# Environmentally Endangered Lands Program Selection and Management Committee & Procedures Committee Joint Meeting

## June 25, 2021 Meeting Minutes

## Attendance

### SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT (SMC) MEMBERS

Tamy Dabu, Liz Becker, Lisa Toland, Oli Johnson, Doug Sphar (Recreation and Education Advisory Committee), Mac McLouth (Tourism Development Council Representative), Jim Burney, and Mark Bush attended via Zoom

### PROCEDURES COMMITTEE (PC) MEMBERS

Linda Behret, Sil Crespo, Bo Platt, Leesa Souto, Rick Follett and Monty Montgomery

### ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM STAFF

Mike Knight and Jenny Warner

### GUESTS

Sue Carlson and Laurilee Thompson

Protecting and Preserving Biological Diversity

Through Responsible Stewardship of Brevard County’s Natural Resources

## Meeting Minutes

### CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Linda Behret called the meeting to order at 11:07 AM and asked for public comment.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Laurilee Thompson stated she is glad to be here.

## MINUTES

The PC March 5, 2021, minutes were presented for approval.

### MOTION 1

**Sil Crespo moved to approve the minutes as presented.**

**Lisa Toland seconded the motion.**

**Motion carried unanimously.**

### AGENDA ITEM 1

**30-Year Report Status**

Mike provided a draft copy of the 30-Year Report to each of meeting attendees. He explained this report has been reviewed by the Director of Parks and Recreation and is being reviewed by upper management. He pointed out the revisions to the graphs on pages 22 and 23 and noted this information is included in the text. Liz Becker noted the bond amounts on page 22 might not be accurate. Mike stated he will update this graphic. He expects this report to be finalized soon and he will provide a copy once it is available.

### AGENDA ITEM 2

**Committee Overview: Mike Knight**

Mike explained the 1990 and 2004 referenda and stated the Program’s vision and mission statement. He provided a brief overview of the responsibilities of the Board of County Commissioners (Board), Recreation and Education Advisory Committee (REAC), Procedures Committee (PC), and the Selection and Management Committee (SMC). He explained the purpose and objectives of the SMC / PC Annual Joint Meeting and asked for questions. This presentation is available upon request.

### AGENDA ITEM 3

**Fiscal Year 2019/2020 Annual Report Presentation: Mike Knight**

Mike provided an overview of the Program and explained the fiscal year began October 1, 2019, and concluded September 30, 2020. He noted there were no land acquisitions this year. He highlighted land management accomplishments including 8 prescribed fires, 3 habitat restorations, 900.5 acres treated for exotic plant species, $96,171 in exotic treatment support from the State, 3 tons of trash removed, and 89 feral hogs removed. Doug Sphar asked if the Program has contractors to remove feral hogs. Mike responded only fully vetted, volunteer trappers may remove feral hogs. Mac McLouth asked if there is a certain requirement regarding the trapped hog. Mike responded the trapper must have a permit and the hogs have to go directly to slaughter or to a State approved quarantine facility and must be dead before they are removed from Program property to ensure they are not released improperly.

Mike reviewed the Florida Scrub-Jay Population Viability Analysis (PVA) joint project that was supported by NASA, the Brevard Zoo, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Brevard County EEL Program that occurred in 2020. Sil Crespo mentioned the amount of road kill he observes as a result of the widening of Malabar Road and wondered how that would impact the population in Malabar. Mike responded that remains to be seen; however, the Program does not anticipate losing any habitat because of the widening of Malabar Road. Sil added the Program is not acquiring lands and noted there is a housing development adjacent to the property. Mike added this modeling considered land we currently have; although connectivity was discussed in the Grant/Valkaria region. Sil asked why connectivity is not utilized to build a case for acquisition. Tamy Dabu stated it may not be a priority for this Board. Mike stated the Program’s focus is on tree reduction and management in the South Region. Jim Burney suggested a take away to summarize this information rich slide such as “South Brevard is key to the mitigation of the extinction of the Florida Scrub-jay in Brevard County”. Leesa Souto asked why the population in the North is so disadvantaged. Mike responded there is not enough scrub habitat to support a large population long term. Mike added steps are being taken in the North and more scrub-jays are being seen at Buck Lake; however, modeling does not suggest this will support long term survival. Rick Follett asked about private lands. Mike responded this analysis did not factor in all private land and added there is very little scrub left. Leesa asked if anyone has gone through the process to get scrub habitat designated as critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act. Mike responded he is unsure. Doug referenced a law suit that went to Federal Court to have the Florida scrub-jay listed as endangered; however, the lawsuit failed. Jim Burney asked for clarification on designating scrub as critical habitat. Leesa explained the process of obtaining this designation for the Indian River Lagoon. Mac asked if the parcels in the South could be acquired and restored. Mike explained there are only two areas in the mega parcels that are comprised of scrub and most of the habitat is pine flatwoods or wetlands. The Program’s goal is to maximize optimal scrub habitat on every scrub acre the Program owns. Jim asked if the PVA changed the management practices. Mike stated the Program is concerned about all scrub species and the Program follows the US Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines.

Mike noted the COVID 19 impacts to the Program’s Education Centers including closing and other CDC guidelines.

Mike provided an overview of public access at the sanctuaries including Eagle Scout projects, youth campers at Sams House, and trail visitation. Doug Sphar mentioned the Photography Club has a meeting and field trip scheduled on July 10th at the Enchanted Forest. Mike stated we are following CDC guidelines. Mike stated the Program will install a device to count trail users. Lisa asked when the Program will begin to count and when the numbers will be available. Mike stated the fiscal year begins in October and perhaps by the holidays. Lisa mentioned this data would be beneficial to publish. Jim agreed with Lisa and stated having 200,000 visitors to the trails is significant.

Mike mentioned the usage at the Environmental Education Centers. Although the numbers were down, once the Centers reopened usage went up. Laurilee suggested comparing 2021 to 2019 in terms of usage to show an increase to gather support for the referendum.

Mike highlighted the Special Events at the sanctuaries. He mentioned the turtle walks were cancelled and the South Beach trail usage is not included in this data.

Mike discussed volunteers, visitation to EEL properties over time, and overall expenses for fiscal year 2019/2020. Mike explained land management, transfers, administration, education and acquisition costs. Doug Sphar inquired about the money allocated to acquisition. Mike noted although the Program did not acquire any properties, this money was allocated to the Acquisition Specialist since she deals with mitigation and donations. Mike explained operational costs over time including operations millage rate history, operations millage revenue history, and total millage rate history.

Mike mentioned the 2020 Economic Benefit Analysis completed by Closewaters LLC that calculated the Net Present Value of the Program to Brevard County at $496 million. The Committee discussed the net present value, the Program’s assets, and the minimum operational cost without any additional acquisition.

Mike mentioned the next steps for the Program including the assessment of interest to place an EEL referendum on the ballot in 2022, request for assistance from the Nature Conservancy for a feasibility study for future funding, and potential revenue impacts from potential delinquent property tax payments. Oli asked about a public poll to determine public interest for a referendum. Mike stated this is part of what the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land will be doing; however, they do not want to move forward unless there is support to place this on the ballot in 2022. Mike added if this is not successful, the options are to be funded by the general fund or collect signatures for a ballot initiative. He added, these decisions are ideally made a year in advance to avoid a funding gap. The Committee discussed the appropriate level of interaction with Board Members, providing recommendations to the Board, and different options for future funding.

Mike asked for questions.

Jim asked if the Program has funds for future acquisitions. Mike responded of the monies that were bonded there is virtually none left and $700,000 has been set aside for an Environmental Management and Education Center in the South. Lisa asked why not spend the $700,000 now and it can be funded by the next referendum. Mike explained there has been some discussion if bonds will be part of the next referendum. He added the Program will never acquire all of the land because of the willing seller requirement. Jim asked if the Program has a good assessment of who the willing sellers are. Mike stated the Program does not have an updated list; however, the SMC compiled a Willing Seller spreadsheet in 2008. Mike outlined a few possible scenarios regarding bonding amounts. Mike mentioned the Program has potentially $17,000,000 in reimbursement for additional acquisition resources from leveraged State funds from the Florida Forever Program. Jim stated as the funding deadline approaches, the Program must explain the impact to the Program based on the different funding levels. Mike stated we are working on compiling that information and to provide answers for other anticipated questions to generate revenue to support the Program. Lisa asked about donations. Mike stated the Environmental Education Centers are equipped to accept donations through their Friends Groups. This presentation is available upon request.

### COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORTS

None

### PUBLIC COMMENT

None

### MOTION 2

**Leesa Souto moved to adjourn the meeting.**

**Sil Crespo seconded the motion.**

**Motion carried unanimously.**

### ADJORNED

Linda Behret adjourned the meeting at 1:07 PM.

### ACTION ITEMS

Provide finalized 30-Year Report to committee members