

Brief History of Okeeheelee Park South

The site of Okeeheelee Park was used for strip mining in the 1950s and 1960s, with portions of land being used as a dump site for scrap metal as well a camping ground for squatters. In March 1973, 20 organizations led by the Palm Beach County Medical Society proposed using the land now occupied by Okeeheelee South specifically for the preservation of our natural habitat (Link5). The county commission voted in July 1973 to request government funds to cover approximately half of the cost and after some setbacks received approval from the state the following year. The land at the current site of Okeeheelee Park South was described by the state as a “wilderness park” (Link6) At the start of construction only 10% of the area was in its natural state. After a 23 year-long restoration effort, Okeeheelee South was transformed into a Pine flatwood and wet prairie habitat, accessible for public use via a networks of trails. (Sat1).

The total area of Okeeheelee South is 750 acres. The FDOT Palm Beach Operations Center and Palm Beach County Water Utilities Department facility account for 90 acres on the western edge. The Jim Brandon Equestrian Center accounts for another 100 acres. Between the years 1999 and 2002, a large lake was created in the center of the site, removing another 120 acres of reclaimed native habitat. I believe this phase is called “*Okeeheelee South Park Dev Phase II*” in the yearly budgets from that time frame. The manner in which the sand extracted during this project was relocated produced a condition that led to a massive spread of invasive species in the southwest portion of the park. The invaded area has grown to approximately 80 acres. ***Of the original 660 acres of restored native habitat, at present only 360 acres remain (Sat1 through Sat5). The Parks and Recreation Natural Resource Division’s inability to properly maintain the park has resulted in a mostly overgrown Pine flatwood habitat and fragile ecosystem. Since fiscal year 2010, on average of \$2 million is approved on a yearly basis for 2 projects labeled “Okeeheelee South Park Dev Phase II” and “Okeeheelee Park South Expansion”(See FY2025 snapshot in Ref. Section). For FY2025, the sum for the latter project was increased by \$1.7 million for “building construction” and “design/engineering”, making the total allotment \$4.4 million.***

The following is a chronological sequence of events that has transpired with regard to the area of the park under consideration for development.

****This information is based on conversations and email correspondence with Tammy Burton, head of the Natural Resources division of P&R and Bob Hamilton, head of the Planning, Research, and Development Division. Some of the points are derived from analysis of historical satellite imagery and archival newspaper articles. Others are educated guesses.**

1. Approximately 42 acres was entirely cleared in the southwest section of the park for the purpose of dumping the extracted sand during the lake construction process. (Sat2)
2. At no point over the following two decades plus was any action taken to control the invasive trees and shrubs that began growing around the clearing. (Sat3-Sat5)

3. In this same time frame, there were at least one, possibly two construction projects initiated at this location. In both cases, early in the process they were abandoned. According to Tammy Burton and Bob Hamilton the projects were a boy scout outpost and/or a park ranger training station. After the abandonment of these projects, the building materials and numerous construction vehicle were left at the site, including about 50 rotting 30 foot long by 3 foot diameter wide logs and several very large cement structures, since covered in graffiti. The area was closed off to the public, presumably at the start of the lake construction project in early 2000's and designated a construction site. It remains so to this day.

Summary of communications with Parks and Recreation staff

Between May 2024 and April 2025 , I spoke and exchanged emails with Tammy Burton, Bob Hamilton, and Emilie Travis(Manager of the Okeeheelee Nature Center). Their contact information is in the PBC contact information section. All email transcripts are in the Email Records section.

1. In a May phone call, Tammy Burton expressed her desire to have the area returned to its natural state and increase park maintenance activity. She stated that Okeeheelee Park South is in very poor health due to a lack of financial resources for prescribed burns. She claimed she had no knowledge of either the Phase III or Park Expansion projects.

2. In a June phone call Bob Hamilton explained that his Planning, Research, and Development Division was about to create a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a construction project. He also expressed the desire for habitat restoration and explained that although the current plan is for an RV Park complex, he would include a natural restoration project in this proposal if I were to provide “strong public support”. He mentioned there are interested stakeholders with certain expectations, but did not elaborate as to who these persons or entities were. At this point we proceeded with the expectation to have our proposal taken into serious consideration, alongside the RV proposal.

a. Shortly after forming the Okeeheelee Conservation Society in July, I emailed Bob for a status update and was informed the project was sidelined by the Capitol Improvement Division until at least late winter 2025.

3. In June, I reached out via phone and email to the manager of the Okeeheelee Nature Center, Emilie Travis to ask if she could assist in garnering support for our proposal through her network of contacts. I also contacted the Friends of Okeeheelee Nature Center non-profit, as well as the South Florida Herpetological Society, both based at the nature center. She replied over a month later in an email that it was not possible for her to provide support as it was outside her “jurisdiction”. I did not get a replies from the FONC or the SFHC.

3. I attempted to contact Tammy Burton in late July to see if she would be interested in utilizing our organization to raise public interest in the park, with a possibility of receiving donations to be used for park maintenance. She did not respond to emails or voice messages. (ETB 1)

4. After requesting an update from Bob in February, 2025, I was informed his department was moving forward with the RFP process. He explained that a design consultant from Colome and Associates, a commercial/residential developer, will be brought on board late spring or early summer to assess the

property. At this point he asked us for a draft of our proposal to review. He did not reply to my concern that, to my understanding, our proposal could not realistically be evaluated by Colome and Associates. They do not specialize in habitat restoration and their portfolio only includes commercial, governmental, are residential construction (Link 3). *At this point it seemed reasonable that our proposal would not be taken into serious consideration when put to a vote against the RV project. After some recent research, I noticed an approval of an additional \$1.7 million in funding for “design and construction” in the FY2025 budget. This is in addition to the existing \$2.4 million for the expansion project. I also came across a detailed rendering of an RV complex at Okeeheelee South on page 231 of the Parks and Recreation 2035 Master Plan document that Bob and his team finalized last November. Putting these facts together, I can only conclude our collaboration effort was never meant to succeed and that the Planning, Research, and Development Division was singularly focussed and determined to approve the RV Park proposal. After 10 months of trying to work collaboratively with the administration, I think the only path to success is to allow the general public to voice their opinions against the RV Park in a way that will compel the board to either drop that proposal entirely or vote against it. In conjunction with that milestone,, Parks and Recreation must be directed to assess and then implement our natural restoration proposal. This is effectively the mission statement of Okeeheelee Conservation Society.*

Symptoms of Ineffectiveness and Neglect at Okeeheelee South

1.

In May, 2024, I notified Tammy Burton of extensive poaching of the adult eastern diamondback population. This was based on my conversation with an amateur herpetologist who was an eye witness during the poaching that winter, as well my personal observations of the disappearance of adult specimens. She agreed to my suggestion of placing warning signs throughout the park in order to deter future poachers. At present, no anti-poaching measures have taken place. I also contacted the head of the Park Rangers with a similar suggestion regarding poaching, but was told that there was nothing they could do and it was for Park Operations(Tammy) to decide on appropriate action. The only new signs that appeared in the subsequent months were more “No Trespassing” signs around the construction zone. Tammy declined to even respond when asked if she would consider collaborating with our non-profit to set up a donation program in order to help with her resource issues. She did not respond to emails or calls. Her only input after our initial conversation was last month, basically stating that she will not provide any guidance regarding our conservation efforts.

2.

In early summer of 2023, a telecom antenna and its truss assembly were trucked in right in the middle of the cleared area. I came across the information related to this antenna by reading the documentation that came with it. The documents were apparently not secured and I came across them on an adjacent trail after they were apparently blown from the site after a major storm. It identified the antenna as a wifi hotspot, part of a Palm Beach County School District program to provide free internet access to public schools. Okeeheelee Elementary School is situated just east of the park.

Presumably this was designed for the school's use. The parts lay dormant on the same truck palettes they arrived in for exactly one year, after which the truss assembly was erected and antenna mounted. However, the truss was never elevated beyond its lowest height and the wifi hotspot never activated. A year has now passed since the antenna erected. I asked Bob whether he knew about this structure, considering it is in the middle of the proposed RV park site. He replied that he had no knowledge of it and suggested it might be part of a camera system the park set up to prevent dumping. There is to my knowledge no dumping in the construction zone or any other part of the park. It was clear that there is a major communication issue within Park Operations after this exchange.

Palm Beach County Contact Information

Commissioner – District 3 (Okeethee South is in this district)



Joel G. Flores:

301 North Olive Ave. Suite 1201
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

[561-355-2203](tel:561-355-2203)

[877-930-2203](tel:877-930-2203)

Fax: [561-355-6344](tel:561-355-6344)

JGFlores@pbc.gov

<https://discover.pbc.gov/countycommissioners/district3/Pages/default.aspx>

County Commissioners

<https://discover.pbc.gov/countycommissioners/Pages/default.aspx>

PBC Parks and Recreation Administration

Jennifer Cirillo, Director 561-966-6133 jcirrilo@pbc.gov

Paul Connell, Deputy Director 561-963-6732 pconnell@pbc.gov

PBC Parks and Recreation Planning, Research & Development Division

Bob Hamilton, Director 561-966-6651 rhamilton@pbc.gov

PBC Parks and Recreation Park Operations Division

Tammy Burton, Environmental Manager 561-963-6737 tburton@pbc.gov

Park Ranger Section 561-963-6787

ONLINE RESOURCES

The Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department 2035 Master (Link1)

https://discover.pbc.gov/parks/PDF/General/PBC_2035MasterPlanUpdate.pdf

Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (Link2)

https://discover.pbc.gov/parks/PDF/General/PBC_CommNeedsAssmnt.pdf

Colomé & Associates, Inc. (Link3)

<https://colome-architect.com/cover/our-work-2/>

Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okeeheelee_Park (Link4)

Historical Newspaper Articles

Palm Beach Post Article 4/11/1973 (Link5)

https://www.newspapers.com/image/132506535/?clipping_id=40458154&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVILXZpZXctaWQiOiEzMjUwNjUzNSwiaWF0IjoxNzQ1NjI4NjMxLCJleHAiOiE3NDU3MTUwMzF9.hgWuUUtu3Mz1eUIsh9MQ9gWQgP5jhqrO8PV5qMf4fsU

Palm Beach Post Article 3/20/1974 (Link6)

https://www.newspapers.com/image/133890546/?clipping_id=40744267&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVILXZpZXctaWQiOiEzMzg5MDU0NiwiaWF0IjoxNzQ1NjI4NjEwLCJleHAiOiE3NDU3MTUwMTB9.F0IGgSOmKkRNsVMnRdO_iJ2wZ1eOK2-UrRhBq53f_o

Personal Okeeheelee South Multimedia

Okeeheelee Park South Walkthrough Google Earth Project

https://earth.google.com/earth/d/17VYidGS6DGPgpnUvlpzARma8eFo_EFAh?usp=sharing

Youtube Links to my channel "WildPalmBeach"

Melaleuca Stand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsXrZ4Qy2Rk>

Walk through the southwest area of the park during the wet season

<https://youtu.be/LjbXkNyF6pc>

Black Racer

<https://youtu.be/EvFa-NTBM90>

Southern Watersnake

<https://youtu.be/n9tp8AMP5FQ>

Eastern Kingsnake

<https://youtu.be/bEfxWj5rau0>

9-banded armadillo

<https://youtu.be/bX8Zq4-aBA>

Pileated Woodpecker

<https://youtu.be/WnZAbd6IdYo>

Sandhill Cranes

<https://youtu.be/Z-n6-rldivo>

<https://youtu.be/Vu71a0Xr3hg>

Eastern Glass Lizard

https://youtu.be/DCPVZ-mnX_Q

Gopher Tortoise

<https://youtu.be/spfTrNdVXYc>

<https://youtu.be/BcbYJdrxN44>

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake Playlist(Not for public viewing as it would provide location for poachers)

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkeZ7FE_aP98UTAKJHw8x-DJtThbz7PtR

Palm Beach County Yearly Budget Line Item Appropriations

****2010 is the first year “Okeethee South Park Dev Phase III” is included in the yearly budget and rolls over each year until present day****

FY2010

https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/PDF/Annual/2010/10-13-09_adopted_expenses_dept_sorted.pdf

FY2011

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/PDF/Annual/2011/2011deptapp.pdf>

FY2012

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/PDF/Annual/2012/esum070312.pdf>

FY2013

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/PDF/Annual/2012/esum070312.pdf>

FY2014

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY2014%20Adopted%20Expense.pdf>

FY2015

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY2015%20Tentative%20Expense%202nd%20Public%20Hearing.pdf>

FY2016

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY2016%20Tentative%20Expense%202nd%20Public%20Hearing.pdf>

FY2017

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY%202017%20Adopted%20Expense.pdf>

FY2018

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/Adopted%202018%20Line%20Item%20Expenditures.pdf>

FY2019

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY%202019%20Adopted%20%20Line%20Item%20Appropriations%20by%20Fund%20Name.pdf>

FY2020

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/Line%20Item%20Appropriation.pdf>

*****2021 is the first year "Okeetee Park South Expansion" is included in the budget allocation*****

FY2021

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/Adopted%20Line%20Item%20Appropriations.pdf>

FY2022

<https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY%2022%20Adopted%20Line%20Item%20Appropriations.pdf>

FY2023

https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/LineItem/FY_23_Adopted_Line_Item_Appropriation.pdf

FY2024

https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/PDF/FY_2024_Adopted_Line_Item_Appropriation.pdf

FY2025

https://discover.pbc.gov/ofmb/budget/PDF/Adopted%20Tentative%20Line%20Item/2025/FY_2025_Adopted_Line_Item_Appropriation.pdf

Email Records

Bob Hamilton February 2025 – April 2025 (rhamilton@pbc.gov)

1.

From: Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 27, 2025 1:52 PM
To: Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov>
Subject: RE: Okeeheelee South RFP Update

Hello Bob,

Just checking in for an update on the Okeeheelee situation when you get a chance.

Thank you,

Leo Goldfine

2.

On Feb 28, 2025, at 13:15, Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov> wrote:

Leo – Thank you for your email. A design consultant (Colome and Associates) has been selected to develop a master plan for Okeeheelee South Park. They are currently in contract negotiations with the County's Capital Improvements Division. Design could start later this spring or summer assuming the contract is approved by the County's Board of County Commissioners.

Regards,

Bob

3.

From: Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 2, 2025 10:54 PM
To: Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov>
Subject: Re: Okeeheelee South RFP Update

Thank you for the update. At what point in the process would you be present proposals, or has this already taken place. Just trying to get a better understanding when our window of opportunity will be to provide you with the outcome of the public outreach effort supporting a natural resource option.

Thank you,

Leo

4.

On Mar 3, 2025, at 13:41, Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov> wrote:

Leo – Once design commences with the consultant we will reach out and seek your input. In the interim you might want to develop a written proposal that we can review.

Best,

Bob

5.

On **Mar 19, 2025, at 23:49**, **Leo Goldfine** <goldfinl@gmail.com> wrote:

Bob,

I've attached a draft of our proposal. In it I made mention of the monetary allotment from this year's budget. We would benefit from a clarification on whether this is the full amount available for any approved proposal or if it only applies specifically to the RV park project. As well, I'm curious how the feasibility for a restoration option would be evaluated. My understanding is the design firm only specializes in commercial and residential development. I look forward to hearing your input. We have a web developer onboard ready to set up a site for public engagement.

Thanks,

Leo

6.

From: Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com>
Sent: **Tuesday, April 22, 2025 5:10 PM**
To: **Bob Hamilton A.** <RHamilton@pbc.gov>
Subject: Re: Okeeheelee South RFP Update

Good Afternoon Bob,

I was wondering if you had a chance to review the draft of our proposal. We're awaiting your feedback before we can put up a website and start getting the word out. The folks I connected with to help are experienced conservationists and they would like to better understand the RFP process in order to best tailor their efforts. I mentioned we've created a non-profit for the purposes of reaching the public and we're coming up on a May 1st fee deadline. I would appreciate if you could get back to me prior to this date.

Thank you,

Leo Goldfine

7.

On **Apr 23, 2025, at 10:44**, **Bob Hamilton A.** <RHamilton@pbc.gov> wrote:

Hi Leo – Thank you for your email. I reviewed your proposal but have placed further discussion of the idea on hold until the County's Capital Improvements Division moves forward with procuring a design consultant to develop a formal master plan. My Department is still waiting for the design contract to be reviewed and approved before we can move forward with the project. Once this occurs we'll review various design options (including yours) with the consultant for the park. I will be sure to reach out to you when we begin meeting with the consultant.

Best,

Bob

1.

From: Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, July 19, 2024 3:24 PM
To: Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov>
Subject: Okeeheelee South RFP Update

Good Afternoon, My name is Leo Goldfine, we spoke in early June regarding public support for habitat restoration in lieu of development at Okeeheelee Park South. You had mentioned work on RFD proposals was forthcoming so I wanted to touch base

Good Afternoon,

My name is Leo Goldfine, we spoke in early June regarding public support for habitat restoration in lieu of development at Okeeheelee Park South. You had mentioned work on RFD proposals was forthcoming so I wanted to touch base with you on my progress. I've partnered with an experienced conservationist to start a non-profit that we plan on using as a platform for a public outreach effort. We recently acquired IRS approval and are ready to take next steps. Prior to doing so, I would like to hear your opinion on what would be the best way to focus our efforts in order to help you present a strong case. I would also like to learn a little more about the RFD process to get an idea of what a best-case scenario would look like regarding funding allocation and timelines. If you could give me a call I would appreciate it.

239-404-8581

Thank you

2.

On Mon, Jul 22, 2024 at 9:18 AM Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov> wrote:

Good morning Leo. Unfortunately no progress on the RFP, the County's Capital Improvements Division is backlogged with projects. My guess is that we're looking at early-2025 before the Master Plan RFP hits the streets and late-spring/summer before we have a consultant on board. As per our prior conversation I'd like to wait until we have a design consultant in place before commencing outreach efforts to you and others on the park. Feel free to reach out to me again near the end of the year and I should have a better idea on the project's timeline.

Regards,

Bob

3.

From: Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, July 22, 2024 10:31 AM
To: Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov>
Subject: Re: Okeeheelee South RFP Update

Good Morning Bob,

Thank you for the update. I will definitely check in with you later this year. By that time we will have the non-profit fully functional with a website and staff organized. In the meantime, would it be conceivable to use potential donations to fund

activities such as prescribed burns or invasives removal? I would of course contact Tammy for the particulars, but just wanted to check the legality of how donations could be passed on to Natural Resources for specific purposes. I think the Friends of Okeeheelee Nature Center non-profit may operate similar to this alongside the Nature Center. If this is out of your scope, would you know a person I could reach out to for clarification?

I was wondering if you were aware of the wifi hotspot antenna that was recently installed in the middle of the construction area. The materials were brought in over a year ago and remained dormant until a few weeks ago when the structure was raised. Just curious if this is a permanent installation as its footprint will have an impact on future development or restoration efforts.

Thanks,

Leo Goldfine

4.

On July 25, 2024, at 10:18 AM, Bob Hamilton A. <RHamilton@pbc.gov> wrote

Leo – We have a Gifts to Parks program that can facilitate donations for specific projects within the park system, you do not necessarily need to be a non-profit or associated with the Department to make those donations.

In regards to the Wi-Fi antenna I am unaware of the installation but it was likely placed at that location to help with the placement of security cameras within that portion of the park. We're experiencing an increase in trespassing and illegal dumping in that area according to our Park Operations team. We'll likely relocate the pole if and when that area is developed.

Regards,

Bob

1.

Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com> Tue, Jul 23, 2024, 10:48 PM

to tburton

Good Morning,

My name is Leo Goldfine, we spoke in May about various issues at Okeeheelee Park South and I wanted to check in with some news. One of the items we discussed was possible development projects related to two programs listed in the county budget. I spoke with Bob Hamilton regarding this in late May and he informed me that he was about to start work on a Request For Proposal which would include the construction of an RV park as the primary option and an alternate proposal for building a site for the Waste Management Authority. I proposed the idea of using the roughly \$2.2 million in allocated funds for habitat reclamation/restoration in the construction area and an intensive prescribed burn plan for the entire park. He was open to the idea of including such an option in the RFP if there was strong public support.

Over the last couple of months I've made progress in preparing for a public outreach effort. After reaching out to the Pine flatwood management experts at the Orianne Society, I was connected with Tasman Rosenfeld. He is an experienced, highly motivated conservationist who is well-connected both locally and at the state level. We decided the ideal platform for reaching the public and helping the park was by starting a 501c(3) non-profit. Several weeks ago we got our IRS approval for the Okeeheelee Conservation Society.

Sadly, earlier this week I received news from Bob that the proposal has been delayed due to a backlogged Capital Improvements Division. His best guess is late winter for the resumption of work on the RFP after a design contractor is brought onboard. He will let us know when things are back on track. Considering the breadth of our proposal, it would be beneficial to get some input from you on the feasibility of a reclamation project to help me better inform the team we will be putting together moving forward. I think we would benefit from having as much detail about what is realistic within the scope of your department in a best case scenario.

I am also interested in hearing your thoughts on how we may best utilize the non-profit to assist your department in managing the park. In order to move forward, we need to know whether a collaboration is possible at this time and an idea of how it would function. One possibility is to run the organization in a fashion similar to that of the Friends of Okeeheelee Nature Center. My understanding is that they work directly with the nature center by providing funding and volunteer work. We can use our platform to push support for park management funding and seek donations to supplement funding for your department.

In the near-term we can begin work on building a website and utilizing Tasman's local contacts to get exposure. Aside from public engagement and feedback, there are many experts in the field that will likely offer statements of support. Having these pieces in place, we would be well-prepared to address the development issue when the time comes.

Tasman and I are both concerned about the recently depleted Diamondback population and getting approval for a study from local and state governments as well as attracting researchers could be another aim. I would also like to touch base on the anti-poaching signage we discussed and park ranger awareness. If you would like to connect over the phone or in person please let me know.

Thank you,
Leo Goldfine
239-404-8581

2.

On Mar 10, 2025, at 6:41 PM, Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com> wrote:

Tammy,

I'm writing to follow up on an email I sent you last July regarding development at Okeeheelee South. I'm not sure if you got around to reading it so I have it copied below. Last week Bob Hamilton let me know the Master Plan is finally in the works and a contract could be finalized for commercial development as early as late spring. There is an opportunity right now to add an alternate option to the county officials taking part in voting on how the \$2+ mil of potential funding will be used at the park. I'm not sure if you're in the loop on these proceedings. As Bob and I discussed, he will add to the RFP the option to use the funds

solely for the purpose of natural resource restoration if there is sufficient public support. At this time he is asking for a preliminary statement to get an idea of what we are requesting. As I mentioned in the last email, with guidance from a well connected conservationist we have created a non-profit to function as a public outreach platform. At this point we really need to get your perspective on the matter in order to understand what is actually feasible within the budgetary allotment. I would appreciate if you reach out or give me a time that's convenient to you to discuss the details.

Thank you,

Leo Goldfine

239-404-8581

3.

On Fri, Mar 14, 2025, at 5:07 PM, Tammy Burton <TBurton@pbc.gov> wrote:

Good afternoon,

Thank you for reaching out. As you are aware Bob's team is responsible for the planning, design and development. His team would determine what is appropriate given the allotted budget. My team would be responsible for maintenance once the project has been completed.

Thank you,

Emilie Travis and Friends of Okeehetee Nature Center (etravis@pbc.gov)

1.

From: Leo Goldfine <goldfinl@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, June 6, 2024 9:45 PM

To: okeeheteeleefriends@gmail.com; ONC <ONC@pbc.gov>

Subject: Okeehetee South Conservation

My name is Leo Goldfine, I'm a frequent visitor of Okeehetee Park South and have some concerns about its future I would like to share with you. There is a forthcoming development proposal to build an RV park in the southwest construction

My name is Leo Goldfine, I'm a frequent visitor of Okeehetee Park South and have some concerns about its future I would like to share with you. There is a forthcoming development proposal to build an RV park in the southwest construction zone. As I'm sure you're aware, that area has been the site of several abandoned construction projects and off-limits for over 20 years. Due to a lack of oversight, Australian pine and Melaleuca have taken over the area, encroaching into the Pine flatwood and wet prairie habitats in its proximity.

I've spoken with Tammy Burton in Natural Resources and she expressed a desire to reclaim and revegetate the area, as well as perform more frequent prescribed burns throughout the park. However, she's unable to do either due to her department's lack of resources.

I've also had a conversation with Director of Development Bob Hamilton about the park's future and he is open to the idea of including a park restoration project as an alternative option in the proposal. The financial resources for a major project have been available in the county budget for some time and I think the department needs to hear where the public would prefer it be allocated.

I've consulted with the Orianne Society, a conservation group specializing in pine flatwood restoration, as well as a field researcher familiar with the park. Their opinion is that the park needs an intensive prescribed burn program to restore the flatwood habitat as well as taking control of the invasive species outbreak. They both suggested the best way to approach the issue with park officials is through a non-profit organization such as yours.

I think a concerted effort to petition the administrators for restoration in lieu of recreational development might make a difference. Preserving the vulnerable Pine flatwood habitat seems like a much better option for the unique wildlife at Okeehetee South, as well as its visitors. Bob is due to begin work on the development proposal very soon, so now would be an opportune moment to take action. I would appreciate hearing your opinion.

Thank you,

Leo Goldfine

239-404-8581

2.

On Jul 15, 2024, at 9:51 AM, Emilie Travis R. ETravis@pbc.gov wrote

Dear Mr. Goldfine,

Thank you for expressing your concerns with future development on the Okeehetee Park South property.

I am the manager of the Okeehetee Nature Center, which is owned and operated by the County and the Department of Parks and Recreation, so like Bob Hamilton and Tammy Burton, I am employed by the County and am not a non-profit organization, so cannot assist your request. We are currently preserving the Pine Flatwood habitat we have on our 90 acres of the nature center's property on the north end of the Park, as we have a large population of Gopher tortoises which was established in 1985-86 that we are trying to improve for their sustainability. Along with Parks crew, we are planning some invasive removals to attempt to control what we can along with future prescribed burns and has been part of the county's environmental plans for Okeehetee.

We do work with several non-profit partners, including the [Florida Trail Association – Loxahatchee Chapter](#), [Palm Beach Pack and Paddle Club](#), [Friends of Okeehetee Nature Center](#), [Palm Beach County Woodturners](#) and the [South Florida Herpetological Society](#). You can reach out to them to see how they might be able to assist as they wish or are able within their scopes and missions. Hope this helps, since I cannot directly assist you.

Emilie Travis | Nature Center Manager II

Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department

We create opportunities for healthy, happy living!

Okeehetee Nature Center

7715 Forest Hill Boulevard | West Palm Beach | Florida 33413

T: 561.233.1407 | F: 561.242.7240 | etravis@pbc.gov

Connect with us: www.pbcparcs.com

Fiscal Year 2025 Approved Budget for Okeeheelee South Projects

Unit	P527	Okeeheelee	South Park Dev Phase III											
3602	581	P527	581P527CA	6504	lotb Non Infrastructure	0	300,000	300,000	0	0	300,000	0	0	300,000
3602	581	P527	581P527CA	6505	Design/Eng/Mgmt- Cip Admin	0	5,627	5,627	0	0	5,627	0	0	5,627
			581P527CA			0	305,627	305,627	0	0	305,627	0	0	305,627
Total	P527	Okeeheelee	South Park Dev Phase III			0	305,627	305,627	0	0	305,627	0	0	305,627

Unit T125 Okeeheelee Park South Expansion														
3950	581	T125	581T125CA	6502	Building Construction - Cip	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,534,500	1,534,500
3950	581	T125	581T125CA	6504	lotb Non Infrastructure	0	1,942,781	2,394,791	0	0	2,394,791	0	0	2,394,791
3950	581	T125	581T125CA	6505	Design/Eng/Mgmt- Cip Admin	0	402	402	0	0	402	0	170,500	170,902
581T125CA						0	1,943,183	2,395,193	0	0	2,395,193	0	1,705,000	4,100,193
Total T125 Okeeheelee Park South Expansion						0	1,943,183	2,395,193	0	0	2,395,193	0	1,705,000	4,100,193

2035 PALM BEACH COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT MASTER PLAN FOR OKEEHHEELER PARK SOUTH





Staff Photo By Nick Arroyo

Karen Fessenden Relaxes in the Area West of Forest Hill Village Designated for a Nature Park

Nature Park Plans Underway

By GAYLE PALLESEN

Post Staff Writer

Palm Beach County commissioners yesterday voted to turn 900 acres of wooded, undeveloped land west of Forest Hill Village into a nature park.

They also voted to seek appraisals on 700 acres of private land immediately north of the county site as a possible expansion of the proposed park.

The county land is between the Florida Turnpike and Jog Road, south of Forest Hill Boulevard.

"I totally support the concept," said Commissioner E. W. Weaver. "But I want the people to be prepared for a substantial acquisition price. If this is the desire of the public, it better be prepared to spend a substantial amount of tax money."

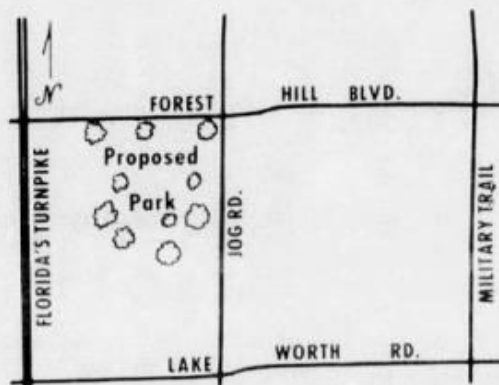
The commission was urged a month ago to turn the 1,500 acres into a nature park by 20 organizations spearheaded by the Palm Beach County Medical Society.

"Every county should have one or more regional parks kept in natural state for passive recreation, day studies and the use of more than one municipality," said architect Richard Cutting.

"This would be the first natural recreation area the county would own," Cutting said. "It is deeply needed by Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and schools for the study of nature."

He described the proposed park as a place where people can go and see the natural trees we have growing here.

The county already had plans to use part of the county land for an engineering complex, a sewage treatment plant and a water plant.



However, Commissioner Robert Johnson, who moved for approval of the park, said the county has plenty of other land it can use for the facilities.

Dr. James Brandon of the Palm Beach County Medical Society said that while the county property should be preserved in its natural state, the property to the north could be used for picnicking, skeet shooting, camping, fishing and horseback riding.

"If you can get it now (the private property) at the prices available, it's the cheapest you'll ever get it," Cutting said.

Commission Chairman Lake Lytal said the value of the land is "well over" \$1.5 million. County planner Clint Effinger said last week the sale value of the property is \$5.6 million.

Effinger has suggested the county acquire the land, use it for sanitary land-fill and in 20 years make it part of the park.

"Ask the people if they are willing to pay for it," urged Bruce Robinson of Zero Population. "You'll be surprised — they can see the asphalt creeping up."

Wesley Wilken of the Royal Palm Audubon Society said his group is willing to spearhead a drive to collect money for the acquisition.

State Okays Share in County Park Bonanza

By DAVID SCHULTZ
and
SALLY SWARTZ

Palm Beach Post Staff Writers

TALLAHASSEE — The Florida Cabinet yesterday agreed to spend \$7.1 million for its share of a 1,500-acre wilderness park and recreation complex in the center of Palm

Beach County's heavily populated coastal area.

The state will buy a 900-acre county-owned tract south of Forest Hill Boulevard to preserve as a wilderness park, and the county will then use the money to buy a 754-acre tract north of Forest Hill to develop for recreational use. The area is adjacent to Florida's Turnpike.

"It's a wonderful example of intergovernmental cooperation," said County Commissioner Robert Johnson. He said the action was the result of "a grass roots movement to save this land for the people."

Dr. James Brandon, one of "hundreds of people who have been working for this," said state Comptroller Fred Dickinson "gave an excellent sales pitch to the Cabinet after our delegation went to Tallahassee."

"Now it's time to get started on development," Brandon said.

The recreation complex the county plans for the northern tract includes lakes, ponds and canals for fishing and boating. Thirty tennis courts, 40 handball courts, soccer, football and baseball fields will be built.

A course for motorcyclists will be shielded from the rest of the park, which

will include a proposed swimming pool, roller skating and ice skating rinks, camping areas and bike trails.

The state land will be preserved in wilderness state for passive recreation.

The County Commission had at one time considered using the land for a county public works site.

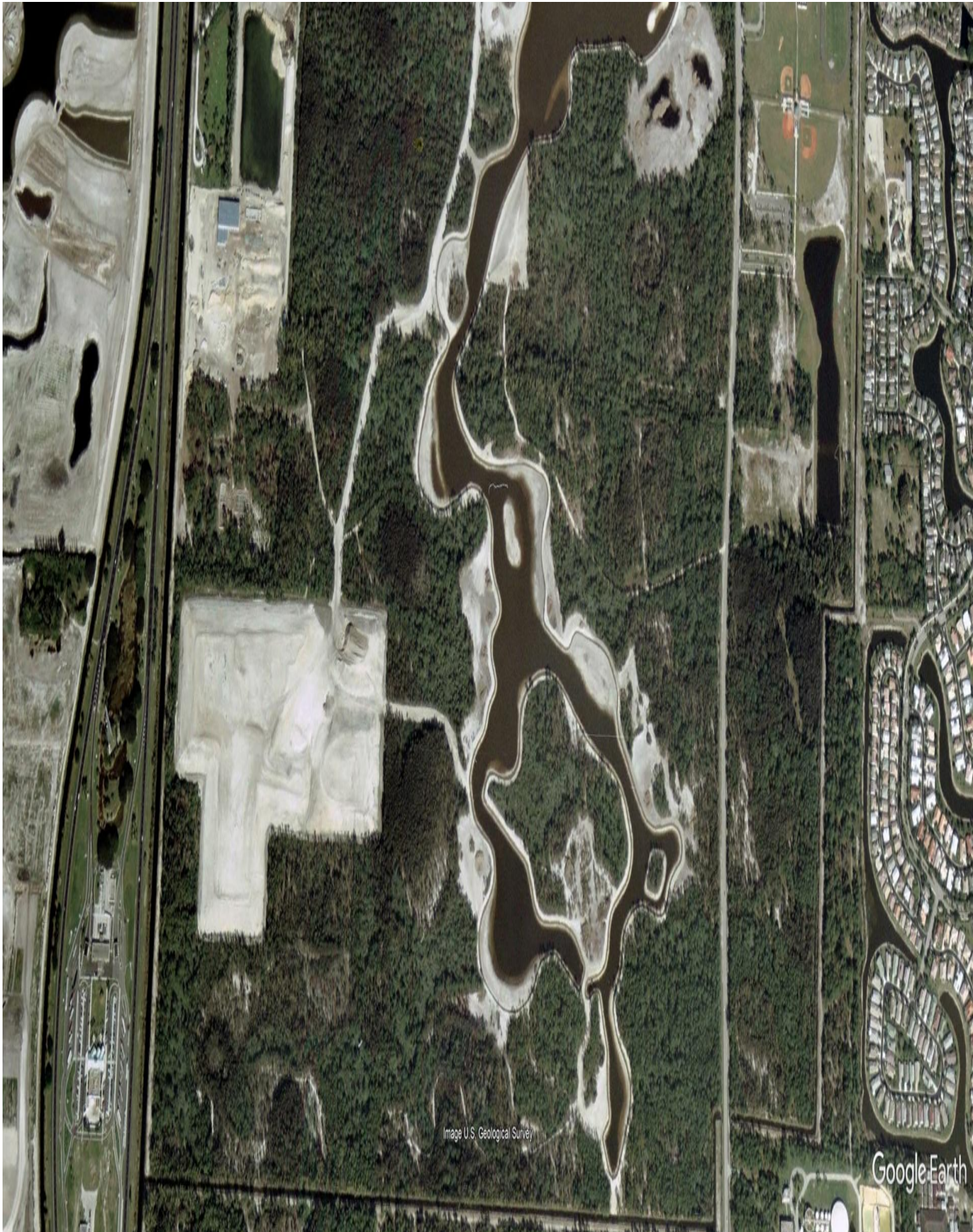
Turn to PARK, A9

Historical Satellite Imagery

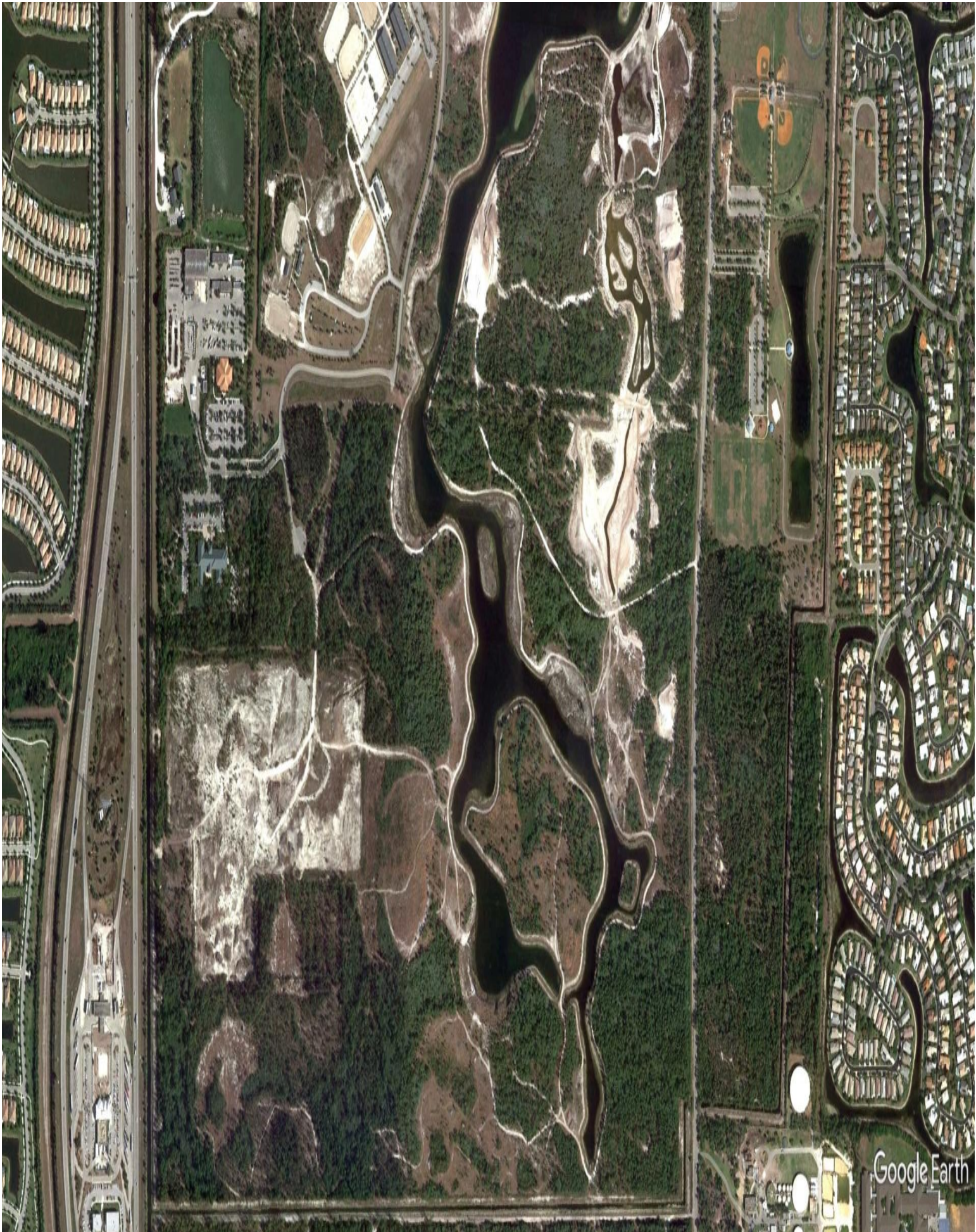
January, 1995 (Sat1)



December, 2002 (Sat2)



March, 2011 (Sat3)



March, 2017 (Sat4)

Untitled Map

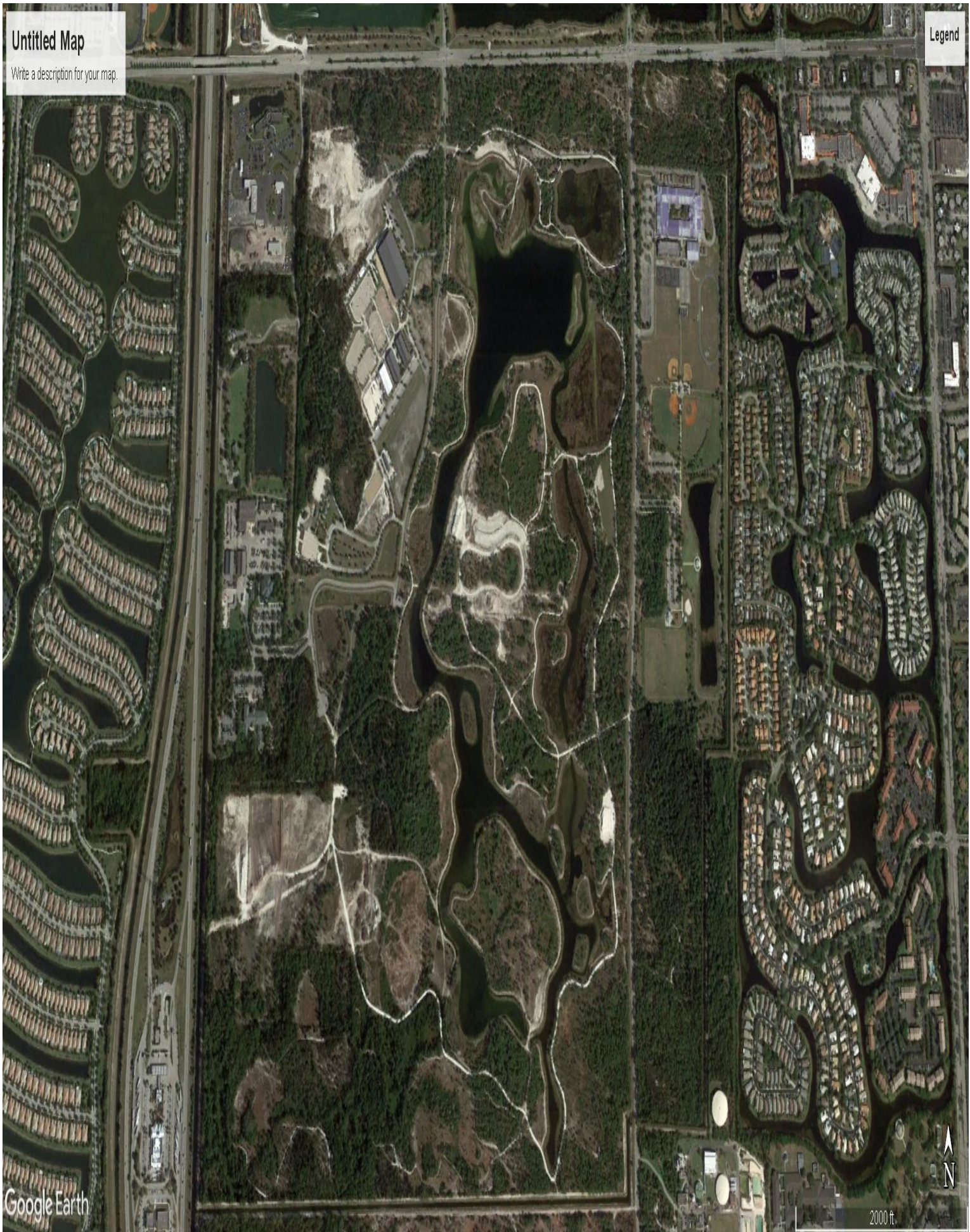
Write a description for your map.

Legend

Google Earth

2000 ft

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March, 2025 (Sat5)

