

**AUBURN ROAD
VENICE, SARASOTA COUNTY, FL**

**SARASOTA COUNTY
REZONE APPLICATION**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Prepared for:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Monarch Ecology Group, LLC (MONARCH) prepared this environmental report in support of a Sarasota County Rezone Application for the Auburn Road single-family residential subdivision proposed by P3 LAF BVR JV, LLC. The site encompasses approximately 10.15 (+/-) acres on the north side of Parcel ID Number 0413050001 and is located north of Venice Avenue and east of Auburn Road in Venice, Sarasota County, Florida (Figures 1 and 2). The project also directly abuts Blackburn Canal to the north and is located in the Southern Coastal Watershed. The property is currently zoned as Open Use Estate (OUE-2) residential), but has a future land use of moderate density residential. The south side of the property has two cell towers and is not included in the rezone application because the 184-foot drop zone is being maintained around the cell towers.

MONARCH reviewed a series of historic aerials from 1948 (Figure 3) which show the north side of the property was previously wetland, but aerials from 1974 (Figure 4) show the site was converted to upland pasture. Trees started to establish on the property in the early 2000's and the site now has some dense wooded areas.

To assist with this Rezone Application, MONARCH has prepared an environmental assessment report that addresses environmental criteria outlined in Sarasota County's Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Code (UDC) pertaining to native habitats, and listed species. MONARCH's findings for wetlands and surface waters, habitat assessments, and listed species are summarized in the report as well as an impact discussion. Grand Trees are being addressed by a certified landscape architect (Kurt R. Crist ASLA) under separate cover.

2.0 HABITAT ASSESSMENT

MONARCH conducted a habitat assessment on June 3, 2024 to evaluate the property for wetlands and surface waters and identified three (3) surface water features, but no wetlands were found onsite. MONARCH delineated the jurisdictional extent of surface waters at top of bank in accordance with state methodology (Chapter 62-340, F.A.C. *Delineation of the Landward Extent of Wetlands and Surface Waters*). As shown on the enclosed Surface Water Map (Figure 5), the property contains a total of 0.43 acres of surface waters including a roadside ditch (0.06 acres) that follows the west property line (on Auburn Road) and Blackburn Canal (0.30 acres) which runs along the north side of the property both of which are designated as surface waters. The site also contains one small isolated borrow pond (0.07 acres) that is shown as a surface water, but the pond was dry during the site review. A Soils Map is enclosed (Figure 6) that shows most of the property is mapped as Felda Fine Sand, Poned and Manatee Loamy Find Sand which are both hydric soils (likely associated with historic wetlands before Blackburn Canal was constructed).

During the site review, MONARCH also conducted a habitat assessment and mapped all habitats and land uses on the property based on the *Florida Land Use and Cover Forms Classification Systems*¹ (FLUCFCS). The wooded areas in the uplands are characterized by mixed hardwood habitat (FLUCFCS 438) as shown on the enclosed Land Use Map (Figure 7), but it does not meet criteria to be claimed as mesic hammock. With the exception of the wooded areas, the rest of the uplands are characterized as pasture (FLUCFCS 211). All habitats and land uses are discussed in more detail below. Grand Trees are being evaluated by Kurt Crist (certified landscape architect) and will be addressed under separate cover.

2.1 UPLANDS

The site contains approximately 9.69 acres of uplands characterized by improved pasture (FLUCFCS 211) and mixed hardwoods (FLUCFCS 438). Below is a description of each upland community and land use.

¹ Published by FDOT January 1999

Improved Pasture (FLUCFCS 211; 1.7 acres)

The site was previously open pastureland dating back to 1974 and some areas are still maintained as open pasture around the cell towers. This pasture area is vegetated predominantly with bahia grass (*Paspalum notatum*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) and broomsedge (*Andropogon glomeratus*) that appears to be mowed regularly. The pasture area also has some scattered live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*), laurel oaks (*Quercus laurifolia*), pines (*Pinus elliotti*) and cabbage palms (*Sabal palmetto*). Representative photographs of this pasture are included in Appendix A.

Mixed Hardwoods (FLUCFCS 438; 7.99 acres)

Most of the uplands are wooded areas that are dominated by a canopy of live oaks, laurel oaks, and cabbage palms intermixed with some scattered invasive species and non-native palms including earpod tree (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*) and queen palms (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*). Most of the understory is disturbed with invasive species and appears to have been cleared historically. The understory consists of cabbage palm saplings, saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*), carrotwood (*Cupaniopsis anacardoides*), reclinata palms (*Phoenix reclinata*), American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*), prickly pear (*Opuntia* sp.), grapevine (*Vitis* sp.), laurel greenbriar (*Smilax laurifolia*) and air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*). Representative photographs of the mixed hardwood areas are included in Appendix A.

2.2 WETLANDS AND SURFACE WATERS

As shown on the Surface Water Map (Figure 5), the site contains 0.43 acres of surface waters associated with a ditch (FLUCFCS 513), the canal (FLUCFCS 511) and one small borrow pond (FLUCFCS 527). Below is a description of each surface water feature.

Blackburn Canal/Channelized Creek (FLUCFCS 511; 0.30 acres)

Blackburn canal runs along the north property boundary and is maintained as an open water canal. Sparse torpedo grass and alligator weed was observed along the edge of the open water, but the

canal appears to be mowed regularly down to the waterline. The top of bank on the south side of Representative photographs of the canal are included in the enclosed photolog (Appendix A).

Ditch (FLUCFCS 513; 0.06)

A roadside ditch runs along the west side of the property on the east side of Auburn Road. It's a deeply incised ditch that appears to be maintained and mowed regularly. Vegetation in the bottom of the ditch is dominated by smartweed (*Persicaria hydropiperoides*), leather fern (*Acrostichum danaeifolium*) and primrose willow (*Ludwigia peruviana*). The east side of the ditch is densely vegetated with oaks and cabbage palms at top of bank. The ditch also drains north into Blackburn Canal. Representative photographs of the ditch are included in the enclosed photolog (Appendix A).

Borrow Pond (FLUCFCS 527; 0.07 Acres)

There is one small borrow pond that was found on the east side of the site and is shown as a surface water although there was no standing water in the pond. The area was unvegetated with the exception of laurel oaks and cabbage palms along the top of bank. Representative photographs of the borrow pond is included in the enclosed photolog (Appendix A).

3.0 LISTED SPECIES

MONARCH conducted a general wildlife survey to specifically evaluate the site for state listed species designated as either Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern by the FWC (under Chapter 68A-27, F.A.C.) or federally listed species designated as Endangered or Threatened by the USFWS (under 50 CFR 17 and 23). Since the site was farmed historically and is completely surrounded by development, the agricultural uses and habitat fragmentation limits potential for listed species to use this site.

The listed species survey was conducted following general guidelines and methodologies provided in the Florida Wildlife Conservation Guide², but focused on listed species with geographic distributions covering Sarasota County as summarized in Table 3-1 below. Before initiating field surveys, MONARCH first conducted a desktop analysis to review relevant regulatory databases for listed species that are known to occur in the area (i.e., eagle nests, wood stork colonies, scrub jay territories, etc.) and also took into consideration USFWS consultation areas that overlap this site (i.e., Florida bonneted bats, Florida Scrub Jay). MONARCH then conducted a field survey on June 3, 2024 to evaluate for listed species and any evidence of them using the site (i.e., gopher tortoise burrows). As part of the survey efforts, MONARCH conducted a preliminary gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) survey in accordance with FWC's *Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines* (Revised April 2023). During the survey, MONARCH observed two (2) gopher tortoise burrows as shown on the enclosed Land Use Map (Figure 7), but no other listed species were observed. Table 3-1 below summarizes the state and federal listed species that were evaluated during the survey and the likelihood of them occurring based on available habitats. Immediately following the table is a summary for each listed species.

² Developed by FWC and USFWS

Table 3-1. Listed Species Observed or Having Potential to Occur on the Auburn Road Site.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Legal Status		Probability of Occurrence
		USF WS	FWC ¹	
Reptiles				
American Alligator	<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	T (S/A)	FT(S/A)	High
Gopher Tortoise	<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	C	ST	Observed
Eastern Indigo Snake	<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>	T	FT	Very Low
Florida Pine Snake	<i>Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus</i>	----	ST	Very Low
Birds				
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	*	---- -	Moderate
Florida Scrub-jay	<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	T	FT	Very Low
Southeastern American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius paulus</i>	----	ST	Very Low
Florida Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia floridana</i>	----	ST	Very Low
Florida Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	----	ST	Moderate (Foraging Only)
Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	T	FT	Moderate (Foraging Only)
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	----	ST	Moderate (Foraging Only)
Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	----	ST	Moderate (Foraging Only)
Roseate spoonbill	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>	----	ST	Moderate (Foraging Only)

* Bald eagles are afforded federal protection under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

USFWS Status: E: Endangered (subject to state and federal protection); T: Threatened (subject to state and federal protection); T(S/A): Threatened due to similarity of appearance; C=Candidate for Listing.

FWC Status: FE: Federal Endangered (subject to state and federal protection); FT: Federally Threatened (subject to state and federal protection); ST: State-Threatened only (not federally listed); SSC: Species of Special Concern (not federally listed).

FT(S/A): Federally Threatened due to similarity of appearance.

American Alligator

The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) is a common species in Florida that is federally listed as Threatened only because of its similarity in appearance to the federally Threatened American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*). American crocodiles mostly occur in coastal areas of south Florida, but their range can extend as far north as Tampa Bay. They primarily occur in brackish or saltwater areas and can also be found in ponds, coves, tidal creeks, mangrove swamps and occasionally are encountered in more inland freshwater areas where extensive canal systems exist. American alligators on the other hand have potential to occur on nearly any site in Florida that has freshwater wetlands, rivers, lakes, ponds, ditches and canals. Alligators are expected to use the canal regularly given it is suitable open water habitat. Regardless, there are no regulations or development restrictions tied to alligators.

Gopher Tortoise

Gopher tortoises are listed as State-Threatened and prefer sandhills, xeric scrub habitat, palmetto prairie and pine flatwoods but can be found in other habitats and even developed areas. MONARCH observed two (2) gopher tortoise burrows during the recent survey as shown on the enclosed Land Use Map (Figure 7). A formal (100%) pre-construction survey will be required as part of future permitting efforts to comply with FWC's *Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines* (Revised April 2023). The survey will be conducted within 90-days of any construction or clearing to identify any gopher tortoise burrows on the property, and a relocation permit will be required from FWC to relocate tortoises offsite (to FWC approved recipient site) prior to construction.

Eastern Indigo Snake

The eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) is federally listed as Threatened and can be found in a wide-variety of habitats throughout Florida including pine flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, high pine, dry prairie, tropical hardwood forests, edges of freshwater marshes, agricultural fields, coastal dunes, and human-altered habitats. The indigo snake is also a commensal species that is known for using tortoise burrows and other refugia particularly in the northern part of their range where temperatures become cooler. A couple of gopher tortoise burrows were observed, but Eastern indigo snakes are typically not found in urban areas that have been subjected to significant

habitat fragmentation. Therefore, Eastern indigo snakes are unlikely to use this site given it is surrounded by development, roads and the canal.

Based on the *Eastern Indigo Snake Effect Determination Key*³ published by USFWS, if development impacts less than 25 acres of potential indigo snake habitat (i.e., pine flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, hardwood- conifer mixed habitats), the project is keyed out as “not likely to adversely affect” indigo snakes as long as the permittee follows the USFWS *Standard Protection Measures for the Eastern Indigo Snake* (August 2013). Therefore, Eastern indigo snakes will not be adversely affected from development of this site.

Florida Pine Snake

Florida pine snakes (*Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus*) are listed as State-Threatened and inhabit sandhill, scrub, xeric hammock, scrubby flatwoods, mesic pine flatwoods, and dry prairie with dry soils. They are commonly associated with gopher tortoises since they are a commensal species that can be found occupying the same burrows, but they are a cryptic species and rarely observed in the field. Pine snakes are not expected to use this site since there is no suitable xeric habitat. It's very unlikely that Florida pine snakes use this site given the habitat fragmentation from surrounding development, roads and the canal. Therefore, Florida pine snakes will not be adversely affected from development of this site.

Florida Bonneted Bat

The site occurs in the consultation area for the Florida bonneted bat which is federally listed as Endangered. They have been documented in a handful of counties in South Florida (including Sarasota County) and are known to forage in a variety of habitats including semitropical forests with tropical hardwood, pineland and mangrove habitats, as well as man-made areas such as golf courses and neighborhoods. Little is known about their life history, but they are known to roost in man-made structures, palms, and hollow trees. USFWS guidelines outlined in the *USFWS Florida Bonneted Bat Consultation Key* (October 22, 2019) require that formal acoustic/roost surveys be conducted for any projects (greater than 5 acres) that have potential roosting habitat. The site has plenty of mature trees but no snags or trees with cavities were observed that could offer potential

roosting habitat. The site also occurs in a highly developed area on the outskirts of the FBB consultation area and is over 25 miles from the closest known critical habitat for FBB (Peace River). Therefore, FBB are very unlikely to occur on this site and will not be adversely affected by development.

Bald Eagle

While no longer listed as Threatened by FWS or FWC, bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) continue to be protected by state and federal laws under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. No eagles were observed, nor does the site have any large pines that offer suitable nesting habitat. According to the Audubon Eagle Watch database, the closest bald eagle nest is located approximately one mile south of the site as shown on the Listed Species Map (Figure 8). Therefore, eagles sightings may occur given the nearby nest, but they are not expected to nest on this site and will not be adversely affected from future development.

Florida Scrub-jay

The Project Site occurs on the USFWS consultation area for the Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) which is federally listed as Threatened and prefers xeric habitats such as scrubby flatwoods and oak scrub. No scrub jays were observed, nor does the site contain any scrub habitat (i.e., sandhills, scrub oak and scrubby flatwoods). MONARCH also reviewed Sarasota County's Scrub Jay Parcel ID database and this parcel (parcel ID number 0413050001) is not listed as a potential scrub jay parcel. Therefore, Florida scrub jays are very unlikely to use this site and will not be adversely affected by development.

Southeastern American Kestrel

The Southeastern American kestrel (*Falco sparverious paulus*) is state listed as Threatened and tends to inhabit open lands where both foraging and nesting opportunities exist. They prefer to nest in natural cavities of dead trees (snags), abandoned woodpecker nests or utility poles and use open lands for foraging where prey can be easily detected, including sandhills, open pine savannah, pastures, and open wooded lots. No kestrels were observed during the survey nor does the site offer any suitable nesting habitat (i.e., snags) and foraging habitat is limited on this site. The site is also located in urban part of the County surrounded by development and is small in size which

is not suitable for kestrels since they typically rely on large tracts of open land for foraging opportunities. Therefore, it's unlikely that southeastern American kestrels use this site.

Florida Burrowing Owls

Florida Burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia floridana*) are state listed as Threatened and inhabit sandhills, ruderal communities, dry prairies, and pasture with minimal groundcover vegetation. No burrowing owls were observed during the preliminary gopher tortoise survey nor are they expected to use the site given most of the site is heavily wooded. Therefore, Florida burrowing owls will not be adversely affected by future development of this site.

Florida Sandhill Cranes

Florida sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) are state listed as Threatened and typically nest in shallow, freshwater marsh wetlands and utilize open grassy areas and pasture for foraging. No sandhill cranes were observed during the surveys, nor does the site have any suitable nesting habitat (freshwater marsh) for sandhill cranes. Sandhill cranes may periodically use the pasture areas as foraging grounds, but will not be adversely affected by future development of this site.

Listed Wading Birds

No listed wading birds were observed during the site review, but a number of state and federally listed wading birds (wood storks, little blue heron, tricolored heron, etc.). The closest known wading bird colonies and wood stork rookeries are located 4 miles west in Dona Bay as shown on the Listed Species Map (Figure 8), but wading birds in general can be expected to use the canal and roadside ditch for foraging purposes. Both the ditch and canal will be avoided with development. Therefore, future development of this site will not result in adverse impacts to wading birds or a loss of wading bird habitat. Additionally, stormwater ponds created through future development will provide more wading bird habitat.

Least Tern

The least tern (*Sternula antillarum*) is state listed as Threatened and is found throughout most coastal areas in Florida including estuaries, bays and rivers. Least terns generally nest from April

through August and have been increasingly documented using artificial nesting sites more inland because of loss of coastal habitat. Artificial nesting sites often preferred by this species includes active and dormant construction sites and/or agricultural lands with clean fill/exposed soils and a water source. The site currently does not offer suitable habitat, but will be monitored during future construction for least tern activity.

4.0 HABITAT IMPACT AND PRESERVATION DISCUSSION

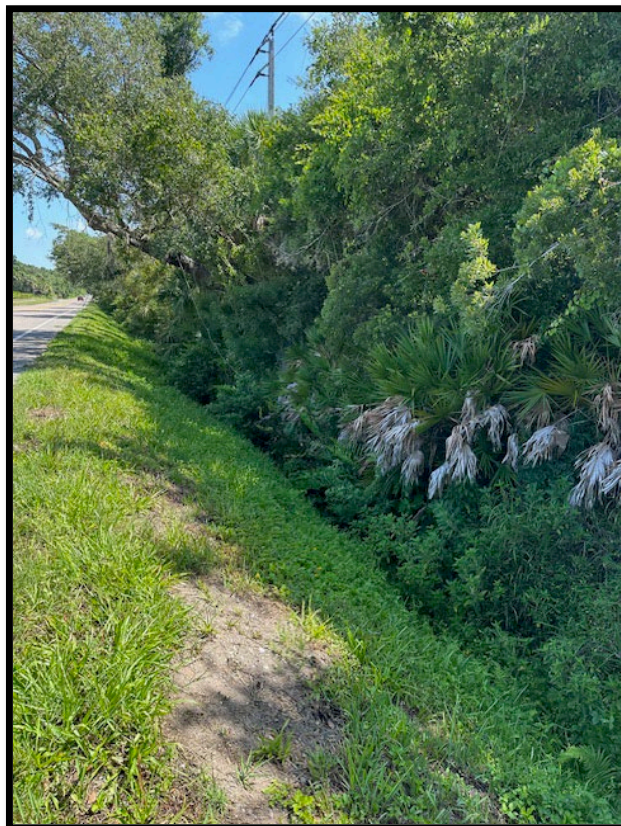
As discussed in Section 3.0, the site does not contain any wetlands, but three surface water features were found onsite. The roadside ditch and canal are being avoided but the small borrow pond will be impacted. A 25-foot landscape buffer is also being maintained along Blackburn Canal as shown on the Development Concept Plan (DCP) prepared by Morris Engineering & Consulting, LLC. The majority of the wooded areas will be impacted from development, but the native habitat abutting the creek will be preserved as part of the landscape buffer that is being maintained along Blackburn Canal.

APPENDIX A

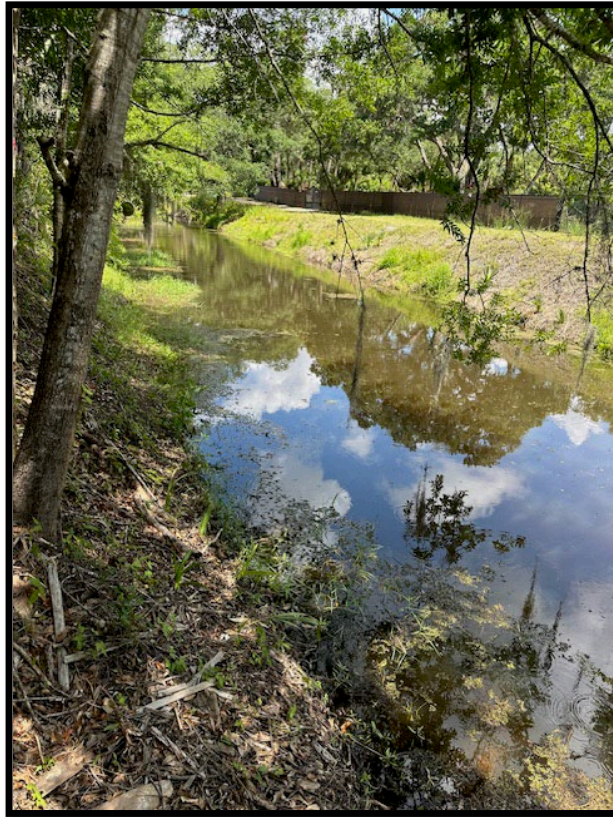
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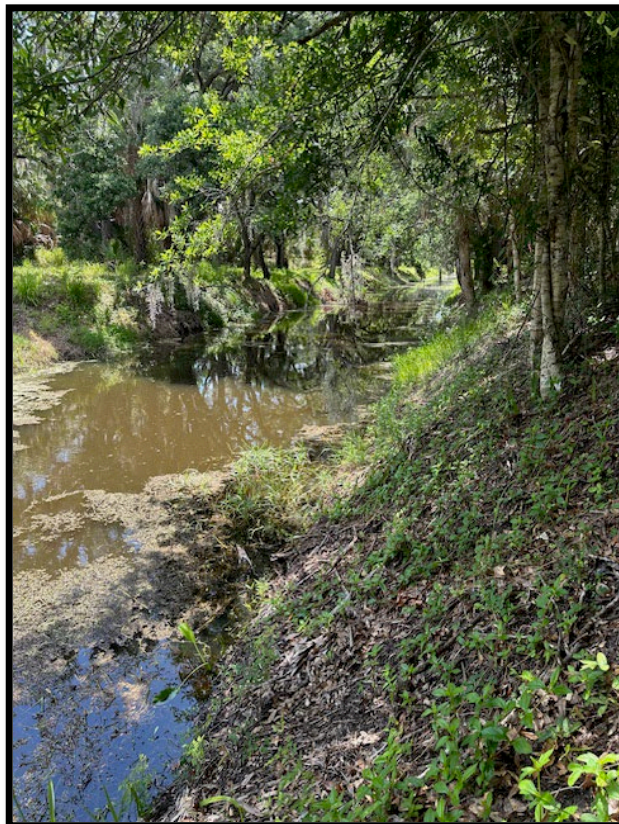
Photograph 1. Roadside Ditch



Photograph 2. Roadside Ditch



Photograph 3. Blackburn Canal



Photograph 4. Blackburn Canal



Photograph 5. Borrow Pond



Photograph 6. Pasture Area



Photograph 7. Pasture Area



Photograph 8. Pasture Area



Photograph 9. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 10. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 11. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 12. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 13. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 14. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 15. Mixed Hardwoods



Photograph 16. Mixed Hardwoods

FIGURES

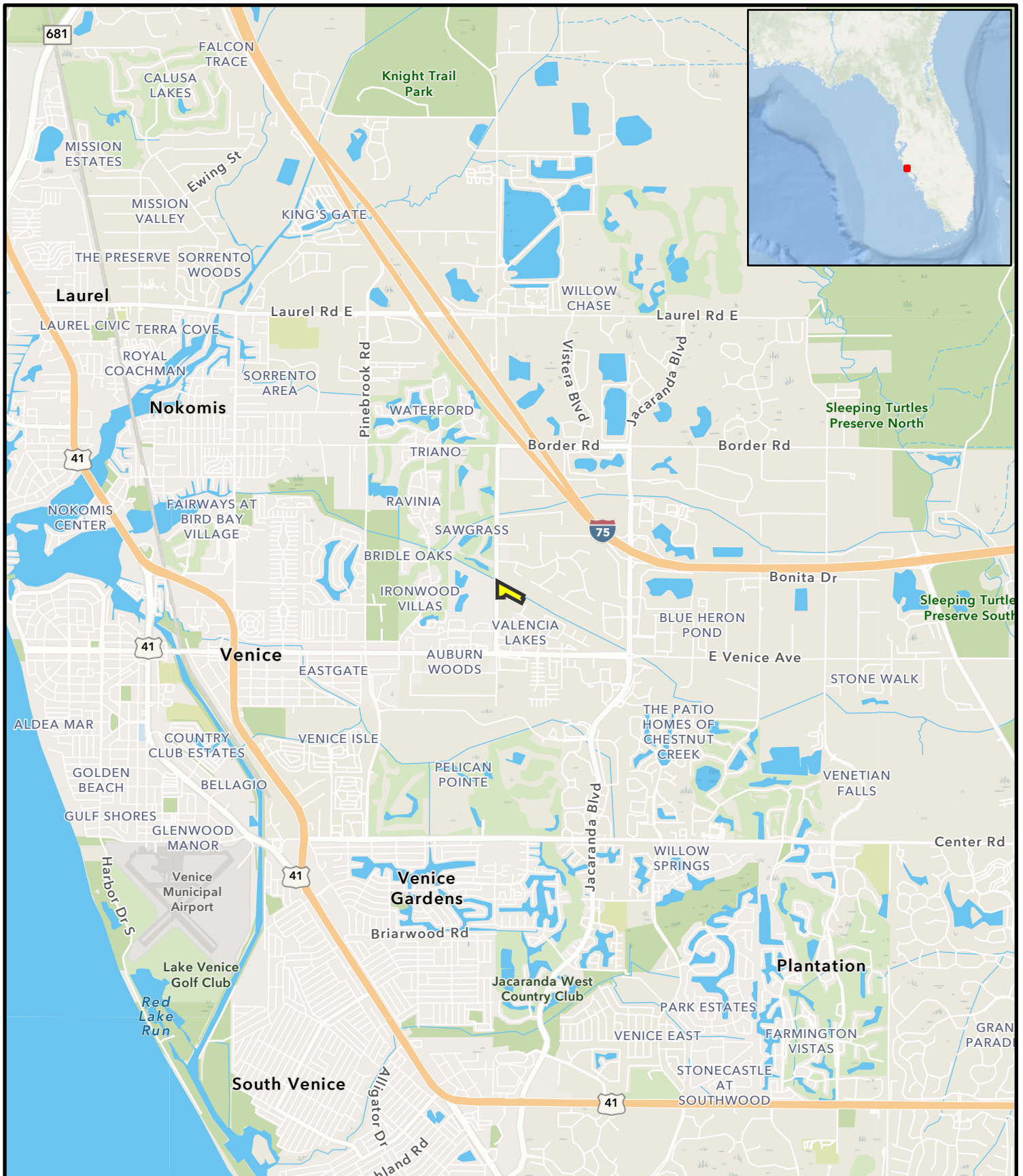
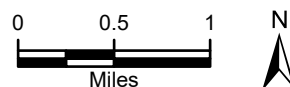


Figure 1
Location Map

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida

 Project Boundary



Sources: USGS, Verna Quad, 1989; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024


Monarch
ECOLOGY GROUP

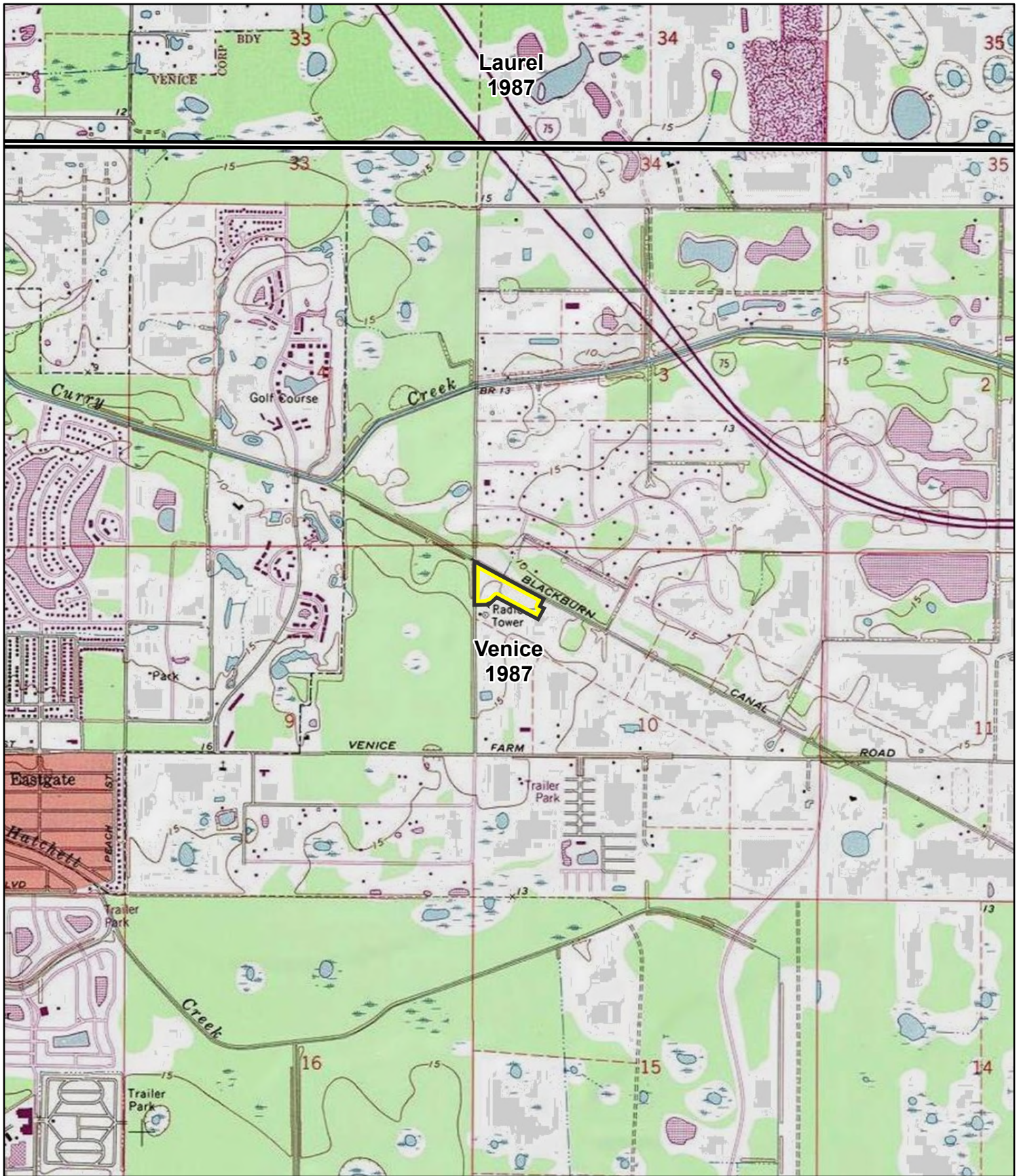
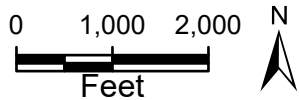




Figure 2
Topographic Map

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida



-  USGS Quad (7.5 min)
-  Project Boundary



Sources: USGS, Venice Quad, 1987; Monarch Ecology, 2024

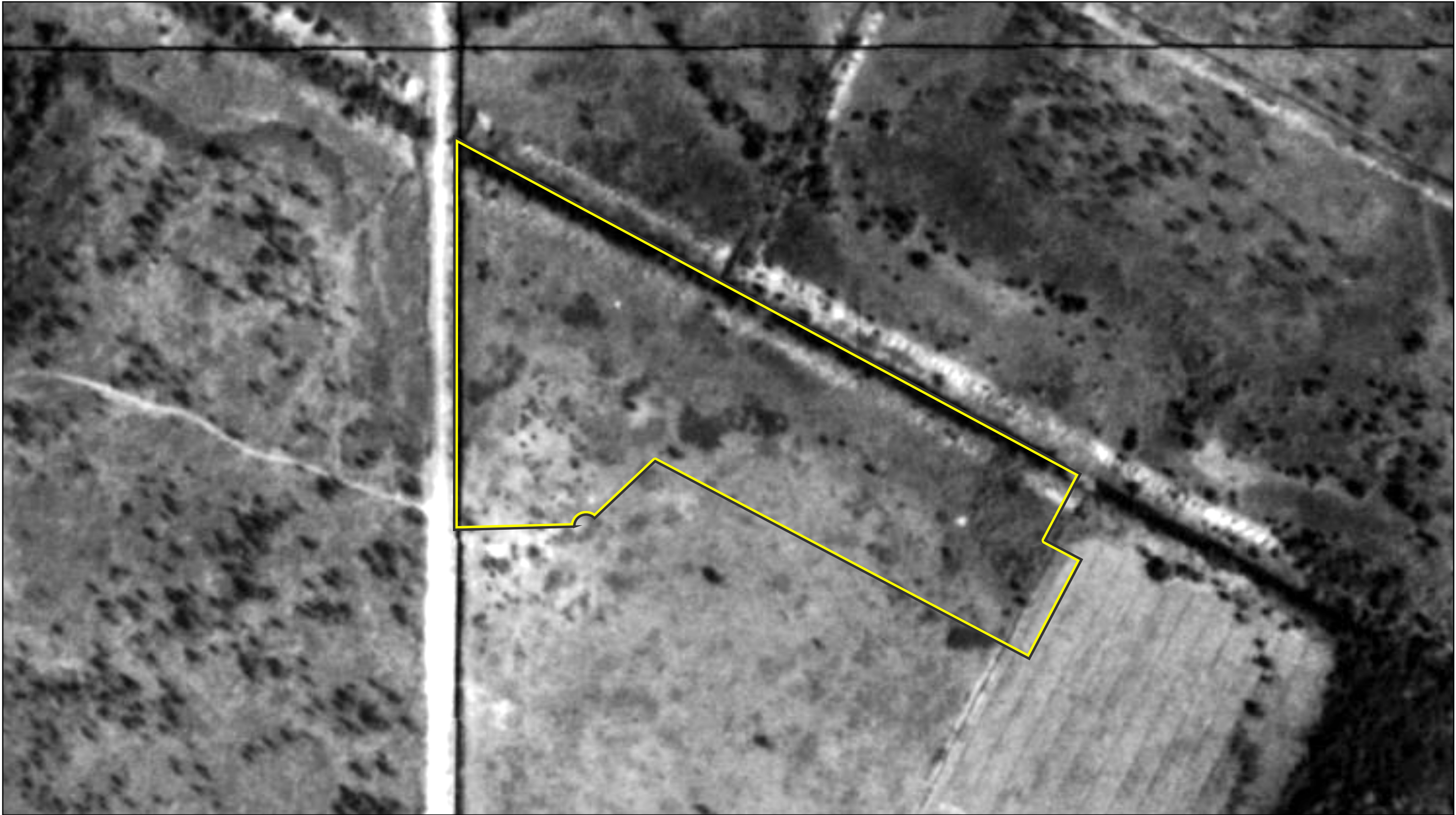


Figure 3
Historic Imagery - Fly Date 1948

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida

 Project Boundary



0 75 150
US Feet



Sources: USDA Imagery, 1948; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024



Figure 4
Historic Imagery - Fly Date 1974

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida

 Project Boundary



0 75 150
US Feet





Sources: USDA Imagery, 1974; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024

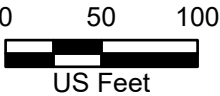


Type	ID	Acres
Canal	OSW-1	0.30
Ditch	OSW-2	0.06
Cattle Pond	OSW-3	0.07
Total		0.43

Figure 5
Surface Waters

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida

-  Project Boundary
-  Surface Water



Sources: Sarasota County Imagery, 2024; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024

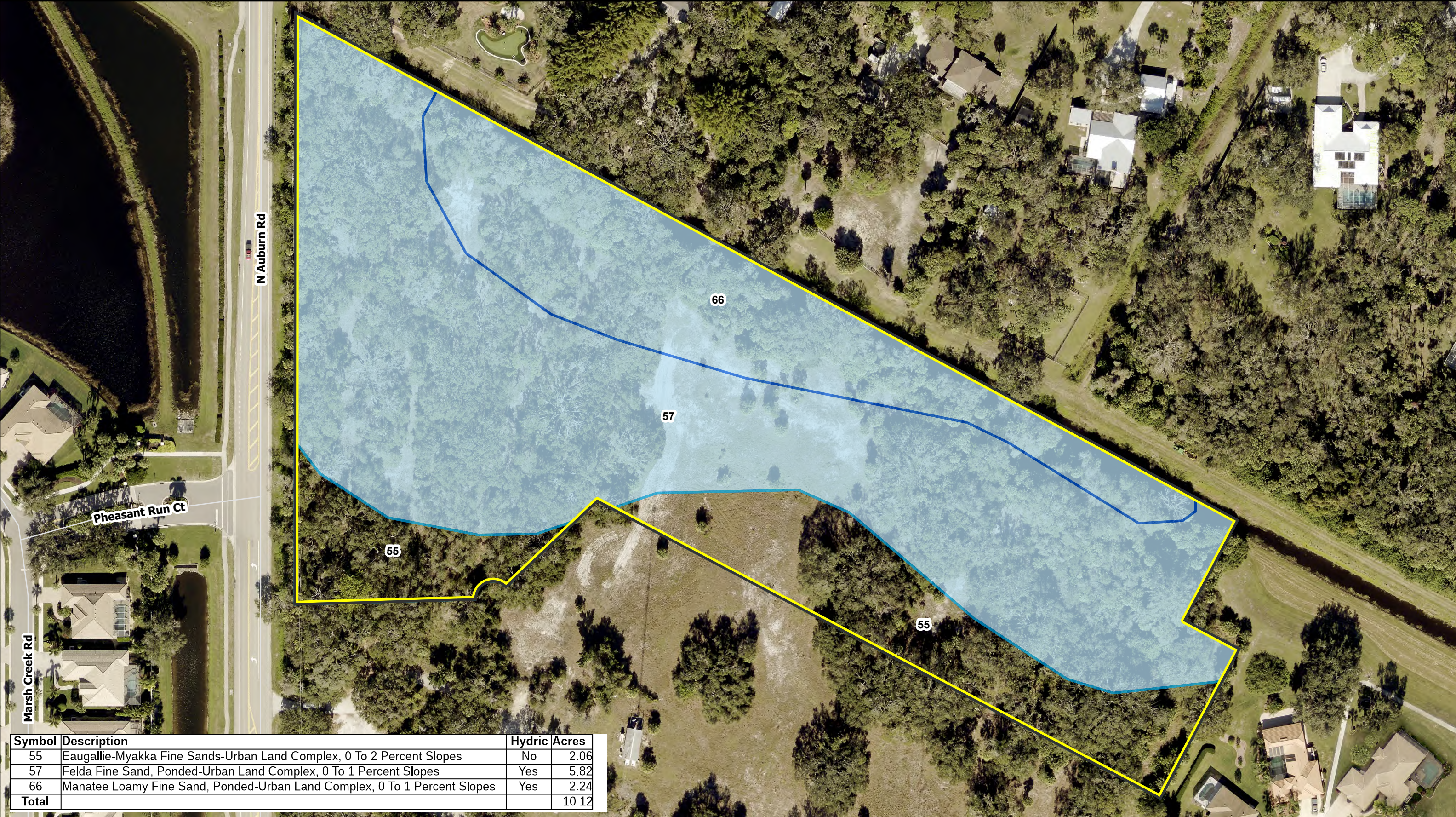


Figure 6
Soils

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida

Project Boundary

Soil

Hydric Soil

N

0 50 100
US Feet

Sources: USDA, 2023; Sarasota County Imagery, 2024; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024

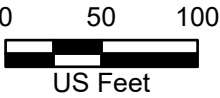


FLUCCS	Description	Acres
211	Improved Pasture	1.70
438	Mixed Hardwoods	7.99
511	Canal	0.30
513	Ditch	0.06
526	Borrow Pond	0.07
Total		10.12

Figure 7
Land Use/Land Cover

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida

- Project Boundary
- Land Use/Land Cover
- Potentially Occupied Gopher Tortoise Burrow



Sources: Sarasota County Imagery, 2024; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024

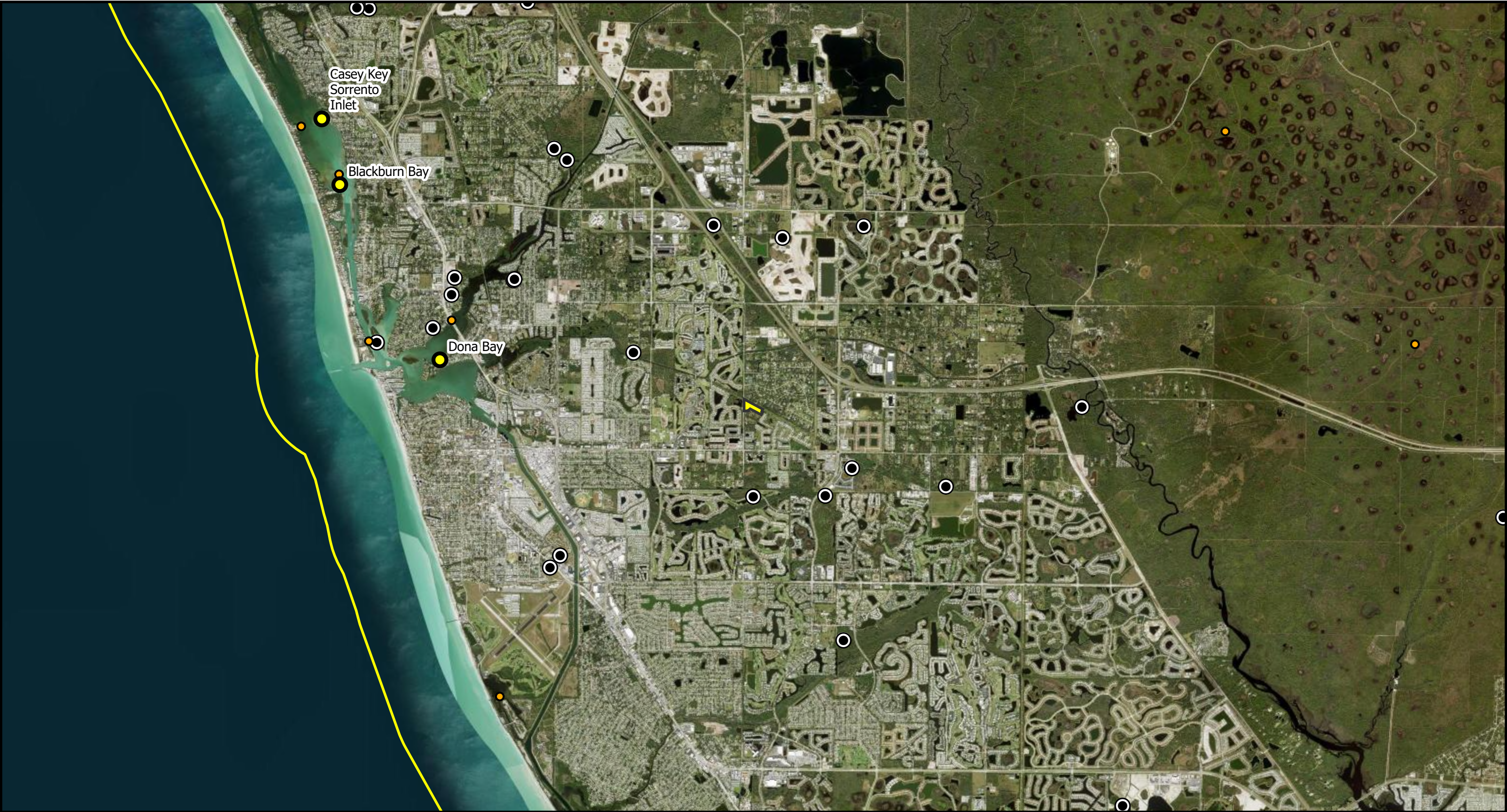
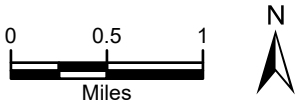


Figure 8
Listed Species

Auburn Road
Sarasota County, Florida



- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Project Boundary | Wood Stork Foraging Colony |
| Phase 1B Project Boundary | Wood Stork Foraging Area |
| Bald Eagle Nest | Wading Bird Rookery |

Site Lies within:
USFWS Wood Stork Foraging Area
USFWS Consultation Area:
Florida Scrub Jay

Source: FWC, 2023; USFWS, 2023; FDOT Imagery, 2020; Monarch Ecology Group, 2024

