

Critical Wetlands Assessment Update

August 2024

Section 373.036, Florida Statutes (F.S.), directs the water management districts, in cooperation with local governments, to identify critical wetlands to be acquired using funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. The statutory criteria to be considered in the evaluation process include (1) ecological value, (2) effects on water quality and flood mitigation, (3) ecosystem restoration value, and (4) susceptibility to development.

In 2024, the District performed an updated analysis of wetlands in its 16-county area. To leverage local knowledge of land acquisition priorities, the District contacted the 16 county governments and requested their priorities for wetland acquisition and protection. Responses were received from Santa Rosa and Washington counties. For each of the remaining counties, District staff identified potential critical wetlands based on considerations such as proximity to coastal developed areas, the Florida Wildlife Corridor, Florida Forever Projects, and Outstanding Florida Springs. Wetlands within the 100-year riparian floodplain or the 500-year coastal storm surge zone were also considered. Sites less than 20 acres in size and those where wetlands comprised only a small portion of the total parcel acreage were excluded.

Priority wetlands submitted by the counties and those identified by District staff were combined into a geodatabase. The 2023 Critical Wetlands were added. Using a GIS-based approach and available data, wetlands were assigned individual scores with metrics based on the statutory criteria. Wetland parcels in the highest tier, comprised of approximately 160 parcels, were individually reviewed using aerial photography. Sites deemed unsuitable for acquisition due to the presence of homes, subdivisions, or ongoing development were excluded.

Following the GIS analysis, the top-ranked wetlands were reviewed relative to land acquisition and management considerations, resulting in a set of 31 candidate wetland parcels across eight counties. In mid-August 2024, letters were sent to the 31 property owners providing the opportunity to remove their property from the list. As of August 29, 2024, three property owners have opted to have their property removed. The resulting list of the 28 remaining critical wetlands is provided in Table 1. Sites range in size from 20 to 515 acres and comprise of mix of wetland types, including hydric pine flatwoods, mixed forested wetlands, saltwater marshes, and wet prairies. Sites are distributed across seven counties and are generally located near incorporated areas due to susceptibility to development as an evaluation criterion. These critical wetlands will be further reviewed for potential acquisition should funding become available from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund.

Table 1. Summary of 2024 Critical Wetlands

Wetland	County	Size (acres)	Section	Township	Range	Wetland Type(s)
1	Calhoun	491.8	15	01S	08W	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands, Non-Vegetated Wetlands,
2	Escambia	23.8	09	3S	31	Wetland Coniferous Forests
3	Escambia	23.9	09	3S	31	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
4	Escambia	24.0	09	3S	31	Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands, Wetland Coniferous Forests
5	Escambia	37.2	12	3S	31	Wetland Coniferous Forests
6	Escambia	57.9	26	1N	32	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Coniferous Forests
7	Escambia	83.4	31	2S	31	Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Coniferous Forests
8	Escambia	110.8	12	3S	31	Wetland Coniferous Forests
9	Escambia	118.3	36	2S	31	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed
10	Escambia	155.6	28	2S	31	Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Hardwood Forests, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
11	Escambia	171.4	22	2S	31	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed, Slough Waters, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
12	Escambia	223.6	03	1N	30	Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Hardwood Forests,
13	Escambia	335.0	21	3S	31	Wetland Coniferous Forests

Wetland	County	Size (acres)	Section	Township	Range	Wetland Type(s)
14	Gadsden	421.9	24	03N	07W	Wetland Hardwood Forests
15	Okaloosa	25.5	1	02N	24W	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed,
16	Okaloosa	26.1	28	03N	24W	Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Hardwood Forests,
17	Okaloosa	51.1	10	03N	24W	Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Coniferous Forests
18	Okaloosa	68.6	27	03N	24W	Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed
19	Okaloosa	128.2	35	03N	23W	Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Hardwood Forests, Reservoirs
20	Okaloosa	515.3	23	03N	24W	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands,
21	Santa Rosa	72.2	23	01N	29W	Wetland Hardwood Forests, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
22	Santa Rosa	80.6	18	02S	26W	Wetland Coniferous Forests
23	Santa Rosa	106.2	36	01N	30W	Wetland Forested Mixed, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
24	Santa Rosa	171.6	29	01N	27W	Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Forested Mixed, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
25	Santa Rosa	195.9	13	01N	30W	Wetlands Hardwood Forests Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands
26	Santa Rosa	502.3	27	02N	30W	Wetland Forested Mixed, Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands, Wetland Coniferous Forests

Wetland	County	Size (acres)	Section	Township	Range	Wetland Type(s)
27	Walton	20.2	29	02S	33	Vegetated Non-Forested Wetlands, Wetland Coniferous Forests
28	Washington	119.5	19	02S	14W	Wetland Coniferous Forests, Wetland Forested Mixed, Wetland Hardwood Forests

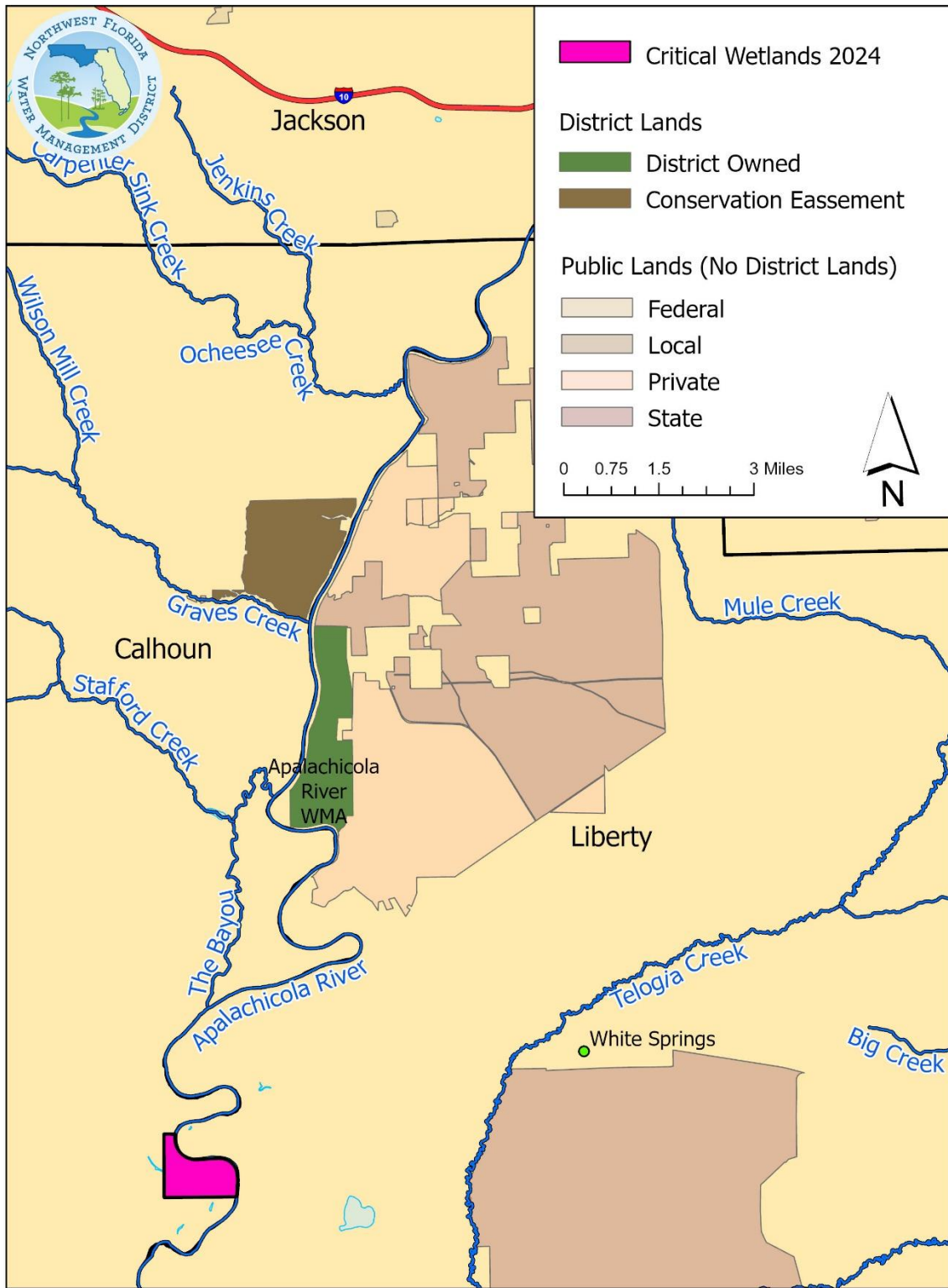


Figure 1. Critical Wetlands in Calhoun County

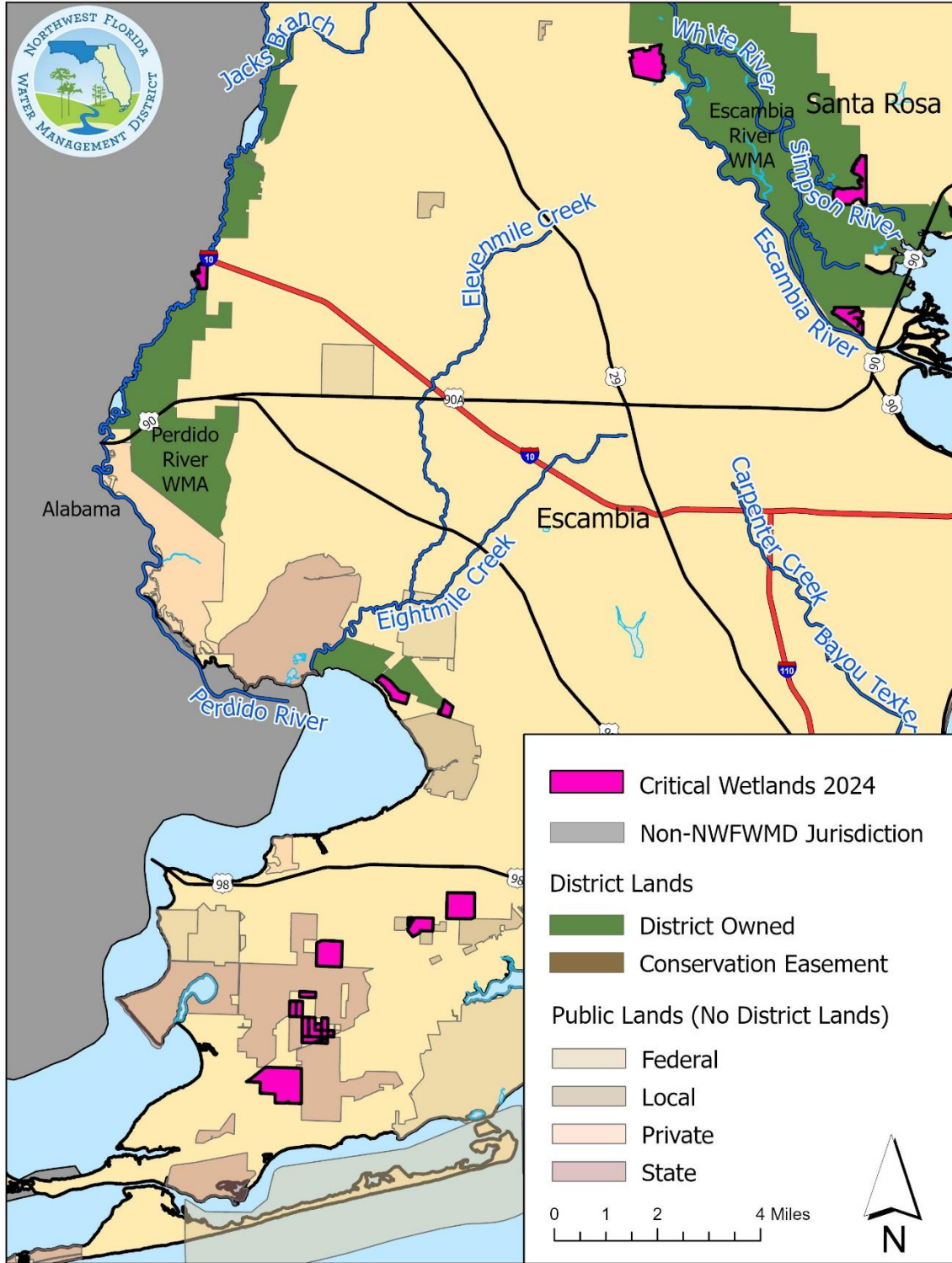


Figure 2. Critical Wetlands in Escambia County

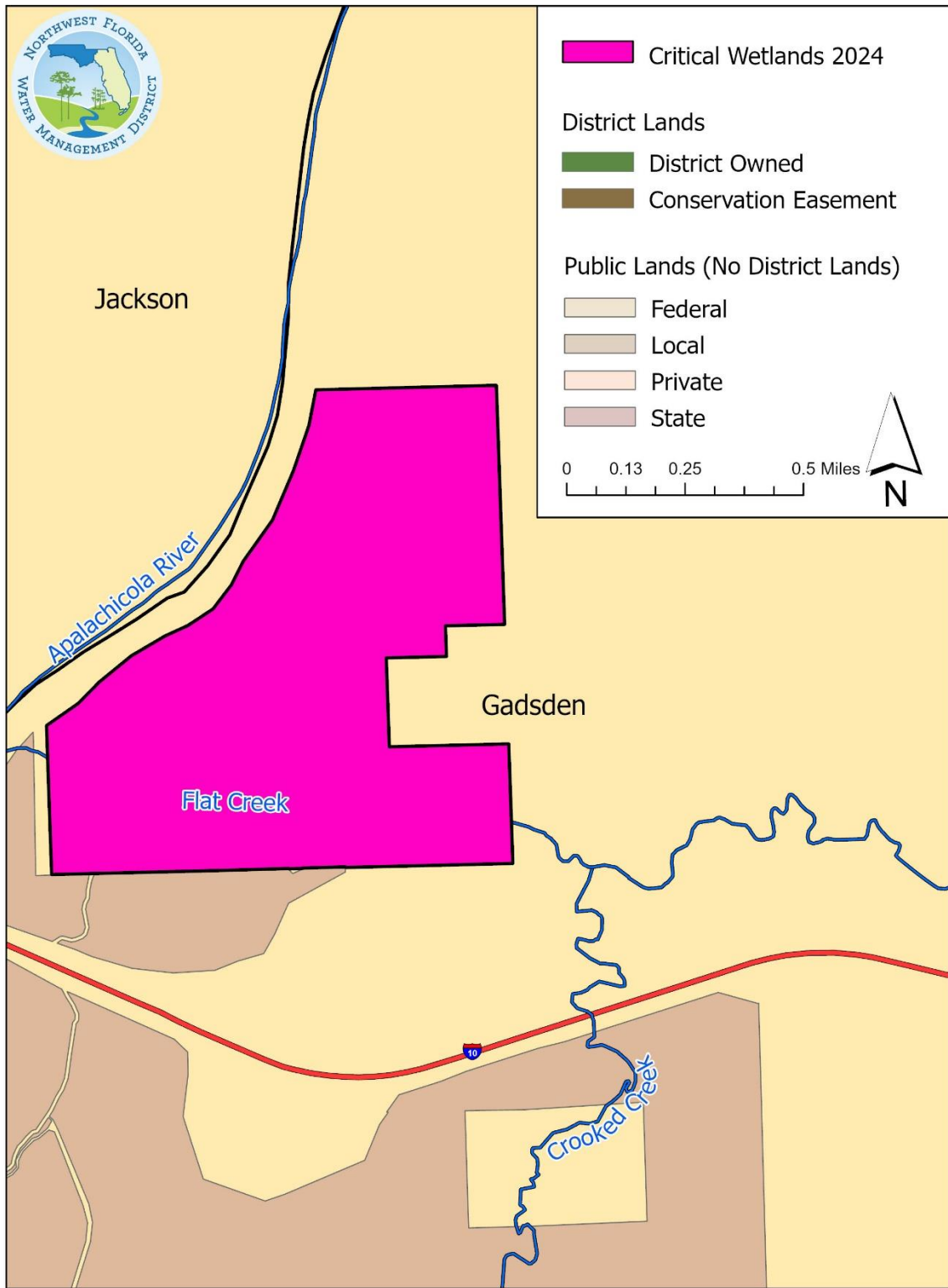


Figure 3. Critical Wetlands in Gadsden County

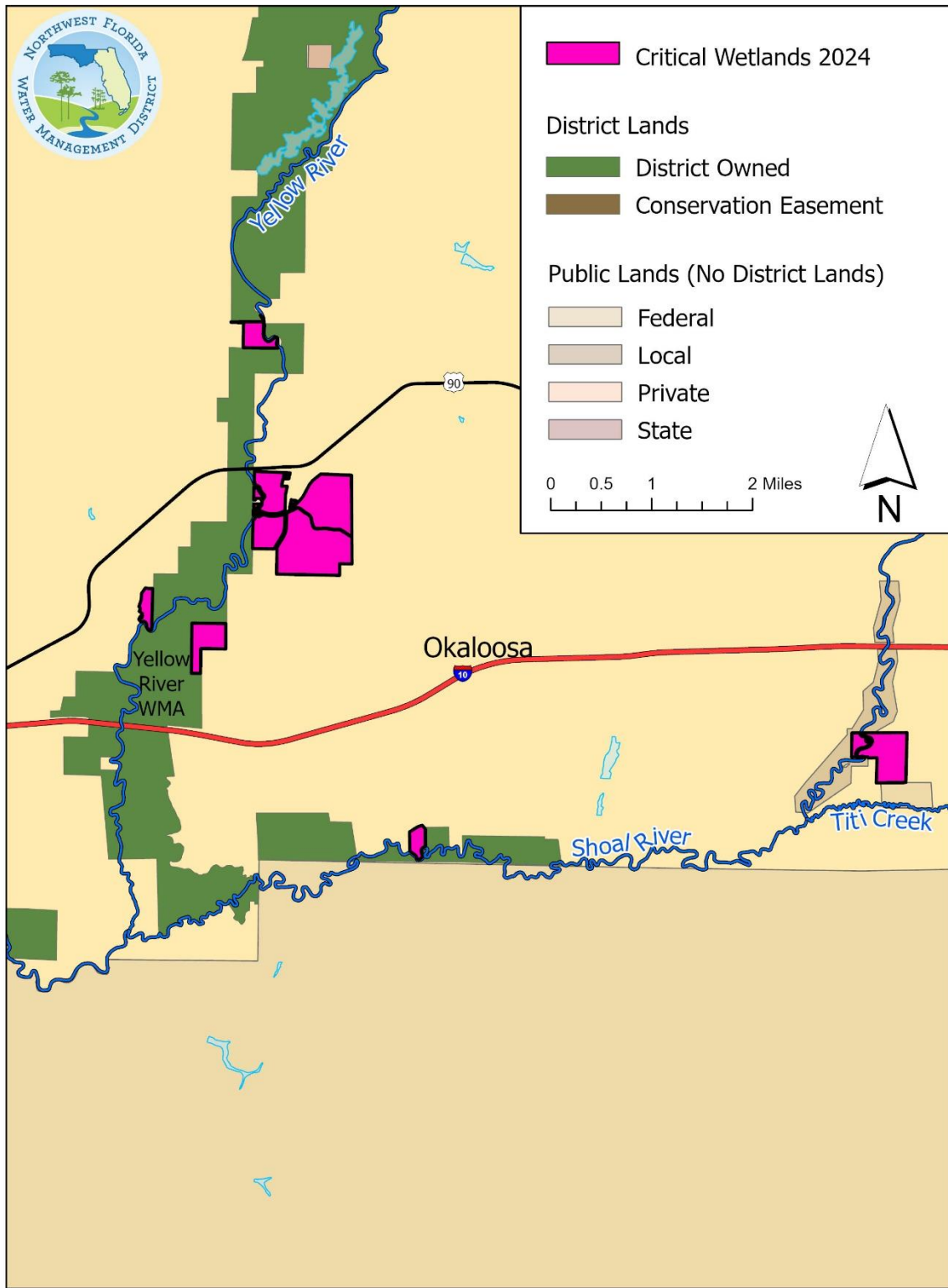


Figure 4. Critical Wetlands in Okaloosa County

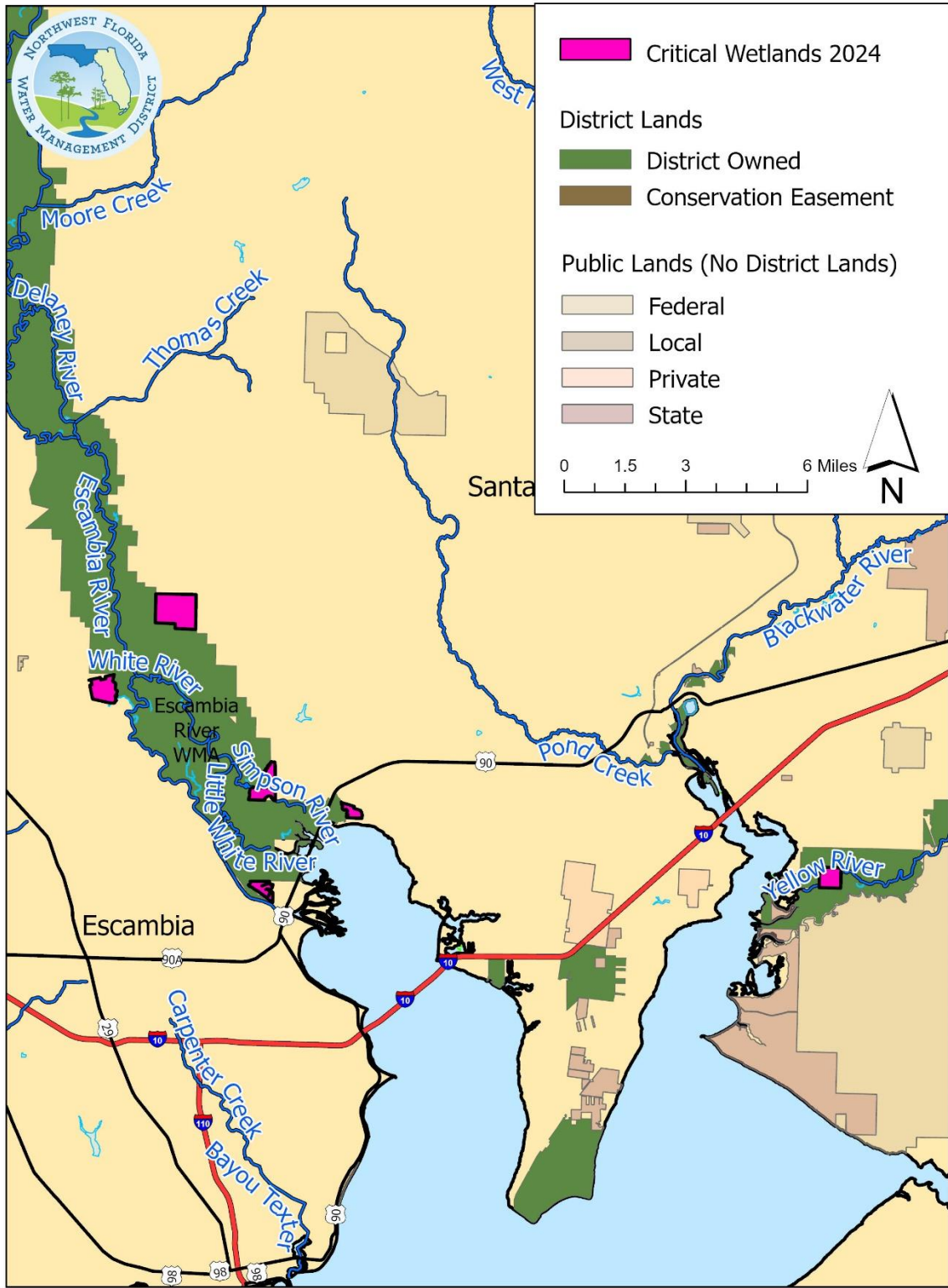


Figure 5. Critical Wetlands in Santa Rosa County

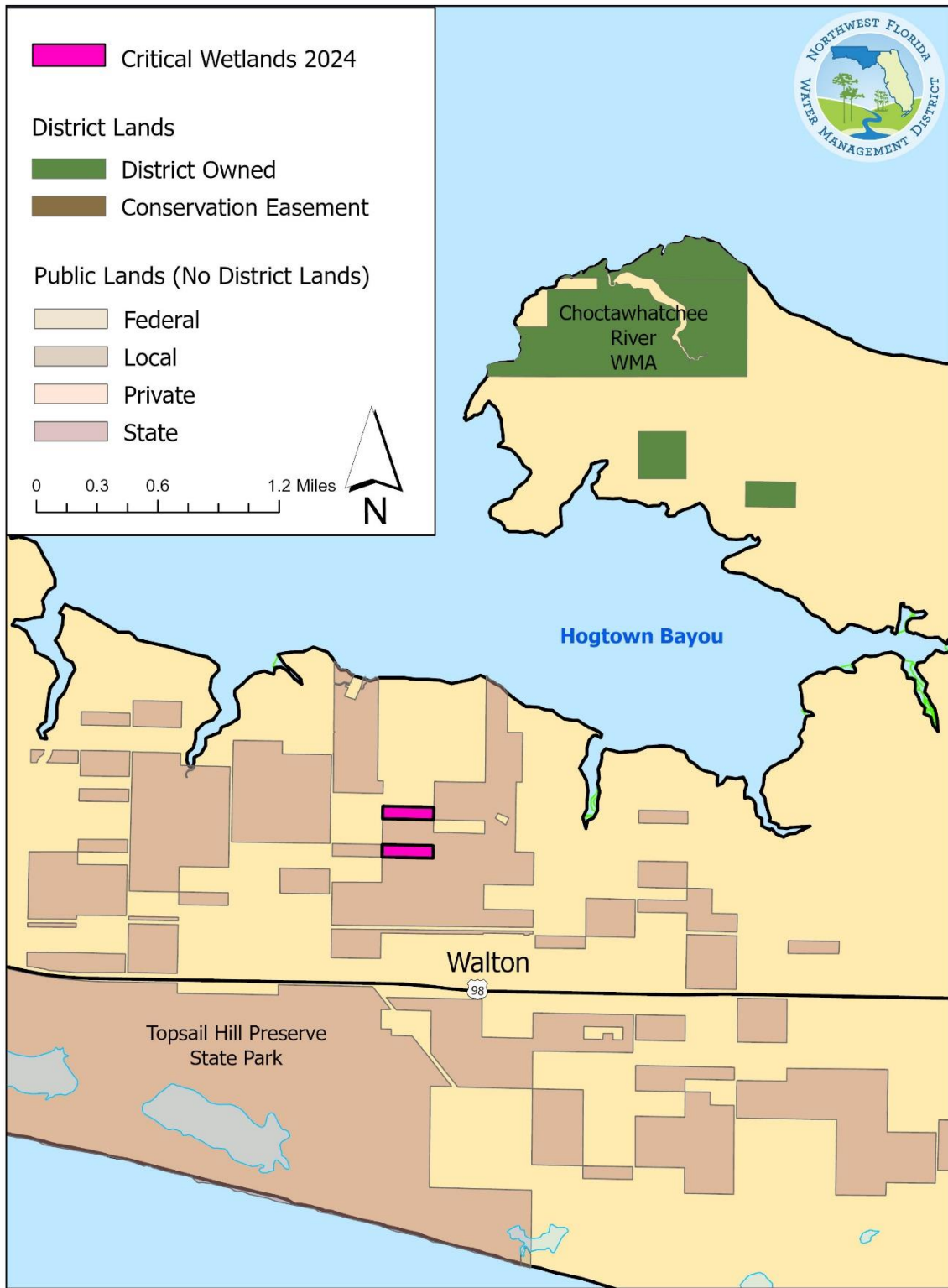


Figure 6. Critical Wetlands in Walton County

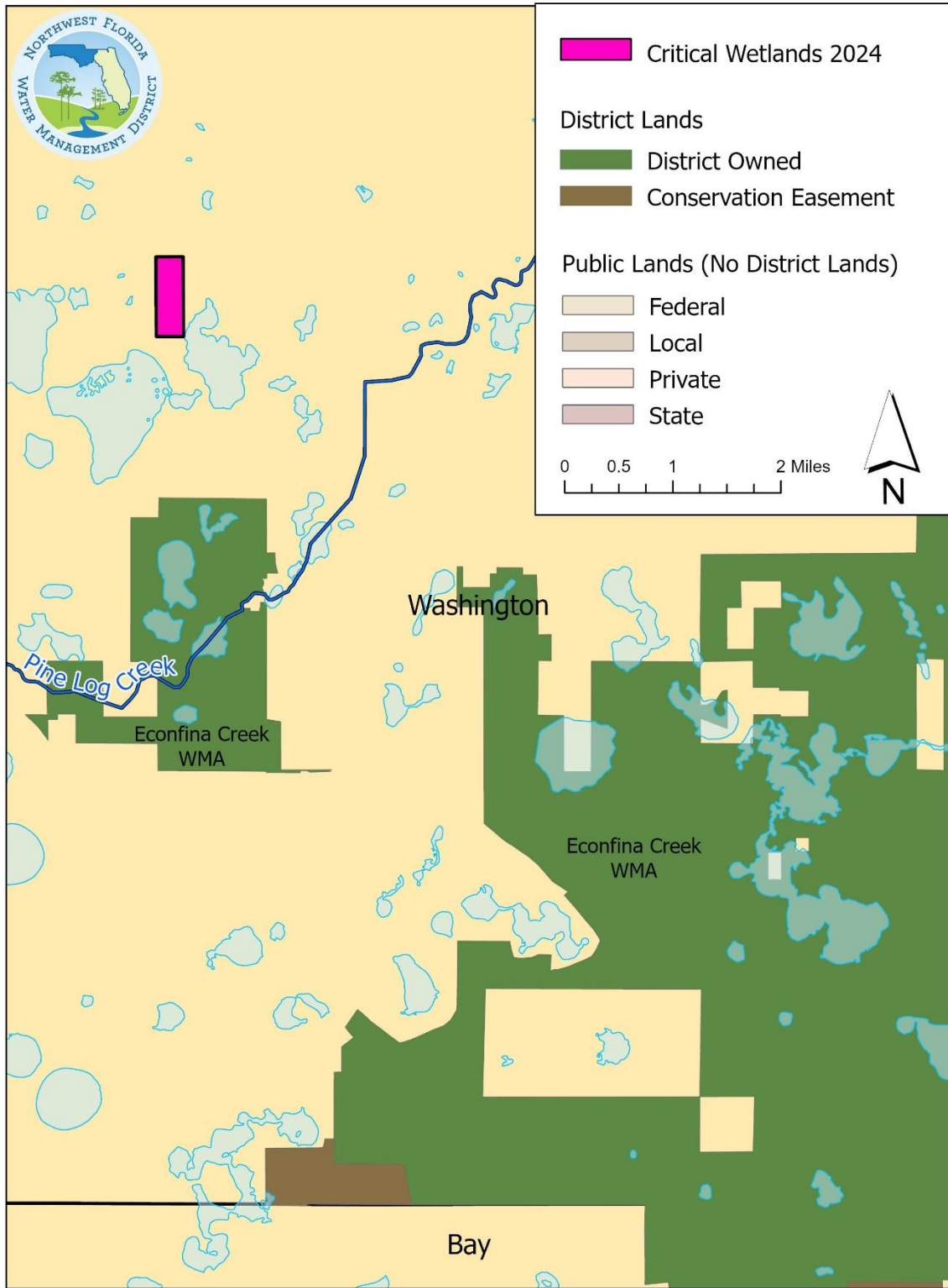


Figure 7. Critical Wetlands in Washington County