DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
10117 PRINCESS PALM AVENUE, SUITE 120
TAMPA, FLORIDA 33610

July 3, 2012

REPLY TO ATTENTION OF

Tampa Permits Section
SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH)

Ms. Michele Baker
Pasco County Board of County Commissioners
7530 Little Road, Suite 320
New Port Richey, Florida 34654

Mr. John Post, Jr.
Florida Department of Transportation
Florida's Turnpike Enterprise
Post Office Box 613069
Ocoee, Florida 34761

Dear Ms. Baker and Mr. Post:

This is in reference to your permit application requesting Department of the Army authorization to impact waters of the United States in association with a project known as "Ridge Road Extension" (SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH)).

By letter dated April 25, 2012, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) requested that you provide a revised wildlife survey plan for the proposed project. In consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC), the Corps has reviewed the revised wildlife survey plan dated May 25, 2012 and supplemental information provided on June 25, 2012. We request that you address the following in a revised plan:

<u>Red-cockaded woodpecker</u>

a. Attachment B of the revised survey plan includes a map of areas to be examined for cavity trees. The Corps presumes that this map depicts areas that may serve as suitable foraging habitat prior to ground-truthing. However, there are large areas of habitat with a pine component that are not included (see Attachment 1 of this letter, which includes these areas outlined in red). These areas include pine flatwoods, long-leaf pine / xeric oak, and hardwood conifer mixed. There are also large areas of pine plantation not marked on this map that may serve as suitable foraging habitat. The Corps requests that you address these areas by providing the specific process by which areas were selected or disqualified for examination for cavity trees as depicted on Attachment B of the revised survey plan.

b. During our May 11, 2012 site visit, a member of your team referenced an inactive cavity tree to the south of the proposed alignment within the Serenova Tract, located during surveys of the original alignment of the Suncoast Parkway. Provide the approximate location of this tree in relation to the proposed project and, if known, the last time it was inspected for activity.

Florida scrub-jay

a. The revised survey plan includes surveys of sub-optimal and optimal habitats within 0.5 mile of the project footprint and surveys of optimal habitat from 0.5 – 2.2 miles (or 3.5 km). Clarify in detail how optimal, sub-optimal, and non-habitat categories were determined. As part of this clarification, please also address the areas outlined by the Corps in red on Attachment 2 of this letter, shrub/brushland and long-leaf pine / xeric oak habitats that were not selected for survey.

b. The Corps, USFWS, and FFWCC do not agree with the complete elimination of playback stations within sub-optimal habitat from 0.5 – 2.2 miles, although a reduced survey effort in these habitats will be considered. The survey plan must be revised to provide sampling effort within sub-optimal habitat from 0.5 – 2.2 miles. It is recommended that a stratified random sample of the sub-optimal habitats between 0.5 mi – 2.2 miles be completed to ensure adequate coverage across the entire 2.2-mile radius survey area. Where optimal and sub-optimal habitats are heavily comingled between 0.5 mi – 2.2 miles, survey of sub-optimal habitats will not be necessary.

The Corps anticipates that you will provide a depiction of proposed playback stations following the field reconnaissance described in the revised survey plan. Please note that Florida scrub-jay surveys should not be conducted until a final list of playback stations is approved by the Corps.

Eastern Indigo Snake

a. You have identified survey areas based on hydrologic soil group of the identified soil of an area per the National Resources Conservation Service soil survey. You base this on higher reported occurrences of gopher tortoises in certain hydrologic soil groups per the 1998 and 2005 surveys. However, this procedure eliminates from survey vast areas of habitat where gopher tortoises were located during the 1998 and 2005 surveys for the project. The proposed survey methodology must be revised to address all upland habitats, regardless of hydrologic soil group. In consultation with the USFWS, we have developed the following survey options for this project:

1. Dog NOT AVAILABLE / Above-ground & underground refugia HAVE NOT been identified:

    - Pedestrian transects (no greater than 33’ in pasture and no greater than 16’ in other upland habitats) within all upland habitat within 1 mile radius of project footprint for at least 5 days between 0900-1600 from Oct 1 – Apr 30.

    - Inspection of area within 33’ of above-ground and underground refugia identified in transects (search for tracks, scat, or shed skin; examine burrow entrance for snake tracks; use flashlight to view first few feet of burrow). *Note: scoping of gopher tortoise burrows requires authorization from the state of Florida.*

2. Dog NOT AVAILABLE / 100% of above-ground & underground refugia within all upland habitats HAVE been identified:

   - Pedestrian transects (no greater than 33' in pasture and no greater than 16' in other habitats) within all upland habitat found to contain above-ground and/or underground refugia within 1 mile radius of project footprint for at least 5 days between 0900-1600 from Oct 1 – Apr 30.

   - Inspection of area within 33' of above-ground and underground refugia identified in transects (search for tracks, scat, or shed skin; examine burrow entrance for snake tracks; use flashlight to view first few feet of burrow). *Note: scoping of gopher tortoise burrows requires authorization from the state of Florida.*

3. Dog AVAILABLE / Above-ground & underground refugia HAVE NOT been identified:

   - Pedestrian/dog transects (spaced no farther apart than scent ability of dog) within all upland habitat within 1 mile radius of project footprint between 0900-1600 from Oct 1 – Apr 30.

4. Dog AVAILABLE / 100% of above-ground & underground refugia within all upland habitats HAVE been identified:

   - Pedestrian/dog inspection of areas within 33' of above-ground and underground refugia (search for tracks, scat, or shed skin; examine burrow entrance for snake tracks; use flashlight to view first few feet of burrow). *Note: scoping of gopher tortoise burrows requires authorization from the state of Florida.*

Please revise the plan to incorporate one of these options, including all upland habitats, regardless of soil hydrologic group.

b. An assessment of potential project impacts on the fragmentation of Eastern indigo snake habitat will also be required, but is not necessary to include in the wildlife survey plan.

As stated in our April 25, 2012 letter, helicopter surveys alone will not be sufficient to address potential wood stork foraging habitat. Although not required as part of the wildlife survey plan, you will ultimately be required to complete the foraging habitat assessment procedure in accordance with the 2008 USFWS Wood Stork Key for Central and North Peninsular Florida.

In a meeting on March 23, 2012 and by letter dated April 25, 2012, the Corps inquired as to whether you had resolved access issues that would enable survey efforts within Phase II of the project, east of the Suncoast Parkway. On March 23, 2012, you indicated you would be contacting the landowners. As survey efforts within all project phases, including Phase II, must be complete prior to a permit decision, we again request the status of your access to these areas. Please also provide an

estimated survey schedule, by species and phase, to ensure the timely completion of our review. Any delay in surveys on Phase II may render previously completed surveys on Phase I invalid, depending on the length of time that has passed, changes in habitat conditions, and developments in scientific research.

Please provide a revised wildlife survey plan, addressing the above-listed items. This plan will be reviewed by the Corps in consultation with the USFWS and FFWCC. As the results of the wildlife surveys are needed to assess the potential effects on protected species, to comply with the ESA this information must be provided prior to a permit decision. The wildlife survey plan must be approved by the Corps prior to commencement of survey efforts. We request you provide the revised wildlife survey plan no later than August 2, 2012. If no response is received, we will assume you have no further interest in obtaining a DA permit and the application will be withdrawn.

The contents of this letter pertain solely to wildlife surveys and do not reflect our ongoing review of other aspects of your application. This letter should not be interpreted as acceptance or approval of any aspect of the proposed application. The Corps is currently reviewing your application and the comments received in response to the November 28, 2011 public notice. Upon completion of this review, you will be notified of any outstanding information needed to finalize the evaluation of your application.

Should you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, please contact Tracy Hurst of my staff at the letterhead address, by phone at 813-769-7063, or by electronic mail at Tracy.E.Hurst@usace.army.mil.

Sincerely,

for: Kevin D. O'Kane
Chief, Tampa Permits Section

Enclosures:

1. 5/25/12 RCW Survey Map with Corps Edits
2. 5/25/12 Scrub Jay Survey Map with Corps Edits

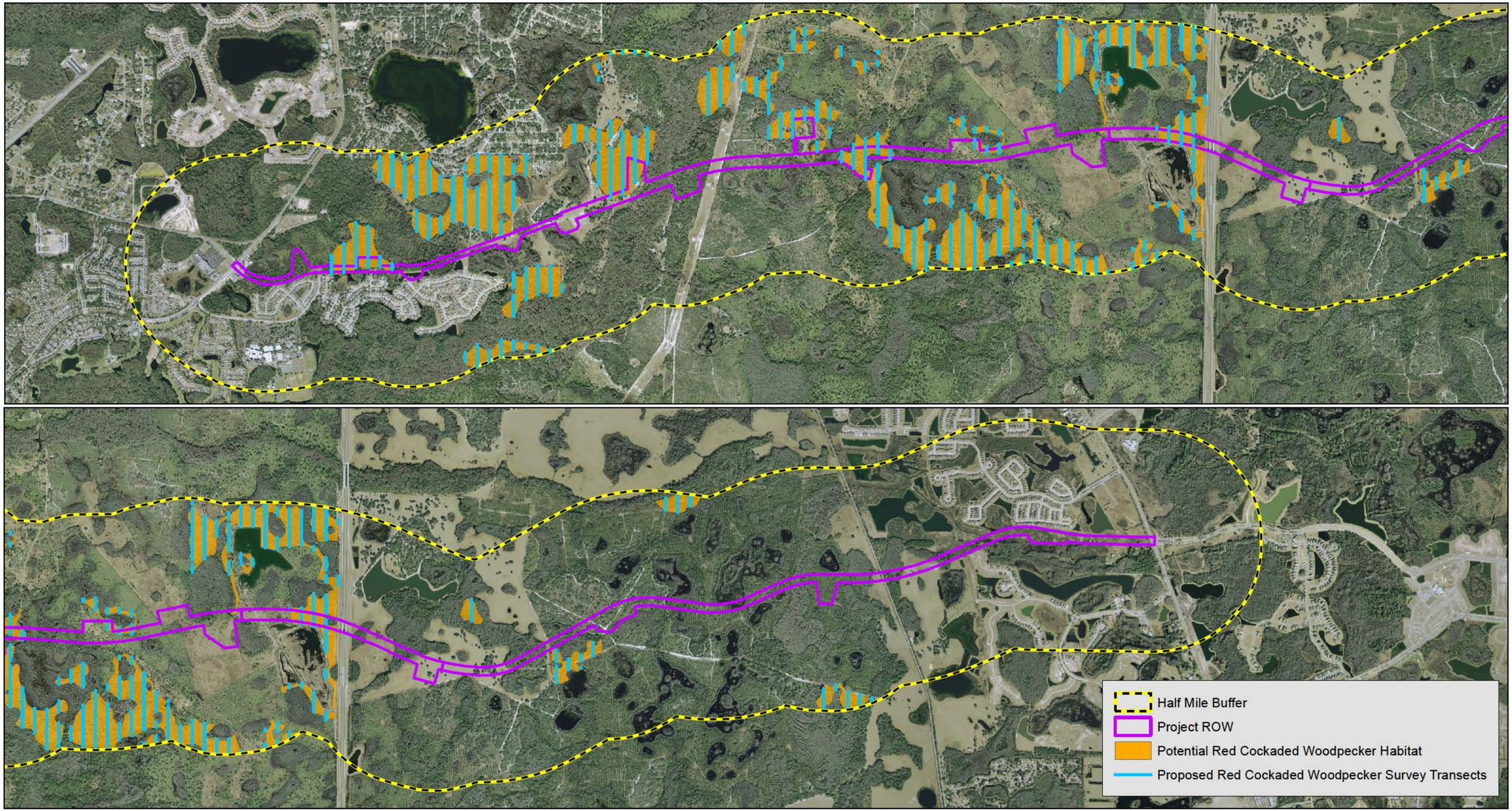
cc (w/encls):

Mr. Terry Gilbert
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
27 West Point Drive
Crawfordville, FL 32327

Mr. Ron Meidema
Wetlands and Marine Regulatory Section
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
61 Forsyth St.
Atlanta, GA 30303-8960

Dr. Heath Rauschenberger
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256-7517

Mr. David Sauskojus
Southwest Florida Water Management District
7601 US Hwy. 301
Tampa, FL 33637-6759
(Ref. ERP No. 43018792.005)



0 2,250 4,500 Feet
0 685 1,370 Meters

This map and all data contained within are supplied as is with no warranty. Cardno ENTRIX, Inc. expressly disclaims responsibility for damages or liability from any claims that may arise out of the use or misuse of this map. It is the sole responsibility of the user to determine if the data on this map meets the user's needs. This map was not created as survey data, nor should it be used as such. It is the user's responsibility to obtain proper survey data, prepared by a licensed surveyor, where required by law.

Attachment B.
Red-cockaded Woodpecker
Potential Habitat and Transect Map

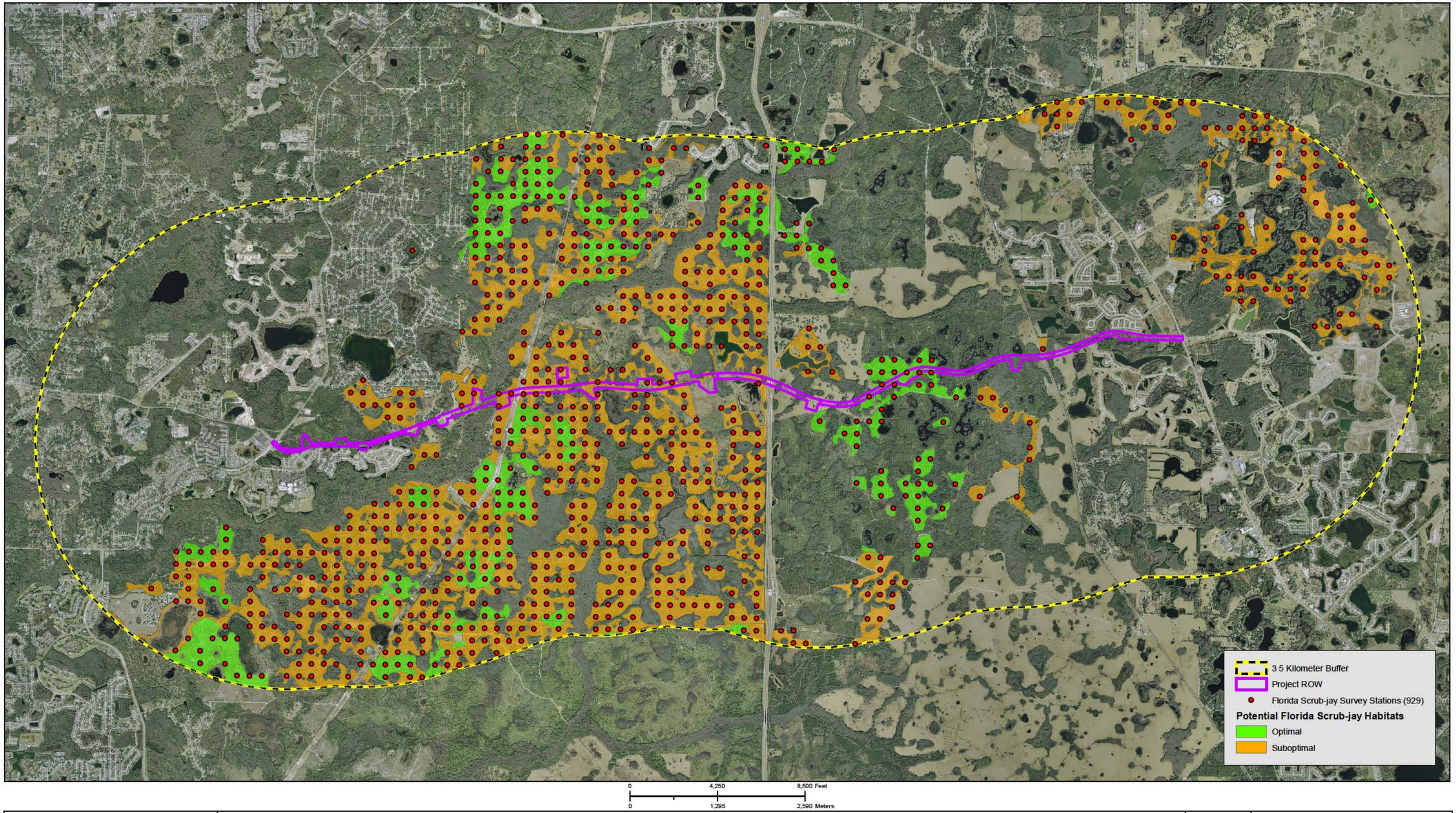
Ridge Road
Pasco County, Florida

Image:2010

Cardno ENTRIX
3905 Crescent Park Drive
Riverview, FL 33578-3625
ph. (813) 664-4500
fx (813) 664-0440
www.cardnoentrix.com

Coordinate System:
NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N feet

Date: 05/04/2012 Rev. Date: n/a PM: SRD GIS Analyst: GdA Map Document: ridge_RedCockadedWoodpecker_habitats_B_gda_20120504.mxd Project Number: 5504-003 PDF Document: ridge_RedCockadedWoodpecker_habitats_B_gda_20120504.pdf Plot Size: 11 x 17



This map and all data contained within are supplied as is with no warranty. Cardno ENTRIX, Inc. expressly disclaims responsibility for damages or liability from any claims that may arise out of the use or misuse of this map. It is the sole responsibility of the user to determine if the data on this map meets the user's needs. This map was not created as survey data, nor should it be used as such. It is the user's responsibility to obtain proper survey data, prepared by a licensed surveyor, where required by law.

Attachment C.
Florida Scrub-jay Potential Habitat and Playback Station Map

Ridge Road
Pasco County, Florida

Image:2010

Cardno ENTRIX
3905 Crescent Park Drive
Riverview, FL 33578-3625
ph. (813) 664-4500
fx (813) 664-0440
www.cardnoentrix.com

Coordinate System:
NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N feet

Date: 05/03/2012 Rev. Date: n/a PM: SRD GIS Analyst: GdA Map Document: ridge_FSJ_habitats_survey_pts_B_gda_20120503 mxd Project Number: 5504-003 PDF Document: ridge_FSJ_habitats_survey_pts_B_gda_20120503.pdf Plot Size: 11 x 17