

bayou sauvage

urban

national wildlife refuge
new orleans, louisiana



Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge Access Study		Stage 0 Feasibility Report / Final Study Recommendations Report		
Comprehensive Access Improvement Study to and within the Refuge		RPC TASK NO. EFL-BSNO	LA FLAP NO STUDY (1)	New Orleans - May 2025
Prepared for 				

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	1. Introduction 1.1. Purpose of Study 1.2. Description 1.3. Study Objectives 1.4. Overview of Process	4 4 4 5 5	5	5. Next Steps 5.1. Shorter-Term Projects and Needed Next Steps and Coordination 5.2. Longer Term Projects and Suggestions for Next Steps 5.3. Connecting Associated Projects	54 54 54 55
2	2. Existing Conditions and Site Assessment 2.1. History and Geography of the Refuge 2.2. Ecology and Drainage 2.3. Transportation Assessment	6 6 9 12	6	6. Summary Conclusion	56
3	3. Outreach 3.1. Description of Process 3.2. Community Profile 3.3. Methodology 3.4. Summary of Input	18 18 20 21 30	7	7. Appendix A. Study Areas B. Partner Entities C. Traffic Counts D. Crash Data E. Title VI Data F. PMT Meetings G. Community Engagement H. Pilot Project Cost Estimates I. Funding Notes J. Stage 0 Environmental Checklist	57
4	4. Conceptual Access Design 4.1. Priority Areas 4.2. Pilot Projects 4.3. Funding Sources	31 35 44 51			

DISCLAIMERS

Any graphics or maps including the RPC seal come under the disclaimer of this report.

The data herein, including but not limited to geographic data, tabular data, analytical data, electronic data structures or files, are provided “as is” without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, or statutory, including, but not limited to, the implied warranties or merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose. The entire risk as to the quality and performance of the data is assumed by the user. No guarantee of accuracy is granted, nor is any responsibility for the reliance thereon assumed. In no event shall the Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC) be liable for direct, indirect, incidental, consequential, or special damages of any kind, including but not limited to, loss of anticipated profits or benefits arising out of use of or reliance on the data. The RPC does not accept liability for any damages or misrepresentation caused by inaccuracies in the data or as a result of changes to the data caused by system transfers or other transformations or conversions, nor is there responsibility assumed to maintain the data in any matter or form. These data have been developed from the best available sources. Although efforts have been made to ensure that the data are accurate and reliable, errors and variable conditions originating from physical sources used to develop the data may be reflected in the data supplied. Users must be aware of these conditions and bear responsibility for the appropriate use of the information with respect to possible errors, scale, resolution, rectification, position accuracy, development methodology, time period, environmental and climatic conditions and other circumstances specific to these data. The user is responsible for understanding the accuracy limitations provided herein. The burden for determining fitness to use lies entirely with the user. The user should refer to the accompanying metadata notes for a description of the data and data development procedures. Although these data have been processed successfully on computers at the RPC, no guarantee, expressed or implied, is made by RPC regarding the use of these data on any other system, nor does the act of distribution constitute or imply any warranty. Distribution of these data are intended for information purposes and should not be considered authoritative for navigational, engineering, legal and other site-specific uses. Data was prepared by Geographic Information System (GIS) professionals, not by licensed professional land surveyors or engineers.

This data consists of information collected by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD) from numerous sources including state and local police departments. The source data was collected by various entities using a variety of reporting methods. These data have been geographically located in the form of X and Y coordinates to generally represent the location of an accident. LA DOTD processed the data to determine geographic locations.

The LA DOTD and the Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC) are not responsible for any errors arising from any use or alterations made to the data. There is no guarantee of warranty concerning the accuracy of the data. Users should be aware that this data may not represent current conditions. Users should not use these data for critical applications without a full awareness of their limitations. Under no circumstances is resale or distribution of the data permitted.

Any use of the data must be accompanied with this citation and accompanying seals, and the special crash citation below:

Special Disclaimer concerning Crash data:

- **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION** – This document is exempt from discovery or admission under 23 U.S.C. 407. – Contact the LADOTD Traffic Safety Office at (225) 379-1929 before releasing any information.
- This report is prepared solely for the purpose of identifying, evaluating and planning safety improvement on public roads; and is therefore exempt from discovery or admission under 23 U.S.C. 407.



INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of Study	4
1.2. Description	4
1.3. Study Objectives	5
1.4. Overview of Process	5

1:1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to create a comprehensive Access Improvements Plan for the Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge (herein referred to as "the Refuge"). This study aims to identify options to enhance recreational access to and within the Refuge, promote sustainable mobility, and benefit New Orleans East's long-term viability.

Developing walking and biking trails to and within the Refuge will expand recreational access for underserved and local communities and attract more visitors while aligning with both the goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and local transportation strategies. This study will also support regional plans to create interconnected trails for nonmotorized activities like walking, hiking, biking, and paddling—strengthening links between communities around Lake Pontchartrain.

1:2 Description

The Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC), in partnership with the City of New Orleans (CNO), was awarded a grant in response to a proposal under the 2022 Louisiana Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) Call for Projects to develop a comprehensive Access Improvements Plan for the Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The study builds off the insights from both the 1994 Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge Master Plan: Environmental Impact Statement, completed by Torre Design Consortium, as well as the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge Access Plan completed by Kimley Horn and BIHL Engineering in 2017. These previous studies established a vision for the Refuge, identified partners, facility needs, and identified potential pilot projects. These priorities were:

- Improve connection to the Crabbing Bridge
- Establish a shuttle/bus-type service to the Refuge
- Re-establish a bike and pedestrian facility on the South Point levee
- Create a formal trailhead for community access the Refuge
- Formalize bike and pedestrian facilities on US-90 (also known as Chef Menteur Highway).
- Create bike and pedestrian connections to the bike lane to Joe W. Brown Memorial Park via Lake Forest Boulevard
- Build more boat launches throughout the Refuge
- Partner with the City of New Orleans' BikeShare program ¹

This study advances those efforts by engaging the public, identifying funding opportunities, and initiating comprehensive and site specific concept-level design.

¹ Kimley Horn, & BIHL Engineering. (2017). (rep.). Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge Access Plan.

1:3 Study Objectives

The study aims to improve recreational access and amenities for all users, with a particular focus on providing access for nearby neighborhoods. The study also seeks to develop connections to these neighborhoods, enhance current infrastructure, and tie-in with future local and regional projects. While the primary emphasis is on non-motorized users, vehicular access challenges are also addressed.

The multi-phase methodology includes:

- An assessment of current access conditions and user needs
- Community and stakeholder engagement
- Development of conceptual plans
- Identify potential funding sources and implementation strategies to support the successful implementation of the recommended plan

The specific objectives are to:

1. Improve multimodal access and safety to and through the Refuge
2. Increase multimodal connections to the adjacent existing public roadway network
3. Increase access for recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, bicycling, birding, kayaking, canoeing, and active learning
4. Improve opportunities for economic revitalization
5. Enhance wildlife habitat and climate resilience
6. Provide informational resources to understand the cultural history of the site
7. Promote trails as resilient Infrastructure

1:4 Overview of Process

The Bayou Sauvage Refuge Access Study followed a multi-phase process designed to assess existing conditions, engage the public, and develop actionable recommendations for improving access to the refuge:

1. **Existing Conditions and Site Assessment:** The project began with a comprehensive review of current access infrastructure, environmental context, and connectivity around the refuge. This phase helped establish a clear baseline understanding of transportation conditions and physical barriers to access.

2. **Public Engagement:** Engagement efforts included regular coordination with a Project Management Team, a series of public meetings, and a public survey. These touchpoints ensured that community voices, agency input, and local knowledge guided the planning and design process.
3. **Key Findings and Analysis:** Feedback and data from the assessment and engagement activities were analyzed to identify major barriers to access, safety issues, and opportunities for improvement.
4. **Preliminary Design Development:** Using input from stakeholders and the public, a preliminary access improvement concept was developed. This design aimed to address critical needs while balancing feasibility, safety, and community priorities.
5. **Final Design and Cost Estimates:** The preliminary design was refined, based on additional rounds of stakeholder engagement, into a final concept, complete with probable opinions of cost. This phase also included the identification of potential funding sources to support implementation.

2

EXISTING CONDITIONS + SITE ASSESSMENT

2.1. History and Geography of the Refuge	6
2.2. Ecology and Drainage	9
2.3. Transportation Assessment	12

Existing Conditions and Site Assessment

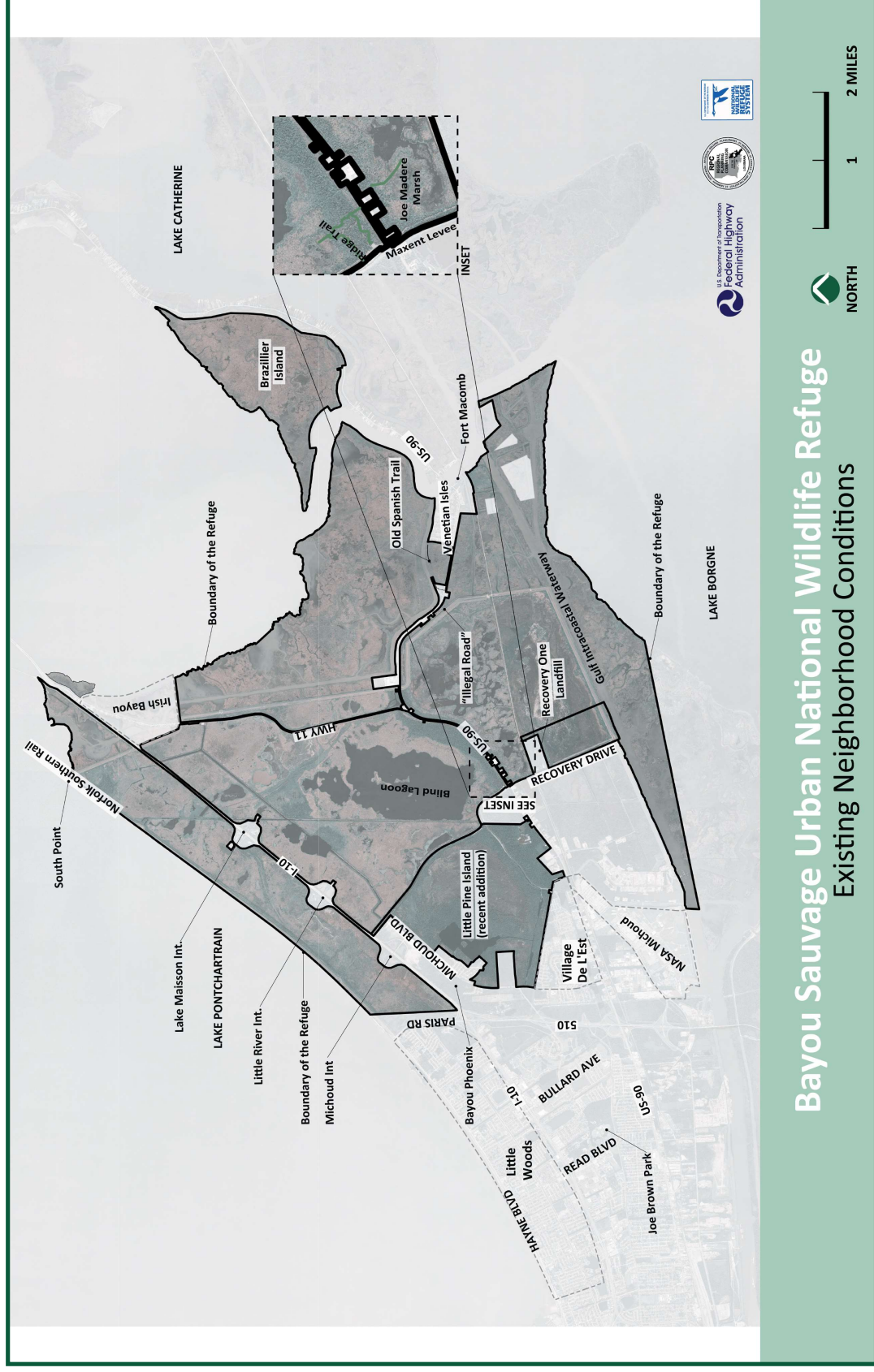
A thorough understanding of existing conditions was foundational to developing access recommendations for Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge. The consultant team conducted a comprehensive field and digital analysis of ecological systems, cultural resources, and existing transportation networks. This inventory informed the identification of gaps, needs, and opportunities for improved recreational access.

2.1 History and Geography of the Refuge

At 27,190 acres, Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge is the second largest urban national wildlife refuge in the country. It is located entirely within the city of New Orleans (coterminous with Orleans Parish, Louisiana.), in the New Orleans East neighborhood. See **Figure 1** for a map of the existing conditions within and surrounding the Refuge. The Refuge is bordered by Lake Pontchartrain to the northwest, Lake Saint Catherine to the northeast, and Lake Borgne to the southeast. Brazillier Island and St. Catherine's Island are located in the easternmost portion of the Refuge. Little Pine Island was recently acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, expanding the Refuge by 2,200 acres ².

² Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge. FWS.gov. (2010, July 1). <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bayou-sauvage-urban/visit-us>

Figure 4: Existing Conditions of the Refuge



Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge Existing Neighborhood Conditions

The Refuge lacks a defined main entrance and interconnections between existing amenities, which presents challenges for access and security. Plans are underway for a visitor's center at the northeastern end of Michoud Boulevard, which will serve as the Refuge's main access point in the future.

Little Pine Island is currently not open for public use. However, it has served as a venue for some USFWS hosted events. In 2024, the Sportsmen's Association donated materials and labor to construct a fishing pier, an informal parking lot, and walking trails. Due to a ruling published in 2023 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which states "all new National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) and expansion to NWRs are prohibited from the use of lead ammunition"³, this parcel of land has differing laws and regulations from the Refuge's original footprint. This makes Little Pine Island's public opening and integration into the rest of the Refuge difficult; however, the Little Pine Island addition presents myriad opportunities for expanded access and recreation at the western edge of the Refuge, particularly for the Village De L'Est neighborhood.

More than half of the refuge lies within the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East (SLFPA-E) levee system. This adds complexity to both water management and access infrastructure, but also provides a measure of storm protection and approved walking and biking trails for the urban communities bordering the Refuge.

Modern-day New Orleans East comprises 32,000 acres of former marshland, much of which was developed in the 1950s through the 1970s. Little Woods, the oldest neighborhood, dates back to the late 19th century as a lakeside resort.² The NASA Michoud Assembly Facility, opened in 1961, catalyzed further industrial development, which led to residential growth in neighborhoods like Village De L'Est and Venetian Isles.

After several failed plans to develop the easternmost marshlands, the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 led to the formal creation of the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, emphasizing the importance of wetland preservation for flood control, biodiversity, and water quality.⁴ Later, the word "Urban" was incorporated into the name, making the official name "Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge".

Today, the Refuge is bordered by diverse residential and industrial zones that

need to be considered for pedestrian and bike linkages with the Refuge. Lincoln Beach, a historic cultural landmark for the city's Black residents during segregation, is currently undergoing redevelopment and lies less than a mile to the west of the Refuge.^{5,6}

Historically, the Refuge was also home to indigenous and maroon communities whose presence and land stewardship predate modern development.⁷ As part of this study, culturally significant sites and landscapes were identified as necessary to restrict access to, and considered in alignment with federal and state preservation requirements.

Fort Macomb is located adjacent to the Refuge, southeast of Venetian Isles. It is a 19th-century fortification listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁸

³ Service promotes public access to hunting and fishing: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. *FWS.gov*. (2023, June 22). <https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2023-06/service-promotes-public-access-hunting-and-fishing>

⁴ Horn, K. (2017). *Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, Refuge Access Plan*.

⁵ Franco, C. (2023, July 1). *The city's beach, run by the people. Places Journal*. <https://placesjournal.org/article/lincoln-beach-new-orleans-black-and-indigenous-space/>

⁶ Medley, K. W. (2020, September 16). *Lincoln Beach was a haven for black families during oppressive Jim Crow era. Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans*. <https://prcno.org/lincoln-beach-was-a-haven-for-black-families-during-oppressive-jim-crow-era/>

⁷ Joseph C. Cripple, H. B. (n.d.). *Big Oak and little oak islands. New Orleans Historical*. <https://neworleanshistorical.org/items/show/1638>

⁸ Weldon, N. (2019, March 8). *The story behind some of TV's most haunting ruins. The Historic New Orleans Collection*. <https://hnoc.org/publishing/first-draft/story-behind-haunting-ruins-featured-true-detective-and-beyonces-lemonade>

Though the fort is currently closed to the public, it offers future opportunities for preservation and educational programming.

New Orleans East and the Refuge hold regional significance in early national transportation networks. Old Spanish Trail, one of America's first transcontinental highways that connected St. Augustine, Florida, to San Diego, California, made up the early foundations of US-90. While few remnants of the original road remain, there is a short paved trail—the only paved trail in the Refuge—near Venetian Isles.^{9,10} This could play a role in providing additional ADA accessibility in a Refuge currently lacking in accessible amenities.

Infrastructure projects related to the Refuge must consider surrounding communities to avoid adverse effects related to ecology, flood risk, or displacement. However, amenities like trails and boardwalks have the potential to increase community value and access to nature.

An understanding of this layered history has informed the access planning process. Community values and cultural significance were key considerations in public outreach, conceptual planning, and project prioritization. Despite historical and environmental challenges, the Refuge remains a vital urban ecological and recreational resource that connects people to nature and heritage in a city shaped by water.

2:2 Ecology and Drainage

Existing and natural levees have created distinct ecosystems, including uplands, brackish marsh, freshwater marsh, and saltwater marsh—each with unique functionality, ecological services, and management challenges. This allows for diverse ecologies which support migratory bird habitat as well as various other flora and fauna species.

The Refuge is part of the Urban Bird Treaty Program and is home to over three-hundred forty bird species.¹² Endangered and threatened species within or near the refuge include the Gulf Sturgeon, Red Knot, Eastern Black Rail, Kemp’s Ridley Sea Turtle, and West Indian Manatee.¹¹ Invasive species such as nutria, feral hogs, water hyacinth, and Chinese tallow trees threaten ecological stability (see the Stage 0 *Environmental Checklist* in the appendix for a full list of ecological impacts).

The Refuge is composed of a network of bayous and marshes, which are ecologically and culturally valuable. Significant trees such as Live Oak, Red Oak, White Oak, Magnolia, and Bald Cypress Trees (see Figure 2) contribute both ecological and aesthetic value.

A portion of the Mississippi River flowed through the Refuge until several hundred years ago, leaving a natural, stable ridge that US-90 now follows. Natural drainage provided by the Bayou Sauvage freshwater distributary channel network, surface runoff, and estuarine tidal channels was impacted adversely by the construction of the hurricane flood protection levees in the mid-1950s.



Figure 2: Bald Cypress Tree
Credit: Batture, LLC November 2024

This implementation necessitated the construction of flap gates, siphons, and pump stations to regulate stormwater flows.

Spoil banks and interior levees (see Figures 3 and 4) restrict sheet flow, contributing to habitat degradation and water quality challenges. However, they also offer access corridors that could be repurposed for trail alignments or other low-impact infrastructure. Understanding these drainage systems is critical to balancing ecological resilience with public access improvements

⁹ Southwest Louisiana Genealogical Society. (2013). *The Old Spanish Trail*. Kinfolks, 23(3).

¹⁰ Laskow, S. (2023, July 24). *The route of the original American Road Trip Route is disappearing*. *Atlas Obscura*. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/resurrecting-the-original-road-trip-on-americas-ghost-highway>

¹¹ *Listed species with spatial current range believed to or known to occur in Louisiana*. *ECOS*. (n.d.). <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/species-listings-by-state?stateAbbrev=LA&stateName=Louisiana&statusCategory=Listed>

Levee-enclosed areas experience degraded stormwater flow and habitat fragmentation. Additionally, the network of major roadways—especially I-10, US-90, and US-11—further fragments wildlife habitats and creates barriers to natural migration patterns. These corridors also contribute to frequent wildlife-vehicle conflicts, particularly along high speed corridors like I-10. In some areas, peat fires

Figure 3: Natural Levee and Spoil Pile Locations

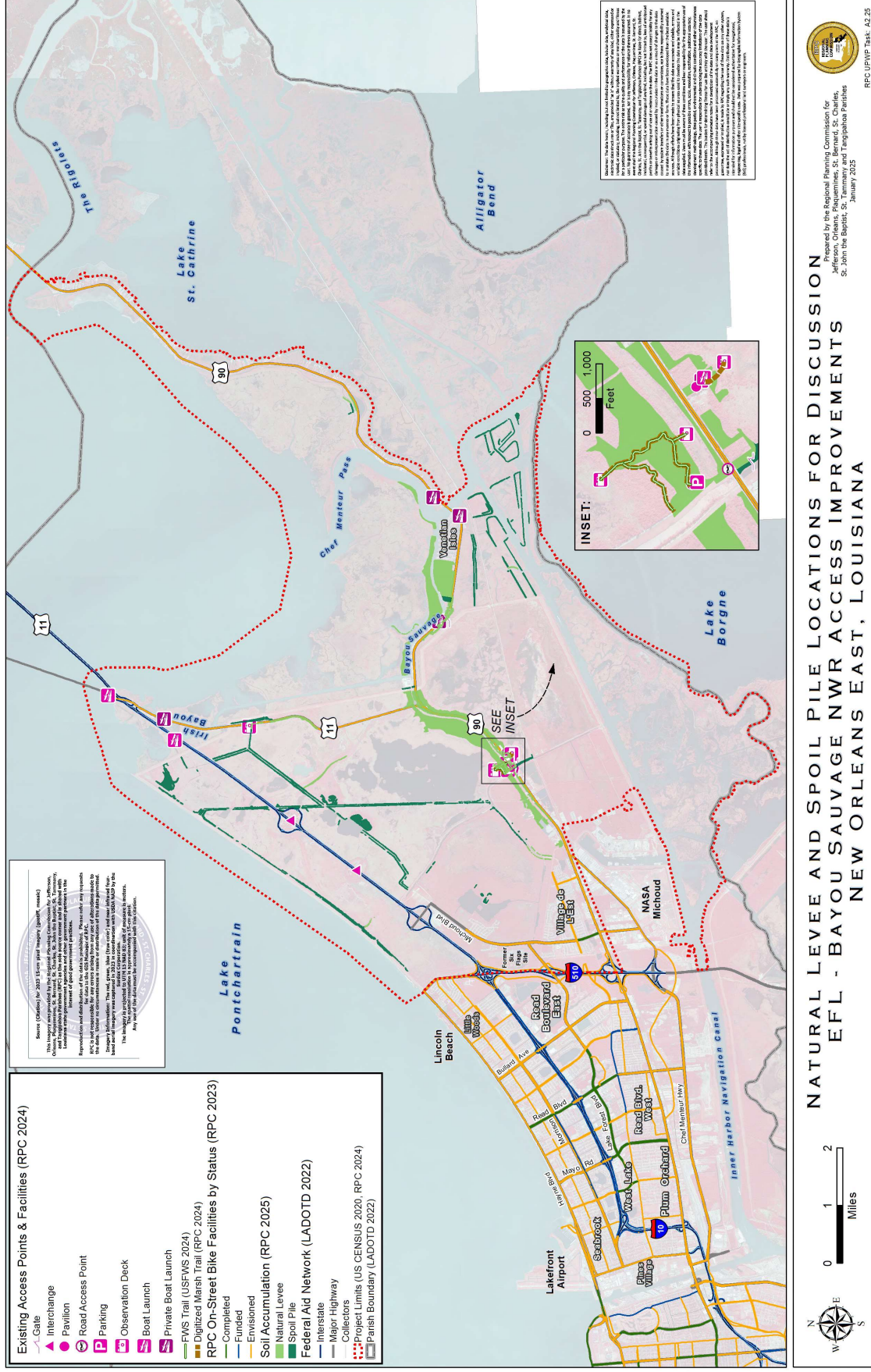
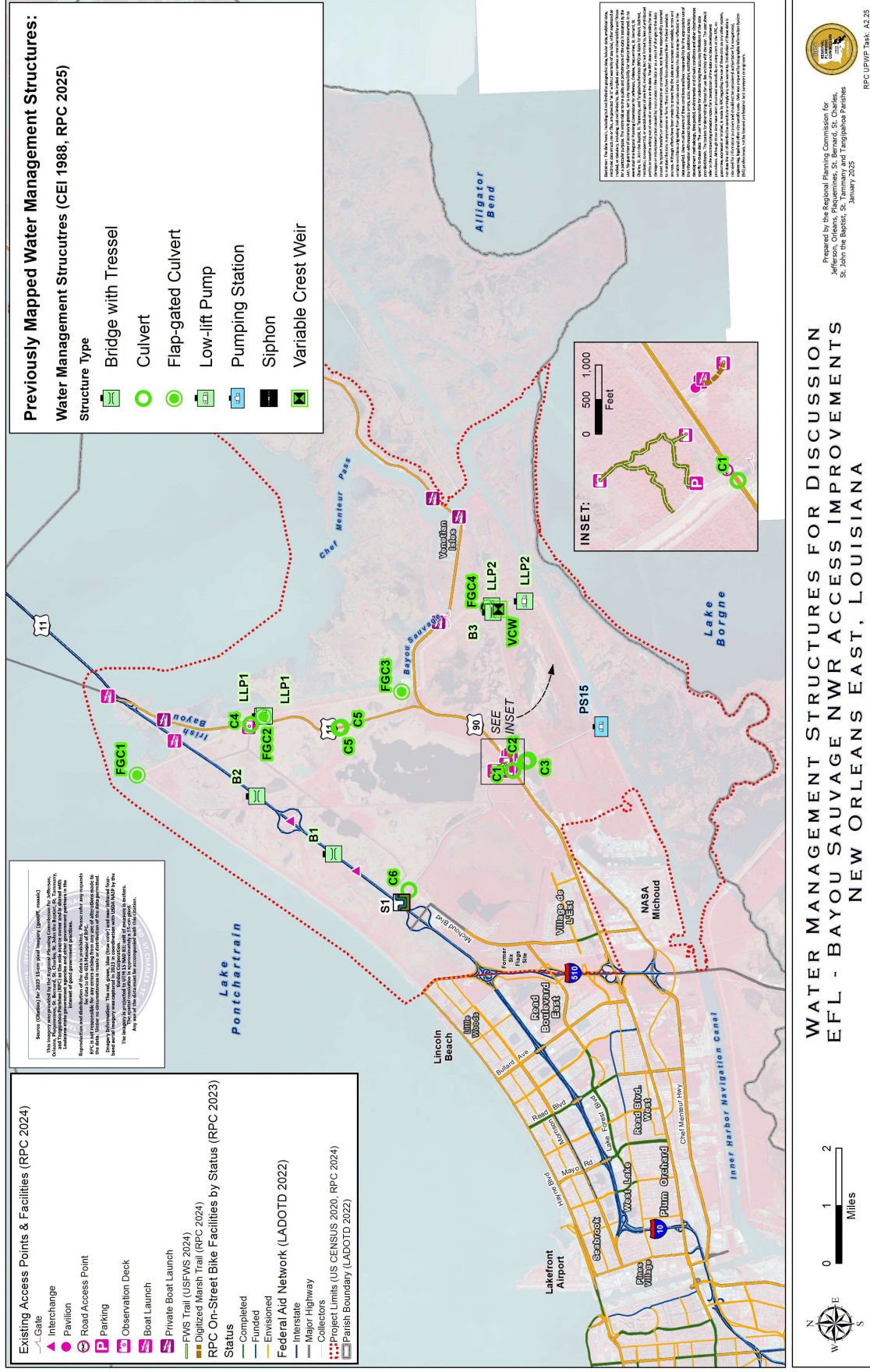


Figure 4: Existing Water Management Structures



have caused significant air quality and safety issues. Saltwater intrusion from Hurricane Katrina killed 80–90% of hardwoods inside the levee system, reducing native canopy habitat and food sources.

Efforts to increase access to the Refuge must provide opportunities for the public to engage with nature, consider the ecological impact, and tie-in with adjacent environmental improvement projects.

¹² U.S. Department of the Interior. *Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region. (2009). Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan*

2.3 Transportation Assessment

Vehicular

Vehicular access to the refuge is primarily provided via three major roadways: Interstate 10 (I-10), U.S. Highway 90 (US-90), which is also known as Chef Menteur Highway, and U.S. Highway 11 (US-11). All existing public amenities within the refuge are accessed from these corridors. Despite this, the corridors lack key access infrastructure such as turning lanes, designated entry points, signage, or bike lanes, sidewalks or crosswalks, which poses safety and navigational challenges.

Although it does not currently provide access into the Refuge, Michoud Boulevard borders the northwest side of Little Pine Island and terminates near the Maxent Levee Canal. It serves as the primary access route to the Village De L’Est and Oak Island neighborhoods. The former Six Flags amusement park site is located on Six Flags Drive, which branches off Michoud. It is currently under construction for Bayou Phoenix, a destination sports complex and resort development. Michoud Boulevard plays a critical role in this study as a potential alternative transportation corridor, linking the Refuge to these neighborhoods and to the broader New Orleans East area. It connects directly to Lake Forest Boulevard, a major thoroughfare which is partially outfitted with a greenway and bike lane, that runs adjacent to key community assets such as the library and Joe W. Brown Park.

I-10 has three interchanges through the Refuge. The westernmost connects to Michoud Boulevard. Additionally, two developed yet unused interchanges along I-10—referred to as “ghost exits”—were initially constructed to support residential development plans in New Orleans East that never materialized.

Although the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) provides service in New Orleans East, there are currently no public transit routes that directly access the Refuge. The nearest bus stops—along US-90 and at Michoud Boulevard and Expedition Drive—are 1.5 to 2 miles from the Ridge Trail, with no continuous sidewalks connecting them. This limits safe access for transit-dependent individuals. Extending a bus route to the refuge poses challenges: US-90 lacks a suitable turnaround near the Refuge, so a stop would likely require a full route extension. This would necessitate a ridership-cost analysis, safety review, and new turnaround planning. Given low projected demand and operational constraints, a fixed-route extension is unlikely in the near term. However, limited or special service (e.g., several trips per week), future microtransit options, or smaller vehicle use may offer more feasible alternatives.

Bicycle and Pedestrian

Non-motorized access within the refuge is limited but growing. However, existing walking and biking paths are disconnected from each other by the vehicular corridors that separate them. There is no safe way to traverse from one refuge amenity to another except by car. The Ridge Trail is a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile wooden boardwalk off US-90 that includes a pavilion and the refuge’s only public restrooms (see **Figure 5**). Across US-90, the Joe Mader Marsh Boardwalk offers an additional pavilion and boardwalk that leads to a fishing pier. The Ridge Trail and Joe Mader Marsh Boardwalk are the only places developed specifically for walking in the Refuge, and are the only ADA accessible walking paths. Despite their similar uses and the close proximity—only a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile apart—users cannot walk or bike between these amenities.

The refuge does allow walking and cycling along existing levees, including the Maxent Levee and the South Point Shared Use Trail¹³ (also referred to as the Bayou Sauvage Bike Trail), which was relocated to the levee’s base as a result of a post-Katrina levee lift. Despite the authorized access for biking, several of the levees have coarsely graded gravel that impedes cyclists; several levees also intersect roads without crossings, creating potential conflicts with vehicles. Multiple informal recreational water access points and boat launches are located throughout the Refuge, including one off of US-11, Joe Mader Marsh Boardwalk, and the “Crabbing Bridge,” a former vehicular bridge now used for crabbing and fishing.

The surrounding area includes several key non-motorized transportation assets that have connection potential to the Refuge. Although the relocated South Point shared use path (SUP) no longer offers lake views, it still provides critical connectivity, terminating at the border of Little Woods neighborhood at the intersection

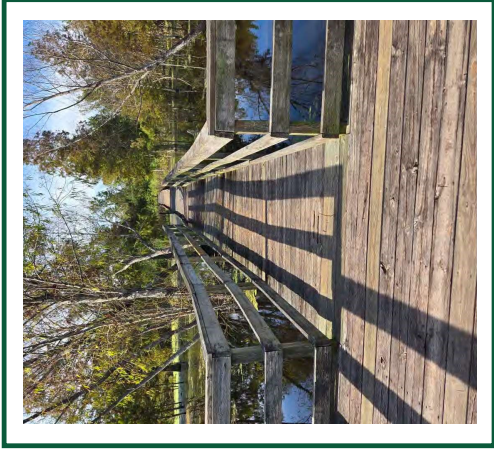


Figure 5: Trail Boardwalk
Credit: Batture, LLC November 2024

of Paris Road and Hayne Boulevard. This node is located approximately half a mile from Lincoln Beach, which presents a possible future connection. Existing bike lanes and greenways along the opposite end of Lake Forest and Michoud Boulevards from the Refuge could provide future links to Joe W. Brown Memorial Park and the Audubon Nature Center.

A region-wide initiative led by Bike Easy, a bicycle advocacy group, and its partners aims to link various trails under the Bootlace Trail Network; this includes a proposed segment called “Ring Around the Lake” which would pass through the Refuge and connect municipalities along Lake Pontchartrain.¹⁴ Another planned project is the Reconnecting New Orleans East project, an ambitious plan to construct shared bike and pedestrian trails alongside the 1-10 service roads, from Vincent Canal to Dwyer Road.¹⁵

The Adventure Cycling Association previously attempted to designate a national route through New Orleans, favoring paths like the South Point Shared Use Trail. However, SLFPA-E did not permit signage on the levee, citing concerns over existing lawsuits and maintaining the levee top as an all-weather access route. Recreational programming at the Refuge includes events hosted by organizations such as Tulane University, the University of New Orleans, the Master Naturalists Society, local charter schools, and the New Orleans

Recreation Development Commission (NORDC). The USFWS also organizes monthly “Saturday at the Refuge” events, kayaking tours, and annual events like Tradeswomen Fishing Day, which emphasizes the need for expanded waterway access.

In terms of water access and connections, waterways, including Blind Lagoon, Lakes Maïsson, Marseille and Michoud, Bayou Sauvage, and others, offer future opportunities for paddling routes.¹ A nearby example of successful blueway planning can be seen in Jefferson Parish, where a “living shoreline” restoration in Bucktown incorporates marshland and a protected kayak route from Bucktown Harbor to Bonabel Boat Launch.^{16,17} This serves as a valuable precedent for blueway development on the nearby Lake Pontchartrain system.

Wayfinding within the refuge is minimal. Identification signage is limited to basic entrance, rules, and regulation signs at the Ridge Trail and Joe Madere Marsh Boardwalk, as well as a small identity sign along I-10 (at the time of this study). The USFWS has plans to add signage at the existing boat launch off of US-11. There are a few, small educational signs along the Ridge Trail, informing users about local ecology. Signage at the entrance to the Ridge Trail includes unclear language such as “Authorized Access Only,” which can deter visitors. None of the levees have signage indicating they are open for public walking and biking. Additionally, digital mapping platforms often misdirect users, complicating public navigation to trailheads and access points.

See Figure 6 for a map of the existing amenities and non-motorized routes within and adjacent to the Refuge.

¹³ Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge. FWS.gov. (2010, July 1). <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bayou-sauvage-urban/visit-us>

¹⁴ Louisiana Bootlace Trail Network. Bike Easy. (2022, August 19). <https://bikeeasy.org/our-work/advocacy/bootlace-trail-network/>

¹⁵ Public works - projects - reconnecting New Orleans East Project - City of New Orleans. NOLA.gov. (n.d.). <https://nola.gov/hext/public-works/projects/reconnecting-new-orleans-east-project/>

¹⁶ Nicholson, L. (2024, July 10). Bucktown “Living Shoreline” starts second phase of Project | Jefferson Parish | Nola.com. https://www.nola.com/news/jefferson_parish/bucktown-living-shoreline-second-phase/article_a76a0be6-3e45-11ef-b793-f7e16aec8064.html

¹⁷ NOAA (2023, September 11). Bucktown Harbor Blueway. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/louisiana-living-shoreline-protect-levees-restore-wetlands-and-reconnect-people-coast>

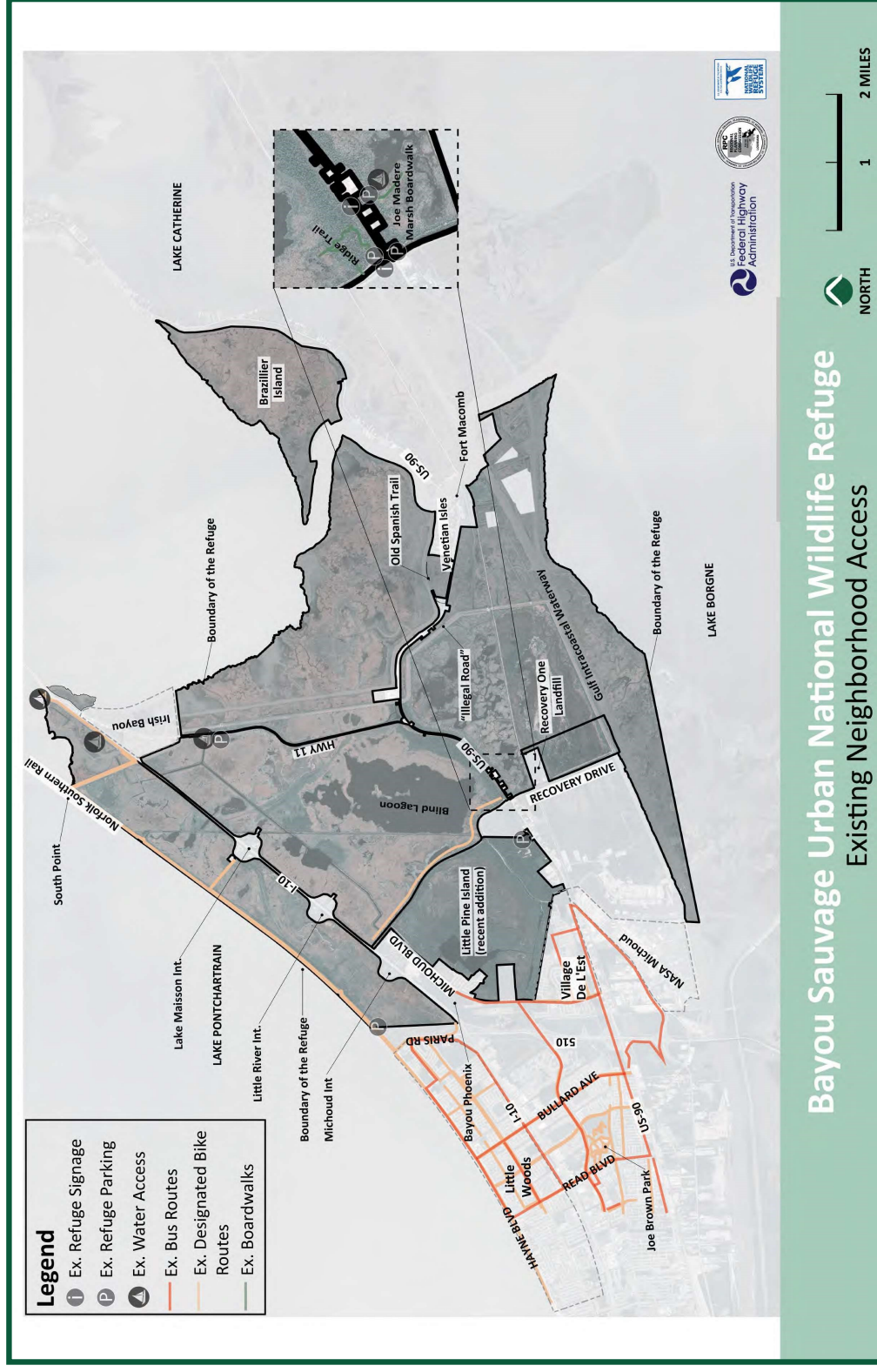


Figure 6: Existing Amenities and Non-motorized Routes

Railroad Service

Three freight and passenger rail lines traverse or border The Refuge. Amtrak’s Crescent line, connecting New Orleans to the northeast, bypasses the refuge along the lakefront.¹⁸ The Southern Rail Commission is working to restore a route between New Orleans and Mobile,¹⁹ which could provide future connectivity. Although LaDOTD continues to search for ways to expand passenger rail service in the state, no plans include service to facilities closer to the Refuge. However, Amtrak has an onboard program, called the “Trails and Rails Program”, created by the National Park Service in 2000. This program, featured on all three of New Orleans’ Amtrak routes, provides passengers with natural, historic, and cultural information about national parks, as well as other important geographic sites along the rail line. This program could be extended to educate the public on Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge.

Freight rail service is provided by CSX and Norfolk Southern. CSX’s east-west line runs along the southern edge of the refuge and links with the New Orleans Public Belt. Norfolk Southern’s northeast corridor serves the Port of New Orleans and crosses areas adjacent to the Refuge.²⁰ CSX’s railroad tracks bisect Refuge levees and walking and biking trails. Therefore, railroad alignments and crossings are necessary to coordinate when developing and improving safe pedestrian and biking access within the Refuge.

¹⁸ University of New Orleans Transportation Institute. (2020). *Louisiana State Rail Plan. Prepared for Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development*

¹⁹ Mckendry, N. (2024, December 5). *Passenger rail set to return between mobile and new orleans. New Orleans City Business.*

Transportation Network- Access Assessment

To support the Bayou Sauvage Access Study’s goal of identifying barriers and opportunities for improved, safe, and multimodal access to the refuge, an evaluation of the surrounding transportation network was conducted. This assessment includes traffic volume counts, crash history, and patterns of pedestrian and bicycle collisions on key corridors adjacent to the refuge.

- **Traffic Counts:** Traffic counts were conducted at sixteen locations over the course of a seven day period. These counts were taken at multiple locations adjacent to the Refuge, including along the corridors of LA 47, Michoud Boulevard, Lake Forest Boulevard, US-11, and US-90.

The count locations provided by Urban Systems, Inc. are shown in the report’s appendix.

- **Crash Data:**²¹ Crash data from LADOTD’s Center for Analytics and Research in Transportation Safety (LA CARTS) was used to review the existing safety conditions. The crashes from 2019 through 2023 were obtained for US-90, US-11, LA-47, Michoud Boulevard, and Lake Forest Boulevard.

Figure 7.1 presents the number of crashes that were reported on each corridor.

²⁰ University of New Orleans Transportation Institute. (2020). *Louisiana State Rail Plan. Prepared for Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development*

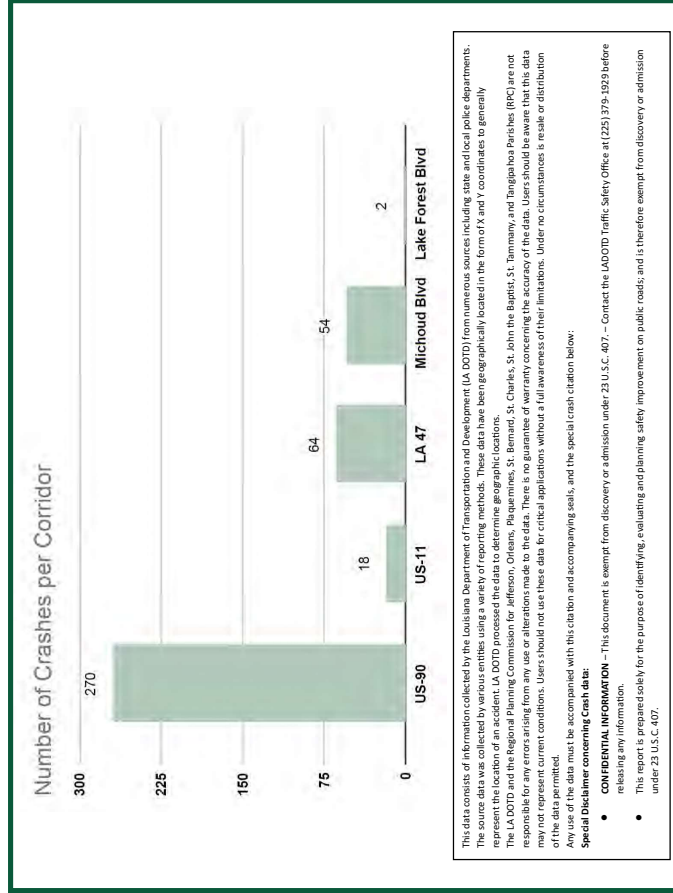
²¹ This data consists of information collected by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD) from numerous sources including state and local police departments. The source data was collected by various entities using a variety of reporting methods. These data have been geographically located in the form of X and Y coordinates to generally represent the location of an accident. LA DOTD processed the data to determine geographic locations. The LA DOTD and the Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC) are not responsible for any errors arising from any use or alterations made to the data. There is no guarantee of warranty concerning the accuracy of the data. Users should be aware that this data may not represent current conditions. Users should not use these data for critical applications without a full awareness of their limitations. Under no circumstances is resale or distribution of the data permitted. Any use of the data must be accompanied with this citation and accompanying seals, and the special crash citation below: Special Disclaimer concerning Crash data: • CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION – This document is exempt from discovery or admission under 23 U.S.C. 407. – Contact the LADOTD Traffic Safety Office at (225) 379-1929 before releasing any information. • This report is prepared solely for the purpose of identifying, evaluating and planning safety improvement on public roads; and is therefore exempt from discovery or admission under 23 U.S.C. 407.

- **Severity of Crashes:**²¹ There were ten crashes that were reported to be fatal in the study area, all of which were reported along US-90. Two of the crashes were pedestrian fatalities, and the remaining eight were vehicle crashes.

Although not included in roadways for this study, in 2023, a wildfire within the Refuge caused severe fog that resulted in low visibility, multiple vehicle pile-ups, and one fatality on I-10 near the Michoud Boulevard Interchange. This incident underscores the complex intersection of environmental and transportation safety in the refuge’s vicinity.

Figure 7.2 indicates the severity of crashes reported on US-90 per crash type from 2019-2023.

Figure 7.1: Number of Crashes per Corridor



- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Collisions:**²¹ Eight crashes on US-90 were reported within the study area involving pedestrians or bicycles. Of the seven remaining collisions, there were six pedestrian crashes and one bicycle crash. Two of these pedestrian crashes involved fatalities, and six of the seven collisions occurred at night. Pedestrian and cyclist-involved crashes were concentrated at night and were most common near US-90, highlighting urgent needs for crossings, and other multimodal safety improvements.

Figure 8 presents a map indicating the locations and severity of the collisions involving pedestrians and bicycles.

Figure 9 shows locations of severe crashes.

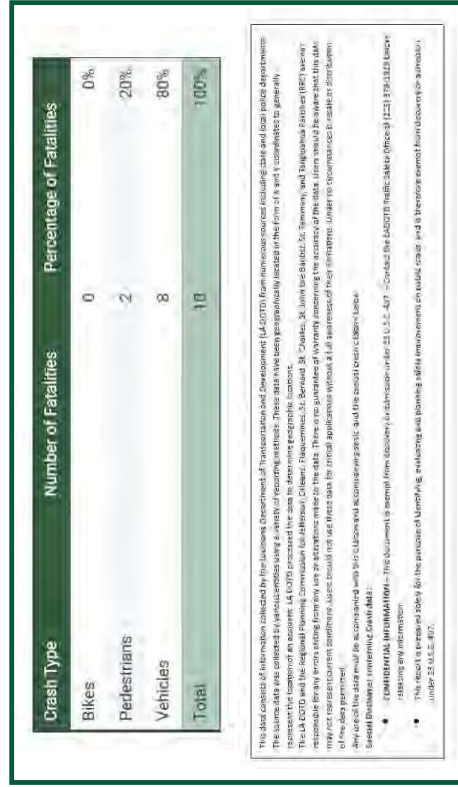
- Analysis: Traffic safety emerged as a critical concern in the study area, particularly along major corridors such as US-90 and I-10. US-90 accounted for a significant number of reported crashes, including ten fatalities within the study period.

Other key findings include:

- Two fatal pedestrian-involved crashes occurred along US-90, accentuating the need for traffic calming measures
- US-90, within the study area, is not congested and traffic is generally free flowing.

Addressing these safety issues will require a combination of traffic calming infrastructure, such as the addition of pedestrian crossings, signage, and separated shared use paths, particularly along US-90.

Figure 7.2: Type of Crashes



²¹ This data consists of information collected by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD) from numerous sources including state and local police departments. The source data was collected by various entities using a variety of reporting methods. These data have been geographically located in the form of X and Y coordinates to generally represent the location of an accident. LA DOTD processed the data to determine geographic locations. The LA DOTD and the Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, and Tangipahoa Parishes (RPC) are not responsible for any errors arising from any use or alterations made to the data. There is no guarantee of warranty concerning the accuracy of the data. Users should be aware that this data may not represent current conditions. Users should not use these data for critical applications without a full awareness of their limitations. Under no circumstances is resale or distribution of the data permitted. Any use of the data must be accompanied with this citation and accompanying seals, and the special crash citation below: **Special Disclaimer concerning Crash data:** • **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION** – This document is exempt from discovery or admission under 23 U.S.C. 407. – Contact the LA DOTD Traffic Safety Office at (225) 379-1929 before releasing any information. • This report is prepared solely for the purpose of identifying, evaluating and planning safety improvement on public roads; and is therefore exempt from discovery or admission under 23 U.S.C. 407.

Figure 8: Crash Severity Map



Figure 9: Pedestrian and Bicycle Crash Map



3

OUTREACH

3.1. Description of Process	18
3.2. Community Profile	20
3.3. Methodology	21
3.4. Summary of Input	30

3:1 Description of Process

A key component of this study involved developing and executing a robust public outreach strategy to ensure that outcomes closely align with public needs and desires. The plan prioritized inclusive engagement with residents, local advocacy groups, and community leaders—especially those in adjacent neighborhoods.

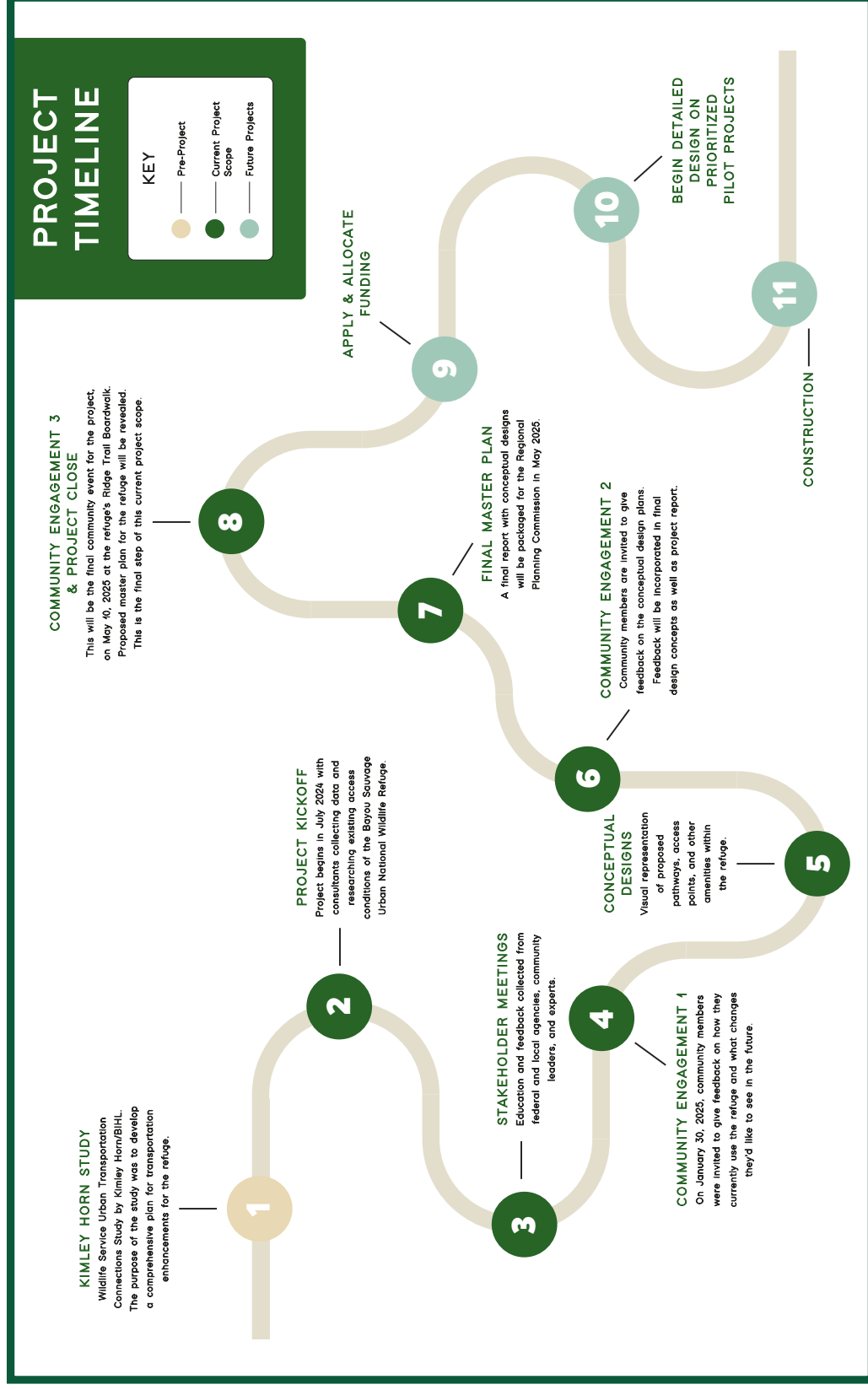
The public participation framework was designed to:

- Promote transparency throughout the planning process
- Ensure meaningful two-way communication
- Gather feedback to inform concept development
- Confirm alignment with local and regional governments and plans

To guide the study’s technical and outreach components, a Project Management Team (PMT) was formed, consisting of a diverse group of individuals with acute, expert knowledge of The Refuge and its surrounding communities. Five PMT meetings were held throughout the life of the project, each offering both in-person and virtual participation options to ensure accessibility and consistent engagement. These members provided critical insight into access barriers, community priorities, and implementation feasibility.

In addition, three public meetings were held at key milestones: the data collection and inventory phase, conceptual access design, and final access recommendations (see **Figure 10** for the project timeline). Each session invited attendees to share their experiences, concerns, and priorities regarding access to and within the Refuge. Materials were made available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to accommodate Limited English Proficiency (LEP) residents.

Figure 40: Project Timeline



3:2 Community Profile

Inclusivity was a guiding principle throughout the study. The planning team considered historic and current demographic and socioeconomic profiles of the neighborhood and their access to outdoor spaces, environmental risks, and transportation options when compiling this report and carrying out community engagement.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a federal law in the United States that prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Informed by Title VI guidance, outreach and design efforts prioritized:

- Populations historically excluded from decision-making processes
- Neighborhoods with limited access to recreational and green space
- Households with limited access to a personal vehicle
- Limited English proficiency households

According to Title VI data estimates from 2017–2021, 81,348 people reside in New Orleans East. More than 96% of the population identifies as belonging to a minority racial group. This is unique to New Orleans East. It varies from New Orleans as a whole, which is made up of 67% minority racial groups. Compared with the rest of Orleans parish, there is a higher percentage of individuals in the category of living below the poverty line, and the category of living with a disability.

See **Figure 11** for a graph of the neighborhood demographics and **Figure 12** for an Overall Vulnerability Map. See the report's appendix for Title VI data.

Figure 11: Neighborhood Demographics

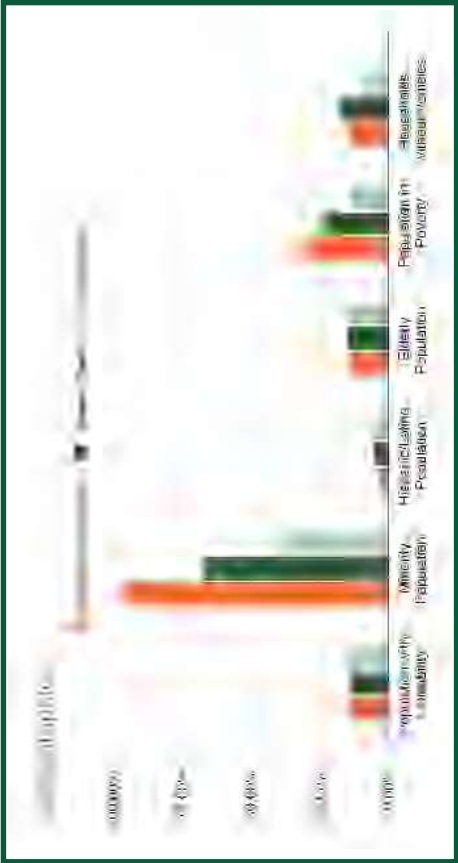
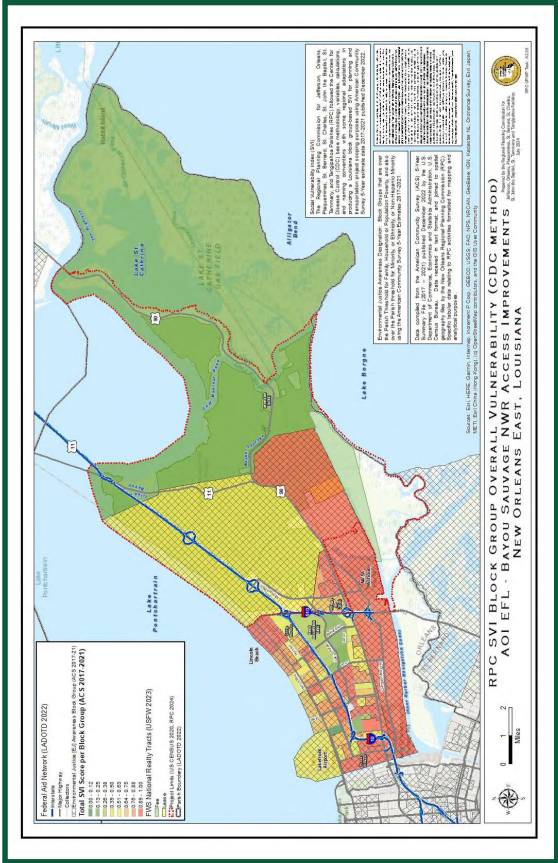


Figure 12: Overall Vulnerability Map



The study area's unique demographic profile played a critical role in shaping the outreach plan, as these populations have a high risk of health issues and are in need of nonmotorized access to outdoor recreation space. These themes were interwoven into engagement messaging, engagement locations, and used to guide culturally sensitive design and access planning.

3:3 Methodology

The project team established a structured engagement process, beginning with a detailed outreach plan co-developed with RPC staff.

Engagement methods included:

- Bilingual digital surveys
- PMT roundtables
- Information booth at USFWS public events
- In-person public meetings

Survey Development

A project webpage housed on the RPC's website included a ten minute digital survey in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to receive feedback on basic demographics of visitors, how visitors currently experience the Refuge, and changes they'd like to see. The survey was advertised through a rack card (see **Figure 13**) that linked to the project website, as well as through all other digital marketing efforts.

Volunteers equipped with iPads at community meetings assisted guests who did not want to take the survey through the QR code or did not have access to a phone or computer.

A total of 27 people participated in the survey at the time of this report - 25 in English and two in Spanish, with none in Vietnamese. The majority of respondents were white/Caucasian, over 40 years of age, and predominantly women. The majority of respondents spoke only English, had at least one car, earned over \$45,000 annually, and lived near or somewhat near the refuge. Respondents noted that the Ridge Trail Boardwalk was the most visited site, though seasonal preferences varied. Wildlife viewing and hiking were top activities, with most visitors staying one to four hours per visit. Infrequent visits were often due to limited amenities and awareness. Nearly all survey participants accessed the Refuge by car, though many were keen on

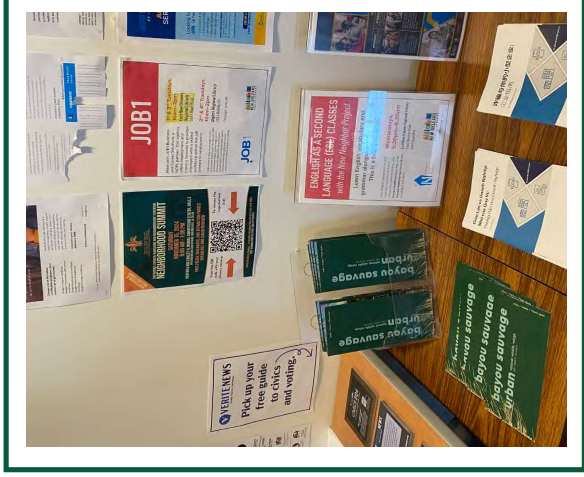


Figure 13: Access Study Rack Cards
Credit: Batture, LLC November 2024

guided tours, swamp tours, and kayak rentals. Most felt safe when visiting the Refuge's amenities, and rated walking and parking areas positively, with ADA accessibility also well-regarded.

Open feedback from survey participants noted issues like litter, dumping, poor boardwalk conditions, and conflicts between vehicle and wildlife—particularly on I-10. Suggestions included reducing high speeds from traffic on bordering roads, better signage and paved trails (notably along Recovery and Frontage Roads and near the Crabbing Bridge), birdwatching areas, wildlife crossings, and a centralized Visitor's Area, along with a marketing push to boost local awareness.

While the team prioritized reaching varied demographics, it is important to note that many survey respondents were already engaged with or interested in the Refuge project, which may have presented a bias in the results. Barriers such as lack of transportation, financial constraints, or limited awareness may have prevented some community members from participating in the survey.

Nonetheless, survey results helped the team define access priorities that reflect community values, especially those related to infrastructure, recreational

opportunities, and cultural preservation.

Reference the Community Engagement #1 meeting minutes in the report's appendix for a complete list of survey questions. Reference meeting minutes from Community Engagement #2 for a comprehensive list of responses to the survey questions.

Project Management Team Engagement

The Project Management Team (PMT) was formed comprising representatives from regional and federal government agencies, local environmental nonprofits, neighborhood advocacy groups, and representatives from local university research facilities. *A full list of PMT members can be found in the report's appendix.*

The PMT met every two months to review progress, evaluate findings, and provide input at each major project milestone. This regular meeting schedule ensured that the study remained grounded in local priorities and responsive to stakeholder and community feedback. PMT discussions were instrumental in shaping the access improvement concepts, identifying pilot projects, and aligning the final recommendations with community needs and agency goals.

The PMT's 45 members remained actively involved throughout the project's duration. After initial input on defining access challenges, PMT members participated in detailed reviews of proposed alternatives, held both in person and virtually. During the latter stages of the project, PMT meetings focused on:

- Reviewing community engagement strategies
- Reviewing and prioritizing draft conceptual access improvement plans
- Identifying implementation challenges and coordination needs
- Providing feedback on potential funding strategies
- Ensuring proposed improvements balanced access, environmental protection, and cultural preservation

This structure of continued engagement helped shape recommendations that were both aspirational and feasible, grounded in the realities of project funding, permitting, and long-term management.

Reference the report's appendix for meeting agendas and meeting notes.

PMT Findings

PMT members provided valuable feedback on issues related to access, habitat protection, and the feasibility of proposed improvements. Their input, and subsequently the report's priorities, evolved over the course of five meetings, with each session building on the last as concepts were refined. Key recurring feedback from each stage of the PMT meeting process included:

- **Initial Meetings:** The team emphasized the importance of improving wayfinding, expanding trails and connections outside of the Refuge, incorporating green infrastructure, and improving wildlife conditions. A bike lane and additional traffic calming along US-90 and surrounding roads was strongly desired, especially due to high speeds from traffic. Discussions on the education and protection of culturally and archaeologically significant history was also identified as an important topic. The consultant team captured these concerns with an initial map drawing (see **Figure 14**).
- **Mid-Project Meetings:** Feedback centered on aligning trail paths with existing infrastructure and future desired amenities, while minimizing permitting hurdles and land acquisition necessities. The PMT helped prioritize design options that balanced ecological restoration, emphasizing safety for bird populations and decreasing vehicle animal collisions, with public access. Support for the consultant proposed transformation of the Little River Interchange into a wildlife crossing was noted. The PMT also informed the consultant team that the area adjacent to Recovery Drive down to the Gulf Intracoastal waterway was not addressed in the initial access design (Figure 14). This corridor has ample opportunities to encounter a variety of bird species, and better access should be provided for this area. The Recovery One Landfill, owned by the City of New Orleans (CNO), is elevated and provides excellent views of the Refuge.
- **Final Meetings:** The consultant team presented an Access Priority Areas map (see **Figure 15**) highlighting the Maxent Levee as a critical access point, considering the future Visitor's Center and existing amenities. PMT members agreed improvements along the Maxent Levee took precedence, but argued improvements along the entire Pontchartrain Lake border should also be a high priority. PMT supported pilot projects (see **Figures 26.1 and 26.2 for pilot project sketches**) included improving access points at the intersection of Paris and Hayne, and the crabbing bridge. Suggestions from the PMT included the creation of boardwalks or small fishing piers to improve shoreline access for crabbers and the incorporation of planting to enhance shade and therefore usage along the Maxent Levee.

Figure 14: Initial Concept Map Based Off Stakeholder Feedback Map

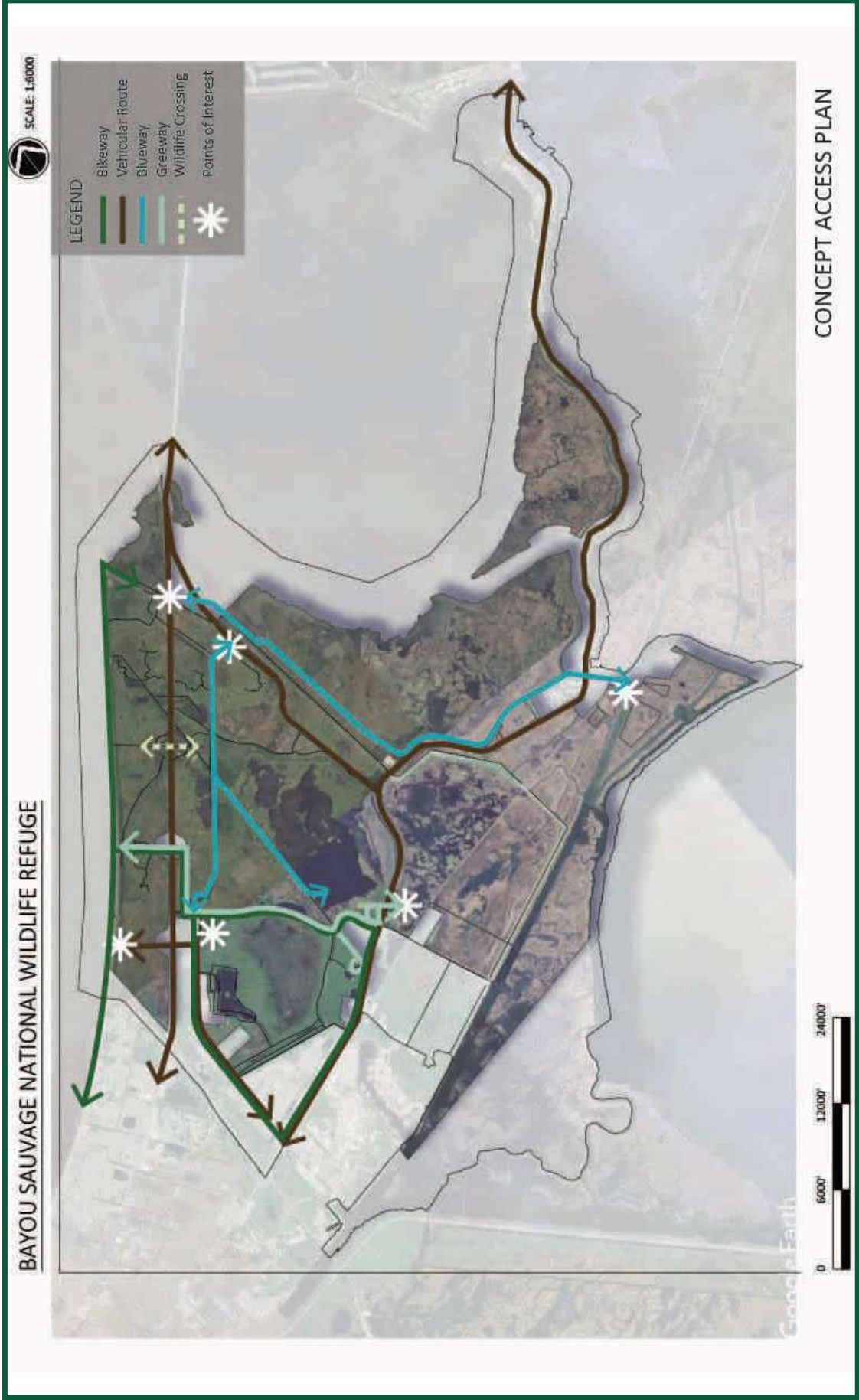
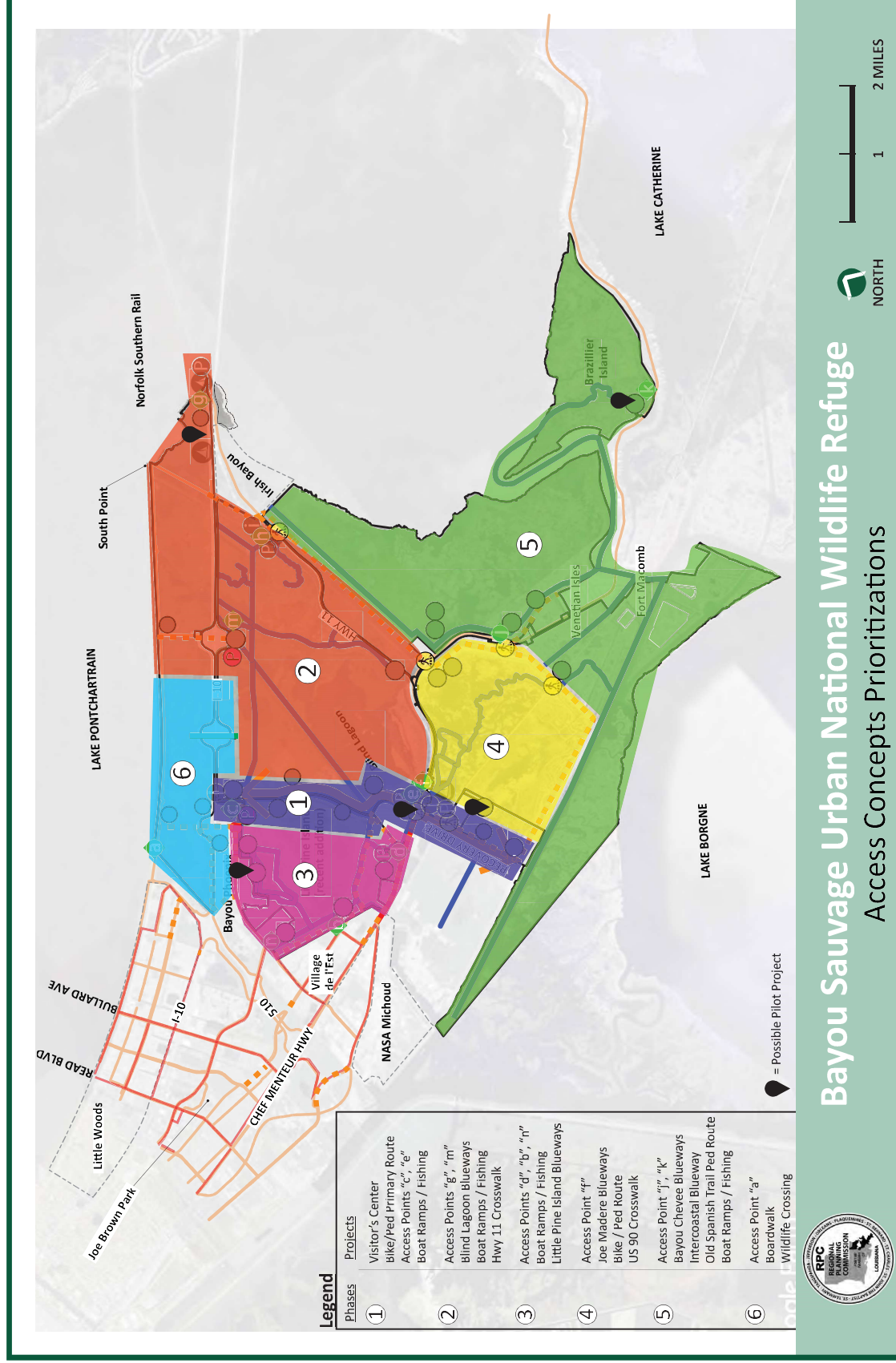


Figure 15: Initial Access Priority Map



Key refinements to the final design based on PMT feedback included:

1. Identification of a primary bike and pedestrian route that links important refuge spaces as Priority, linked by a pedestrian crossing over US-90
2. Adjustments to proposed trail alignments to avoid sensitive cultural areas
3. Prioritization of amenities such as: Signage and wayfinding, access to remote areas for birding and paddling, and safe street crossings near access

The PMT's sustained involvement ensured that study recommendations remained technically feasible, fiscally responsible, and aligned with agency policies and environmental priorities, while the stages of community engagement ensured the project design recommendations aligned with community desires for the Refuge.

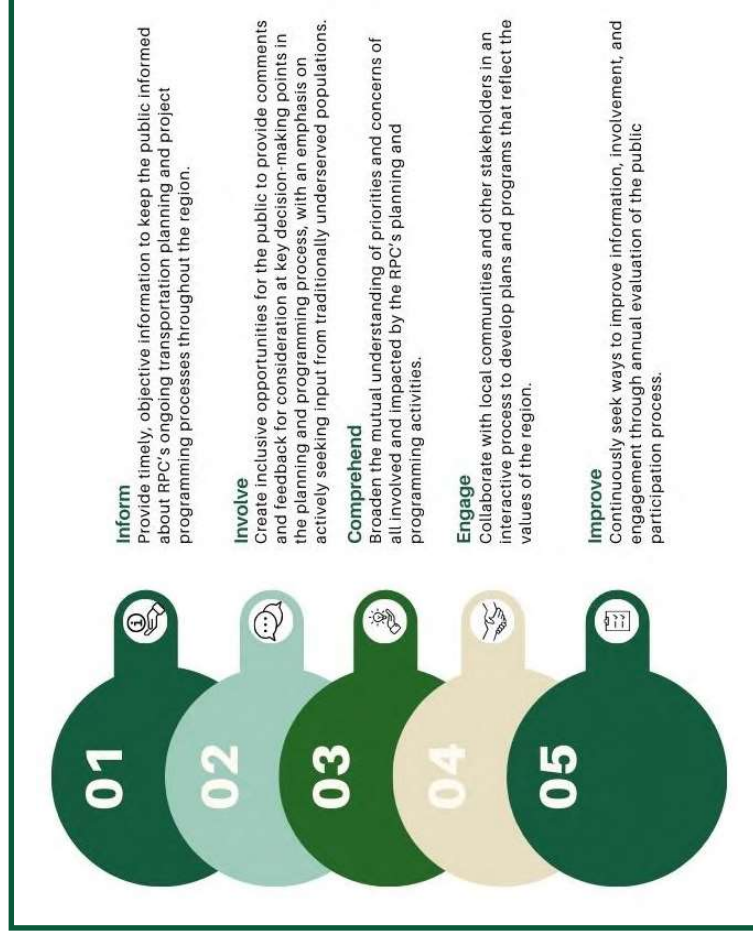
Community Engagement

To achieve broader public understanding and consensus on transportation plans, programs, and projects; the depicted major goals were identified for the public participation efforts of the RPC (see **Figure 16**).

Community meetings were designed as interactive forums featuring break out sessions, activity stations and large-format maps, where participants could mark desired access points, suggest trail alignments, and vote on amenity improvements such as restrooms, signage, and boat launches. Attendees included local residents, school groups, advocacy organizations, and elected officials. The first two meeting locations, at East New Orleans Regional Library and Joe W. Brown Memorial Park, were selected for their central location and availability of alternative transportation. The final meeting was held at the Refuge's Ridge Trail Boardwalk to bring attention to and garner excitement for the Refuge. It was co-hosted with USFWS's regular "Saturday at the Refuge" event to broaden our reach.

The first meeting focused on community needs, asking attendees to list their favorite places and activities in the Refuge, how they get to the Refuge, and what they would like to see at the Refuge. A breakout focus group with mapping exercises facilitated discussions and provided valuable insight into neighborhood connectivity gaps, safety concerns, and desired circulation routes.

Figure 16: Public Participation Plan



At the second public meeting, community members directly evaluated conceptual design alternatives. Interactive stations allowed participants to provide feedback on trail alignments, preferred recreational amenities, and areas requiring environmental sensitivity.

The final engagement event offered a culminating opportunity for participants to review and validate the final set of recommendations (see **Figure 17**). This event not only increased public awareness of the Refuge, but also fostered a sense of shared ownership over the future of access improvements.

Figure 17: Community Engagement Interactive Stations
Credit: Batture, LLC May 2024



Figure 18: USFWS's Saturdays At the Refuge
Credit: Batture, LLC May 2024



To promote the community events, a multi-channel marketing strategy was deployed. This included the RPC-hosted project website, rack cards with survey QR codes distributed at The Refuge, libraries and community hubs, bilingual flyers and yard signs posted throughout New Orleans East, targeted social media ads, RPC-hosted web content, and outreach via PMT listservs. These efforts were complemented by appearances at USFWS “Saturday at the Refuge” and kayaking events, where the consultant team connected directly with visitors (see [Figure 18](#)).

Community Engagement Findings

Community members consistently expressed a desire for more convenient and safe access to the refuge. Their feedback also progressed across three engagement events:

- **First Meeting (Project Launch):** At least 28 guests participated in a circulation map activity (see [Figure 19](#)), creating their own preferred connections to and routes with the Refuge. Few people in this meeting had an understanding that the levee trails allowed public

access for walking and biking. A need for expanded recreational trails to improve the health of New Orleans East residents emerged as a priority concern.

See report's appendix for the circulation map activity boards' results.

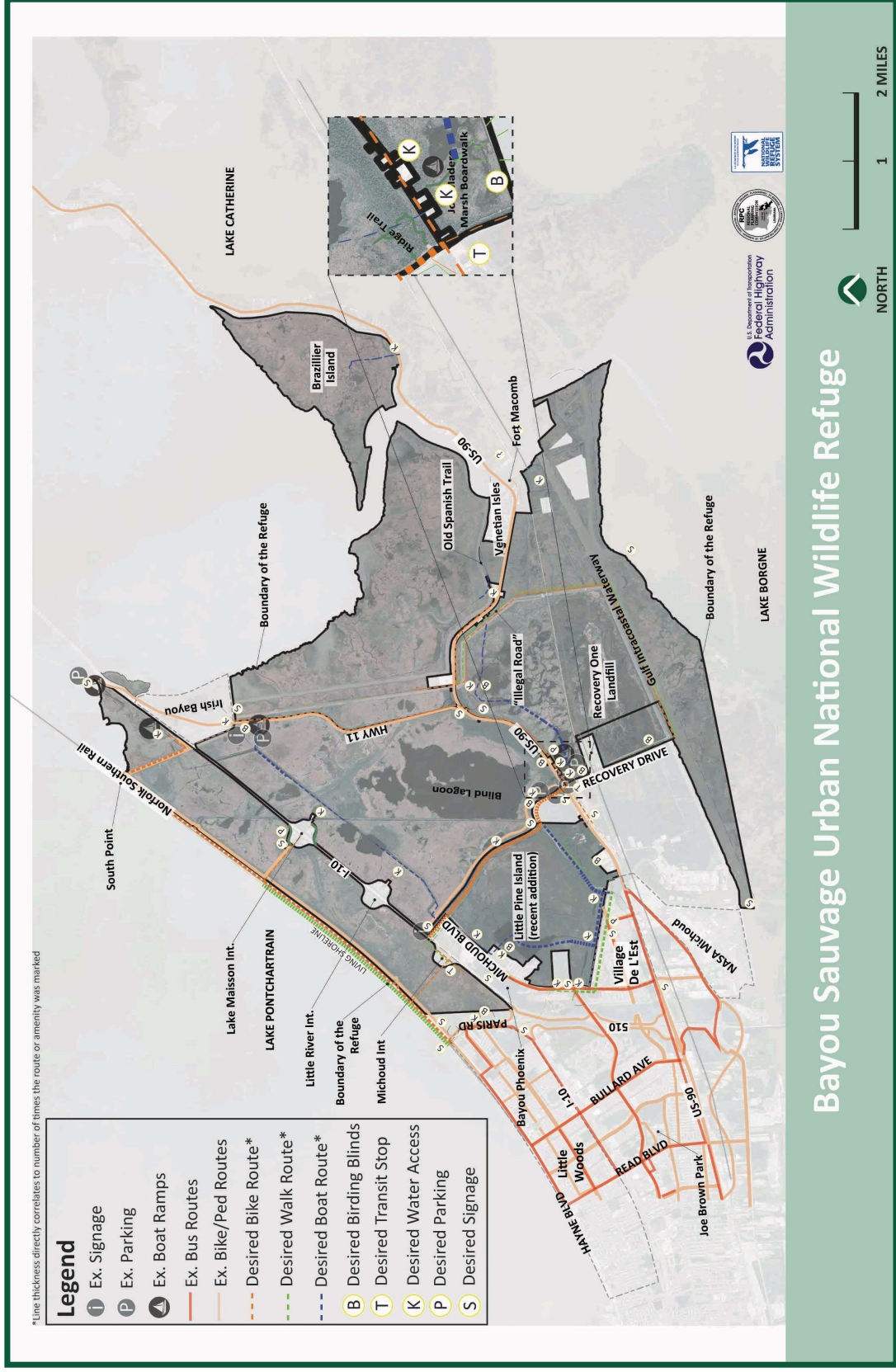
The consultant team compiled the results of the map activity into one “Community and Stakeholder Feedback” map (see [Figure 20](#)). The thickness of each line represents how often that pathway was suggested to the consultant team by participants at either the second PMT meeting or the first community engagement meeting. The areas with the most amount of responses were the South Point Shared Use Trail, the Maxent Levee Trail, and some blueway trails in Little Pine Island and Joe Maderre Marsh. Most of the aforementioned biking and pedestrian trails are currently open to the public as available walking and biking trails which suggests that plans for the Refuge should prioritize additional expanded and improved trails and signage.

- **Second Meeting (Concept Development):** Approximately 30 community members helped refine trail alignments, suggested additional amenities, and voiced concerns about environmental impacts. There was strong support for opening Little Pine Island or public use. Improvements for boating access to Brazilier Island were also encouraged.



Figure 19: Community Engagement #1 Circulation Map Activity
Credit: Batture, LLC January 2025

Figure 20: Stakeholder Feedback



It is also important to note that for this meeting, the consultant team was encouraged by the RTA to ask the community when and how they might use transit to access the refuge, as that data could support creative solutions.

See **Figure 21** for results of a voting exercise for a bus route extension to the Refuge.

Bus Route Options

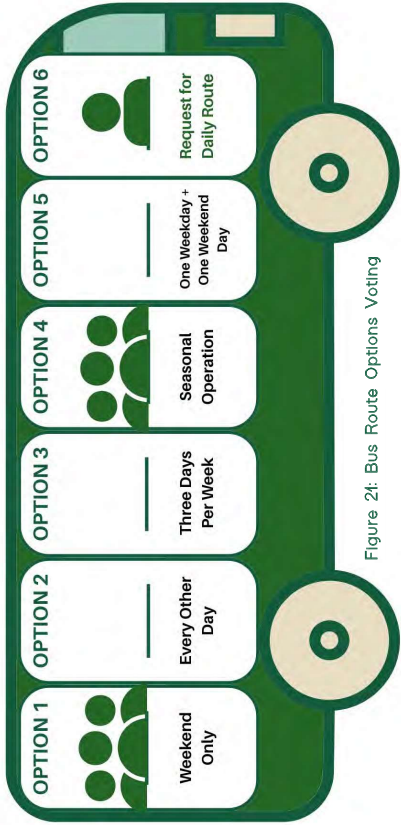


Figure 24: Bus Route Options Voting

See **Figure 22** for a photo of the community engaging with a giant map of the conceptual proposed access improvements (see **Figure 23**). See appendix for photos of each activity and their outcomes.

- **Final Meeting (Recommendations Review):** Participants prioritized improvements that addressed immediate safety issues, including better bike and pedestrian crossings and clear wayfinding. A few community members voted for the Bayou Chevee and Brazillier Island area to be priority 1 through map activities provided during the meeting. The community expressed

continued excitement about opening Little Pine Island to the public, improvements to the Crabbing Bridge, and strongly also supported adding a pedestrian crossing on US-90 at the Maxent Levee. Some interest in the wildlife crossing was expressed.

Key community priorities that shaped the final design recommendations included:

- Improved non-motorized connections between neighborhoods and the refuge, especially from Village De L'Est and Little Woods.
- Improvements to an access point off Paris Road, the Crabbing Bridge, Little Pine Island, Joe Maderre Marsh Boardwalk, Bayou Chevee, and the Ridge Trail.
- Additional recreational amenities such as kayak launches and improved access for birding and fishing.

Figure 22: Community Engagement #2 Giant Map Activity
Credit: Batture, LLC March 2025

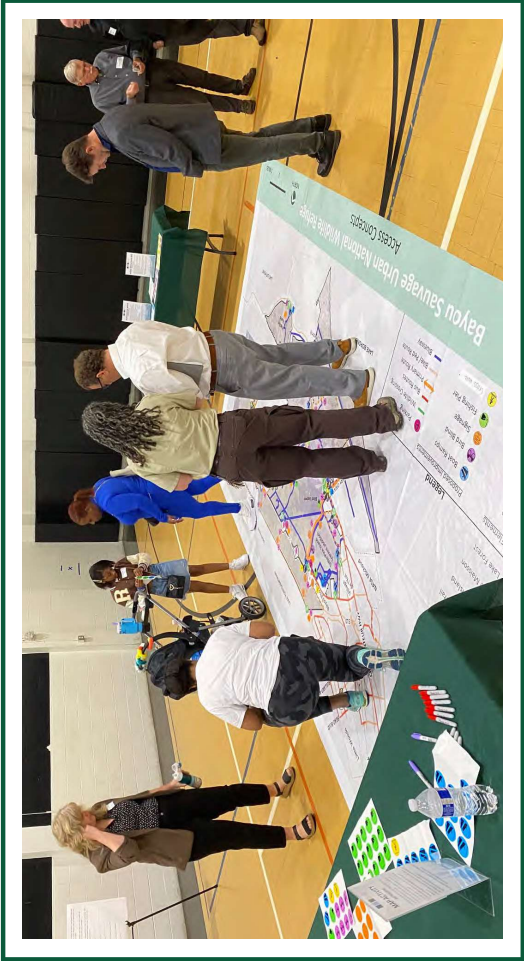
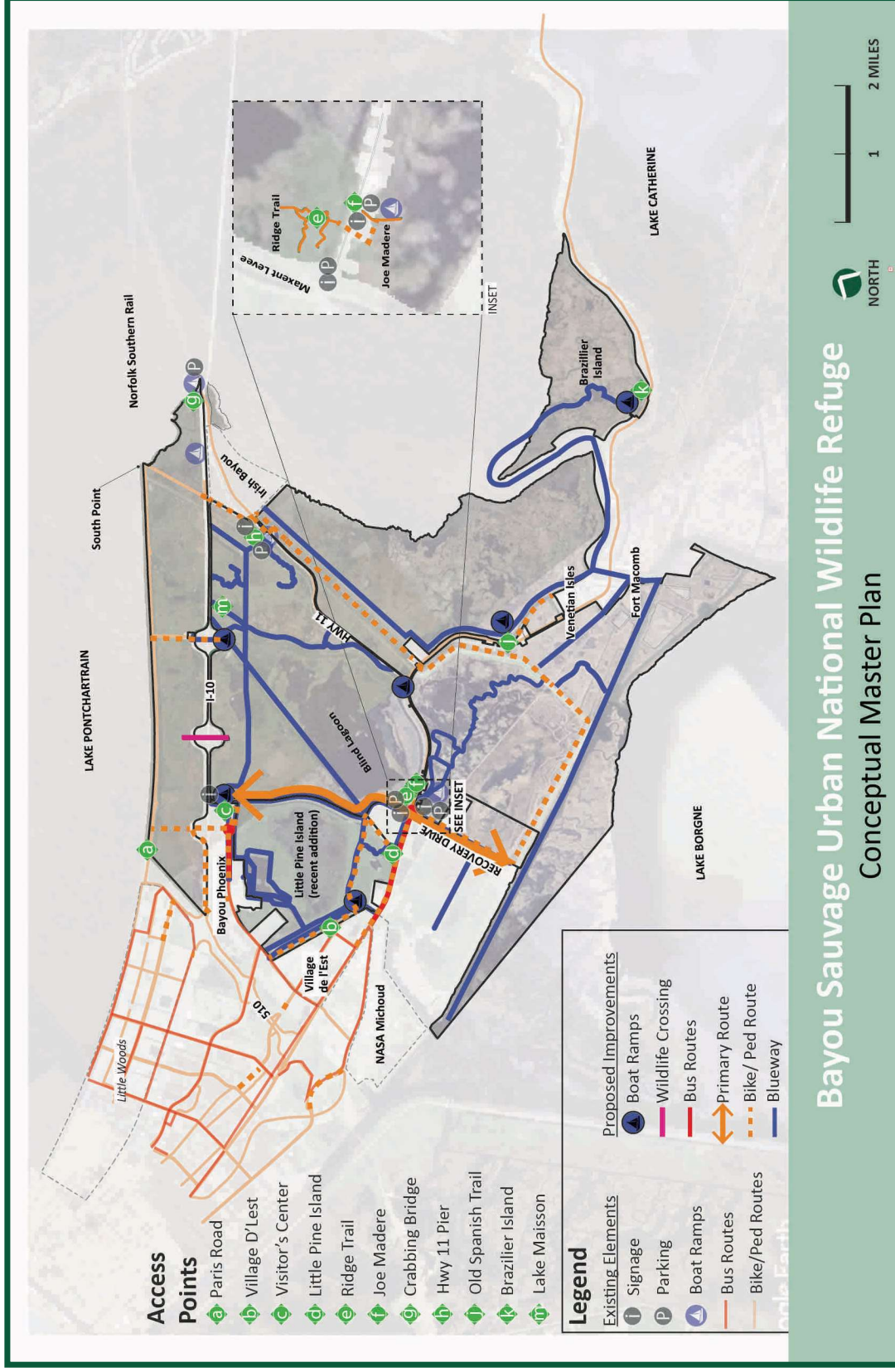


Figure 23: Conceptual Proposed Access Improvement Map

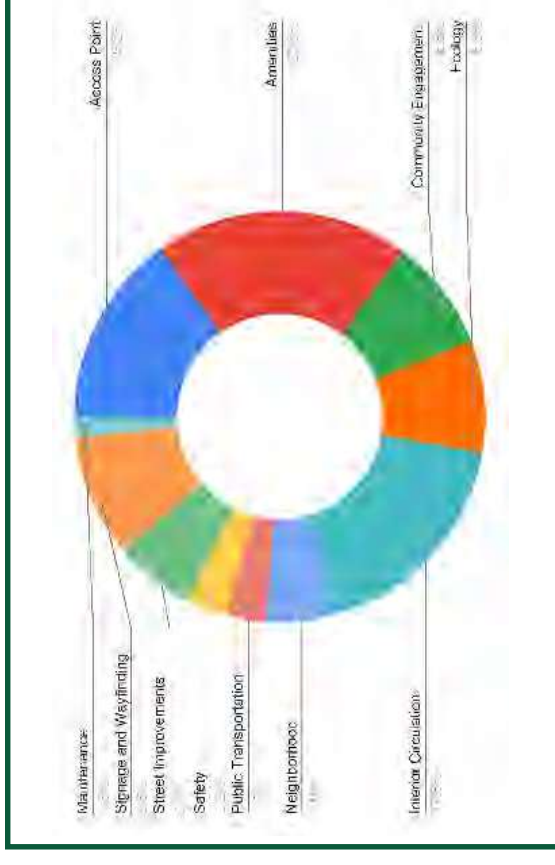


3.4 Summary of Input

Feedback gathered from the survey, PMT, and community engagement events was synthesized and used to identify recurring themes, which were incorporated into project priorities and conceptual design alternatives (see **Figure 24**). These recurring concerns were:

- **Access Points:** Concerns about the availability, visibility, and convenience of entry points to the refuge, including connections from major roads or neighborhoods.
- **Amenities:** Feedback focused on the need for more recreational facilities such as boat launches, birdwatching shelters, parking, and a Visitor's Center to improve the overall refuge experience.
- **Interior Circulation:** Refers to the amount of interior bike and pedestrian trails, and ease of non-motorized movement within the Refuge.
- **Community Engagement:** Relates to comments the consultant team received from the PMT and community members on how to best improve community engagement and outreach.
- **Ecology:** Concerns about the environmental health of the Refuge, including preservation of habitats, wildlife protection, and sustainable maintenance practices.
- **Signage and Wayfinding:** Focuses on the clarity and adequacy of signs within and around the refuge to help visitors locate amenities, trails, and points of interest.
- **Safety:** Refers to both physical safety and perceived safety for visitors (crime, sightlines, traffic safety, etc).
- **Maintenance:** Comments related to upkeep of the Refuge infrastructure, such as litter removal, trail maintenance, and cleanliness of facilities.
- **Street Access:** Concerns about road conditions or infrastructure near the Refuge that might impact ease of arrival by car, bike, or on foot.
- **Public Transportation:** Reflects the need for improved public transportation to provide access to users without personal vehicles.
- **Neighborhood Connections:** Focuses on how well the Refuge is connected to adjacent communities through walking paths, visual presence, or transportation links.

Figure 24: Compiled Community and Stakeholder Concerns



The findings of this study represent a synthesis of technical analysis, stakeholder input, and community engagement. They address key safety concerns, stakeholder priorities, and reflect the values expressed by the community throughout the planning process.

4

CONCEPTUAL ACCESS DESIGN

4.1. Priority Areas	35
4.2. Pilot Projects	44
4.3. Funding Sources	51

Conceptual Access Design

Using the findings from the inventory and transportation assessment, the consultant team created a feasible comprehensive access improvements design that prioritized stakeholder wants and needs. The design proposes greenway and blueway connections to and within the Refuge that have the greatest impact on access, safety, and recreational opportunities.

A key component of this framework is the strategic addition of access points that improve connectivity between the refuge and surrounding neighborhoods. These access points will provide new opportunities for safe and welcoming entry, as well as allow for increased use of the Refuge. Access points may vary in scale and amenities, ranging from simple trailheads with signage to more fully developed nodes that include parking, shelters, picnic areas, and boat launches. Access points with less development, like access point “b” and “n”, were decided from community feedback on limiting impact to neighborhoods. **Figures 26.1 and 26.2 depicts the range in scale of the access points.** These locations will be designed to improve both recreational access and multimodal transportation connections, supporting the broader vision for conscientious and resilient infrastructure within the region. Pedestrian crossings are another recurring feature to achieve the goal of connect existing amenities and proposed greenways. They will aid in unifying a refuge fragmented by high speed bisecting roads. See **Figure 25** for the proposed design, including location of access points.

Figure 25: Access Concepts Map

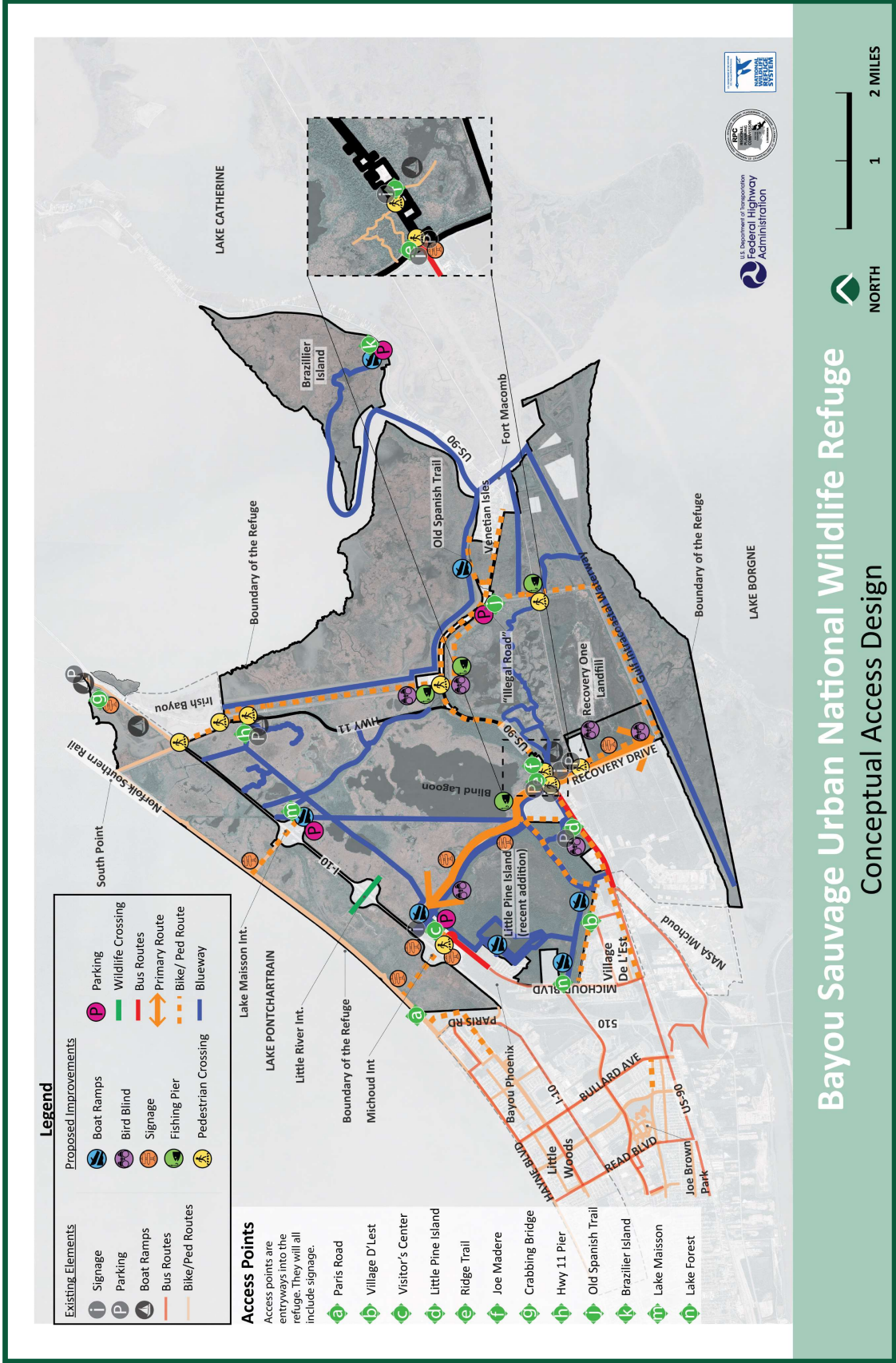
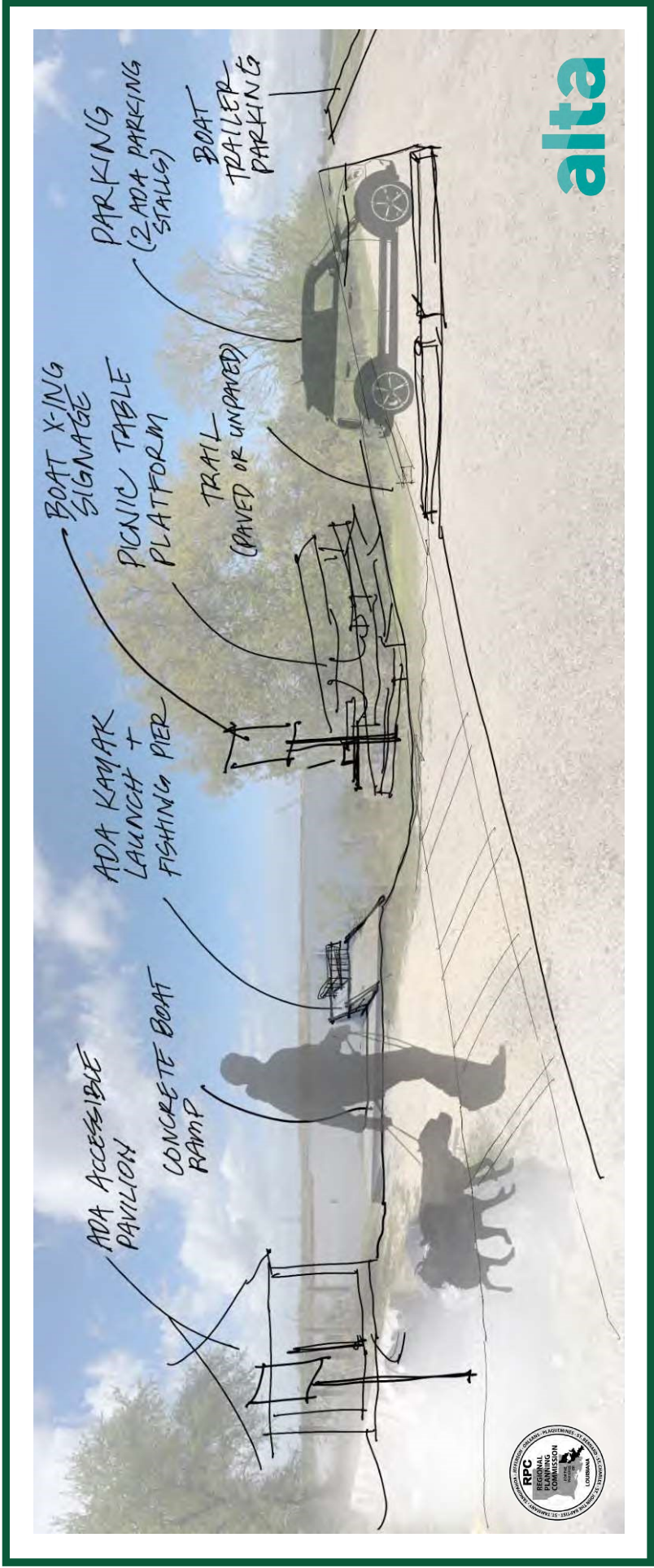


Figure 26.1: Sketch demonstrating the development scale of proposed access points. Sketch of less developed access point at Village De L'Est is considering low impact to the adjacent community.



Figure 26.2: Sketch demonstrating the development scale of proposed access points. The Crabbing Bridge is a more developed access point due to its location along I-40. It could offer a variety of recreational access including parking, ADA walking paths and docks, fishing, paddling, and educational signage



4:1 Priority Areas

The following prioritization framework was developed based on safety analysis, stakeholder feedback, community engagement, and implementation feasibility. Recommendations are then grouped into short-term and long-term priorities to guide future planning and funding efforts in section 4.5 and 4.6 of this report.

Each priority area includes associated pilot projects that represent “low-hanging fruit”, or early-action opportunities that can quickly move into design and construction. These pilot projects are intended to build momentum, demonstrate immediate improvements, and establish a foundation for long-term success in each priority area. See **Figure 27** for the proposed *priority locations*.

1. Maxent Levee Corridor (Figure 28): Identified as the highest priority in stakeholder and community engagement events, due to its adjacency to existing high-use amenities and future Visitor’s Center, is the establishment of a primary multi-use nonmotorized corridor; reflects key refinements discovered in the PMT roundtables. This corridor will extend along the northeast side of the Maxent Canal, beginning near Michoud Boulevard—to provide an access point for the Oak Island and Bayou Phoenix developments—and continuing south to the pump station on the Intracoastal Waterway. This will provide critical north-south connectivity within the refuge. A US-90 crossing to unify the trail is a paramount feature as it will provide US-90 traffic calming, and critical safe bike and pedestrian connection between Ridge Trail and Recovery Drive. A preliminary design is detailed in section 4:2 of this report. A series of directional and educational signage and wayfinding elements should be installed along this pathway to improve navigation and enhance the visitor experience, with interpretive content highlighting the area’s ecological significance and cultural history. In addition, the corridor should include strategically placed fishing piers and wildlife viewing platforms to create new recreational opportunities and foster a stronger connection between visitors and the natural environment. This project will serve as the backbone of the refuge’s future trail system.

2. South Point (Figure 29): This area will provide a critical pedestrian and bike connection from the Little Woods neighborhood via a formalized access point, containing a trailhead, signage, and small parking lot,

at Paris Road (labeled Access Point A). This priority area also includes a new half-mile long boardwalk connecting the South Point Levee Shared Use Trail across the I-10 Michoud Boulevard interchange and ultimately to the Maxent Levee. These two projects will ensure that residents can access the future planned Visitor’s Center from Paris Road without the use of a car. Improvements and an extension of the South Point levee trail on the east side will provide a connection from the crabbing bridge. To provide an alternative non-motorized access route to the Crabbing Bridge, a proposed pedestrian bridge over I-10 will connect the levee running along US-11 up to South Point. This will further integrate the Crabbing Bridge into the comprehensive access plan by linking the Crabbing Bridge to the boat launch on US-11. This, along with pedestrian crossings in Priority Areas 1, 4, and 5, will create an uninterrupted, circuitous walking and biking path throughout the refuge. Proposed improvements to the Crabbing Bridge itself includes parking, fishing piers, a pavilion, and boat launch. Additionally, a proposed wildlife crossing using the Little River Interchange in this corridor would help mitigate habitat fragmentation and reduce wildlife-vehicle conflicts—a concern continually brought up by stakeholders. A successful precedent for this type of infrastructure can be seen in Osburne, Idaho, where an abandoned interchange was converted into a wildlife crossing over I-90 through a series of fences and one-way gates. This case study dramatically reduced animal-vehicle collisions and restored migration routes for species such as elk, deer, and mountain lions.²²

²² Review, E. D. T. S. (2024, January 30). *Abandoned Idaho Bridge to become a wildlife crossing, fulfilling resident's longtime dream. Idaho State Journal.* https://www.idahostatejournal.com/outdoors/outdoor_news/abandoned-idaho-bridge-to-become-a-wildlife-crossing-fulfilling-resident-s-longtime-dream/article_459b5144-ba1b-11ee-97fe-4fbee59a65ee.html

Figure 27: Priority Areas Map

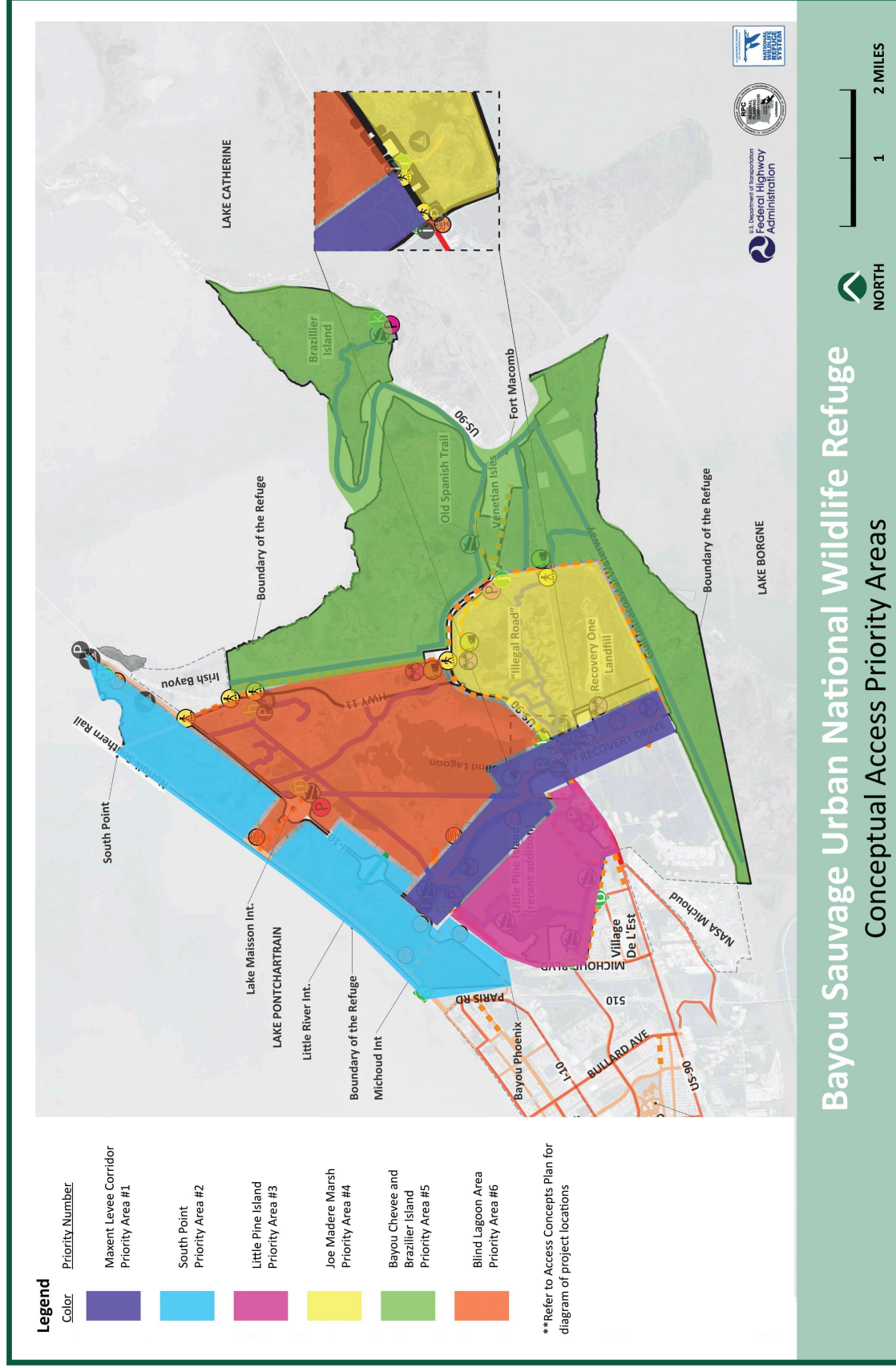


Figure 28: Maxent Levee Corridor

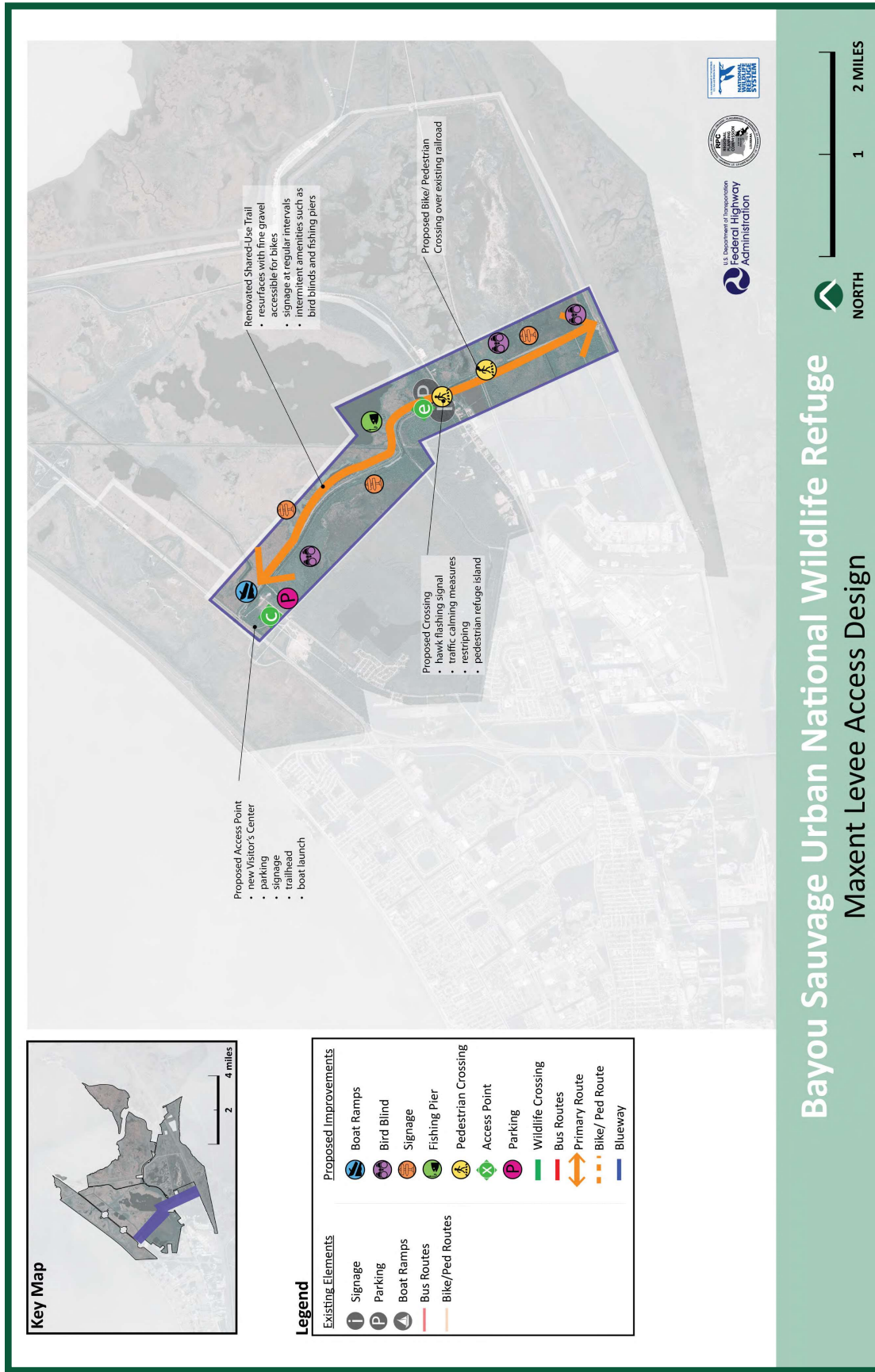
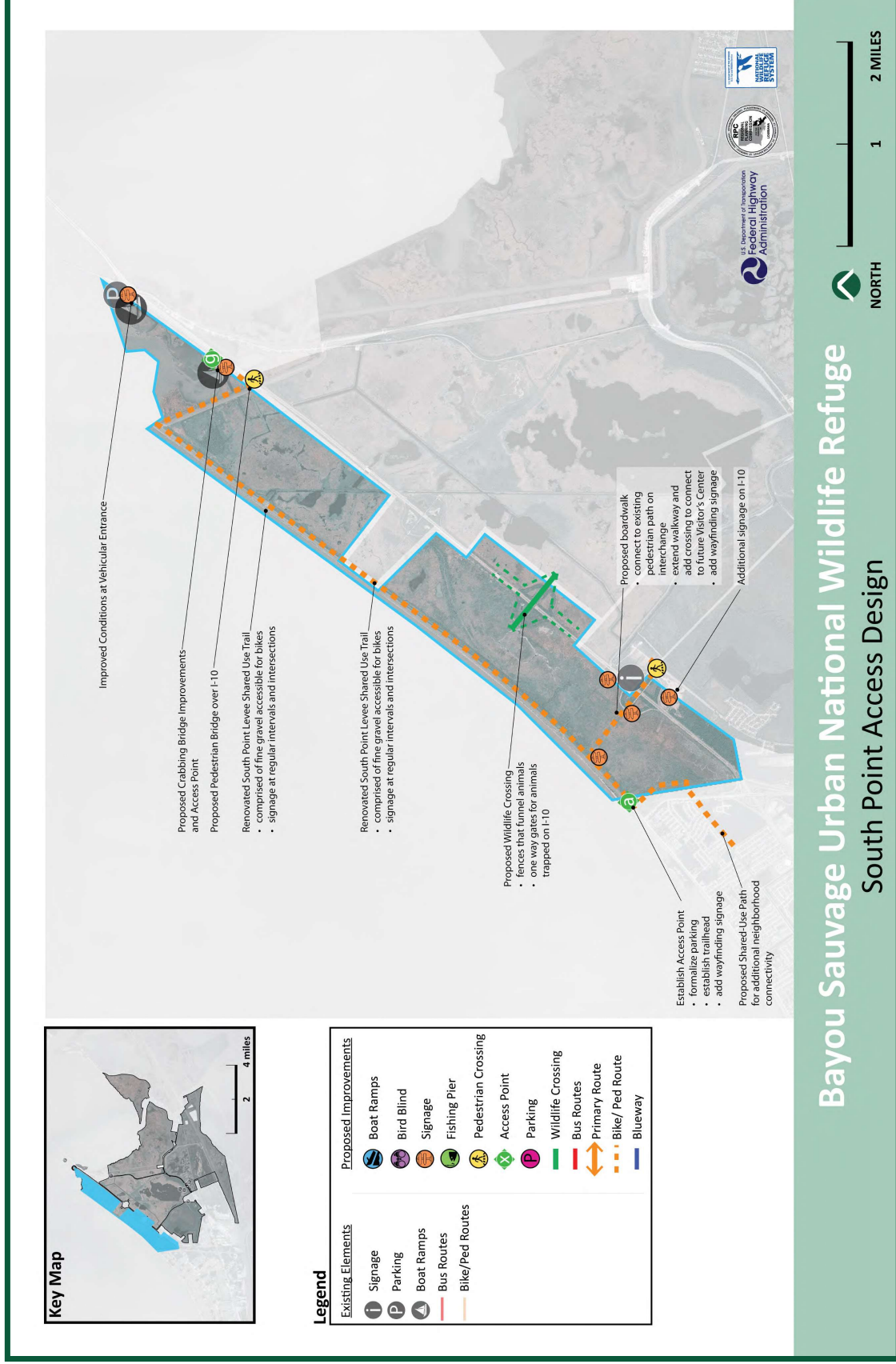


Figure 29: South Point Priority Area



3. Little Pine Island (Figure 30): Strong community interest has been expressed in opening this area for controlled public access and recreational use. Initial priorities include creating partnerships with wild life tour companies and developing low-impact trail loops, fishing piers, and boat launches. These trailheads and amenities should prioritize access for residents of Village De L'est and Oak Island neighborhoods. In addition, a clear communication plan should be developed to inform visitors of the different rules and use restrictions that will apply to Little Pine Island compared to the remainder of the refuge. This plan should ensure consistent messaging through signage, outreach materials, and online resources to support visitor understanding and compliance.

4. Joe Madere Marsh (Figure 31): This area currently serves as a popular destination for birders and paddlers. A proposed second US-90 crossing will connect Ridge Trail Boardwalk to Joe Madere Marsh Board walk safely, and will extend traffic calming measures proposed in Priority Area 1. The USFWS is currently planning to extend the Ridge Trail to US-90, which will directly facilitate this connection. This priority area also includes wayfinding signage to clearly direct visitors to recreational offerings, upgraded access and amenities for birding, and development of formal boat launches and blueways. In addition, a partnership with the City of New Orleans to provide access to the Recovery One Landfill would be mutually beneficial; this partnership could facilitate environmental remediation and restoration efforts, while creating new opportunities for recreational access and wildlife viewing adjacent to the refuge.

Figure 30: Little Pine Island Priority Area

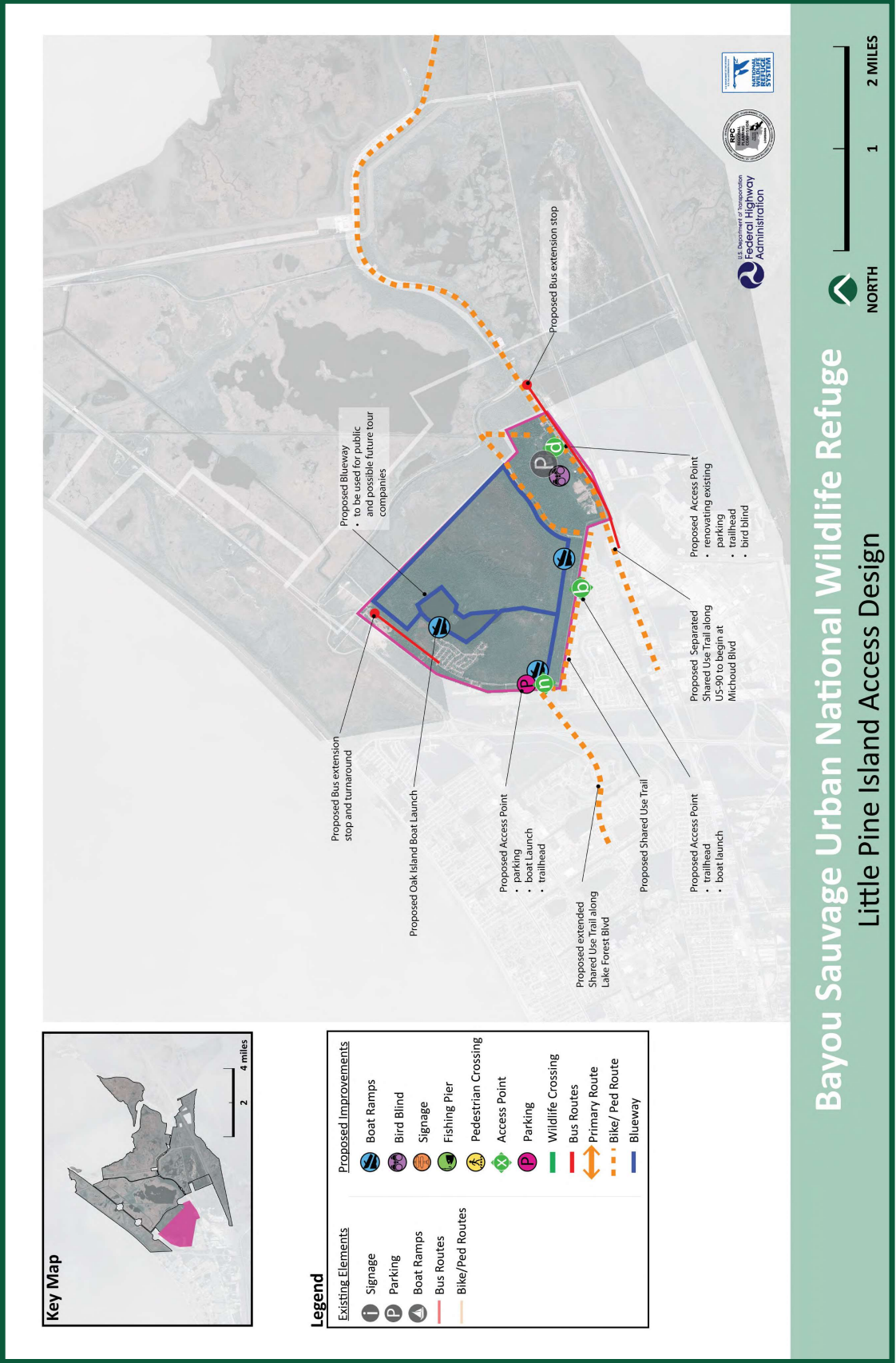
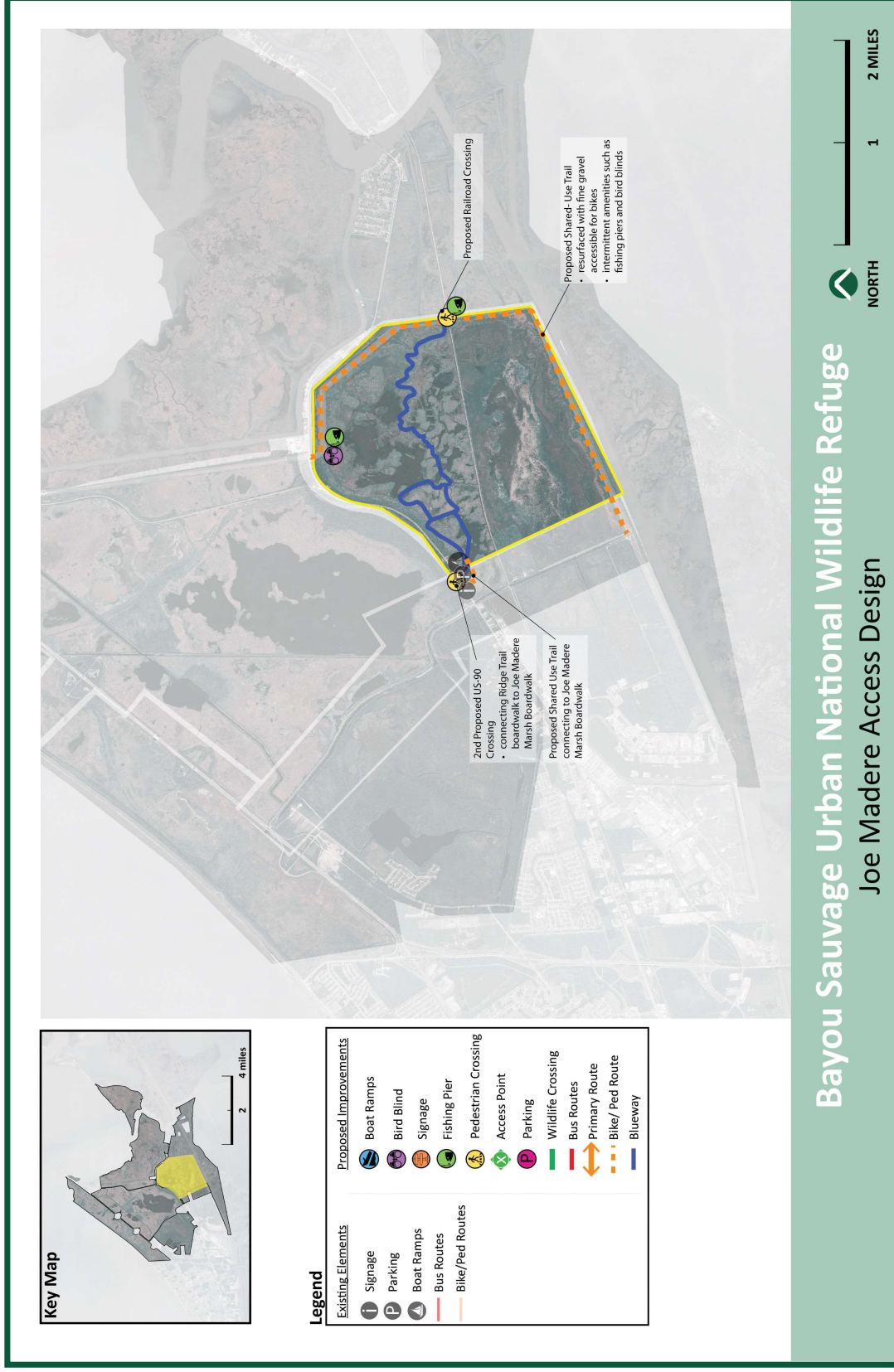


Figure 34: Joe Madere Marsh Priority Area



5. Bayou Chevee and Brazillier Island (Figure 32): Identified as the fifth priority, this area focuses on improving connectivity between US-11 and Brazillier Island. The existing levee in this area extends from South Point, runs parallel to US-11, and continues down to the Intracoastal Waterway. This plan proposes the addition of a gravel multi-use path on top of this levee to improve walking and biking access throughout the area. To facilitate safe access to the proposed trail, a pedestrian crossing over US-11 is recommended to connect the existing US-11 boat launch directly to the levee trail. Additionally, a pedestrian crossing should be designed where the levee intersects US-90 to provide a critical east-west connection. Access Point J, where a service road named “Illegal Road” currently exists, can be modified to include a parking lot and trail. The landowner of a 113-acre parcel along the southern border of Brazillier Island has expressed willingness to coordinate with USFWS to provide future visitor access to the island. The team as been advised that discussions concerning USFWS and adjacent property owners along the southern border of Brazillier Island could present access opportunities to the island.

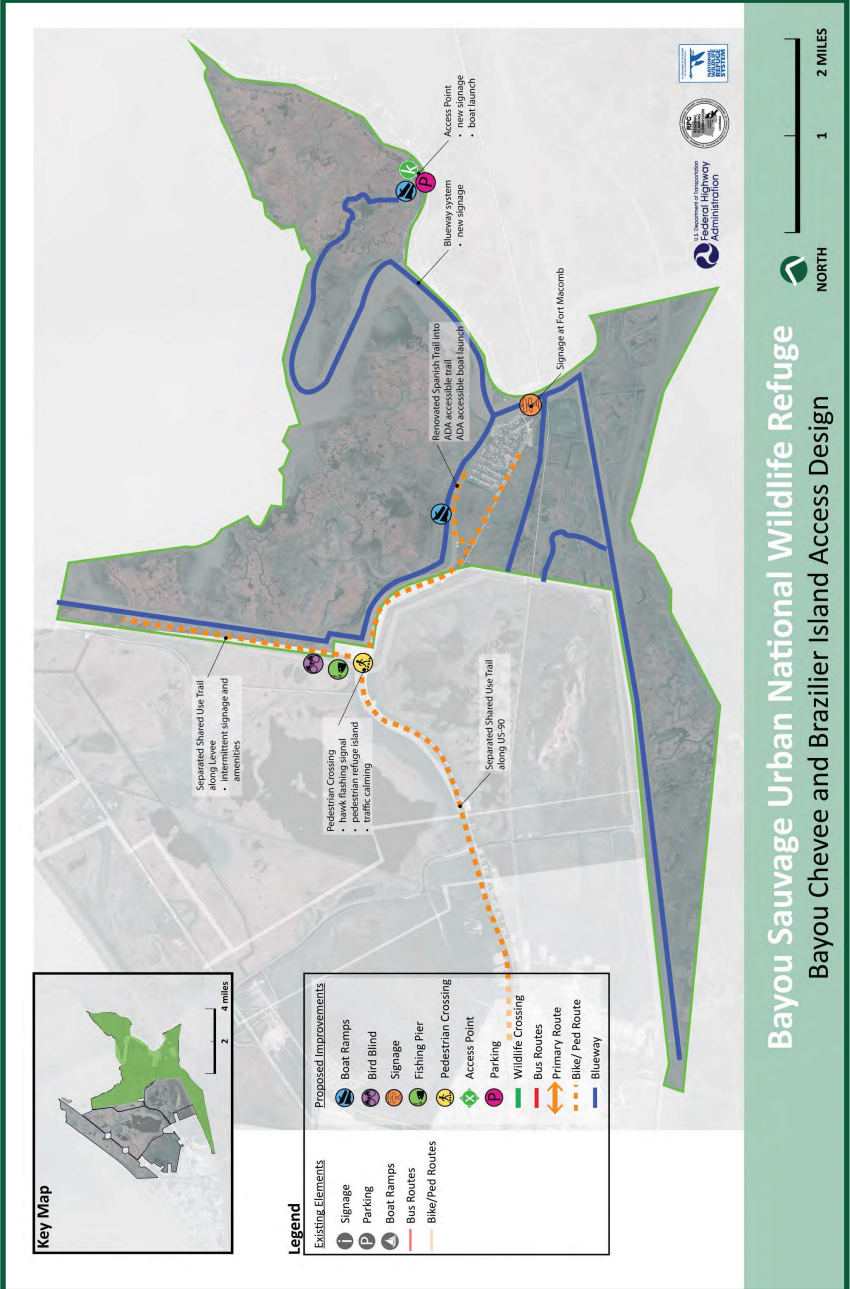


Figure 32: Bayou Chevee Priority Area

6. Blind Lagoon Area (Figure 33): Identified as the final priority, this area focuses on the northeasternmost abandoned interchange along I-10, referred to as the Lake Maission Interchange in this plan. This interchange is likely in better condition than the Little River interchange, as it was recently utilized as a construction route for upgrades to the hurricane protection levee. Aerial imagery analysis indicates that this location presents a strong opportunity for new access improvements and has been designated as Access Point M in the proposed access plan. An existing, though currently closed, bike trail built from a previous construction access road connects the interchange to the South Point levee trail. This plan proposes reopening and formalizing that connection, along with creating an access point at the interchange that includes parking, a boat dock, and a fishing pier. Additional improvements in this area will focus on developing clear wayfinding for navigable blueways to support recreational access and enhance visibility of the refuge's water-based amenities.

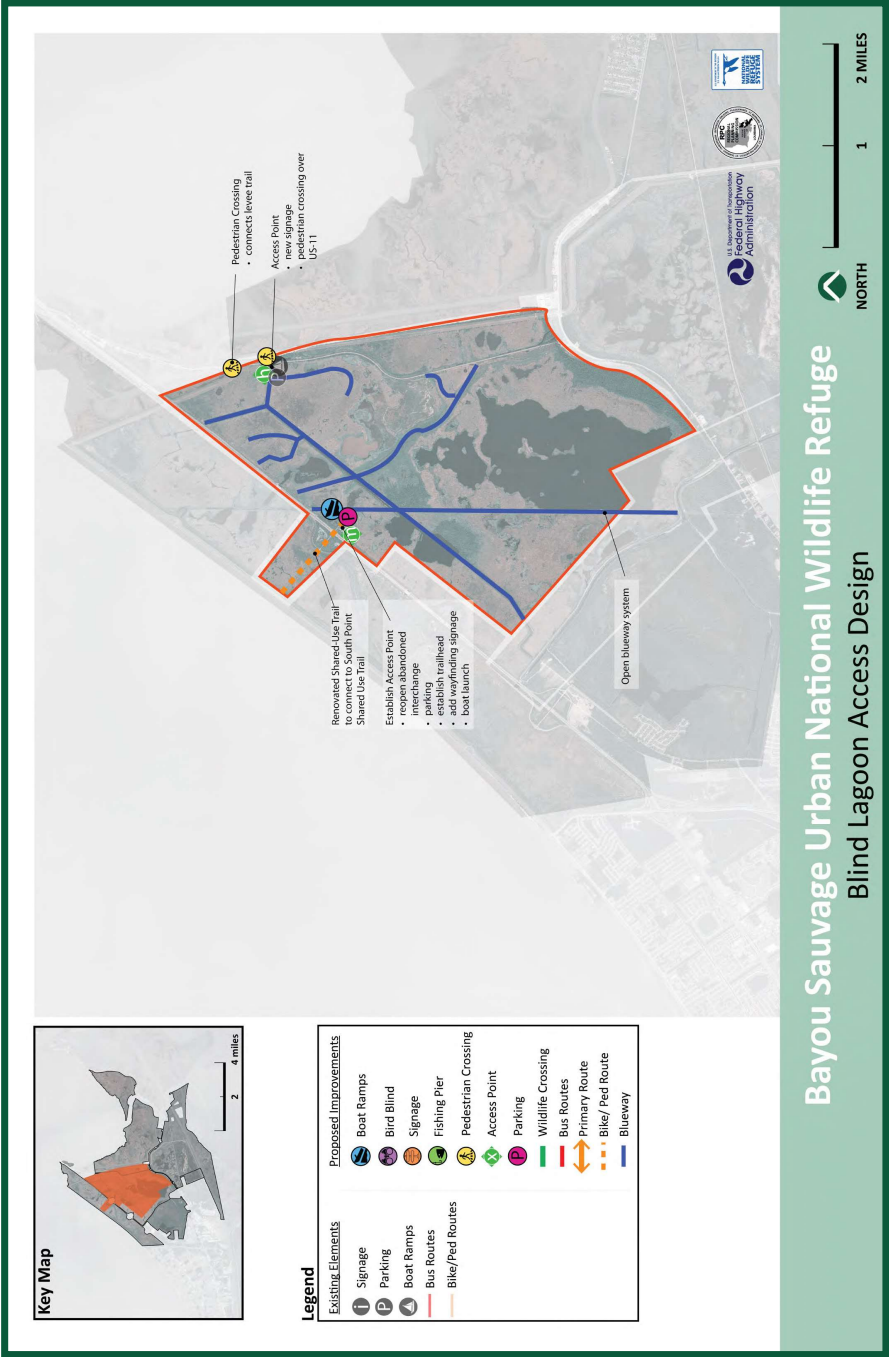


Figure 33: Blind Lagoon Priority Area

The following pilot projects were selected to demonstrate early success that will help jumpstart larger-scale improvements for each of the Priority Areas; they provide opportunities for design and construction in the short-term. See **Figure 34** for the location of these projects within the priority areas. Descriptions of these projects are included in the proceeding pages (see **Figure 35**).



Figure 35: Priority Areas Table

Priority Areas	Pilot Project(s)	Additional Projects
Maxent Levee Corridor	Maxent Levee Crossing	Access Point C Multi-use corridor
South Point	Paris Road Access Point Crabbing Bridge	Wildlife Crossing Michoud Int. Boardwalk Lake Maisson Int Bike Trail
Little Pine Island	Oak Island Boat Launch	Access Point D Access Point B Access Point N Walking/Biking Trails Blueway Access Routes
Joe Madere Marsh	Recovery Drive Bird Blind	I-10 Crossing at Joe Madere Fishing Access Path to Recovery Road
Bayou Chevee and Brazilier Island	Brazilier Island Access Point	US-11 Crossing US-90 Crossing Access Point K Blueway Access Routes
Blind Lagoon Area	None	Access Point M Blueway Access Routes

- Maxent Levee Crossing** (see **Figure 36**): Located in Priority Area 1, a proposed pedestrian crossing with a vehicular hawk beacon signal and pedestrian crossing signage would help to create safe crossing for pedestrians across US-90 and combat traffic speed, traffic volume, and the crossing distance. A concrete median will serve as a pedestrian refuge island; it will shorten the crossing distance and provide another measure of safety. This crossing will connect two existing pathways frequently used by the public that bisect the Refuge; this will also provide ease of access and wayfinding to all amenities along this arterial route. Additionally, this will allow users to park in the parking lot at the head of Recovery Drive to use as overflow parking when the Ridge Trail parking lot is full. This pilot project allows for the introduction of a separate shared-use non-motorized path in the expansive right-of-way. While this path will be vital to increasing non-motorized access to the Refuge, coordination with DOTD and design of the path may not be able to be accomplished at the same time as the crossing.

Maxent Levee Crossing Probable Cost: \$546,000

See report's appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project.

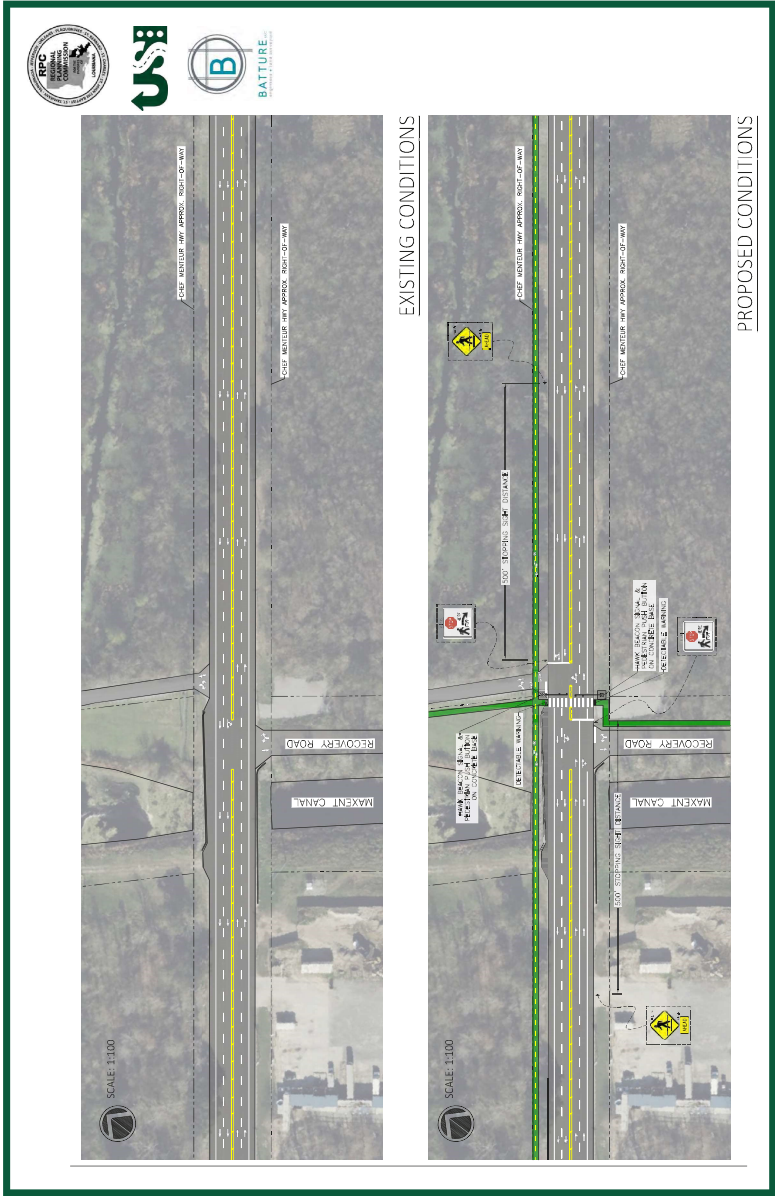


Figure 36: Maxent Levee Crossing Pilot Project Concept

- **Paris Road Access Point:** Associated with Priority Area 2, “South Point,” this project will develop a formal trailhead and small parking area at Paris Road. This access point should include wayfinding and educational signage to clearly guide visitors and provide information about the refuge’s amenities and neighboring public spaces. This location will serve as a key connection between the refuge, the Little Woods neighborhood, and Lincoln Beach, facilitating safer and more convenient access for both local residents and visitors.

Paris Road Access Point Probable Cost: \$336,000

See report’s appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project.

- **Crabbing Bridge** (see **Figures 37 and 38** for a perspective rendering): The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed an approved design plan for the Crabbing Bridge in 2016, but it was never constructed. The 2017 Access Plan identified connections and improvements to the Crabbing Bridge as a top priority. This study maintains that the Crabbing Bridge is a top concern, and should be included as a pilot project. The consultant team, informed by the PMT, built upon the 2016 design to transform this space into another key point of access to the refuge. While the area remains popular for crabbing, there is currently limited space on the bridge for this activity. The area also includes an existing informal boat launch that could be improved to enhance safety and convenience for paddlers and small watercraft users. Proposed access improvements at this site include construction of a pavilion and picnic area, extension of and access to the South Point Levee Shared Use Trail, and the addition of a living shoreline or breakwater reef to improve habitat conditions. These shoreline improvements will create calmer waters, making the area more suitable for fishing, crabbing, and safer for inexperienced paddlers. This project presents a valuable opportunity to activate the space through targeted improvements that foster recreational access, safety, and environmental resilience.

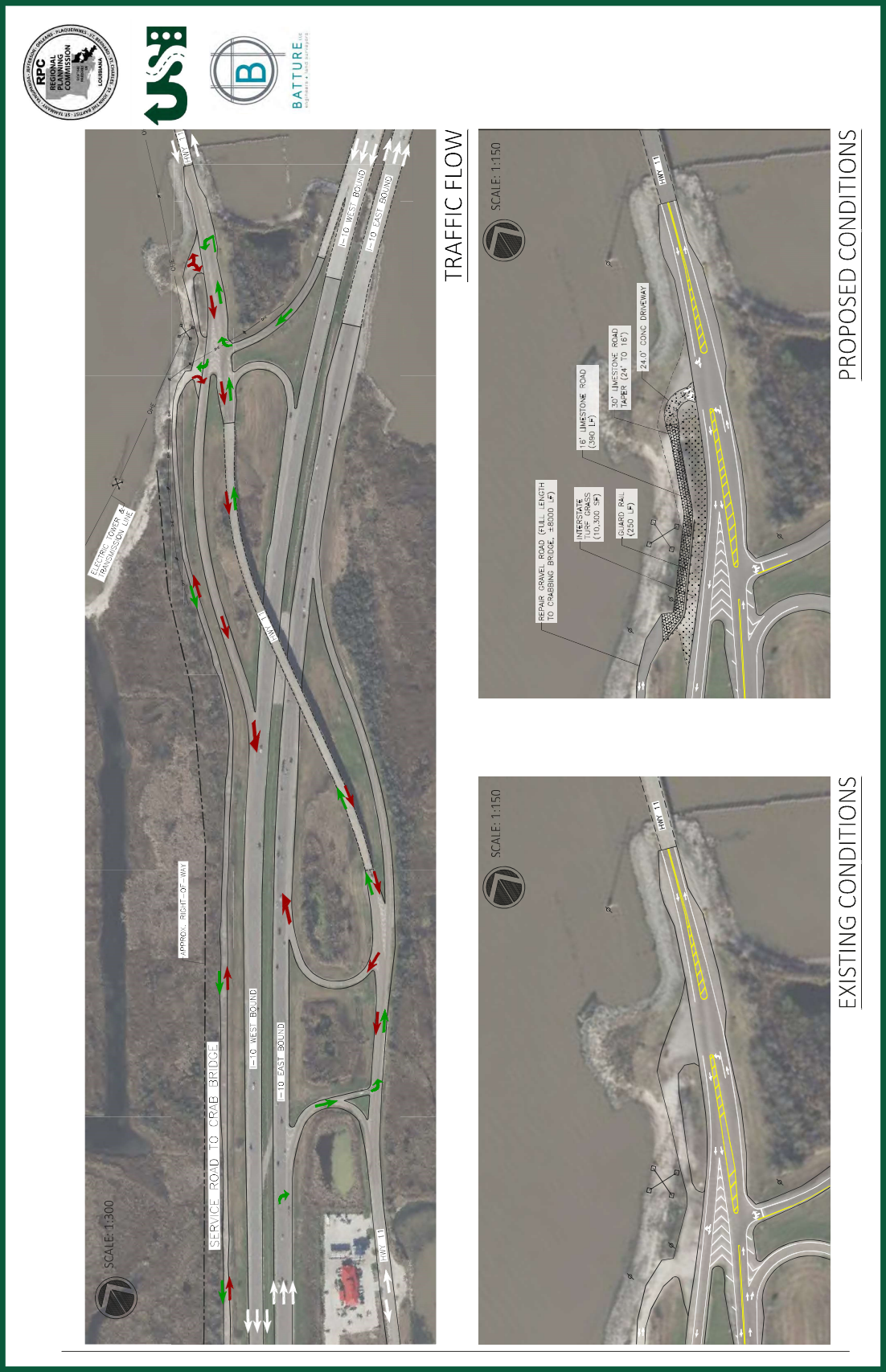
Crabbing Bridge Probable Cost: \$1,686,000

See report’s appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project.

Figure 38: Crabbing Bridge Pilot Project Concept



Figure 38: Crabbing Bridge Pilot Project Concept

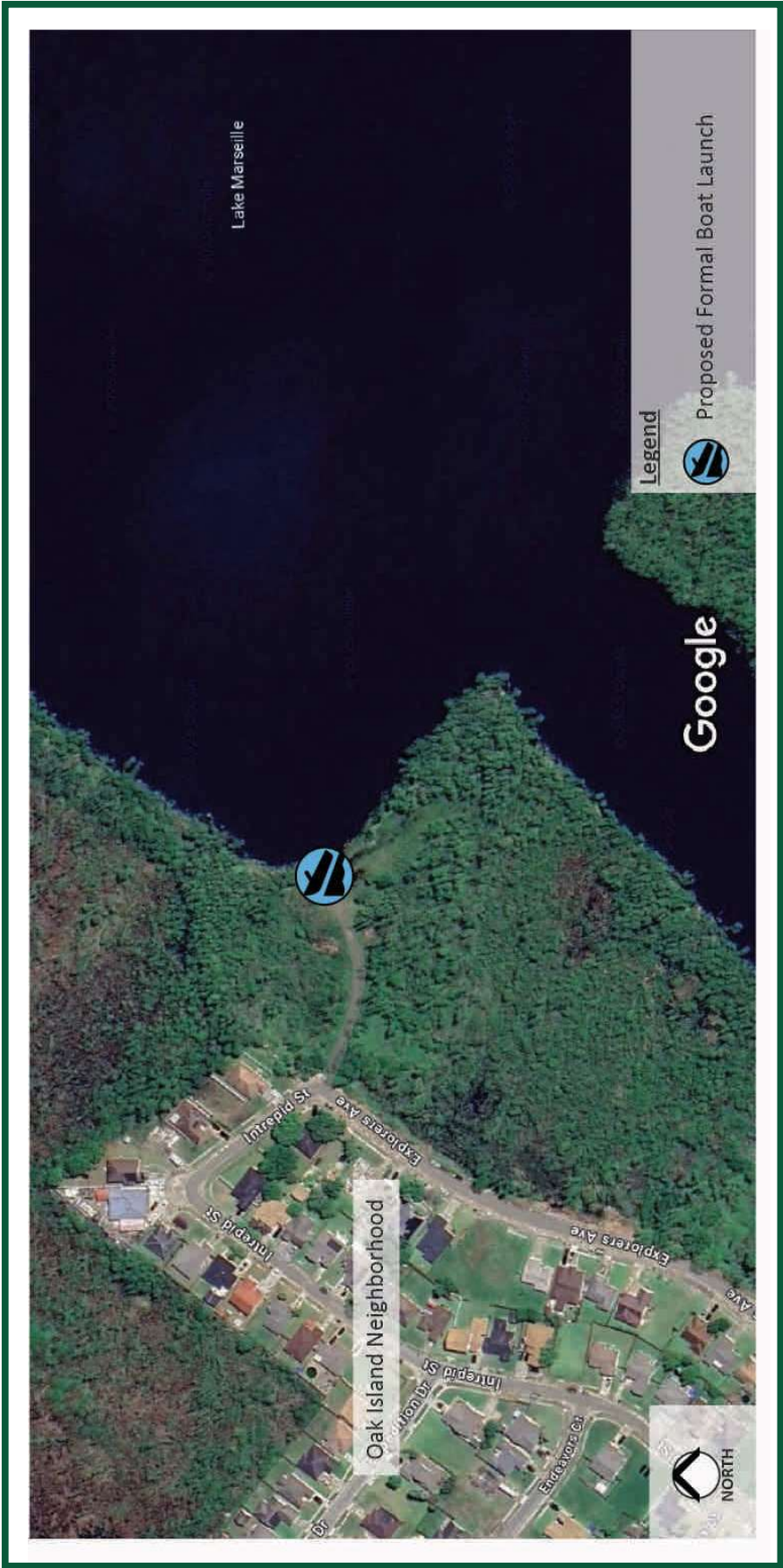


- Oak Island Boat Launch** (see **Figure 39**): At Community Engagement #2, several community members expressed an interest in construction of a new boat launch behind the Oak Island neighborhood. There is currently an informal pathway and informal boat launch that could be improved and formalized to provide access for residents of the Oak Island neighborhood. This pilot project would be associated with Priority Area 4, Little Pine Island.

Oak Island Boat Launch Probable Cost: \$336,000

See report's appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project.

Figure 39: Oak Island Boat Launch Location



- **Recovery Drive Bird Blind:** Recovery Drive, the levee along the Gulf Intra coastal Waterway, and the Joe Madere Marsh area are recognized as excellent locations for birding. To help activate this priority area, the consultant team recommends construction of a bird blind—an enclosed wooden viewing structure with educational signage. This low-cost, high-impact improvement will support wildlife observation, provide educational opportunities, and attract new visitors interested in birdwatching and environmental learning.

Recovery Drive Bird Blind Probable Cost: \$576,000

See report's appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project.

- **Brazilier Island Access Point:** Brazilier Island has a multitude of possible blueways. Therefore, an optimal pilot project would be development of Access Point K and a boat launch located on Brazilier Island. USFWS already has an ideal location for a boat launch, just to the north of the existing Brazilier Island Road. To help with wayfinding, signage should be installed at the entry to Brazilier Island off of US-90 to complete this pilot project.

Brazilier Island Access Point Probable Cost: \$336,000

See report's appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project

Each pilot project is designed to demonstrate the feasibility of larger-scale improvements, generate community excitement, and provide visible and functional benefits to refuge users in the near term.

4.3 Funding Sources

Funding opportunities are available at the Municipal, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), State, and Federal levels, as well as independent sources. *These opportunities are summarized in Figures 40.1 and 40.2 and expanded upon more fully in the report's appendix.* Note that potential funding opportunities were compiled at the time of this study and specific funds and funding amounts are subject to change. To manage funding, beginning with a “Phase 1” of implementation is recommended. This phase includes the following components

and estimated costs (*See report's appendix for a detailed probable cost for this pilot project*):

- Maxent Levee Crossing \$546,000
- Paris Road Access Point \$336,000
- Crabbing Bridge \$1,686,000
- Oak Island Boat Launch \$336,000
- Recovery Drive Bird Blind \$576,000
- Brazilier Island Boat Launch \$336,000
- Phase 1 Total \$3,816,000

Different funding strategies can be pursued concurrently or in phases to complete Phase 1 of Implementation for this project and to open up opportunities for implementation of future phases. Listed below are several potential strategies for pairing all or some Phase 1 components to funding opportunities.

1. Large Federal Grant for Park Access: The most direct and impactful way to complete implementation of Phase 1 would be to secure a federal grant that is specifically tailored to the project components – in other words, a grant that has selection criteria most in line with the project benefits. The two most likely programs are: FHWA’s Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP), in follow-up of the current FLAP-funded planning study, and the FHWA’s Nationally-Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Program (NSFLTP). These are the two major avenues of funding for access to national parks and refuges.

The FLAP FY 27-29 Call for Projects application period opens July 1, 2025 through October 1, 2025. The NSFLTP Call for Projects deadline has not been announced yet, but in prior years was scheduled for October.

Coordination with the National Park Service (required to be the sponsor for the NSFLTP) and FHWA should start immediately if an application for either program is desired in 2025; additional preliminary engineering steps should be undertaken to, at a minimum, arrive at an engineering-level preliminary cost estimate that fits the grant requirements.

Considerations:

- A minimum project cost for NSFLTP funds is \$12.5 million, and a total of \$55 million is available for the program in 2025 and 2026
- Transportation facilities need to be the focus of the application,

therefore the Visitor’s Center and other non-transportation amenities may not be eligible

- Boat ramps and piers may not be eligible for the grant programs, unless they serve a transportation-related transit or ferry service to the Refuge
- Incorporation of additional components may be necessary to meet the minimum cost requirements of some funding opportunities

2. Large Federal Grant for Transportation Improvements: A similar strategy would be to seek grants from other federal transportation funding opportunities that fund transportation enhancements, such as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) program. Grant applications could be pursued for these programs in parallel to or to Strategy 1 grant applications. Many of the materials compiled and used for Strategy 1 grant applications could be reused and modified for each Strategy 2 grant application.

3. Break Up Phase 1 into Smaller Components: Another potential strategy is to break down Phase 1 components into smaller packages, targeted to different funding programs.

One example of the breakdown into different packages is:

- **Access points and trailheads**
 - Funding Program: USDOI LWCF, New Orleans Recreation and Culture Fund
- **Pedestrian, bicycle, and multiuse path components**
 - Funding Program: LASP RTP, New Orleans Recreation and Culture Fund
- **Boat ramps, Crabbing Bridge improvements, and bird blind observation decks**
 - Funding Programs: USFWS Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG), USACE Civil Works Recreation Grant, USDOI LWCF, CPRA Conservation and Restoration Fund

A second example is:

- **Access points and trailheads**
 - Funding Programs: USDOI LWCF, New Orleans Recreation and

Culture Fund

- **Pedestrian, bicycle, and multiuse path components**
 - Funding Program: Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)
- **Boat ramps, Crabbing Bridge improvements, and bird blind observation decks**
 - Funding Programs: USDOI LWCF, USFWS Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG), USACE Civil Works Recreation Grant, USDOI LWCF, CPRA Conservation and Restoration Fund

4. Municipal Bond Issue or TIF Financing: If funding from state and federal sources proves difficult, CNO could include Phase 1 components as a project within its own municipal bonding program. Alternatively, CNO could start a tax-increment financing (TIF) program where funds are raised based on future tax revenues that would be generated by future development (such as Bayou Phoenix). TIF financing could be applied to the Shared Use Path in the US-90 right-of-way, or the remediation and access development of Recovery One Landfill.

5. Pilot One Component: Finally, a potential strategy is to identify a single component from Phase 1 that is deemed low cost, easy to implement, and/or has the most potential impact– and complete it as a pilot project. As a first step, project partners could secure a small grant or engage in a small fundraising effort, with the goal of completing that pilot project within one year. A large public and stakeholder involvement program would then build up support for future phases of the project and for additional effort and resources to be dedicated to Potential Strategies 1 through 4.

Figure 40.1

bayou sauvage national wildlife refuge new orleans, louisiana		potential funding opportunities						
FUNDING SOURCES		TYPES OF IMPROVEMENTS						
INDEPENDENT	Available Funds	PEDESTRIAN / BIKE	SIGNAGE	AQUATIC	Trailheads	Trails (unpaved)	Trails (paved)	Stewards & Crossings
PeopleForBikes Community Grant	\$	•	•	•				On-Road Bike Infrastructure
The Conservation Alliance Grants	\$	•	•	•				Interpretive Signage & Bird Blinds
Local Businesses sponsorships	\$	•	•	•				Wayfinding Signage
Greater New Orleans Foundation Environmental Fund	\$	•	•	•				Boat Ramps & Launches
American Trails Trails Capacity Program	\$	•	•	•				Resilience
MPO & MUNICIPAL								
Municipal and Agency Bond Issuance	\$-\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
City Council approved Tax Increment Financing	\$	•	•	•				
New Orleans Recreation and Culture Fund	\$	•	•	•				
in collaboration with GNOF		•	•	•				
RPC Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG)	\$-\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
STATE								
LADOTD STIP	\$-\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
LADOTD Transportation Alternative Program (TAP)	\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA)	\$	•	•	•				
Conservation and Restoration Partnership Fund	\$	•	•	•				
LAW&F State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program	\$-\$		•	•				
(Wildlife Action Plan - for habitat restoration			•	•				
LASP Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
FEDERAL								
FHWA Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)	\$-\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
FHWA Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP)	\$	•	•	•				
EPA Healthy Communities Grant	\$	•	•	•				
NOAA Grants 2025-2026	\$-\$-\$							
FHWA FTA Protect Grant (Through MPO)	\$	•	•	•				
Coastal ecosystem infrastructure								
US Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works Recreation Budget	\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				
NPS Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP)	\$-\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				

*No funding is currently allocated to the construction of any part of the Access Plan

Figure 40.2

bayou sauvage national wildlife refuge new orleans, louisiana		potential funding opportunities						
FUNDING SOURCES		TYPES OF IMPROVEMENTS						
FEDERAL (CONTINUED)	Available Funds	PEDESTRIAN / BIKE	SIGNAGE	AQUATIC	Trailheads	Trails (unpaved)	Trails (paved)	Stewards & Crossings
USDOI Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	\$-\$-\$	•	•	•				On-Road Bike Infrastructure
Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries (LDWF)	\$	•	•	•				Interpretive Signage & Bird Blinds
Wallop/Breaux Act - Federal Boating and Fishing Access Program	\$	•	•	•				Wayfinding Signage
US Fish & Wildlife Service Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG)	\$							Boat Ramps & Launches
US Fish & Wildlife Service Urban Bird Treaty Grant	\$	•	•	•				Resilience
USDOT BUILD GRANT	\$	•	•	•				
USDOT SS4A GRANT	\$-\$	•	•	•				
FEMA-BRRC Grant	\$-\$	•	•	•				
NFWF Coastal Resilience Fund	\$-\$	•	•	•				
CWPPRA Regional Planning Team Priority List	\$							
Pontchartrain Restoration Program	\$							

*No funding is currently allocated to the construction of any part of the Access Plan



SHORTER-TERM PROJECTS AND NEEDED NEXT STEPS & COORDINATION

5.1. Shorter-Term Projects and Needed Next Steps and Coordination	54
5.2. Longer Term Projects and Suggestions for Next Steps	54
5.3. Connecting Associated Projects	55

5.1 Shorter-Term Projects and Needed Next Steps and Coordination

To ensure early successes and sustained project momentum, the following immediate next steps are recommended:

- **Secure Phase 1 Funding:** Begin immediate efforts to identify and apply for funding sources identified in Section 4.4. Assign roles for grant writing and establish a tracking system for application deadlines and opportunities.
- **Implement Pilot Projects:** Finalize design and initiate construction of the six pilot projects identified in this report. Prioritize projects based on their potential for quick implementation, community impact, and alignment with available funding sources.
- **Formalize Interagency Partnerships:** Establish a working group between the City of New Orleans, USFWS, LADOTD, RPC, and other key stakeholders to coordinate on design standards and project funding.
- **Develop a Comprehensive Wayfinding Plan:** Create a unified wayfinding and interpretive signage system for both trail and blueway networks. Signage should incorporate cultural history, ecological education, and multilingual access where appropriate.
- **Establish an Annual Work Plan:** Develop a clear implementation roadmap with defined project phases, responsible parties, and measurable performance metrics.
- **Engage the Public and Build Support:** Launch a public outreach campaign to keep the community informed of progress and to generate enthusiasm for ongoing projects. This should include public workshops, social media updates, education through existing programs like the “Rails to Trails” program, and partnerships with local community organizations.
- **Develop Partnerships with Local Institutions:** Establish partnerships with local institutions and businesses, such as swamp tour companies and cultural organizations, to offer guided tours and educational experiences within the refuge. These partnerships can expand recreational offerings, foster stewardship, and provide new economic opportunities for the community.

These actions will provide a foundation for future success and ensure that manageable, actionable steps are taken towards implementing the overall access improvements plan.

5:2 Longer Term Projects and Suggestions for Next Steps

While the implementation of the short-term will create significant improvements in access and safety, several longer-term initiatives are necessary to fulfill the broader vision for the Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding communities. These projects require additional coordination, environmental assessments, and sustained funding efforts:

1. **Construction of the Priority Areas:** Implement the full build-out of the six priority areas identified in this report, building on the momentum created by the pilot projects.
2. **Secure Funding and Construct the Visitor's Center:** Collaborate with USFWS and other partners to secure necessary funding and initiate construction of a dedicated Visitor's Center that will serve as a hub for education, outreach, and public amenities.
3. **Create a Separate Shared-Use Path (SUP) Along US-90:** Collaborate with LADOTD to design and construct a separated shared-use path along US-90, providing a safe, dedicated corridor for pedestrians and cyclists accessing the refuge and connecting surrounding neighborhoods. This improvement will play a critical role in responding to community desires for reducing conflicts between vehicles and non-motorized users while promoting safe access for all community members.
4. **Establish a Bus Route Providing Access to the Refuge:** Coordinate with the RTA to establish a dedicated bus route that improves public transportation access to the refuge, prioritizing connections from surrounding neighborhoods. This may include identifying or constructing a bus turnaround.
5. **Establish linkages in adjacent roadways:** Coordinate with CNO to create shared-use paths or bike lanes that connect communities to the Refuge. This includes extending the greenway and bike lanes along Lake Forest Boulevard to Michoud Boulevard, and extending multimodal paths from existing routes on Michoud Boulevard to Access Point C.

5.3 Connecting Associated Projects

Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge has several current projects underway that align with the goals of this study and should be coordinated with for this study's proposed access plan and subsequent projects:

- New signage with the correct name, Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge, to be installed at Venetian Isles, US-11, US-90 east, I-10 east, and I-10 west.
- Refurbishment of all public use parking lots
- Improvements to and extension of the Ridge Trail boardwalk that will extend the boardwalk over the original Bayou Sauvage Channel to

- US-90. This will create a foundation to connect the Ridge Trail to the Joe Madere Marsh Boardwalk via the pedestrian crossing described in Priority Area 4.
- Long term plans to fund and construct a new Visitor's Center in the Refuge. This Visitor's Center will be located at the end of Michoud Blvd, conveniently situated off of exit 248 eastbound on I-10.

Several Refuge- adjacent projects are underway, led by the City of New Orleans or other entities. These projects include:

- **Reconnecting Communities Pilot Grant Program:** Plan to create a separate bike and pedestrian pathway along the I-10 Service roads
- **Lincoln Beach:** Development project with improvements and access to this historic area
- **Brazilier Island Waterfront Development:** A privately led initiative currently in the planning and permitting stage. Envisioned as a hospitality destination centered on ecotourism, the project includes infrastructure upgrades and shoreline enhancements.
- **Bootlace Trails Network:** A series of connected walking and biking trails from Baton Rouge to the Mississippi Coast
- **Bayou Phoenix:** A new development that will feature a water park, sports complex, and hotels

The Access Improvements Plan for Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge should consider connections with and potential users of these projects.



SUMMARY CONCLUSION

6: Summary Conclusion

The Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge Access Improvement Plan represents a critical step toward creating a more accessible and resilient public space for the residents of New Orleans East and beyond. This plan reflects a comprehensive effort to understand current barriers to access, engage with the community and key stakeholders, and propose meaningful, actionable solutions that balance recreational access with environmental preservation.

Through the prioritization of six key areas, pilot projects, and a phased approach to implementation, this plan lays out a clear path forward for enhancing pedestrian, bicycle, and water-based connectivity to and within the refuge. The proposed pilot projects provide tangible opportunities for near-term success, while the longer-term strategies establish a vision for sustained improvements that will benefit future generations.

The next steps outlined in this report focus on building momentum through early wins, securing critical funding, and fostering long-term partnerships that will drive the successful realization of this plan. With continued collaboration between public agencies, private partners, and the surrounding communities, the Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge can serve as a national model for egalitarian access, cultural preservation, and ecological stewardship.

By embracing these recommendations and moving toward implementation, this project will help restore vital connections between people and the natural environment, creating a refuge that is not only a sanctuary for wildlife but also a treasured asset for all who call New Orleans home.