

Florida National Scenic Trail – Ocala National Forest

Trail Location and Opportunities Assessment



Summer, 2011

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Introduction

There are 11 National Scenic Trails in the United States, and the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) is one of them. Since the FNST is part of a national scenic trail system, it must be on the level of the other scenic trails in the nation. The Ocala National Forest (ONF) section of the FNST was the first section of the FNST to come to fruition. With this in mind, the ONF section of the FNST should be the premier section in the state.

The purpose of this assessment is to: accurately identify the location of all the FNST on the ONF problem and opportunity areas, and explore the alternatives or solutions. Some examples of problems areas are: road walking, particularly if extensive in length; existing or potential residential or commercial development near the trail, or other impact; chronic, recurring maintenance demands or problems; arbitrary or circuitous routing; etc (The Optimal 2, 5).

Most of the explored alternatives or solutions are proposed trail reroutes. They will possibly solve some of the problems of the trail. These proposals can be taken into consideration and enacted, used to inspire spin-off/ better solutions to the problems, or disregarded and the trail can be kept as is. The assessment starts from the southern entrance of the FNST into the forest and will work its way north. Proposed trail additions are denoted in purple. Proposed trail obliterations are denoted in black. Other symbols can be deciphered through the legends included in the GIS maps provided with each proposal. Refer to Appendix A for detailed data on trail additions and obliterations.

Proposal #1.1: ONF southern entrance of FNST

Current state of this section: Trail crosses SR 42 into the forest and continues north for 0.3 miles, then turns to the northwest.

Proposed change of this section: Turn trail to the west northwest from the entrance of the forest towards the Clearwater Lake Trailhead. Then, instead of taking the old side/spur/blue-blazed trail to the FNST, route the trail directly north from the trailhead and tie into the FNST near the corner of the private property boundary. The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 0.67 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 0.95 miles. Refer to Figure 1.

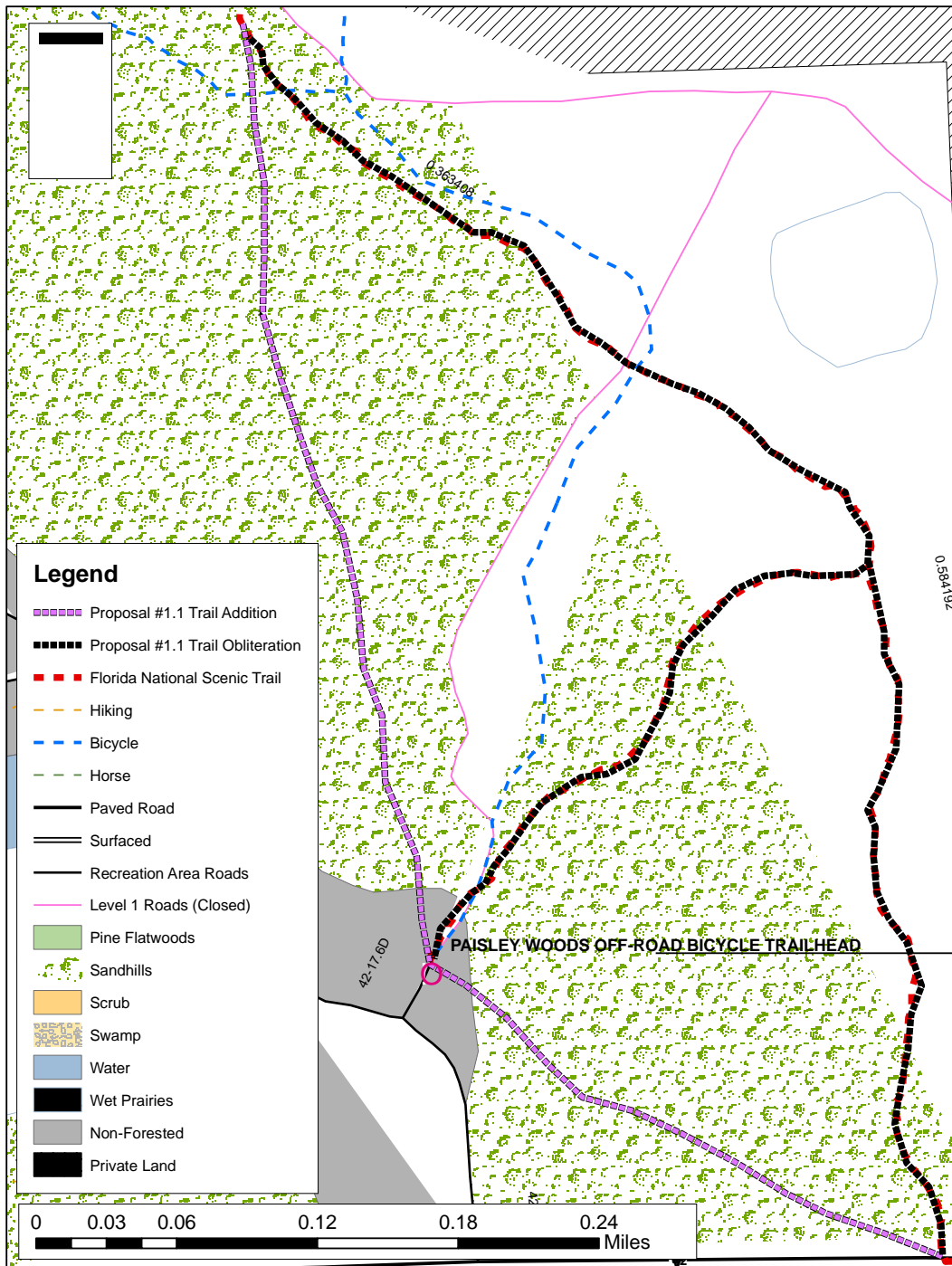


Figure 1

Reasons for proposed change:

-We are trying to eliminate unnecessary side/spur trails to give the FNST a better flow and more defined route.

-The trail parallels private property on the east side which is unsightly and should not be as visible since it's first thing people see upon entering the Ocala National Forest.

Proposal #2.1: Section approximately 1 mile north of southern entrance

Current state of this section: Trail approaches private property that is east of the forest. It comes within 20-30 yards of the FNST.

Proposed change of this section: Where the trail intersects FR 63-3.4, route the trail directly north and meander slightly to the north northwest, then tie back into the FNST where the trail turns north just north of the intersection of FR 69 and FR 69-1.4. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 1.55 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 1.64 miles.* Refer to Figure 2.

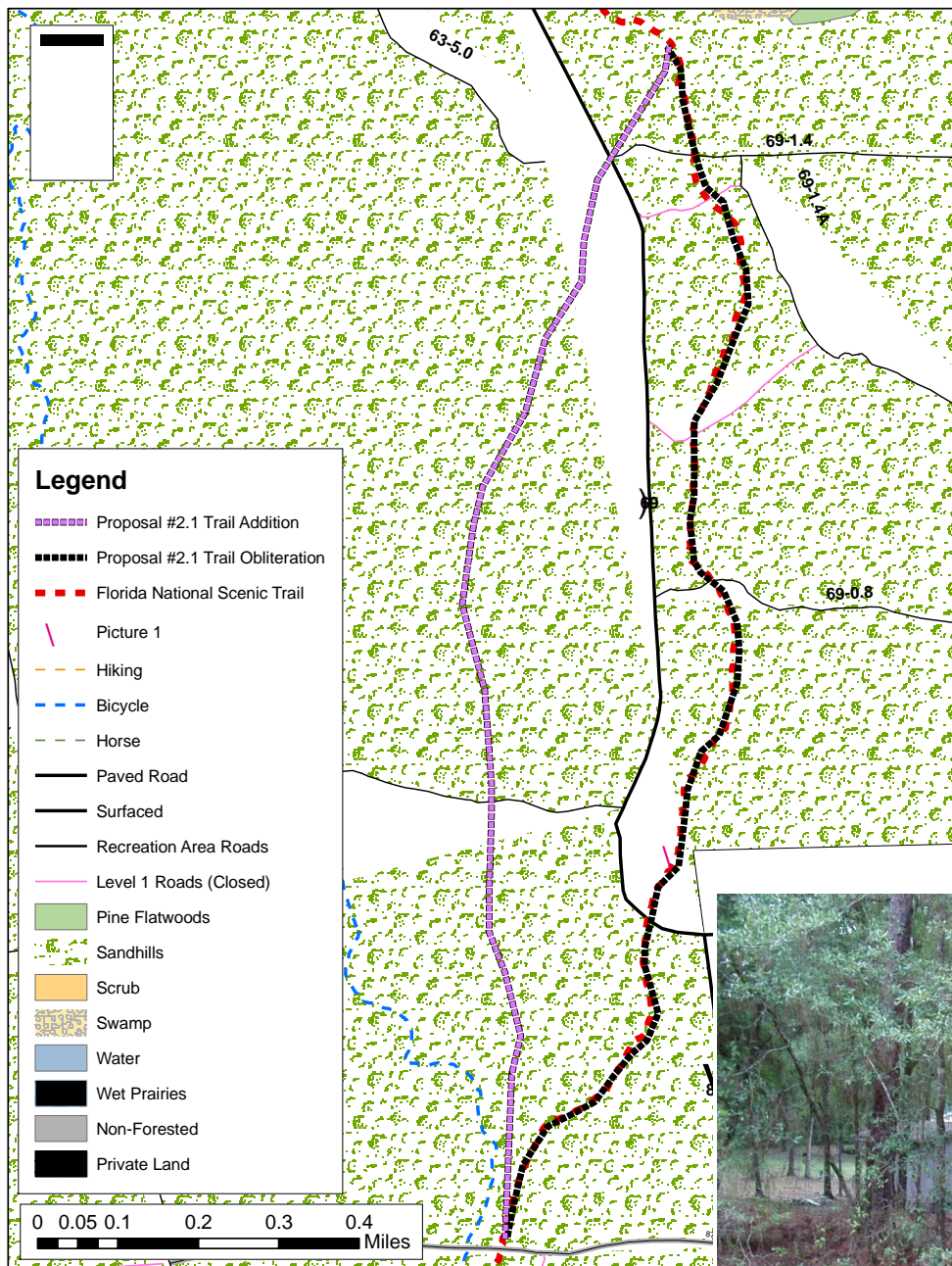


Figure 2

Reasons for proposed change:

-It is very unsightly for users who are seeking a “primitive hiking/biking experience” to come that close to private property. Refer to Picture 1 to see view from trail.

-There are several play areas where the locals have torn up the trail with their vehicles which also adds to the unpleasant scenery. These torn up areas along the trail have made it extremely sandy and bumpy, which hinders the hiking/biking experience for users.



Picture 1

Proposal #'s 3.1 & 3.2: Section that is just south of FR 06

Current state of this section: Trail goes through several swampy areas which are navigated over by several puncheons. A couple of these puncheons are in very poor condition and will need replacing or major repairs within a year or two. The puncheons which are in better condition will need replacing within 5 years or so. Refer to Pictures 2-5.



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5

Proposed change of this section:

-Proposal #3.1: Reroute the trail to the west of the swampy areas where the elevation is higher to negate the need for puncheons which will eventually need replacing. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 0.87 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 1.31 miles.* Refer to Figure 3.

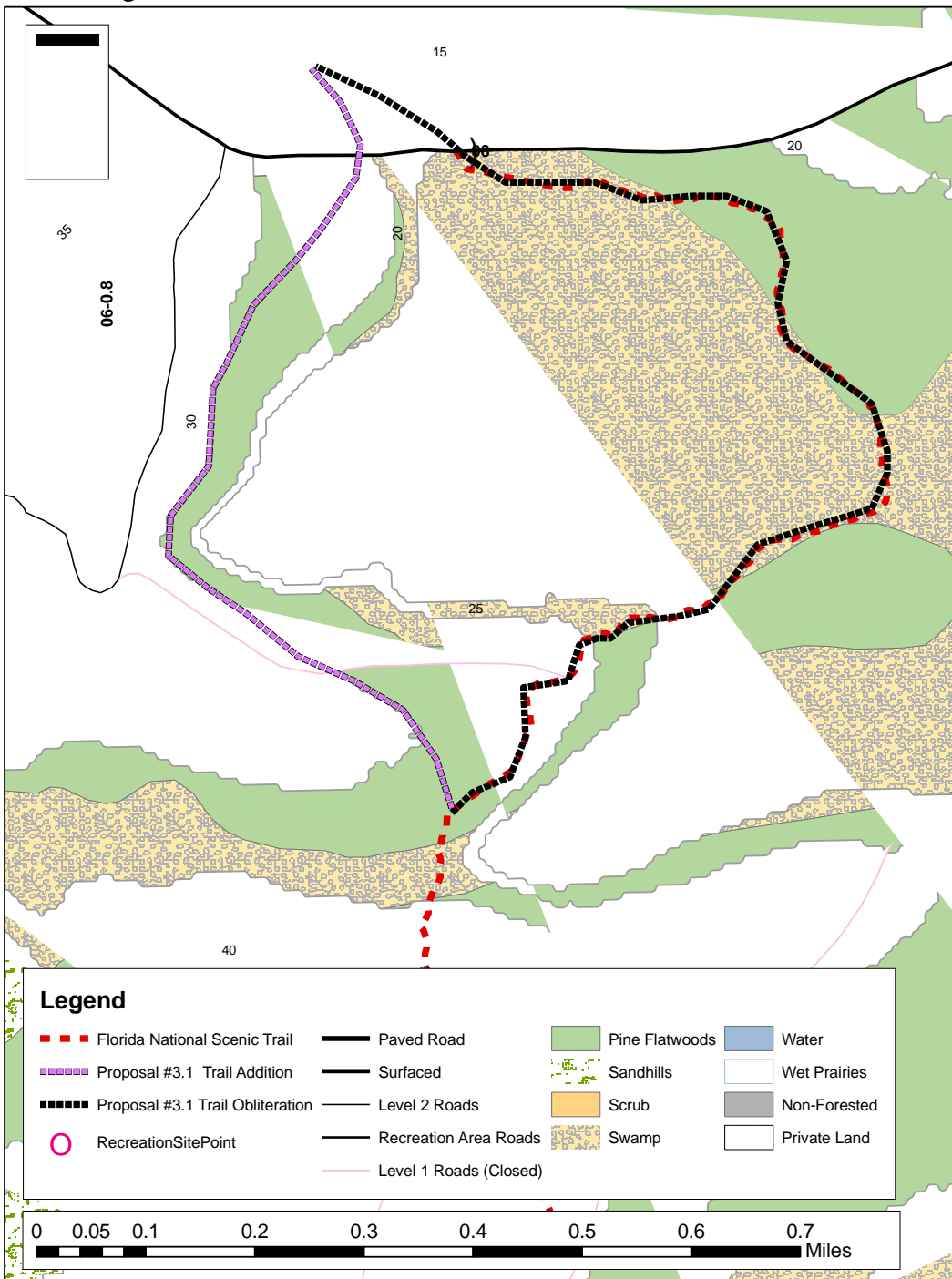


Figure 3

-Proposal #3.2: Tear down the puncheons that need replacing and build new puncheons composed of different, longer lasting materials such as concrete and metal.

Reasons for proposed changes:

-Proposal #3.1: The reason for proposing a trail reroute around the swampy area is to stop investing more money into costly puncheons or other infrastructure needed to navigate over extremely wet areas such as these.

- Proposal #3.2: The reason for replacing puncheons that are in poor condition as opposed to a reroute is to provide a recreational opportunity to the users that would not otherwise be available if not for the puncheons. These puncheons that are in poor condition are hazardous to hikers and bikers. The new puncheon should be replaced with more durable

materials such as concrete and metal. Concrete and metal will be more of an investment up front, but in the long run it will save money on maintenance and repairs, and will eliminate the need for new puncheons 10 years into the future.

Proposal #4.1: Section south of Alexander Springs Recreation Area

Current state of this section: The trail comes to a three way intersection about a half a mile south of Alexander Springs Recreation Area. One part of the trail goes north the recreation area (this part is a blue blazed spur trail of the FNST), one heads west towards FR 69 and eventually SR 19, and the third section heads southeast towards FR 06 and eventually the Clearwater Lake Trailhead (this section has a puncheon that is in very poor shape and will need replacing or major repairs within a year or two).

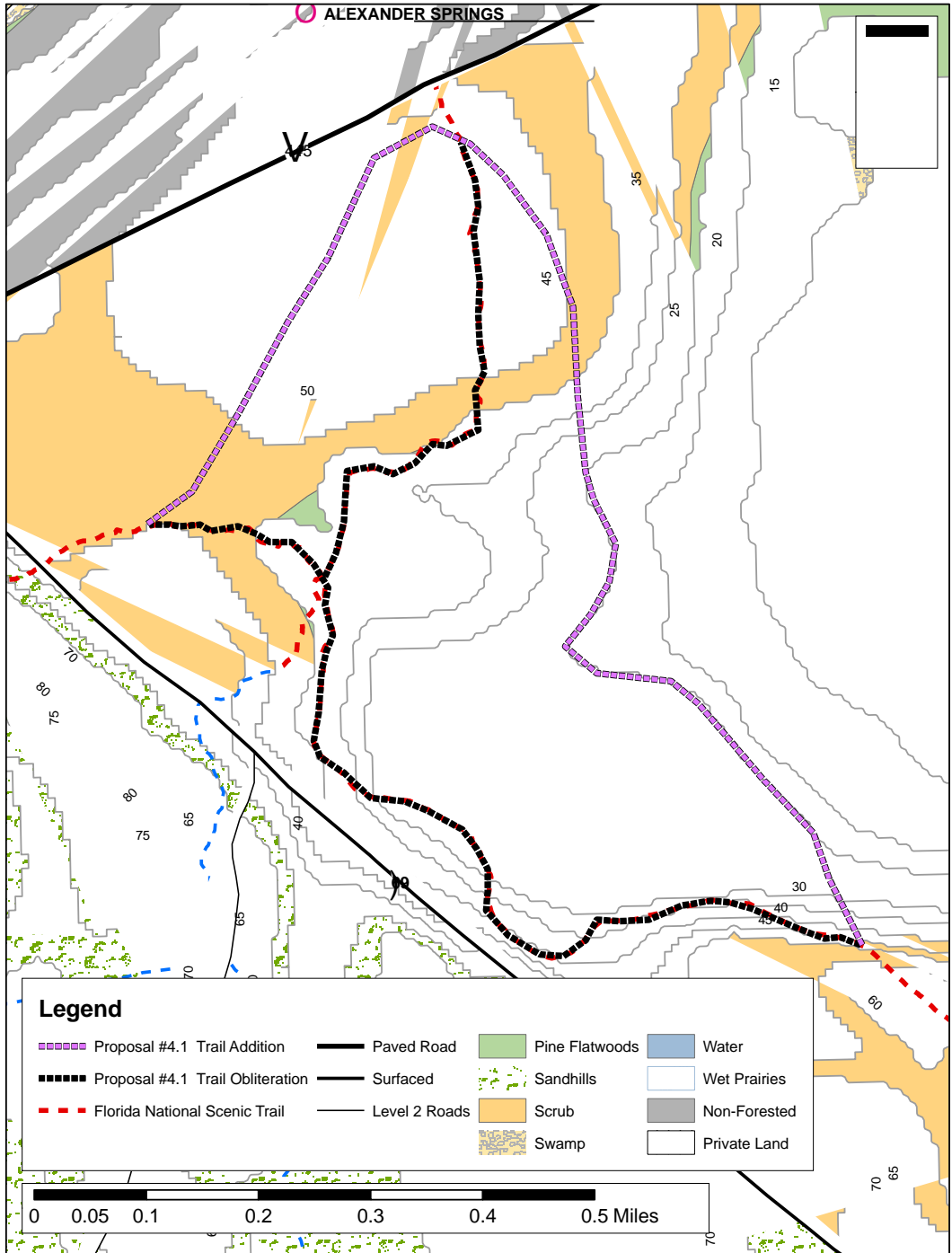


Figure 4

three way intersection is to: A) try to avoid the wet area and eliminate the need for a puncheon, B) eliminate the need for a blue blazed spur trail.

Proposed change to this section:

-Proposal #4.1: About 1 mile southeast of the three way intersection, reroute the trail to the north northwest, following the higher elevation of the area. Take the trail all the way to the Alexander Springs Recreation Area and meet up with the blue blazed spur trail there. Then use the existing blue blazed trail to go westward. Also, delete all parts of the trail leading to that 3-way intersection. Connect trail right above the 3-way intersection since there will no longer be any use for traveling to it. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 1.38 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 1.43 miles.* Refer to Figure 4.

Reasons for proposed change:

-Proposal #4.1: The reason for rerouting to the north northwest just south of the

Proposal #4.2: Section south of Alexander Springs Recreation Area

Current state of this section: The trail comes to a three way intersection about a half a mile south of Alexander Springs Recreation Area. One part of the trail goes north the recreation area (this part is a blue blazed spur trail of the FNST), one heads west towards FR 69 and eventually SR 19, and the third section heads southeast towards FR 06 and eventually the Clearwater Lake Trailhead (this section has a puncheon that is in very poor shape and will need replacing or major repairs within a year or two).

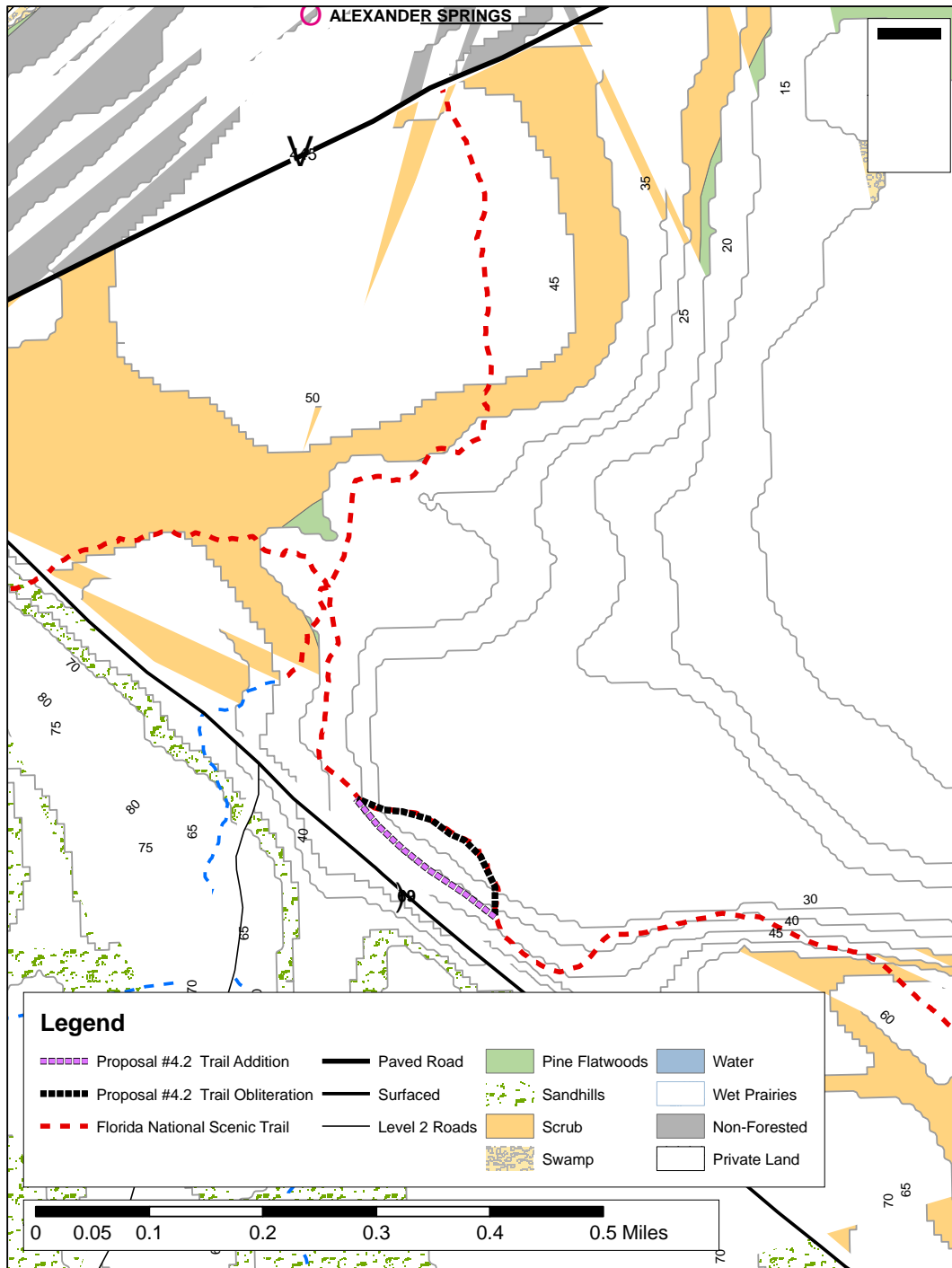


Figure 5

Proposed change to this section:

-Proposal #4.2: About ½ mile southeast of the three way intersection, reroute the trail to the northwest, following the higher elevation of the area. Delete the trail that goes directly north over the boardwalk. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 0.16 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 0.18 miles.* Refer to Figure 4.

Reasons for proposed change:

-Proposal #4.2: The reason for rerouting to the northwest just south of the three way intersection is to: A) try to avoid the wet area and eliminate the need for a puncheon

Proposal #5.1: Section adjacent to Buck Lake (Group campground for reservation only)

Current state of this section: The main trail runs along the southern edge of Buck Lake, never getting closer than around 400 feet. There is a blue-blazed spur trail that runs along the west side of Buck Lake and ends at the hand pump for hikers to access water.

Proposed change to this section of the trail: Strategically place several “camping areas” on year-round dry ground on the edge of Buck Lake (along the FNST) for hikers to use. These camping areas would be very simple, low-cost, and low maintenance. They would possibly consist of: a cleared area big enough for a tent or two, a fire ring with a buffer zone around it, and naturally provided shade.

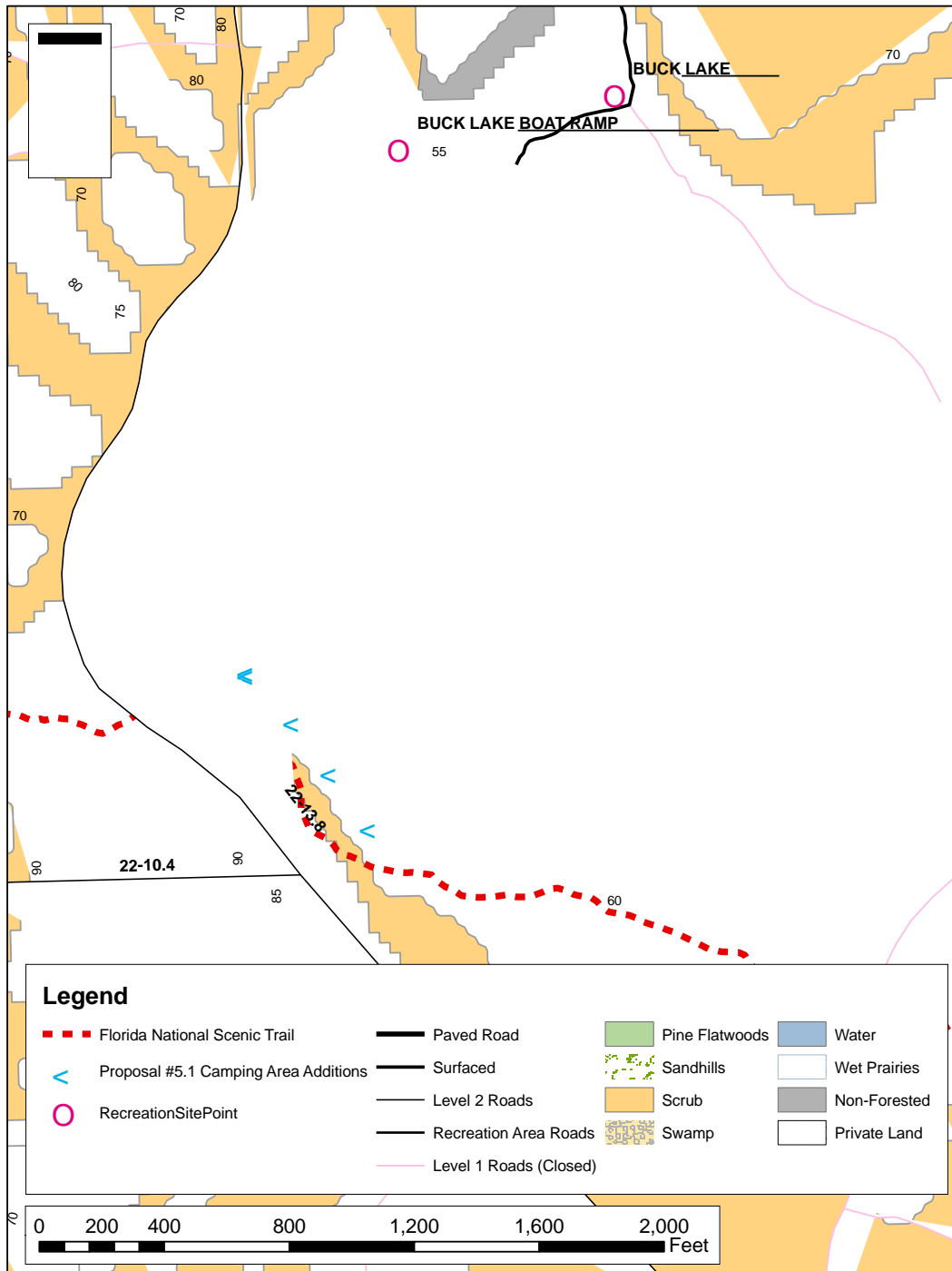


Figure 6

Reasons for proposed changes:

-There aren't many areas for hikers to camp during general gun hunting season outside of our recreation or wilderness areas; these would provide more opportunities for our users.

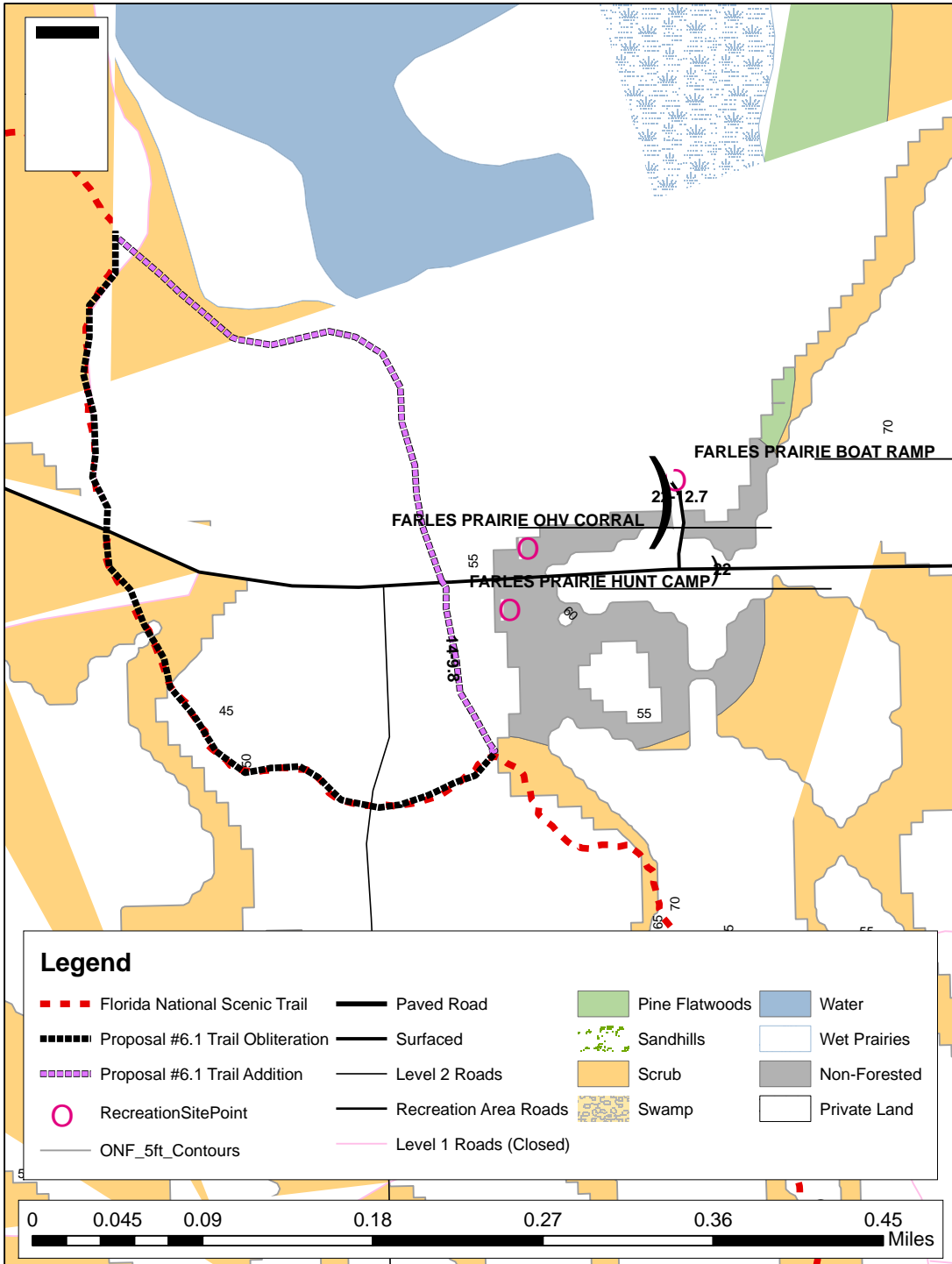
-Buck Lake campground is for group reservation only. Not to say hikers couldn't reserve the campground, but many hikers go there for water then want to rest and end up camping there with out reserving it, which is illegal. These camping areas would lessen the frequency of this happening.

-Buck Lake is a very scenic area, and carefully placing several camping areas along its edge could reveal incredible vantage points for potential hikers/bikers/campers.

Proposal #6.1: Section just west of Farles Lake Campground

Current state of this section: The main part of the FNST turns to the west just south of Farles Lake Campground, and then turns to the north. There is an old spur/blue-blazed trail that goes north where the main part of the trail turns to the west. This spur trail runs right along the western edge of Farles Lake Campground and meets back up with the main trail about 0.38 miles to the north northwest.

Proposed change to this section: Delete the western, main part of the trail and make the old spur/blue-blazed trail the main/orange-blazed trail. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 0.39 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 0.47 miles.* Refer to Figure 7.



Reasons for proposed change:

-There is no reason to have two routes at this section when one route will suffice.

-The spur/blue-blazed trail is more scenic as opposed to the mostly scrub, shadeless main/orange-blazed trail.

Figure 7

Proposal #7.1: Section southeast of Juniper Springs Recreation Area

Current state of this section: The trail crosses State Road 40 a little over a mile east of the Juniper Springs Recreation Area access road. The trail runs west, almost parallel to SR-40 for 1.40 miles, with about 0.70 miles of it crossing through Juniper Prairie Wilderness Area.

Proposed changes to this section:

-Right after the trail crosses over the small bridge about ¼- ½ mile south of SR-40, route the trail to the west instead of going north towards the highway. Run the trail to the west until it approaches directly south of the Juniper Springs Recreation Area access road and starting turning it north towards the highway. The trail should exit the woods right where the Juniper Springs Recreation Area sign is located on the south side of SR-40. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 1.53 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 1.57 miles.* Refer to Figure 8.

-Along with the route change, there should be a designated trailhead parking area established along the Juniper Springs access road.

-Move current kiosk to the designated trailhead parking area.

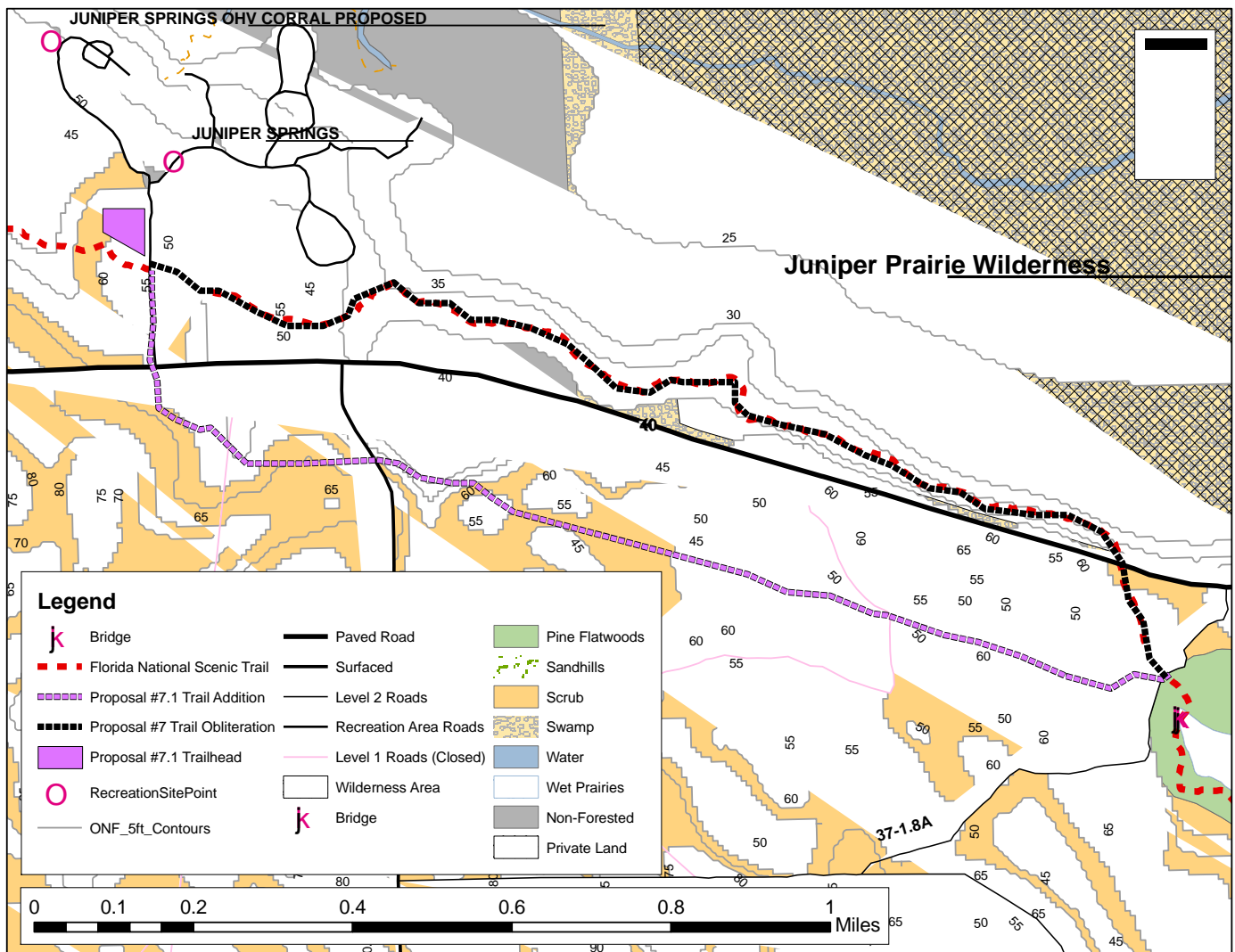


Figure 8

Reasons for proposed changes:

- This small section of trail crosses through Juniper Prairie Wilderness Area which is unnecessary.
- Having the trail cross SR-40 directly across from the Juniper Springs access road will put an emphasis on trailhead parking.
- Establishing a trailhead parking area will promote trail use because users won't have to pay a fee for vehicle parking at the recreation area.
- Moving the kiosk to the parking area is a must. Visitor use information should be presented at the trailhead/parking area, not ½ mile into the trail as it is now.

Proposal #8.1: Section just west of FR 46 FNST Trailhead

Current state of this section: Trail runs about a tenth of a mile west of the FR 46 FNST Trailhead parking area, creating the need for a spur/blue-blazed trail from the FNST to the parking lot. There is a kiosk at the junction of the main/orange-blazed trail and the spur/blue-blazed trail.

Proposed changes to this section:

-Route the FNST slightly to the east so it butts up to the FR 46 FNST Trailhead parking area. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 0.17 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 0.22 miles.* Refer to Figure 10.

-Move kiosk to the trail entrance from the FR 46 FNST Trailhead parking area once the trail is rerouted slightly to the east.

Reasons for proposed change: To eliminate the need of a tenth of a mile spur/blue-blazed trail.

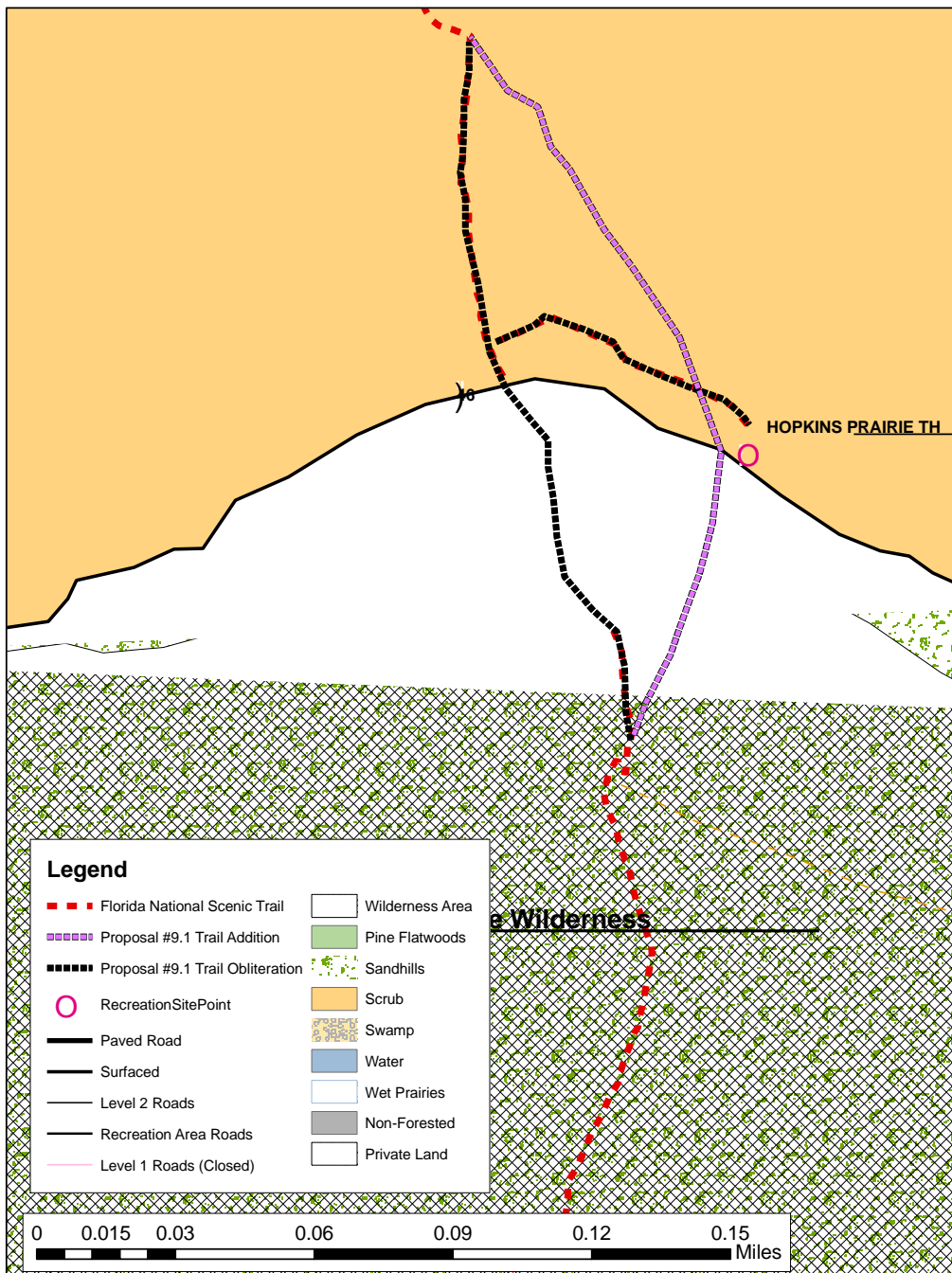


Figure 9

Proposal #9.1: Section just west of the “88 Gas Station/Pub”

Current state of this section: The east and west corridors intersect southwest of the 88 pub. The trail then runs to the north northeast. There is a spur/blue-blazed trail the runs directly east to the rear of the 88 pub where FNST users can buy goods, shower, and camp year-round. The main trail keeps going and crosses CR 316 a tenth of a mile west of an old hunt information station and FR 11.

Proposed changes to this section: Route the eastern corridor northward where it intersects the closed road just south of the sand pine stand. Route the trail north, heading towards the western side (back of) the 88 pub. Continue the trail northward and connect the proposed trail where the existing FNST curves to the northward. Make the western corridor the existing main FNST and continue it northeastern towards the hunt information station. Make the western and eastern corridors meet at or behind the hunt information station where there is a

parking area (place kiosk here) and possibly a future trailhead and volunteer center of sorts. Continue the trail north across CR 316 and turn towards the northwest and tie back into the existing FNST. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 1.91 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 1.63 miles. Refer to Figure 11.*

Reasons for proposed changes:

-There is no reason to have a spur/blue-blazed trail here when the trail can easily be routed slightly east.

-This proposal moves the western and eastern corridor junction to a more meaningful and less arbitrary location.

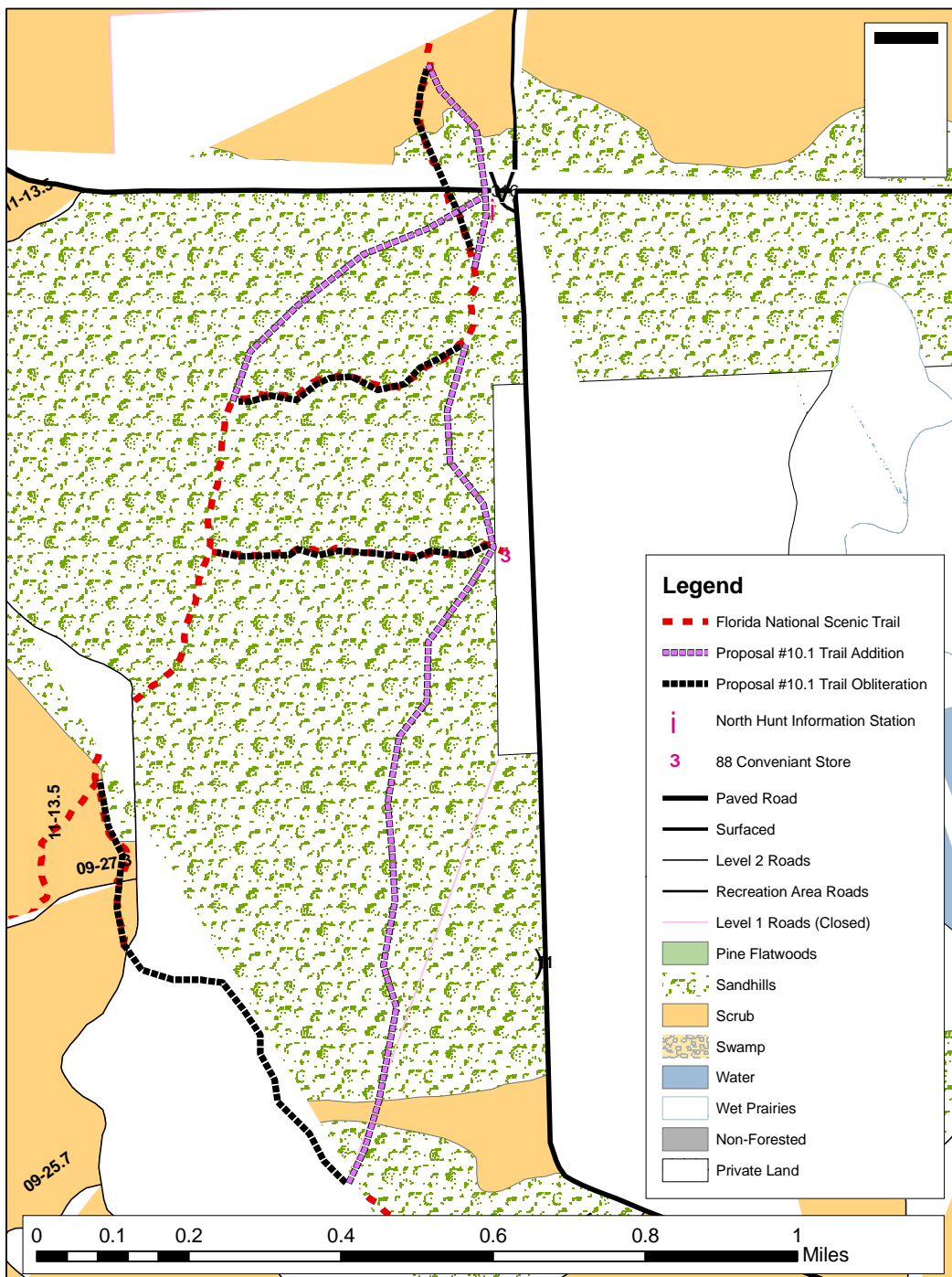


Figure 10

Proposal #10.1: Section just north of FR 74

Current state of this section: This section splits in two different directions just north of FR 74. The western section tends to become flooded during wetter patterns of weather which is why the eastern trail was added. The trail converges once again about ¾ of a mile north of FR 74.

Proposed change to this section: Delete the western (wet) part of the trail as a part of the FNST system and make it a Forest Service trail for the ONF. Have the FNST's sole route become the eastern section. *The approximate length of the proposed deleted trail is 1.05 miles.* Refer to Figure 12.

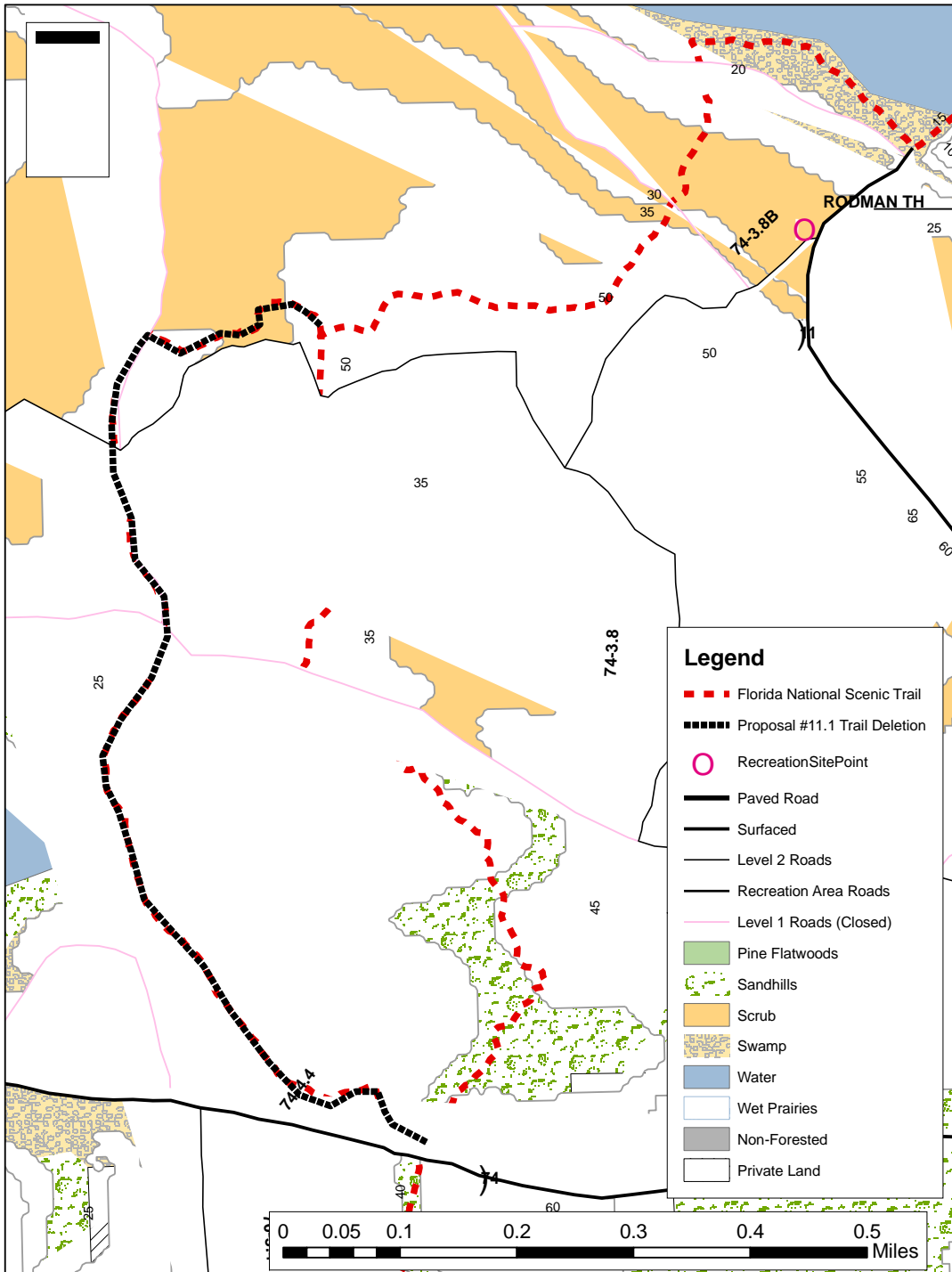


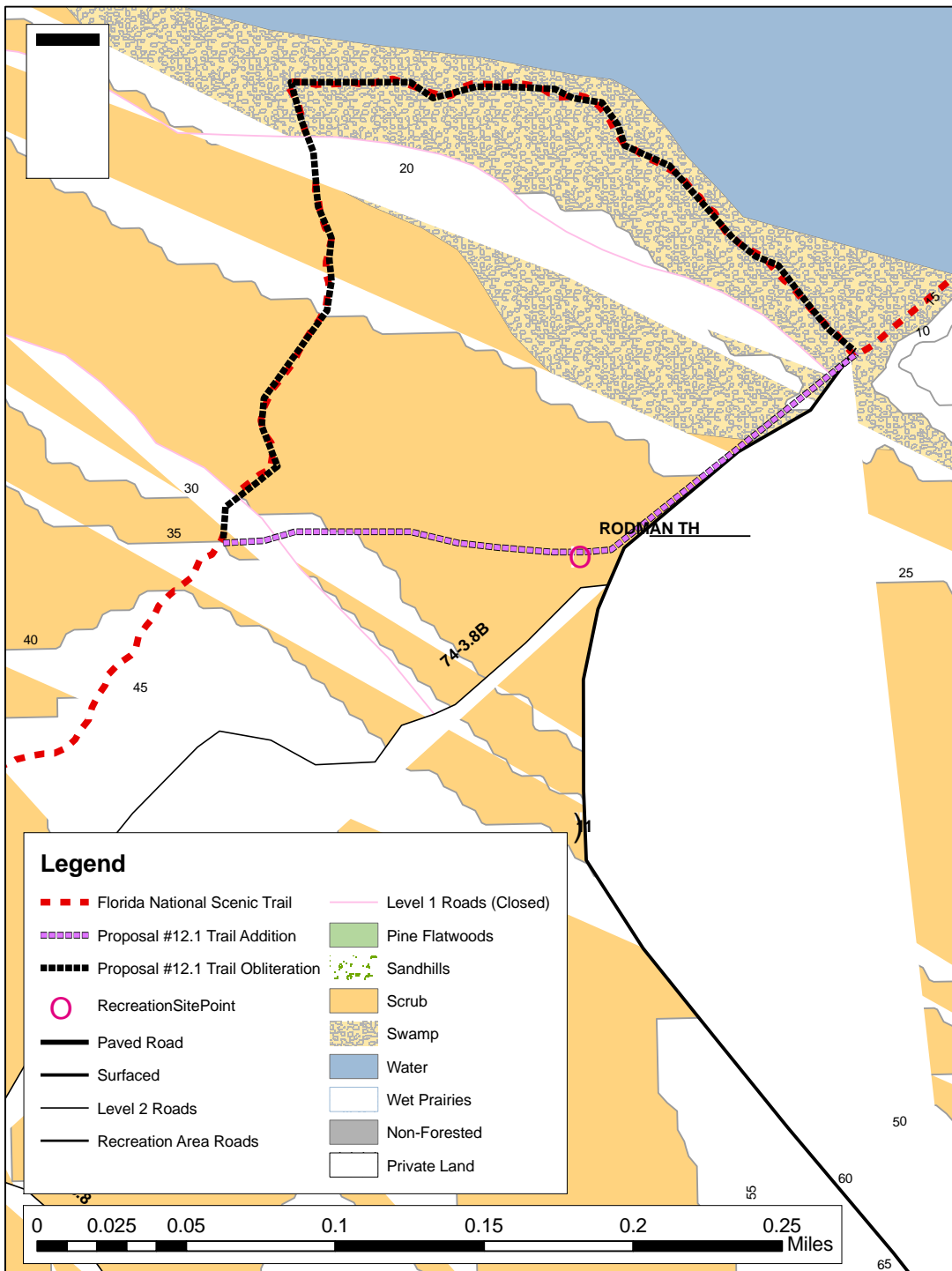
Figure 11

Reasons for proposed changes: The FNST should not have two routes going to the same place (especially if one of the routes is under water for 2-3 months out of the year). Designating the western portion as an ONF trail will suffice for the users who want to hike a loop trail.

Proposal #11.1: Section just south of Rodman Dam

Current state of this section: This section heads to the northwest of the OHV Rodman Trailhead and turns almost directly to the east then turns to the southeast towards FR 11. The trail then turns to the northeast along FR 11, heading towards Rodman Dam and off of the forest.

Proposed change to this section: Turn the trail to the east towards the Rodman OHV Trailhead and make the OHV trailhead a multiuse trailhead for OHV and FNST trail users. Then turn the trail to the northeast along FR 11 towards Rodman Dam and off the forest. *The approximate length of the proposed added trail is 0.24 miles. The approximate length of the proposed obliterated trail is 0.40 miles.* Refer to Figure 13.



Reasons for proposed changes: Rodman OHV Trailhead is a major trailhead with already established infrastructure (bathrooms, trashcans, kiosks, parking lot, etc.) and it makes sense to combine the two. There is ample parking for both user groups.

Figure 12

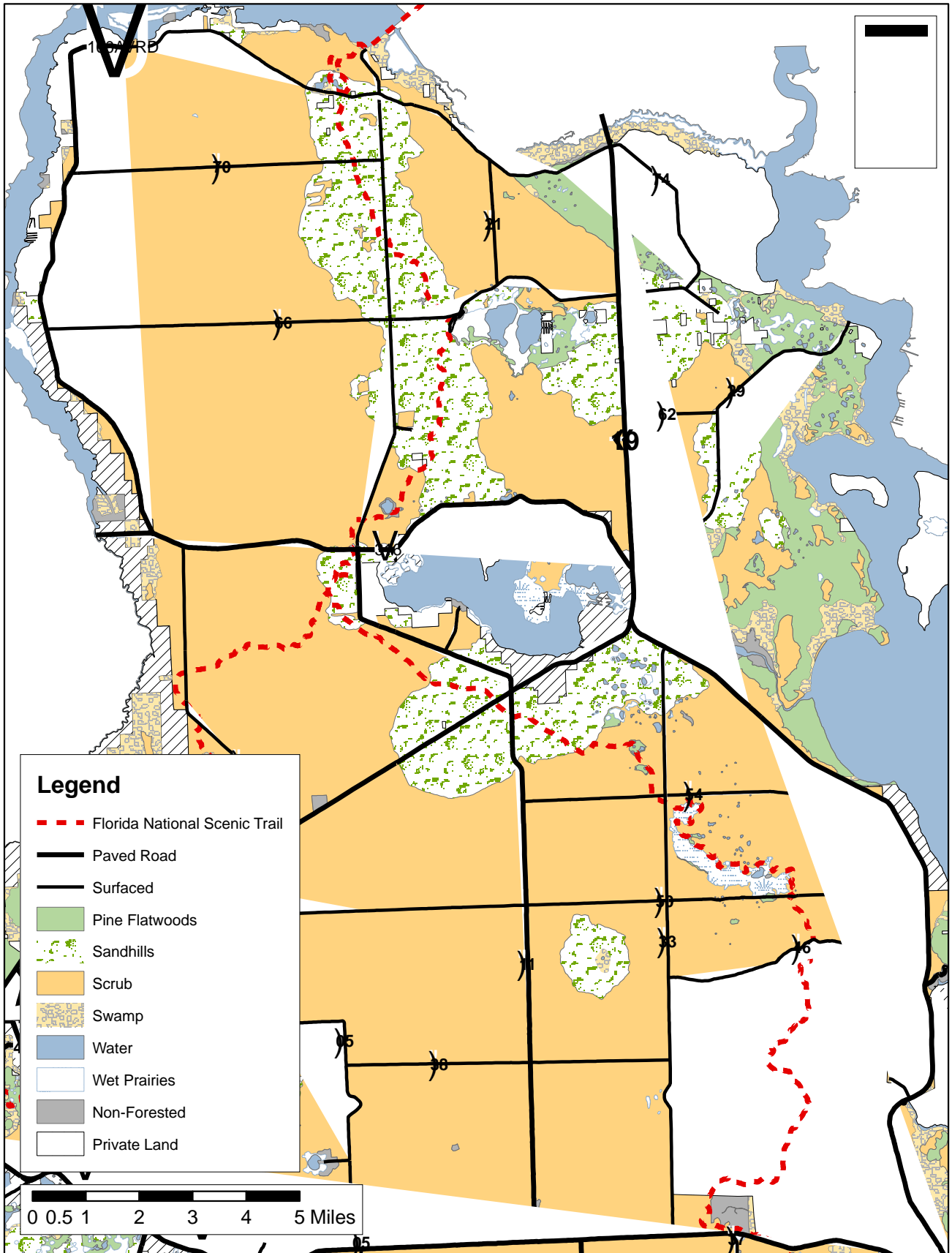
Conclusion

This assessment will hopefully provide solutions to problematic areas along the Florida National Scenic Trails on the Ocala National Forest, creating a more pleasant hike for our users and an easier trail to manage. Some specific goals of this document are to: suggest better and more meaningful routing, new trailheads that will likely be used more frequently, and more opportunities for users to take advantage of, and better and more efficient ways for us to manage the trail.

Majority of these recommendations/ proposals require trail additions and obliterations. These tasks will need man power. Something to consider is recruiting/including volunteers for the on the ground process of enacting these proposals (with Forest Service supervision to ensure precise and safe work is accomplished): blazing new trails, obliterating old trails, disassembling puncheons, etc.

Hopefully, within 5 years, the FNST on the ONF will have been totally revamped and could possibly result in: more hiker use, more public awareness due to an overall better trail, and stronger public support for not only the Florida National Scenic Trail, but outdoor recreational opportunities in general.

Appendix B (FNST north of SR 40)



Appendix C

This table shows the specific mileages for trail additions and obliterations for each proposal. These numbers are included in each proposal description.

| <u>FNST Proposed Additions and Obliterations Approximate Lengths (Miles)</u> | | | |
|---|--|--|-------------------|
| <u>Proposal #</u> | <u>Proposed Trail Addition(s) Mileage</u> | <u>Proposed Trail Obliteration(s) Mileage</u> | <u>Net</u> |
| 1.1 | 0.67 | 0.95 | -0.28 |
| 2.1 | 1.55 | 1.64 | -0.09 |
| 3.1 | 0.87 | 1.31 | -0.44 |
| 4.1 | 1.38 | 1.43 | -0.05 |
| 5.1 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 6.1 | 0.39 | 0.47 | -0.08 |
| 7.1 | 1.53 | 1.56 | -0.03 |
| 9.1 | 0.17 | 0.22 | -0.05 |
| 10.1 | 1.91 | 1.63 | 0.28 |
| 11.1 | 0.00 | 1.05 | -1.05 |
| 12.1 | 0.24 | 0.40 | -0.16 |
| <u>Totals:</u> | 8.71 | 10.66 | -1.95 |

Works Referenced

The Optimal Location Review, an Explanation of the Process. LMPG Appendix I. February

1997.