

An Assessment of
Public Hunting Opportunities on
Southwest Florida Water Management District Lands

September 26, 2006



Introduction

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) provides a diverse array of public access and recreational opportunities on conservation lands. Because of the diversity of uses (and users) it is important to continuously evaluate newly proposed and existing uses within the context of potential user conflicts, adjacency of other uses, and the compatibility with the original purpose of acquisition. Ownership interests (acquisition partnerships) and management partnerships must also be considered. Access to, and availability of, lands for public hunting in the State of Florida is an apparent concern of the State's hunting public. This concern has resulted in the Florida Legislature passage of House Bill 265.

Summary of Current Statutory Requirements

The following are excerpts of newly created Section 372.0025, Florida Statutes, regarding responsibilities of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), state agencies and the water management districts relative to hunting.

(4) Commission land management decisions and actions, including decisions made by private owners to close hunting land managed by the commission, shall not result in any net loss of habitat land acreage available for hunting opportunities on commission-managed lands that exists on the effective date of this act. The commission shall expeditiously find replacement acreage for hunting to compensate for closures of any existing hunting land. Replacement lands shall, to the greatest extent possible, be located within the same administrative region of the commission and shall be consistent with the hunting discipline that the commission allowed on the closed land.

(5) Any state agency or water management district that owns or manages lands shall assist and coordinate and cooperate with the commission to allow hunting on such lands if such lands are determined by the commission to be suitable for hunting. To ensure no net loss of land acreage available for hunting, state agencies and water management districts shall cooperate with the commission to open new, additional hunting lands to replace lost hunting acreage. However, lands officially designated as units within the state park system may not be considered for replacement hunting lands and may only be opened for hunting when necessary as a wildlife control or management tool as determined by the Division of Recreation and Parks in the Department of Environmental Protection.

(6) By October 1 of each year, the executive director of the commission shall submit to the Legislature a written report describing:

(a) The acreage managed by the commission that was closed to hunting during the previous fiscal year and the reasons for the closures.

(b) The acreage managed by the commission that was opened to hunting to compensate for closures of existing land pursuant to subsection (4).

(7) By October 1 of each year, any state agency or water management district that owns or manages lands shall submit a written report to the commission and the Legislature that includes:

(a) A list of properties that were open for hunting during the previous fiscal year.

(b) A list of properties that were not open for hunting during the previous fiscal year.

(c) The acreage for each property and the county where each property is located, except for right-of-way lands and parcels under 50 acres.

In summary, this legislation requires the water management districts and state agencies to assist the FWC in securing lands for public hunting to compensate for closure or loss of existing lands (public and private) that are currently open for public hunting. In response to these concerns and in an effort to assist the FWC in identifying potential replacement hunting lands within the District's region, the District has undertaken an assessment of hunting opportunities on District lands.

Background

The District has developed strong partnerships with other public land acquisition and management programs, including agencies that facilitate public hunting opportunities. These partnerships afford District staff the opportunity to engage in new initiatives and discussions as they relate to other agency concerns, trends, and demands. Over the past year, the District has participated in a number of meetings, discussions and summits to better understand issues related to hunting on public lands. These coordination events included:

- Meetings between District and FWC executive staff;
- Participation in the 2005 Summit on the Future of Hunting in Florida; and
- The recently formed statewide FWC initiative, "Upland Ecosystem Restoration Project," focusing on restoration of degraded pine grasslands, where SWFWMD serves to represent all of the water management districts.

Through its participation in these discussions, the District has assimilated information related to public hunting statistics and trends. These statistics and trends are interesting when compared to the apparent concern of loss of public land for hunting.

Over the last five years, approximately 450,000 acres, 90,000 per year, have been added to the public hunting system and opened to hunting (FWC Legislative Affairs, 2006). The District alone has increased hunting acreage 64 percent (47,032 acres) from 1998 to 2000. This has resulted in a total of approximately 5,500,000 acres of public hunting land within the state (FWC Legislative Affairs, 2006) and places Florida ninth in the nation in state-owned lands open to public hunting and fourth in the nation in the amount of leased state land open for public hunting. Although acreage available to the public has increased, actual number of hunters and hunting participation has declined as evidenced by declining hunting license sales in Florida, from approximately 195,270 in 1993 to approximately 157,299 in 2004 (FWC, response to inquiry, 2006). This reflects a reduction in hunting participation of 20% from 1993 to 2004.

The District currently owns 331,700 acres in fee simple, of which the District has lead management responsibility for 283,500 acres. Of the total 331,700 acres owned by the District, 155,384 acres, in 12 projects, are under public hunting programs: 133,795 acres under Type 1 Wildlife Management Area (WMA) agreements with the FWC and 21,589 acres under special hunt programs for the disabled through an agreement with the Wheelin' Sportsmen – National Wild Turkey Federation (WS– NWTF) program.

The District conducted an assessment in January of 2006 using methodologies slightly modified from the one used during an assessment conducted in 1998. The updated assessment identified three additional District conservation lands that are candidates for expanded or new hunting programs: the Gilley Creek North Tract within the Lake Manatee Reserve (Manatee County – 4,789 acres), the Deer Prairie Creek Preserve (Sarasota County – 10,128 acres) and the Micaloney Tract within the Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve (Lake County – 903 acres).

This document presents the assessment results and staff recommendations. The document is also intended to:

1. Formalize the criteria used to evaluate which areas are suitable for public hunting;
2. Establish a baseline inventory of all District lands that are currently suitable for public hunting, and
3. Describe the rationale for those District lands that are not suitable for public hunting.

Current Status of Public Hunting Opportunities on District Lands

In 1998 the District Land Resources Department undertook its first formal assessment of District conservation lands to ascertain if lands not hunted at that time would be suitable for public hunting. Prior to the assessment, 73,828 acres of District lands, in five projects, were open for public hunting programs. As a result of the assessment, three additional projects, totaling 47,032 acres were opened to public hunting in 2000. Other properties managed by the District's partners in WMA status include 277 acres managed by the South Florida Water Management District as part of the 9,469-acre Lake Marion Creek WMA, and 4,614 acres managed by the Florida Division of Forestry as part of the 58,146-acre Richloam WMA, bring the total to approximately 133,795 acres on ten projects (Table 1).

Table 1. Type 1 Wildlife Management Areas

| Project | County | Ownership/ Acq. Funding | Lead Manager | Acreage |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Green Swamp | Lake, Polk, Sumter | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 49,768 |
| Green Swamp West | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 34,335 |
| Upper Hillsborough | Pasco & Polk | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 5,178 |
| Gum Slough/Half Moon | Sumter | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 4,021 |
| Flying Eagle | Citrus | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 10,247 |
| Little Withlacoochee (part of 58,146-acre Richloam WMA) | Lake | SWFWMD | Fla. Division of Forestry | 4,614 |
| Potts Preserve | Citrus | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 9,384 |
| Lake Panasoffkee | Sumter | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 8,676 |
| Myakka State Forest | Sarasota | SWFWMD/ State | Fla. Division of Forestry | 7,295 |
| Upper Lake Marion Creek Watershed (part of 9,469-acre Lake Marion Creek WMA) | Polk | SWFWMD | SFWMD | 277 |
| Total | | | | 133,795 |

In addition to increasing hunting opportunities for the general public, the District has opened lands to hunting for people with special needs. In 2004 the District entered into an agreement with the WS-NWTF, an organization that provides hunting opportunities for the disabled. Under this agreement four hunts were held on District lands as a trial program. Due to the success of this trial, in 2005 the hunting events under this partnership were increased to six. These events

were held on lands not deemed appropriate for more intensive public hunting programs; however see the discussion of Gilley Creek North Tract within the Lake Manatee Reserve under “Assessment Results.” The program includes archery, modern gun, feral hog and spring turkey hunts. This special hunt program added 21,589 acres of hunting opportunities on previously un-hunted District land. The District has been recognized both locally and nationally for these efforts. Table 2 identifies those properties hunted in cooperation with the WS–NWTF.

Table 2. WS–NWTF Hunt Program Lands

| Project | County | Ownership/ Acq. Funding | Lead Manager | Acreage |
|--|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Starkey Wilderness Preserve/ Serenova Tract | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 6,533 |
| Upper Hillsborough/ Alston Tract | Polk | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 2,747 |
| Green Swamp/ Hampton Tract | Polk | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 7,520 |
| Lake Manatee Reserve/ Gilley Creek North Tract | Manatee | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | 4,789 |
| Total | | | | 21,589 |

Between FWC WMA status hunts and special hunt programs for individuals with disabilities, the total of District lands under public hunting programs is approximately 155,384 acres on 12 projects.

Hunting Lands Assessment Update

All un-hunted District lands were reassessed utilizing the methodology established in 1998. The methodology is based on a numeric ranking system used to rank the lands’ potential to accommodate future hunting programs based on seven qualitative criteria. The criteria are:

1. Habitat composition/condition; ranks tract’s ability to support abundance of major game species.
2. Limitations or conflicts posed by other land uses.
3. Limitations posed by capital site improvements such as education centers or reservoirs.
4. Limitations posed by adjacent land uses/development/safety concerns.
5. Accessibility infrastructure; sufficient all weather roads and access. Would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage.
6. Ecological constraints; ranks tract against limitations posed by sensitive ecological features, listed species, etc.
7. Public hunt demand; ranks tract against the local abundance of other public hunting opportunities.

The criteria were ranked on a scale from 1 to 4:

- 1 = poor
- 2 = fair
- 3 = good
- 4 = very good

Assessment Results

The results of the hunting assessment are contained in the two categories of potentially suitable lands and recommended as unsuitable. For potentially suitable lands, a description of the land and recommendations for further field investigations are described below. The results for lands

recommended as unsuitable are contained in Table 3. Figure 1 shows the general location of all lands that were assessed, as well as other public lands.

Potentially Suitable Lands

Three additional land projects ranked as suitable candidates for new or expanded public hunting programs. They are Gilley Creek North Tract within the Lake Manatee Reserve, Deer Prairie Creek Preserve and Micaloney Tract within the Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve.

- ***Gilley Creek North Tract within the Lake Manatee Reserve (Manatee County, Map Reference A)*** – This tract encompasses 4,789 acres and is located in Manatee County east of the town of Parrish, east of Duette Park. The tract is currently included in the District/WS–NWTF hunting program for a three-day quail hunt. The accessibility of the property, the mix of habitat types to support a diversity of sustainable game species populations, the rural character of the surrounding area, and good accessibility are factors that make the Gilley Creek North Tract a candidate for consideration of additional special hunt opportunities, or expansion of the current special hunt program. Factors limiting the tract's potential to special hunting programs, in contrast to more intensive WMA hunts include its relatively small size, an existing cattle lease over a portion of the tract and the use of the tract by burrowing owls as a breeding site.

Just south of the Gilley Creek North Tract is the 1,005-acre Gilley Creek South Tract, which includes a Florida Department of Transportation mitigation site and a cattle lease. Due to these features and its small size, it is not considered a viable candidate for either WMA hunt status or special hunt programs for individuals with disabilities.

Recommendation – Conduct further field investigations to determine what game populations are supported by the habitat that would sustain an expanded low-intensity, special hunting program. Focus should be placed on quail and turkey population densities and the occurrence of feral hogs and associated disturbance. The District should consider the Gilley Creek North Tract for the expansion of the WS–NWTF program and other outdoor sporting programs to further diversify the District's recreation opportunities. Resulting programs should be administered by the District.

- ***Deer Prairie Creek Preserve (Sarasota County, Map Reference B)*** – This 10,128-acre Preserve was jointly acquired and is jointly managed by the District and Sarasota County. The Preserve is bounded on the west by the Myakka River, on the north by I-75 and the District's Schewe tract, and on the west and south by the City of North Port and the community of Warm Mineral Springs, respectively. Although its adjacency to the interstate and dense rural development is an issue, the size of the Preserve allows for buffering of these restricted areas from hunting activities. The Preserve includes ample habitat to support sustainable populations of game species, and additional feral hog control is needed. Although access within the interior can be restricted during wet periods, existing roads and trails may sufficiently accommodate hunting access. The District's partnership with Sarasota County will require a mutual decision regarding implementation of a hunting program. Sarasota County has historically shown caution and reluctance towards allowing hunting on lands purchased through their Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program. The portion of the Schewe tract south of I-75 is owned and managed solely by the District but as a functional matter, is part of the contiguous Preserve landscape. Portions of this tract should be considered for inclusion into future hunting discussions.

Recommendation – The Preserve can accommodate either a form of a WMA status hunting program, or a special hunting program administered by the District and/or Sarasota

County. Field observations suggest that some form of regular feral hog control is needed on the tract and special hunts have been suggested as a viable alternative. If further field investigations confirm that deer, turkey and other game populations exist at sustainable levels, the District and Sarasota County should discuss viability of a general public hunting use. This issue will be considered during the drafting of the Land Use and Management Plan for the Preserve during fiscal year 2007.

Micaloney Tract within the Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve – (Lake County, Map Reference C) – This 903-acre parcel is located in Lake County in the extreme northeastern corner of the Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve near the town of Bay Lake. It is bounded on the south by the Green Swamp WMA and on the west and north by the Withlacoochee State Forest–Richloam WMA. Together these two WMAs constitute over 150,000-acres of contiguous, publicly hunted lands. Upon acquisition, the parcel, which consisted almost entirely of improved pasture, was leased for cattle grazing and deemed incompatible for inclusion into the Green Swamp WMA. Subsequently, the lease was terminated and the parcel was reforested for use as a timber management zone. Its immediate adjacency to public access infrastructure within the existing Green Swamp WMA and the low potential for conflicts with existing uses now makes it a potential candidate for inclusion into the WMA. Factors limiting the parcel's potential for high quality public hunting include relatively low habitat quality and correspondingly low game species populations, and insufficient access infrastructure to support public vehicle access. The District and FWC are currently in discussions regarding deficiencies which exist in the management of the Green Swamp WMA by the FWC, primarily involving noncompliance with campground management conditions contained within the WMA agreement between the agencies. Another issue being discussed is the potential for improving deer management on the WMA to increase the quality of the herd, which at present is relatively low. Discussions to include the Micaloney parcel into the Green Swamp WMA should be held within the context of finding mutually satisfactory solutions to these outstanding issues.

Recommendation – Conduct further field investigations to determine the status of sustainable game species populations supported on the parcel. This information will be the basis for initiating discussions with the FWC regarding inclusion of the parcel into the WMA once the outstanding compliance and game management issues are resolved satisfactorily.

Table 3. District Lands Recommended as Unsuitable for Hunting

| Map Ref | Project | Fee Acres | County | Ownership/ Acq. Funding | Lead Manager(s) | Rationale for Recommendation |
|---------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | Hálpata Tastanaki Preserve | 8,146 | Marion | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with passive recreation, urbanizing, incompatible with xeric habitat/ listed species restoration priority for the project |
| 2 | Two-Mile Prairie State Forest | 2,980 | Citrus | SWFWMD/ State | Fla. Division of Forestry | Managed by the Florida Division of Forestry, deemed incompatible pursuant to the FDOF forest management plan |
| 3 | Potts Preserve/ non-WMA Tract | 835 | Citrus | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage), adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 9,432-acre Potts WMA) |
| 4 | Flying Eagle/ former Boy Scout Tract | 4,964 | Citrus | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with capital site improvements, youth center program (portion of tract leased to Boy Scouts of America to administer program) and passive recreation, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 11,382-acre Flying Eagle WMA) |
| 5 | Panasoffkee/ Outlet | 820 | Sumter | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (adjacent Sumter County park site), currently leased for cattle grazing, insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage), nearby residential development |
| 6 | Lake Panasoffkee/ non-WMA Tract | 587 | Sumter | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible as property is used as a spoil site for dredging Lake Panasoffkee |
| 7 | Chassahowitzka River | 5,563 | Citrus & Hernando | SWFWMD | SWFWMD/ Citrus Co. | Incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (Chassahowitzka campground), insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage), incompatible with listed species pressured by development and adjacent hunting, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 5,674-acre Homosassa WMA and nearby 33,919-acre Chassahowitzka WMA) |
| 8 | Annutteliga Hammock | 2,475 | Hernando | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species (many small disjunct parcels), urbanizing, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on nearby 5,674-acre Homosassa and 33,919-acre Chassahowitzka WMAs) |
| 9 | Weekiwachee Preserve | 11,149 | Hernando & Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (education center/ Weeki Wachee attraction), highly urbanized, incompatible with listed species pressured by development and adjacent hunting, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 33,919-acre Chassahowitzka WMA and nearby 5,674-acre Homosassa WMA) |
| 10 | Hidden Lake | 589 | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat, highly urbanized, no access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |

| Map Ref | Project | Fee Acres | County | Ownership/ Acq. Funding | Lead Manager(s) | Rationale for Recommendation |
|---------|---|-----------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 11 | Starkey Wilderness Preserve | 19,103 | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD/ Pasco Co. | Incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (education center/developed park improvements), highly urbanized, deed restriction prohibits hunting on 8,621 acres, special hunting program is conducted on the 6,567-acre Serenova tract pursuant to agreement with WS-NWTF |
| 12 | Conner Preserve | 2,980 | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with passive recreation and restoration priority for project (FDOT mitigation), highly urbanized, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on nearby 5,178-acre Upper Hillsborough, 34,335-acre Green Swamp West and 33,919-acre Chassahowitzka WMAs) |
| 13 | Cypress Creek | 7,446 | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (wellfield infrastructure), highly urbanized, designated as "Wildlife Refuge" by FWC |
| 14 | Green Swamp West/ non-WMA Tracts | 2,835 | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with youth education program, capital site improvements (leased to Lowry Park Zoo for captive breeding program and youth education), adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 33,919-acre Green Swamp West WMA and nearby 5,178-acre Upper Hillsborough WMA) |
| 15 | Upper Hillsborough/ non-WMA Tracts | 1,251 | Pasco | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 5,178-acre Upper Hillsborough WMA and nearby 33,919-acre Green Swamp West WMA) |
| 16 | Green Swamp/ Overstreet Tract (Colt Creek State Park) | 5,067 | Polk | SWFWMD/ State/ Polk Co. | Fla. State Parks | Managed by Florida State Parks, incompatible with passive recreation and prohibition of hunting on state parks, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 49,768-acre Green Swamp WMA, and nearby 33,919-acre Green Swamp West and 5,178-acre Upper Hillsborough WMAs) |
| 17 | Green Swamp/ Small Tracts East of State Trail | 4,275 | Lake | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Many small disjunct parcels, adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on adjacent 49,768-acre Green Swamp WMA, and nearby 33,919-acre Green Swamp West and 58,146-acre Richloam WMAs) |
| 18 | Hillsborough River Corridor | 276 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species (2 small parcels), insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 19 | Lower Hillsborough Wilderness Park | 15,030 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co. | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co. | Incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (five developed park sites, wellfield infrastructure, education center), highly urbanized, in 1980s Governing Board designated project unsuitable for hunting based on the above factors |

| Map Ref | Project | Fee Acres | County | Ownership/ Acq. Funding | Lead Manager(s) | Rationale for Recommendation |
|---------|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| 20 | Brooker Creek Headwaters | 1,038 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co. | Hillsborough Co. | Incompatible with passive recreation, highly urbanized |
| 21 | Brooker Creek Preserve | 1,634 | Pinellas | SWFWMD | Pinellas Co. | Incompatible with passive recreation/education, highly urbanized |
| 22 | Jerry Lake | 81 | Pinellas | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat, public use prohibited (pursuant to deed restriction), highly urbanized, no public access |
| 23 | Sawgrass Lake | 398 | Pinellas | SWFWMD | SWFWMD/ Pinellas Co. School Bd. | Insufficient habitat, incompatible with capital site improvements (education center/developed park improvements), highly urbanized |
| 24 | Lake Thonotosassa | 144 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species, incompatible with restoration priority for the project (SWIM priority water body), insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 25 | Edward Medard Reservoir and Park | 1,290 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD | Hillsborough Co. | Insufficient habitat/game species, incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (county park infrastructure), Hillsborough Co. partners with FWC for fisheries management in the reservoir |
| 26 | Alafia Reserve | 334 | Polk | SWFWMD/ Polk Co. | SWFWMD/ Polk Co. | Insufficient habitat/game species, incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (developed park improvements on adjacent Polk Co. tract), urbanized, insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 27 | Circle "B" Bar Reserve | 1,267 | Polk | SWFWMD/ Polk Co. | Polk Co. | Insufficient habitat/game species, incompatible with passive recreation, capital site improvements (county park/education center infrastructure), insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage), prior to commencement of restoration Polk Co. allowed duck hunting on site – it is anticipated after restoration duck hunting will again be allowed on site in a more controlled manner |
| 28 | Lake Hancock | 4,027 | Polk | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species, incompatible with future water resource development priorities for project |
| 29 | Alafia River | 4,727 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co. | Hillsborough Co. | Insufficient habitat/game species (many small/disjunct parcels), incompatible with passive recreation, insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 30 | C.W. "Bill" Young Regional Reservoir | 5,228 | Hillsborough | SWFWMD/ Tampa Bay Water | SWFWMD/ Tampa Bay Water | Insufficient habitat/game species, capital site improvements (potable supply reservoir), incompatible with mitigation priorities. |

| Map Ref | Project | Fee Acres | County | Ownership/ Acq. Funding | Lead Manager(s) | Rationale for Recommendation |
|---------|---|-----------|----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 31 | Little Manatee River | 6,989 | Hillsborough/ Manatee | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co. | Hillsborough Co./ SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species (many small/disjunct parcels), incompatible with passive recreation, insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 32 | Tampa Bay Estuarine Ecosystem | 4,728 | Hillsborough, Pinellas & Manatee | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co./ State/ Manatee Co./ City of Bradenton | SWFWMD/ Hillsborough Co./ Fla. State Parks/ City of St. Pete/ Manatee Co. | Insufficient habitat/game species, (disjunct parcels, many small), incompatible with restoration priority for project (SWIM priority water body), insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 33 | Lake Manatee Reserve/ Coker Prairie Tract | 2,135 | Manatee | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage); adequate hunting lands available within region (hunting conducted on nearby 17,877-acre Duette Park) |
| 34 | Upper Myakka River Watershed | 2,357 | Manatee | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species |
| 35 | Jack Creek | 1,284 | Highlands | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species, urbanized area, insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 36 | Myakka Prairie | 8,246 | Sarasota | SWFWMD | Fla. State Parks | Managed by Florida State Parks as an annex to Myakka River State Park, incompatible with passive recreation and prohibition of hunting on state parks |
| 37 | RV Griffin Reserve | 5,917 | DeSoto | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Incompatible with capital site improvements (potable supply reservoir/future reservoir expansion, ASR wellfield), incompatible with future mitigation priorities, cattle lease, marginal access infrastructure (could require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 38 | Deep Creek | 1,988 | DeSoto | SWFWMD | SWFWMD/ DeSoto Co. | Incompatible with passive recreation, future capital site improvements (DeSoto County park site), urbanized, insufficient access infrastructure (would require significant capital investment with likely environmental damage) |
| 39 | Prairie/ Shell Creek | 609 | Charlotte | SWFWMD | SWFWMD | Insufficient habitat/game species, urbanized |
| 40 | Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park | 7,631 | Charlotte | SWFWMD/ State | Fla. State Parks | Managed by Florida State Parks, incompatible with passive recreation and prohibition of hunting on state parks |

Conclusion

The District has identified conservation lands suitable for hunting, and through both public and private partnerships, has opened those lands to public hunting. The District will consider adding lands for public hunting as new acquisitions occur, and suitable projects are acquired.

Acceptance of this document by the Governing Board will result in meeting the three main objectives of this document: 1) The establishment of a baseline inventory of lands currently available for hunting in response to House Bill 265 enacted by the 2006 Florida Legislature; 2) the formalization of hunting lands assessment criteria, and: 3) the approval of staff's rationale concerning those tracts recommended as unsuitable for hunting.

Figure 1.

Southwest Florida Water Management District Assessment of Public Hunting Opportunities

