

Sprawl could gobble up another 5 million acres in Florida by 2070

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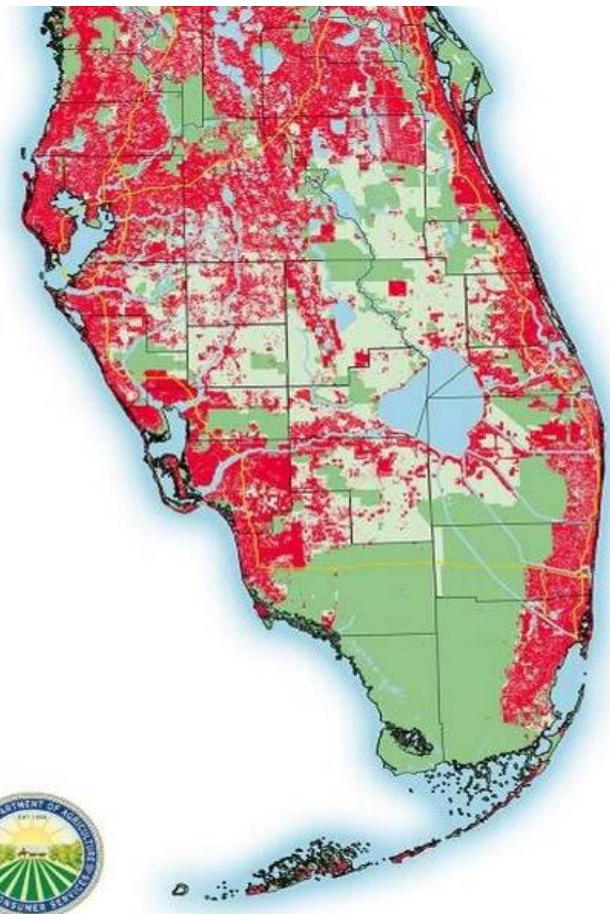
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Statewide 2070 Trend

- Developed
- Protected
- Other



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By 2070, if the state continues its existing pattern of development, about 5 million more acres will be consumed by housing projects, shopping malls and other uses needed to accommodate and projected 15 million more residents.

Over the next 50 years, Florida's swelling population is expected to gobble up another 15 percent — or 5 million acres — of the state's disappearing farms, forests and unprotected green space, according to a [new study](#) released Thursday.

With the population expected to reach nearly 34 million by 2070, University

of Florida researchers partnered with 1000 Friends of Florida and the state Department of Agriculture to look at growth trends and urban sprawl in a state powered by [land booms](#). What they found was startling: In Central Florida, where the population is expected to surge along the I-4 corridor, half the region will be developed if no more land is protected. Agriculture and other green spaces shrink by nearly 2.4 million acres. That could dramatically increase the flow of urban pollution into Lake Okeechobee.

In [rapidly expanding](#) South Florida, another 1.1 million acres would be lost.

But with smarter planning that concentrates growth around urban cores, researchers found they could save up to 1.5 million acres.

We're not talking about removing the idea that you're going to have construction or development. We're just talking about it being more compact.

University of Florida urban planner Paul Zwick

“We're not talking about removing the idea that you're going to have construction or development. We're just talking about it being more compact,” said University of Florida urban planner Paul Zwick.

Six years ago the group conducted a similar study. But this time around, they wanted to see what would happen if the state applied a shrewder philosophy to growth, with more attention paid to putting all those extra people in existing cities, preserving green corridors for recreation and wildlife and protecting agricultural lands and water supplies.

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1000 Friends of Florida planner Vivian Young

“We chose moderate projections wherever possible so we don't view this as an

out-there kind of project,” said 1000 Friends of Florida planner Vivian Young. “We really wanted citizens and elected officials to understand the cumulative impact of the many small land use decisions we make today.”

To come up with the forecast, the team looked at proximity to existing urban cores, coastlines and open water, presence of wetlands, roads and regional developments already approved, said UF landscape architect Peggy Carr. They then calculated how much land could be saved under reasonable conservation, using lands targeted for protection under the [Florida Forever](#) program and [Florida Ecological Greenways Network](#).

They also found that costs could be kept down if ag land was placed under protective easements rather than bought outright. Concentrating development would also up savings for homeowners, developers and local governments with less money spent on land, infrastructure and transportation. Smarter growth could also ease pressure on the state’s dwindling water supply and reduce pollution impacts on Lake Okeechobee.

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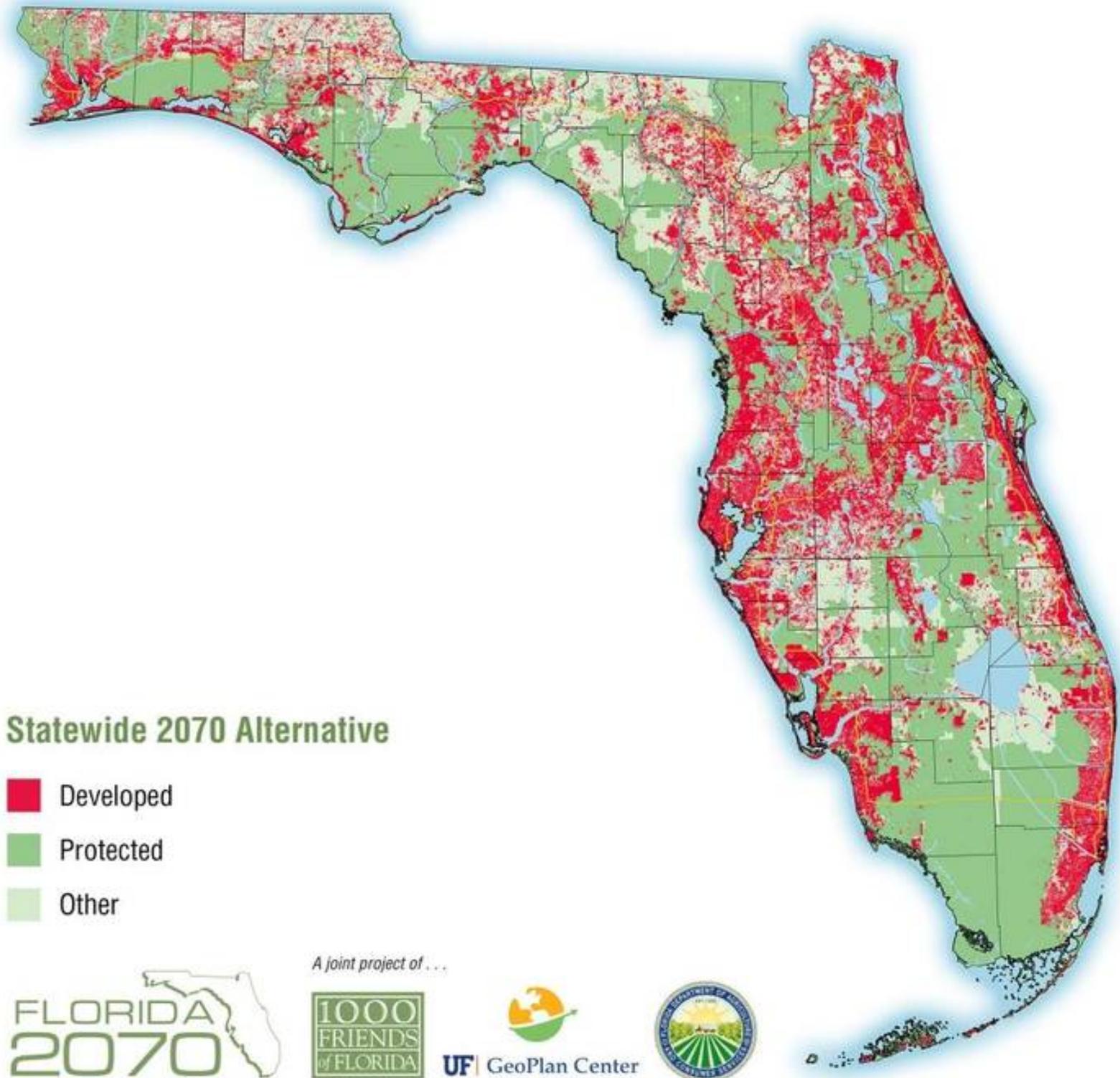
UF landscape architect Peggy Carr

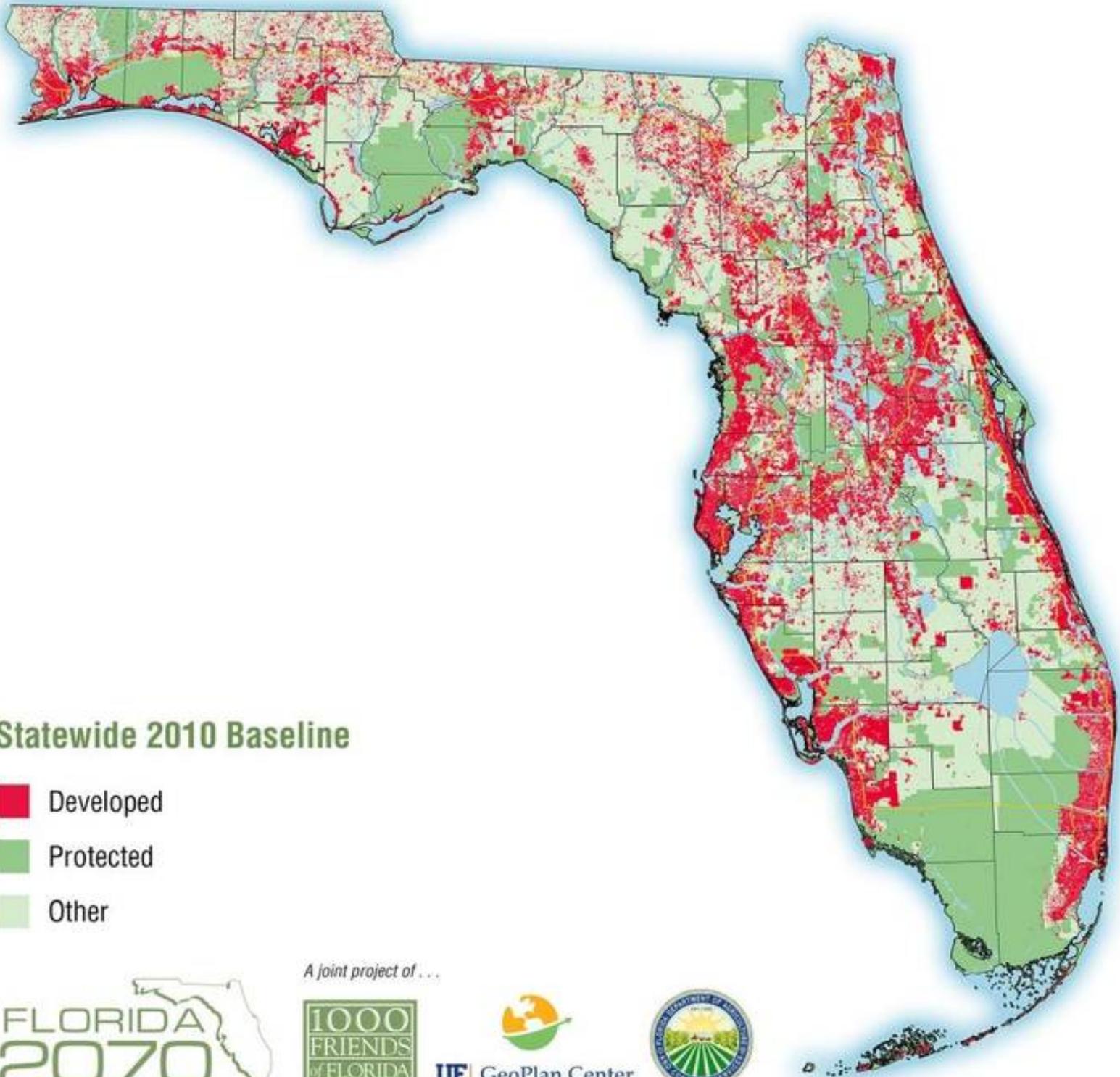
“There’s still plenty of single family options. But the average density would go up,” Carr explained. “South Florida agricultural lands are super productive and have a real market edge with their winter crops. So trying to preserve some agriculture in South Florida could have real impact on the state’s economy.”

Central Florida would be hardest hit, followed by Northeast Florida, the study found. The Panhandle and South Florida lose less because so much land is covered by timber or marshes. South Florida also contains vast expanses of land already permanently protected from development, such as Everglades National Park and the Big Cypress Preserve.

To better protect the land, the group suggested providing more incentives to land owners, linking green corridors, giving priority to projects proposed near existing cities and improving public transportation and bike paths in more crowded cities.

“We’re not talking about bulldozing all cities and making them canyons of highrises,” Young said. “We realize there’s a lot of value in existing communities, but let’s do infill and other things that are compatible.”





Statewide 2010 Baseline

- Developed
- Protected
- Other

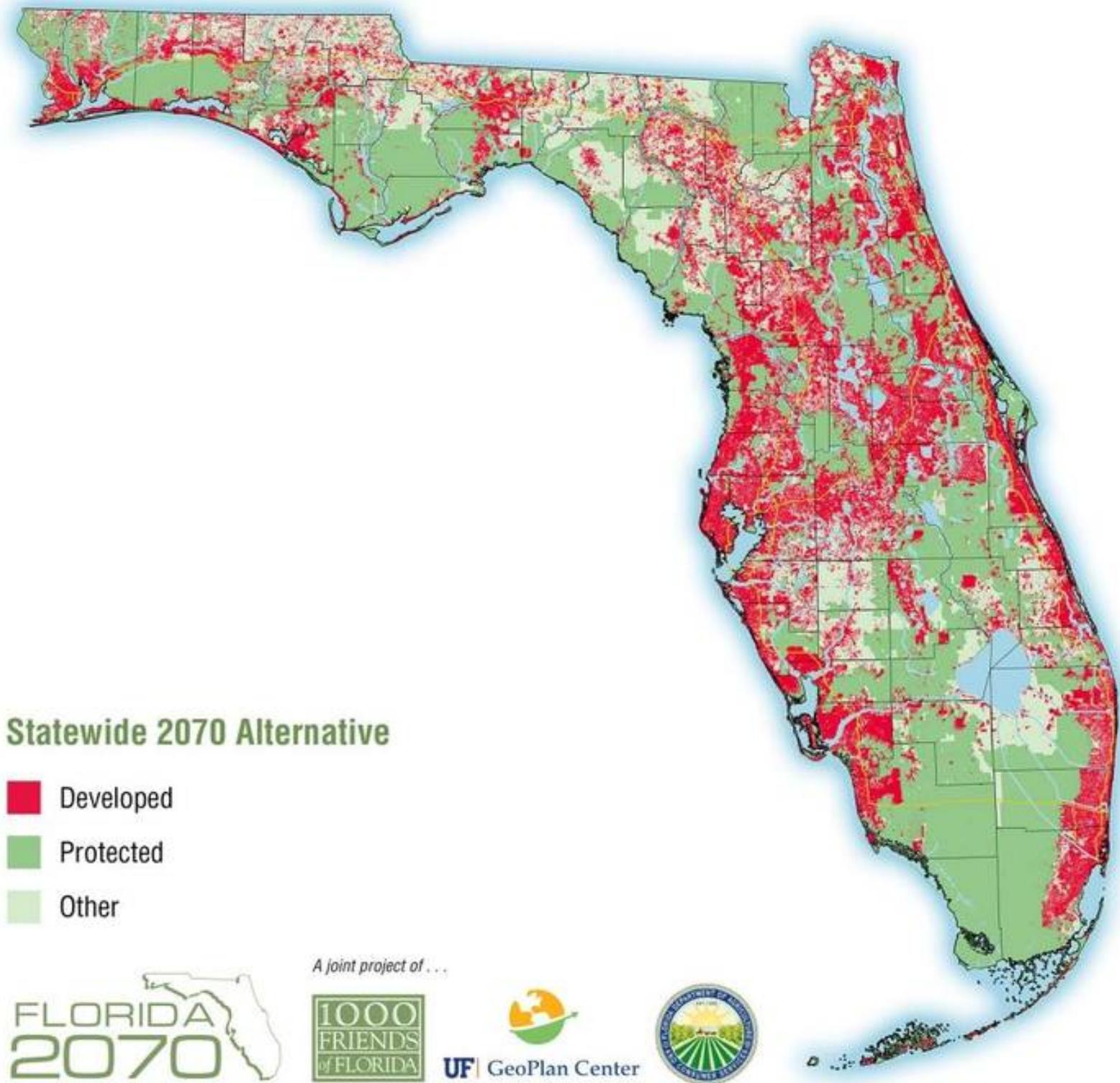


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Using data from 2010, researchers mapped how much of the state is developed, shown in red. 1000 Friends of Florida

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