

SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

History

Weedon Island's rich cultural history dates back to the Middle Archaic Period, 5,000-3,000 BCE. The prehistoric culture and recent history are documented in "The Weedon Island Story."

Weedon Island Preserve was established originally as a State Preserve in 1974, and was the first purchase under the Environmentally Endangered Lands Act. The Florida Park Service opened the Preserve to the public in December 1980. Weedon Island Preserve State Lease #3985 was purchased through the State's Conservation and Recreational Lands Program (CARL) in 1984. In 1991, using funds from its Environmental Lands program, Pinellas County purchased an additional 47 ac. along Riviera Bay. Management of the State-owned parcels was designated to BOCC through State Lease #3985 in October 1993 and State Lease #3376 in September 1995 (Appendix 2).

PEF, formerly Florida Power Corporation, entered into four agreements with the BOCC (Appendix 3). For security of the Preserve, the 1994 license agreement required that Pinellas County build an entrance station that would be staffed by PEF. The agreement in 1999 granted the County management and protection of the natural and cultural resources on designated PEF property. An agreement in 2001 gave the County authority to regulate boating activities on PEF submerged lands. The 2002 agreement provided a boat lift for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PSCO) on PEF property.

In October 2001, the DEP Office of Greenways and Trails entered into an agreement, Sublease 43.6, (Appendix 2) with the BOCC for an additional 43.6 ac. In May 2010 this was transferred to be included in State Lease #3985 to simplify management of the leases.

The Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center (WIPCNHC) opened to the public in December 2002. The Center was built to educate visitors on the significance of the Preserve and about the importance of preserving Florida's important natural and cultural resources. The interactive exhibit gallery opened in October 2007.

Ownership

Weedon Island Preserve is owned by the FIITF (2165.5 ac. or 66%), PEF (341.2 ac. or 10%), and Pinellas County. Most of the land within the Preserve is in public ownership (Figure 3). The State-owned areas of the Preserve are managed by the County under lease agreements. The area in the Weedon Island State Lease #3376 agreement includes the submerged lands extending 400 feet from the Mean High Water Line. The PEF owned areas are managed by the County under lease agreements that restrict public access. A small portion of the property is owned by the County. Pinellas County continues to evaluate parcels for purchase as they become available.

Easements

A lease agreement with PEF and the DEP outlined access agreements and management responsibilities (Appendix 3). This agreement, titled the “Weedon Island Use Agreement and License among the Florida Department of Natural Resources, Pinellas County, Florida, and the Florida Power Corporation,” identifies each party’s access and management responsibility.

Adjacent Land Use

PEF operates a power plant and owns a considerable portion of land that is managed as Preserve. The adjacent land uses are predominantly classified as developed single-family residential as well as commercial (Figure 4). None of the adjacent land uses conflict with the planned use of the Preserve.

Policy Compliance

This plan serves as a fundamental statement of policy and direction for the management of Weedon Island Preserve. It identifies the objectives, criteria, and standards that guide each aspect of the management of the Preserve’s natural and cultural resources and sets forth specific management actions that will be implemented to meet management goals as defined in Table 1. Approval of this plan by Pinellas County and the State of Florida does not supersede any prevailing statutes, rules, regulations, and ordinances of appropriate local, state or federal agencies.

State

No legislative or executive directives constrain the use of this property other than the official lease agreements with the State of Florida (leases #3376, #3985; see Appendix 2). The lease agreements require, in part, that the properties be managed “... only for the conservation and protection of natural and historical resources and for resource-based public outdoor recreation which is compatible with the conservation and protection of these public lands.”

In addition to the lease requirements, the Preserve is subject to appropriate state and federal laws as well as the policies of the FIITF regarding state-owned lands. This plan meets the requirements of Section 253.034, F.S., and Chapter 18-2, Florida Administrative Code and is intended to be consistent with the State Lands Management Plan. In accordance with Section 25.032, F.S., this plan will be reviewed and updated in 2022. Should this plan require significant changes prior to 2022, the Weedon Island Advisory Group will be convened and asked to provide guidance and comments on proposed changes.

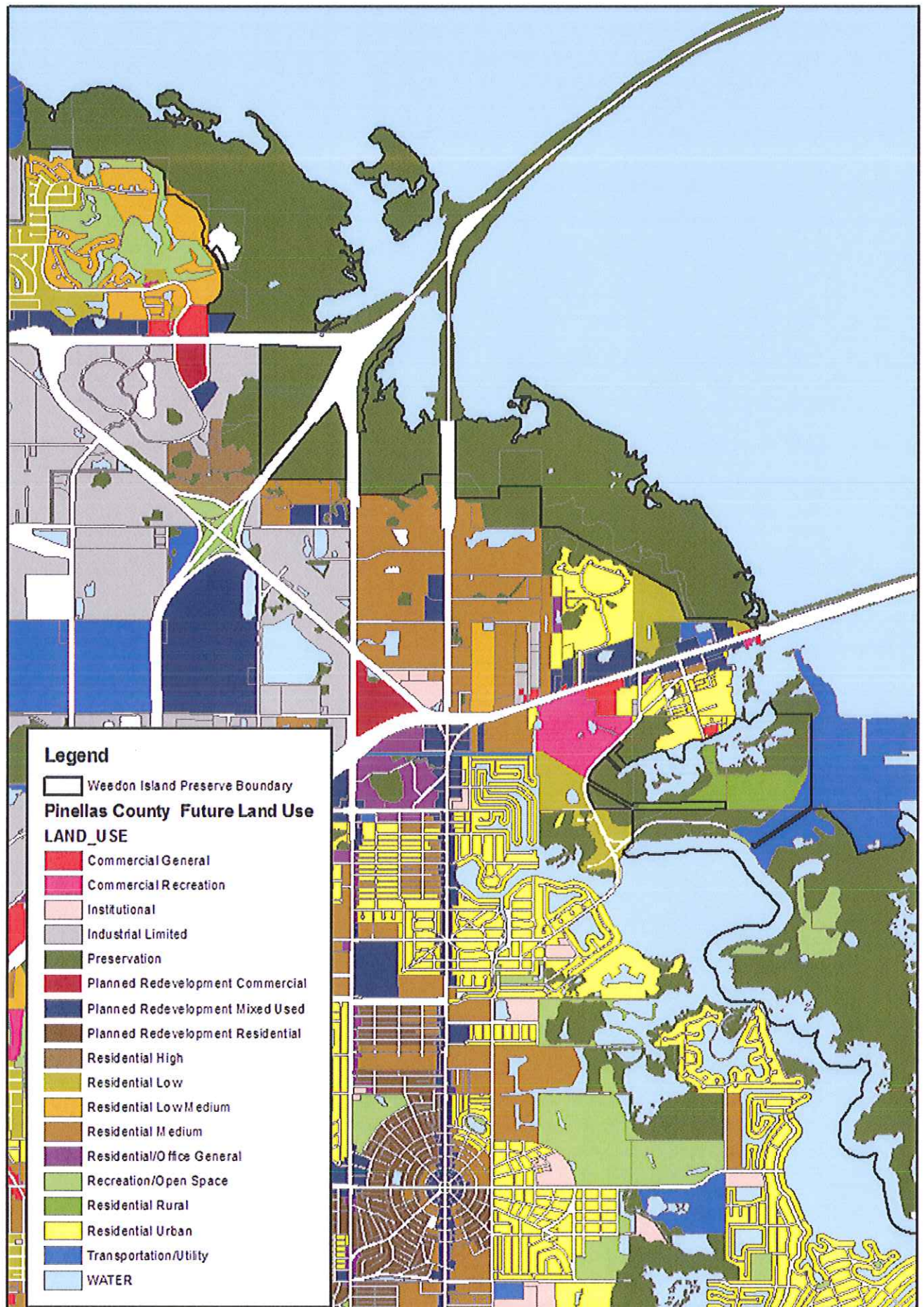


Figure 4. Adjacent Land Use Map

Table 1. Goals and Objectives for Weedon Island Preserve.	
A. Habitat Restoration and Improvement	Habitat restoration and improvement includes prescribed fire, mechanical vegetation reduction, exotic vegetation control and selective restoration of uplands throughout the Preserve.
Long-term Goal	Restore and improve habitats using natural resource management practices in the Preserve.
Short-term Goal	Maintain the current levels of service based on available staff and financial resources.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete prescribed burns in at least two units per year as part of regular fire regime (Table 3). • Mechanically reduce vegetation in recently burned units as needed to improve the natural communities in fire-suppressed areas. • Treat exotic vegetation annually with herbicides as needed in recently burned units. • Remove 9.8 ac of exotic vegetation as part of the Feather Sound Project to begin in 2012. • Restore 8.9 ac of saltern as part of the Feather Sound Project to begin in 2012. • Hire contractor by 2016 to identify mosquito ditches to be filled as part of Weedon Island South restoration of saltern and salt marsh communities.
B. Hydrologic Preservation and Restoration	The legacy mosquito ditches resulted in the loss of salt marsh and saltern communities by disrupting natural flow. Further, spoil ridges act as conduits for the encroachment of exotic species. Filling-in selected mosquito ditches will help restore the hydrology of the Preserve.
Long-term Goal	Improve hydrology in the Preserve to reduce nutrient loading to Tampa Bay, restore saltern and salt marsh communities, and reduce the exotic vegetation.
Short-term Goal	Complete Feather Sound and Weedon Island South restoration projects.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire contractor by 2012 to selectively fill 0.5 ac mosquito ditches in Feather Sound to restore hydrology and reduce nutrient loading to Tampa Bay. • Hire contractor by 2018 to selectively fill mosquito ditches in the southern part of the Preserve to restore hydrology and reduce nutrient loading to Tampa Bay.
C. Exotic and Invasive Species Management and Control	Exotic and invasive species negatively impact the natural resources of the Preserve and are controlled by removal and annual maintenance.
Long-term Goal	Reduce the extent and abundance of exotic invasives in the Preserve.
Short-term Goal	Use herbicide to treat exotic vegetation on annual maintenance schedule.

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Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct annual exotic vegetation maintenance treatment of burn units 1E, 1F, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 3 and 7 (57 ac.). • Introduce annual exotic vegetation treatment following prescribed fire in recently burned units not already under maintenance. • Introduce annual exotic vegetation treatment to restored areas following completion of Feather Sound project in 2014. • Introduce annual exotic vegetation treatment to restored areas following completion of Weedon Island South project in 2018. • Continue removing exotic and nuisance animals from the Preserve as detected.
D. Imperiled Species Habitat Maintenance, Enhancement, Restoration, or Population Restoration	In August 2010, staff and volunteers planted over 300 Florida golden-asters in the Preserve in collaboration with Bok-Tower Gardens. Holistic management of the Preserve's natural communities provides habitat for other imperiled species.
Long-term Goal	Support imperiled species that utilize the Preserve and create a self-sustaining population of Florida golden-asters in the Preserve.
Short-term Goal	Monitor imperiled species as encountered in the Preserve. Encourage the success of introduced plants and the recruitment of new plants by providing open areas; document status of the population in collaboration with staff of Bok-Tower Gardens and volunteers.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor imperiled species and their habitat as encountered in the Preserve. • Continue to support research and monitoring projects through partnering with agencies and organizations, including FWC, to support informed resource management actions. • Conduct a prescribed fire in Unit 3 (10 ac) in 2012. • Document the fate and traits of introduced Florida golden-asters in Unit 3 in November 2012 and November 2013. • Document recruitment of plants in Unit 3 in November 2012 and November 2013.
E. Cultural and Historical Resources	The Preserve supports important cultural resources have been identified through numerous surveys.
Long-term Goal	Maintain strong partnerships with AWIARE and other agencies and organizations to provide sound stewardship of cultural resources.
Short-term Goal	Continue to identify and protect archaeological sites at the Preserve.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with AWIARE, map locations of mound sites and other significant features and integrate this information into existing archaeological databases.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update annually the listed Florida Master Site Files. • Complete preservation and display of the dugout canoe at WIPCNHC by 2015.
F. Public Access and Recreational Opportunities	The Preserve offers a range of uses enjoyed by visitors, including hiking, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, cycling, and observing nature.
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Long-term Goal	Provide for resource-based public outdoor recreation which is compatible with the conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources.
Short-term Goal	Maintain the current levels of service based on available staff and financial resources.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide 363 days of public access from 7:00 a.m. to the posted closing time. • Patrol the Preserve a minimum of two times per day in support of the safety of visitors. • Conduct routine inspections of boardwalks, hiking trails, observation tower, and fishing pier twice a month. • Conduct inspections of the South Paddling Trail twice a year. • Continue to offer canoe and kayak rentals through a contracted vendor.
G. Capital Facilities and Infrastructure: WIPCNHC	The Preserve offers educational opportunities to the public through programs at Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center.
Long-term Goal	Provide for public understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural resources through exhibits, educational programs, and interpretive hikes.
Short-term Goal	Maintain or enhance existing levels of service at WIPCNHC based on available staff and financial resources.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to WIPCNHC facilities at the current level of service of 3 days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Increase access to WIPCNHC to include additional days of the week if resources can be secured. • Maintain annually and as needed the interactive exhibit gallery "Weedon Island Preserve: Connecting People and Place." • Provide monthly public programs related to ecology, sustainability, history, art, archaeology, Native American culture, and other relevant topics. • Collaborate with FOWI, AWIARE, FYCCN, and other partners to offer additional educational programs and events.

Also in accordance with Chapter 259.036, F.S. a land management review team selected by DEP evaluated the 2002 Management Plan and management of the Preserve in 2006 and in 2010. The team evaluated the extent to which current management actions are sufficient, whether the land is being managed for the purpose for which it was acquired, and whether actual management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan. The evaluations and land managers responses are included in Appendix 4.

All permanent water bodies within the Preserve have been designated as Outstanding Florida Waters (OFW). Administered by the DEP, this program was created by Section 403.061, F.S. to address water bodies that are “worthy of special protection because of their natural attributes.”

The submerged portions of the Island Preserve are designated as an aquatic Preserve under the provision of the Florida Aquatic Preserve Act of 1975 (Section 258.35, F.S.). Aquatic Preserve management programs emphasize the protection of existing natural resources as well as the promotion of compatible outdoor recreational uses such as boating, fishing, skin diving, and nature appreciation.

The Preserve encompasses the Weedon Island Site, a complex of mounds and is a registered historic place on the National Registry of Historic Places. Weedon Island Preserve has not been designated an Area of Critical State Concern, and currently is not under study for such designation.

County

Ordinance 10-44

Pinellas County Ordinance 10-44 provides rules and regulations that control the public’s use of Pinellas County Parks, Preserves and Management Areas (Appendix 5). It includes detailed information concerning: the Parks and Conservation Resources Advisory Board; vehicles and traffic control; protection of property, facilities, flora and fauna; permits; enforcement and penalties; and the identification of county-owned environmental lands subject to Charter restrictions. This ordinance is enforced by PCR and the PCSO.

Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan

The implementation of this Plan will assist with fulfilling the goals, objectives and policies of the *Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan*. The elements targeted in the *Comprehensive Plan* are the Natural Resource Conservation and Management Element, Recreation Open Space and Culture Element, Coastal Management Element, Capital Improvement Element, and the Future Land Use and Quality Communities Element (Appendix 6).

Goal 3 of the Natural Resource Conservation and Management Element states, “Pinellas County’s environmental lands and resource-based parks are the hallmark of this County’s environmental commitment, and these lands are to be protected and managed in perpetuity for their contribution to the biodiversity and biological sustainability of the region, as a means of providing respite from urban life and because they instill future generations with a sense of appreciation for Florida’s natural heritage.” This element further affirms the County’s

commitment to providing educational and recreational opportunities that enhance appreciation for, and encourage the stewardship of, natural systems and their dependent living resources.

The goals, objectives and policies of the Recreation, Open Space, and Culture Element focus on the need to conserve, protect, and appropriately manage natural and cultural resources and continue the acquisition of open space and environmentally sensitive areas. Goal 5 is “to promote the arts, culture, and historic and archaeological resources within Pinellas County, and their preservation, through public and private investment and by raising awareness of existing facilities and programs.” The objectives and policies further recognize the need to identify, inventory and provide protection of archaeological sites in the County.

Protection and management of coastal and marine resources, including boater education, seagrass protection, and effective marine speed zones are among the goals, objectives and policies of the Coastal Management Element.

The Capital Improvements Element states, “Pinellas County shall undertake actions necessary to provide adequate, needed public facilities in a manner which protects investments in existing facilities, maximizes the use of existing facilities and promotes orderly growth.” This includes projects identified to protect the natural and cultural resources in the County.

Goal 1 of the Future Land Use and Quality Communities Element states, “The pattern of the land use in Pinellas County shall provide a variety of urban environments to meet the needs of a diverse population and the local economy, conserve and limit demands on natural and economic resources to ensure sustainable built and natural environments, be in the overall public interest, and effectively serve the community and environmental needs of the population.” Goal 3 of this Element states “Pinellas County shall promote a balanced relationship between the natural environment and development.”

Board of County Commissioners Strategic Plan and Strategic Business Plan 2007-2012

The BOCC Strategic Plan and Strategic Business Plans 2007-2012 was adopted in February 2006. This document provides BOCC direction on six strategic focus areas (SFA). The SFA that pertains to the Preserve is the “Environment, Open Space, Recreation, and Culture” (Appendix 7). This document indicates unequivocally that County residents favor the protection of natural and cultural resources. It also specifies that County government should provide passive access to natural areas, but avoid inappropriate encroachments into these areas.

Pinellas County Charter Amendment

Pinellas County’s designated environmental lands, such County-owned property within Weedon Island Preserve, are protected under Pinellas County Charter, Article II, Section 2.06. Under this Charter the County may not remove the environmental lands designation or sell, convey, or transfer any fee simple interest, lease or license for a period longer than ten years unless authorized by a majority vote of the electorate of Pinellas County in a referendum held at a general or special election called by the BOCC.

Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan (September 2005)
Pinellas County's Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan, was developed by the firm of Glatting-Jackson (Appendix 8). Under contract with Pinellas County, Glatting-Jackson conducted public surveys and worked closely with County staff to develop this master plan. One of the major initiatives was to increase protection for regional parks and preserves. It states that the County needs to protect these "priceless resources for future generations." Management plans for each site are needed to guide their development and management. Pinellas County has "steadfastly protected these sites from overuse and over-development, and they represent an asset that residents will cherish for generations to come."

Arthropod Management Plan

Mosquito control throughout the County is the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Infrastructure's Mosquito Control and Vegetation Management program. The Weedon Island Preserve Arthropod Management Plan is included in Appendix 9.

Private

PEF owns approximately 341 acres within the Preserve. The County and PEF have four license agreements for the privilege of access, management, and security of said parcels (Appendix 3). In the 1994 agreement, PEF provided staff for the entry station constructed and maintained by the County for security of the Preserve. The 1999 agreement granted the county access to PEF property for the protection and management of natural and cultural resources. In 2001, PEF granted the County access for the sole purpose of installing and maintaining pilings and signs regulating boating activities on PEF property. Under the terms of the 2002 agreement, the County installed a boat lift at the PEF intake channel and dock to provide space for a PCSO boat.

Non-Recreational Infrastructure

Non-recreational infrastructure within the Preserve is primarily located in the maintenance area (Figure 5). Structures include a research station, three bay-workshop (which includes two offices and a restroom) and a pole barn for storage of boats and other equipment. The guard station at the entrance of the Preserve is currently monitored from dusk to dawn by PEF staff. Maintenance of the guard station is provided by PCR staff.

Staffing

From January 1997 through September 2010, the Preserve was managed by the Department of Environmental Management's Environmental Lands Division (ELD). Pinellas County budget reductions from 2008 through 2010 resulted in a reduction of ELD staff. On October 1, 2010 management responsibilities were transferred to the Parks and Conservation Resources Department (PCR) and ELD staff was incorporated within this newly-formed department. This resulted in a number of staffing changes. With the exception of those assigned to WIPCNHC,

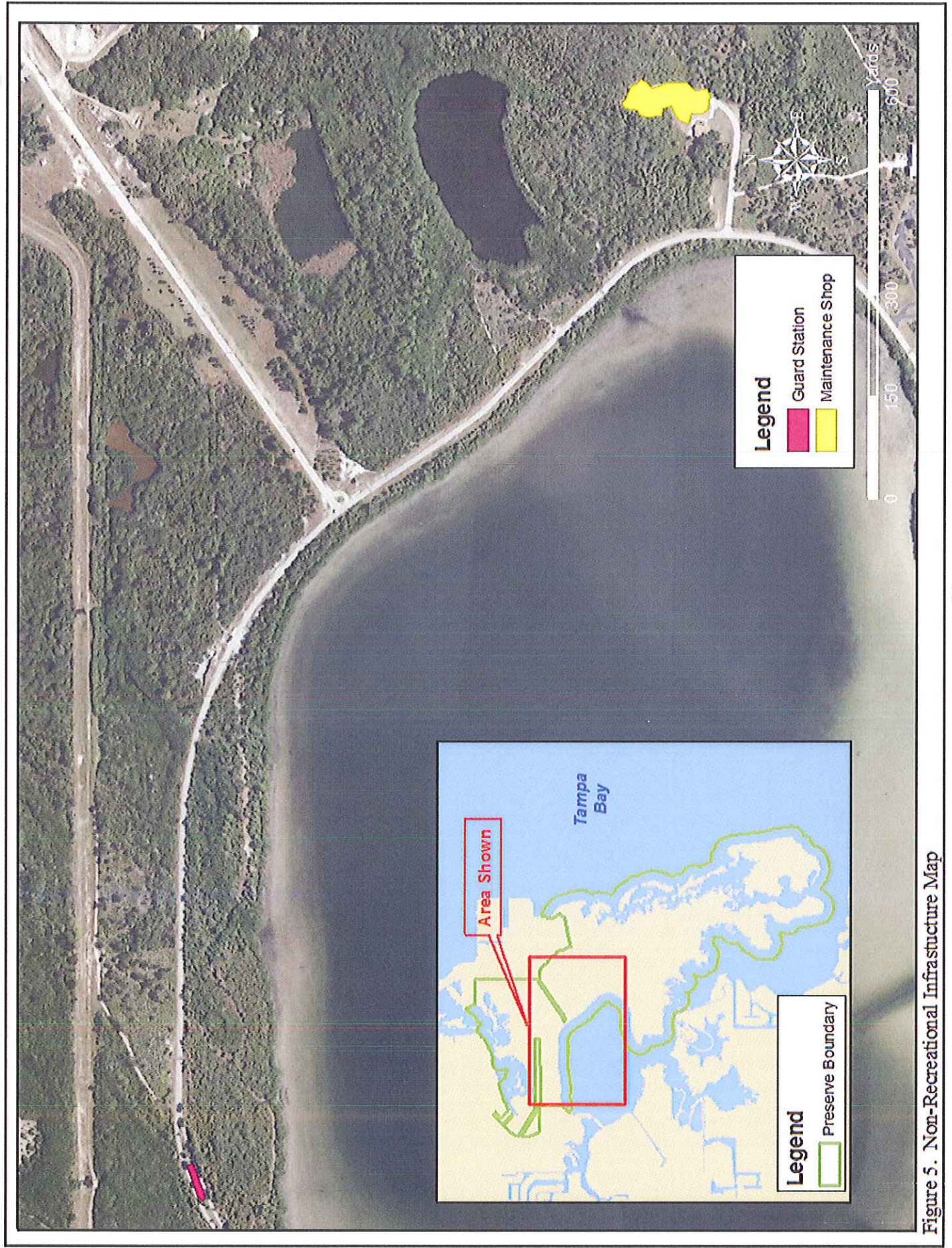


Figure 5. Non-Recreational Infrastructure Map

staff no longer has offices located at the Preserve. Staff servicing the Preserve rotates among the Preserve and all other parks and management areas located in the south part of the County.

The Natural and Historical Resource Management program of PCR is responsible for resource management of the Preserve. Staff time for ecological monitoring, species inventories, prescribed fire, GIS support and coordination with outside researchers is approximately 60 hours per month. Exotic and nuisance vegetation maintenance work accounts for approximately 16 hours per month of staff time.

The Parks and Environmental Lands, South District program is responsible for the public use components of the Preserve. Staff responsibilities include maintenance, safety and security of the trails, boardwalks, and facilities. This includes regular trash removal and shelter cleaning. The South District staff currently spends approximately 84 hours per week working in the Preserve.

Mowing and fire break maintenance is completed by staff of the Countywide Horticulture Operations program. Crews mow approximately every 21 days during peak growing season. Staff currently spends approximately 15 hours per month on mowing and fire break maintenance.

The Extension Services staff supports various educational programs at WIPCNHC, including a permanent exhibit, nature walks, and education activities with school groups, public workshops, and environmental presentations. A classroom laboratory provides additional opportunities to groups. The Center is staffed with one fulltime and two part-time employees. This is discussed in detail in Section 5.

Volunteer Support Services of PCR

A large team of volunteers assists staff with a wide variety of Preserve tasks. At WIPCNHC, volunteers are visitors' first contact. Volunteers answer questions, perform general office work, lead guided hikes, and provide interpretation and general support. Trail maintenance, trash removal, and landscaping are some of the tasks volunteers complete in support of land management and general preserve work. Monitoring projects supported by volunteers include butterfly and bird counts, floristic surveys and archaeological surveys and mapping. Volunteers have an important role in supporting the management of the Preserve now, and in the future, due to financial limitations. Volunteers have provided 39,213 hrs of support to the Preserve since 2004 (Table 2).

Table 2. Volunteer hrs. 2003 – 2011. Numbers obtained from the annual report covering July 1st – June 30th of indicated year.

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
3673	3522	4950	5386	5665	5163	4999	5855

PCR works to increase our volunteer activity and support to WIPCNHC through increased numbers and volunteer hours. Staff is committed to growing the volunteers' knowledge and expertise through training and seminars. Volunteers are encouraged to attend various educational opportunities presented at the Preserve. PCR also works closely with area universities to attract interns. Volunteer groups are encouraged for special events and clean ups, especially those who have a sustained interest in the environment.

Additionally, a Lead Volunteer program is used to designate volunteers able to mentor volunteers under their area of expertise. The Lead Volunteers must be certified to offer training to other volunteers on any equipment needed for a particular task.

Collaboration

Friends of Weedon Island

The Friends of Weedon Island, Inc. (FOWI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, supports efforts to advance environmental preservation and education at the Preserve (Appendix 10). Their mission is to promote the public's understanding of maintaining the Weedon Island Preserve as an important ecological and cultural resource. Members are volunteers who provide ongoing support by raising funds, participating in volunteer efforts, providing scholarships for summer camps, supporting special projects, and hosting and publicizing events. More information can be obtained at <http://www.fowi.org>.

Alliance for Weedon Island Archaeological Research and Education

The Alliance for Weedon Island Archaeological Research and Education (AWIARE) entered into a formal agreement (Appendix 11) with County in July 2010 for the support of archaeological and interdisciplinary scientific research on Weedon Island Preserve and related public education programs. AWIARE, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization has as its goals and purposes to provide opportunities for public involvement in archaeological and environmental research projects, and to promote and facilitate long-term archaeological research at the Weedon Island Preserve and the adjacent Gulf Coast region.

On May 10, 2011, AWIARE signed a license agreement (Appendix 11) with the County for the establishment and use of an archaeological field station and housing space, and other improvements to the former residence located at 1500 Weedon Drive N.E., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. This research field station will provide a base for AWIARE's projects and operations.

Site Use Agreements

Site use permits are required for scientific research and other activities that require access to non-public trails in the Preserve. Extensive partnerships have been established with researchers from other agencies and institutions to complete work at the Preserve. Research partners bring expertise and resources that allow for detailed investigations beyond the scope of local government. Authorized research projects conducted to date have investigated a wide range of

topics (Appendix 12). Opportunities exist for additional research at the Preserve, and basic and applied studies will be encouraged through partnering with scientists from external agencies and institutions.