

NEWSLETTER: Conservation Report

Dan Roberts, September 27, 2026

The EAS conservation committee has been collecting and mapping data related to a major expansion of the Hillsborough County urban service area (USA) into the Little Manatee River Watershed. It has been suggested at official meetings that, combined with development in northern Manatee County, the Little Manatee South (LMS) combined impact could exceed 40,000 houses with related infrastructure and major alterations to hydrology, elevation, and stormwater management, including habitat loss and perturbations of major ecological consequence for southern Hillsborough and northern Manatee Counties and especially the Little Manatee River Watershed and Ecotone. This development and alteration of natural ecosystems will have a major impact on all wildlife, fisheries, and especially birds. This expansion has been a topic at the Audubon Florida Regional Conservation meetings.

The Site Map in Figure 1 below illustrates the magnitude of the expansion for Hillsborough County. The suggested footprint is approximately 12,000 acres and includes the northern shore of the Little Manatee River between U.S. 41 and Interstate 75, south to the Manatee County Line, and west of U.S. 41 to County Line Road and the Rock Ponds Preservation. Several hundred acres of wild corridor need to be protected.

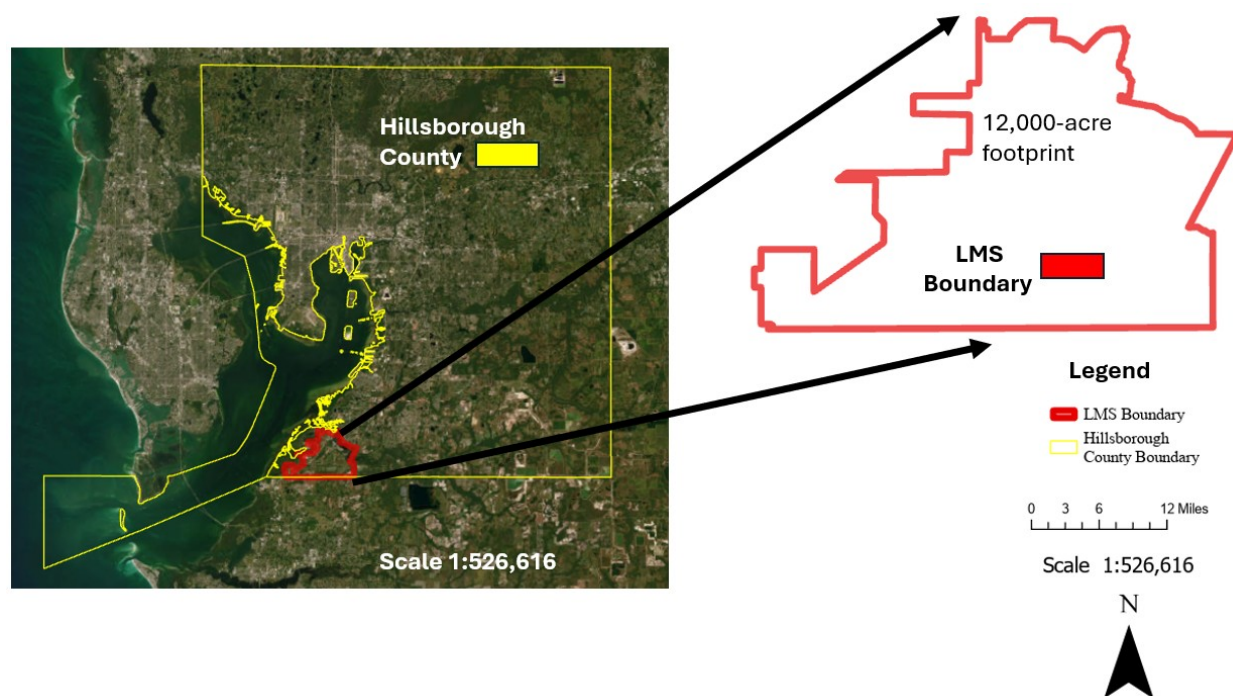


Figure 1. Hillsborough County Urban Expansion, Little Manatee South Site Map.

To summarize, a partial assessment (ongoing) of current water and wetland resources within the boundary includes the following:

Water Bodies of the mesohaline and freshwater Little Manatee River and tributaries: Hayes Bayou, Bolster Bayou, Mill Bayou, Wildcat Creek, Curiosity Creek, Redfish Creek, Winding Creek, Little Manatee River, and Cockroach Creek.

Certain negative consequences will impact wetlands, including this abbreviated list of **wetlands within the LMS boundary:**

Freshwater Wetlands: 90 freshwater ponds (132 acres), 16 riverine features (67 acres), 125 forested shrub and emergent plant wetlands (576 acres), Cypress Domes, **Deepwater Estuarine Wetlands:** (590 acres), **Intertidal Estuarine Wetlands:** high marsh (371 acres), 48 miles of intertidal high marsh coastline, 34 miles of deep-water estuarine coastline.

Parcel and Land Use-Land Cover have been assessed and quantified for future reference. That analysis provides critical habitat, residential, and agricultural resource summaries.

Stay tuned for more detailed information on the status of these projects as they occur in the backyard of Eagle Audubon Society.

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