# Environmentally Endangered Lands ProgramSouth Beach Region Public Access Meeting

## February 23, 2021 Meeting Minutes

## Attendance

### ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM STAFF

Mike Knight

Ray Mojica Jr.

Amy Rivera

### GUESTS

Paul Ruben

Paul Schmalzer (Selection and Management Committee)

Megan

djb5787

Protecting and Preserving Biological Diversity
Through Responsible Stewardship of Brevard County’s Natural Resources

## Meeting Minutes

### CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Mike Knight started the meeting at 6pm.

### PUBLIC ACCESS PRESENTATION

Ray Mojica Jr., South Beach Region Land Management Superintendent, introduced himself and explained the Program is seeking public input as management plans are updated. Ray provided an overview of the South Beaches Region and noted this region is overlapped by the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge and the various conservation lands are managed by the Florida State Parks, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Brevard County Parks and Recreation, and the Brevard County EEL Program.

Ray stated three of the eight EEL properties have public access trails. Public access is available at the Barrier Island Sanctuary, Maritime Hammock and Coconut Point. He explained some properties are not configured for a trail system and may negatively impact the privacy of adjacent property owners, duplication of habitats for the public to experience at a nearby sanctuary, the function of the property is for research or restoration and not compatible with public use, the trail is for the sole use of a neighborhood, or there are not provisions for parking without significant land clearing.

Ray provided an overview of each of the sites from north to south.

Ocean Ridge Sanctuary does not have public access because it is approximately one mile from Coconut Point. There was a request several years ago to add an access point to the west; however, this neighborhood is gated and not available to the public.

Coconut Point Sanctuary includes a one-mile trail with parking and bathrooms available across the street at the Juan Ponce de Leon Landing beach access. This is the only property that is burned regularly on a five to six-year cycle. This is an opportunity to educate the public on the benefits of prescribed fires and demonstrate how the habitats recover. Sea World has a research center on an outparcel within the site that is not open to the public.

Hog Point Cove Sanctuary is comprised of three non-contiguous segments and does not offer public access. The northernmost segment is a research field station.

Hog Point Sanctuary is the oldest sanctuary. This sanctuary does not have public access because parking is not available and the Maritime Hammock Sanctuary is approximately two miles away.

Washburn Cove Sanctuary does not have public access because of the lack of a good access point and its proximity to Maritime Hammock.

Maritime Hammock Sanctuary offers public access including a trail system. There is an additional access point through a neighborhood that is not gated. The public can use this entrance to walk around the ponds and view the resident gators.

The Barrier Island Sanctuary opened in 2008 and offers interactive exhibits, events, school field trips, and a 1 mile loop trail. Access to the beach is available at the adjacent Bonsteel Park, within 500 feet of the center. Prior to the pandemic, thirty-five thousand people visited the center annually. The Dune to Lagoon Trail takes users from the beach to the Indian River Lagoon which are home to a plethora of wildlife. One challenge at this site is keeping users off of the dunes. The proposed change to the trail is the addition of an Eco Explores Loop which was previously covered by pepper trees. This proposed natural trail will include a play house and interactive exhibits for younger visitors. This project is being planned and is expected to be completed in approximately six to nine months.

Hardwood Hammock Sanctuary is comprised of four non-contiguous segments. This site does not offer public access because of the lack of parking and its proximity to the Barrier Island Sanctuary.

Ray mentioned challenges including vandalism, unauthorized vehicles, and unauthorized pets. Signs were placed at every access point noting pets and bikes are not permitted.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Ruben asked if there is a borrow pit near the entrance of Maritime Hammock. Ray responded that was part of the old exotic nursery. This was man-made and flooded to grow aquatic plants and there is a fair amount of damage to this property. Paul asked if there will be a full restoration to this area and removal of the pink and white flowers. Ray responded the Madagascar Periwinkle is not particularly aggressive and the Program keeps up on it, but focuses on exotics such as Rosary Pea and grasses which require immediate attention. Paul mentioned the trails at Maritime Hammock, referenced damage, and asked if the boardwalk will be repaired. Ray stated this damage was from Hurricane Matthew and there is also erosion near the shoreline. Oyster reefs were installed near the shoreline to mitigate erosion and the Program hired a Field Technician who is skilled at construction and trail maintenance. Ray expects this refurbishment will be completed before it gets too hot this summer. Paul mentioned he is a fairly good carpenter and general ecologist. He and his wife volunteered to help with this project.

Paul asked about scrub-jay translocation at Coconut Point. Ray responded scrub-jays used to inhabit his area, but were hit by cars. Dave Breininger, the acknowledged expert in the area, felt this is a sink area and it is unlikely scrub-jays will return. Paul asked if silt fences will be installed to keep gopher tortoises from crossing. Ray responded they exist on both sides of the fences and it is not feasible to keep them in one place and from crossing. The Program’s goal is keeping the habitat optimal and the population level to a point where the occasional lost tortoise can be absorbed.

Paul asked if EEL has an Instagram to get these videos publicized and invite people to attend these types of meetings. Ray explained the EEL Facebook page combines all of the regions and he is actively seeking solutions to get the word out to neighbors.

Paul Schmalzer asked about the efforts to reduce mountain bikers from unauthorized use on the sites. Ray explained this use is intermittent and he speaks to people on a case by case basis and about fifty percent of users will comply with the Program rules. Law enforcement are aware of this unauthorized use and will speak to people who they observe breaking the rules. Ray does not want staff or volunteers having negative interactions with persons who are breaking the rules. Paul asked if the bikes come off of AIA or from the Indian River Lagoon State Park. Ray stated about ninety percent of the bikers read the sign and do not enter from Indian River State Park. Paul is glad to hear about that progress.

Mike stated there will be several other opportunities during the management plan process to learn more. He asked guest to contact the Program if they would like more information on upcoming public meetings.

### ADJORNED

The meeting ended at 6:50.