



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

October 12, 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 (DA) 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 July 3, 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 provided in correspondence dated September 4, 2012 and supplemental information provided on September 26, 2012.

Florida Scrub-jay and Red-cockaded woodpecker

The Corps finds that the revisions to the proposed survey protocols for the Florida scrub-jay and red-cockaded woodpecker, presented in your September 4, 2012 correspondence, address our previous concerns. In accordance with the proposed plan, the Corps will review the refined set of playback stations following the proposed field reconnaissance. Florida scrub-jay surveys (aside from the limited survey effort proposed during initial field reconnaissance) should not be conducted until a final list of playback stations is approved by the Corps.

Eastern Indigo Snake

With regard to the Eastern indigo snake survey, the Corps has considered the additional information provided in your correspondence dated September 4, 2012 and September 26, 2012. You have identified survey areas based on the 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 conducted within the proposed alignment. However, this procedure eliminates from survey some areas that may contain suitable habitat to support the gopher tortoise burrows targeted for survey.

In coordination with USFWS, my staff has undergone a rigorous GIS-based review of the habitat within one mile of the proposed road alignment, using aerial photography from 1995-2012, 2009 FLUCCS data, and soil survey data. Additional areas requiring survey, totaling approximately 36 acres, have been identified and are featured on Attachment 1. This includes a 1.6-mile unpaved road network. In many cases, review of the habitat from aerial photography and FLUCCS data revealed that the soil survey limits did not correlate precisely with the habitat type. You will also note the addition of survey areas in the area to the southwest of the intersection of the proposed roadway and the Suncoast Parkway where proposed coverage was sparse. The Corps agrees with the elimination of survey areas (approximately 53 acres) east of U.S. Highway 41 given the close proximity of roadways and the fact that these roadways isolate the 53 acres from the project area.

You seek approval for two methods of survey – standard pedestrian surveys and surveys that make use of a detector dog. The Corps would like to reiterate the survey options from our July 3, 2012 correspondence, as applied to required survey areas in Attachment 1:

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) 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 HAVE been identified:
 - Pedestrian transects (no greater than 33' in pasture and no greater than 16' in other habitats) within all habitat found to contain above-ground and/or underground refugia 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) between 0900-1600 from Oct 1 – Apr 30.
4. Dog AVAILABLE / 100% of above-ground & underground refugia 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.*

You have recently inquired as to whether the Eastern indigo snake could be presumed to be present on the project site rather than conducting a survey to detect presence or absence. My staff has discussed this at length with the USFWS. Surveys would provide information on the distribution of the species, if present, within and adjacent to the project area. Survey data would then be used to evaluate the adequacy of avoidance and minimization measures (e.g. undercrossings). If a survey is not conducted, the Corps must presume the Eastern indigo snake is present in all parts of the project area. Therefore, if you opt to assume presence of the Eastern indigo snake, the Corps will evaluate the adequacy of the current avoidance and minimization measures under the supposition that the species occurs in all parts of the project area. If you opt to presume presence of the Eastern indigo snake, the Corps requests that you provide a detailed assessment of the habitat within one mile of the alignment and adequacy of the proposed undercrossings and other avoidance and minimization measures for this species.

Wood Stork, Gopher Tortoise, Striped Newt, Listed Plant Surveys

The Corps approves the survey plan presented for these species as reflected in your June 1, 2012 correspondence (and presented again, unchanged, in your September 4, 2012 correspondence).

Survey Schedule

In a meeting on March 23, 2012 and by letters dated April 25, 2012 and July 3, 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, the Corps again requests the status of your access to these areas. As stated in the Corps' July 3, 2012 correspondence, 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.

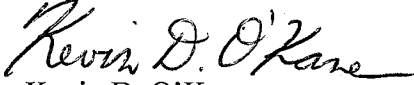
As you are aware from our July 23, 2012 correspondence, the Corps requires additional information to adequately evaluate the project alternatives. You may want to consider delaying the completion of the required wildlife surveys until the Corps is satisfied that the project represents the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative and complies with the 404(b)(1) Guidelines.

Please provide the estimated survey schedule and information regarding site access outlined above no later than November 12, 2012. If no response is received, the Corps 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 the Corps' 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.

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,


Kevin D. O'Kane
Chief, Tampa Permits Section

Enclosures:

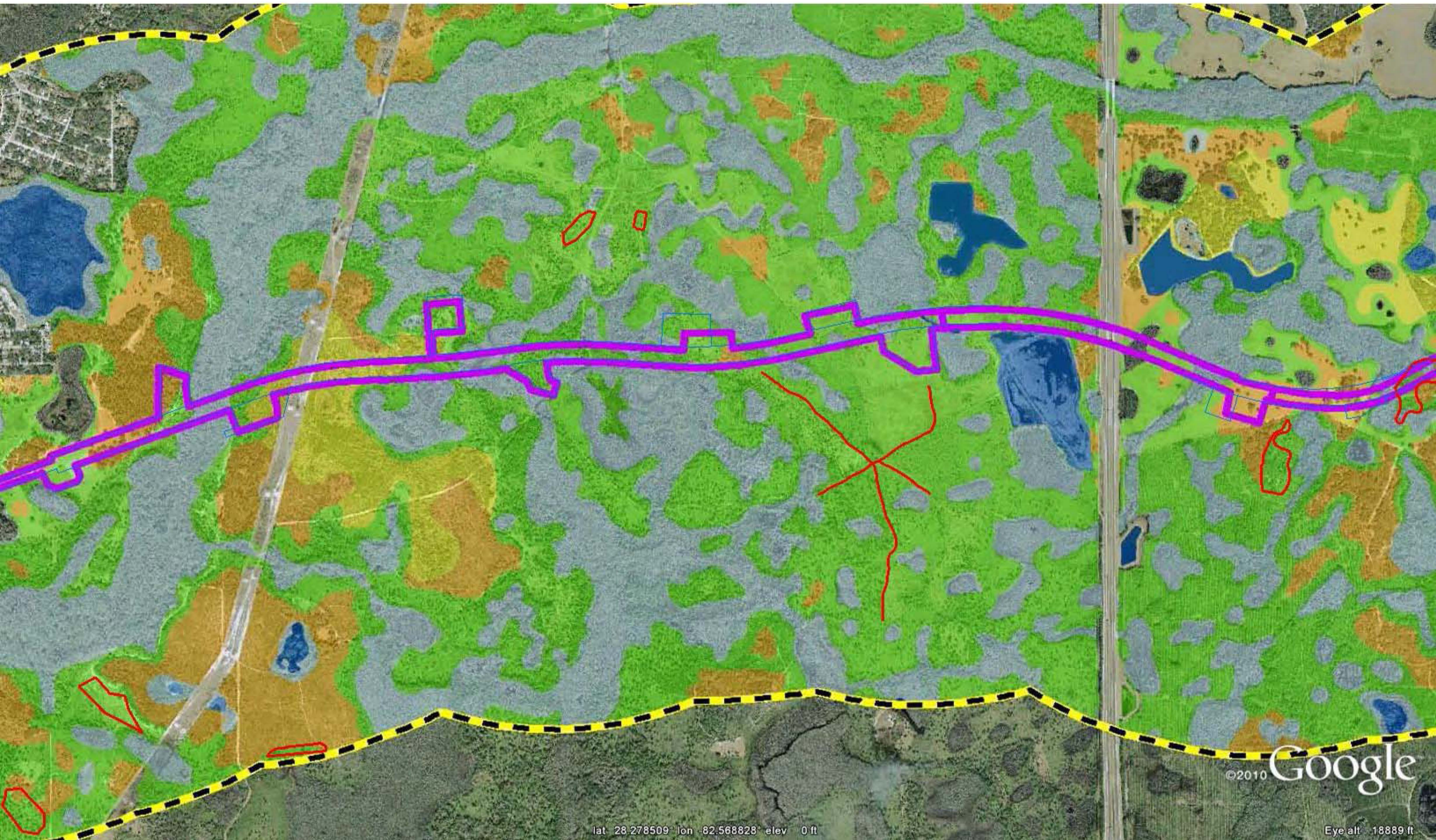
1. Map showing additional survey areas

cc (w/encl):

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



lat 28.278509 lon -82.568828 elev 0 ft

©2010 Google

Eye alt 18889 ft