues

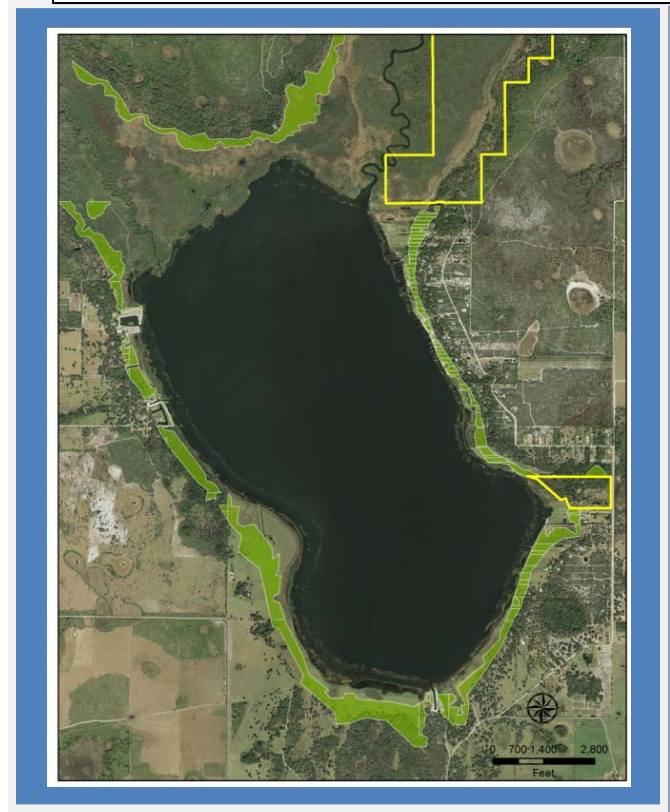
There are two existing buildings on these residential lots as well as a large dock.

Public Use and Recreation Value

There are no developed public use facilities on this property.



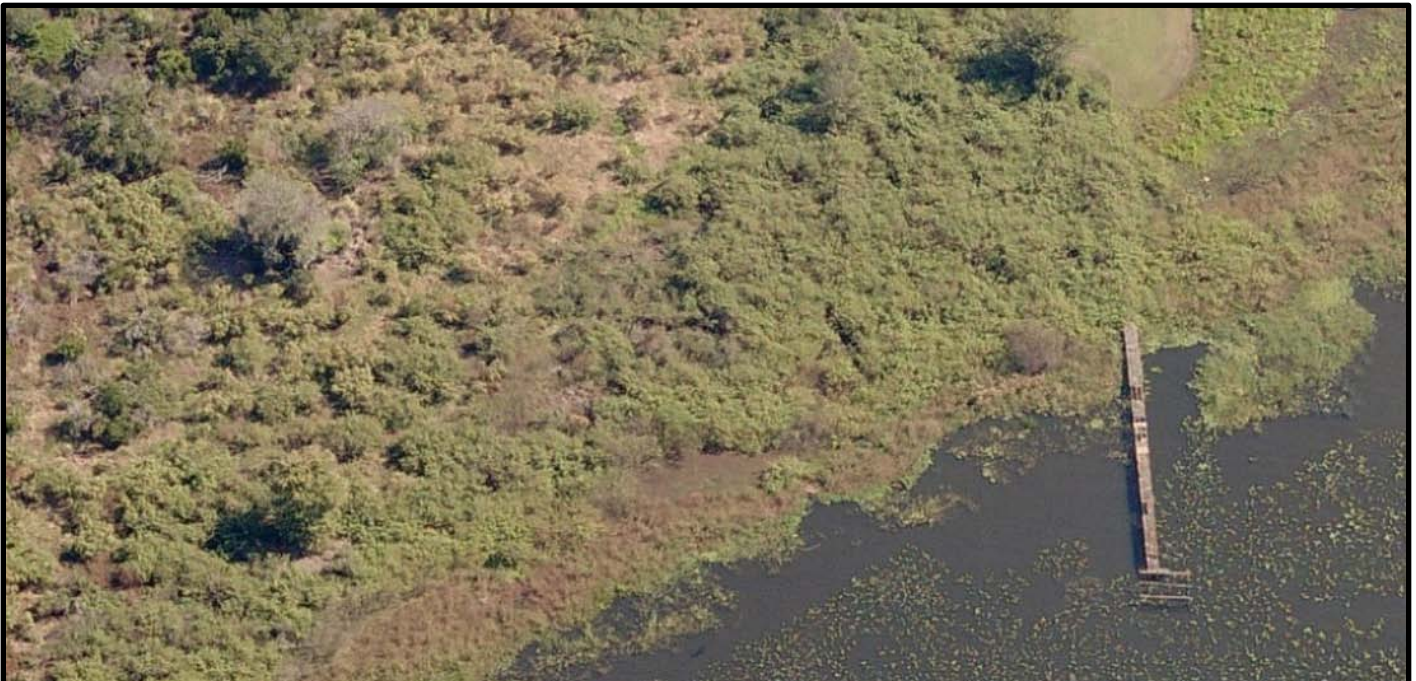
The Tiger Lake Assessment Unit, District-owned parcels are outlined in yellow. District easements are in green.



Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Tiger Lake, Photos



An oblique photo showing the buildings and structures on the Tiger Lake property. 27° 53' 17"N, 81° 20' 11"W



An oblique photo showing the shore and dock at the Tiger Lake property. 27° 53' 17"N, 81° 20' 25"W

Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Tiger Lake, Photos



The Tiger Lake shoreline.

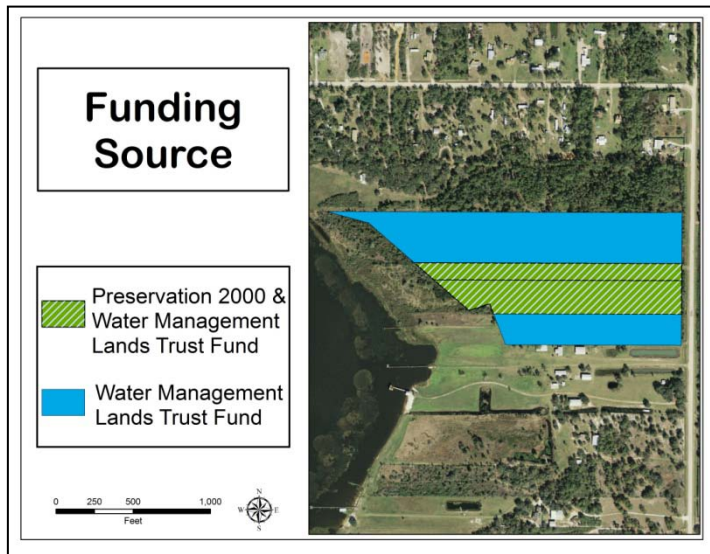
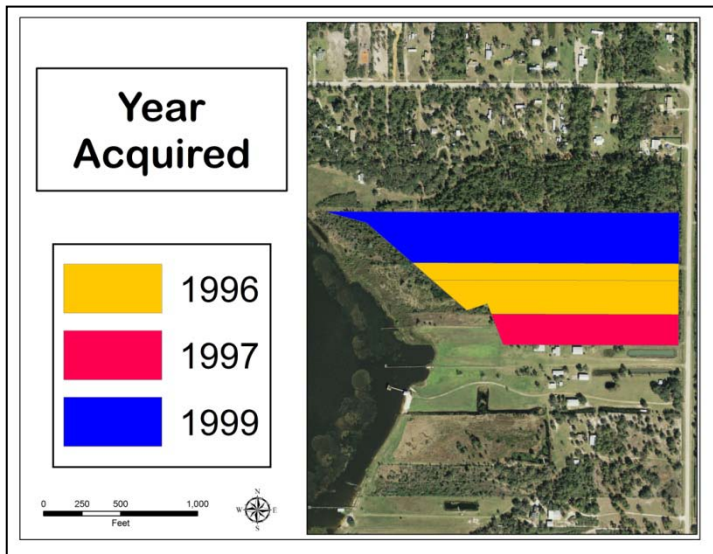


Roadside view of the cleared and developed lots on the southern end of the tract.

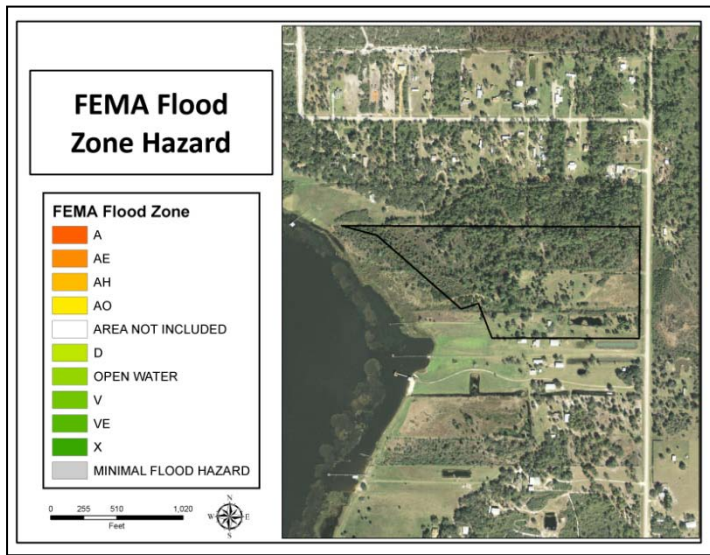
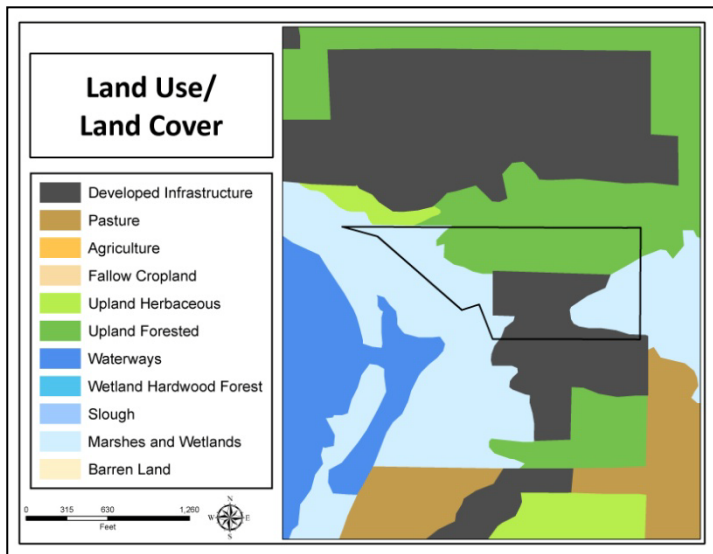


Roadside view of the wooded lot on the north side.

Tiger Lake: Land Acquisition



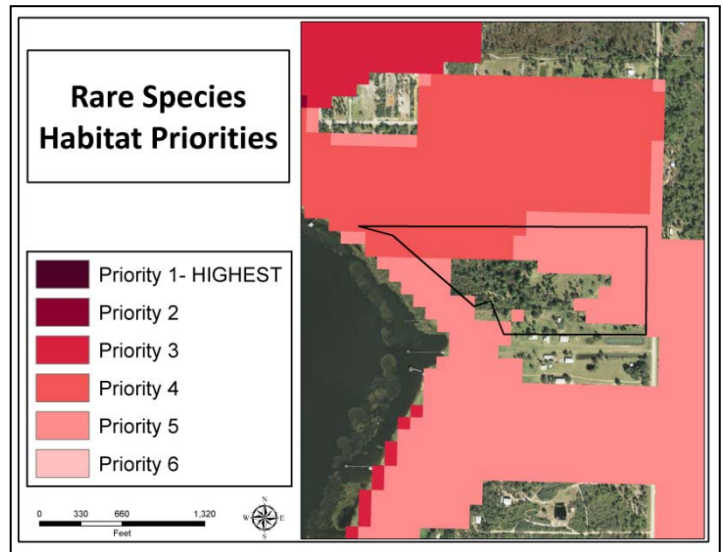
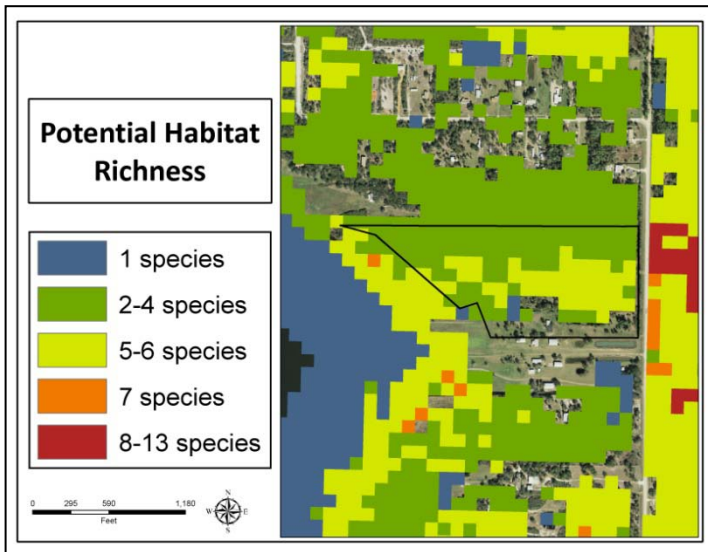
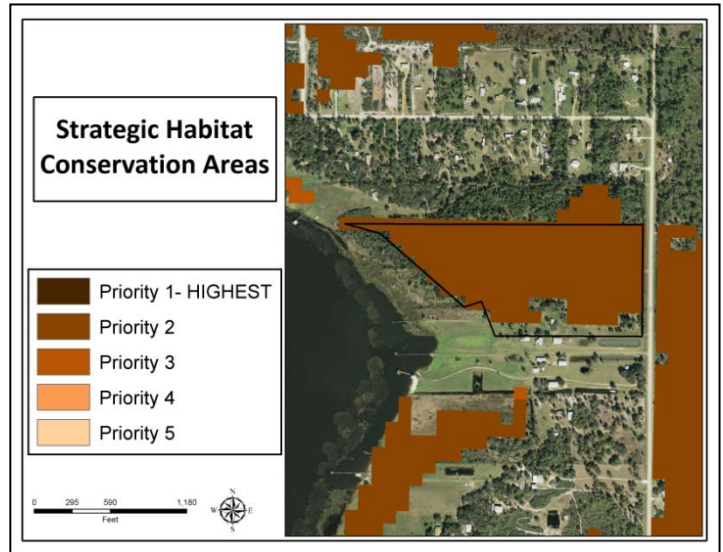
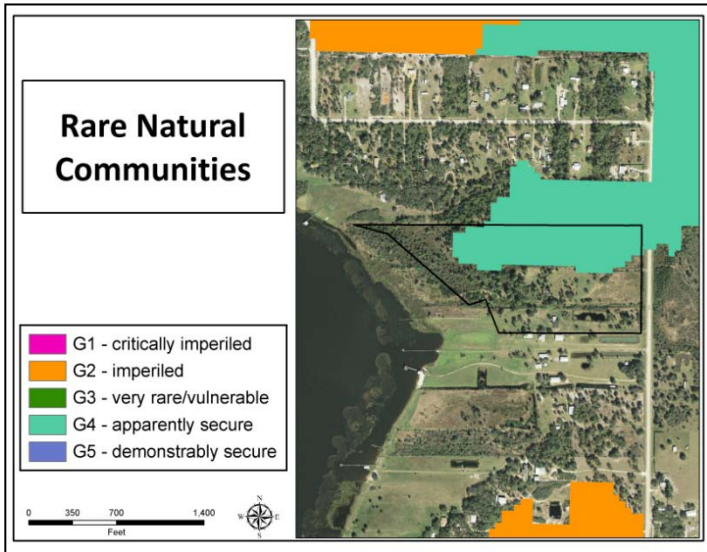
Tiger Lake: Land Character



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Tiger Lake: Land Character (Continued)



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Kissimmee Chain of Lakes,

Assessment Unit: Lake Kissimmee

Core Mission Value

These tracts lie along the shoreline of Lake Kissimmee and were acquired to support the higher water stages in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes that will be necessary to supply adequate flow to the restored sections of the Kissimmee River. The District primarily acquired the fee-simple interest in the land, but flowage easements were also acquired along some stretches of the shoreline.

Other Resource Value

The District land in this area are transitional plant communities that border the shore of Lake. Whooping cranes, sandhill cranes, woodstorks, snail kites, ospreys, and many other wading birds and raptors utilize these shoreline communities.

Current Use, Management Issues

The properties are being managed as natural areas. Those areas that can support cattle have either reservations or leases that allow for continued grazing. The east shore and interior islands are accessible by boat, but automobiles may access the shore at a couple points on the west shore and at the Overstreet boat ramp on the east shore.

Public Use and Recreation Value

These areas support boating, airboating, hunting, fishing, canoeing/kayaking, and primitive tent camping.



The Lake Kissimmee Assessment Unit, District-owned parcels are outlined in yellow. District easements are in green.

Kissimmee Chain of Lakes –Lake Kissimmee

- floodplain topographic contours

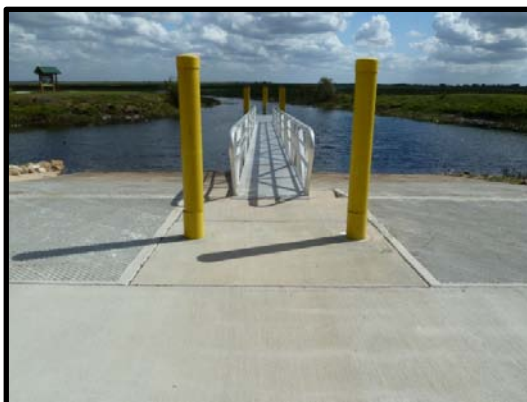


**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Lake Kissimmee,
Photos**

Lake Kissimmee is a particularly large area stretching nearly 15 miles from south to north, and nearly seven miles from west to east. The following photos follow the shore of the lake clockwise beginning at the Oasis Marsh at SR 60



The Oasis Marsh, north of State Road 60 at the south end of the lake (27° 48' 25"N, 81° 12' 08"W). It is an area of improved pasture that is wet today and will become inundated with the implementation of higher lake stages. The very southwestern corner is slightly higher than the rest of the property (see the individual parcel assessment at the end of this section for greater detail).



In 2011 the District constructed a large boat ramp facility on Lake Kissimmee, about a mile north of the Oasis Marsh, and transferred the ownership and operations to Polk County. The facility includes two boat ramp lanes (left), an airboat ramp (center), and an informational kiosk with panels on the Chain of Lakes, the Kissimmee River restoration, and area wildlife.

**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Lake Kissimmee,
Photos**



This is the west shore of Lake Kissimmee opposite of Brahma Island, which is visible in the distance in both photos above (27° 51' 03"N, 81° 17' 29"W). This is a relatively wide area of District ownership known as Otter Slough. This area has been undergoing restoration since its acquisition and has involved a significant amount of vegetation management, application of prescribed fire. Hydrologic restoration has included the installation of 5 ditch plugs and the backfilling of two drainage ditches. The full hydrologic benefit of this work will be realized when the higher lake stages are implemented.



The west shore between Otter Slough and Tiger Creek is generally characterized by a narrow shoreline marsh, a grassy slope, and with an oak hammock just inland (27° 55' 36"N, 81° 19' 35"W).

**Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Lake Kissimmee,
Photos**



These photos show the outfall of Tiger Creek into Lake Kissimmee, the left photo is looking south and the right photo is looking north. The land to south of the creek is owned by the District, where a cattle lease and a cattle reservation is in place. The north side of the creek is owned by the State as part of Lake Kissimmee State Park.



The three islands in northeastern Lake Kissimmee, Bird (above), Sturm (upper right), and Rabbit (lower right). These marshy islands fall between the 52.5' and 54' contours and will be seasonally inundated when the higher lake stages are achieved.

Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Lake Kissimmee,

Photos



The shore of Lake Kissimmee is home to many rare or endangered birds including whooping cranes (left), snail kites (center) and sandhill cranes (right)



The eastern shore of Lake Kissimmee is generally characterized by a low broad marsh that transitions to pasture inland (27° 57' 24"N, 81° 13' 41"W). There are cattle leases or cattle reservations in place on the District lands on the eastern

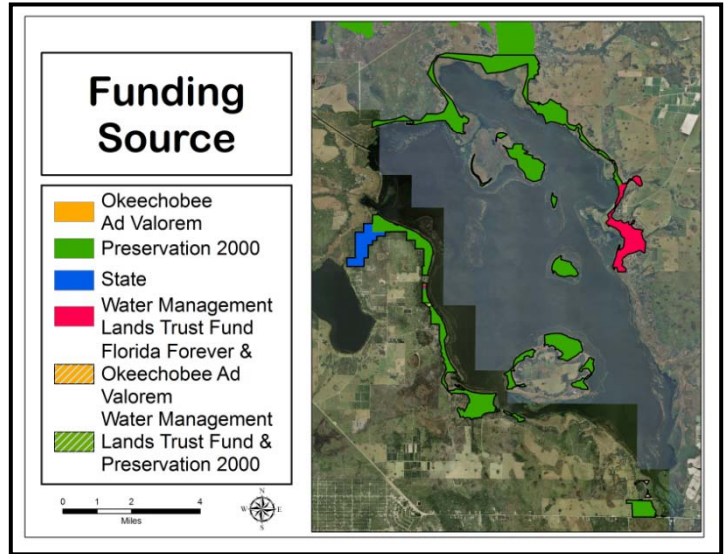
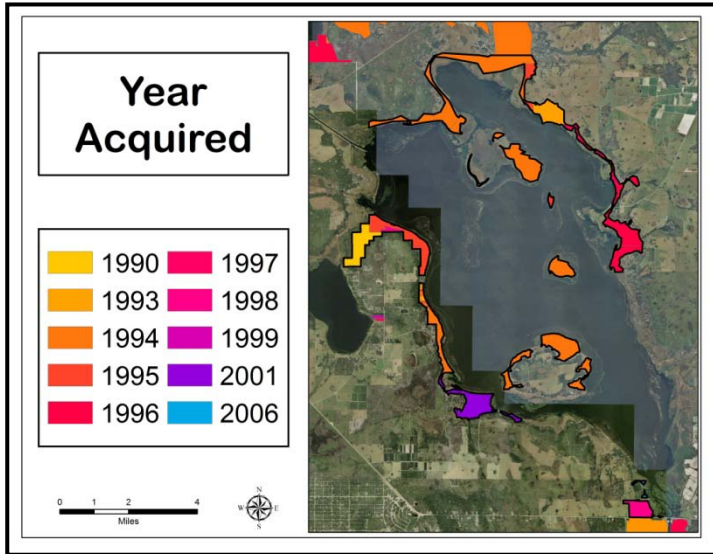
Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Lake Kissimmee,

Photos

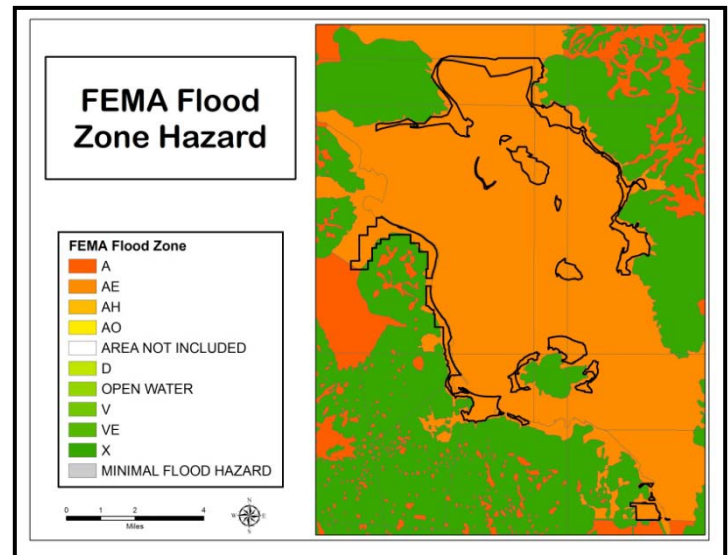
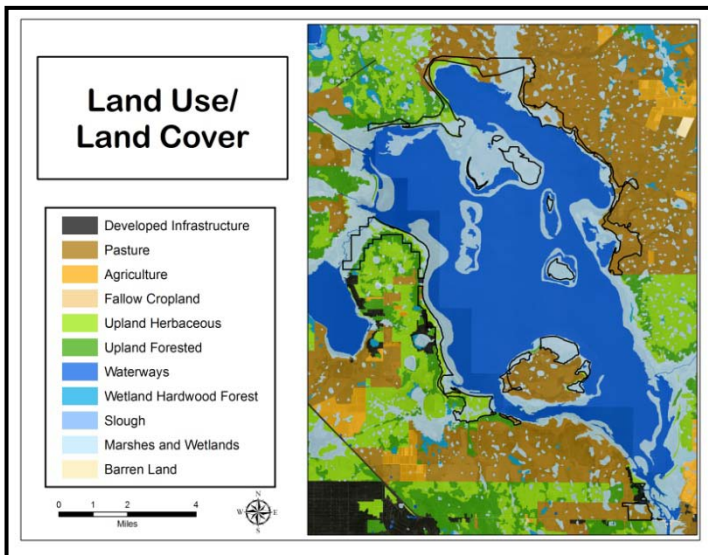


Access to the eastern shore and Bird, Sturm, and Rabbit Islands is supported by the Overstreet boat ramp facility managed by Osceola County. The boat ramp lies near the midpoint of the eastern shore and is surrounded by District land.

Lake Kissimmee: Land Acquisition



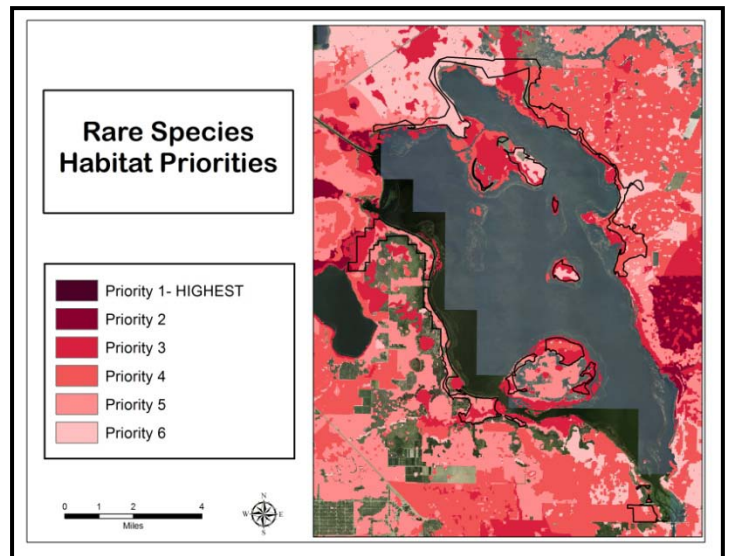
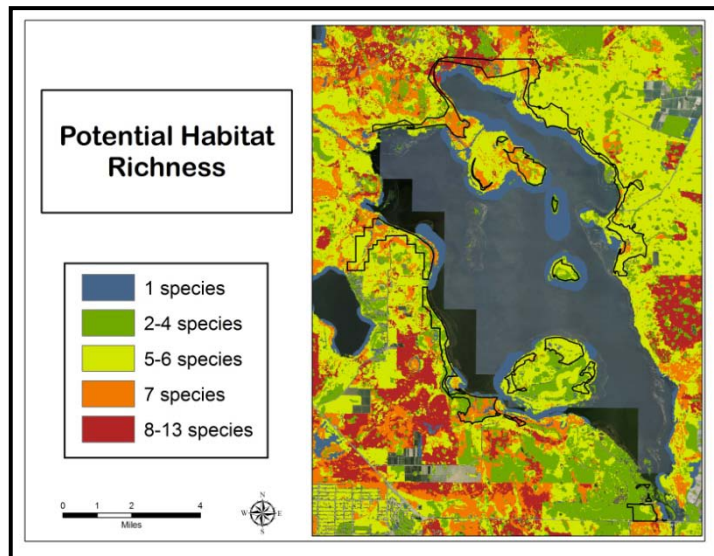
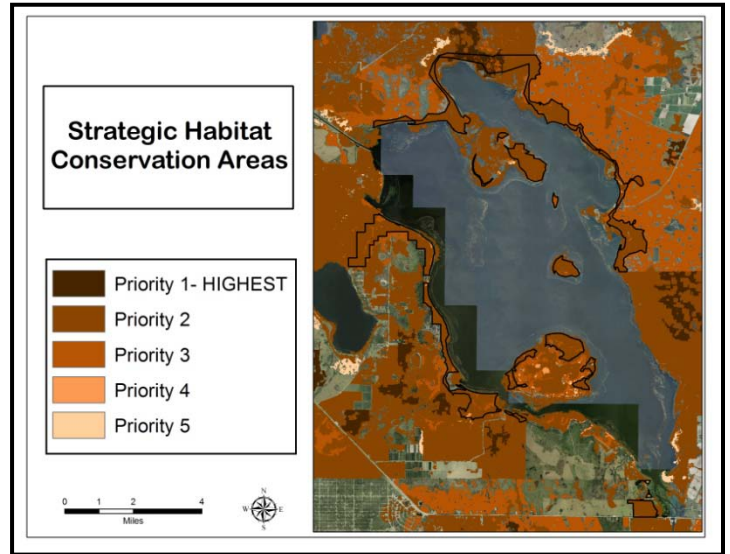
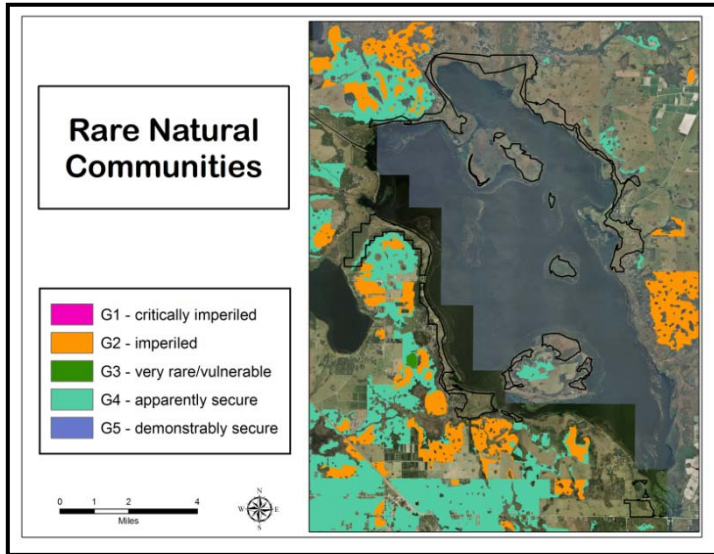
Lake Kissimmee: Land Character



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Lake Kissimmee: Land Character (Continued)



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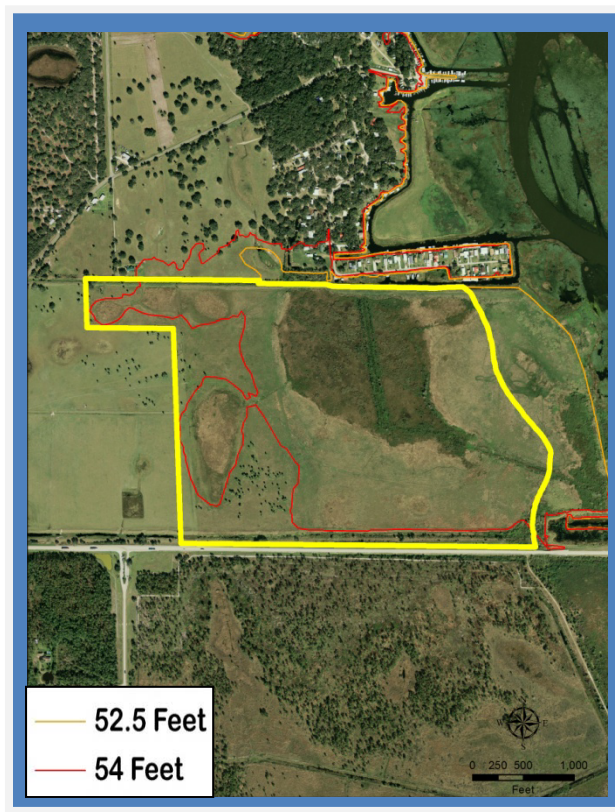
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Lake Kissimmee

Individual Parcel Assessment

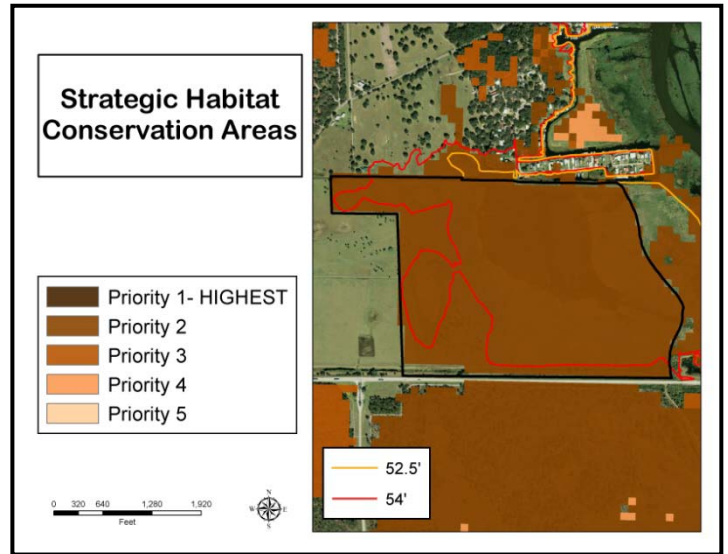
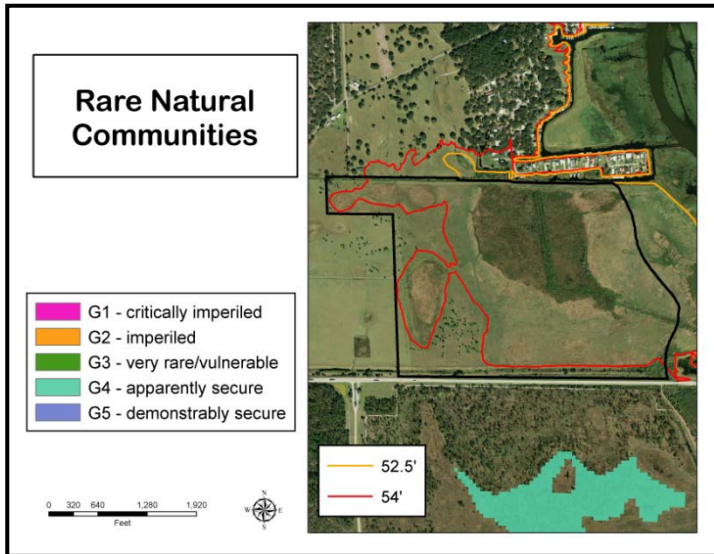
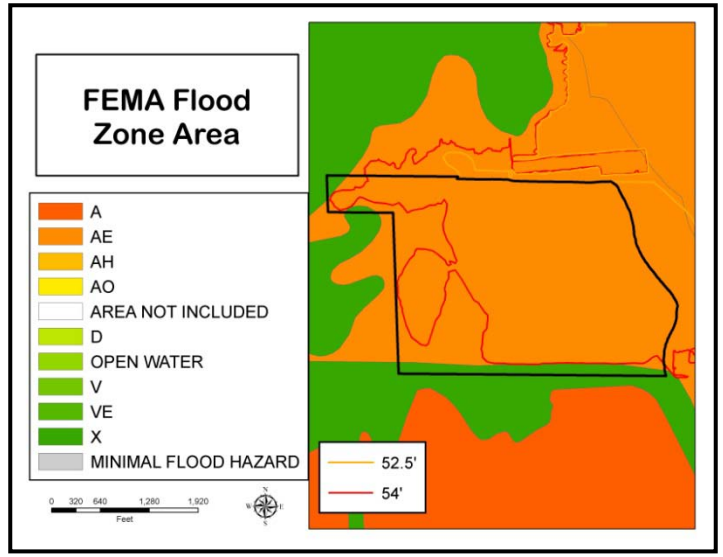
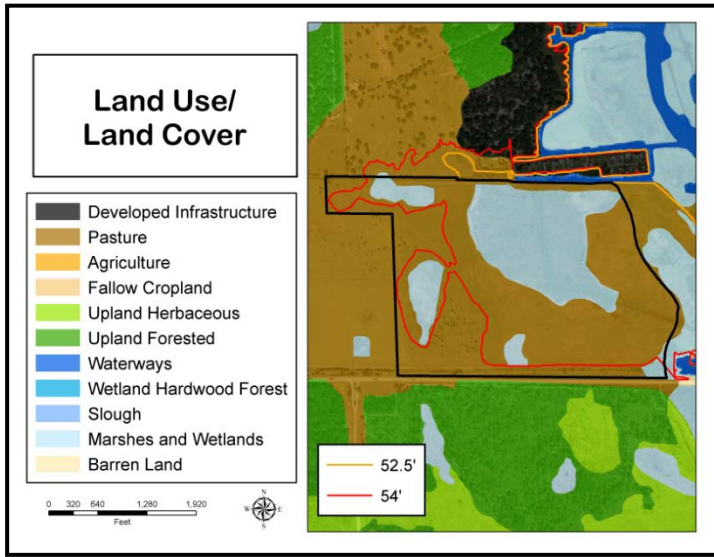
Oasis Marsh, outside of the floodplain

A portion of the western side of the Oasis Marsh property is higher than the 54' contour that was necessary to acquire to allow for adequate seasonal flow to the restored Kissimmee River. The area is approximately 205 acres and consists of degraded improved pasture. The area lies along State Road 60 at the southwestern corner of the Oasis Marsh property, but there is no direct access to the road due to a drainage ditch that runs along the south edge of the property.



Portions of the western side of the Oasis Marsh tract lie outside of the 54' contour, the line to which property rights were necessary to acquire to support higher water levels in Lake Kissimmee (27° 48' 22"N, 81° 12' 53"W)

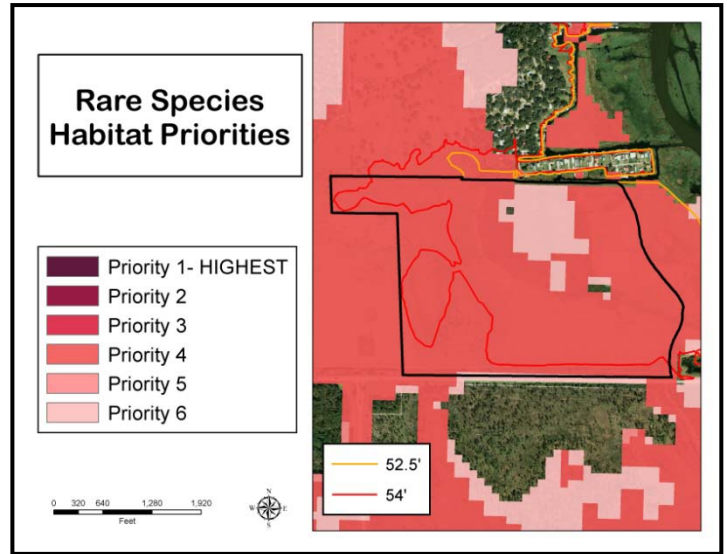
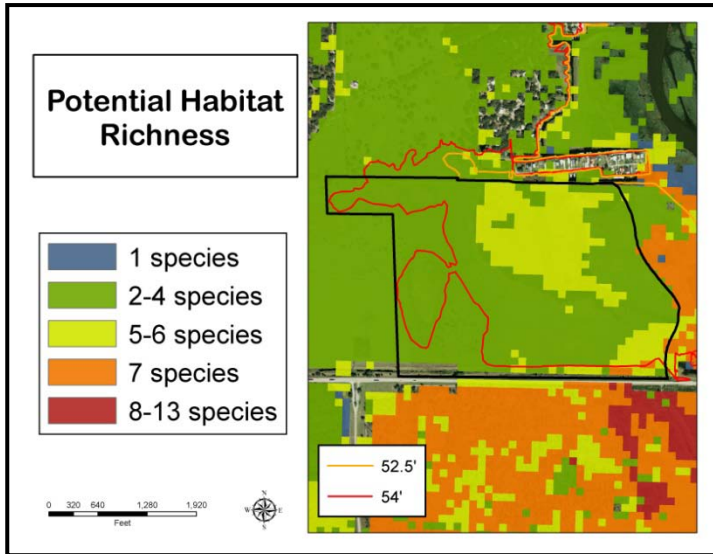
Oasis Marsh, Outside of Floodplain: Land Character



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Oasis Marsh, Outside of Floodplain: Land Character (continued)



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