

## **SECTION 4. PUBLIC RECREATION**

Brooker Creek Preserve is the largest remaining tract of wild land in Pinellas County and contains many species not found anywhere else in the County. As such, these wild lands are primarily managed for the conservation, protection and enhancement of the natural resources. Resource-based recreation, a secondary goal of the Preserve, provides opportunities for residents to experience, understand, and enjoy natural Florida. There are currently two hiking trails, two horseback riding trails, and a primitive campsite within Brooker Creek Preserve (Figure 27). Current uses and limiting access points are compatible with the protection, security, and management of the natural resources. Proposed uses (discussed later in this section) will be further evaluated to ensure they meet these criteria. Ordinance 08-29 (Appendix 5) provides rules and regulations controlling the public's use of County Preserves and Management Areas.

Individual trail brochures, fliers and/or signs contain information, including rules, for each of the recreational areas. Due to wildfire danger, smoking is limited to areas around the BCPEEC.

To protect the natural resources and for visitor safety, general rules for the Preserve prohibit the following:

- dogs and other pets
- alcoholic beverages
- glass containers
- hunting
- weapons
- firearms
- fireworks
- release of any wildlife or domesticated animals
- fishing (except in future designated areas)

Additionally, the following are prohibited on the trails:

- bicycles
- motorcycles
- all-terrain vehicles

For safety, hiking trails have been established separately from horseback riding trails. Hiking trails may cross horse trails, but none are used for both purposes. Hikers must always yield to horse riders when meeting at a cross trail.

To minimize impacts to the Preserve, many of the trails also function as firebreaks. Most of the trails were established using old hunting, cattle, and jeep trails. Some were also created using plowlines dating back as far as the 1950's that were created to control past wildfires. New trails that do not follow any of these old scars will be installed such that they minimize the impacts to natural resources. This would include avoidance of wetlands, gopher tortoise burrows, removal of large native trees and areas containing

listed flora. Additionally, equipment and methods would be selected to cause the least amount of damage to soils and surrounding vegetation.

All trails are subject to closure due to high water levels, high fire danger, wildfires, prescribed burns, downed trees, and routine and emergency maintenance. The current status of the hiking trails can be found on the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management's web site <http://www.pinellascounty.org/Environment/> and at the BCPEEC visitor's desk. Signs at the two trail entrances of the "Wildlands Hiking Trails" specify which loop trails are currently open.

The following sections outline and discuss the existing, improvements to existing, and potential future recreational facilities within the Preserve.

## **Existing Recreation Facilities**

### *Hiking Trails*

#### The Friends Trail (Figure 28)

- Hiking trail
- Entrance located at the south end of Lora Lane
- Roadside parking at entrance
- 1.4 miles of trails
- Walking distance - 1.75 miles
- Dirt trails with one small foot bridge crossing a ditch
- Observation deck
- Interpretive stations
- Bike rack at entrance
- No restroom facilities
- Opened 1999
- Located partially on P2000/FCT funded tract
- Renamed from "The Nature Trail" to "The Friends Trail" in 2001

#### Wildlands Hiking Trails (Figure 29)

- Hiking trails
- Entrance located south of the Environmental Education Center, 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, Florida 34688
- Paved parking
- Four loop trails (0.7, 1.5, 2.8, and 4.0 miles)
- Dirt trails with 0.2 miles of boardwalks and bridges
- Bird blind
- Interpretive signage on the 0.7 mile trail
- Picnic shelter near parking area (6 tables and trash cans)
- Bike rack near parking area
- Restrooms, water fountains, and trash cans located at the Education Center
- Opened September 2006

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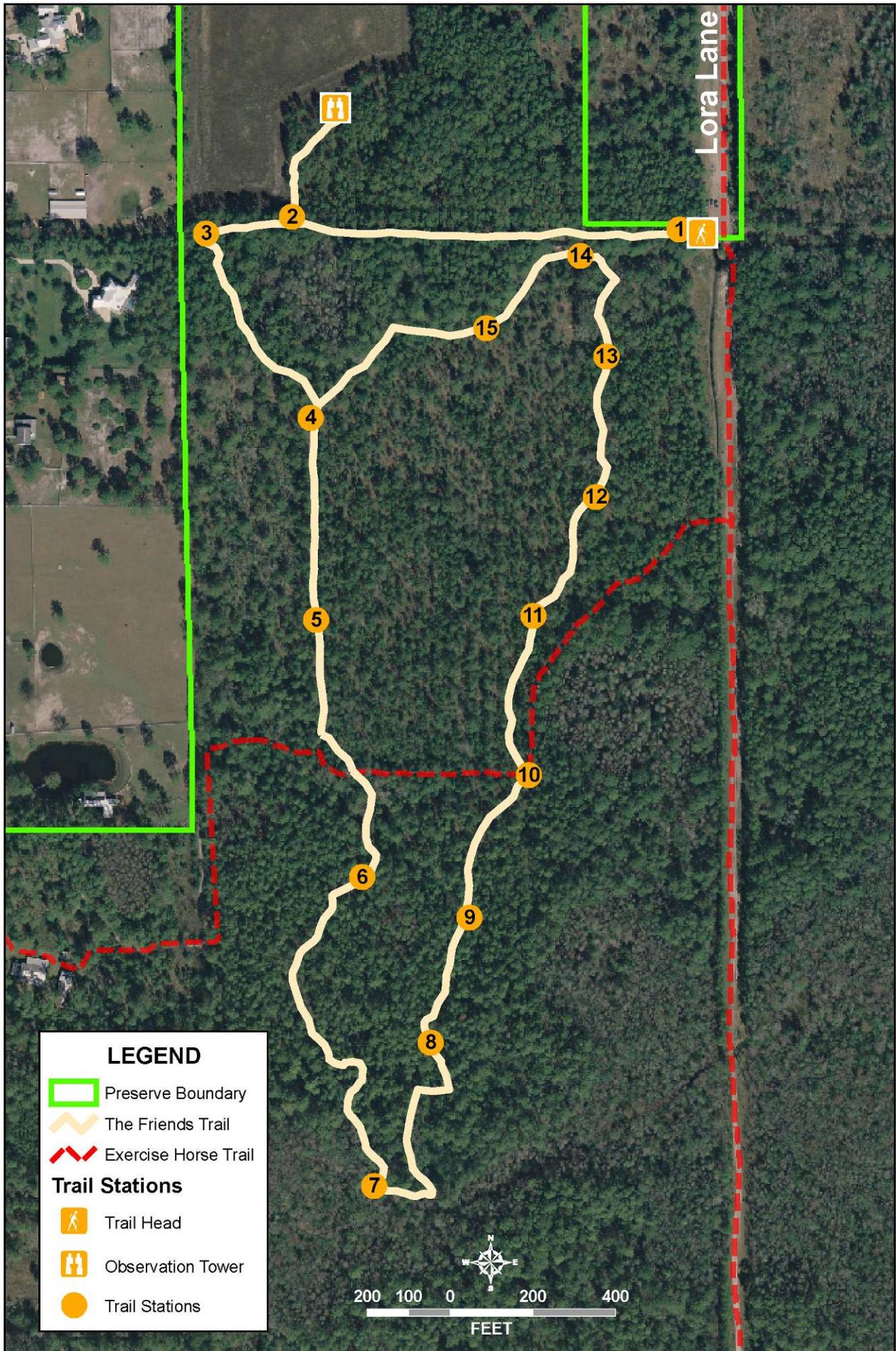


Figure 28. Brooker Creek Preserve - The Friends Trail

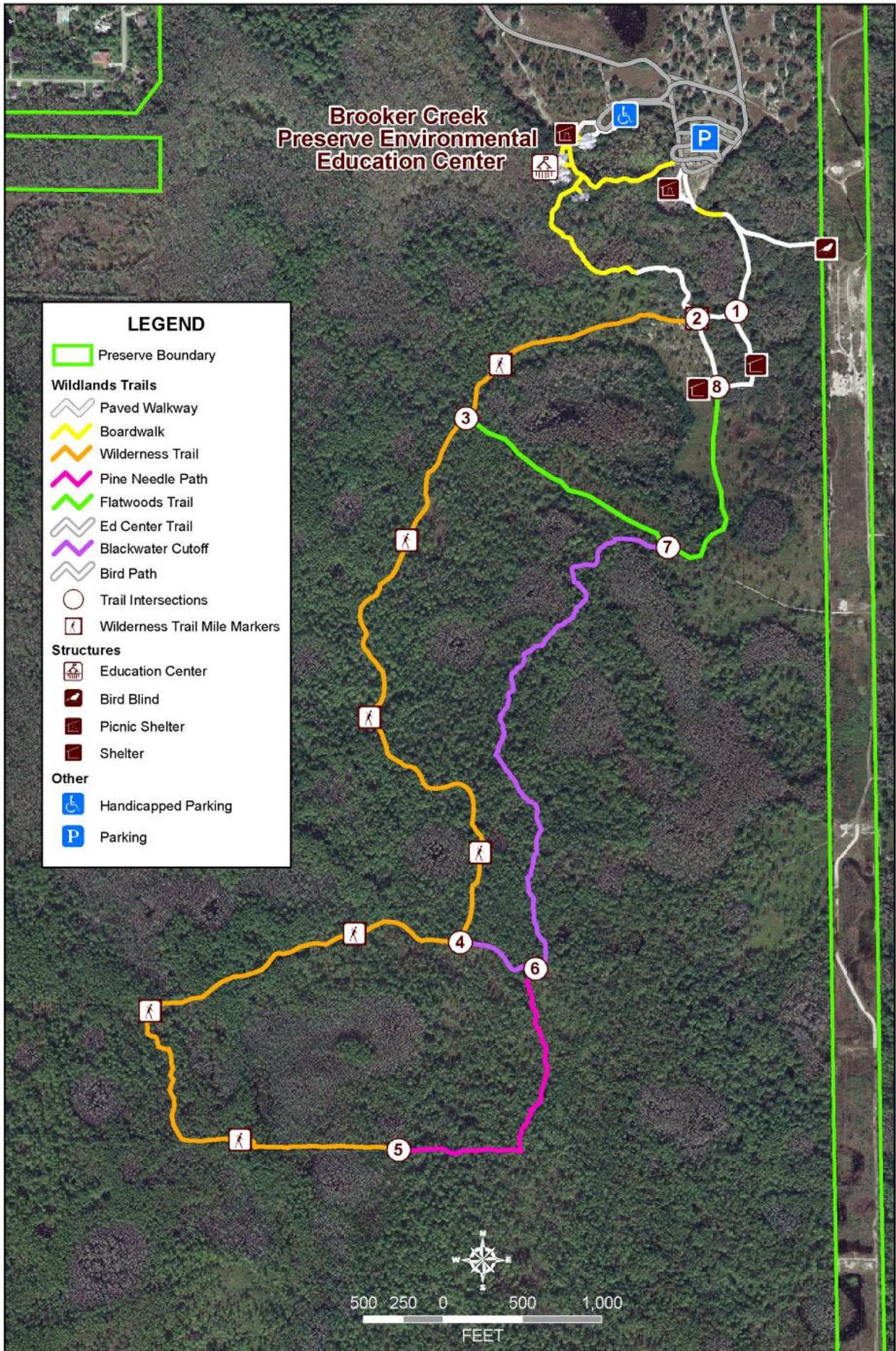


Figure 29. Brooker Creek Preserve - Wildlands Hiking Trails

## *Horseback Riding Trails*

### Scenic Horse Trail (Figure 30)

The Equestrian Partners with Brooker Creek Preserve was formed in 2007. This group is made up of local residents who have expressed support for the Preserve, especially its horseback riding trails.

- Horseback riding trails
- Entrance located on the north side of Old Keystone Road
- Mowed grass horse trailer parking
- 5.2 miles of trails
- Various riding length loops
- Dirt trails
- No restroom facilities
- Opened March 1996

### Exercise Horse Trail (Figure 31)

- Horseback riding trails
- Entrance located at the south end of Lora Lane
- Ride in only
- 4 miles of trails
- Dirt trails
- No restroom facilities
- Opened 1998

### *Four Lakes Hammock Primitive Group Camp Site* (Figure 32)

- For use by recognized service-oriented non-profit organizations
- Maximum capacity = 30
- Campers must complete a service project for the Division
- Entrance is northeast of Trinity Road and East Lake Road intersection
- Grass parking area
- Campfire ring (1) (subject to closure depending on wildfire danger)
- Picnic tables (2)
- Animal-proof trash cans
- Portable toilet (1)
- No running water
- 1 mile of dirt hiking trails (1.3 miles walking distance)
- Opened October 2005

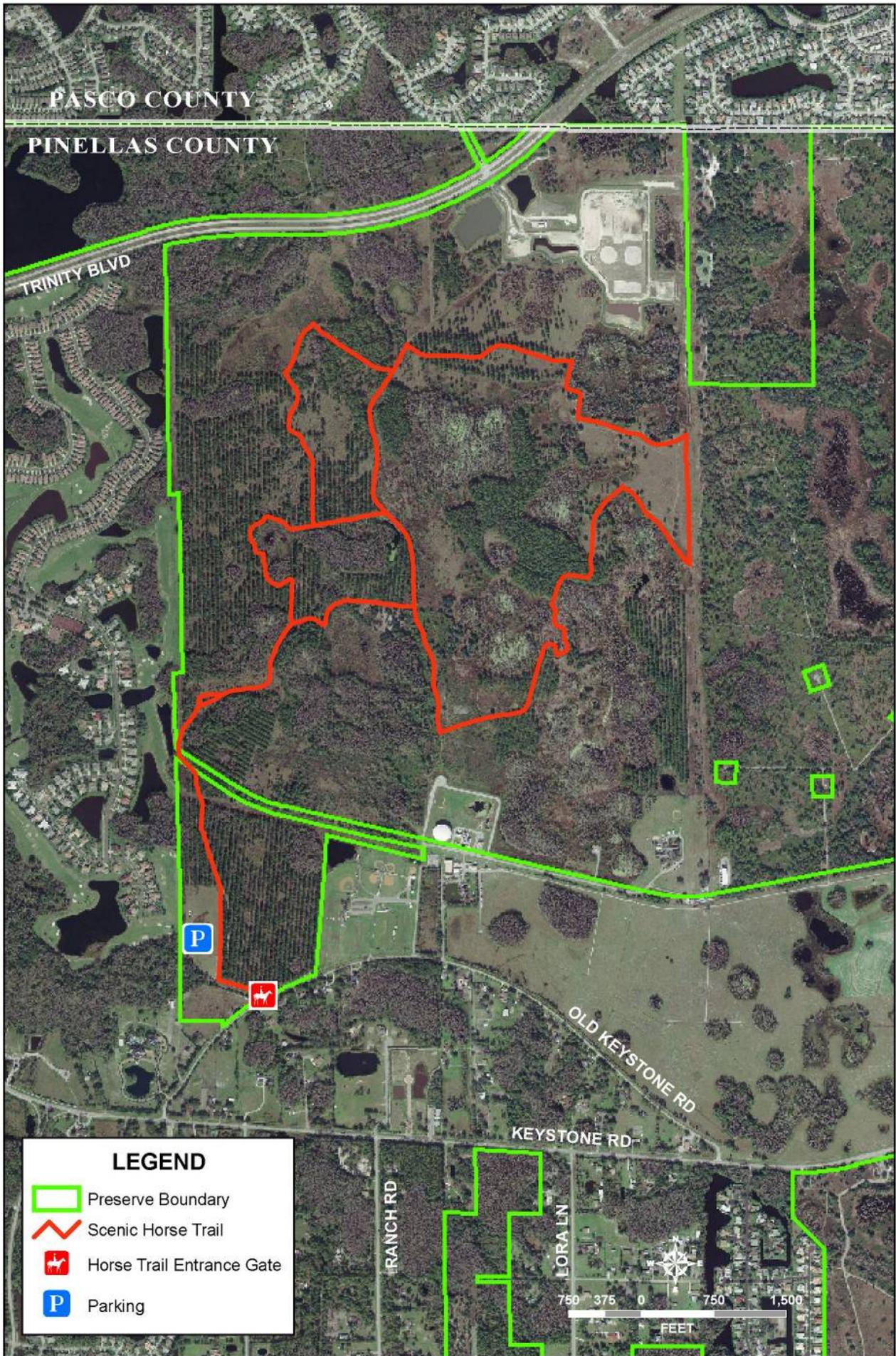


Figure 30. Brooker Creek Preserve - Scenic Horse Trail

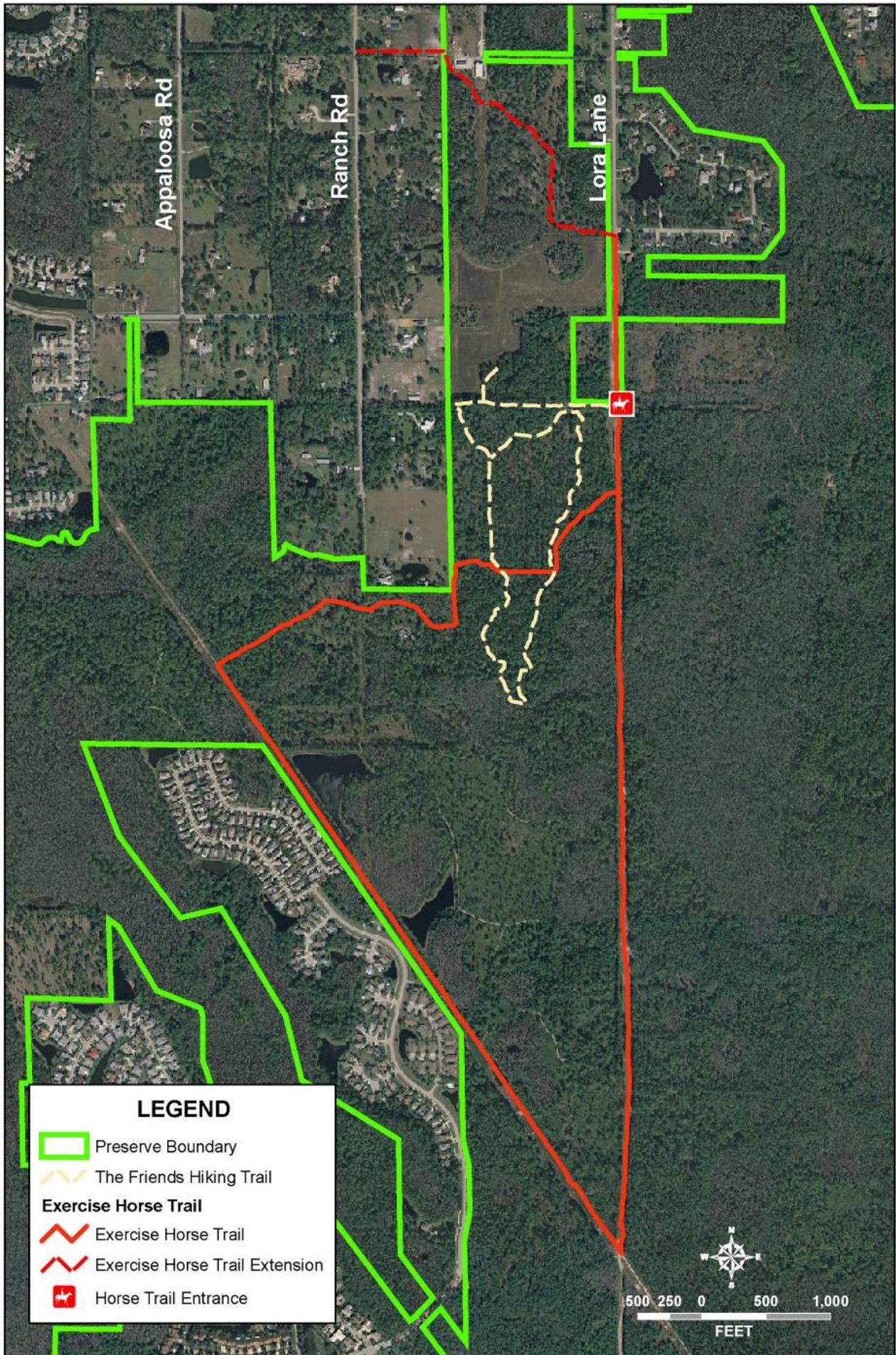


Figure 31. Brooker Creek Preserve - Exercise Horse Trail



Figure 32. Brooker Creek Preserve - Four Lakes Hammock Area

## **Potential Improvements to Existing Recreation Facilities**

### *Hiking Trails*

#### The Friends Trail

Aside from normal maintenance and repairs, a sign will be placed at the entrance to recognize the Florida Communities Trust Program for the land acquisition funds.

#### Wildlands Hiking Trails

This trail system was primarily built using old jeep trails and wildfire plowlines. Several long stretches along the Wilderness Trail and the southern extent of Pine Needle Path are up to two feet below natural grade (Figure 33). As such these areas of trail hold excessive water during the rainy season and when ground water levels are high. A combination of raising these areas up to grade and shifting the trail where possible will be conducted to alleviate excessive flooding within the trail. Care will be taken to obtain clean fill to prevent introduction of a new seed source of exotic vegetation. Even with this regrading effort the trails will never be completely dry throughout the year, due to the Preserve's extensive wetlands and hydric flatwoods and hammocks. Therefore, at times, it will still be necessary to close all or parts of the two southern loop trails for safety and to prevent harmful environmental impacts.

Boardwalks installed in limited locations will be investigated. One concern with the installation of boardwalks along the two southern loop trails is the large expansive wetlands in this area of the Preserve. These wet natural communities limit the installation of additional firebreaks and access roads in the area. Boardwalks would limit the entry of emergency vehicles in the event of wildfires or other emergency situations on the hiking trail. The high cost of boardwalk installation, mitigation, maintenance and replacement are other issues that will be considered.

The trail entrance near the parking lot and picnic pavilion is being evaluated for changes to the trail surface material. Currently, a dirt path runs from the paved parking area to the picnic pavilion and then to the bridge. Another dirt trail runs directly from the parking area to the bridge (Figure 34). The area is being examined to determine if it is feasible to make it accessible per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Different materials and costs will be evaluated and the general slopes of the land will be measured to determine if these meet the ADA requirements.

In December 2006 interpretive signs were designed for the areas within the BCPEEC complex and along the Ed Center Trail. Funding was available in FY07 for fabrication and installation of only a portion of these signs. Future allocated funding will allow the completion of the sign fabrication and installation along the Ed Center Trail.

## *Horseback Riding Trails*

### Scenic Horse Trail

This trail has been altered over the years since its opening in 1996 (Figure 35). Portions of the trail were closed after dry impaired wetlands became rehydrated. This improvement to the wetlands' hydrology caused some areas along the trail to become impassable and in other areas ecological damage began to occur in the newly hydrated wetlands. The northeastern sections of the trail were also permanently closed as the area was cleared for the new water blending facility. When this area was closed, parts of the trail were rerouted. The overall trail will be reevaluated to determine if there are any other areas with undue ecological impacts. Potential expansion will be explored to return the trail closer to its original distance. The trail will also be re-evaluated if any Utilities projects are required in the proposed FLUM PWR-2 Overlay (see page 1-20).

### Exercise Horse Trail

This trail will be revisited to look for areas of possible expansion. The firebreaks within the perimeter of the existing loop trail will be investigated for alterations and potential use as riding trails. Environmental impacts, safety concerns and maintenance needs will be analyzed to help determine if any trail expansion is feasible.

### *Four Lakes Hammock Primitive Group Camp Site*

No additions or alterations are expected for the camp area. Additional recreational facilities in this general area of the Preserve are discussed in the Future Recreation section.

## **Potential Future Recreation Facilities**

### *Hiking Trail in Oldsmar Area*

At the request of the City of Oldsmar, a loop hiking trail will be considered for the southern area of the Preserve (Figure 36). It would be a dirt path located along existing access roads and firebreaks. As with all Preserve trails, this trail will be closed at various times of the year due to high water levels, high wildfire danger, or prescribed burns. Security concerns and environmental impacts will be evaluated as part of the process for determining whether a trail should open in this area. Trail signs, a bike rack, and trail brochures will all be required if the decision is made to open this trail.

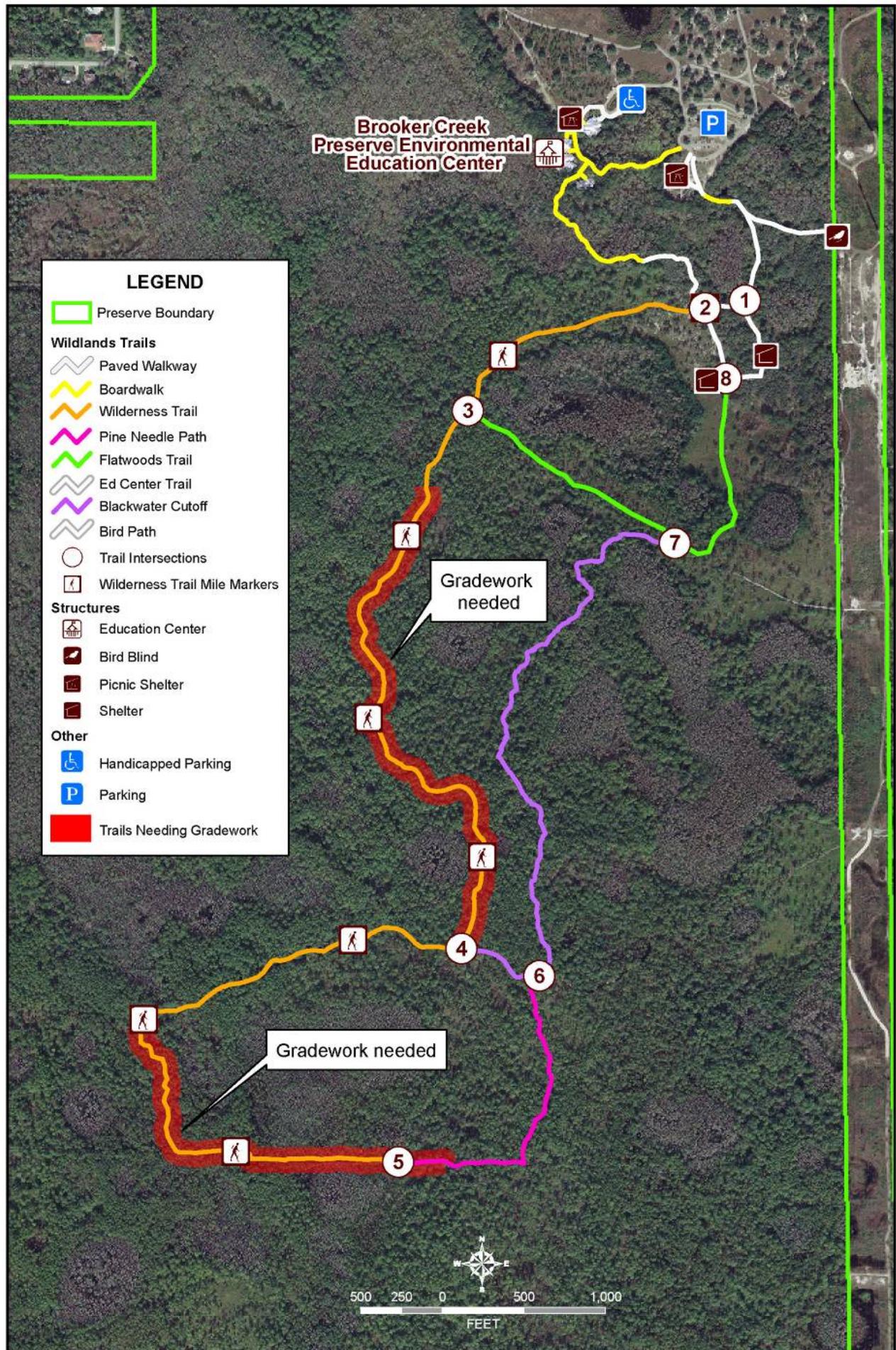


Figure 33. Brooker Creek Preserve - Wildlands Hiking Trails Gradework

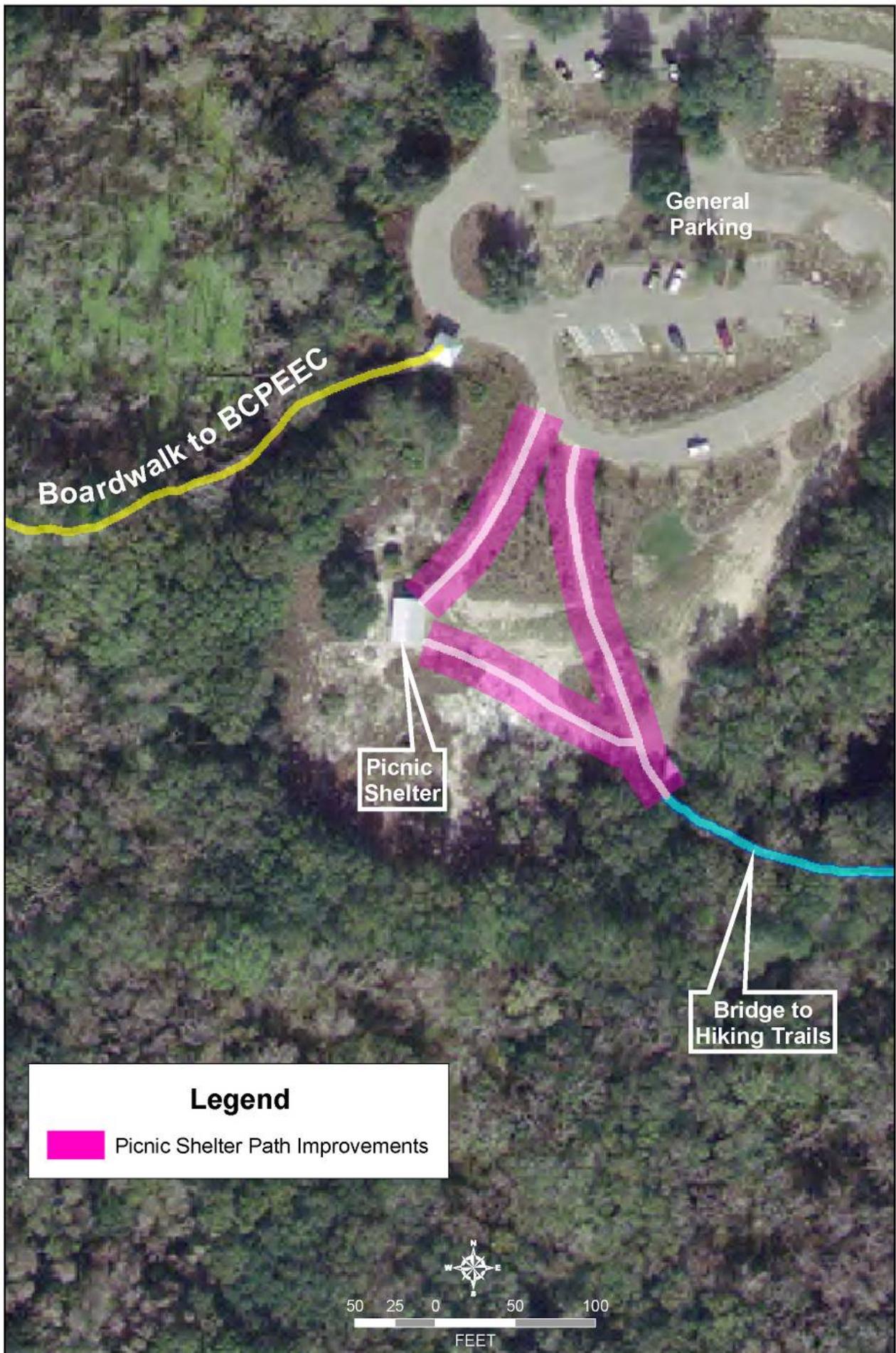


Figure 34. Brooker Creek Preserve - Wildlands Hiking Trails Picnic Shelter Path Improvements

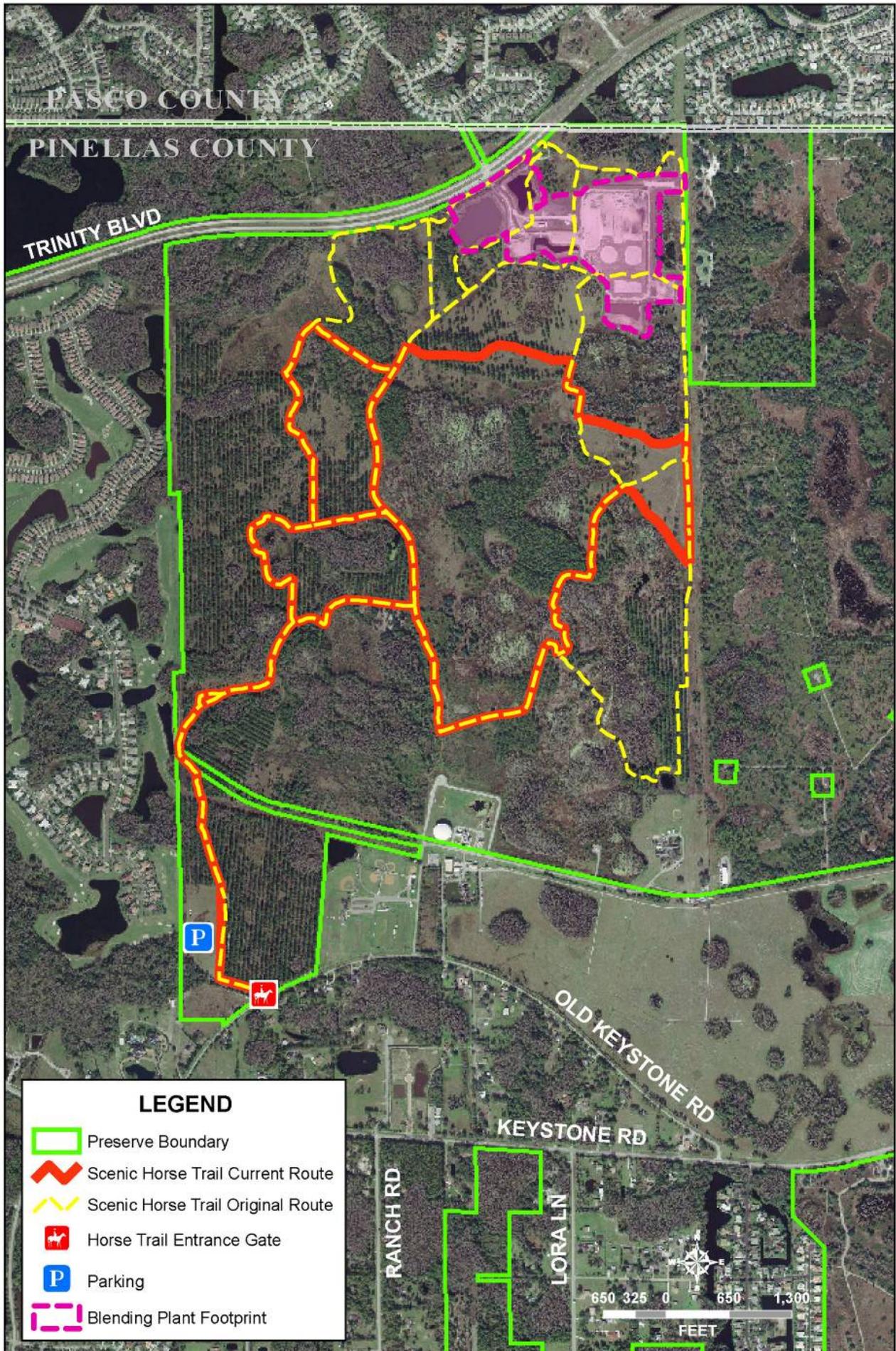


Figure 35. Brooker Creek Preserve Original Route of the Scenic Horse Trail

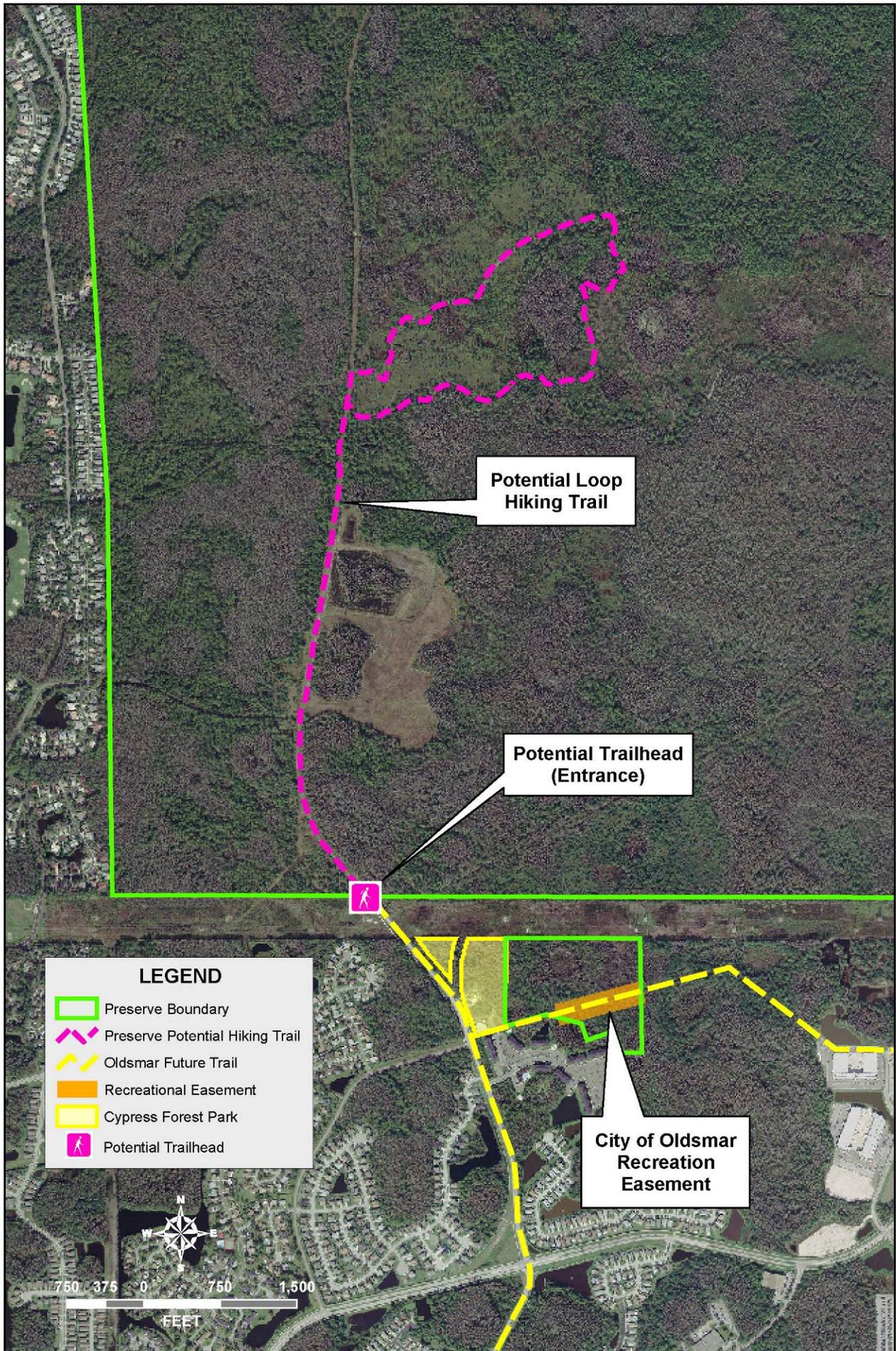


Figure 36. Brooker Creek Preserve Potential Oldsmar Area Hiking Trail

### *Brooker-Anclote Corridor*

This area of the Preserve is located north of Trinity Boulevard and extends from East Lake Road west to the Anclote River. Portions of this tract of land were acquired with partial funding from the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) in 2003 (Figure 37). Several grant requirements are associated with receiving money from this land acquisition fund. (Appendix 2):

- Hiking trail
- Boardwalk
- Canoe/kayak landing\*
- Observation platform
- Basketball court\*\*
- FCT recognition sign
- Interpretive kiosk
- Bike rack
- Parking
- Native plants for landscaping

\*The future canoe/kayak landing will give access to the property from the Anclote River. The Anclote River is a shallow coastal river that meanders over 7 miles from the Gulf of Mexico to this future canoe landing. Those entering the property at this point will have direct access to the Brooker-Anclote Corridor hiking trail system. Fishing and bird watching are common recreational activities along the Anclote River.

\*\*An old basketball court in disrepair exists on site. In the 2003 grant application, the County stated it would refurbish this court. When the grant money was awarded, this was placed into the grant contract. In 2007, the County formally requested FCT to remove this requirement as it is a user-oriented recreational facility and, therefore, is not compatible with the FLUM, zoning and type of uses permitted within the Preserve. FCT will allow the removal if a replacement user-oriented amenity is made. A list of suggestions was sent by FCT, but a replacement has not been decided at this time. A compass-orientation course or horseshoe pit near the primitive campsite is under consideration as examples of mutually acceptable amenities.

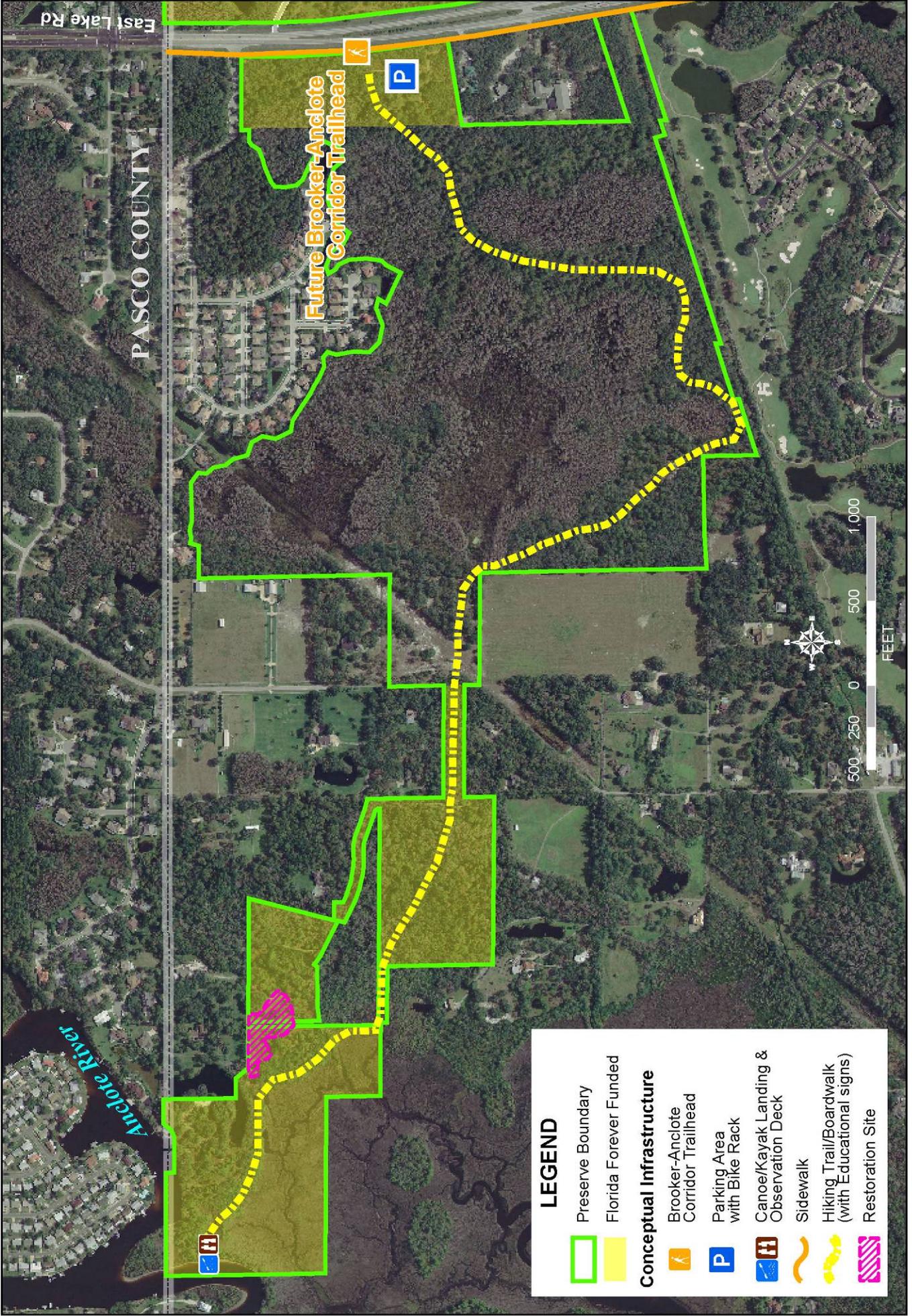


Figure 37. Brooker - Anclote Corridor Conceptual Future Recreation

### *Four Lakes Hammock*

This 253-acre area of the Preserve is located north of Trinity Boulevard and extends from East Lake Road east to Trinity Oaks Boulevard. The east 190 acres of this tract of land were acquired with partial funding from Florida Communities Trust (FCT) in 2003 (Figure 38). By accepting these acquisition funds, the County must comply with grant requirements (Appendix 2) to include:

- Hiking trails
- Boardwalks
- Fishing docks
- Fitness trail\*
- Picnic pavilion
- Restroom
- FCT recognition sign
- Interpretive kiosk
- Bike rack
- Parking
- Trash cans (animal proof)
- Native plants for landscaping

In addition to these requirements, the County hired a consulting firm, Glatting-Jackson, Inc., to design a conceptual layout for recreational amenities on this site. As a result of this work, the following are additional facilities proposed for the site (Figure 39):

- Primitive camp site (completed)
- Canoe/kayak launch on one of the borrow pit ponds
- Outdoor shower area, sinks and cleanup area added onto the restroom

\* The Fitness Trail was removed and replaced with the primitive camp site and canoe/kayak launch. This modification to the grant contract was approved by FCT in 2006.

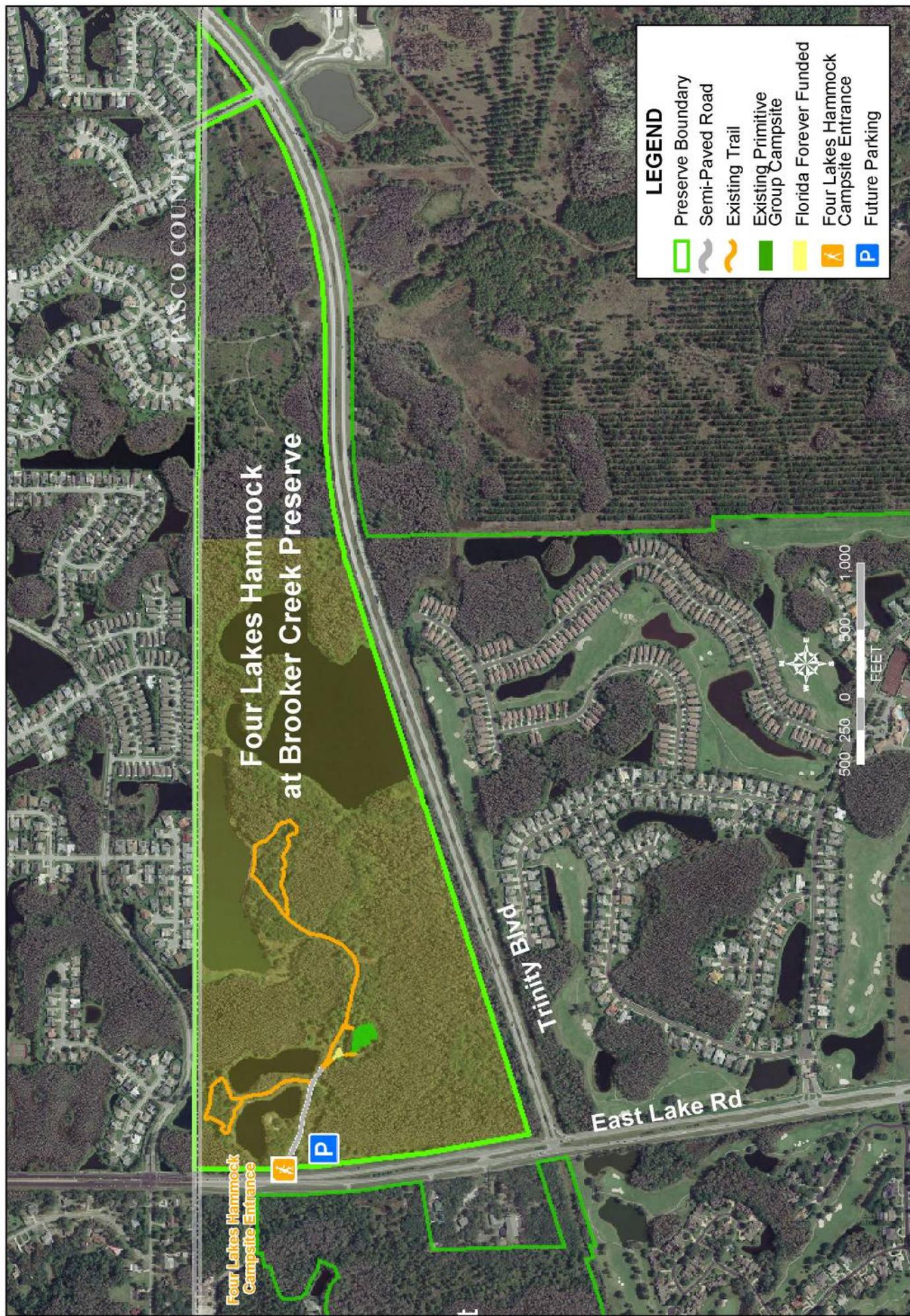


Figure 38. Brooker Creek Preserve Four Lakes Hammock Area Future Recreation

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## Canopy Walkway

A proposed canopy walkway will provide an outdoor facility designed for observation, study, and enjoyment of Pinellas County's subtropical forests. This facility will be located near the BCPEEC (Figure 40). A spur will be built from the existing boardwalk that will lead to the canopy walkway. The canopy walkway will be situated in the bottomland forest of the main channel of Brooker Creek. The total length will be approximately 300 feet with the walkway platform at a height of 40 feet. One end of the walkway will be built as an observation tower at a height of 75 feet. The construction method of this project will cause little impact to the surrounding environment. The original plans for the BCPEEC included an observation tower but was not built due to lack of funding. Therefore, this canopy walkway project would just be an expansion of that original project.

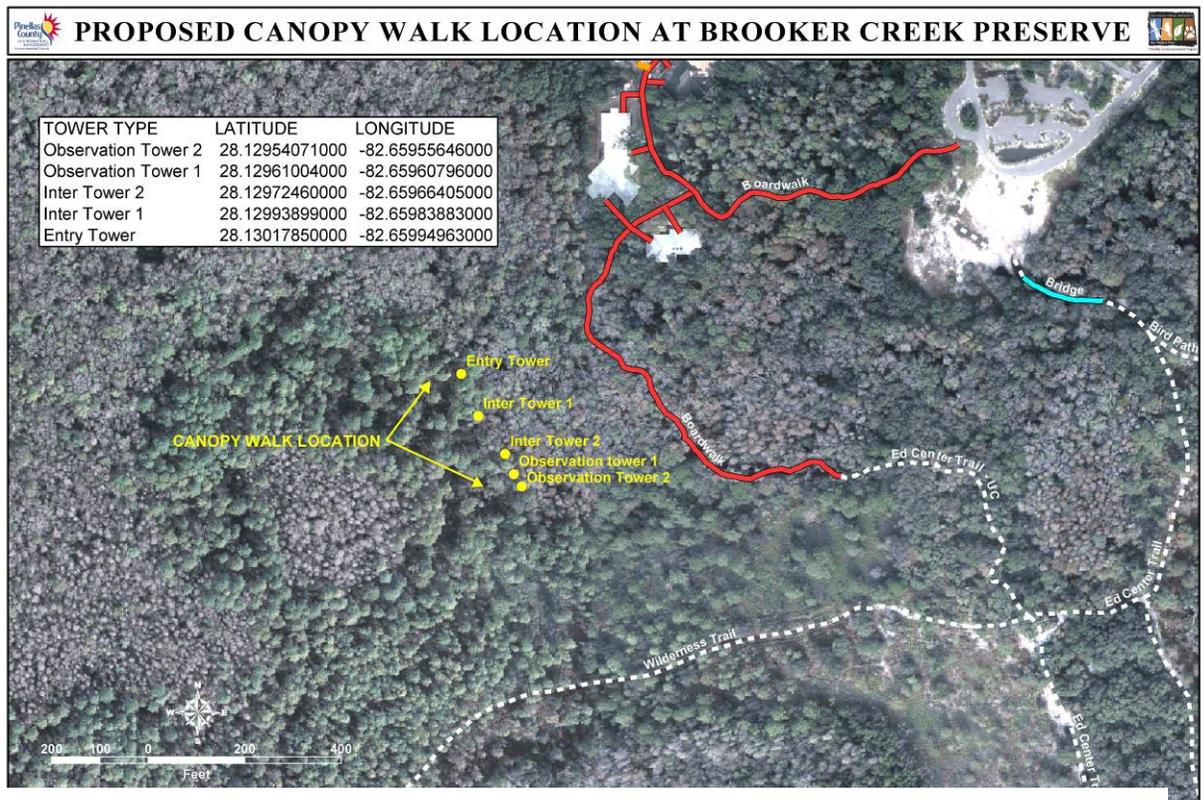
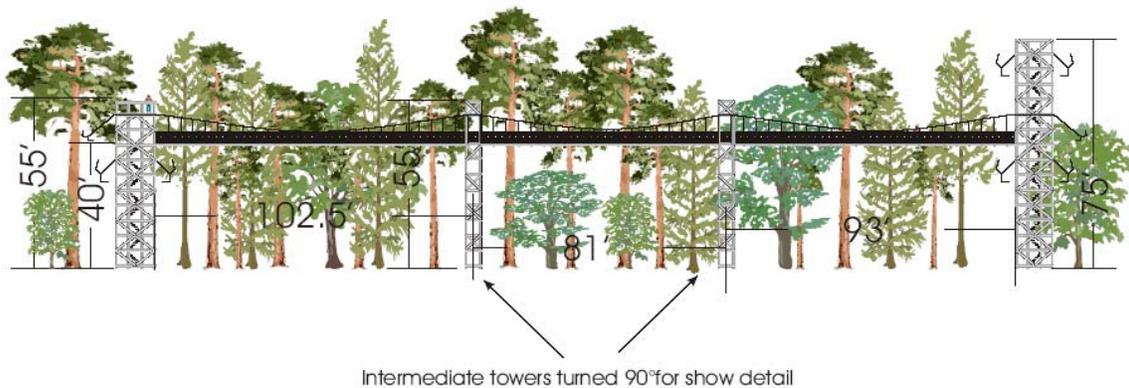


Figure 40. Brooker Creek Preserve Proposed Canopy Walkway



## **Funding Sources**

Funding for the improvements to the existing and new recreational amenities will come from several sources. The interpretive signs along the Wildlands Hiking Trails will be paid for using money allocated in the CIP. The boardwalks for Brooker-Anclote Corridor and Four Lakes Hammock are funded in the current CIP, and applications will be submitted to The Greenways and Trails grant program to offset some of these expenses. The remaining improvements have no identified funding source. Grant applications will be submitted to maximize CIP funding. The canopy walkway will be funded through grants, donations, sponsorships, and/or partially through CIP, if available.

**Estimated Schedule**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>IMPROVEMENTS TO EXISTING:</b>							
The Friends Trail							
Wildlands Hiking Trails							
• Grade work		Work goes beyond 2014					
• Boardwalk						Work goes beyond 2014	
• Picnic area path stabilization							
• Interpretive signs							
Scenic Horse Trail							
Exercise Horse Trail							
<b>NEW RECREATION:</b>							
Hiking trail in Oldsmar							
Brooker-Anclote Corridor *			Work goes beyond 2014				
Four Lakes Hammock *			Work goes beyond 2014				
Canopy Walkway							

 Shading denotes estimated timeframe for project completion

\* See Appendix 2 for FCT grant details

**Cost Estimates**

(Based on FY07 costs)

Note: Staff salaries are a set expense covered by the Division’s operating budget so staff time is listed a \$0 cost.

*The Friends Trail*

Florida Forever/Florida Communities Trust recognition sign = **\$500 to \$1,500**

*Wildlands Hiking Trails*

Grade work:

[In-house]

- initial tree and shrub trimming/removal to widen trails to accommodate large fill moving equipment = staff time
- equipment rental: 3 yd loader = \$4,000/mo, off road dump truck = \$8,600/mo, two staff = 320 hrs/mo
- estimated two months of rental = **\$25,200**  
[Contractor]
- cost unknown

Boardwalk:

- \$260 linear ft (8 ft wide), handrails  $45 \times 2 = \$90$  linear ft, mesh  $4 \times 2 = \$8$  linear ft, total per linear ft = **\$358**

Picnic area path stabilization:

- Approximate linear 500 ft x 8 ft wide = 4,000 ft<sup>2</sup>
- 4,000 ft<sup>2</sup> x \$9 = **\$36,000**

Interpretive signs:

- Fabrication and installation = **\$100,000 - \$150,000**

*Scenic Horse Trail*

In-house, staff time

*Scenic Horse Trail*

In-house, staff time

*Hiking Trail in Oldsmar*

- Sign material, bike rack = **\$1,500**
- In-house, staff time

*Brooker-Anclote Corridor and Four Lakes Hammock*

- Estimated cost for all infrastructure = **\$2,500,000**
- In-house, staff time

*Canopy Walkway*

- Site preparations (including boardwalk spur) = **\$50,000**
- Structure (4-5 towers and 2-3 100'-spans) = **\$350,000**
- Yearly maintenance = \$1,500

## **Recreational Facility Maintenance**

Maintenance of the recreational facilities is the responsibility of ELD. Routine duties include mowing, trimming, trash removal, boardwalk cleaning and repairs, minor building repairs, sign maintenance, and landscape upkeep. ELD currently employs six full-time staff members to handle these duties for Brooker Creek Preserve as well as other north and mid-County properties managed by ELD. When possible, volunteers are enlisted to help with some of these tasks.

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