



Environmentally Endangered Lands Program Selection and Management Committee Meeting

January 15, 2025, Meeting Minutes FINAL

Attendance

SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT (SMC) MEMBERS

Jason Miller, Maryanne Civil, Curt Smith, Chris O'Hara, Jon Shepard, Kim Zarillo, Lisa Toland, Jim Burney, Paul Schmalzer (Emeritus member), Jennifer Thompson

ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM STAFF

Mike Knight, Vanessa Bethauser, David DeMeyer

GUESTS

Catherine Vecchio

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

EEL Program Selection and Management Committee Meeting

January 15, 2025

Approved by SMC on April 16, 2025

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Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Jason Miller called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Catherine Vecchio, with the Florida Shorebird Alliance said she would like to comment about what's on the agenda regarding the Shorebird Nesting Platforms and she's started a little petition to support them.

MINUTES

The SMC January 17, 2024, meeting minutes were presented for approval. The minutes were approved.

The SMC and Procedures Committee Joint Meeting April 17, 2024, minutes were presented for approval. The minutes were approved.

The SMC July 17, 2024, minutes were presented for approval. Paul Schmalzer pointed out two corrections. Paul was present for the meeting and on page five the end of the first paragraph last sentence a word is missing. The word "of" should be added between the words "caretaker" and "the". Mike also pointed out in same paragraph, in the first sentence Doc should be capitalized. Also, Kim Zarillo was present at that meeting. With four corrections, the minutes were approved as amended.

MOTION 1

Jennifer Thompson moved the motion to approve the January 17, 2024, meeting minutes as written.

Lisa Toland seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION 2

Lisa Toland moved the motion to approve the April 17, 2024, minutes as written.

Jennifer Thompson seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION 3

Lisa Toland moved the motion to approve the July 17, 2024, minutes as amended.

Jim Burney seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.



ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Welcome Vanessa Bethauser, EEL Administrative Secretary

Mike Knight welcomed Vanessa Bethauser, EEL Administrative Secretary. Vanessa has worked with the Parks Department in the South Area Operations Office for over 10 years and brings a wealth of experience to EEL. She started with us in the beginning of August.

SMC Appointments

Mike explained the SMC Appointments process. During the process of requesting consideration of member re-appointments, staff was directed to advertise for SMC members. Current members remain active until they are either reappointed or replaced. Mike encouraged the members to reapply. Members who are interested in continuing to serve on the committee would need to apply through the County advisory committee member site. Mike already has resumes for current members so only the application is required. Lisa Toland asked if they don't apply by the 21st they're not considered. Mike confirmed that is correct. Mike said the process is we have our qualifying meeting which is himself, the director of Human Resources and the chair of the Procedures Committee. The chair for the Procedures Committee is vacant so he asked Diane Stees to sit in and fill that role, and she's fine with that. We do an initial ranking on the science candidates that separates out qualified from the not qualified. The Procedures Committee will have a separate meeting to confirm they agree with the ranking list. The qualified list is the only list that will go the Board. All the candidates for the business real estate side will go to the Board for their final ranking. We do not do a qualification list for them.

State Management Plan Review

Mike brought up the State of Florida Division of State Lands will be conducting their five-year management review for the Brevard Coastal Scrub Ecosystem Florida Forever Project which primarily includes the south region properties. That would be Malabar, Jordan, Micco, and Grant Flatwoods. It also includes the Dicerandra Scrub and Helen and Allan Cruickshank sites. The review will take place on January 30 & 31. The primary goal of this review is to determine if the sites are being managed according to the approved management plans.

Malabar Scrub Restoration

Mike shared a current picture of the Malabar Scrub restoration. The picture is from Briar Creek Blvd looking towards Cameron Preserve. The bulk of the restoration work is complete. The contractor at Malabar West is finishing up the removal and mulching of



the cut and piled sand pines. Jason Miller asked what's the burn schedule. Mike said he didn't know for sure but within the next 3 or 4 months. The new and relocated trails are approximately 60% complete. The delay was due to yellowjackets. A permitting delay for the new boardwalk has slowed things down but we are hopeful it will be resolved shortly. Jim Burney asked who the vendor was. Mike replied, John Brown and Sons.

Fox Lake Black Bears

Wildlife monitoring cameras at the Fox Lake Sanctuary have been detecting a significant increase in Florida black bear sightings including a mother with at least two cubs. Mike shared the video showing the sightings. Additional cameras have been deployed to further monitor a larger area.

COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORTS

None

LAND ACQUISITION REPORT

Land acquisition contract RFQ

Mike Knight said we are getting close to having the RFQ go out for acquisition contractor to spend the \$3 million potentially more that's designated for Land Acquisition. Once the contractor is on board, Mike will be requesting the committee meet more often than quarterly. Paul Schmalzer referenced in the July minutes Mike mentioned we can't move forward until we get clarification to continue the partnership with the state on matching funds through Florida forever. Mike said we were told to keep it in there and move it forward as we always have. Maryanne Civil asked Mike regarding the same meeting minutes did he get clarification from the new Parks Director or the Board about the Conservation Value Matrix. Mike said he recalls it going to the Board and there were no concerns or change but he will double check.

AGENDA ITEM 1

Shorebird nesting platforms

Mike shared a power point presentation. The presentation is a follow up to the committee's previous discussion about shorebird nesting in the Thousand Islands, staff has done some additional research on nesting platforms and will present the information as an alternative to the creation of ground nesting areas. Staff visited several city managed islands north of Minuteman Causeway. It appears to have some current nesting activity. Staff researched nesting platforms and identified five potential platform locations on EEL managed lands. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) visited the potential locations to determine suitability. In doing so staff and



FWCC spotted a sixth location. There are no plans to do a workshop with the city due to the change in focus to nesting platforms.

Mike presents a slide with two pictures of existing nesting platforms done through FWCC. They're 24'x50' aluminum structure with pea gravel surface. They cost between \$80,000 - \$100,000. They are ground predator proof but still susceptible to bird predation. All the platforms that the state has done in the south recruited least terns in the first season with a maximum of 90 fledges on a single platform.

Mike went over the sites that were looked at for consideration. Pine Island Conservation Area site considered by FWCC to be the most suitable for the platform location. Thousand Islands Conservation Area, West Crawford Island site FWCC considers the site potentially suitable but expensive to construct and maintain. Hog Point Cove Sanctuary not considered suitable by FWCC due to number of taller trees and power lines that allow for predator perching. Maritime Hammock Sanctuary was considered not suitable for the same reason as Hog Point Cove. Ocean Ridge Sanctuary is suitable by FWCC and came in second. Vegetation is currently low, the site has no current public use trails; however, site would require further evaluation for potential gopher tortoise impacts. Barrier Island Sanctuary considered not suitable by FWCC for the same reason as Hog Point Cove and Maritime Hammock.

Overall, Pine Island Conservation Area site was the most suitable. Ocean Ridge was also suitable and worth exploring further. All other sites were not considered suitable. Nesting platforms are the most preferred option by staff due to limited vegetation impacts, limited maintenance and removability if needed in the future. FWCC is pursuing a grant to fund a pilot platform at Pine Island. Staff recommends discontinuing further efforts to create ground-nesting opportunities at the Thousand Islands. If other mainland platform locations prove to be successful, the program could consider south or west Crawford Islands as additional platform sites in the future. Currently the EEL Program does not have funding to dedicate to nesting platform construction. Any purposed platforms would require grant funding.

During members discussion Maryanne asked if the nesting platforms are hurricane rated. Lisa Toland asked if we can track the cost and how tall are the platforms. Mike Knight answered yes, the nesting platforms are hurricane rated and made of aluminum. Aluminum is expensive and it's involving a contractor. That's what's driving up the cost. We wouldn't be involved in the construction cost. The platforms are 15 feet tall. Jennifer Thompson asked why 15 feet tall. Maybe shorter could be cheaper. Is it something we can ask the manufacturer. Chris O'Hara asked who's going to be



responsible for long term maintenance. Mike said it's his understanding we would not be responsible for maintaining it. Other than signage and any public use factors around it. Kim Zarillo added, part of the consideration should be a long-term agreement for maintaining the platform. Mike agrees, we just haven't gotten that far yet. Jason Miller asked what the life span is on a platform. Mike said he doesn't know the expected life span of the platforms. Catherine Vecchio suggested looking at more information from the Regional Biologists in South Florida. They did this in a state park. Catherine commented as a volunteer of Shorebird Alliance and seeing nesting on the ground; it would be nice to let them have their natural habitat. But if a raised platform is what it's going to take, as a volunteer we have a better opportunity to count the numbers and see how the species is really thriving. It also gives the opportunity to getting them back on the roofs safely. Maryanne asked if we have a timeline on the grant application. Mike doesn't know the timeline on the grant application. He plans to wait and see if FWC comes forward with money and they want to do this project. Then we would have all these discussions. Curt Smith asked if there would have to be any changes made to the management plan. Mike responded it's not something critical but if it's something we move forward with, it will have to be addressed.

The members feel it's a good starting point and a good way forward.

AGENDA ITEM 2

Duck hunting site assessments

A recent request to allow waterfowl hunting in the Sykes Creek basin between the barge canal and Hall Road on Merritt Island has prompted a question related to how decisions are made by the EEL Program to prohibit hunting at EEL nature sanctuaries and conservation areas. Mike went over what is stated in the Board-approved EEL Land Acquisition Manual on page 7 and the Board-approved EEL Sanctuary Management on page 9 regarding hunting language.

When staff evaluated the public uses opportunities at Kabboord Sanctuary, hunting was not considered a logical option for a few reasons: The site is an impounded salt marsh with no current physical access for public recreation. There is a history of complaints from residents about hunting in the area. The site is adjacent to the Ulumay Wildlife Sanctuary which has a State legislative designation of a no hunting zone. The site is smaller in size than the Ulumay Sanctuary, adjacent homeowners, and a golf course community. Also, the previous attempt at offering duck hunting at Pine Island was unsuccessful, was expensive to implement and attracted limited interest from the community.



Mike said there's a meeting coming up in March with one of the Commissioners. We are asking the committee for input. If we are asked to do a thorough site impact analysis to determine when we would, and when we would not allow hunting, what would that look like?

A discussion followed recommending doing a title search of Kabboord with the state if it's sovereign submerged lands. The EEL Program's primary mission is to protect and preserve biodiversity of the county. There are management actions such as removal of feral pigs that tributes to protecting these biological diversity sites, but duck hunting doesn't. That's why we should look at the mission of the program and if it isn't why would we pursue it, and should it be where the Program is devoting resources. We need evaluation criteria to determine if it contributing to the biodiversity of the site.

MOTION 4

Lisa Toland made a motion that the committee recommends hunting should not be allowed on this property based on the recently approved Management Plan and the EEL Program mission.

Jennifer Thompson seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

Jim Burney asked what the process would be to change the language in the EEL Land Acquisition Manual (LAM) on page 7 about hunting, fishing will be reviewed on a site-by-site basis. Mike said it would involve the Procedures Committee and the SMC recommending it to the Board. The Board would decide whether to approve the change. Mike suggested if the Committee is considering changing the language it could be to distinguish between recreation hunting versus controlled hunting.

Catherine Vecchio commented as a resident, could the EEL Program through the County Commissioners be prepared to educate the public about hunting. Jim Burney said that neighbor concerns could be part of the criteria to be taken into consideration.

Mike expressed his appreciation for the good discussion and all the input.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Ulumay Land Donation

Mike explains Mike Dichristopher has contacted County Attorney and informally is offering the EEL Program a donation of approximately 33 acres of wetlands directly adjacent to the Ulumay Sanctuary on the east boundary. Since this donation would not be related to mitigation, the Committee would have to find if this property is appropriate

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to accept and recommend. Then it would require approval from the County Commission. Mike shows the area of the property on a map.

The property is similar to the existing habitat types and conditions within the adjacent Ulumay Sanctuary. The property is primarily wetland with some historic berms and ditching. The site would require management actions to control Brazilian Pepper trees which would most likely be done using State invasive plant management grant funds.

The site has a significant number of neighbor encroachment issues along the boundary line that would need to be resolved prior to accepting the donation. Although the site does add similar habitat to the overall sanctuary footprint, it is heavily infested with Brazilian pepper and has a significant amount of dredging and berm disturbance which is also similar to the existing sanctuary. Physical access to the property is primarily limited by boat with a potential for legal access between two homes that would need to be confirmed prior to acceptance.

If the property is donated to the County it will come with a fair amount of challenges related to exotics and access control issues. Staff is not clear if there is a net conservation benefit to the property being under public ownership when considering the level of management attention the site will require.

Once members opened the discussion Lisa Toland decided to recuse herself from this agenda item because she has worked for Mr. Dichristopher in the past. The members have several concerns that this property may be costly and an endless battle with invasive species. Just gaining access to the property could double the cost having to come in through the water. David DeMeyer already tried to pursue a grant through the State for this site. He said we finished 2nd to last for State funding. Any EEL staff time and money would come directly out of our budget.

Before the Committee decides a recommendation, Mike said he would like staff to bring back to the Committee a more in detail solution for access, encroachment issues, land clearing, and cost. Also, a better understanding of the exotics. The SMC agrees with that approach.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

NEXT MEETING

Jason Miller verified if the next meeting April 16, 2025, 9:30am – 12:30pm would work for everyone. Jennifer Thompson asked if we could start meetings at 9am. Everyone is



fine with 9am. Lisa Toland asked if we should revisit the Board policy of the Committee only having quarterly meetings. Mike said once we have an Acquisition contractor on board we will request to meet more often.

Next meeting is April 16, 2025 9am – 12pm.

ADJOURNED

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45am.