

- **Provide a higher capacity east-west travel facility in east Lake County and west Seminole County**

Most of the existing roadways within the study area consist primarily of local and collector roads. SR 46 is the only east-west connection between Lake County and Seminole County within the study area. SR 46 is a two-lane rural roadway which was constructed prior to current design standards. The majority of SR 46 through Lake and Seminole Counties consists of two 12-foot travel lanes with varying shoulder widths.

A safer, higher capacity east-west travel facility is needed. Many roads in the study area are currently operating at conditions below LOS "C". However, for SR 46 in east Lake County and west Seminole County in the area of the Section 4(f) public lands, the existing LOS is "F", with annual average daily traffic of 23,700.

These LOS conditions, especially for SR 46, are projected to worsen significantly under the No-Build scenario. Growth in residential population and employment opportunities has contributed to an increasing travel demand in northwest Orange County, northern Lake County, and western Seminole County. Population and employment projections indicate that travel demand will continue to increase in the area for the foreseeable future. In the 2032 design year for the proposed project, the projected No-Build condition for SR 46 in east Lake County and west Seminole County in the area of the Section 4(f) public lands is a further deteriorated LOS "F", with annual average daily traffic of 37,440. That would be a 58% increase in traffic on a facility that is currently operating at LOS "F".

The proposed project is a needed link between urbanized areas. Modes of transportation within the Wekiva Parkway study area are generally limited to personal vehicles and vehicles for hire. There are currently no public bus service routes within the study area. Much of the study area traverses rural residential and conservation lands; however, the corridor connects the urbanized areas of Apopka in Orange County, Mount Dora in Lake County, and Sanford in Seminole County. The proposed Wekiva Parkway project would meet increased travel demand from population growth in an environmentally sensitive and compatible manner.

- **Improve safety to reduce vehicle crash fatalities**

Many of the study area roadways are two-lane local and arterial roads that do not meet the current design standards for safety and capacity. That is a major contributing factor in the high crash and fatality rates, especially for SR 46 through Lake and Seminole Counties. According to FDOT Crash Data Reports from 2000 to 2004, there were 27 fatalities resulting from vehicle crashes on the 18.5 mile segment of SR 46 from US 441 near Mount Dora in Lake County to I-4 near Sanford in Seminole County. FDOT data indicates that in 2004 alone there were 10 fatalities and 117 injuries resulting from 95 vehicle crashes on that section of SR 46.

Public awareness of this safety issue has been raised through media attention, such as an *Orlando Sentinel* article on September 28, 2005 which described SR 46 in Lake County as "Central Florida's Deadliest Road". The *Sentinel* stated that, according to their analysis of regional crash data from FDOT and the Florida Highway Patrol, on a per mile basis the section of SR 46 through Lake County is the most dangerous roadway in Central Florida, and the section of SR 46 through Seminole County was described as the region's second most dangerous roadway. While such media reports are not the basis for decision-making,

they have heightened public interest in the need for a safer travel facility in east Lake County and west Seminole County.

As traffic volumes grow on these unimproved local roadways, it is reasonable to expect that a similar increase in traffic incidents and fatalities would continue to occur. The proposed Wekiva Parkway and the widened and realigned sections of SR 46 would be designed and constructed in accordance with all current standards and would be available to those regional motorists desiring to bypass local traffic. A modern facility, coupled with the opportunity for segregation of trip types, would help to reduce the potential for traffic incidents and fatalities when compared to existing conditions.

- **Develop a transportation facility that minimizes impacts to the Wekiva Basin Area resources and that specifically improves wildlife habitat connectivity between conservation lands and reduces vehicle-wildlife conflicts**

The recognition of the importance of the Wekiva Basin Area, its habitat, wildlife, conservation and recreation values, the associated spring systems, and the connection to the Ocala National Forest elevates the protection of this resource to a primary component of the purpose and need for the Wekiva Parkway. There are numerous publicly held conservation and recreation lands within the study area, including Rock Springs at Kelly Park, Wekiwa Springs State Park, Rock Springs Run State Reserve, Seminole State Forest, and Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park. Vast areas of floodplains and wetlands, including the Wekiva Swamp south of SR 46 and the Seminole Swamp north of SR 46, are located west of the Wekiva River. The natural environment includes the Wekiva River Basin ecosystem, springshed, and an expansive wildlife habitat area that connects to the Ocala National Forest.

An additional safety concern in the study area is vehicle-wildlife conflict. Since much of the study area consists of sparsely populated rural residential areas and large tracts of conservation land, there have historically been many conflicts between vehicles and wildlife on roadways, particularly SR 46 in east Lake County. Over the past 20 years, more than 50 black bears have been killed by collisions with vehicles on a six mile segment of SR 46 adjacent to the Section 4(f) public lands. From 1994 to 2005 on that same section of SR 46, 23 black bears were killed by vehicles. Both the proposed Wekiva Parkway and a parallel service road in Lake County East incorporate three long wildlife bridges to enhance wildlife habitat connectivity between state conservation lands, which would greatly reduce the number of vehicle-wildlife conflicts.

## 1.3 Project Description

In early 2005, the Expressway Authority and FDOT began the Wekiva Parkway (SR 429)/SR 46 Realignment PD&E Study under joint management. The study addresses the following proposed project components:

- **The Wekiva Parkway**, a four-lane divided (expandable to six-lane divided) limited access toll facility, which would begin in Orange County at the planned terminus of the John Land Apopka Expressway at US 441 just west of CR 437 and extend to the north/northeast into Lake County, turning east and crossing the Wekiva River into Seminole County and terminating at I-4. The approximate length of the Wekiva

Parkway is 20.94 miles, with 8.16 miles in Orange County, 7.37 miles in Lake County and 5.41 miles in Seminole County.

- **SR 46 Reconstruction and Realignment** which would begin at the SR 46/US 441 interchange in Lake County and extend along the existing SR 46 corridor to the east, then turning southeast on a new alignment and entering Orange County with a systems interchange connection at the Wekiva Parkway. It is expected that the SR 46 improvements would provide six-lane divided controlled access along the existing alignment from US 441 to east of Round Lake Road, while the remaining alignment to the southeast is expected to be limited access. The approximate length of the SR 46 Reconstruction and Realignment is 4.79 miles, with 4.01 miles in Lake County and 0.78 mile in Orange County.
- **CR 46A Realignment**, a two-lane rural (expandable to four-lane rural) roadway, which would begin on existing CR 46A in east Lake County and extend to the south on a new alignment and tie into existing SR 46 with an access connection to the Wekiva Parkway. The approximate length of the CR 46A realignment is 2.72 miles.
- **Wekiva Parkway Access Improvements** would be required between the realignment of CR 46A in Lake County and Orange Boulevard in Seminole County to allow access to the private property along existing SR 46. A two-lane, non-tolled service road would be parallel to the Wekiva Parkway from north of the Wekiva Parkway interchange near Neighborhood Lakes to just east of the Wekiva River in Seminole County. Two-lane, one-way non-tolled frontage roads would be parallel to the Wekiva Parkway from east of the Wekiva River to Orange Boulevard in Seminole County. Those service and frontage roads would provide access to properties while also providing a non-tolled alternative for local trips.

### *Analysis of Alignment Alternatives*

Before the PD&E Study team developed initial alignment concepts in Orange, Lake, and Seminole Counties, a comprehensive data collection effort was undertaken within and adjacent to the study area. Controlled aerial photography of the corridor was used for base mapping. Along with property parcel lines/numbers, street names, geographic features and other identifiers, the data collected on such items as the locations of community facilities, public lands, known or potential historic sites, wetlands, floodplains, wildlife habitat, potential contamination sites, and others were put on the base map. Avoidance or minimization of impact to these facilities and sensitive areas, as well as homes and businesses, to the greatest extent possible was key in the development of the alignment alternatives.

The initial alternatives were presented at three Public Workshops held in Orange, Lake, and Seminole Counties in November 2005. After the first Public Workshops and meetings with local and state governmental agencies and other stakeholders on the initial alternatives, the project team began the process of alternatives evaluation and refinement. The concepts and impact assessments developed in the initial alternatives phase of the study served as the basis for identification of potential viable alternatives. The Viable Alternatives were presented at July/August 2006 Public Workshops held in Orange, Lake, and Seminole Counties. Two documents (*Technical Memorandum – Development and Analysis of Initial Alternatives* and *Technical Memorandum – Identification and Evaluation of Viable Alternatives*)

were prepared in December 2006 to provide information on the process that was completed during the initial and viable alternatives phases of the PD&E Study.

Based upon comparative assessment of the results of the engineering/environmental analysis and the evaluation of impacts/costs, and after extensive coordination with multiple stakeholders, the proposed alignment alternative was identified by the Expressway Authority and FDOT in April 2007. Subsequent coordination with state and local agencies resulted in some revisions to that alternative.

Following the identification of the proposed alignment alternative for the overall project, extensive discussions on funding options reached a crucial decision point. Due to declining transportation dollars available to FDOT, it was determined in early 2009 that the preliminary estimated cost of the project (\$1.8 billion) would not be financially feasible to fund without tolls on the Wekiva Parkway. In response to residents in the east Lake County area who expressed concerns over paying a toll for a local trip, FDOT and the Expressway Authority analyzed options to provide a non-tolled alternative for local trips. After several meetings during mid to late 2009 with area residents, local government officials, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and members of the environmental stakeholder community, a two-lane, two-way service road concept parallel to the Wekiva Parkway was developed. To minimize impacts, the service road is proposed to be within the previously identified Wekiva Parkway right-of-way. The service road would extend from just north of the Wekiva Parkway interchange near Neighborhood Lakes to just east of the Wekiva River in Seminole County; that concept was presented at a Public Workshop in Lake County on December 17, 2009. Public comments resulting from the workshop were reviewed and incorporated into the preliminary design of the service road and the Wekiva Parkway mainline.

The proposed Wekiva Parkway alignment alternative, depicted in **Exhibit 3**, will be presented at three Public Hearings to be held in Orange, Lake, and Seminole Counties. Coordination with federal, state, and local agencies, the project advisory group, the environmental advisory committee, the public and other stakeholders has been ongoing and will continue throughout the study.

### ***Acquisition of Conservation Lands***

The *Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act* authorizes the Expressway Authority to act as a third-party acquisition agent on behalf of the State of Florida Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) or the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) for acquisition of conservation parcels and land needed to construct the Wekiva Parkway. The Act requires acquisition of the parcels known as Neighborhood Lakes, Pine Plantation, Seminole Woods, and Wekiva River Mitigation Bank (formerly New Garden Coal) prior to completion of the Wekiva Parkway. Florida Statutes Chapter 369.316.317(6)(b) and (c) state that “acquisition of the land described in this section is required to provide right of way for the Wekiva Parkway, a limited access roadway linking State Road 429 to Interstate 4, an essential component in meeting regional transportation needs to provide regional connectivity, improve safety, accommodate projected population and economic growth, and satisfy critical transportation requirements caused by increased traffic volume growth and travel demands. Lands acquired pursuant to this section that are needed for transportation facilities for the Wekiva Parkway shall be determined not necessary for conservation purposes pursuant to ss. 253.034(6) and 373.089(5) and shall be transferred to







or retained by the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority or the Department of Transportation upon reimbursement of the full purchase price and acquisition costs.”

In May 2005, FDEP, FDOT, and the Expressway Authority acquired for the state a perpetual conservation easement over the majority of the 1,553 acres of the Wekiva River Mitigation Bank, excluding the required right-of-way for Wekiva Parkway. The agreement protects the environmentally sensitive land from future development.

On December 19, 2006, the Governor and the Florida Cabinet approved the purchase of the Neighborhood Lakes parcels totaling 1,619 acres. Acquisition of those parcels was completed in March 2007 through a multi-party agreement between FDEP, SJRWMD, the Expressway Authority, Orange County, and Lake County. Approximately 192 acres of the Neighborhood Lakes property will be needed for the proposed Wekiva Parkway roadway and stormwater ponds. The remainder may be managed by FDEP and SJRWMD as part of the Wekiva River Basin State Parks, possibly Rock Springs Run State Reserve which is contiguous to Neighborhood Lakes.

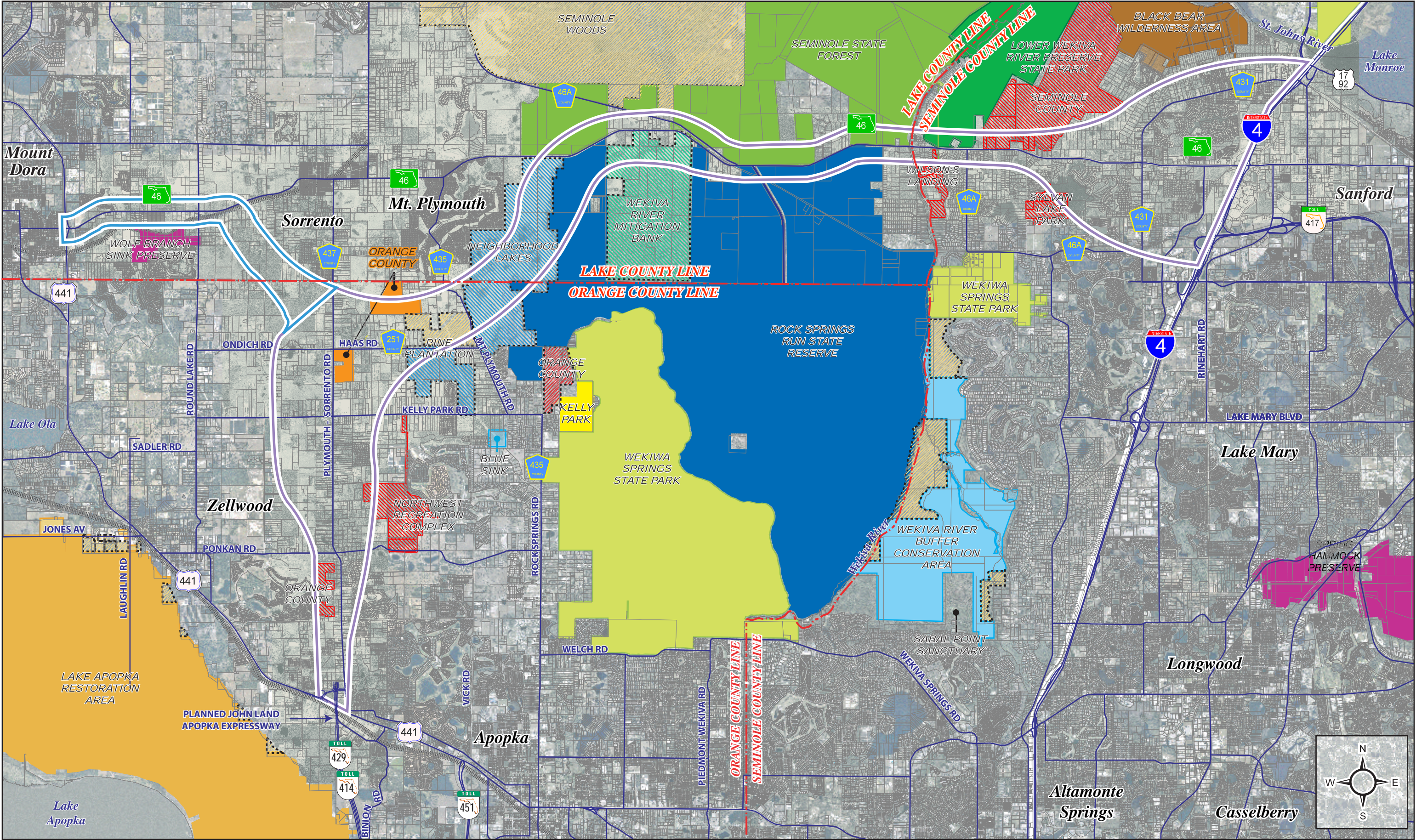
The Pine Plantation property consists of approximately 628 acres located in north Orange County. On September 30, 2008, the Governor and the Cabinet approved an agreement to purchase 385 acres of Pine Plantation in partnership with the Expressway Authority and FDOT. The land acquired will serve as a buffer to protect surface water and groundwater resources within the Wekiva Study Area, including recharge within the Wekiva River spring-shed, and will protect it from future development. The remainder of Pine Plantation consists of one parcel through which the Wekiva Parkway will traverse.

**Exhibit 4** shows the properties identified for acquisition in the *Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act*, along with the publicly owned lands within the study area.

## 1.4 Section 4(f) Resources

The Wekiva-Ocala Greenway is a continuous natural corridor spanning the north-central portion of the state from Orlando to the Ocala National Forest. The Greenway is an important refuge for the Florida black bear, as well as other wildlife such as the bald eagle, swallow-tailed kite, Florida scrub-jay, and wading birds. Located within the Wekiva and St. Johns River basins, the Greenway also serves an important water quality protection function. It provides the metro Orlando area with a large, accessible natural area to enjoy primitive, nature-based recreation opportunities. Public conservation lands currently included in the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway are the Wekiva River Buffer Conservation Area, Wekiwa Springs State Park, Rock Springs Run State Reserve, Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park, Seminole State Forest, Black Bear Wilderness Area, Hontoon Island State Park, Blue Spring State Park, and the recently acquired Neighborhood Lakes. Although the Neighborhood Lakes property is now considered to be state conservation land, it is not subject to this Section 4(f) impact evaluation because the Wekiva Parkway project was contemplated in joint planning for acquisition of the property -- that is clearly stated in the acquisition agreement. Excerpts from both the Neighborhood Lakes purchase agreement and the Warranty Deed are provided in **Appendix B**. Also, the *Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act* states lands acquired pursuant to the Act “that are needed for transportation





**LEGEND**

Wekiva Parkway Study Area

SR 46 Realignment Study Area

Solid Color = State or County Owned Conservation/Park Lands

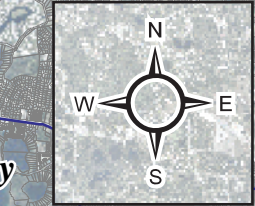
Potential Acquisition

Public Land - Not Conservation

Recently Acquired

Perpetual Conservation Easement

**Exhibit 4**  
**Public Lands and Potential Acquisition Parcels**





facilities for the Wekiva Parkway shall be determined not necessary for conservation purposes”.

Section 4(f) resources which will be affected by the proposed Wekiva Parkway include **Rock Springs Run State Reserve** and **Seminole State Forest** in east Lake County and **Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park** in west Seminole County. The following subsections provide a summary of each property’s location and significance. More detailed information concerning property characteristics is provided in the Wekiva Parkway (SR 429)/SR 46 Realignment PD&E Study *Determination of Section 4(f) Applicability* (October 2007). The approximate locations of these three Section 4(f) properties in relation to the proposed alignment alternative are shown on the previously referenced **Exhibit 3** on page 1-9.

### 1.4.1 Wekiva River Basin State Parks

Three contiguous parks in Orange, Lake, and Seminole Counties comprise the Wekiva River Basin State Parks, which are managed by the FDEP, Division of Recreation and Parks. The three parks are Wekiwa Springs State Park, Rock Springs Run State Reserve, and Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park. The Wekiva River Basin State Park staff manages the three parks as one operational unit. The Wekiva Parkway alignment, while following the existing SR 46 alignment as closely as possible through this area, will impact Rock Springs Run State Reserve and Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park. The proposed roadway will also impact Seminole State Forest, which is separated from Rock Springs Run State Reserve by SR 46. Seminole State Forest is managed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Division of Forestry and is discussed in subsection 1.4.2.

The following information for Rock Springs Run State Reserve and Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park was obtained from the FDEP, Division of Recreation and Parks *Wekiva River Basin State Parks Multi-Unit Management Plan* (April 22, 2005) and from the Statement of Significance provided by the Division of Recreation and Parks, Office of Park Planning (included in **Appendix C**).

#### 1.4.1.1 Rock Springs Run State Reserve

*Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks*

Rock Springs Run State Reserve is located in north Orange County and east Lake County. The park is bounded on the north by State Road 46, the Wekiva River Mitigation Bank, and a small number of rural residential parcels in Lake County, and on the east by the Wekiva River up to the abandoned Seaboard Coastline Railroad, and by Wekiva River Road from the former railroad line north to SR 46. Wekiwa Springs State Park is adjacent to Rock Springs Run State Reserve on the southwestern boundary, and the recently acquired Neighborhood Lakes property is the northwestern boundary. The Seminole State Forest and Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park are located immediately north of State Road 46.

On March 10, 1983 the Trustees obtained fee simple title to the property that became Rock Springs Run State Reserve. The Trustees conveyed management authority under the Multiple Agency Management No. 3571 (originally Lease No. 745-9008). The lead managing agency is the FDEP, Division of Recreation and Parks. Other agencies included in the management of the Reserve are the Division of Forestry, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and SJRWMD.



Rock Springs Run State Reserve is a unit of the Florida State Park system managed for the primary purpose of resource-based outdoor recreation and conservation. The Reserve is also a Type I Wildlife Management Area. The Reserve is part of the Wekiva River Basin, whose waterways and associated lands in central Florida comprise some of the most prized natural assets of the state. The Reserve has regional, state, and national significance for the conservation and recreational values it provides. The property functions as a habitat preserve for many listed species, including Florida black bear, Florida scrub jay, striped newt and gopher tortoise, natural buffer to a National Wild and Scenic River and Florida Aquatic Preserve, and source of high-quality resource based recreational opportunities.

The Reserve provides opportunities for horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, primitive camping, fishing, paddling, and nature observation. Limited hunting is permitted within the Wildlife Management Area and is managed by the FWC. Visitor use is focused on the Reserve trail system that includes 14 miles of hiking trails, 17 miles of equestrian trails, 15 miles of biking trails, and 32 miles of multi-use trails. A trail head kiosk is located on the main paved entrance road. Other public facilities include an equestrian concession and restroom. Support facilities include a ranger residence, a volunteer residence site, an old hunt cabin, a shop and an office. It should be noted that none of these structures or facilities are located within the project study area.

#### 1.4.1.2 Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park

*Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks*

Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park is located in east Lake County and west Seminole County, and stretches north approximately 12 miles from State Road 46 up to the Ocala National Forest. The Preserve lies between State Road 44 and the Seminole State Forest to the west and the St. Johns River to the east. Rock Springs Run State Reserve and Wekiwa Springs State Park are located immediately south across State Road 46. The lower four miles of the Wekiva River and Black Water Creek cut through the southern portion of the Preserve.

On August 19, 1976, the Trustees obtained fee simple title to the property that became the Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park. The Trustees conveyed management authority of the property to FDEP, Division of Recreation and Parks, under Lease No. 2950. This lease expires on April 4, 2076. Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park, Rock Springs Run State Reserve and Wekiwa Springs State Park are managed collectively as one operational unit by the Division of Recreation and Parks, and are referred to as the Wekiva River Basin Parks. The basic policy and direction of management for these properties is contained in the approved *Wekiva Basin Parks Multi-Unit Management Plan* of April 22, 2005.

Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park is a unit of the Florida State Park system managed for the primary purpose of resource-based outdoor recreation and conservation. The Preserve is part of the Wekiva River Basin, whose waterways and associated lands in central Florida comprise some of the most prized natural assets of the state. The Preserve has regional, state and national significance for the conservation and recreational values it provides. The original purchase in 1976 of almost 5,000 acres was intended for protection of the lower Wekiva River. Additional purchases in 1994 and 1995 have formed a wildlife corridor along the Wekiva and St. Johns Rivers connecting to the Ocala National Forest. The



property functions as a habitat preserve for many listed species, including Florida black bear, Florida scrub jay, and gopher tortoise, natural buffer to a National Wild and Scenic River and Florida Aquatic Preserve, and source of high-quality resource based recreational opportunities.

The Preserve provides opportunities for horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, primitive camping, fishing, paddling and nature observation. Visitor use is focused on the Preserve trail system that includes 23 miles of service roads and 18 miles of dedicated trails for horseback riding, hiking and biking. A portion of the Florida National Scenic Trail is located at the southern end of the Preserve and the property is a designated stop on the East Section of the Great Florida Birding Trail. A trailhead and equestrian camping area with stalls, corrals, and restroom is located at the north entrance of the park. The southern entrance provides trailhead access for hiking and a canoe/kayak launch on the Wekiva River is located at Katie's Landing. Support facilities include an office for the Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve, a ranger residence, and volunteer RV site, all located near the southern entrance. It should be noted that none of these structures or facilities are located within the project study area.

## 1.4.2 Seminole State Forest

*Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Forestry*

Seminole State Forest is located in Lake County, north of SR 46. The forest is bounded on the east by the Wekiva River and the Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park. Seminole Woods/Swamp is located to the west of the forest, and Rock Springs Run State Reserve and the Wekiva River Mitigation Bank (formerly known as New Garden Coal) are located south of the forest, separated by SR 46 and a small cluster of rural residential and commercial parcels.

The majority of Seminole State Forest is owned by the State of Florida Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund. The St. Johns River Water Management District owns 2,922 acres. The forest is managed by the FDACS, Division of Forestry. FWC is a cooperative manager and is responsible for wildlife management.

The property is designated a state forest and is managed under the multiple use concept (see Florida Statutes Chapter 253.034(1)(a) and Chapter 589.04(3)) and offers many benefits to Florida's citizens and visitors. Management of the forest promotes recreation, timber, wildlife, wildlife habitat, endangered species, watersheds, environmental education and many other values. Disturbed areas are to be restored to functioning natural communities. Recreation opportunities include hiking, horseback riding, primitive camping, canoeing, wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting. Two hiking trails (Lower Wekiva and Sulphur Island) are included in the Division of Forestry's Trailwalker Hiking Program and three horse trails are included in the Trail Trotter Program. None of these structures or facilities are located within the project study area. The Statement of Significance for Seminole State Forest from the Division of Forestry is provided in **Appendix C**.