

RETHINKING FLORIDA'S STATE PARKS: STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING IN THE “NEW NORMAL” ECONOMY

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Background

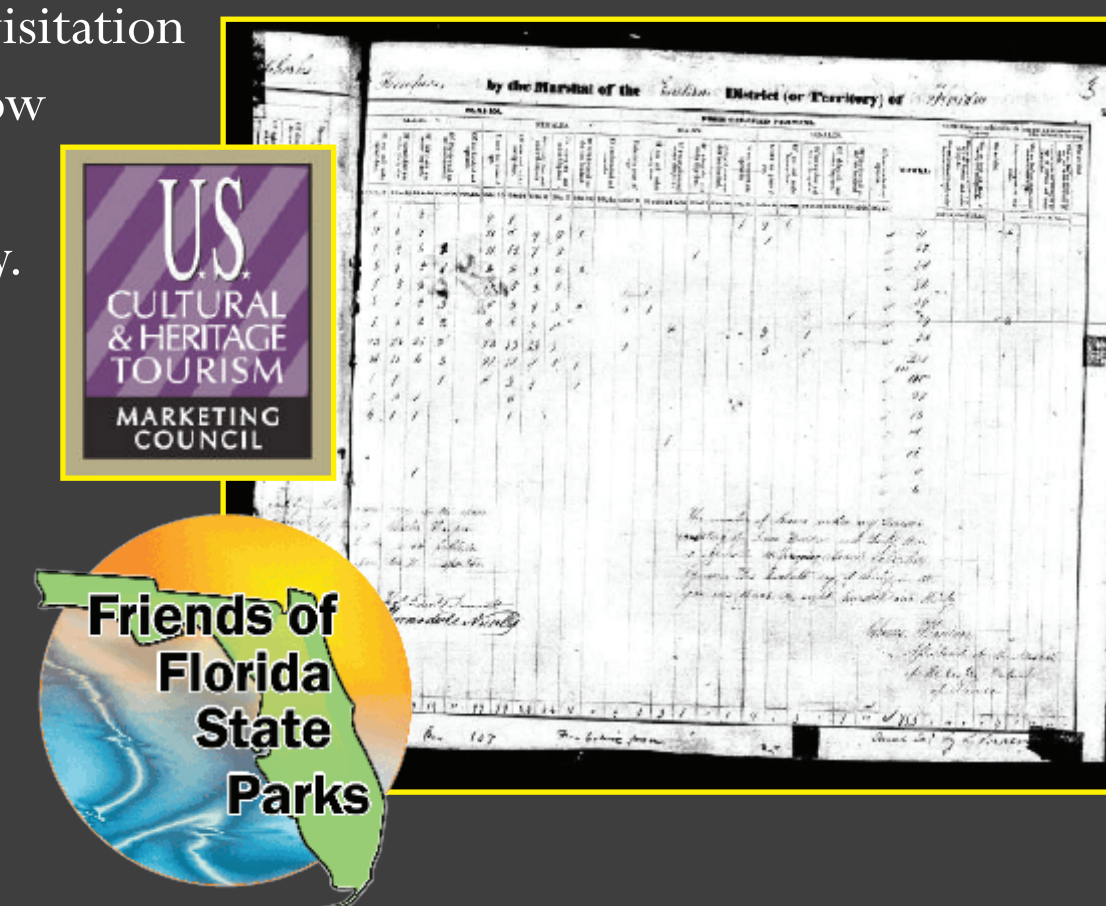
The Florida Park Service manages the sites of fifteen plantations in the area once known as East Florida, including the U.S.-Territorial-Period sugar plantation known as Bulow Plantation (8F17). The plantation is now located within the Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park, located in Flagler County approximately two miles north of the Volusia County line and two miles from the Atlantic Coast. Current interpretations at the park are limited in scope, visitation is considered to be relatively low, and the mill structure and associated buildings pose a variety of management issues. The development of solutions for the Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park will be applicable not only to other plantation sites managed by the Florida Park Service, but any state park in Florida and site managers beyond Florida's boundaries.



Solutions

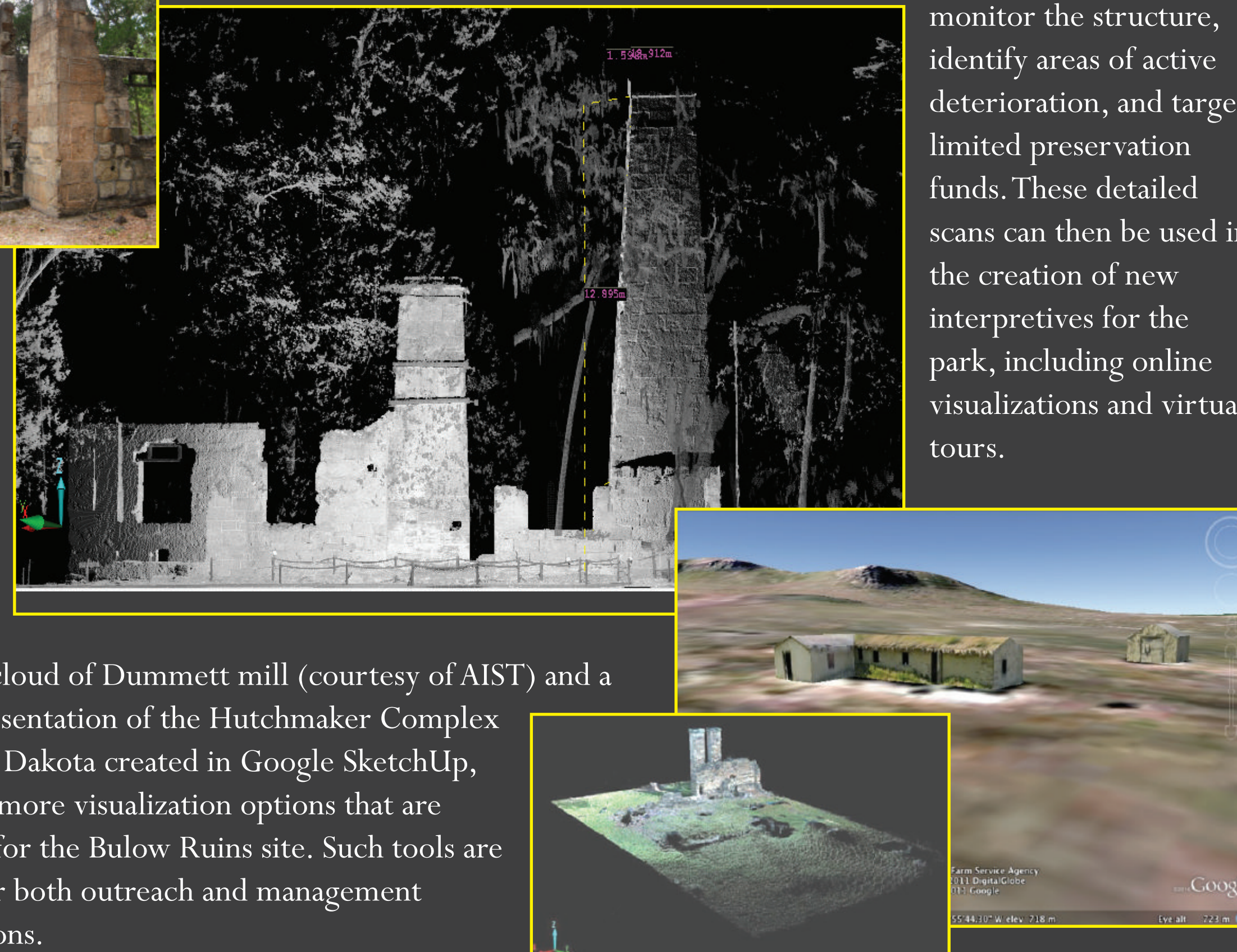
In order to address the issues that face Florida State Parks, I have developed an integrated group of solutions for The Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park. I will present this plan to the Florida Park Service. They will then be able to facilitate the meetings and methods outlined for Bulow, as well as apply the plan to other state parks in a similar situation. The elements of the plan include the identification of park stakeholders and potential visitor sectors, multi-scaled outreach strategies, and more efficiently and effectively tying the management of the park's cultural and natural resources together.

Any park within the Florida Park Service must increase visitation numbers in order to avoid potential future closures. Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park currently has a very small volunteer corps and very little community visibility. A first step towards increasing visitation is to identify those within the community with a vested interest in the future success of the park. These include government agencies, descendant groups, museums, conservation groups, and members of the local community. A goal of identifying stakeholders is the formation of a Citizen Support Organization for the park.



The lack of FPS historic preservation funding creates challenges in effectively managing the Bulow Mill ruins. A quarter-million-dollar preservation project has been identified for Bulow, but little chance exists it will be fully funded.

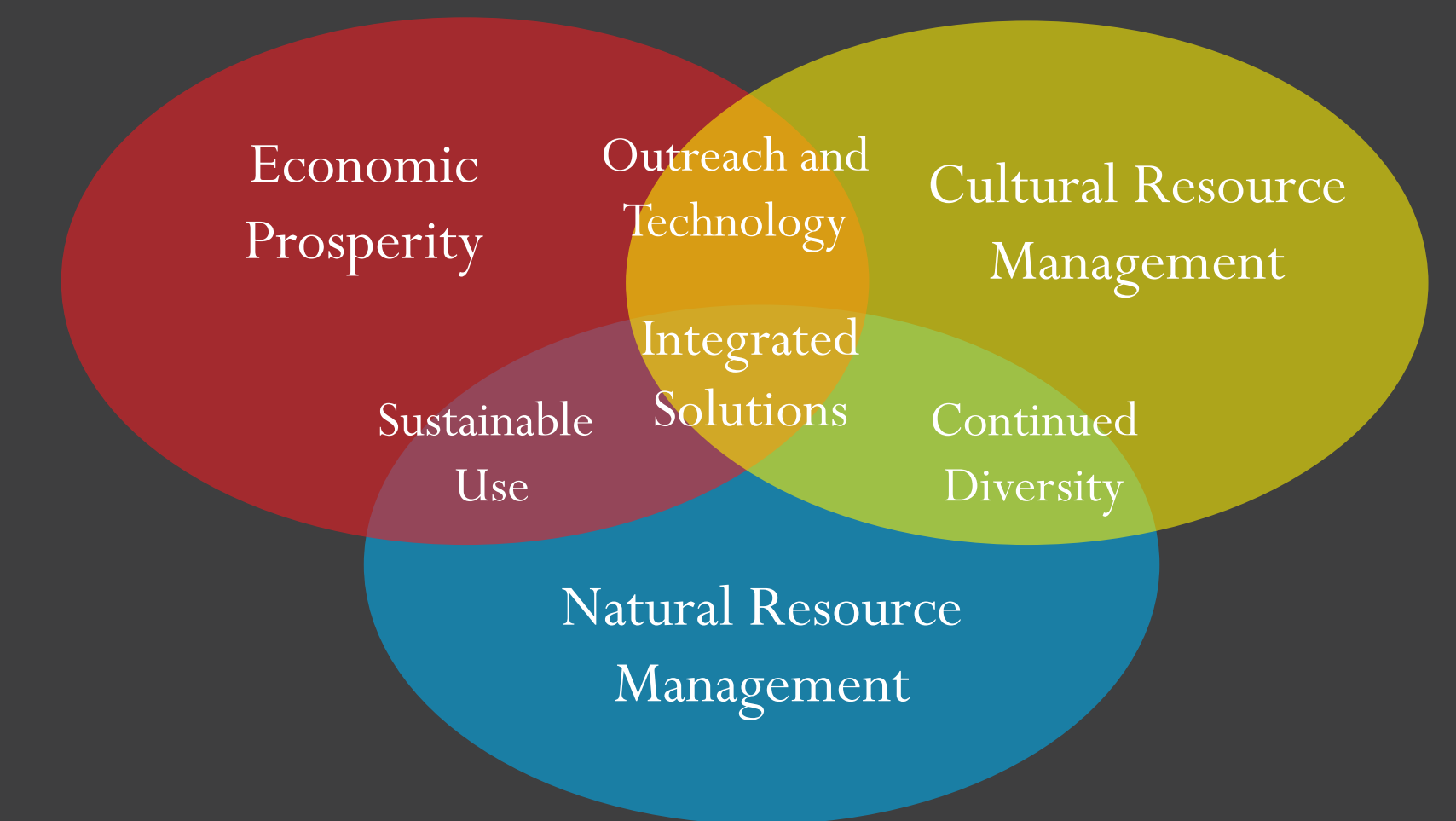
Three-dimensional high-definition laser scanning offers managers the ability to monitor the structure, identify areas of active deterioration, and target limited preservation funds. These detailed scans can then be used in the creation of new interpretives for the park, including online visualizations and virtual tours.



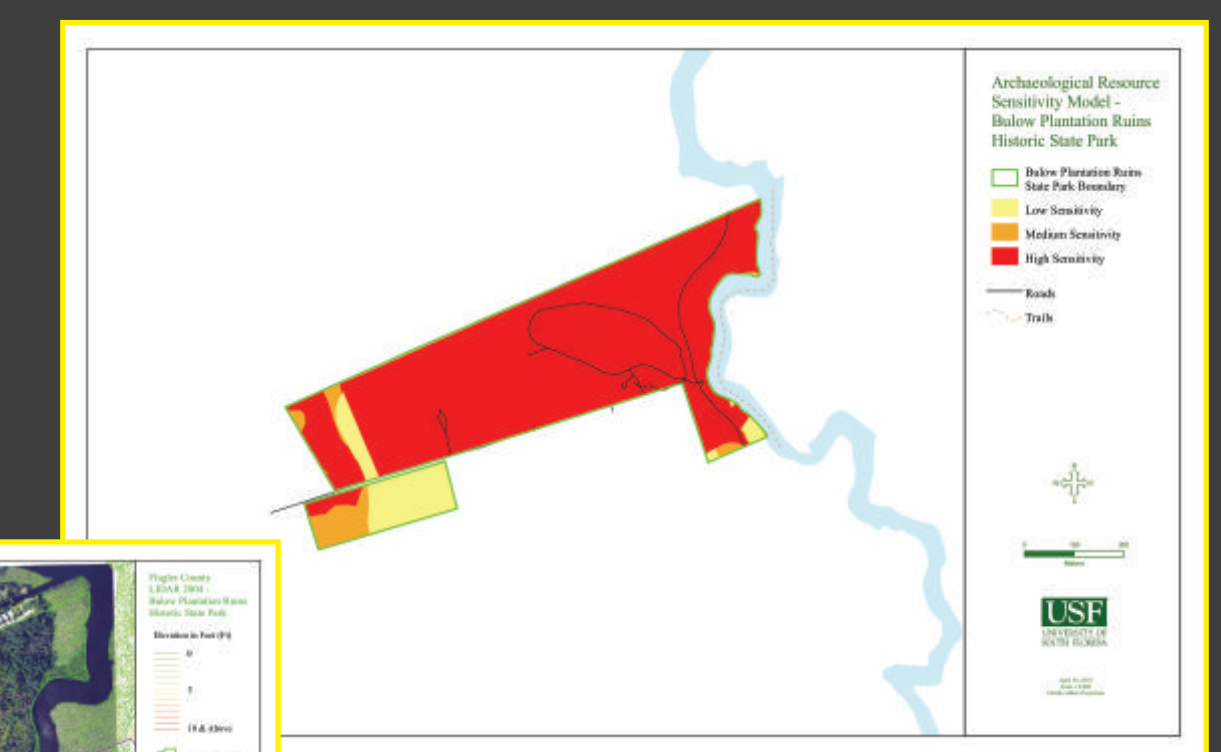
A point cloud of Dummett mill (courtesy of AIST) and a 3D representation of the Hutchmaker Complex in North Dakota created in Google SketchUp, showing more visualization options that are possible for the Bulow Ruins site. Such tools are useful for both outreach and management applications.

Rationale for Approach

ICOMOS and UNESCO both currently advocate for holistic site management strategies that allow for the continued monitoring of ongoing structural conservation projects, the maintenance of knowledge that allows for the understanding of the site's cultural heritage, and the involvement of people in the process (Santana-Quintero and Addison 2008). In the state park setting, both asset conservation and tourism are a goal, each with unique stakeholders (Stein et al. 1999) and management strategies (McKercher and du Cros 2002). It is essential to create sustainable tourism options (Chambers 2010), recognize and meet the needs of different tourist segments (Cameron and Gatewood 2000), and develop management strategies that see state parks as an ecosystem with interrelated parts that need to be managed as a whole (Chapin et al. 2009).



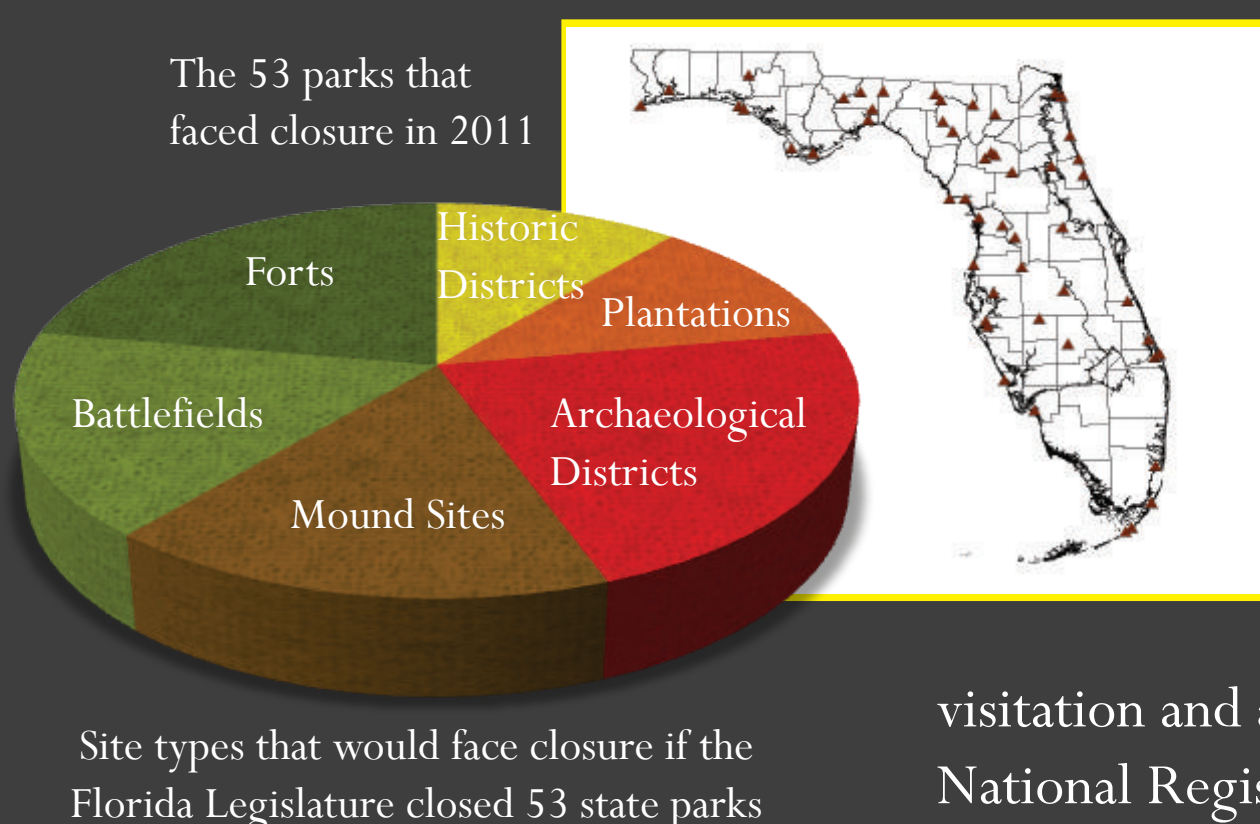
Sensitivity models created using LiDAR, GPS, and survey data can be used as a basis for management strategies.



Information Management (BIM) models as a template, task management, site interpretive info, pictures, and sensitivity models can all be included in one three-dimensional database.

The Problem

The U.S. economy has experienced several years of recession, a rising debt level, and the lowest tax revenues in decades. Though the economy is showing signs of recovery, the likelihood is considered low that it will return to the prosperous levels of the early 2000s. Referred to as the “New Normal Economy,” federal and state governments will need to continue to cut funding and personnel for a variety of important programs for the foreseeable future. In Florida, one state program that has seen drastic cuts is the Florida Park Service (FPS). FPS has lost over \$10 million in funding over the past decade, Monies allocated to FPS for historic preservation and site interpretation have dwindled from several million dollars eight years ago to zero dollars in 2011 (Florida Department of Environmental Protection 2011).



In addition to declining resources for maintenance, preservation, and interpretation, the FPS faces the threat of closure of some of its parks to further decrease the FPS operating budget. In 2011, the Florida Legislature considered closing 53 parks due to low visitation and a lack of camping facilities. Sadly, these 53 parks include 25 National Register sites and 5 National Historic Landmarks.

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Acknowledgements

Lori Collins
Brent Weisman
Antoinette Jackson
Phil Werndli
Travis Doering

Ellen Andrews
Piper Ferriter
Gerald Brinkley
Phil Rand
John Kunzer

Stephen Fernandez
Alex Kinder
Kim Tennille
Toni Carrier
Dot Moore

