SR 87 Connector Determination of Applicability for Section 4(f)

This report documents specific Section 4(f) information for the SR 87 Connector Project from the Intersection of SR 87S and US 90 to SR 87N in Milton.

Santa Rosa County
Florida

Financial Project I.D. (FPID) #'s: 416748-3-22-01, 416748-3-22-02, 416748-4-22-01, 416748-4-22-02, and 416748-4-22-90

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ETDM # 12597

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1.0 PURPOSE OF DETERMINATION OF APPLICABILITY FOR SECTION 4(F) PROPERTY

The purpose of this Determination of Applicability (DOA) is to provide the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) with sufficient information to make a determination of Section 4(f) applicability regarding a portion of the Blackwater Heritage State Trail (BHST) that intersects with the project corridor for Alignments 1 and 2, located 0.6 miles east of Munson Highway in Santa Rosa County, Florida. The BHST is an 8.02-mile recreational trail and conservation land managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Office of Greenways and Trails. Upon review, the FHWA is being asked to notify the State of Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) as to the level of evaluation that will be required if Section 4(f) applies.

2.0 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT (PD&E) DESCRIPTION

FDOT District 3 is conducting a study to evaluate potential corridors that would connect State Road (SR) 87S at US 90 east of the City of Milton to SR 87N. The primary objectives in this extension/realignment of SR 87 are to facilitate north/south traffic movement to more effectively transport freight and to provide for a more direct hurricane evacuation route from the Gulf Coast to areas north in Alabama. Another objective is to reduce congestion in the City of Milton and to alleviate travel demand on the section of US 90 currently shared by SR 87. Versions of this project have gone through the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) screening as ETDM Project 12597 in 2010. **Figure 1** depicts the current study area.

3.0 DETERMINATION OF SECTION 4(F) APPLICABILITY

In accordance with Chapter 13 (Section 4(f) Evaluations) of the PD&E Manual, the items listed below must be submitted to FHWA for formal Determination of Section 4(f) Applicability. Following each item is the required information and/or reference to figures which provide the information.

1. *A detailed map or drawing of sufficient scale to identify the relationship of the alternatives to the Section 4(f) property.*

See **Figures 2, 3 and 4** for maps depicting the proposed SR 87 crossing of the Blackwater Heritage Trail. **Figure 6** is an illustrated rendering of the proposed crossing.

2. *Size (square meters followed by square feet in parentheses) and location (maps or other exhibits such as photographs, sketches, etc.) of the affected Section 4(f) property.*

See attached **Figures 2, 3 and 4**. The subject area is approximately 1,384 square meters (14,907 square feet).

3. *Ownership (City, County, State, etc.) and type of Section 4(f) property (park, recreation historic, etc.).*

According to the BHST information and maps located on the FDEP website (http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/guide/regions/panhandlewest/trails/black_heritage.htm), the BHST is a multi-use paved recreational trail facility and a conservation area owned by the State of Florida and managed by the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails. It is officially part of Florida's Statewide System of Greenways and Trail. The trail map is included as **Appendix A**.

4. *Function of or available activities on the property.*

The Trail Map (**Appendix A**) and the Statement of Significance prepared by Mr. Matthew Klein from FDEP (**Appendix B**), describe the BHST as a predominantly rural trail that is available for biking, running, walking, in-line skating, rollerblading, horseback riding and bird watching.

5. *Description and location of all existing and planned facilities.*

Recreational resources on the BHST that are listed on the trail map include the 8.02-mile paved multi-use trail, a visitor center, and three trailheads: the Milton Trailhead, the Munson Highway/Equestrian Trailhead, and the Whiting Field Naval Air Station Trailhead (Whiting Field Trailhead). The Visitor Center located at 5533 Alabama Street (approximately one mile north of the Milton Trailhead), offers parking, restrooms, picnic tables, barbeque grills, an amphitheater, and a playground for children and a meeting room. The beginning of the Milton Trailhead is located within the town of Milton, on the northwest corner of the Highway 87N/US Highway 90 intersection. The Milton Trailhead features picnic tables and a gazebo, restrooms, a

water fountain and a bicycle rack. A nearby shop sells, rents and repairs bicycles. The Munson Highway Trailhead, located at the intersection of the trail and Munson Highway, offers space for parking, including spaces for horse trailers and oversized vehicles. The equestrian trail runs parallel to the asphalt trail with shared bridges. The trail end at the Whiting Field Trailhead is located about two miles north of the Route 87A/Route 191 intersection (just northeast of Milton). This trailhead includes a parking area and a covered picnic table. See the Trail Map in **Appendix A** for a depiction of Trail facility locations.

In addition, about 1/4 mile north from the Munson Highway Trailhead, there is a well-maintained, ADA accessible, portable toilet. Two waterless vaulted restroomswere installed in 2010 (one near the six-mile point and the second one near the eight-mile trail point). A project scheduled to be completed by the end of 2012/beginning of 2013 includes a full service restroom facility near the 3.5-mile point of the trail. No existing or planned facilities are located or will be installed within the portion of the trail that crosses the project corridor.

6. *Access (pedestrian, vehicular) and usage (approximate number of users/visitors, etc.)*

For visitors accessing the BHST via car, parking is available at the Milton Trailhead, the Munson Highway Parking Area, the Visitor Center, and at the Whiting Field Naval Air Station. The trail, however, is only accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, horseback riders and roller-skaters. Motorized vehicles are not permitted on the trail. Equestrian access is available at the parking area located at the Munson Highway Trailhead. The equestrian portion of the trail begins about one mile north of the Milton Trailhead. The closest access point to the project corridor/trail crossing is through the Munson Highway Parking Area, located about 1.7 miles southwest of the project corridor/trail crossing. The Whiting Field Naval Air Station (located about 2.7 miles north of the project corridor/trail crossing), is the second closest access point to the area.

7. *Relationship to other similarly used lands in the vicinity.*

The Military Heritage Trail, managed by the United States Navy, is located immediately adjacent to the BHST Whiting Field Trailhead and spans 1.5 miles from the Whiting Field Trailhead to the Naval Air Station Entrance Gate (see location of the Military Trail in **Figure 5**.

The Historic Florida State Road No. 1 is located approximately 2.6 miles south of where the project corridor crosses the BHST. The historic trail is owned and managed by the State Historic Preservation Office. See **Figure 2**, Project and Section 4(f) Resource Location Map for the location of the Historic Florida State Road No. 1 Trail.

The Blackwater River Water Management Area is a managed conservation land (owned and managed by Northwest Florida Water Management District [NWFWMD]), and is located 0.6 miles south of the Trail and about two miles southwest of the project corridor portion that crosses the Trail. See **Figure 5**, Florida Managed Areas Map, for the location of the Blackwater River Water Management Area.

The Whiting Field Naval Air Station is a United States Navy base owned by the U.S. Navy and managed by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and the U.S. Navy and is located about 0.6 miles west of the trail and approximately 1.5 miles northwest of the portion where the project

corridor crosses the trail. This facility is included in the Florida Managed Area list from the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI, 2011). Most of the Whiting Field Naval Station has been developed for mission related activities (particularly to train students to fly helicopters and airplanes). The DOD has acquired additional adjacent land to be used for off-road recreation and that can serve as habitat for a number of rare species.

8. *Applicable clause affecting the ownership, such as lease, easement, covenants, restrictions, or conditions, including forfeiture.*

The BHST trail is owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida. The management responsibility is conveyed to the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails, Division of Recreation and Parks, in the form of a lease. There are no restrictions or conditions that would preclude this project.

9. *Unusual characteristics of the Section 4(f) property (flooding problems, terrain conditions, or other features) that either reduce or enhance the value of all or part of the property.*

Included in Appendix B of this document is a letter from Mathew Klein, Land Administration and Acquisition Coordinator, DEP, outlining the BHST's unique characteristics.

10. *Statement of significance from the official who has jurisdiction over Section 4(f) property. The significance is on the entire Section 4(f) property and not of the proposed use.*

Included in Appendix B of this document is a letter from Mathew Klein, Land Administration and Acquisition Coordinator, DEP, outlining the BHST's significance.

11. *Whenever a potential constructive use is identified include a description of the attributes of features of the Section 4(f) property which may be sensitive to proximity impacts along with a discussion and evaluation of project activities which may result in proximity impacts to the resource.*

In accordance with Sec 13-2.1.2(C) of the PD&E Manual, no constructive use of the BHST will occur as a result of this project.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed project corridor crosses a portion of the BHST approximately 0.6 miles east of Munson Highway in Santa Rosa County. The proposed project alignment over the BHST will include the construction of a grade-separated overpass that will traverse the 100-foot wide trail corridor. No bridge pilings or other bridge infrastructure will be installed within the trail corridor. There will, however, be a link provided to the BHST enabling access and connectivity to approximately 7 miles of new trail associated with the proposed corridor improvements. In addition, with this new link, the BHST will be afforded additional regional connectivity by accessing the Historic Florida State Road No. 1 bricked path located along US 90.

As a result, the construction of the crossing will enhance access, but will not impact usage of the trail, nor will the project impact the vital functions of the trail. The crossing will not impact existing BHST restroom or trailhead facilities and is not proposed in the vicinity of any planned facility improvements. No relocation of the trail or other facilities is proposed for this project. It is anticipated that the project as planned will not adversely affect the portion of the trail that crosses the proposed alignment.

FIGURES 1-6

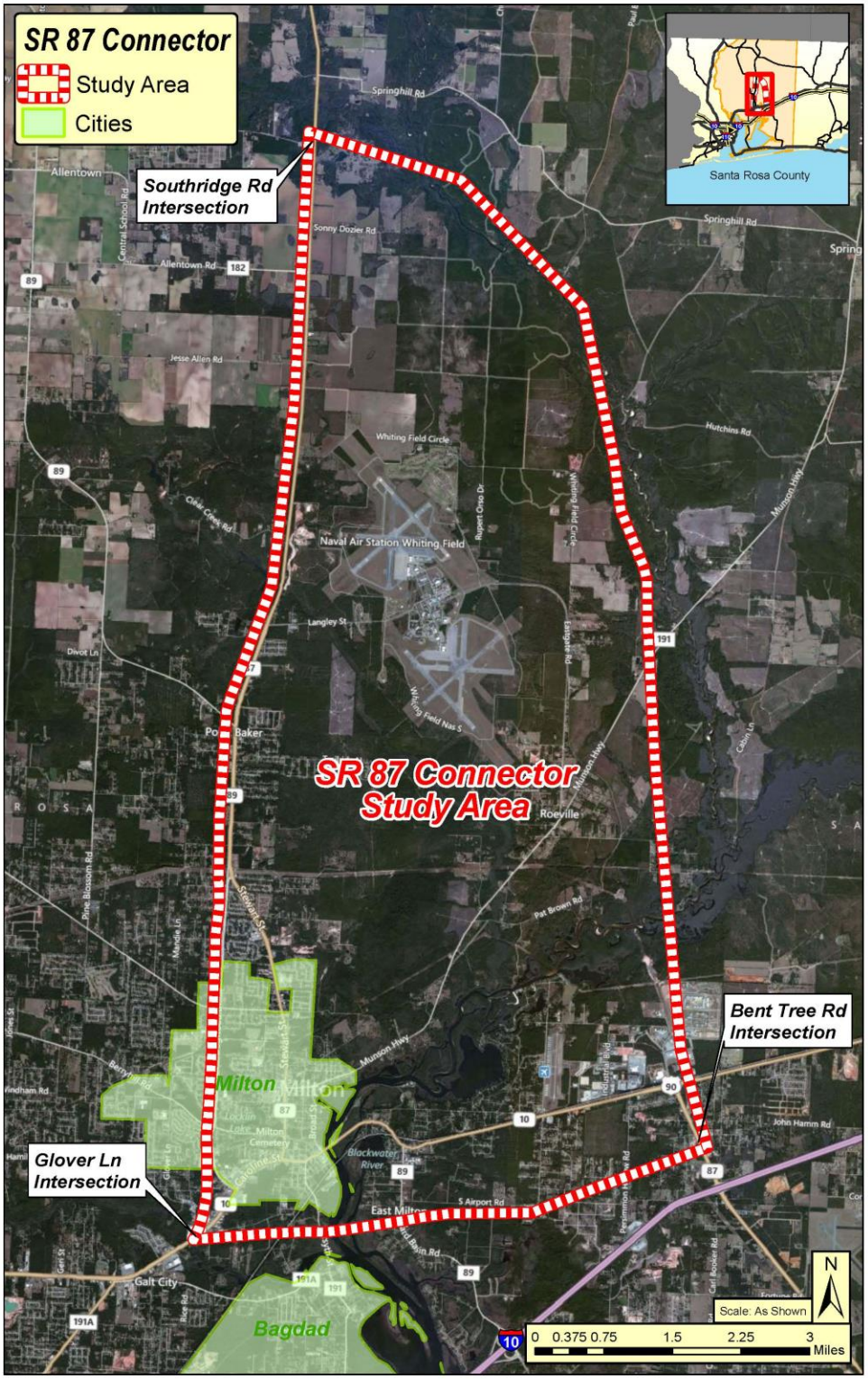


Figure 1: Project Study Area Map

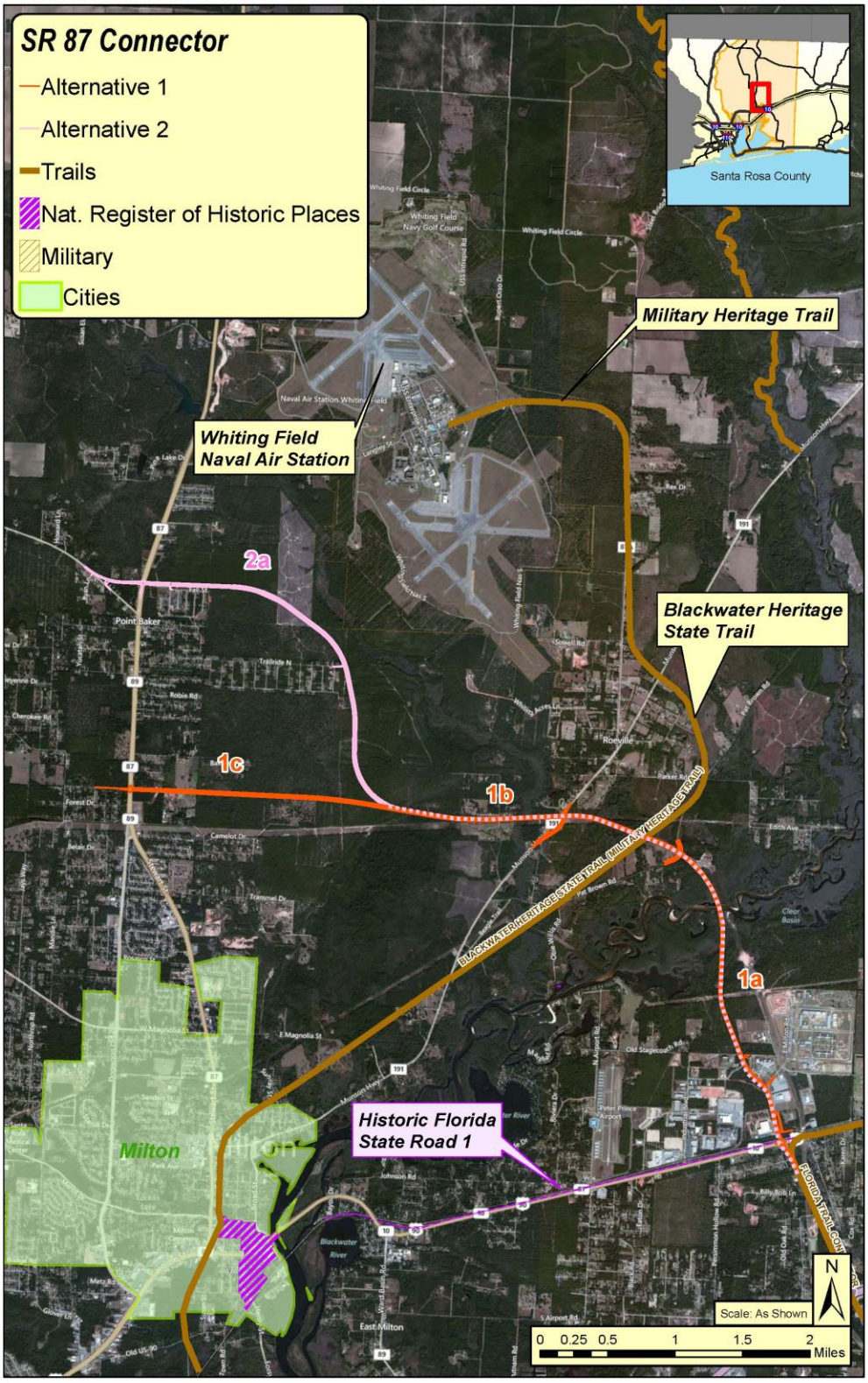


Figure 2: Project and Sec 4(f) Resource Location Map

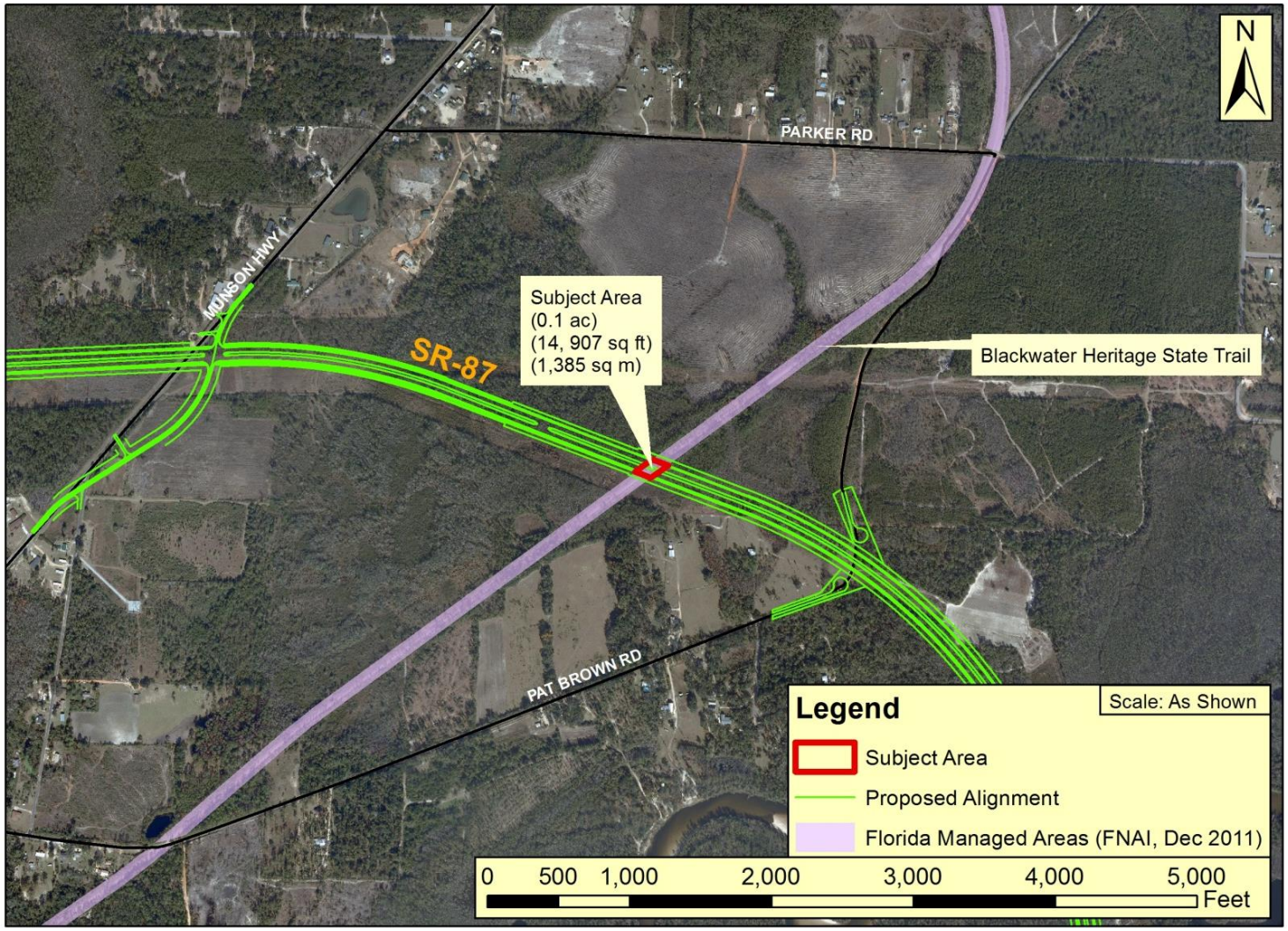


Figure 3: Sec 4(f) Subject Area Vicinity Map

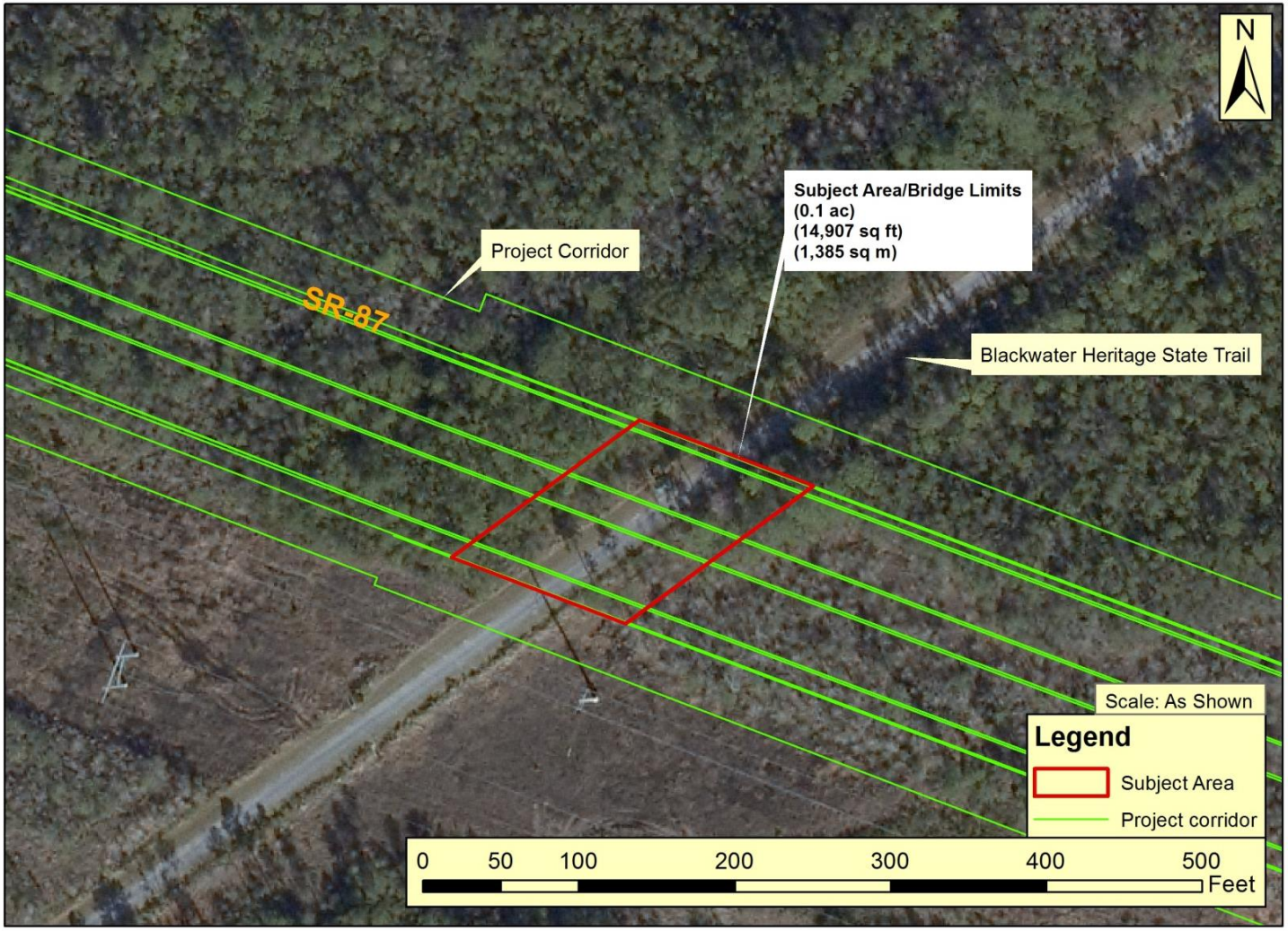


Figure 4: Sec 4(f) Subject Area Map

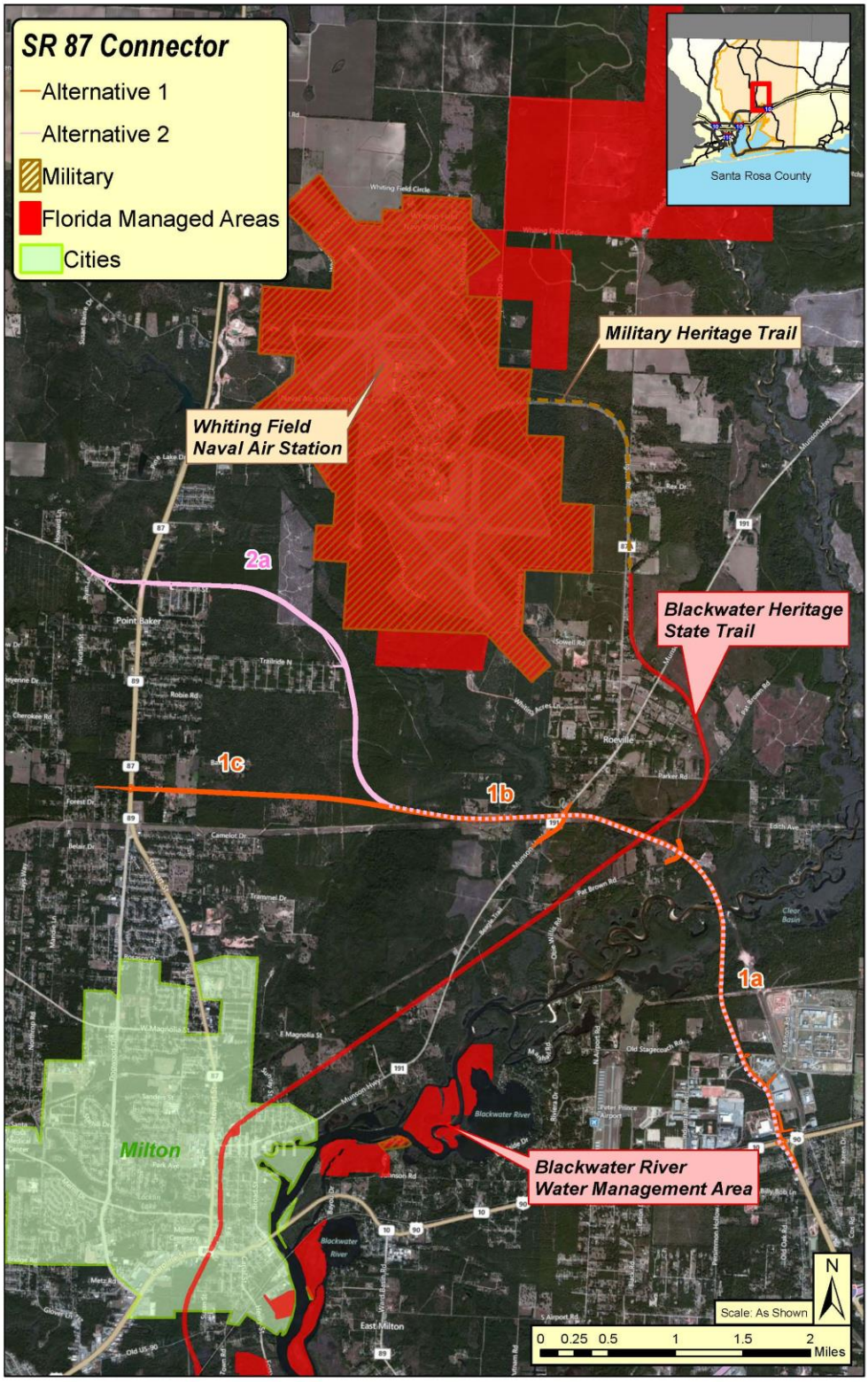


Figure 5: Florida Managed Areas Map

Figure 6: Rendering of SR 87 Crossing over Blackwater Heritage Trail

APPENDIX A: Blackwater Heritage State Trail Map

Blackwater Heritage State Trail

Major Activities: Walking, biking, in-line skating, rollerblading, horseback riding and bird watching

Trail Length/Surface: Blackwater Heritage is 8.1 miles, non-motorized paved (asphalt 12' wide); the Military Heritage Trail is 1.5 miles, non-motorized paved trail (asphalt 9' wide); equestrian unpaved trail parallels a portion of the paved trail

Fee: None

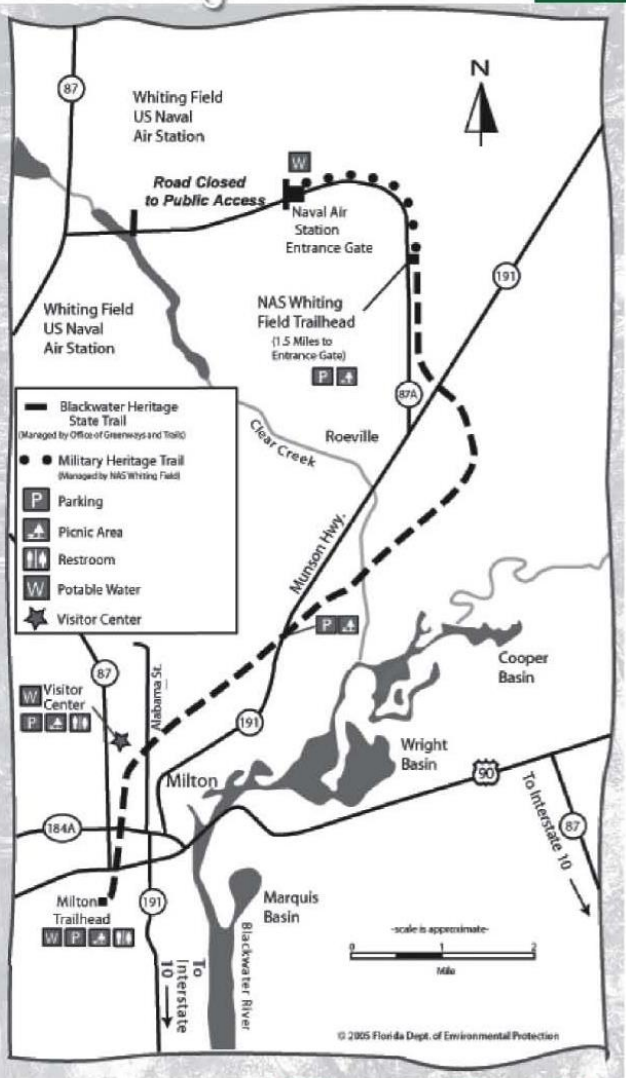
County: Santa Rosa

Nearby Town: Milton

Notes:
The Milton Trailhead contains a covered picnic shelter, restrooms, a water fountain and a bicycle rack. The visitor center, approximately one mile from the trailhead, offers picnic tables and parking. The Blackwater Heritage State Trail Citizen Support Organization operates a concession at the visitor center where snacks and souvenirs can be purchased. Benches have been located at various points along the trail for visitor convenience.

When traveling north of the visitor center, bring plenty of water because there are no facilities for potable water available.

Hours: 8:00 am – Sunset, 7 days a week, 365 days a year



Access/Directions:

Milton Trailhead: From I-10 West (coming from Crestview), take Exit 31 to SR 87. Follow SR 87 to the intersection at US 90. Take a left (heading west) on US 90. Follow US 90 into Milton to the intersection at SR 87. Trailhead is located at this intersection.

From I-10 East (coming from Pensacola), take Exit 26 to SR 191. Follow SR 191 through Bagdad into Milton and turn left on US 90. Trailhead is located at the intersection of US 90 and SR 87.

Munson Highway Parking Area: Follow directions above to Milton. In Milton, proceed to intersection of US 87 North and SR 191. Proceed north on SR 191 (Munson Highway) to intersection with trail and parking area.

APPENDIX B: Statement of Significance

leucophylla) and the panhandle lily (*Lilium iridollae*), while listed fauna include the flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*).

The BHST provides numerous recreational, ecological, and hydrological benefits on a local, regional, and even national level. Consequently, the BHST is highly significant with regards to the resource-based recreational opportunities and the conservation benefits that it affords area residents and visitors alike. To ensure the BHST's enjoyment by future generations, it is imperative that its resource values are not diminished.

DRP acknowledges that the design plans for the State Road 87 Connector intend for the roadway to cross the 100'-wide trail corridor as a grade-separated elevated overpass, and that no bridge pilings or other bridge infrastructure will be installed within the trail corridor. We consider this to be a positive development as it relates to natural resource protection and trail user safety and enjoyment.

We look forward to completing our review of the project once a final version of the PD&E study is available. Please let me know if you have any further questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Matthew Klein
Land Administration & Acquisition Coordinator
Division of Recreation and Parks

/mk

cc: Albert Gregory, Bureau Chief, Office of Park Planning
Jim Wood, Bureau Chief, Office of Greenways and Trails
Daniel Jones, Chief, Florida Park Service – District One