

Florida National Scenic Trail – Ocala National Forest

Maintenance Assessment for Volunteer Work Season 2011-2012



July, 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Maintenance Priority Levels	5
Maintenance Priority Level #1	5
Maintenance Priority Level #2	7
Maintenance Priority Level #3	8
Maintenance Priority Level #4	9
Maintenance Priorities for the FNST on the ONF	10
Maintenance Priorities for the FNST south of SR 40	10
Maintenance Priorities for the FNST north of SR 40	15
Maintenance Priority map north of SR 40	19
Maintenance Priority map south of SR 40	20
Conclusion	21
Works Cited	22

Introduction

According to the 2009-2010 Florida National Scenic Trail Visitor Assessment (Wan 23), 31.3% of interviewed trail users suggested the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) needed improved trail maintenance. The goal of this assessment is to inventory and prioritize the maintenance needs of the FNST on the Ocala National Forest (ONF) for the upcoming 2011-2012 volunteer season. With public lands' budget cuts and a dwindling and aging volunteer work force, the need for trail maintenance efficiency has never been greater than now. Upon personal inspection of the FNST on the ONF, there were sections of trail that appeared to have been unmaintained for over a year or two. These observations were based upon trail scouting performed in June and July, 2011. The prioritizing of maintenance tasks does not take into consideration that there will be a couple additional months of vegetation growth during our wet summer months.

Ideally, "the trail should be cleared approximately four feet wide and cleared high enough to permit passage of a hiker and his pack. The actual tread should be at least 18 inches wide. Vary the width to avoid a "tunnel effect" where the vegetation dictates. In dense growth, the width may narrow to three feet and still allow the hiker to pass" (Florida 132).

The assessment will start from the south going northward and will break the trail into subsections based upon maintenance needs (which usually coincide with vegetation type). These sections will then be ranked 1-4, 1 needing extreme maintenance performed to 4 needing very little if any maintenance. Refer Table 1 to see rough guidelines of maintenance priority levels.

<u>Priority Level</u>	<u>Definition</u>
1	Trail Corridor $\leq 1'$
2	$1' < \text{Trail Corridor} \leq 2'$
3	$2' < \text{Trail Corridor} \leq 4'$
4	$4' < \text{Trail Corridor}$

Table 1

These maintenance need levels will be defined further in depth and include photographic examples. Once the four levels are understood, the FNST on the ONF will be broken down into sections according to maintenance needs.

Maintenance Priority Levels

Maintenance Priority Level #1: This priority level requires immediate attention by volunteers once the season starts up. On these sections, the trail is so overgrown that it is challenging to see the trail tread and corridor. These trail sections have a trail corridor of 12” or less. Most of the trail sections with this priority navigate through flatwoods vegetation. Hazards associated with these trail conditions are: injuries while trying to navigate over, under, and through thick vegetation, hidden wildlife such as poisonous snakes, unseen tread terrain such as trenches and wildlife burrows, etc. See Figures 1 and 2 for examples of maintenance priority level #1.



Notice that the trail is totally overgrown by palmettos and other vegetation. There is no visible trail tread or corridor. Extensive work is needed on these sections.

Figure 1

Again notice the trail is totally overgrown by palmettos. The trail tread can barely be seen by the hiker.



Figure 2

Maintenance Priority Level #2: This priority level will definitely need work performed at least once during the volunteer season. These sections of trail mostly have a corridor greater than 1'

but less than 2'. Most of the trail sections with this priority tend to navigate through scrub or flatwoods vegetation. These sections mostly have vegetation encroaching upon the trail at or above the waist level. See Figures 3 and 4 for examples of maintenance priority level #2.

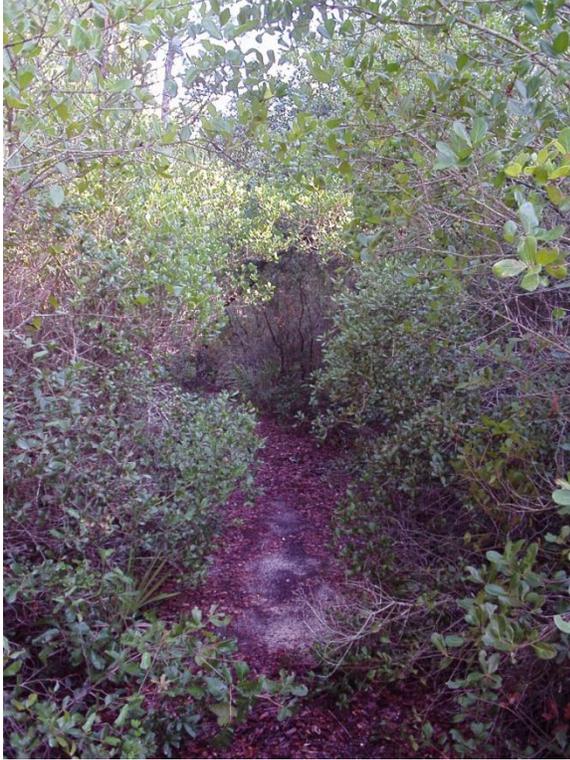


Figure 3

Notice the trail corridor is close to 2' or under. This scrub oak grows very quickly, especially with the rainy season upon us.

Again notice the trail corridor is being encroached by the scrub oak and is less than 2'. Here the trail tread is around 1'.

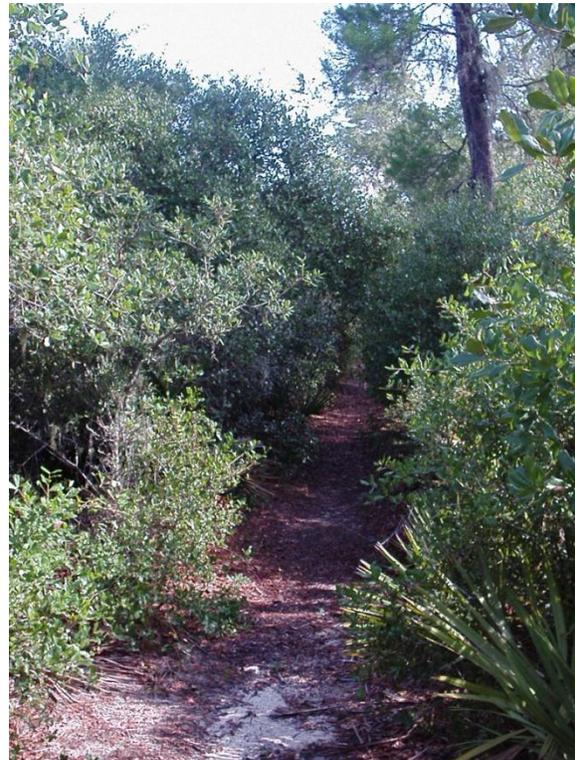


Figure 4

Maintenance Priority Level #3: This priority level requires some trail maintenance and it will need attention once the higher priority level sections are maintained. These sections may require

some lopping and mowing. These sections of trail generally navigate through scrub or flatwoods vegetation and that is mostly encroaching upon the trail closer to the ground and knee level. See Figures 5 and 6 for examples of maintenance priority level #3.



Notice the trail tread width is below 12” and the trail corridor width is below 48” with ferns on the edges of the trail. This will need mowing.

Figure 5

Notice the trail tread width is around 12” and the trail corridor width is again less than 48” with gallberry and palmettos on the edges of the trail. This will also need mowing and trimming.



Figure 6

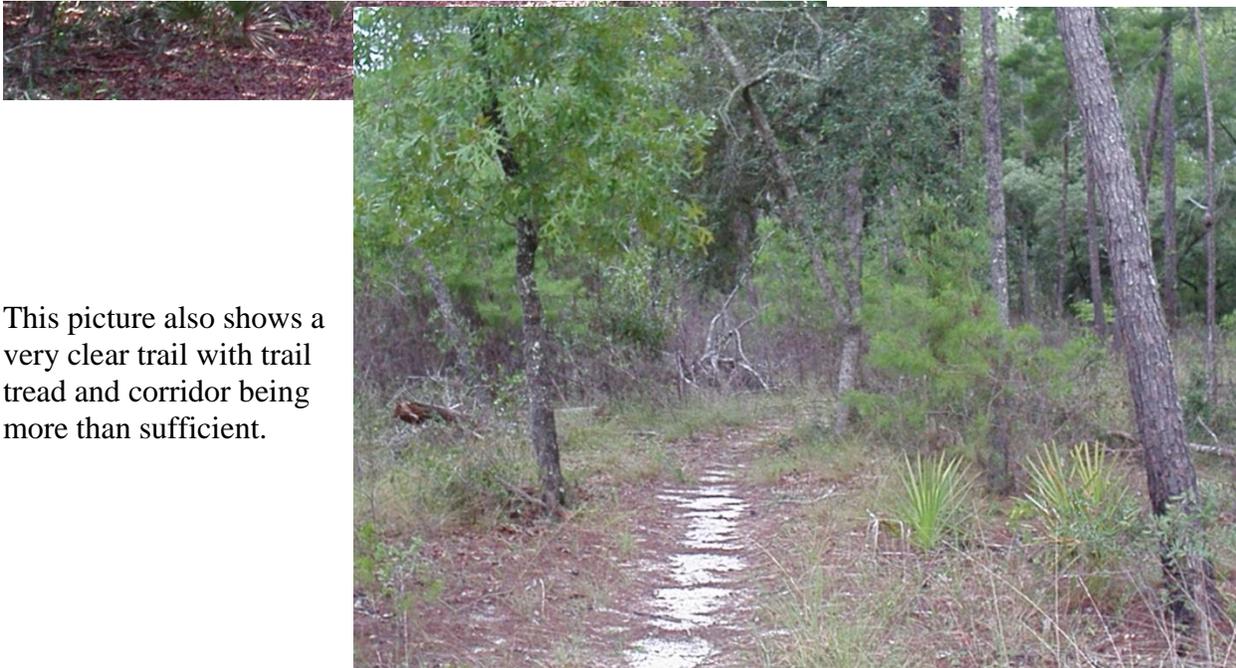
Maintenance Priority Level #4: This priority level requires very little if any trail maintenance for this upcoming volunteer season. It may require light trimming and mowing but is of low priority.

These sections of trail are usually either: in sandhill vegetation, on old roads, alongside existing roads, or are just wider sections of trail that don't need much maintenance this year. See Figures 7 and 8 for examples of maintenance priority level #4.



Notice the trail tread width is over 18" and the trail corridor width is over 48" with sand live oaks and palmettos on the edge of the trail

Figure 7



This picture also shows a very clear trail with trail tread and corridor being more than sufficient.

Figure 8

Florida National Scenic

Trail - Ocala National Forest – Maintenance Priorities

Section of trail from SR-42 to FR 06: Refer to Figure 9 for this description. The trail enters the forest through sandhill vegetation which usually requires little if any maintenance. The trail becomes rough upon entering the flatwoods vegetation just north of FR 69-1.4. The worst parts are about 1 mile south (mixture of priority #'s 1 and 2) and a ¼ mile north of FR 69-3.1.

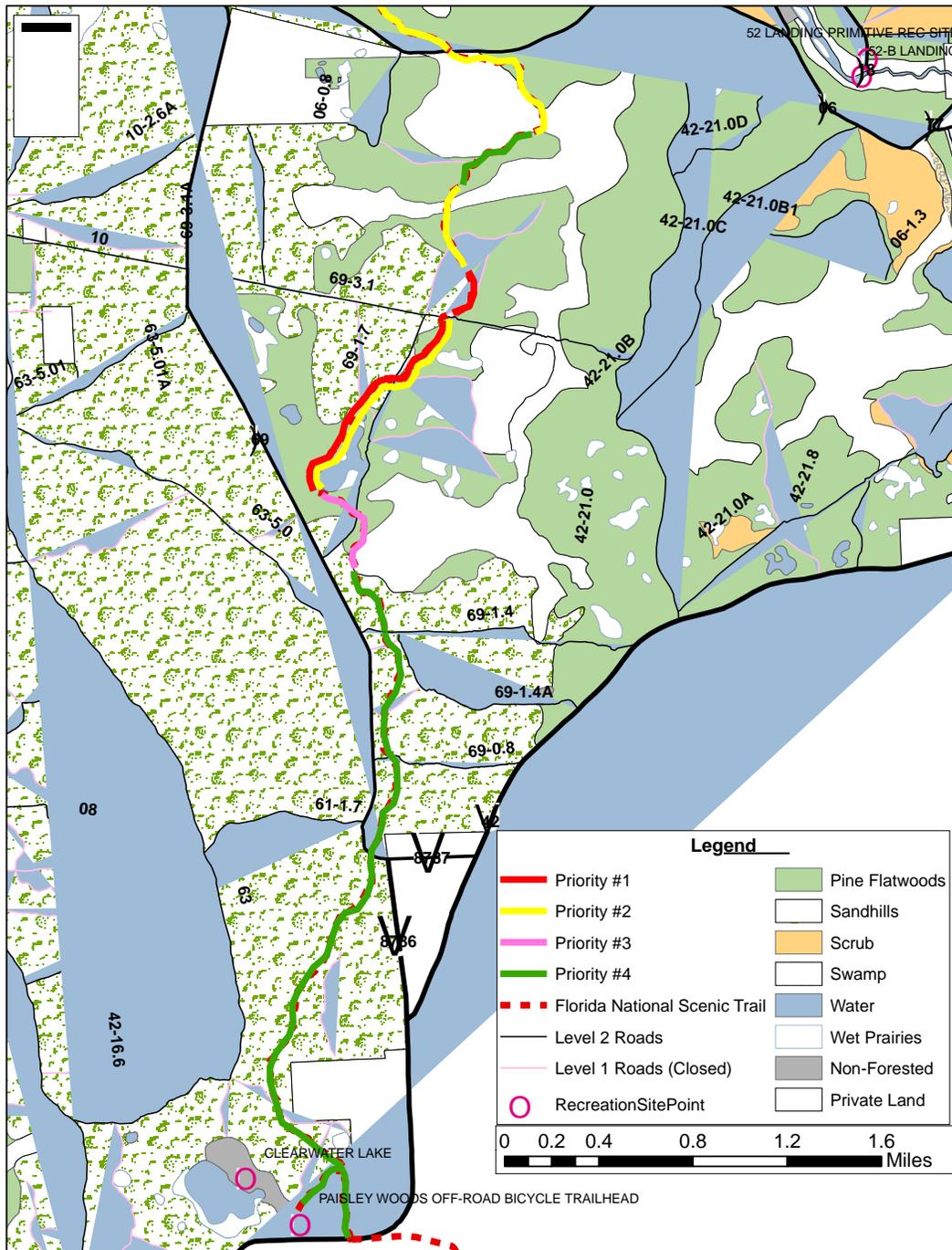


Figure 9

Section of trail from FR 06 to CR 445: Refer to Figure 10 for this description. From FR 06 to FR 69-4.8 there are priority #'s 1 and 2. The priority #1 subsection in the middle was in very poor condition. You can see this subsection goes through both scrub and flatwoods vegetation. Going north of FR 69-4.8 you come to more sandhill vegetation (the map shows it's in scrub but it actually isn't) so the trail is in good condition. Approaching the flatwoods vegetation the trail becomes very poor once again. This priority #1 subsection runs over the dilapidated puncheon and is overgrown and ridden with fallen trees. The rest of this section is of priority #4 besides the priority #3 subsection connecting to FR 69.

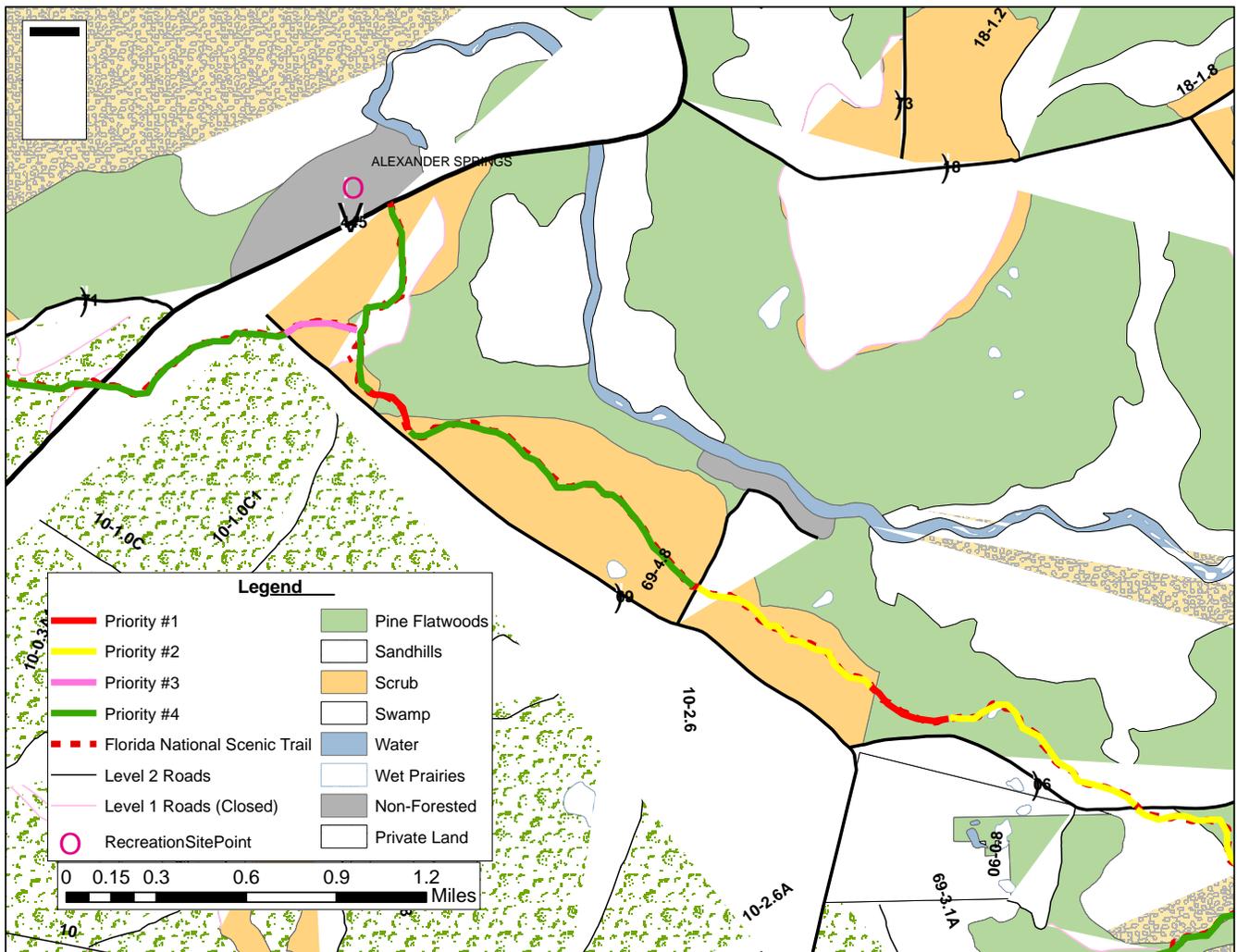


Figure 10

Section of trail from CR 445 to FR 22-13.8 (just west of Buck Lake): Refer to Figure 11 for this description. This section of trail starts off going through sandhill vegetation and makes its way through scrub vegetation. The subsection of trail east of SR 19 that runs through scrub needs attention. The subsection of trail that runs west of SR 19 all the way to FR 22-13.8 was in decent shape.

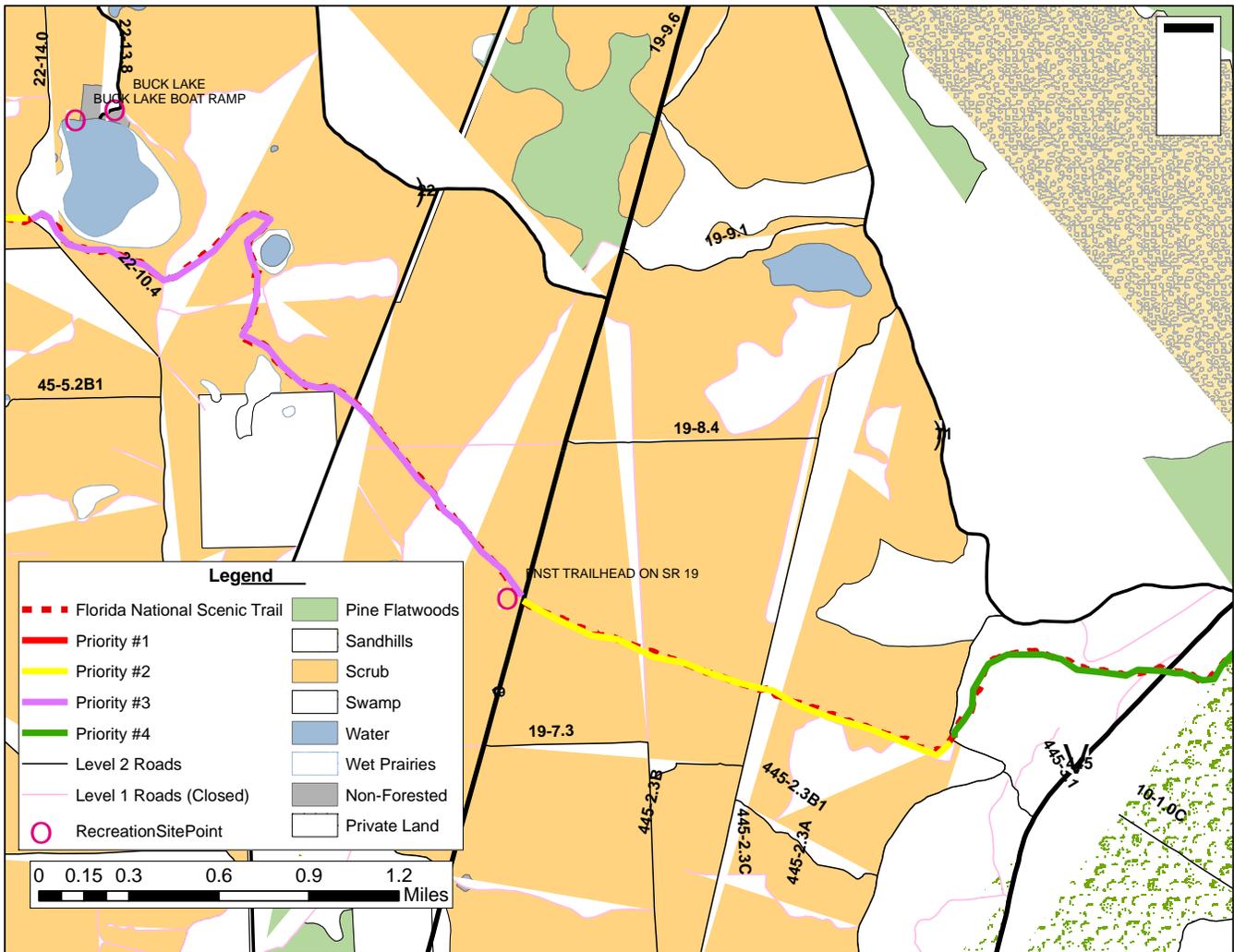


Figure 11

Section of trail from FR 22-13.8 to FR 30: Refer to Figure 12 for this description. The first subsection is of priority #2 because not only does it need trimming but it also runs through two older sand pine stands so blow-downs are common. The third subsection is of priority #2 because the trail runs through a stand of dead pines, which are constantly falling onto the trail. The stretch of priority #4 trail running along the wet prairies is wide open and needs little maintenance.

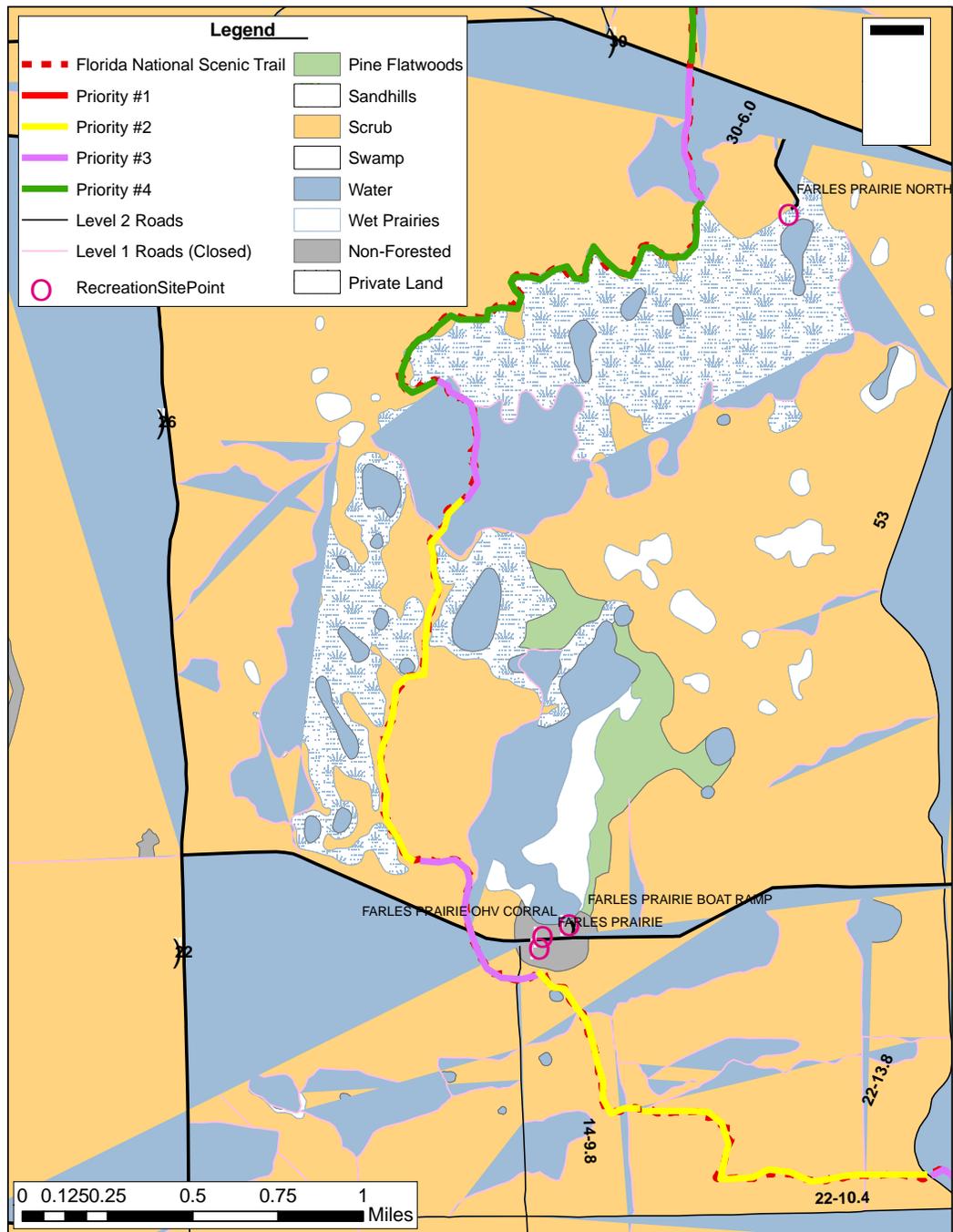


Figure 12

Section of trail from FR 30 to SR 40: Refer to Figure 13 for this description. Most of this section runs through overgrown scrub habitat. The trail is being encroached by scrub oak. The short subsection just north of FR30 was cleared by a brush-cutter. Most of the rest of this section runs through flatwoods and needs some attention.

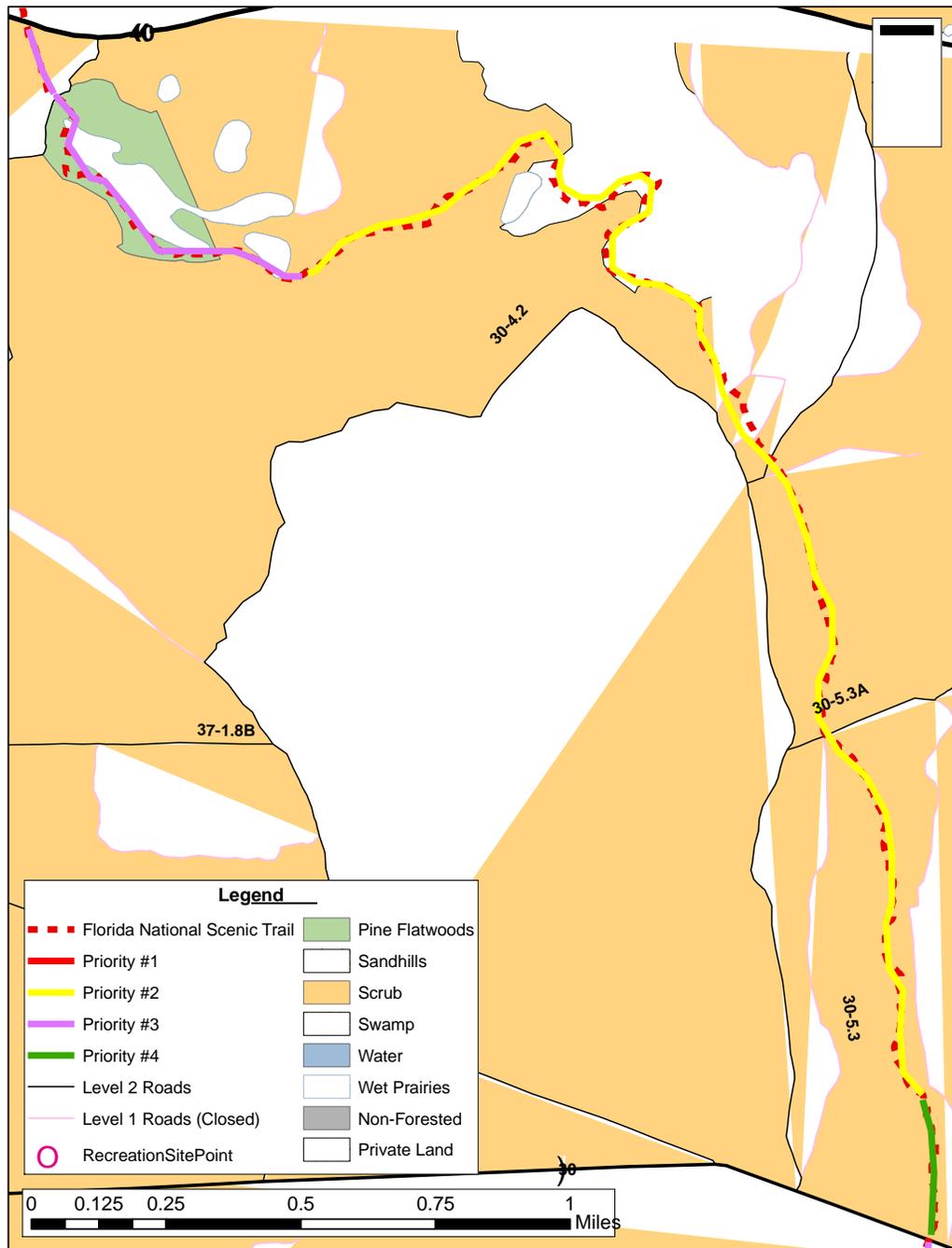


Figure 13

Section of trail from SR 40 to FR 46 (through Juniper Prairie Wilderness): Refer to Figures 14 and 15 for this description. As you can see from Figure 14 (photo taken heading south, when first entering the northern portion of Juniper Wilderness), the standard of maintenance is less stringent than the rest of the FNST. Regardless of the lesser standard, the current condition of the



Figure 14

trail is represented in Figure 15. First entering the wilderness from SR 40, the trail is mostly priority #3 with a few palmettos jutting into the trail. Upon heading west from FR 40-17.3 (Juniper Recreation Area access road) to the southwestern boundary of the wilderness, the trail is grown in and needs maintenance. The trail through the wilderness is a consistent mixture of priority level #'s 2 and 3.

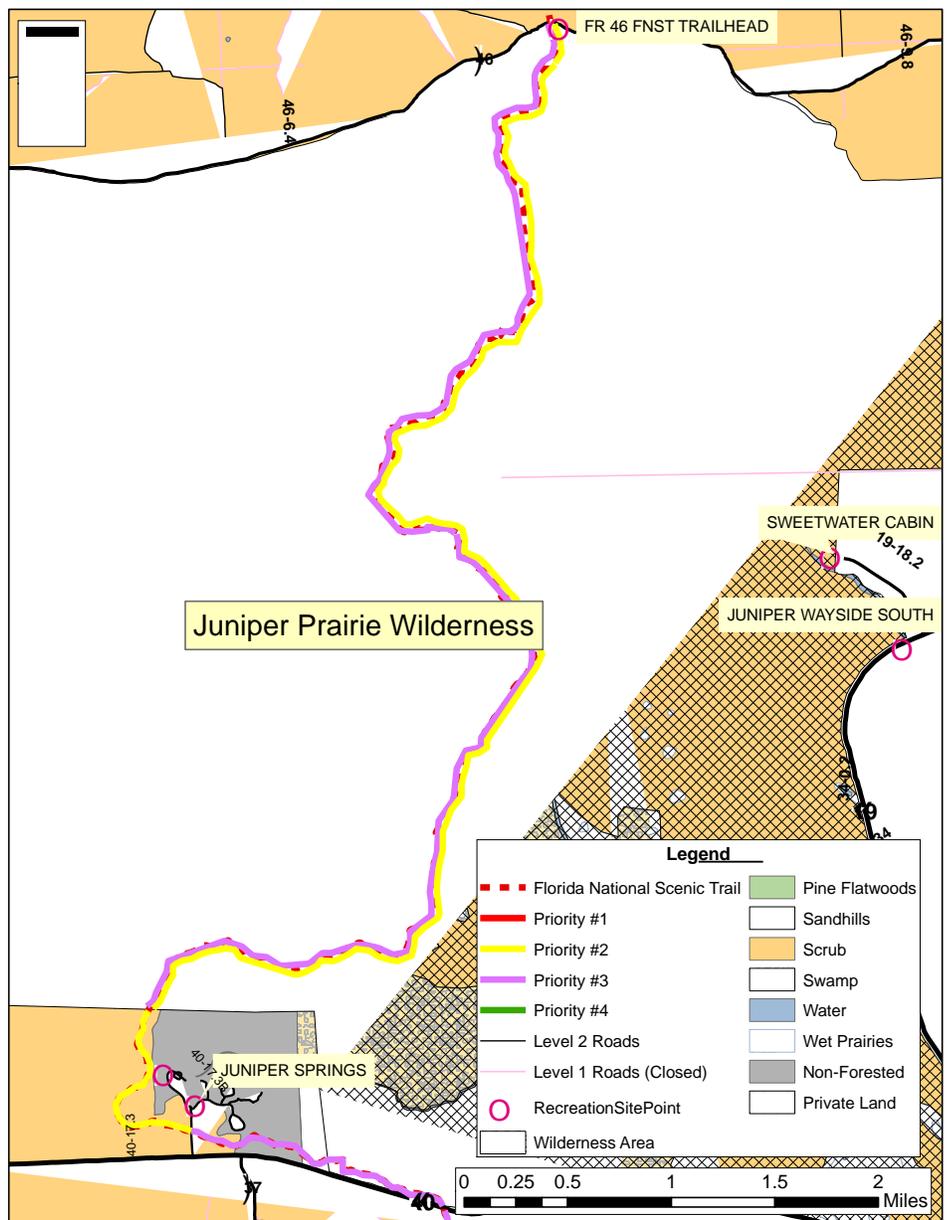


Figure 15

Section of trail from FR 46 to Salt Springs Marina and CR 314: Refer to Figure 16 for this description. The first subsection goes from FR 46 to Hopkins Prairie Campground. It runs mostly through scrub habitat and will need some attention. The second section runs along Hopkins Prairie and is very wide open. The only issue with this section is fallen trees. The third subsection has priority level #3 and splits to the west and north towards Salt Springs. This section is also through scrub and will eventually need some attention. The rest of this trail section goes through sandhill habitat and is of low priority.

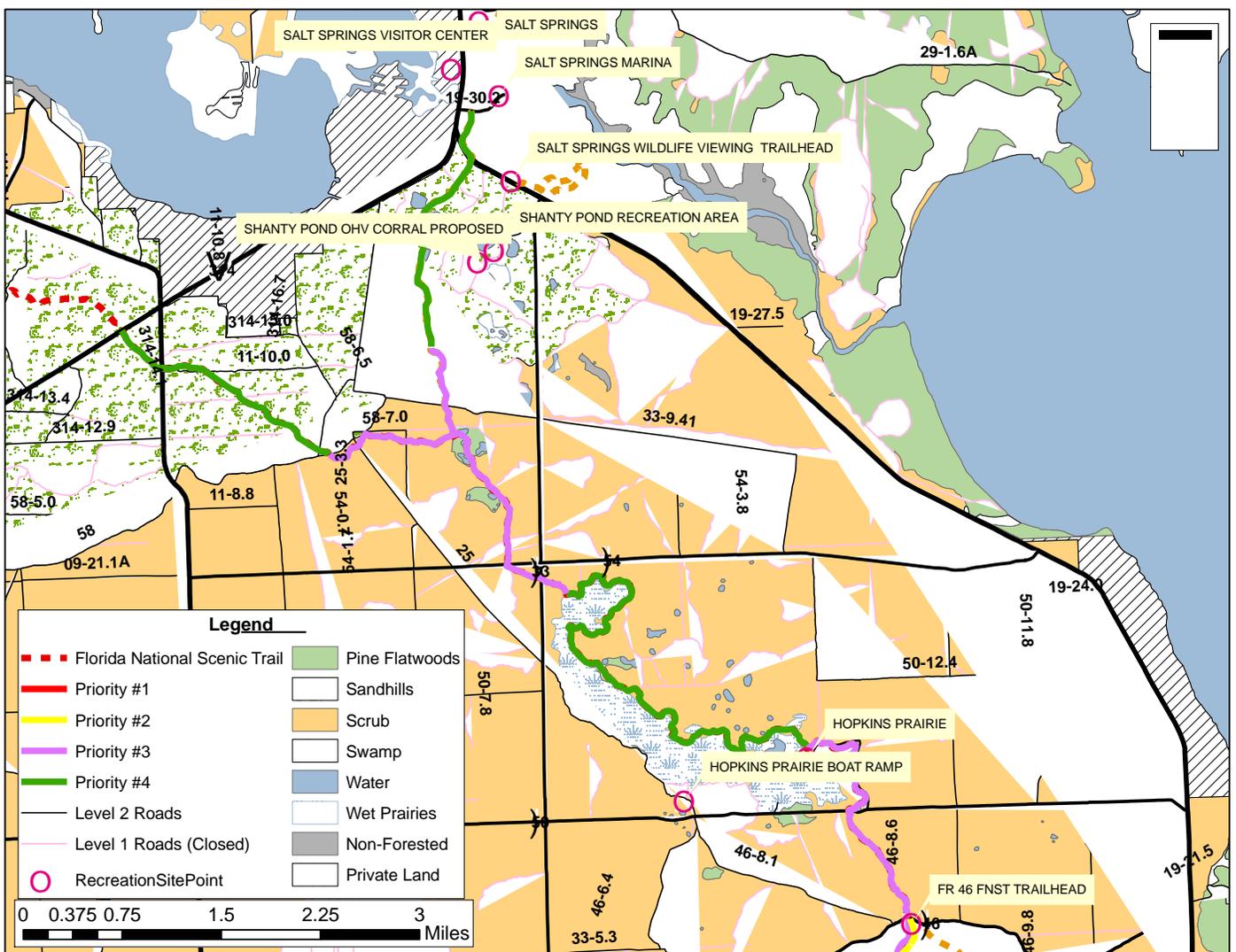


Figure 16

Section from FR 66 to the edge of the northern part of the forest: Refer to Figure 18 for this description. This section is very straight forward and needs little maintenance. The only subsection that could use some maintenance is the northern subsection that runs through some scrub habitat. This subsection is of priority level #3.

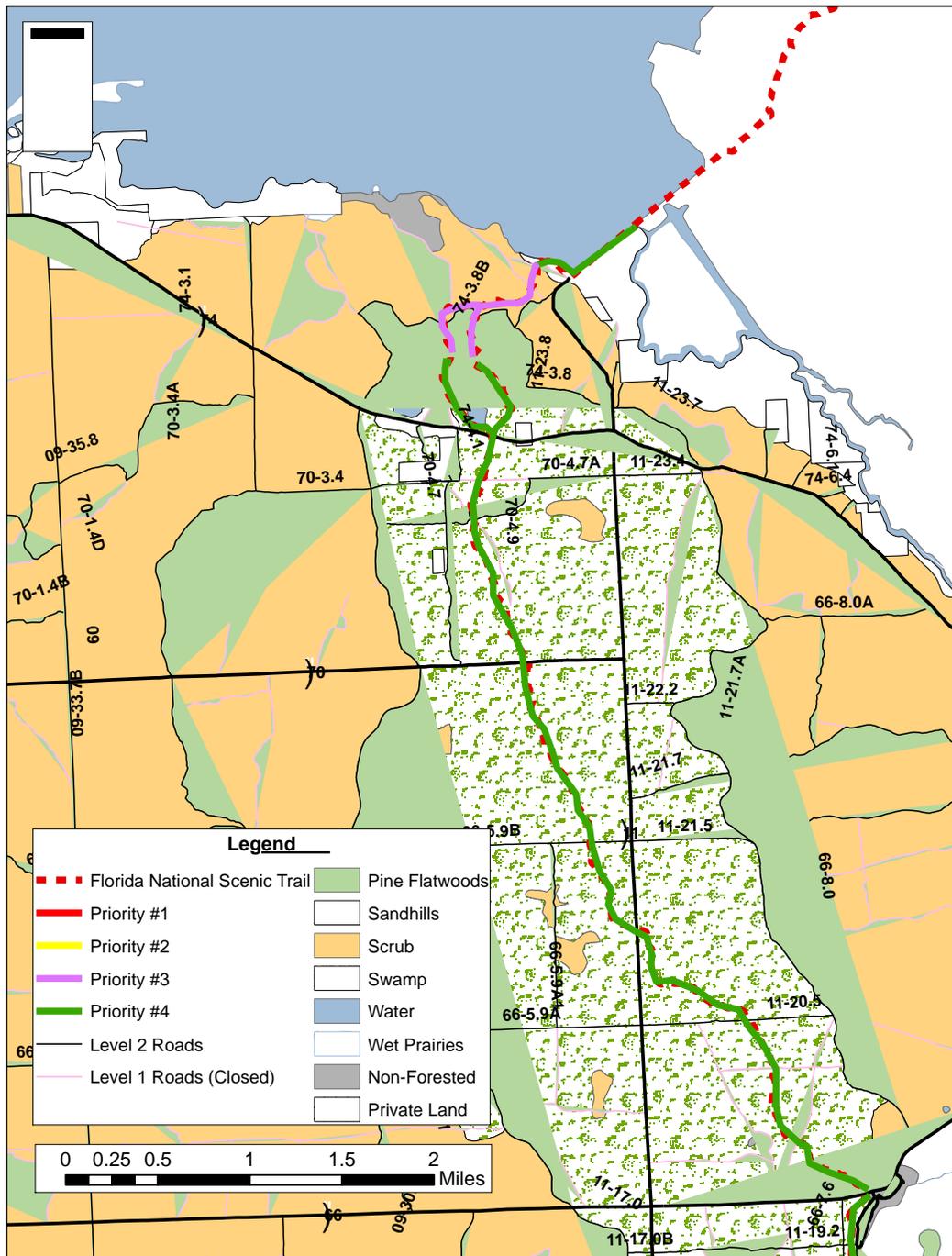
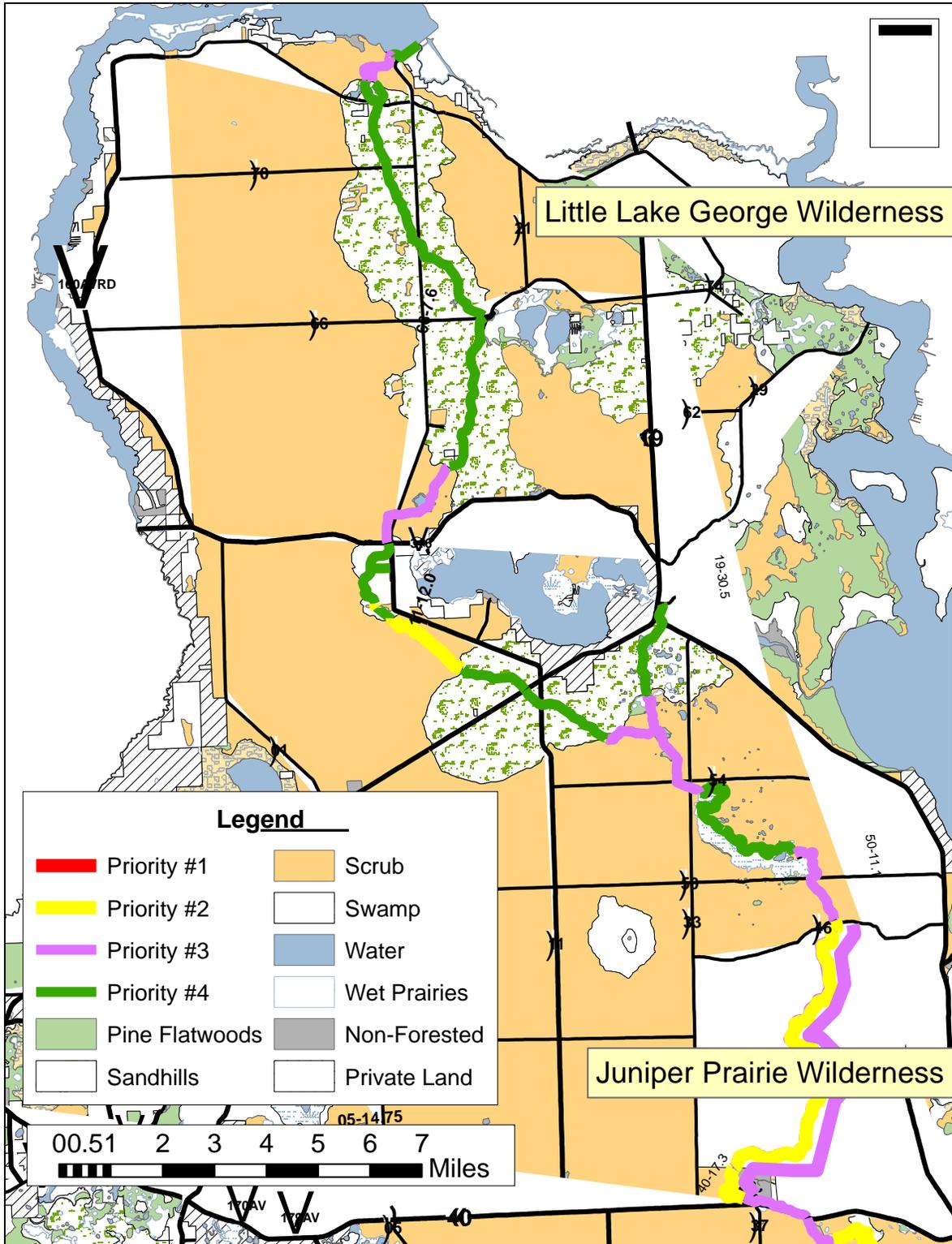
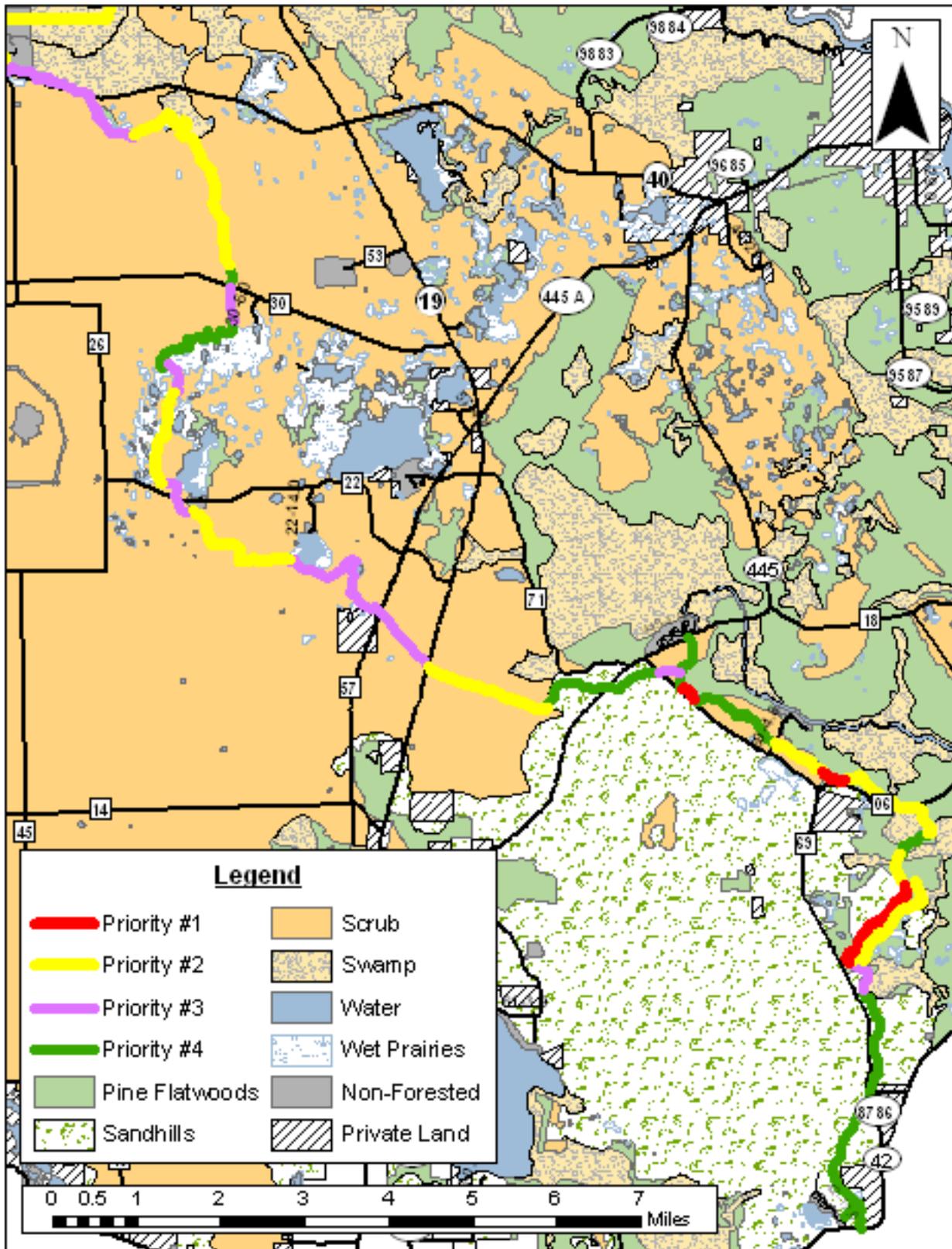


Figure 18



Maintenance Assessment north of SR 40

Maintenance Assessment south of SR 40



Conclusion

To reiterate what was stated previously, this maintenance assessment shows the *current* conditions of the FNST. There will be another two to three months of vegetation growth during Florida's wet season before the volunteer season begins which must be accounted for. That being said, this assessment is meant to be a guideline of where needs the most work along the FNST on the ONF. Hopefully, this will help make the upcoming volunteer season the most efficient and productive season yet. With this information and well coordinated efforts by the appropriate personnel, the Florida National Scenic Trail on the Ocala National Forest can be one of the more pleasant hikes in the state.

Works Cited

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