



Everglades Coalition

July 31, 2018

Terrie Bates
Water Resources Division
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406

Re: Kendall Parkway Comprehensive Plan Amendment, State Application Review

Dear Ms. Bates:

On behalf of the 62 member organizations of the Everglades Coalition committed to the protection and restoration of America's Everglades, we are taking this opportunity to provide comments during the State review process of the proposed state road 836 extension application. We hope you include the following points in the agency response letter and consider this information as part of your review and information gathering process.

The Miami Dade Expressway Authority's (MDX) proposed extension of the SR 836 expressway beyond the Urban Development Boundary through the sensitive wetlands of the Bird Drive Basin directly conflicts with Federal and State objectives including Endangered Species Act protection and the goals of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP).

Both proposed corridors, as shown in red and yellow in Attachment C, being considered by MDX and Miami- Dade County, cut directly through the Bird Drive Basin, crossing over and adjacent to property purchased with federal funds for the purposes of Everglades restoration and endangered species protection. In a letter sent by the US Department of the Interior (DOI) to the executive director of MDX on November 3, 2017, agency officials expressed these concerns directly, stating that "The department is concerned that placement of a 4-6 lane high speed paved highway on these lands is in conflict with the legally mandated purpose for which these lands were acquired"¹. The DOI brought this conflict with environmental objectives to MDX's attention as early as 2015, and yet MDX did not take the federal agency's concerns into account, and continued to advocate for project routes that would directly impact the Bird Drive Basin project footprint and federal grant lands.

¹ Letter to MDX Executive Director from Shannon A. Estenoz, Director of Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives, US Department of the Interior. November 3, 2017

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1000 Friends of Florida
Arthur R. Marshall Foundation
Audubon Florida
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Audubon of the Western Everglades
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Backcountry Fly Fishers of Naples
Bullsguar Alliance
Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association
Caloosahatchee Waterkeeper
Center for Biological Diversity
Clean Water Action
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Defenders of Wildlife
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society
Earthjustice
Environment Florida
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Law Center
Everglades Trust
Florida Conservation Voters Education Fund
Florida Defenders of the Environment
Florida Keys Environmental Fund
Florida Native Plant Society
Florida Oceanographic Society
Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall
Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Everglades
Hendry-Glades Audubon Society
International Dark-Sky Association,
FL Chapter
Izaak Walton League of America
Izaak Walton League Florida Division
Izaak Walton League Florida Keys Chapter
Izaak Walton League Mangrove Chapter
Lake Worth Waterkeeper
Last Stand
League of Women Voters of Florida
Martin County Conservation Alliance
Miami Pine Rocklands Coalition
Miami Waterkeeper
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
North Carolina Outward Bound School
Ocean Research & Conservation Association
Reef Relief
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
Save It Now, Glades!
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Florida Chapter
Sierra Club Broward Group
Sierra Club Calusa Group
Sierra Club Central Florida Group
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group
Sierra Club Miami Group
Snook and Gamefish Foundation
South Florida Audubon Society
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
The Florida Wildlife Federation
The Institute for Regional Conservation
The National Wildlife Federation
The Urban Environment League of
Greater Miami
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership
Tropical Audubon Society

The Bird Drive Basin project is a critical component of CERP meant to reduce seepage from Everglades National Park, recharge groundwater east of Krome Avenue, provide C-4 peak flood attenuation, provide water deliveries to the South Dade Conveyance System, and increase the spatial extent of wetlands². Although this project was delayed for restudy purposes in 2008 and currently lacks a specific timeframe for construction, it is still on track for implementation³. The restudy called for an altered project concentrated on the western half mile of the Bird Drive Basin, which was approved by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in resolution No. 2012-511 and shown in Attachment B. It was decided by the SFWMD to concentrate land in a one-mile area shown in Attachment A, to ensure the actual project met all of its objectives and had a half mile buffer. The MDX proposed preferred corridor, in yellow in Attachment C, cuts into the one-mile project protection area, as well as through lands purchased with federal grant investments. The MDX project as proposed would force further reevaluation of and may result in reduced funding and support for the implementation of the Bird Drive Basin project. We ask that you urge Miami-Dade County and MDX to relocate the proposed road expansion footprint eastward of this one mile area in order to ensure the project is not impacted by the existence of a 6-lane highway.

The project would also encroach on areas of the Pennsuco wetlands purchased with federal grant funding for the express purpose of protecting and restoring the Everglades ecosystem. We ask that you highlight suggested specific actions, such as complete relocation or full bridging, to avoid and minimize the impacts to the Pennsuco wetlands and identify areas that must be avoided completely due to Federal encumbrances. Furthermore, the corridors proposed by MDX could interfere with Florida Power and Light's use of the West Consensus Transmission Line Corridor in the central Bird Drive Basin shown in Attachment D⁴. This transmission line corridor was established as a compromise between federal and state governments and the utility to minimize damage to the ecosystems of Everglades National Park. To the extent that this issue is yet to be resolved we request that you identify your agency's preferred corridor and we ask that you request the proposed project be relocated to avoid this future conflict altogether.

The federal government's purchase of land in the Bird Drive Basin also safeguards the well-being of endangered species in the region. The Bird Drive Basin lies within the focal area for the Florida bonneted bat shown in Attachment F and the Everglade snail kite Consultation Area shown in Attachment G. While the project lies outside the focus area for the Florida Panther, the observation of a 120-pound male panther mortality that occurred on June 25, 2007 in close proximity to the proposed project shows that development in the region "may affect" the Florida panther⁵. The project also lies within core wood stork foraging areas in close proximity to observed Wood stork and Everglade snail kite nesting sites shown in Attachment E⁶.

The development pressure which will follow in the wake of this project will have further negative impacts on Everglades Restoration goals. The impacted land is in a particularly low-lying and flood prone region, as demonstrated in Attachment H⁷. As such, it will require significant flood protection and will serve to add additional sources of pollution. We ask the SFWMD to highlight these conflicts now and ask that Miami-Dade

² SFWMD, Bird Drive Basin Update-Background and Current Status, December 14, 2011.

³ SFWMD, Bird Drive Basin-Background and Current Status. April 30, 2012.

⁴ US Department of the Interior-National Parks Service. Acquisition of Florida Power & Light Company Land in the East Everglades Expansion Area Final Environmental Impact Statement. November 2015.

⁵ US Army Corps of Engineers. SAJ-2017-01814(SP-NDF). Posted: 3/7/2018.

<http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/Public-Notices/Article/1460341/saj-2017-01814sp-ndf/>

⁶ Miami Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management, 'Urban Expansion Area #2 Environmental Issues'. October 24, 2017.

⁷ Miami Dade County Water & Sewer Department. Flood Risk Map.

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County not run a highway through this land so as to ensure the successful implementation of Everglades Restoration.

At its most basic level, CERP is a partnership between the federal government, the State of Florida, and the local communities of Florida based on a commitment to cost-sharing and cooperation for mutual benefits. By approving this project, Miami-Dade County and the State of Florida would prove themselves to be wholly uncooperative partners, thus eroding federal funding support for CERP and putting the continued success of the partnership into jeopardy. The state of Florida cannot allow these conflicts to jeopardize the successful implementation of Everglades Restoration. The success of CERP is far too important to the economy for tourism, water supply, home values, flood attenuation, ecological function, water quality and the overall resilience of South Florida as a whole for such a risk to be deemed acceptable.

We ask you to continue consolidating land in the Bird Drive Basin within the one mile area identified at the May 10, 2012 Governing Board meeting, as highlighted in Attachment A. And, in coordination with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), we ask you to raise the above mentioned conflicts with Miami-Dade County in your review of the “Kendall Parkway Comprehensive Plan Amendment” before the August 6 deadline. SFWMD needs to assume that the road depicted in yellow in Attachment C, the worst case scenario for the Everglades because it is the more western alignment, is their preferred corridor as indicated by the mayor and the commission at the April 20, 2018 Miami-Dade County Commission meeting.

The Everglades Coalition looks forward to working with and supporting the SFWMD to ensure the successful completion of the Bird Drive Basin project and to ensure that no other proposed projects jeopardize its success as this proposal before you clearly does.

Sincerely,



Mark Perry
Co-Chair



Marisa Carrozzo
Co-Chair

CC: Terese Manning, Policy and Planning Analyst, SFWMD
Matthew Morrison, Office Chief, Federal Policy & Coordination, SFWMD
Eva Vélez Torres, Office Chief, State & Agricultural Policy, SFWMD
Steve Collins, Director, Real Estate Divison, SFWMD
Noah Valenstein, Secretary, FDEP
Eric Sutton, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Attachments

Attachment A: Bird Drive Basin Project Area
(Source: SFWMD)

Attachment B: Bird Drive Basin Proposed Project Concept
(Source: SFWMD)

Attachment C: Current MDX Proposed 836 Extension Project Corridors Overlay Map
(Source: Miami Dade County)

Attachment D: FPL West Consensus Transmission Line Corridor
(Source: US DOI-NPS)

Attachment E: Wood Stork & Snail Kite considerations in the proposed project area
(Source: Miami Dade County DERM)

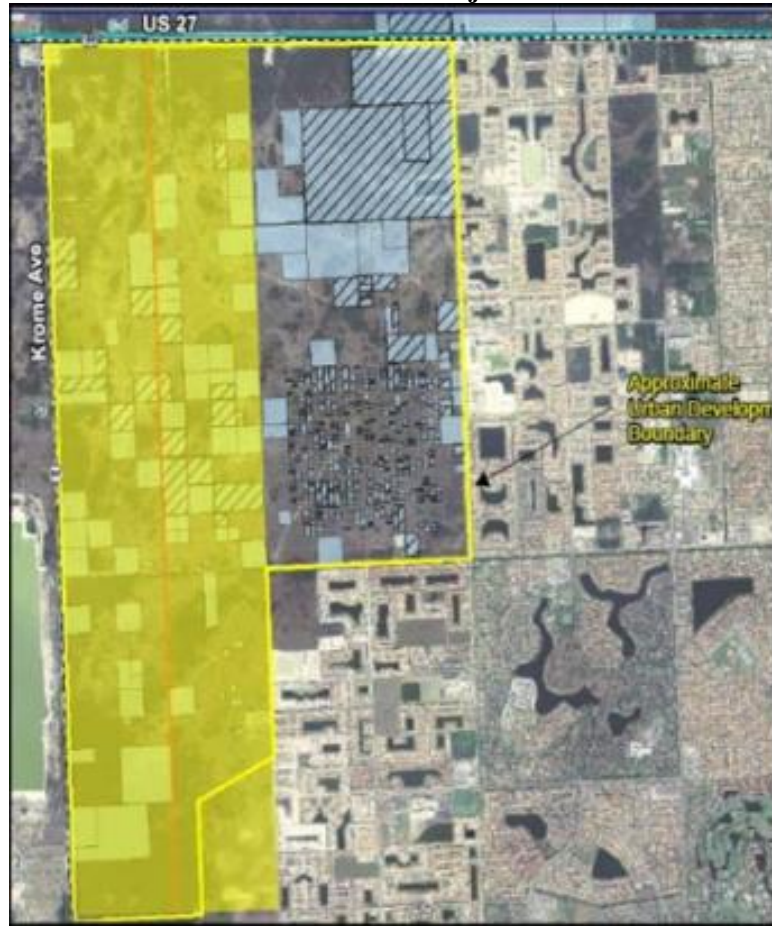
Attachment F: Florida Bonneted Bat Focal Area
(Source: US Army Corps of Engineers)

Attachment G: Everglade Snail Kite Consideration Area
(Source: US Army Corps of Engineers)

Attachment H: Miami Dade County Groundwater Elevations and Flood Risk Map
(Source: Miami Dade County Water & Sewer Department)

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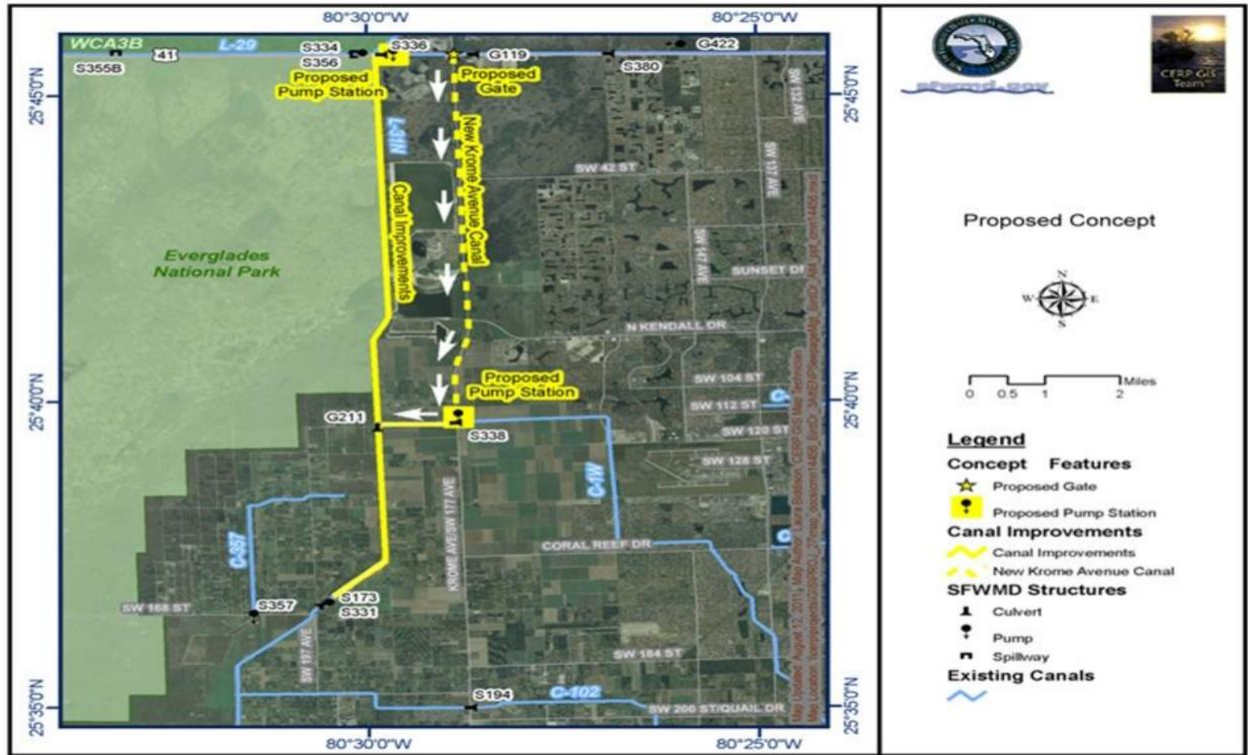
**Attachment A:
Bird Drive Basin Project Area**



Source: South Florida Water Management District

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Attachment B: Bird Drive Basin Proposed Project Concept

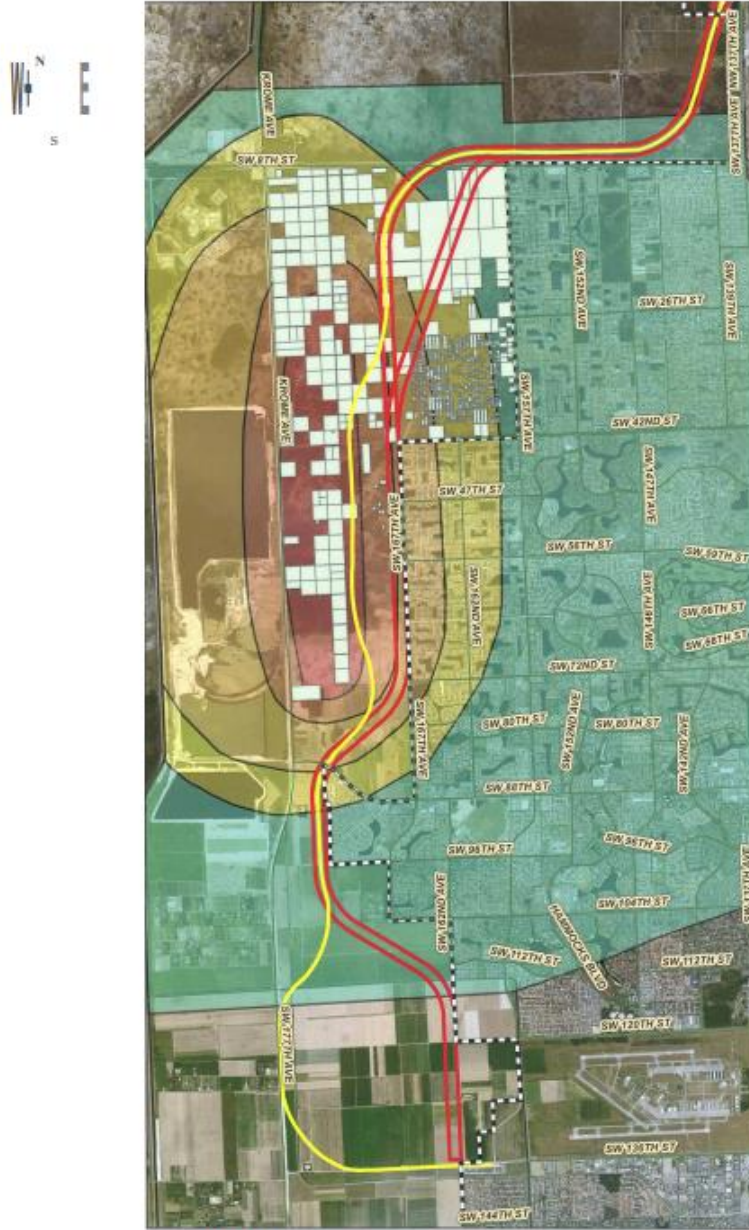


Source: South Florida Water Management District

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**Attachment C:
Current MDX Proposed 836 Extension Project Corridors Overlay Map**

Proposed 836 Extension



Legend

-  Proposed 836 Extension Corridor
-  Proposed 836 Extension Corridor - alternate
-  Publicly Owned Properties in Bird Drive Basin
-  Urban Development Boundary

DRAFT

Source: Miami Dade County

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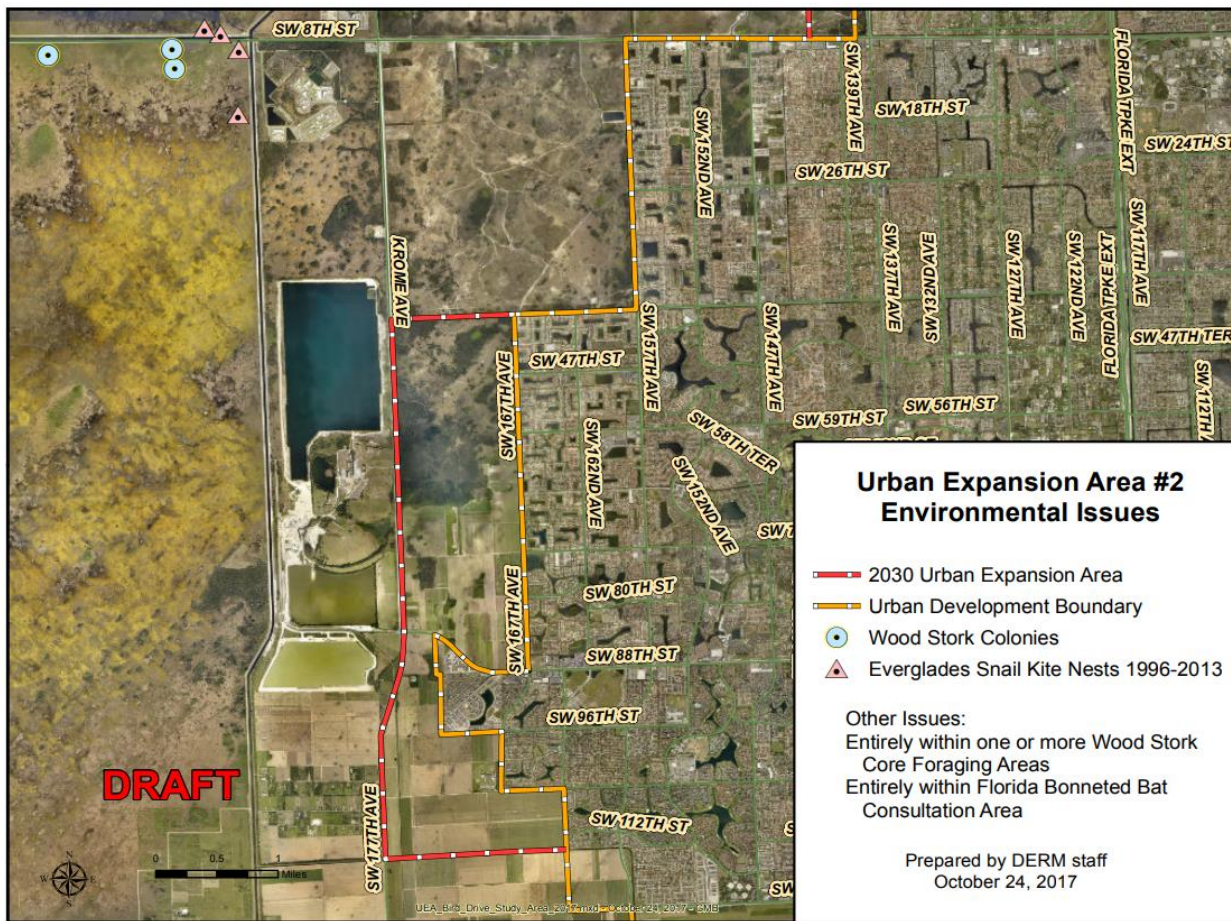
**Attachment D:
FPL West Consensus Transmission Line Corridor**



Source: United States Department of the Interior, National Parks Service

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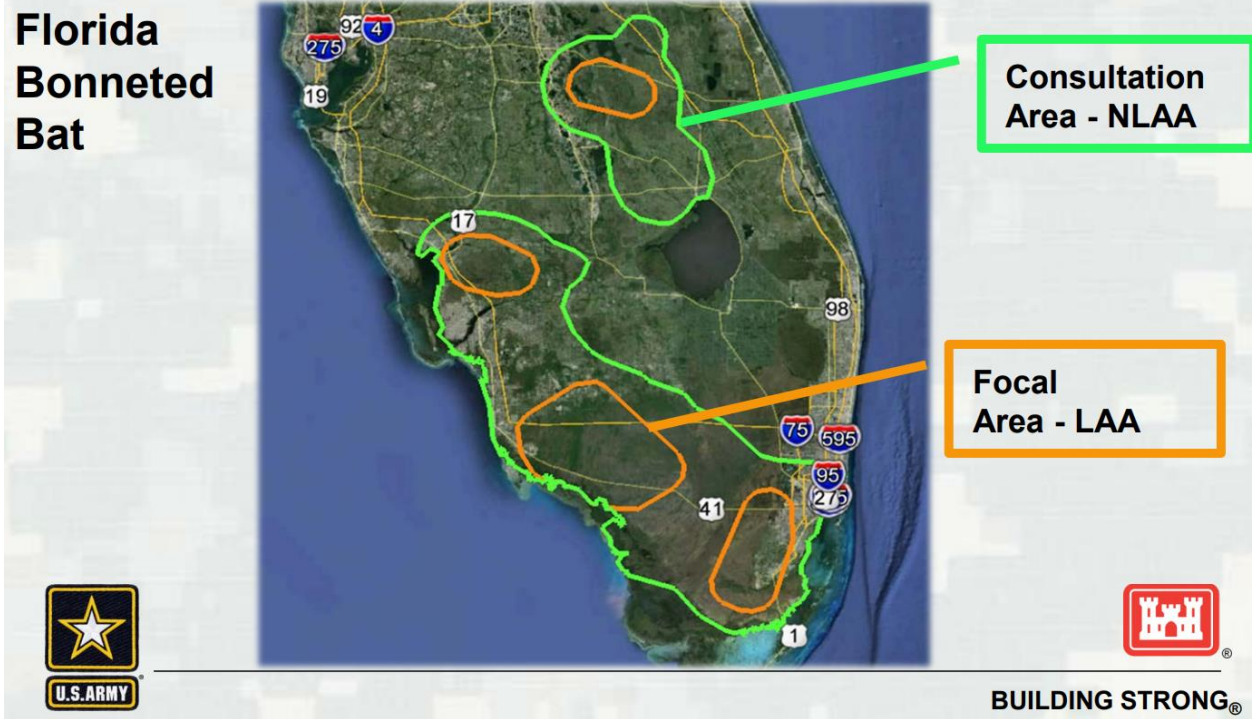
**Attachment E:
Wood Stork & Snail Kite considerations in the proposed project area**



Source: Miami Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management

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**Attachment F:
Florida Bonneted Bat Focal Area**

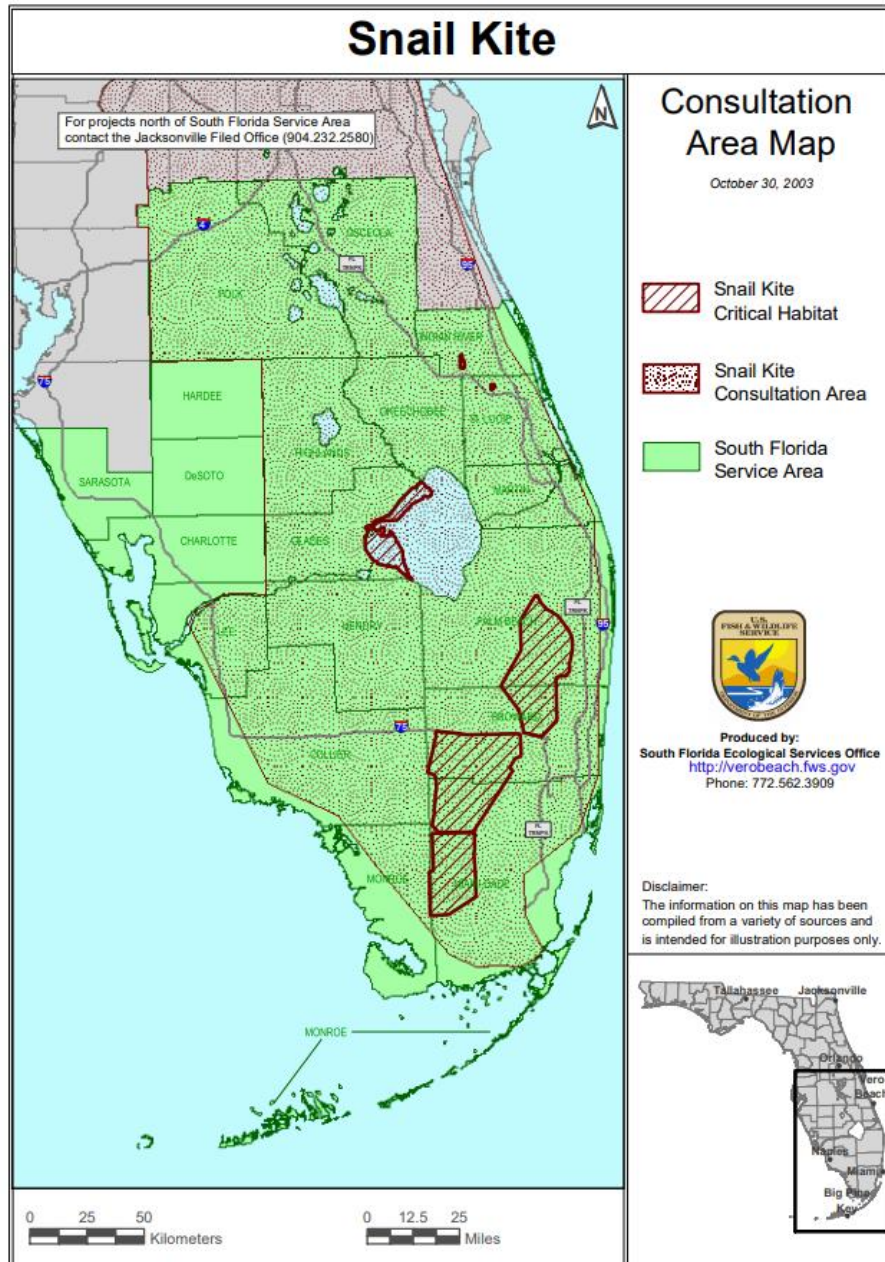


Source: US Army Corps of Engineers

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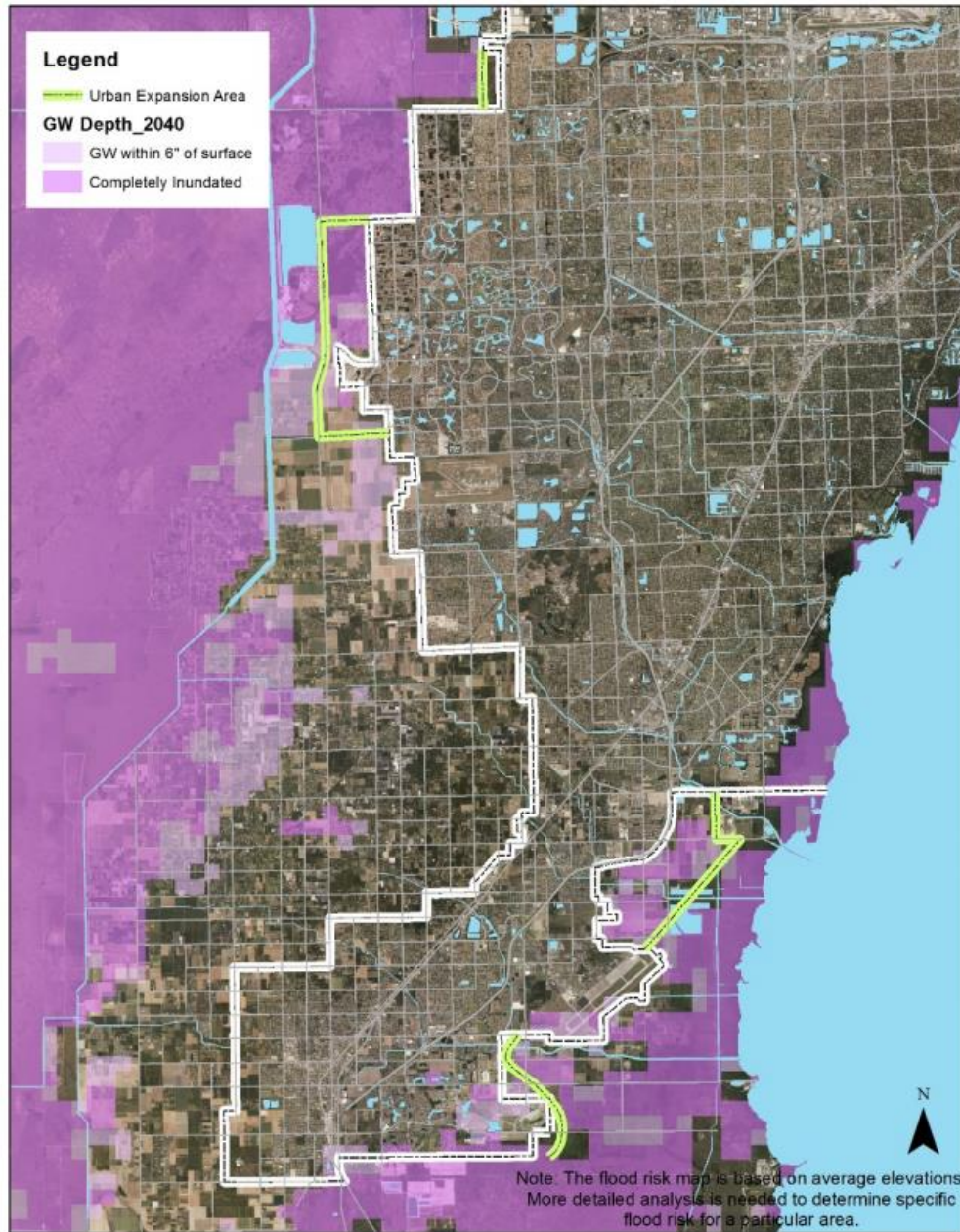
**Attachment G:
Everglade Snail Kite Consideration Area**



Source: US Army Corps of Engineers

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**Attachment H:
Miami Dade County Groundwater Elevations and Flood Risk Map**



Source: Miami Dade County Water & Sewer Department

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