

SLIDE 13 – Types of Legal Descriptions

The three accepted methods of legally describing parcels of real estate are:

- metes and bounds
- rectangular survey system, or government survey method
- recorded plat method, or lot and block method

We'll take a thorough look at each of these in this section.

Since the metes and bounds method preceded the inception of the rectangular survey system, the older East Coast states generally employ metes and bounds descriptions.

States in the Midwest and West predominantly use the rectangular survey system. Some states combine methods.

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Metes and Bounds

A metes and bounds description identifies the boundaries of a real estate parcel using reference points, distances and angles.

The description always identifies an enclosed area by starting at an origination point, called **point of beginning**, or **POB**, and returning to the POB at the description end.

A metes and bounds description must return to the POB in order to be valid.

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Metes and Bounds

This system is the oldest of all the measuring systems still in use in the United States.

The term **metes** refers to distance and direction, and the term **bounds** refers to fixed reference points, or monuments/landmarks, which may be natural and artificial.

Natural landmarks include trees, rocks, rivers, and lakes. Artificial landmarks are typically surveyor stakes.

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Metes and Bounds

Direction in the metes and bounds system is related to points of the compass considering the compass has 360 degrees.

Directions given in degrees ($^{\circ}$), minutes (') and seconds (").

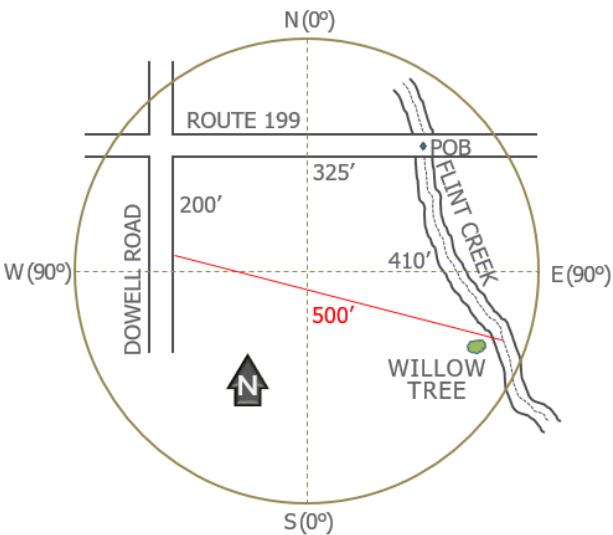
Example: **N 45° 25' 20"E** = North 45 degrees, twenty-five minutes, 20 seconds East.

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Metes and Bounds – EXAMPLE

A parcel of land located in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, having the following description: commencing at the intersection of the south line of Route 199 and the middle of Flint Creek, thence south-easterly along the center thread of Flint Creek 410 feet, more or less, to the willow tree landmark.

Thence north 65 degrees west 500 feet, more or less to the east line of Dowell Road, thence north 2 degrees east 200 feet, more or less, along the east line of Dowell Road to the south line of Route 199, thence north 90 degrees east 325 feet, more or less, along the south line of Route 199 to the *point of beginning*.



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Government Survey System

The federal government developed the rectangular survey system, or government survey method, to simplify and standardize property descriptions as a replacement for the cumbersome and often inaccurate metes and bounds method.

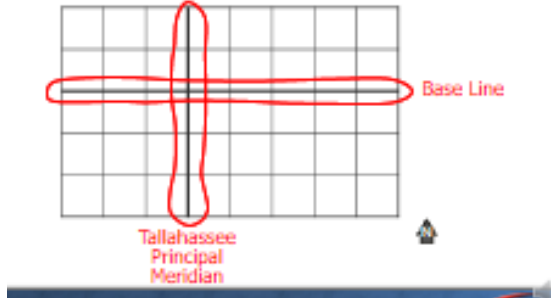
It's based on the logic that you can identify any point on a plane by reference to two axes.

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Government Survey System

Primary reference lines running in a north-south direction are called **principal meridians** in this example that's the Tallahassee Principal Meridian.

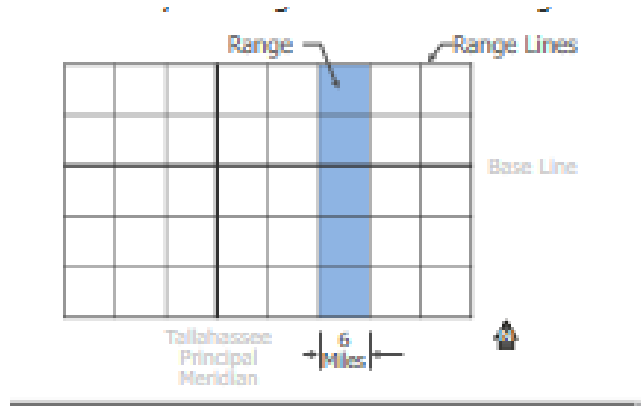
Lines running in an east-west direction are called **base lines**.



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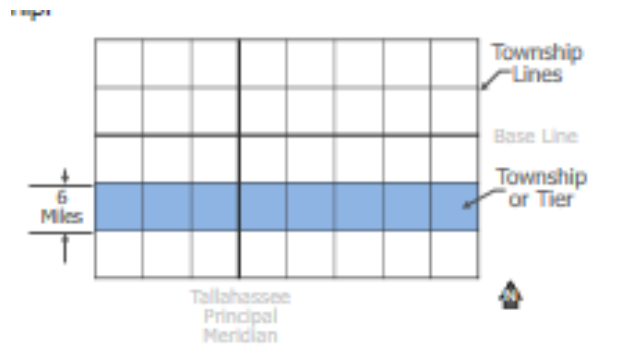
Government Survey System

Range lines run north-south every 6 miles. The north-south strip of land formed by two range lines is called a range.



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Township lines run east-west every 6 miles. The east-west strip of land formed by two township lines is called a tier or township.



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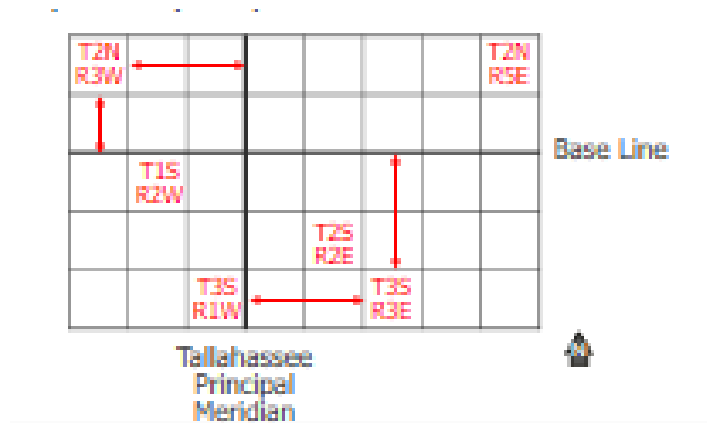
Government Survey System

Each square of the grid is a **township**. The townships are numbered in relationship to the direction and position of the township to the principal meridian and the base line.

For example: This township is numbered T2N-R3W because the tier is 2 blocks north of the baseline and the range is 3 blocks west of the meridian.

Then T3S-R3E would be 3 townships south of the baseline and 3 townships east of the principal meridian.

Take a minute to look at these four townships and see how their numbering relates to the baseline and principal meridian.



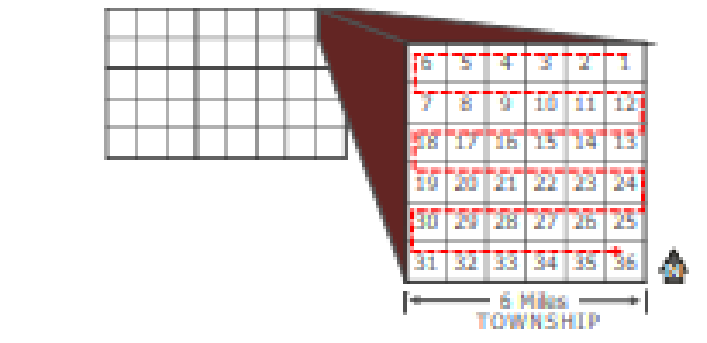
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Government Survey System

The rectangular survey system divides a township into thirty-six (36) squares called **sections**. Each side of a section is one mile in length.

The area of a section is one square mile, or 640 acres.

Notice the sections begin their numbering at the eastern top edge of the township and zig-zig east and west from north to south so that section 36 ends up being the lower eastern corner of the township.

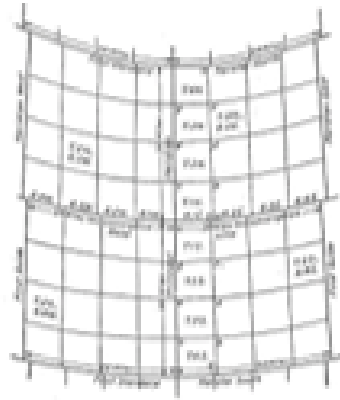


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Government Survey System

To compensate for the curvature of the earth **correction lines** occur every 24 miles north and south of a base line.

There is also a **guide meridian** every 24 miles to the east and west of the principal meridian.



Section 10 – Part 2

SLIDE 1

Government Survey System

The size in acres of a subsection of a township is a fraction of 640 acres, since there are 640 acres in a section.

Sections are further subdivided:

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6	5	4	3	2	1
7	8	9	10	11	12
18	17	16	15	14	13
19	20	21	22	23	24
30	29	28	27	26	25
31	32	33	34	35	36

6 Miles TOWNSHIP

Section 1

1 Mile

1/4 section 160 acres

1/2 section 320 acres

1/16 section 40 ac

1/8 section 80 ac

1/32 section 20 acres

1/64 section 10 acres

Section 10: Legal Descriptions

SLIDE 2

Government Survey System

A quick method of calculating the acreage of a parcel from its legal description is as follows:

1. Multiply the denominators of the fractional descriptions together.
2. Divide 640 by the resulting number.

$$\frac{640}{4} = 160 \text{ acres}$$

$$\frac{640}{(2 \times 4)} = 80 \text{ acres}$$

$$\frac{640}{(2 \times 4 \times 4)} = 20 \text{ acres}$$

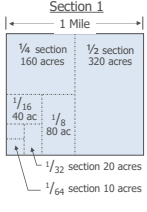
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The diagram shows a square labeled 'Section 1' with a width of '1 Mile'. It is divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant is labeled '1/4 section 160 acres'. The top-right quadrant is labeled '1/2 section 320 acres'. The bottom-left quadrant is further divided into four smaller squares: the top-left is '1/16 section 40 ac.', the top-right is '1/8 section 80 ac.', the bottom-left is '1/32 section 20 acres', and the bottom-right is '1/64 section 10 acres'. A small house icon is located at the bottom left of the diagram.

Section 10: Legal Descriptions

SLIDE 3

Government Survey System

Applying this method to the foregoing descriptions, we get:

1. SE 1/4 of Section 1
2. W 1/2 of the NW 1/4 of Section 1
3. E 1/2 of the NE 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of Section 1

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Section 10: Legal Descriptions

SLIDE 4

Government Survey System

In some cases, property may be joined in the legal description by “anding” a section with an adjoining section.

For example:

W 1/2 of the NW 1/4 of Section 1
“AND”
E 1/2 of the NW 1/4 of Section 1

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For example:

- 1 W 1/2 of the NW 1/4 of Section 1
- 2 E 1/2 of the NW 1/4 of Section 1

“AND”

Section 10: Legal Descriptions

SLIDE 5

Government Survey System

It's common that sections will be irregularly shaped due to water areas or other property usage such as military installation or native lands.

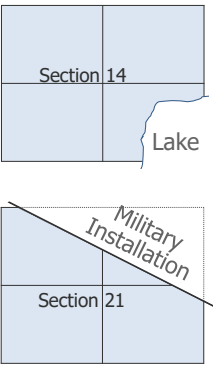
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The diagram illustrates two sections of land. Section 14 is shown as a rectangular area with a lake on its right side. Section 21 is shown as a rectangular area with a diagonal line representing a military installation cutting through it. A north arrow is positioned between the two sections.

Section 10: Legal Descriptions

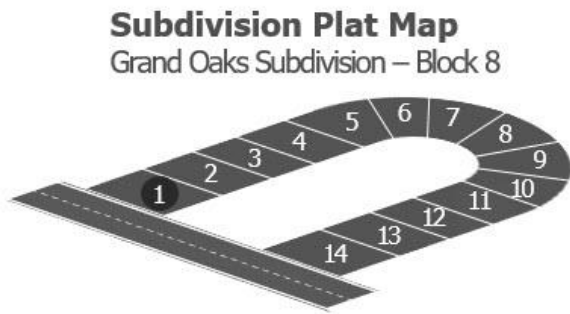


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Lot and Block Survey Method

The lot and block method, also called the recorded plat method, is used to describe properties in residential, commercial, and industrial subdivisions.

Tracts of land are subdivided into lots and blocks and shown on a survey map called a plat.



The legal description for this Lot 1 would be....

Lot 1, Block 8 of the Grand Oaks Subdivision of the SE 1/4 of Section 35, Township T22S, R14E of the Tallahassee Principal Meridian in Pinellas County, Florida.