



ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
OF THE  
OAKSTEAD AUTO PROPERTY, PASCO COUNTY.

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by

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Oakstead Auto project contains about 3.56 mol acres of uplands and 12.04 mol acres of wetlands located on the north side of SR 54 in Lutz, Florida TRS: 26/18/27 (Figure 1). The site is bordered on the north, east and west by undeveloped wetlands and on the south by SR 54 and commercial properties. This report represents an environmental assessment of the existing flora and fauna of the site with special reference to all listed species that may have some protection by state and federal agencies and Pasco County.

## ***SOILS***

The site is dominated by periodically mowed Uplands and Mixed Hardwood Swamps. A total of three (3) soils have been mapped as follows (Figure 2):

1. Sellers mucky loamy fine sand (#8) – This nearly level, poorly drained soil is found in depressions. In most years, the soil is ponded during the wet season for 3 to 6 months and the water table is within a depth of about 10 inches for 6 to 12 months. The natural vegetation is bald cypress, pond pine, bay, sweetgum, pickerelweed, and various perennial grasses.
2. Smyrna fine sand (#21) – This nearly level, poorly drained soil occurs in broad flatwoods areas. The water table is at a depth of less than 10 inches for a period of 1 to 4 months in most years and between 10 and 40 inches for more than 6 months. The natural vegetation is longleaf pine, slash pine, and an undergrowth of saw palmetto, running oak, gallberry, wax myrtle, huckleberry, pineland threeawn, and scattered fetterbush.
3. Narcoossee fine sand, 0 to 2 percent slopes (#26) - This somewhat poorly drained soil occurs on low knolls and ridges in the flatwoods. In most years, the water table is at a

depth of 2 to 3.5 feet for 4 to 6 months. During drought conditions, the water table recedes to a depth of more than 60 inches. The natural vegetation is slash pine, longleaf pine, live oak, laurel oak, willow oak, and an understory of greenbrier, lovegrass, and lopsided Indian grass.

The wetlands have been previously delineated and approved by the SWFWMD.

## **VEGETATION**

The vegetation of the site is Improved Pastures that have been abandoned and are now periodically mowed. The Pasture is surrounded by Mixed Hardwood/Cypress Swamp that was inundated and largely free of exotics except for the disturbed upper edges. A brief description of each vegetation type will follow based on the dominant canopy, sub canopy, shrub, and herbaceous layers.

### **Improved Pastures (4.2 acres) (FLUCCS # 183314)**

The existing uplands were utilized historically as Improved Pasture until abandonment in the early 2000's (Figure 4). Today about 80% of the uplands have been invaded by the exotic cogon grass and are periodically mowed. A few small areas of the pasture still support bahia grass and other ruderal species. The most common species include bahia grass (*Paspalum notatum*), broomsedge grass (*Andropogon virginicus*), goldenrod (*Euthamia minor*), creeping Charlie (*Lippia nodiflora*), ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), carpetgrass (*Axonopus furcatus*), marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle umbellata*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), nutsedge (*Cyperus retrorsus*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), small fruited beak rush (*Rhynchospora microcarpa*), coinwort (*Centella asiatica*), cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*), thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*), sweetbroom (*Scoparia dulcis*), swamp fern (*Blechnum serrulatum*), Caesar's weed

(*Urena lobata*), chickweed (*Drymaria cordata*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), St. Augustine grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*), and other isolated grasses and sedges.

### **Mixed Hardwood Swamp (FLUCCS #2211/2233)**

The entire perimeter of the upland pastures are surrounded by Mixed Hardwood/Cypress Swamp vegetation (Figure 5). The overstory canopy species are dominated by bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) with a subcanopy of red maple (*Acer rubrum*), laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), and isolated cabbage palms (*Sabal palmetto*) along the edges. The shrub layer is somewhat sparse due to the standing water and low light levels in the swamp. The most common shrub species include fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) along the upper edges of the swamp.

The most common herbaceous species include sawbrier (*Smilax auriculata*), poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), chain fern (*Woodwardia virginica*), swamp fern (*Blechnum serrulatum*), cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), shield fern (*Thelypteris interrupta*), pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), southern cattail (*Typha domingensis*), waterlilies (*Nymphaea odorata*), maidencane (*Panicum hemitomon*), Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) and others.

### **LISTED PLANT SPECIES**

One listed plant species was observed during this survey of the site as follows:

1. Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) – Commercially Exploited (FDA)

Cinnamon fern was observed along the upper edges of the forested wetlands and tend to be growing on elevated tussocks in saturated or flooded soils. No federally listed plant species were observed at the time of this survey.

## ***LISTED ANIMAL SPECIES***

No listed animal species were observed during the survey of the existing vegetation.

## **OBSERVED ANIMAL SPECIES**

Several animal species were observed in both the uplands and wetlands associated with the project as follows:

### **Mammals**

Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)  
Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)  
Eastern cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

### **Birds**

Red shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)  
Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)  
Ground dove (*Columbina passerina*)  
Fish crow (*Corvus ossifragus*)  
Mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*)

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The site supports about 3.56 mol acres of upland (abandoned pastures) and 12.04 mol acres Mixed Hardwood/Cypress Swamp. The existing pastures have been invaded by cogon grass that are periodically mowed. The wetland vegetation supports a healthy mixture of native swamp vegetation with minor encroachment by exotics along the swamp margins.

2. A survey of all jurisdictional wetlands has been completed and approved by the SWFWMD.

3. One listed plant (i.e., cinnamon fern) and no listed animal species were identified for this site. The apparent lack of gopher tortoise activity is directly related to the invasion of cogon

grass and historic mowing of the pastures. No permit is needed for the plant species as most are associated with the wetlands which will remain intact.

4. Development of this disturbed site will have minimal effect on the resident animal and plant populations due to the high degree of disturbance along SR 54. The existing wetlands will provide additional corridors for the movement of wildlife along this disturbed corridor.

Figure 1. Location map for the Oakstead Auto project.

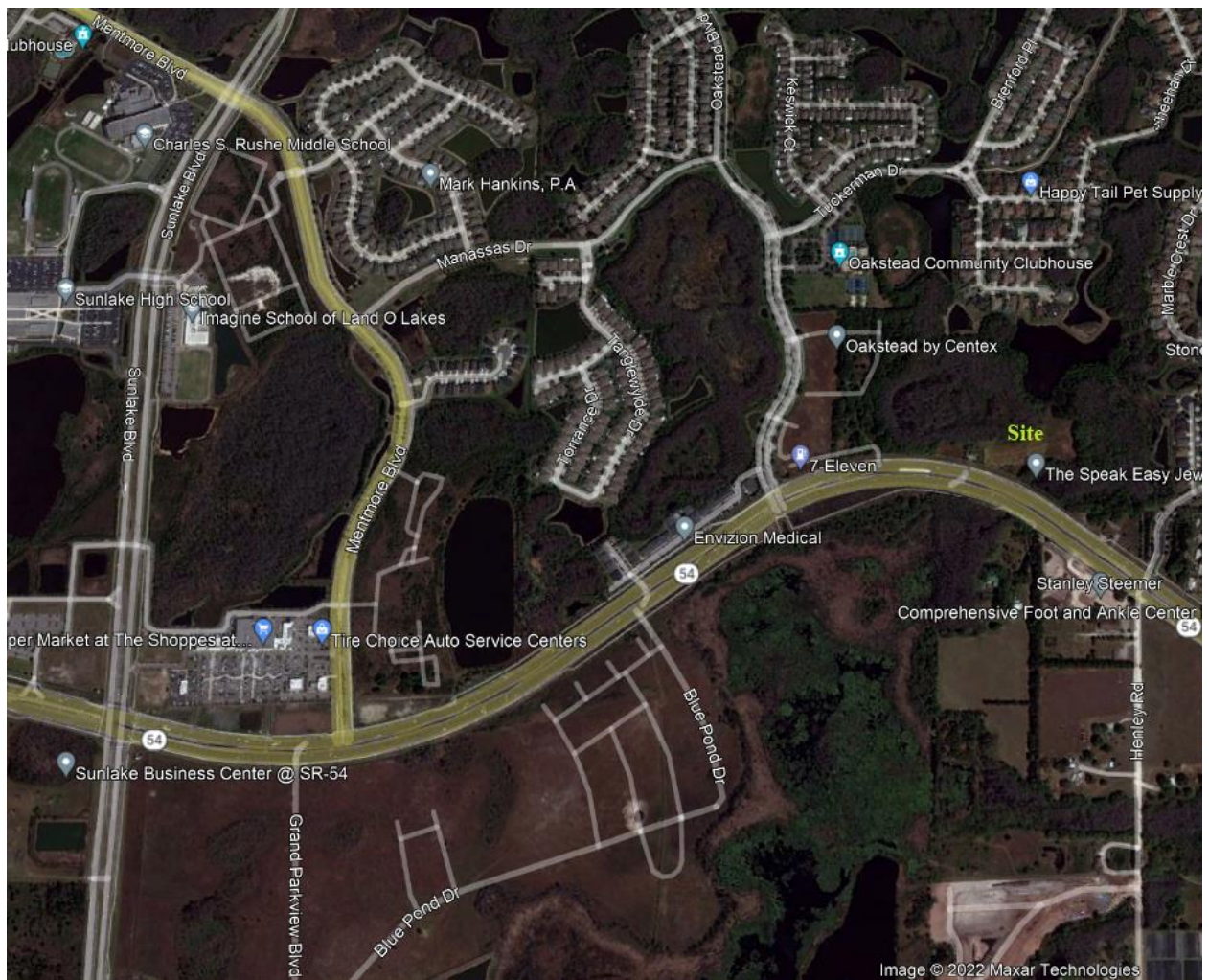




Figure 2. Soils map for the Oakstead Auto project.

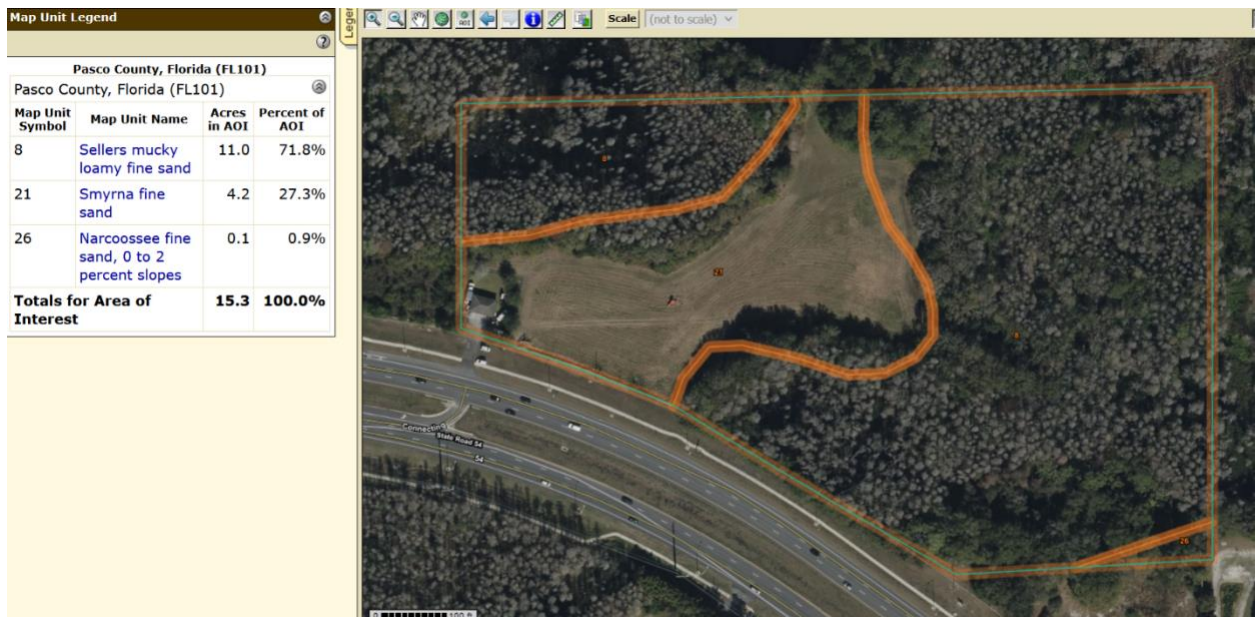




Figure 3. Vegetation type and Listed Species for the Oakstead Auto project.



Figure 4. Abandoned Pasture looking east.





Figure 5. Typical Mixed Hardwood Swamp vegetation.

