INTERSTATE 75

Potential Section 4(f) Involvement
at the I-75/Big Bend Road Interchange

SOUTHERN STUDY – FROM MOCCASIN WALLOW ROAD IN MANATEE COUNTY TO SOUTH OF US 301 IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY (WPI Segment No. 419235-2)

What is Section 4(f)?

Section 4(f) refers to the original section within the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 which established the requirement for consideration of park and recreational lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites in transportation project development. The law is implemented by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) through the regulation 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 774. Section 4(f) properties include publicly-owned public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife or waterfowl refuges, and certain historic sites. Section 4(f) applies to projects that receive funding from or require approval by an agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation, such as the FHWA. The FHWA is ultimately responsible for making all decisions related to Section 4(f) compliance.

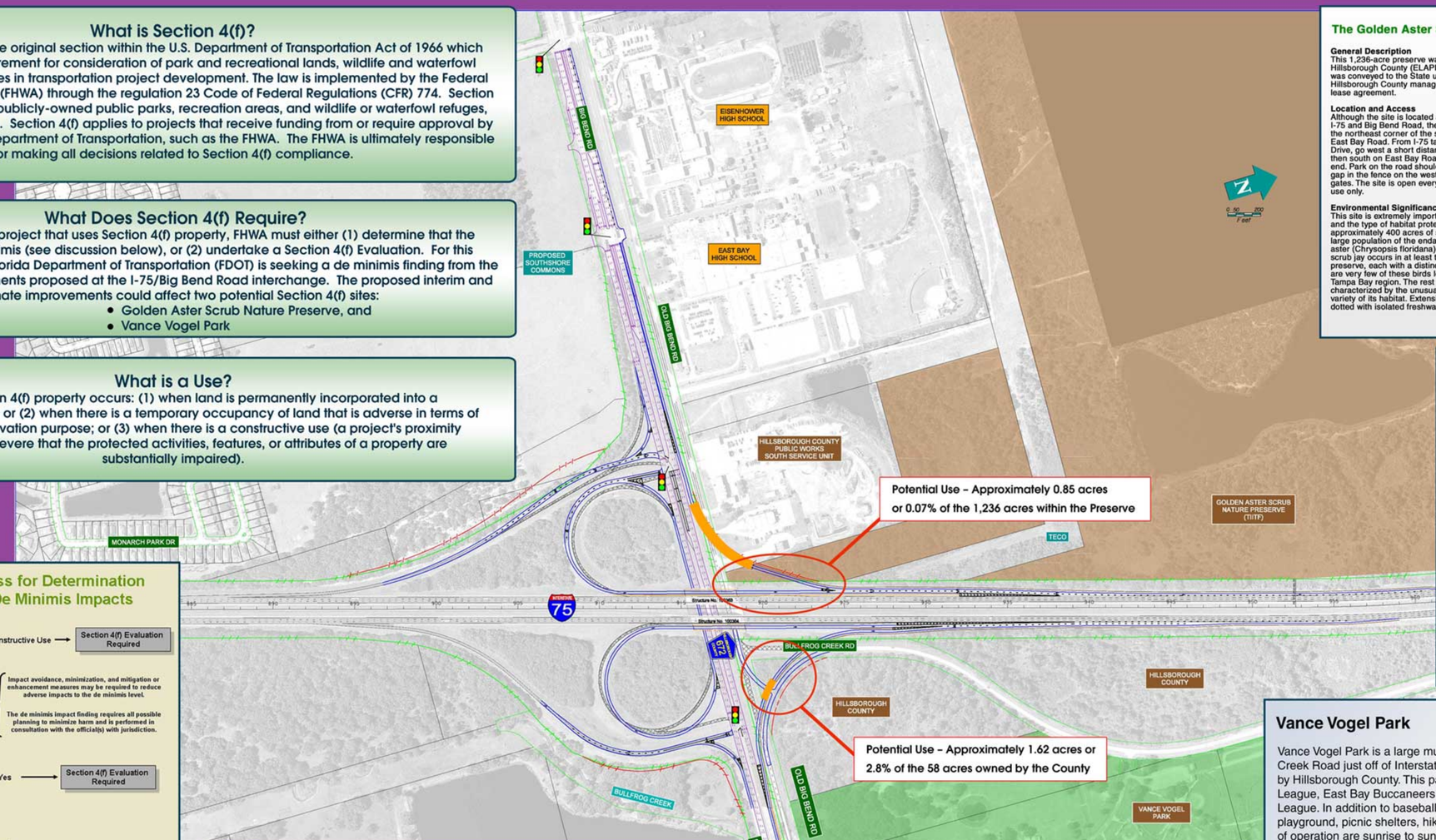
What Does Section 4(f) Require?

Before approving a project that uses Section 4(f) property, FHWA must either (1) determine that the impacts are de minimis (see discussion below), or (2) undertake a Section 4(f) Evaluation. For this proposed project, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is seeking a de minimis finding from the FHWA for the improvements proposed at the I-75/Big Bend Road interchange. The proposed interim and ultimate improvements could affect two potential Section 4(f) sites:

- Golden Aster Scrub Nature Preserve, and
- Vance Vogel Park

What is a Use?

Use of a Section 4(f) property occurs: (1) when land is permanently incorporated into a transportation facility; or (2) when there is a temporary occupancy of land that is adverse in terms of the statute's preservation purpose; or (3) when there is a constructive use (a project's proximity impacts are so severe that the protected activities, features, or attributes of a property are substantially impaired).



The Golden Aster Scrub Nature Preserve

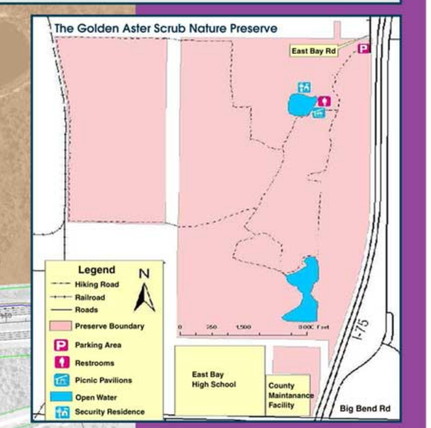
General Description
This 1,236-acre preserve was purchased by Hillsborough County (ELAPP) in 1995, and ownership was conveyed to the State under the CARL Program. Hillsborough County manages the site through a lease agreement.

Location and Access
Although the site is located at the northwest corner of I-75 and Big Bend Road, the only access point is in the northeast corner of the site, at the south end of East Bay Road. From I-75 take exit 250, Gibsonton Drive, go west a short distance to East Bay Road, then south on East Bay Road for 2 miles to the dead end. Park on the road shoulder and enter through a gap in the fence on the west, between two metal gates. The site is open every day to foot traffic, day use only.

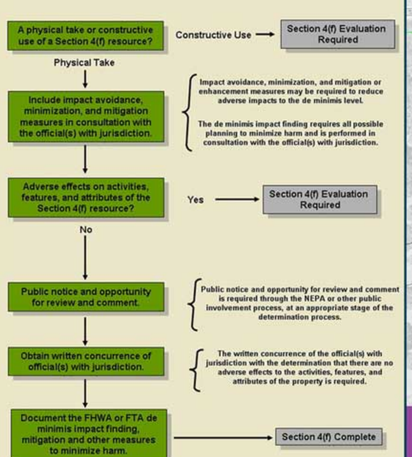
Environmental Significance
This site is extremely important due to its overall size and the type of habitat protected. It contains approximately 400 acres of scrub which supports a large population of the endangered Florida golden aster (Chrysopsis floridana). In addition, the Florida scrub jay occurs in at least two family groups on the preserve, each with a distinct home territory. There are very few of these birds left anywhere in the Tampa Bay region. The rest of the site is characterized by the unusually high quality and variety of its habitat. Extensive pine flatwoods are dotted with isolated freshwater wetlands of varying size, some of which are used as nesting sites by Florida sandhill cranes. Oak hammock, scrubby flatwoods, a locally rare bay head swamp, and two man-made lakes add to the overall diversity of the site. In addition to providing habitat for native plants and wildlife, large areas of protected natural habitat hold rain water and release it gradually, reducing downstream flooding from stormwater runoff. Evapotranspiration improves air quality and moderates temperature extremes. Active habitat management is essential to maintain this site, including prescribed burns, removal of invasive exotic species, and patrolling for illegal activities such as off-road vehicles, trash dumping, and poaching.

Recreational Opportunities
A marked hiking trail, over 5 miles in length, follows existing woods roads. A trail brochure with a map is available from the County. Hikers may fish from shore in either of two man-made lakes. This site is an excellent place for native plant identification, bird watching, and other nature-oriented pursuits.

Contact Information
Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department, Conservation Services Office, 10940 McMullen Road, Riverview, FL 33569. (813) 672-7876.



Suggested Process for Determination Of Section 4(f) De Minimis Impacts



Source: FHWA (Public Roads, May/June 2007)

What is a *de minimis* Impact?

For publicly owned public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, a de minimis impact is one that will not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes of the property. A de minimis impact determination does not require analysis to determine if avoidance alternatives are feasible and prudent, but consideration of avoidance, minimization, mitigation or enhancement measures should occur. There are certain minimum coordination steps that are also necessary (see separate flowchart).

How Can I Provide Input?

Improvement alternatives are on display at today's public hearing. Please review the exhibits and fill out a comment form (or make a statement to the court reporter) to give us your views on the improvement options and their potential affect on either the Golden Aster Scrub Nature Preserve or Vance Vogel Park. Additional ways to comment are explained in the newsletter and video presentation.

Vance Vogel Park

Vance Vogel Park is a large multipurpose park located on Bullfrog Creek Road just off of Interstate 75 at Big Bend Road maintained by Hillsborough County. This park is the home of the East Bay Little League, East Bay Buccaneers Youth Football, and South Hillsborough County Soccer League. In addition to baseball, football and soccer fields, other amenities include a playground, picnic shelters, hiking trails, concession facilities and rest rooms. The hours of operation are sunrise to sunset unless posted otherwise.