

# Chapter 8: Land Stewardship Annual Report

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## SUMMARY

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In accordance with the Save Our Rivers (SOR) Program [Chapter 373.59, Florida Statutes, (F.S.)], states that lands acquired through the Land Stewardship Program “shall be managed and maintained in an environmentally acceptable manner and, to the extent practicable, in such a way as to restore and protect their natural state and condition.” This program is responsible for the planning and management of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD or District) lands, including Project Lands, the implementation and administration of mitigation banks and regional offsite mitigation areas and recreation on District lands and on District canal rights of way. The Project Lands component of the Land Stewardship Program is responsible for managing those properties acquired by the District for future Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and other projects until the land is needed for construction. Major components of the Land Stewardship Program include hydrologic/habitat restoration, exotic plant and animal control, prescribed burns, public use and environmental education, and mitigation.

The programs under Land Stewardship can be divided into three different types, and include lands acquired under SOR, Preservation 2000 (P2000), and Florida Forever. This report provides a brief description and summary of each SOR project, organized by land management region.

The program’s principal source of management funding has been the Water Management Lands Trust Fund, which utilizes a portion of the state’s documentary tax revenue to pay for land management activities. Other funding sources include offsite mitigation, mitigation bank revenues, lease revenues, grants for wetland restoration and exotic control projects, and Everglades Restoration Trust Fund and *ad valorem* tax revenue for CERP recreational programs.

The Fiscal Year 2006 (FY2006) (October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006) budget for the component of the Land Stewardship Program that manages Project Lands was over \$3.1 million, including personnel costs, contractual expenses for activities such as exotic control, cleanup, security, and general administrative costs. Revenue generated from agricultural leases, sale of products, and other alternative sources for this fiscal year was in excess of \$4 million. Management activities for FY2007 are anticipated to be an estimated total cost of \$10.9 million, or unit cost of \$17 per acre.

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## BACKGROUND

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The Save Our Rivers (SOR) Program began in 1981 with the legislative enactment of the Water Management Lands Trust Fund, Chapter 373.59, Florida Statutes (F.S.), which enabled the state's five water management districts to buy lands needed for water management, water supply, and the conservation and protection of water resources, and to make them available for appropriate public use (see Chapter 6 of this volume). Since that time, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD or District) and its acquisition partners have purchased 392,929 acres of environmentally sensitive land (not including 800,000 acres in the three Water Conservation Areas). Water resource projects, or those lands associated with the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) consisting largely of impacted agricultural lands, have added an additional 230,415 acres. Of this amount, 131,000 acres are managed as Project Lands with commercial leases administered by the District's Land Stewardship Division until they are transferred to CERP. The remaining 99,415 acres are Project Lands for which the Land Stewardship Program has responsibility, which is limited to managing recreational opportunities and providing security control.

The District owns and, with its partners, manages 623,310 acres of SOR and interim project lands from Orlando to Biscayne Bay. The SOR projects are lands that were purchased for their conservation values—high quality floodplains, wetlands, and uplands that will continue providing recreation, water resource protection, and wildlife habitat for future generations. The interim lands are those properties that will be transformed into engineered reservoirs and stormwater treatment areas as part of the District's massive ecosystem scale restoration initiatives. The management of both the interim lands and the natural lands are now a part of the Land Stewardship Program. Both areas have their inherent land management challenges—habitat restoration, prescribed burns, and exotic treatment on SOR lands; exotic animals, illegal dumping, and abandoned structures on interim lands.

### THE LAND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM AND GOALS

The Land Stewardship Program is responsible for the planning and management of District lands, including Project Lands, the implementation and administration of mitigation banks and regional offsite mitigation areas and recreation on District lands and on District canal rights of way. For the 392,929 acres of environmentally sensitive lands, the program has direct management responsibility for 252,001 acres in 14 projects; contracts, agreements, or leases have been entered into with other agencies, local governments, or private entities for the 140,928 acres of non-District managed lands. For the 131,000 acres of Project Lands managed by the Land Stewardship Program, nearly 100 different leases, reservations, or management agreements are used. The total lands managed by the program are 623,344 acres.

Many District owned properties include upland areas that are disturbed and dominated by undesirable non-native plants. Restoring such areas with diverse native understory is challenging, but the rewards for wildlife habitat are great. The Land Stewardship Program is attacking this problem by working with ecological restoration experts in the state and through a Request for Quotes that was released in FY2006 to the selected consultant who will evaluate more effective and less expensive restoration techniques beginning in FY2007. In order to accomplish its mission of managing and protecting water resources, the District is moving ahead on restoration of critical natural lands across South Florida.

The major goals of the program are to restore the lands to their natural state and condition, manage them in an environmentally acceptable manner, and provide public recreational opportunities that are compatible with natural resources protection. Additionally, the Land Stewardship Program includes activities to manage those properties acquired by the District for

future CERP or other projects uses until needed for construction. The program is implemented by a professional staff of 33 based in three service centers: two field offices, including the DuPuis Management Area in Martin County and the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) Management Center in Lee County, and the District headquarters in West Palm Beach. Additional background information on the Land Stewardship Program can be found on the District's web site at [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov) under the *What We Do, Land Resources, Land Stewardship & Management* section.

### **Program Objectives**

- Complete/update management plans for all projects
- Control invasive exotics
- Restore natural fire regime
- Restore native communities
- Employ multiple use practices
- Manage interim agricultural uses through reservations, lease agreements, or similar agreements
- Open lands for appropriate public use
- Implement two mitigation banks and offsite mitigation per permit conditions

### **Program Finances**

Since its inception in the early 1980s, the Land Stewardship Program has been funded by a variety of sources. The principal source of management funding has been the Water Management Lands Trust Fund, which utilizes a portion of the state's documentary tax revenue to pay for land management activities. The fund reimburses actual expenditures based on quarterly invoices to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), which administers the fund. Appropriate expenditures are identified in the District's annual budget and approved by the District's Governing Board by a resolution to the FDEP. Since 2000, use of these funds has been limited to land management costs, the payment in lieu of taxes program, capital programs, the Surface Water Improvement and Management Program, and to retire the District's land acquisition bonds.

Other funding sources include offsite mitigation, mitigation bank revenues, lease revenues, grants for wetland restoration and exotic control projects, and Everglades Restoration Trust Fund and *ad valorem* tax revenue for CERP recreational programs. Offsite mitigation funds are collected as a result of site-specific conditions placed on Environmental Resource Permits approved by the District's Governing Board for authorized impacts to wetlands. These funds must be spent strictly in accordance with the permit requirements for land acquisition, restoration, and general maintenance of the mitigation lands. This form of mitigation allows the District to direct mitigation funds where they most benefit the South Florida ecosystem. To date, Land Stewardship Program staff has obtained several grants to fund specific restoration projects on District lands. Additionally, substantial in-kind services are provided by the lessees, state, and local governments, as well as numerous recreational groups and individual volunteers.

The Fiscal Year 2006 (FY2006) (October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006) budget for the component of the Land Stewardship Program that manages Project Lands was over \$3.1 million. This included personnel costs, contractual expenses for activities such as exotic control, cleanup, security, and general administrative costs. Revenue generated from agricultural leases, sale of products, and other alternative sources for the year was in excess of \$4 million. This was in addition to the \$2,290,051 (calculated at an average cost of \$17 per acre) in

management costs avoided due to the 100 leases and management agreements in place for the 131,000 acres under contract. By maintaining the leased properties on the local tax rolls, the lessees paid \$1.9 million in property taxes for a total contribution of over \$8 million by the interim property management program. Management activities for the Land Stewardship Program in FY2007 are anticipated to occur on 623,344 acres of land at an estimated total cost of \$10.9 million, or unit cost of \$17 per acre.

## **LAND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

Chapter 373.59, F.S., the enabling legislation for the SOR Program, states that lands acquired through this program “shall be managed and maintained in an environmentally acceptable manner and, to the extent practicable, in such a way as to restore and protect their natural state and condition.” Major components of the Land Stewardship Program include hydrologic/habitat restoration, exotic plant and animal control, prescribed burns, public use and environmental education, mitigation, and project lands. An overview of each of these components is presented in the following sections.

### **Hydrologic/Habitat Restoration**

A major thrust of the Land Stewardship Program is to protect and restore the flow-ways, watersheds, and wetlands, all of which are critical to regional water resources. Hydrologic restoration has been accomplished on numerous District projects, which include installing earthen ditch plugs, rehydrating isolated wetlands, constructing at-grade road crossings to restore sheetflow, constructing levees and water control structures, and reflooding impacted Everglades marsh. Upland restoration efforts incorporate timber thinning and chopping as a mechanical means to support prescribed fire preparation and habitat restoration. Such restoration includes planning the reintroduction of the endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers (*Picoides borealis*). Revegetation efforts include restoring groundcover and planting pine to return pastures into pine flatwoods, and creating hardwood hammocks and forested wetlands in the southern Everglades.

### **Exotic Plant and Animal Control**

The District is committed to reducing the proliferation of exotic invasive plant and animal infestations by controlling the problem where possible (see Volume I, Chapter 9). The District's Exotic Plant Control Program consists primarily of an environmentally acceptable, ground-based herbicide application with limited aerial application in dense monocultures applied in three phases. The first phase focuses on the initial elimination of seed bearing trees and seedlings. In the second phase, the treatment focuses on the missed areas and seedlings that resulted from the previous treatment. The last phase involves a long-term or maintenance program that monitors the effectiveness of the control program and provides follow-up treatments, as needed. The District's contractors typically use a five-year schedule, reducing the estimated cost of treatments by 50 percent for each succeeding year, until the seed source is brought under control. Co-operators who manage District lands under contract or lease are strongly encouraged to apply a similarly aggressive approach to exotic plant control. Overall exotic control is consistently the single largest item in the Land Stewardship Program annual budget. The District is working closely with land managers from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Everglades National Park (ENP or Park) to control exotic snakes and other reptiles inhabiting inactive agricultural fields near the Park. Hog trapping contracts are also available to SFWMD land managers to help control the feral hog population while not interfering with the publicly managed hunts.

## Prescribed Burns

Periodic fire is a natural element of native Florida ecosystems. The District uses prescribed burns to reduce hazardous buildups of vegetative fuel loads, enhance wildlife habitat, and encourage the restoration of native plant communities. District lands are prescribed burned to simulate natural fire cycles, which benefit native plant communities. The goal is to conduct at least 50 percent of the prescribed burns during the growing season to mimic the natural occurrence of season fires produced by lightning. The fire management program is an industry standard based on ecological research and proven safety standards that require trained and experienced staff familiar with the diverse fire management needs of South Florida's unique landscape. Conducting prescribed burns requires intensive staff support and specialized equipment.

## Public Use and Environmental Education

Great strides have been made to enhance and expand recreational use opportunities on District-owned and managed lands, and the District encourages use of its lands for appropriate outdoor recreational activities. All District lands are available for public use, except in a few instances where there is no legal public access or where contract or lease restrictions prohibit such use. The vast majority of lands are managed as semi-wilderness areas, with limited vehicular access other than off-road parking. Multiple recreational opportunities include hiking, primitive camping, canoeing, fishing, and horseback riding, with numerous volunteers maintaining the trails and wilderness campsites. Cooperative agreements with the FWC enable high quality, low impact managed hunting on nearly 654,677 acres, excluding the Water Conservation Areas. Acquisition and management partners from several counties have constructed environmental education centers, boardwalks, and interpretive trails that are used annually by thousands of students and visitors at no cost to the District.

## Mitigation

Under Chapter 373, F.S., the District is authorized to participate in and encourage the development of private and public mitigation banks and regional offsite mitigation areas. Chapter 62-342, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), of the state's mitigation banking rule also encourages each water management district to establish two mitigation banks. The use of mitigation and mitigation banking offers opportunities to generate supplemental revenue for the District's land acquisition, restoration, and management programs.

The SFWMD's mitigation bank sites include the Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank in Palm Beach County and the Corkscrew Regional Mitigation Bank in Lee County. The District is developing each bank in a public/private contractual agreement. Private bankers obtain permits, restore the land, reimburse the District for its land acquisition and staff costs, and then provide a revenue stream to the District for future projects. The total revenue collected during FY2006 from the Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank was \$410,000.

## Project Lands

The Project Lands component of the Land Stewardship Program is responsible for managing those properties acquired by the District for future CERP and other projects until the land is needed for construction. These lands will ultimately be used as stormwater treatment areas, surface water reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas, and/or buffer lands between the Everglades and other sensitive areas and urban development. These lands are not specifically acquired or designated for environmental enhancement, restoration, or preservation purposes, and, generally, are not proposed for recreational or other public uses except on a limited basis that is consistent

with their designated future use. The Project Lands component has developed a multi-faceted management approach to accomplish the following:

- protect the natural resource
- provide onsite management and security for District-owned lands at a minimal cost to the District
- minimize District expenses by increasing revenue from non-governmental sources to off-set District management, maintenance, and resource protection costs
- generate additional funding for future acquisition
- minimize impacts to the local agricultural economy by keeping viable agricultural lands in active production for as long as possible
- minimize fiscal impacts to the local government by keeping lands on the tax roll until they are actually needed for construction

Historical property uses, such as grazing, sod, vegetable, sugar cane farming, nurseries, and tree farms, are allowed to continue using reservations, leases, or similar agreements, where appropriate. Generally, a competitive bid process is used to solicit proposals and award contracts, which include the appropriate cancellation clauses to make the land quickly available when needed. In some cases, short-term leases (five years or less) are negotiated as part of the acquisition package. Lessees are typically required to actively manage the property, control exotics, provide security for the property, implement applicable Best Management Practices, keep the property and facilities in good repair and condition, obtain all required permits and approvals for their activities, maintain required insurance coverage, and pay applicable taxes.

## PROJECT STATUS

The following project summary section provides a brief description of each SOR project, organized by the five land management regions: Upper Lakes, Kissimmee/Okeechobee, East Coast, Everglades, and West Coast. This section also includes regional maps for each of these management areas (**Figures 8-1** through **8-5**). **Tables 8-1** summarizes the FY2006 land acquisition status according to project under the District's Land Stewardship Program. **Table 8-2** highlights current and recreational use opportunities for the public, according to land management region.

**Table 8-1.** Land Stewardship Program acquisition summary for FY2006.

Project Name	County	Project Size (Acres)	District Ownership (Acres)	Acquisition Partners
Allapattah Flats	Martin	22,658	20,948	Martin County/federal
Atlantic Ridge Ecosystem	Martin	12,461	6,094	Martin County/CARL
Corkscrew Mitigation Bank	Lee	633	633	None
CREW	Lee/Collier	63,338	26,025	CARL/Lee County
Cypress Creek/Loxahatchee	Martin/Palm Beach	4,255	3,547	Martin County/ Palm Beach County
Cypress Creek /Trail Ridge	St. Lucie	14,270	1,233	None
DuPuis	Palm Beach/Martin	21,858	21,858	None
East Coast Buffer – Remaining	Broward/ Miami-Dade	6,375	6,375	Broward County /Miami-Dade County/federal
Halpatoikey Park	Martin	347	347	None
Henscratch Ranch*	Highlands	2,671	657	None
Indian River Lagoon	Martin/St. Lucie	653	653	St. Lucie County/ CARL/federal
Kissimmee Chain of Lakes	Polk/Osceola	36,763	38,415	None
Kissimmee Prairie	Okeechobee	38,284	38,284	CARL
Kissimmee River	Highlands/Okeechobee/ Polk/Osceola	68,332	57,109	None
Lake Marion Creek	Polk	15,584	7,067	Polk County/ SWFWMD/USFWS
Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank	Palm Beach	1,256	1,256	None
Loxahatchee River	Palm Beach	1,547	1,547	Palm Beach County
Loxahatchee Slough	Palm Beach	12,713	1,488	Palm Beach County
Model Lands	Miami-Dade	47,482	12,182	Miami-Dade County
North Fork St. Lucie River	St. Lucie	3,694	482	St. Lucie County/CARL
Okaloacoochee Slough	Hendry/Collier	37,218	34,982	CARL/DOF/FWC
Pal-Mar	Palm Beach/Martin	38,549	16,807	CARL/Palm Beach County
Paradise Run	Glades	7,978	3,328	None
Reedy Creek	Osceola	5,479	5,479	None
Shingle Creek	Orange/ Osceola	8,066	1,718	City of Kissimmee
Six Mile Cypress	Lee	2,193	842	Lee County
Southern Glades	Miami-Dade	36,362	32,408	None
SUMICA	Polk	4,009	4,009	Polk County
Tibet-Butler Preserve	Orange	439	439	None
Stormwater Treatment Areas	Palm Beach/Hendry	46,717	46,717	None
<b>Totals</b>		<b>555,809</b>	<b>392,929</b>	

\* Conservation easement interest only

**Table 8-2.** Public use opportunities for land management regions.

Public Use Opportunities											
Land Management Region	Lead Manager	Airboating	Bicycling	Canoeing	Camping	Education / Visitor Center	Equestrian	Fishing	Hiking	Hunting	Picnic Tables
<b>Upper Lakes Region</b>											
Kissimmee Chain of Lakes	SFWMD	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Lake Marion Creek	SFWMD		•		•			•	•	•	•
Reedy Creek	SFWMD	•		•		•		•	•	•	•
Shingle Creek	SFWMD		•	•				•	•	•	•
SUMICA	Polk County		•		•		•	•	•	•	•
Tibet Butler Preserve	Orange County					•			•		
<b>Kissimmee-Okeechobee Region</b>											
Kissimmee Prairie	FDEP		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Kissimmee River	SFWMD	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Paradise Run	SFWMD		•	•				•	•	•	•
<b>East Coast Region</b>											
Allapattah Flats	SFWMD								•		
Atlantic Ridge	FDEP										
DuPuis	SFWMD		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Helipotkee Park	Martin County		•	•				•	•		•
Indian River Lagoon	St. Lucie County			•					•		
Loxahatchee River	FDEP		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Loxahatchee Slough	Palm Beach County								•		
North Fork St. Lucie River	FDEP					•		•	•		
Pal-Mar	FWC			•	•			•	•	•	
Riverbend Park	Palm Beach County		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Ten Mile Creek	St. Lucie County		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
<b>Everglades Region</b>											
Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge (Water Conservation Area 1)	USFWS		•	•		•		•	•	•	
Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area (Water Conservation Areas 2 and 3)	FWC	•	•	•				•	•	•	
Everglades Buffer Strip	SFWMD							•	•	•	
Model Lands	SFWMD								•	•	•
Southern Glades	FWC	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Stormwater Treatment Area 1W	SFWMD		•						•	•	
Stormwater Treatment Area 3/4	SFWMD		•						•	•	
Stormwater Treatment Area 5	SFWMD		•						•	•	
<b>West Coast Region</b>											
CREW	SFWMD				•				•	•	•
Okearocoochee Slough	DOF		•		•		•	•	•	•	•
Six Mile Cypress Slough	Lee County					•			•	•	•

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## UPPER LAKES LAND MANAGEMENT REGION, ORLANDO SERVICE CENTER

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### KISSIMMEE CHAIN OF LAKES (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)

- County: Osceola and Polk
- Project size: 36,763 acres
- District ownership: 38,415 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

Acquisition of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (KCOL) project was designed to provide the capacity to store and flow water up to the 54 foot National Geodetic Vertical Datum 1929 (NGVD 29) contour line. Public access to most of the land is by boat, and several cattle leases and grazing reservations are within the KCOL Management Area. Resource management goals for KCOL are to maintain and, where possible, restore natural communities, provide cost effective resource protection, and provide opportunities for compatible public use. In FY2006, ten picnic sites with benches were established. For exotic plants, approximately 25,000 acres were treated. In addition, 10,000 acres of semi-improved pasture were mowed to reduce nuisance native and exotic plants and to improve the conditions of the altered wet prairie communities on Gardner-Cobb Marsh, Lightsey Units, Catfish Creek, Rough Island, Johnson Island, and Lake Kissimmee East Shoreline. Approximately 4,050 acres were cleared utilizing prescribed burn. For FY2007, three Natural Resource Conservation Service restoration projects are planned for restoring approximately 3,000 acres.

### LAKE MARION CREEK (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)

- County: Polk
- Project size: 15,584 acres
- District ownership: 7,067 acres
- Acquisition partners: Polk County, SWFWMD, and USFWS

Polk County's Lake Marion Creek flows from Lake Marion to Lake Hatchineha. Contained within the project area are scrub, sand hills, pine flatwoods, and riverine swamp forests. The majority of the property is open for year-round hiking; camping is available by Special Use License. Lands in this project have been acquired with the assistance from Polk County, the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Primary stewardship activities include prescribed burns, exotic plant control, resource protection, and public use. The FWC participates as a cooperative management partner by conducting a hunt program and security patrols. The area is managed as a Type 1 Wildlife Management Area. The management plan was adopted at the December 2005 District Governing Board meeting.

In FY2006, dense pine saplings were thinned on approximately 20 acres of cutthroat grass habitat, preventing encroachment on this endangered species. Exotic treatment of approximately 250 acres of Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium*), Caesar weed (*Urena lobata*), and cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) also occurred; additional vegetative scrub may be acquired in FY2007. Florida scrub jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and sand skink (*Neoseps reynoldsi*) surveys were completed in 2006 by private contractors. Additional projects completed in FY2006 were the establishment of two new parking areas and finalization of an archaeological inventory.

**SUMICA (MANAGED BY POLK COUNTY)**

- County: Polk
- Project size: 4,009 acres
- District ownership: 4,009 acres
- Acquisition partners: Polk County

Polk County participated as a 50 percent acquisition partner under its Environmental Lands Program, and Polk County is also lead manager. A five-year management plan was prepared by Polk County and approved by the SFWMD. SUMICA, formerly known as Lake Walk-in-Water, is named after the historic logging town that existed on the site in the 1920s. Current public uses include hiking, hunting, camping, and horseback riding. There is an elevated walking trail to access the old elevated railroad tram and observation area.

**REEDY CREEK (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)**

- County: Osceola
- Project size: 5,479 acres
- District ownership: 5,479 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

For management purposes, the project is divided into Upper and Lower Reedy Creek. The Upper Reedy Creek Management Area includes those lands north of Pleasant Hill Road, and the Lower Reedy Creek Management Area encompasses approximately seven miles of creek corridor. There are two cattle leases and grazing reservations within the Reedy Creek Management Area. Management goals for both areas are to conserve and protect water resources and supplies, protect and restore the land in its natural state and condition, and provide compatible public use opportunities. The Lake Russell Management Unit in Poinciana is jointly managed by Osceola County Schools as an environmental education facility. A center with classrooms and displays provides interpretation to the scrub, Lake Russell, and the floodplain swamp communities that exist onsite. An interpretive hiking trail describes the unique plant communities and wildlife that exist in the scrub habitat of the site.

The management plan was adopted at the December 2005 District Governing Board meeting. District staff treated approximately 2,500 acres of exotic vegetation in FY2006. Cooperative management of exotics along Reedy Creek with the Nature Conservancy continues. Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium*), tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*), and Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*) follow-up treatments have been implemented. The FWC has identified the area of Lower Reedy Creek as a “Strategic Habitat Conservation Area,” a “Biodiversity Hotspot,” and a “Priority Wetland for Listed Species.” These designations make the area a priority for preservation based on known occurrences of rare or listed species.

### **SHINGLE CREEK (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)**

- County: Orange and Osceola
- Project size: 8,066 acres
- District ownership: 1,718 acres (includes 124 acres of conservation easement )
- Acquisition partners: City of Kissimmee

The District has undertaken several successful restoration projects within Shingle Creek Swamp that were funded as mitigation to offset wetland impacts associated with the construction of the Orlando Beltway. The management plan was adopted at the December 2005 District Governing Board meeting. In FY2006, the entire 1,700 acres were surveyed and spot treated for exotic vegetation, including Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium*), Para grass (*Urochloa mutica*), Caesar weed (*Urena lobata*), and primrose willow (*Ludwigia peruviana*). In addition, 30 acres of dense myrtle thickets around the perimeters of the east and west pine islands were treated to restore the historic wet prairie community.

Also in FY2006, the SFWMD staff worked with Hunter's Creek Middle School on placing the Everglades Trail Kiosk behind the school leading into the swamp. A canoe access point was also established at the school site. Signage at access points of the three parking area was installed this past fiscal year. The District is now working with Osceola County to open the Babb property for public recreation.

### **TIBET-BUTLER PRESERVE (MANAGED BY ORANGE COUNTY)**

- County: Orange
- Project size: 439 acres
- District ownership: 439
- Acquisition partners: None

The Tibet-Butler Preserve covers 439 acres along the southwest shore of Lake Tibet-Butler in Orange County. This site includes approximately 4,000 feet of shoreline on Lake Tibet. Vegetative communities include bay swamp, pine flatwoods, cypress swamp, and smaller areas of xeric oak and freshwater marsh.

The Orange County Parks and Recreation Department manages Tibet-Butler Preserve as an environmental education facility that is open for public use. A museum with a classroom was constructed in 1994. It has a full-time staff, which conducts programs for thousands of students each year. Land managers also treat exotic vegetation and maintain the system of hiking trails and boardwalks that lead to the many community types on the property.

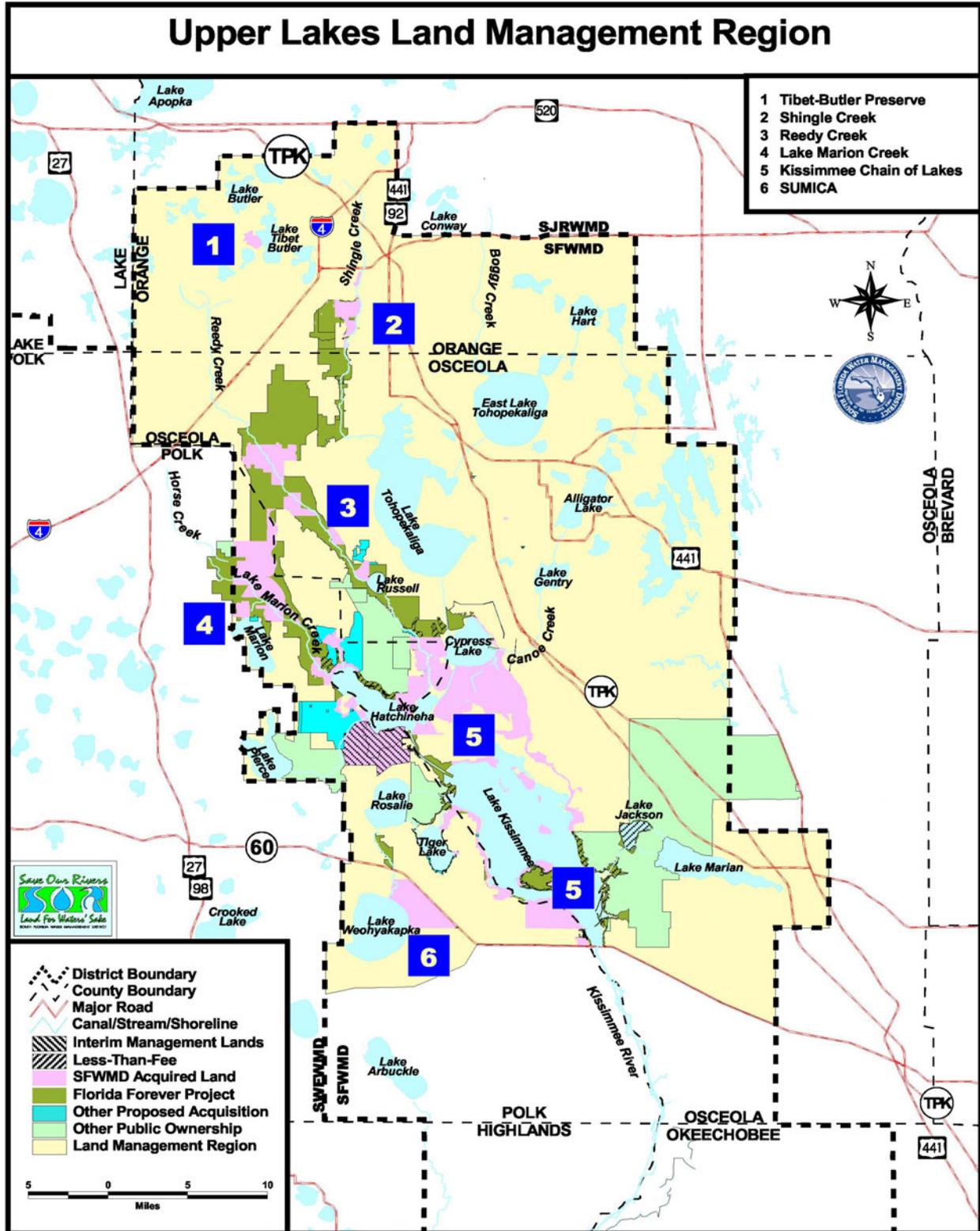


Figure 8-1. Upper Lakes Land Management Region.

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## **KISSIMMEE/OKEECHOBEE LAND MANAGEMENT REGION, OKEECHOBEE SERVICE CENTER**

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### **KISSIMMEE PRAIRIE ECOSYSTEM (MANAGED BY THE FDEP)**

- County: Okeechobee
- Project size: 38,284 acres
- District ownership: 38,284 acres
- Acquisition partners: Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL)

Known as the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, the project is managed by the FDEP Division of Recreation and Parks under lease from the District and state. Recreational uses include hiking, bicycling, camping, horseback riding, and astronomy. A state-approved management plan is in place that addresses prescribed burns, exotic control, and public use. Exotic treatments and prescribed burns are ongoing.

### **KISSIMMEE RIVER (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT AND FWC)**

- County: Osceola, Polk, Highlands, and Okeechobee
- Project size: 68,332 acres
- District ownership: 57,109 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

The Kissimmee River is cooperatively managed by the SFWMD and the FWC. The five-year plan for both areas includes prescribed burns, exotic plant control, upland shrub control, wildlife management, and forest management. In FY2006, 2,330 acres were prescribed burned, 2,214 acres were chemically treated for exotic plants, and 648 acres of overgrown shrub were mechanically shredded.

An extensive public use program on the river attracted hundreds of visitors to the area and included hunting, fishing, horseback riding, nature watching, hiking, camping, boating and education programs through the Riverwoods Field lab. Development of a campground for equestrian use has been completed, and the road leading to the campground is under development in Hickory Hammock. Completion of the road is scheduled for completion in winter 2007.

### **PARADISE RUN (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)**

- County: Glades
- Project size: 7,978 acres
- District ownership: 3,328 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

Paradise Run lies west of the C-38 canal, between structure S-65E and Lake Okeechobee, and is open for public use, including hunting, under FWC's Public Use Area concept. There are also two cattle leases on the property. Along with Pool A of the C-38 canal, the Paradise Run area of the C-38 canal will not be backfilled. However, a plan is being considered in the District's Lake Okeechobee Division to hydrologically restore Paradise Run without backfilling the C-38 canal. Remnant river oxbows are still present, although the surrounding land has been drained and is now improved pasture and spoil. During FY2006, 11 acres were treated for exotic plant control.

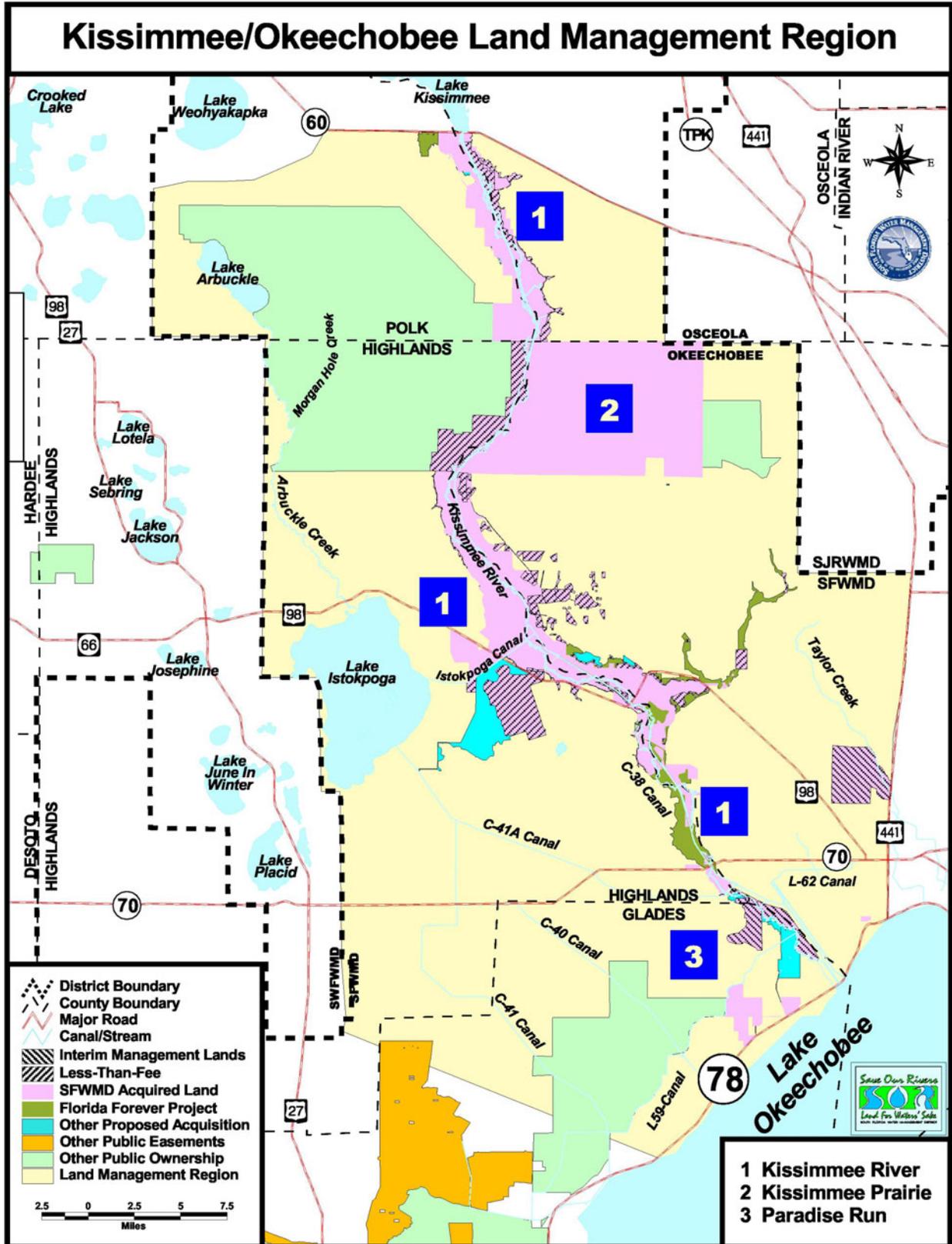


Figure 8-2. Kissimmee/Okeechobee Land Management Region.

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## **EAST COAST LAND MANAGEMENT REGION, WEST PALM BEACH/DUPUIS**

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### **ALLAPATTAH FLATS (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT AND FWC)**

- County: Martin
- Project size: 22,658 acres
- District ownership: 20,948 acres
- Acquisition partners: Martin County and the federal government

With funding assistance from Martin County and the federal government, Allapattah was purchased as part of CERP's Indian River Lagoon – South, Project Implementation Report Recommended Plan. The Allapattah Flats is also known as the Allapattah Complex Natural Water Storage and Treatment Area. It is proposed that the ditches and swales that were excavated to drain and improve the property for cattle grazing will be plugged and filled. Afterwards, a low berm will be constructed at strategic locations to protect roadways and water control structures will be replaced to effect greater control of the site's water resources, allowing rehydration of the property's extensive wetland systems. Restoration will be partially funded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetland Reserve Program. It is expected that flood attenuation and water quality improvement be the outcomes to provide a reduction in discharges to the C-23 canal and, eventually, the Indian River Lagoon – South.

Management activities included continued treatment of exotic vegetation in FY2006. Wetland restoration activities were continued on Parcel A, with a low berm constructed on the west perimeter and a replacement water control structure constructed at the C-23 canal to allow more refined control of water elevations on the site. Two buildings formerly associated with the dairy operation were demolished. Additionally, the dairy lagoon and borrow canal located west of Fox Brown Road was filled in compliance with lagoon closure criteria, and onsite wells and septic systems unassociated with residences were closed.

The FWC implemented rules establishing the property as a wildlife management area and has posted the property boundaries. A parking area is being constructed north of County Road 714 to facilitate public use activities, including hiking, bicycling, equestrian use, hunting, and fishing.

### **ATLANTIC RIDGE ECOSYSTEM (MANAGED BY THE FDEP)**

- County: Martin
- Project size: 12,461 acres
- District ownership: 6,094 acres
- Acquisition partners: CARL

Atlantic Ridge is being managed by FDEP Division of Recreation and Parks, under a joint management lease from the SFWMD and the FDEP Division of State Lands, and will be eventually designated as the Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park. The management plan outlines the goals and objectives for the park. This plan describes hydrologic restoration and staffing needs, plans for exotic control and prescribed burns, and a public use program. It is proposed that initial public facilities will include a trailhead, small shelter, parking area, and restroom. Public access to the property is anticipated for FY2007 through a new residential development off Cove Road.

**CYPRESS CREEK/LOXAHATCHEE (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT AND PALM BEACH COUNTY)**

- County: Martin and Palm Beach
- Project size: 4,255 acres
- District ownership: 3,547 acres
- Acquisition partners: Martin and Palm Beach counties

The project is divided between Martin and Palm Beach counties and forms connections with Pal-Mar and District-owned lands in Jonathan Dickinson State Park. Nearly 3,000 acres are high quality natural area, containing a mixture of pine flatwoods, cypress swamps, and freshwater marshes. The area is the headwaters to Cypress Creek, a major tributary to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River. The remainder of the site has been cleared and used for intensive agriculture for many years. In FY2006, 1,815 acres of Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium*), tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*), guava (*Psidium*), pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), downy rose myrtle (*Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*), Australian pine (*Casuarina*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), and melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) were chemically treated. Staff from Martin County Parks and Recreation Department was consulted for possible public recreational opportunities in the natural area. Restoration plans are underway to enhance the impacted natural areas and convert the agricultural lands to reservoirs or treatment marshes as a component of CERP.

**CYPRESS CREEK/TRAIL RIDGE (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)**

- County: St. Lucie
- Project size: 14,270 acres
- District ownership: 1,233 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

The Cypress Creek/Trail Ridge Complex is a component of CERP's Indian River Lagoon – South, Project Implementation Report Recommended Plan. It is also known as the Cypress Creek/Trail Ridge Natural Water Storage and Treatment Area. Some of the property identified within the Cypress Creek/Trail Ridge footprint includes the St. Lucie County owned Bluefield Ranch property and Pinelands. The District acquired 1,239 acres along the eastern edge of the proposed project in late 2005. It is proposed that many of the ditches and swales that were excavated to drain and improve the property for cattle grazing will be plugged and filled to improve the wetland character of the property and minimize flows to the canal system and ultimately the St. Lucie and Indian River Lagoon estuaries. No restoration activities were completed in FY2006, as authorization and funding for the Indian River Lagoon – South Plan is still pending congressional approval. However, some boundary fencing was repaired or installed to facilitate interim use for cattle grazing.

## **DUPUIS MANAGEMENT AREA (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT AND FWC)**

- County: Palm Beach and Martin
- Project size: 21,858 acres
- District ownership: 21,858 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

The DuPuis Management Area is cooperatively managed by the SFWMD and the FWC. The DuPuis five-year management plan includes prescribed burns, exotic plant control, upland shrub control, wildlife management, and forest management. In FY2006, approximately 8,000 acres were prescribed burned, 1,500 acres were chemically treated for exotic plants, and 775 acres of overgrown shrub vegetation were mechanically shredded. Select areas of over-dense stands of cabbage palms and over 900 acres of pine trees were thinned to improve habitat quality. Significant progress was made toward reintroducing the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) onto the area. In addition, an extensive public use program at DuPuis attracted thousands of visitors to the area and included activities such as hunting, fishing, horseback riding, nature watching, hiking, camping, and education programs through the DuPuis Visitors' Center.

## **HALPATIOKEE REGIONAL PARK (MANAGED BY MARTIN COUNTY)**

- County: Martin
- Project size: 347 acres
- District ownership: 347 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

Halpatiokee is the portion of the Atlantic Ridge Ecosystem Project that lies west of the South Fork of the St. Lucie River (163 acres) as well as the 184 acres previously acquired by the District as the South Fork project. Martin County manages the natural area in conjunction with Halpatiokee Regional Park staff. The property consists of pine flatwoods that surround a series of lakes that were originally excavated to provide fill for the construction of Interstate 95. The South Fork property is a mixture of river floodplain, pine flatwoods, and scrub. In FY2006, the county treated approximately 150 acres of Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), ear-leaf acacia (*Acacia auriculiformis*), cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*), melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), and downy rose myrtle (*Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*). In addition, Martin County held a one-day workday with the North County Land Managers group to treat those same invasive species; the ten participants provided 80 hours of work effort. The county also installed interpretive signage along the river trail, provided an interpretive trail map, and is proceeding to install a composting restroom at the campground.

**INDIAN RIVER LAGOON (MANAGED BY ST. LUCIE COUNTY)**

- County: St. Lucie/Martin
- Project size: 653 acres
- District ownership: 653 acres
- Acquisition partners: St. Lucie County, CARL, and the federal government

Indian River Lagoon (IRL) is managed by St. Lucie County under a lease from the SFWMD and the FDEP Division of State Lands. The IRL property itself has been included for participation in the county's non-chemical mosquito control efforts, which has greatly improved water quality, wildlife, and fisheries habitat in the lagoon. Mosquito impoundment berms are accessible to the public and provide excellent opportunities for fishing, crabbing, and bird watching. The Blind Creek property includes ocean beachfront access and a dune crossover. During FY2006, approximately 40 acres of Blind Creek was treated for exotics. A volunteer day was held to replant 5 acres that were previously exotics. Sixty volunteers were available that day to plant 1,200 trees, shrubs, and groundcovers.

**LOXAHATCHEE RIVER (MANAGED BY PALM BEACH COUNTY AND FDEP)**

- County: Palm Beach
- Project size: 1,547 acres
- District ownership: 1,547 acres
- Acquisition partners: Palm Beach County

District-owned lands along the river are managed by the FDEP Division of Recreation and Parks and the Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department. The FDEP manages the area north of State Road 706 (Indiantown Road) as part of Jonathan Dickinson State Park while Palm Beach County manages the lands south of the road as Riverbend County Park. Both land managers have extensively treated exotics. Palm Beach County, in cooperation with the District, is completing hydrologic restoration of its management area in an attempt to restore the Eastern Slough, a historic tributary to the Loxahatchee River. The restoration project will enable water to be delivered to the Loxahatchee River through a more natural flow-way.

FDEP manages its lands under the Jonathan Dickinson State Park plan. Palm Beach County has a development plan for Riverbend Park. A management plan will be developed as park development progresses.

**LOXAHATCHEE SLOUGH (MANAGED BY PALM BEACH COUNTY)**

- County: Palm Beach
- Project size: 12,713 acres
- District ownership: 1,488 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

Palm Beach County's Department of Environmental Resources Management is currently managing the Sandhill Crane portion of the project—a 1,488 acre tract purchased by the District. The transfer of ownership from the District to Palm Beach County is forthcoming. The county owns more than 10,000 acres in the Loxahatchee Slough Natural Area, which adjoins the Sandhill tract. In FY2006 more than 1,000 acres of exotic vegetation in the Sandhill tract were treated by Palm Beach County.

**NORTH FORK ST. LUCIE RIVER (MANAGED BY ST. LUCIE COUNTY AND FDEP)**

- County: St. Lucie
- Project size: 3,694 acres
- District ownership: 482 acres
- Acquisition partners: St. Lucie County and CARL

State of Florida, St. Lucie County, and District-owned lands along the North Fork are being managed by St. Lucie County and FDEP as part of the North Fork Aquatic Preserve. Both agencies are treating exotics and conducting limited prescribed burns, which is extremely difficult due to the surrounding urban development area. Most of the site was retreated for exotics. In addition to the exotic plant treatment, ten hogs were trapped from the site in FY2006.

St. Lucie County has constructed and now operates the Oxbow Eco-Center, which is an environmental education facility along the North Fork of the St. Lucie River in Port St. Lucie. This facility incorporates indoor displays with outdoor programming that utilizes interpretive trails, towers, and boardwalks. Approximately 20,000 students and visitors participated in classes, workshops, and special events at the facility.

**PAL-MAR (MANAGED BY THE FWC AND PALM BEACH COUNTY)**

- County: Palm Beach and Martin
- Project size: 38,549 acres
- District ownership: 16,807 acres
- Acquisition partners: CARL and Palm Beach County

State and District-owned lands are under management lease to FWC using an approved management plan. The FWC manages the Martin County lands as the John C. and Mariana Jones/Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area. Palm Beach County manages its lands south of Indiantown Road as the Trail Glades Natural Area. The property is open for public use activities, including hiking, primitive camping, hunting, fishing, bicycling, and horseback riding.

The FWC is conducting resource inventories and have mapped exotic infestations. Exotic treatments and prescribed burns are ongoing. This past fiscal year, approximately 6,300 acres were surveyed and treated for exotics (initial), and 455 acres were surveyed and treated for exotics as part of second year maintenance. Also in FY2006, 885 acres were prescribed burned.

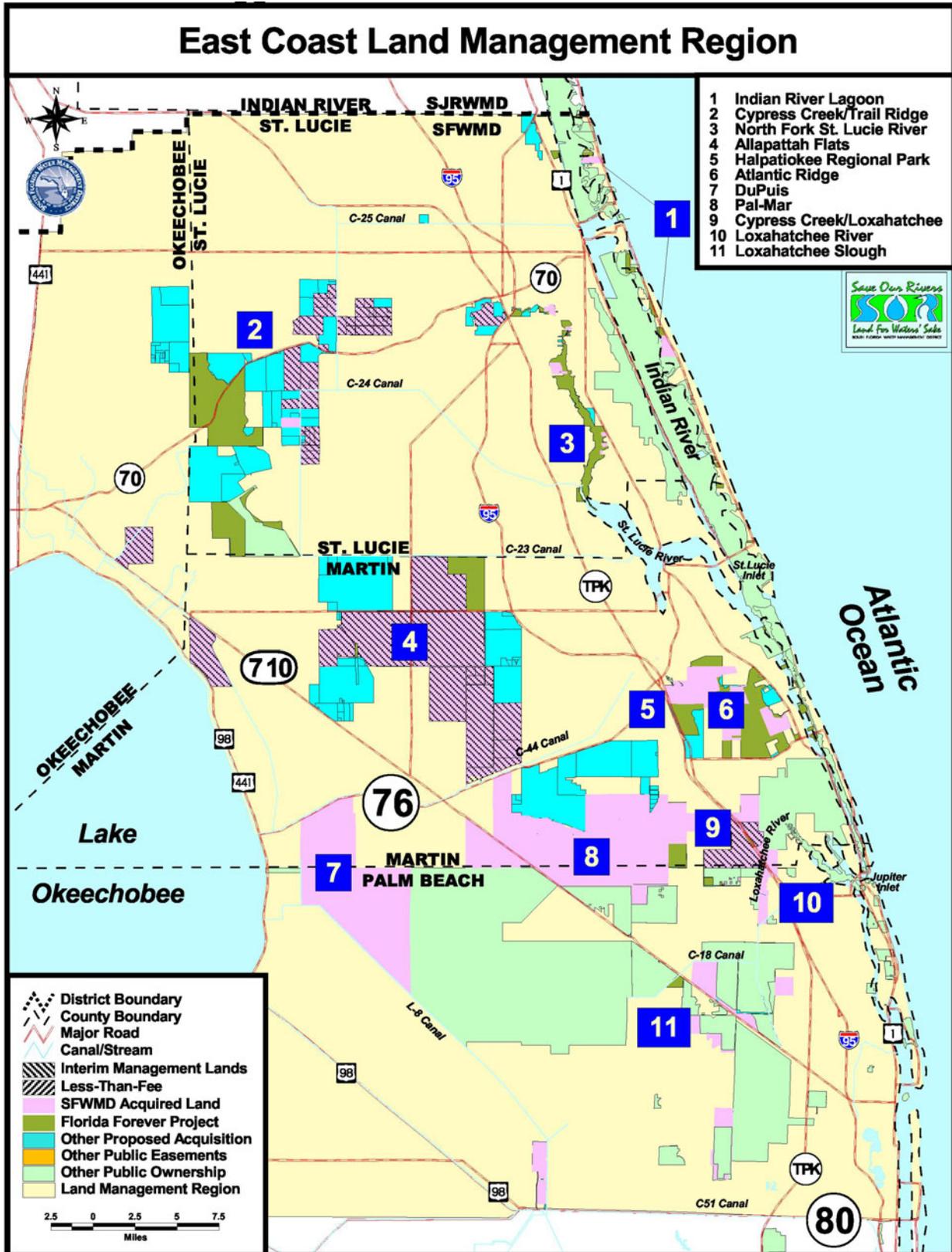


Figure 8-3. East Coast Land Management Region.

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## EVERGLADES LAND MANAGEMENT REGION, MIAMI SERVICE CENTER/WEST PALM BEACH

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### EAST COAST BUFFER

- County: Broward and Miami-Dade
- Project size: 6,375 acres
- District ownership: 6,375 acres
- Acquisition partners: Broward and Miami-Dade counties and the federal government

The East Coast Buffer project provides a buffer between the developed areas and the Everglades. Initially, the Audubon Society proposed the storage of excess waters currently being discharged to tide. Instead, the excess waters would discharge into a series of storage areas that would then be incorporated into a larger system of regional marshes. This concept, known as the East Coast Buffer, was furthered by the SFWMD as a continuous buffer between the Everglades and the urban metropolis in the lower east coast. The primary goal is to raise water levels to prevent seepage from the Water Conservation Areas, reestablish natural hydroperiod patterns and maintain flood protection for urban and agricultural areas. The project integrates the development of deep water reservoirs located along the edge of the east coast urban service area with a series of shallower, connecting wetland marshes. During FY2006, the primary management activity was exotic control with over 4,500 acres treated.

### LOXAHATCHEE MITIGATION BANK (MANAGED BY TETRA TECH EC, INC.)

- County: Palm Beach
- Project size: 1,256 acres
- District ownership: 1,256 acres
- Acquisition partners: Palm Beach County

The Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank site lies adjacent to the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. This site provides habitat connectivity that augments existing Everglades wetland systems. Unfortunately, Brazilian pepper and other exotics have degraded the area, adversely impacting native wildlife habitat, including a number of threatened and endangered species. The goal of the bank is to restore habitat values and provide enhancement of a degraded Everglades ecosystem through hydroperiod restoration, exotic vegetation removal, revegetation with desired species, and prescribed burns. Through an open and competitive solicitation process, Tetra Tech EC, Inc. (Tetra Tech) was selected to establish the Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank. Permitting and construction have been completed; exotic vegetation removal and native community enhancements are ongoing. As of November 2006, the Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank completed its fourth year of monitoring towards attainment of the success criteria. In May 2006, the third revenue disbursement, amounting to \$410,000, was provided by Tetra Tech to the SFWMD. This amount will be utilized to offset previous land acquisition costs and associated project costs.

## MODEL LANDS (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)

- County: Miami-Dade
- Project size: 47,482 acres
- District ownership: 12,182 acres
- Acquisition partners: Miami-Dade County

The Model Lands project will play a vital role in conveying and treating sheet flow from the southern Miami-Dade County area to the downstream estuaries into Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park. The project area is a combination of fresh and saltwater wetlands, with portions heavily infested with exotic vegetation. Although more than 15,500 acres are in public ownership, there is no public use program due to lack of legal access and scattered ownership. The major management activities have been treating exotic vegetation and restricting detrimental activities, such as off-road vehicular use, which can cause long-term ecological impacts, poaching, and dumping. Hydrologic restoration is necessary and is planned under CERP. The primary management focus for the District and Miami-Dade County is the treatment of exotic species including coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), Australian pine (*Casuarina*), and the increasingly observed patches of Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*). In FY2006, over 620 acres of exotics were treated for the first time and follow-up was completed on more than 3,340 acres. With cooperation from Miami-Dade County, the District's land-received ecological benefit with the removal of upland exotic vegetation, hydrologic restoration, and establishment of a freshwater marsh on the 100 acres adjacent to the boundary of Southern Glades Wildlife Environmental Area.

## SOUTHERN GLADES (MANAGED BY THE FWC)

- County: Miami-Dade
- Project size: 36,362 acres
- District ownership: 32,408 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

Southern Glades is cooperatively managed by FWC, under a lease agreement, as the Southern Glades Wildlife and Environmental Area. It is publicly open to hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting, airboating, bicycling, and horseback riding. The District is directing mitigation funds for habitat restoration to include exotic plant removal and re-vegetation with native species. In FY2006, the District, in cooperation with FWC, received \$3,000 worth of nursery stock to enhance both the existing hardwood hammocks and a pine rockland several acres in size. The District performed exotic plant control over 612 acres (134 acres of initial with 478 acres of follow-up treatment) using aerial and ground crews. The primary species targeted include coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), Australian pine (*Casuarina*), and red leucaena (*Leucaena diversifolia*).

**STORMWATER TREATMENT AREAS (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT)**

- County: Palm Beach and Hendry
- Project size: 46,717
- District ownership: 46,717
- Acquisition partners: None

The Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) are large, constructed wetlands designed to remove phosphorus from surrounding agricultural areas before the runoff reaches the Everglades. The treatment areas are divided into several cells, each with varying degrees of water quality treatment to maximize the cleanup. Public access facilities are included in the STA construction plan and are currently in different stages of design and construction. Three sites will be completed by fall 2007. In the meantime, the Land Stewardship Program manages organized bird watching trips with Pine Jog and the Audubon Society in STA-1W and STA-5, respectively; FWC manages waterfowl hunts in STA-1W, STA-3/4, and STA-5. During FY2006, alligator hunts occurred for the first time in STA-5.

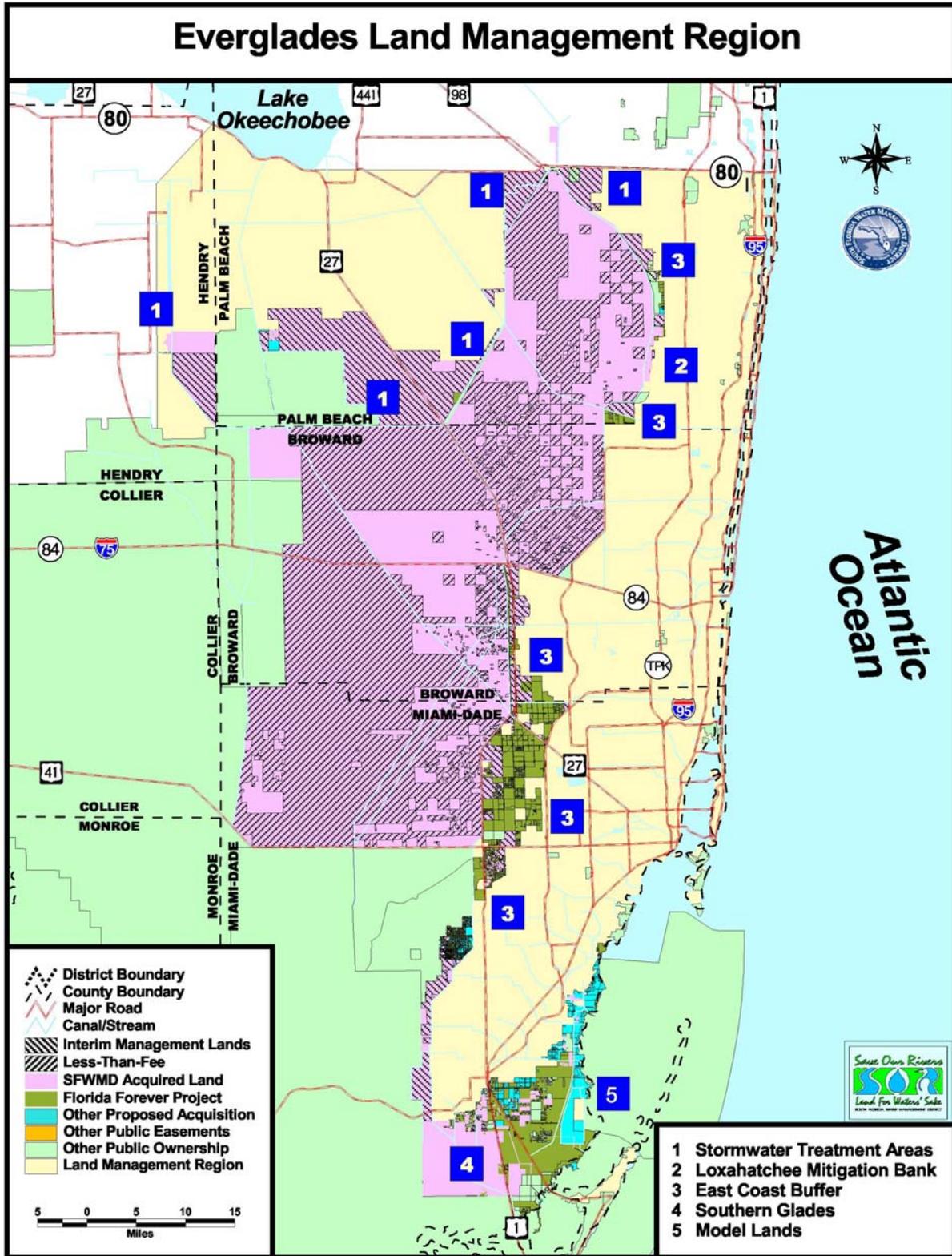


Figure 8-4. Everglades Land Management Region.

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## **WEST COAST LAND MANAGEMENT REGION, CREW MANAGEMENT CENTER**

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### **CORKSCREW REGIONAL MITIGATION BANK (MANAGED BY MARINER PROPERTIES DEVELOPMENT, INC.)**

- County: Lee
- Project size: 633 acres
- District ownership: 633 acres
- Acquisition partners: None

The Corkscrew Regional Mitigation Bank is located in southern Lee County along Corkscrew Road (State Road 850). It is adjacent to the Imperial Marsh/Stairstep mitigation area, established to offset impacts associated with the Southwest Florida Regional Airport. The goal of the bank is to improve habitat values and restore the historic function of the upland/wetland mosaic through hydroperiod restoration, re-vegetation, exotic vegetation removal, and prescribed burns. The bank site contributes to corridor building and the green infrastructure within the regional context. Mariner Properties Development, Inc., selected through an open and competitive solicitation process, is establishing the bank. During FY2006, the bank continued herbicide treatment of pasture grass and other exotic plants. After treatment and soil preparation, pasture areas were planted with mixed native seed collected from natural areas; good germination of these native seeds was achieved. In addition, a prescribed burn on upland areas greatly improved the wildlife habitat value.

### **CORKSCREW REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM WATERSHED (MANAGED BY THE DISTRICT AND FWC)**

- County: Lee, Collier
- Project size: 63,338 acres
- District ownership: 26,025 acres
- Acquisition partners: Lee County and CARL

The SFWMD and FWC jointly manage the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). Property boundaries are posted, and FWC wildlife officers patrol the property. The public use and environmental education program is directed by the CREW Land and Water Trust. The general management plan was updated in FY2006 and adopted at the August 2006 District Governing Board meeting. It describes plans for exotic control, prescribed burns, upland restoration opportunities, and public use. In FY2006, approximately 368 acres were prescribed burned and 3,948 acres of exotics were treated. Restoration work continued on the CREW Management Center (288 acres), East Corkscrew Marsh (80 acres), East Bird Rookery Swamp (70 acres), and Tree Wizard (10 acres) using both mechanical shrub control and exotic plant control techniques. Three miles of earthen berm were graded back into borrow ditches on the 640 acre Gordon Swamp cattle lease area. During FY2006, a 1,400-foot boardwalk into Bird Rookery Swamp was completed, providing future access to 10 miles of old logging tram roads that will be used for hiking and biking trails.

## **OKALOACOOCHEE SLOUGH (MANAGED BY THE DIVISION OF FORESTRY AND FWC)**

- County: Hendry and Collier
- Project size: 37,218 acres
- District ownership: 34,982 acres
- Acquisition partners: CARL, FWC, and DOF

The DOF and FWC purchased additional lands in the project that expand the original purchase by the District and the state. The project is managed as Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest with DOF as the lead manager, and FWC is responsible for wildlife management under a four-party lease agreement with the FDEP Division of State Lands and the District. The FWC also manages the project as a Type 1 wildlife management area and conducts a public hunt program. An approved management plan is in place.

In FY2006, approximately 1,900 acres were prescribed burned, and 5,261 acres of exotic vegetation were surveyed and/or chemically treated. Additionally, 243 acres were drum chopped for planting site preparation and planted with 151,000 South Florida slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) in various areas throughout the forest. Within the area, over 1,000 visitors came to the forest, and a total of 150 people utilized the campgrounds. Ground improvements included 1 mile of trail marked, 3 miles of road upgraded, 77 miles of road maintained, 2 miles of boundary line maintained, 86 acres of maintenance mowing, and 250 acres were mechanically controlled in preparation for inclusion into the native seed collection area. There were also 85 acres of Bahia pasture restored to native ground cover.

## **SIX MILE CYPRESS (MANAGED BY LEE COUNTY)**

- County: Lee
- Project size: 2,193 acres
- District ownership: 842 acres
- Acquisition partners: Lee County

The Six Mile Cypress property is jointly owned by Lee County and the District. Since acquisition, it has been managed by Lee County Parks and Recreation. The management plan was updated in 2002. Six Mile Cypress likely has the highest rate of public visitation of any District project. Each year, approximately 50,000 Lee County students and visitors use the outdoor classroom facility and boardwalk built and maintained by Lee County. In FY2006, permitting was completed for a new Interpretive Building to be built onsite. Construction is anticipated to begin soon.

Management activities conducted during FY2006 included working with consultants on the design and permitting for two mitigation projects involving removing exotic plant, replanting with native vegetation, and filling ditches in the slough. Work on the two larger projects permitted last year is anticipated to begin in early FY2007. Also conducted were monitoring surveys of selected ponds to determine wildlife presence, percent cover by exotic vegetation, and other related parameters. In addition, an extensive study of the slough hydrology was begun by the SFWMD and Florida Gulf Coast University in FY2006.

Other management activities included feral hog removal, as a large number of hogs have been entering the preserve from adjacent lands cleared for development. As of the end of FY2006, over 300 hogs have been removed. Lastly, vandalism within the area has been reduced by a combination of patrols by county rangers and postings of regulatory signage.

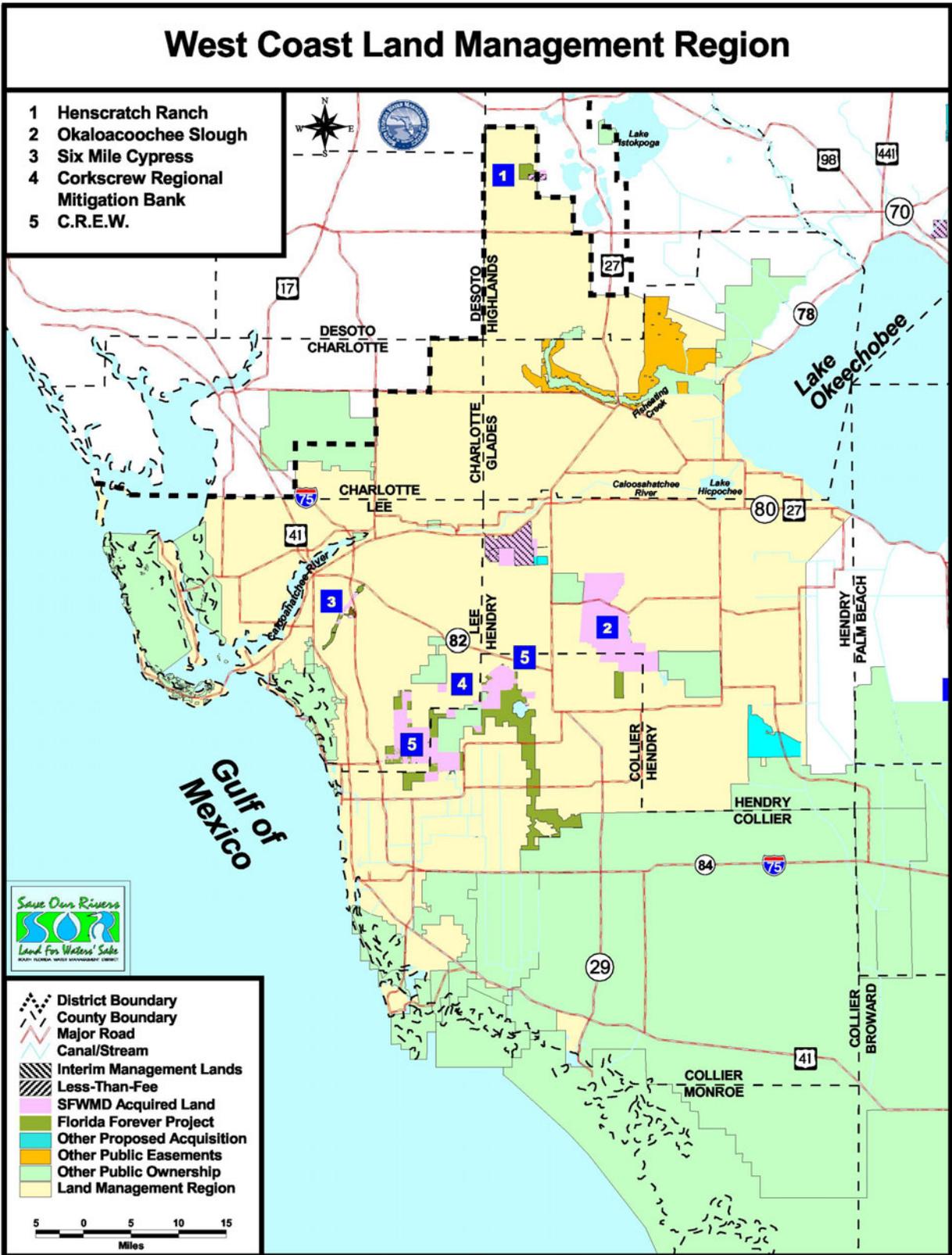


Figure 8-5. West Coast Land Management Region.