



# **Overview of the Avian Protection Plan within the STAs**

## **Snail Kite Nesting and Recreational Activities**



[sfwmd.gov](http://sfwmd.gov)

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# Snail Kite Biology

- Everglade snail kites are a medium sized raptor that consumes apple snails year-round in south and central Florida marshes and lakes.
- Males are slate gray, while females and juveniles are brown and spotted. All have white bands on their rump and very hooked beaks.



# Snail Kite Biology

- Snail kite nesting usually peaks from March to August, but they can nest during any month.
- The only month that they haven't been observed nesting in the STAs is December, but it is known that they have nested in December in other parts of the state.



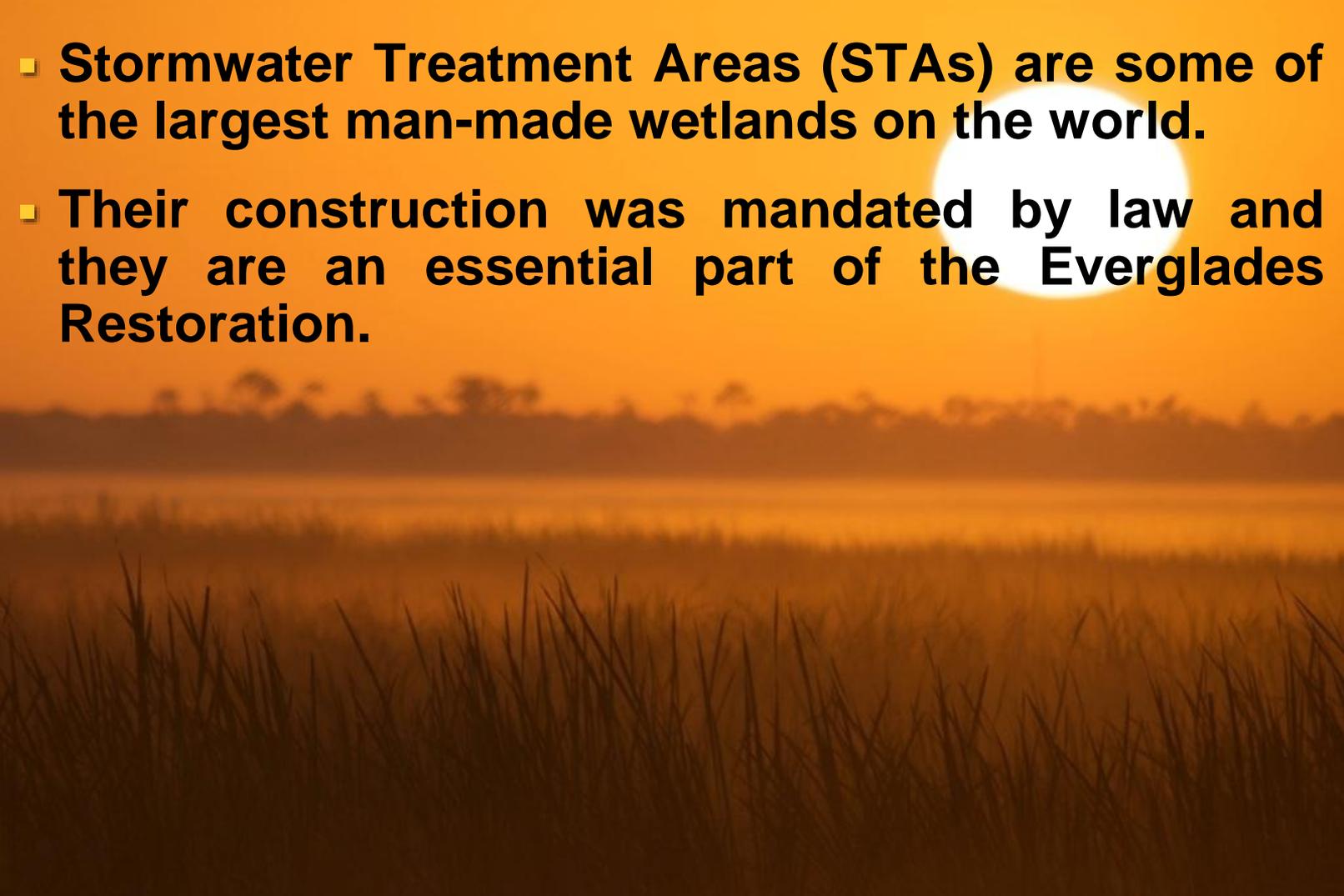
# Snail Kite Protection

- These raptors are listed as an endangered species under both the federal Endangered Species Act and the Florida Endangered & Threatened Species Act.
- Additionally, they are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.



# Stormwater Treatment Areas

- Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) are some of the largest man-made wetlands on the world.
- Their construction was mandated by law and they are an essential part of the Everglades Restoration.



# Stormwater Treatment Areas

- The District is held to high standards to make sure these STA function in a way that will minimize phosphorus inputs into the Everglades.
- The STAs attract a lot of wildlife including many protected species.
- The District is sometimes required to change operations and maintenance to a great extent within STAs to keep from impacting protected wildlife.



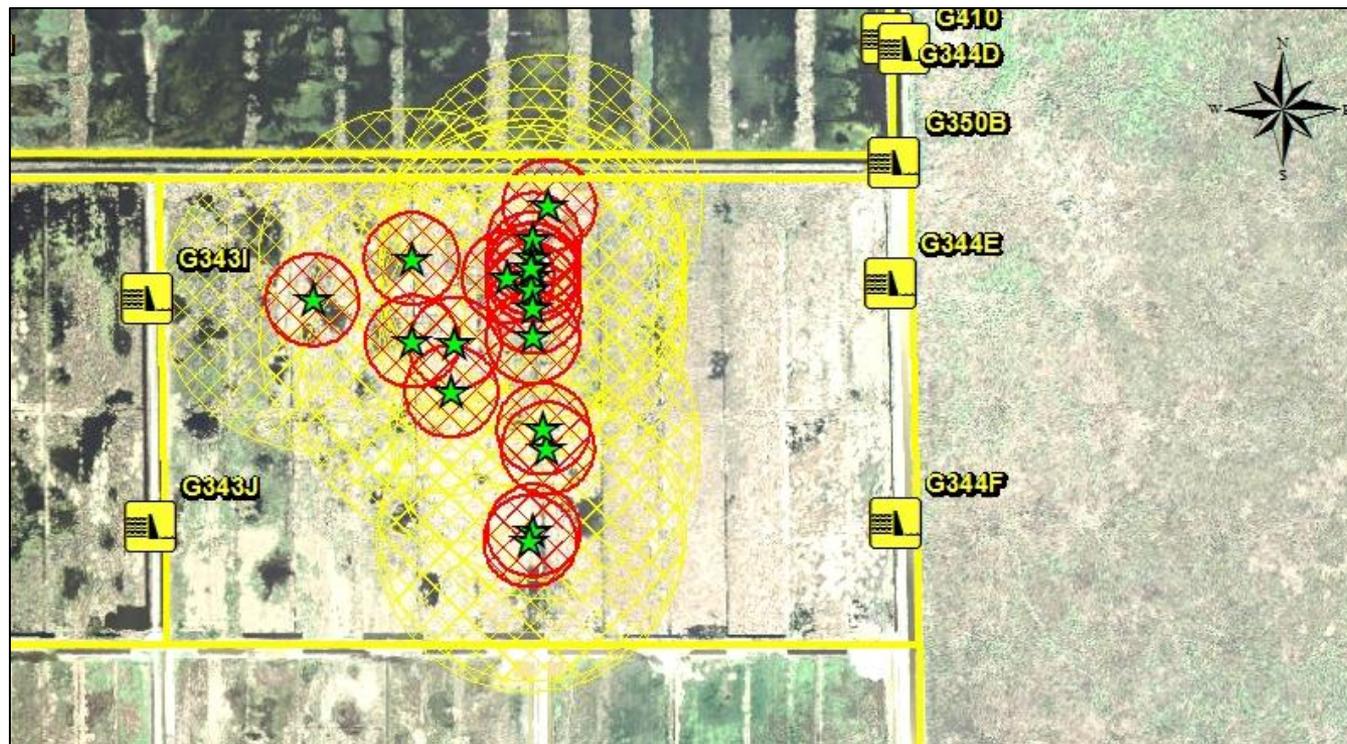
# Snail Kite Nesting

- In 2010, the first noted Everglade snail kites nested in STA-5/6.
- Since that time 187 known snail kite nests have been observed within the boundaries of the STAs.

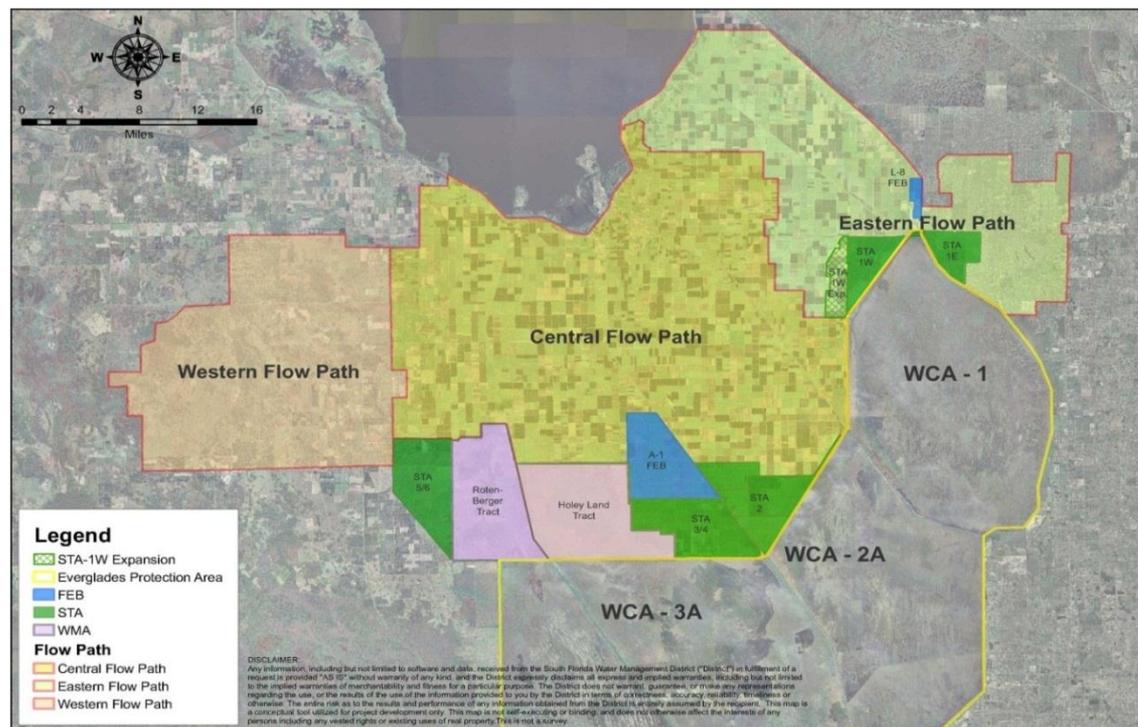


# Snail Kite Nesting

- There have been 111 snail kite nests in STAs during 2014 alone.
- Most of these have been in STA-5/6 Cell 5-3B.



# Snail Kite Nesting



- So far, snail kites have been observed nesting in STA-5/6, STA-3/4, and STA-1E. These birds have also been observed in STA-1W and STA-2, but no nesting has been observed in these STAs.

# Snail Kite Nesting

- There are ideal conditions in the STAs for nesting kites:
  - Plenty of exotic apple snails
  - Substrates to nest on (willow, cattail)
  - Nearby open areas are available for snail foraging
  - Water is kept in cells to keep aquatic plants hydrated
  - Water depths maintained through much of the year
- The same habitat that is the great for hunts, bird watching & other recreation activities are also ideal for nesting snail kites.



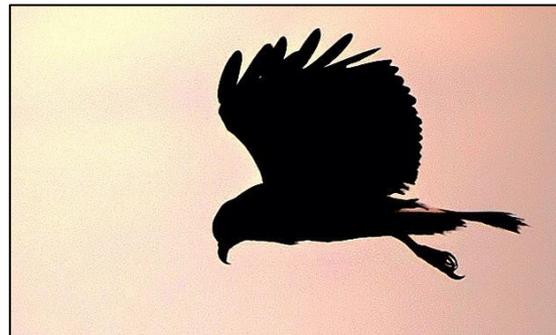
# Snail Kite Nesting

- Snail kite nests are surveyed by the University of Florida (UF) Snail Kite Lab.
- The District works with UF to make sure they have access to the STAs & so they can provide timely data following each survey.
- This way appropriate protective measures can be implemented for each nest.



# Snail Kite Recreational Guidance

- We usually have the latest snail kite nest data within hours of the surveys being completed.
- The District analyzes this nesting data and works with FWC and USFWS to develop guidance associated with all activities in the STA.
- Guidance is based on an annual agreement made between SFWMD & USFWS as well as snail kite guidance issued by USFWS.



# Snail Kite Recreational Guidance

- USFWS recommends minimizing disturbance within 500-meter (about 1600 feet) of snail kite nests to protect the kite nests.
- Nests are primarily inside the STA cells, but at times the 500-meter buffer zones crosses over levees.
- Parts of these levees are then closed to recreational activities (including driving vehicles along these levees and walking these levees).



# Snail Kite Recreational Guidance



- This guidance is passed on to recreational tours throughout the year and we coordinate with FWC and USFWS prior to hunt seasons to develop the guidance in reference to hunts.
- This includes agreeing on any necessary levee closures and rerouting recreational access to protect these nesting endangered birds.

# Snail Kite Recreational Guidance

- Guidance can change as the nesting activity changes in the STAs.
- There are no plans to close entire STAs to recreational activities due to nesting species.
- SFWMD, USFWS, and FWC all believe that responsible recreational activities can still proceed in the presence of nesting snail kites.



# Snail Kite Recreational Guidance

- Disturbances of the nesting snail kite (especially repeated disturbances and new types of disturbances) can cause nest failures since adult kites may choose to abandoned the nest.
- Causing the failure of breeding activities of any state and federally listed species is unlawful, so when most native bird species are nesting in STAs a lot of caution is taken when we develop guidance for mandated activities.
- We close access to our own staff as well.
- Similarly, a lot of caution is used when developing recreation activity guidance.



# Snail Kite Recreational Guidance

- There are some other bird species that can cause levee closures to recreational activities like hiking and bird watching in the STAs too.
- Colonies of threatened least terns can spread across levee roads and cause closures.
- Black-necked stilts have been known to nest in loose colonies that have closed entire levee roads as well.





# Questions?