

**ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM
SELECTION & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (SMC)
PROCEDURES COMMITTEE (PC)
June 2, 2003
Attendance List**

SELECTION & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dave Breininger
Mark Bush
Ron Hight
Ross Hinkle
Randy Parkinson
Paul Schmalzer
Kim Zarillo

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Priscilla Griffith
Bill Koehne
Rocky Randels
Courtenay Roberts
Sharon Savastio
Diane Stees
Kim Zarillo

EEL PROGRAM STAFF

Anne Birch
Laura Clark
Mike Knight
Ray Mojica
Zachary Prusak
Tami Robinson
Scott Taylor
Kit Van Wagner

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Angela Klug
Lori Thoms

GUESTS

Matt Thompson, EEL Intern
Bill Hausmann, EEL Intern

**ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS PROGRAM
SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
PROCEDURES COMMITTEE
June 2, 2003
Meeting Minutes**

CALL TO ORDER:

Rocky Randels called the meeting to order at 1:12 PM and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

MEETING PURPOSE:

Rocky described the purpose of the Procedures Committee (PC) as threefold:

- Provide in one document, all the policies relating to the acquisition of real property
- Ensure the acquisition procedures are carried out in a uniform manner
- Make the acquisition process easily understood by the public

Ross Hinkle stated the goal of this meeting was to have staff provide a status report on the EEL Program and for the SMC to provide scientific information on the status of the EEL Program's goals and future acquisition and management plans.

NEW BUSINESS:

Procedures Committee Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Motion One

Rocky called for nominations for Committee Chair.

Priscilla Griffith moved to nominate Rocky Randels as Committee Chair.

Sharon Savastio moved that the nominations be closed.

Rocky asked if there was any further discussion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Motion Two

Sharon moved to nominate Priscilla Griffith as Vice-Chair

Diane Stees seconded the motion.

Rocky asked if there was any further discussion.

The motion carried unanimously.

Presentations:

Overview of EEL Program and Presentations – Anne Birch, EEL Program Manager

Anne provided a brief overview of the Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) Program to include the following.

- Established by voter approval of a 1990 referendum.
- EEL Program is one of 25 local government conservation programs in the State.
- Scientific criteria is used in the selection and management of lands
- Purpose is to protect biodiversity by purchasing and managing environmentally endangered lands

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Approved September 23, 2003*

- Management activities include land management, passive recreation and environmental education
- Mission: To preserve biological diversity throughout the County
- TNC – land acquisition consultant since Dec. 1993.
- 18,000 + acres of land purchased – some with partners
- \$61+ million dollars spent in land acquisition since start of Program – this figure includes contributions from partner funds
- Management and Education Centers
- Volunteer Program
- Education Program

Land Acquisition – Angela Klug, The Nature Conservancy

Angela Klug provided information regarding land acquisition and funding partnerships. The Acquisition and Restoration Council meets every six months, to determine which projects will receive state funding. Angela commented that the information provided by the SMC as the scientific advisory committee, in addition to the continued success of existing projects has helped the EEL Program receive much of it's partnership funding.

The State has approved and funded four projects initiated by the EEL Program

- Enchanted Forest Sanctuary
- North Indian River Lagoon/Blueway
- Maritime Hammocks Initiative
- Brevard Coastal Scrub Ecosystem (BCSE)

Land Management – EEL Land Managers

1. Scott Taylor, Central Region Land Manager, discussed habitat restoration using two examples of land management activities:

- Scrub Restoration – Buck Lake Conservation Area and the Helen & Allan Cruickshank Sanctuary. Many natural landscapes are dependent on fire. Much of the natural lands have been fire suppressed, some for 50 or more years. Vegetation becomes overgrown and the fuel levels dangerously high. Mechanical chopping is sometimes needed before land managers can initiate a prescribed fire. Once the canopy is reduced, the land can be safely managed.
- Wetland Restoration – Pine Island Conservation Area (PICA) and the Barrier Island Ecosystem Center (BIEC). Mosquito impoundments and spoil deposits have affected many wetland areas. Removal of exotic plants (especially Brazilian pepper and Australian pine) is frequently accomplished with interagency cooperative support. At the PICA passive introduction of salt water removes invasive freshwater plants such as cattails and is helping to clear a future canoe/kayak trail. Spoil at PICA is being also removed to allow restoration of natural salt marsh. Restoration of sites in the south beaches area of the County is being accomplished by the installation of culverts to restore tidal flows followed by the re-vegetation of native plants.

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2. Zach Prusak, South Region Land Manager, provided information on prescribed fire and its importance in maintaining many of the natural landscapes.
 - Zack is the Burn Boss for the EEL Program
 - Prescribed burns help to prevent wildfires that can occur in natural areas
 - Prescribed burns conducted by the EEL Program are only possible with the interagency cooperative efforts it receives for equipment and experienced crews
 - He stated the importance of fire safety training
 - Public understanding of the importance of prescribed fire is increasing due to interagency education efforts

3. Ray Mojica, South Beach Region Land Manager, spoke about control efforts of exotic plant and animal species:
 - Uncontrolled invasive exotic plants and animal species result in negative impacts on biodiversity.
 - Exotic species usually do not have natural predators. They grow uncontrolled and can out-compete native habitats.
 - Because Brevard County has both temperate and subtropical climates, there is a large number of invasive plant species.
 - Herbicide can be applied to small patches of exotic plant growth, but mechanical treatment followed by the application of herbicide may be required for larger areas.
 - Treated areas may recover with native plants within a few years.
 - The EEL Program has been very successful in receiving grant funding for treatment of exotic plant species.

4. Tami Robinson, North Region Land Manager, provided information about recreational opportunities on EEL Sanctuaries.
 - EEL Program directives call for passive recreation that is compatible with the conservation goals .
 - Sites are divided into 3 categories:
 - Category I –
 - There is a Category I site in each of the EEL Program's four management regions.
 - A Management and Education Center is planned for each Category I site. The Center at the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary opened in November of 2002.
 - These sites offer many opportunities for passive recreation
 - Category II – some public access
 - No staff on site
 - Self guided trails
 - Category III – limited public access due to vulnerability of the natural resources
 - Types of recreational opportunities are specific to each site based on the natural resources that are present. Passive recreational activities available on EEL managed sites include: hardened paths, boardwalks, canoeing, freshwater and saltwater fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Community input is taken into consideration for the planning of recreational opportunities.

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Volunteer Program - Mike Knight, EEL Volunteer Coordinator

Mike spoke about the Volunteer Program and site security issues.

- Site security is the first step in land management
 - Fences provide boundary delineation
 - Reduces dumping of trash and other illegal activities
 - Volunteers provide some assistance in monitoring sanctuary use
- Volunteer Program provides local citizens the opportunity to become involved in the preservation of Brevard County's rich biological resources.
 - Maintains citizen input
 - Builds volunteer partnerships within local communities
 - SMC and PC members volunteer their time and are an invaluable resource
 - Expands ability to effectively manage the EEL sanctuary network
 - Friends of the Enchanted Forest is a volunteer group specific to the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary. Additional Friends Of groups are planned for each Center
 - Volunteers, including AmeriCorps, have saved the EEL Program approximately \$384,000
 - Future plans call for a full time AmeriCorps team

Environmental Education - Kit Van Wagner, EEL Education Specialist

Kit spoke about Management and Education Centers and Education Outreach:

- The main goal of the environmental education program is to support the EEL Program's environmental education directive and to ensure that the education programs are consistent with the EEL Program's conservation goals
- Focus is to provide a central clearing-house for information and to train teachers how they can use the sites to educate their students
- There are plans for four Management and Education Centers, one within each management region. Each Center will offer a different educational theme related to the ecology and biodiversity within the County and EEL Sanctuary Network. The Centers will also serve as an office for that region's EEL Land Manager.
 - Enchanted Forest Sanctuary in the North region is the flagship sanctuary of the EEL Program. Visitors at the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary have increased from approximately 4,000 per year to 3,000 per month since the Center opened in November 2002. The Universal Design elements included at the Center and in the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary provide an opportunity for persons with disabilities to enjoy natural areas. This Center includes a hands-on exhibit area, two multipurpose classrooms, and a large screened porch in addition to a gift shop and small library run by the Friends of the Enchanted Forest, and office space for on site EEL staff. The education theme is biodiversity and geology.
 - The Barrier Island Ecosystem Center in the South Beaches is in the Architectural and Engineering design phase. Opening is scheduled for fall of 2004. This facility is being constructed on property donated by the Richard King Mellon Foundation. Partners for this facility include the Caribbean Conservation Corporation and Friends of the Archie Carr

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- National Wildlife Refuge. The education theme will focus on the ecosystems of barrier islands and sea turtles.
- Renovations to the Sams' House, located in the Central Region's Pine Island Conservation Area are scheduled for completion in 2004. This Center will focus on the lagoon, salt-water habitats and historic land uses. Partial funding for this project has come from the St. John's River Water Management District and a State Division of Historical Resources grant.
 - A fourth center is planned at the Malabar Scrub Sanctuary in the South Region. This Center will focus on prescribed fire and upland habitats.
 - In addition to the Management and Education Centers, educational outreach is also accomplished using interpretive trail signs and kiosks - many of which are constructed and installed by volunteers, trail tours lead by volunteers - publications and handouts on conservation and EEL Program opportunities, the EEL Program web page and teacher education workshops. The EEL Program staff also works with the community to educate citizens about conservation and the Program's goals.

Anne thanked staff for their presentations.

Ross reminded the group that the original intent of the Referendum provided for the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, development of a management program to protect and maintain those lands, development of an education outreach program and to provide passive recreation opportunities to the public. He affirmed the EEL Program's accomplishments highlighted by the presentations.

Rocky asked if it would be possible for the PC to receive a shorter version of the information that they could pass on to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

Anne stated the members of the PC and SMC would receive a CD of the presentation. A Progress Report will be generated in the near future and will be provided to committees and the BOCC. There may be an opportunity to produce a Public Service Announcement highlighting the EEL Program using this information.

Rocky asked about the possibility of additional AmeriCorps teams working with the EEL Program. Mike explained that next year there are plans to request a full time crew of approximately 12 people once lodging requirements are arranged. It is anticipated that the restoration of the Sams' House in PICA will provide housing for AmeriCorps teams and visiting research scientists.

Regional Planning & Status of EEL Referendum Goals - Ross Hinkle, SMC Chair

Ross presented on the SMC's recommended future plans for the EEL Program. He stated that the EEL Program has been successful in establishing the acquisition process. He indicated the land management program was progressing well and that at this time the SMC, as the science-advisory group, was evaluating the success of the EEL Program's goal of conserving biological diversity. Ross provided examples of how the land cover in Brevard has changed since 1920 and discussed the SMC's plans to identify the

next steps for the EEL Program in order to ensure long-term viability of the conservation areas:

- Loss of critical habitat has resulted in the loss of 50% of the breeding pairs of Scrub-Jays from 1993 to 2002.
- 64 State and/or Federal listed species occur on EEL acquired properties.
- A matrix for connectivity is required to allow for species dispersal between critical pieces of habitat
- There are large areas recognized by the State as critical conservation areas that have not yet been conserved.
- Although there are many tools for land conservation, the primary tool of the EEL Program has been to purchase lands from willing sellers and maintaining those lands for conservation in perpetuity.
- The East Coast Regional Conservation Workshop, organized by the EEL Program, is using three indicator species to develop a regional conservation plan: Florida Scrub-Jay, Eastern Indigo Snake and Florida Black Bear. Many other species benefit from lands used by these indicator species. The Workshop identified critical gaps in conservation landscapes that would provide for connectivity of Brevard County conservation lands to other existing and proposed conservation areas in Central Florida.

Ross stated the long-term goal of the referendum was to preserve biodiversity in perpetuity for Brevard County and told the group that Anne would provide additional information on the funding needs to meet this goal.

Future Opportunities – Anne Birch

Anne spoke regarding the EEL Program's funding needs.

- Future Focus of Acquisition Areas:
 - Lands in existing state projects have not yet been acquired
 - New areas identified by the SMC that form critical connections between conservation areas
 - Together these lands total 74,000 ± acres with a current assessed value of approximately \$104 million dollars
- Funds needed for first time capital land management activities on these lands, such as site security and scrub treatment, is currently estimated at \$4 million dollars
- To date there remains less than \$5 million dollars for land acquisition and first time capital expenses on any new lands purchased.
- One of the reasons the EEL Program has succeeded in receiving matching dollars from the State is because of the matching funds it has been able to offer

Anne discussed possible funding options:

1. Infrastructure Sales Tax

- Description
 - November referendum being considered by the Board of County Commissioners
 - County, School Board, Municipalities each get one third of revenue

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- County's one third is estimated at \$18 million dollars, if collected annually. If bonded, the County estimates a maximum borrowing capacity of \$187 million.
 - The EEL Program has spent an average of \$3.8 million annually on land acquisition. An estimated 20% of the County's one third would be needed for the EEL Program to continue acquisition in a manner consistent with current capital budget spending trends.
 - Possible Pros
 - EEL Program receives needed funding
 - EEL Program continues with land acquisition uninterrupted
 - Possible Cons
 - Land costs will always be increasing
 - Spending flexibility may be reduced if the tax is collected annually due to the set amount available to spend each year. This may limit the ability of the EEL Program to acquire properties which purchase price exceeds the annual funds received.
 - Does not provide for operating dollars. The EEL Program is funded through 2011. Additional funding would be needed for operating expenses when the original referendum tax collection expires.
- 2. EEL Program Referendum
 - Description
 - Extension of the current ad valorem collected under the Beach and Riverfront (B&R) Program referendum with those funds being shifted to the EEL Program
 - Collection of the B&R Program ad valorem tax expires in 2004
 - B&R program currently collects 2085 mill
 - The B&R tax revenue is approximately \$4 million/year
 - Possible Pros
 - EEL Program maintains separate identity
 - No tax increase
 - Provides for operating funds
 - Possible Cons
 - Acquisitions may be stalled if the EEL Program's current funding is expended prior to a referendum
 - Increasing land costs
- 3. Remain Status Quo
 - Description
 - Do not pursue additional funding resources
 - Possible Pros
 - None stated
 - Possible Cons
 - When current funding is exhausted, the EEL Program can no longer purchase land or partner in land purchases with other agencies
 - The EEL Program will not be able to continue the referendum's goal of preserving biological diversity.

DISCUSSION:

Randy Parkinson commented that the EEL Program has been very successful in meeting its original goals but that as new information is gained the SMC has realized that there remain opportunities to advance the conservation goals.

Dave Breininger stated the rate of urbanization has been greater than originally expected and the County may be looking at total build-out far earlier than anticipated.

Randy told the group he felt the EEL Program needed to let citizens know about its successes and that a seamless funding transition was critical.

Anne stated that Broward County residents approved a land acquisition program two years ago that provided for \$400 million dollars, partially to acquire any undeveloped lands in the County because there is so few natural lands remaining in that County.

Sharon stated many people do not understand the idea of total build-out, and that a strong marketing effort would be required to get the word out to the citizens.

Priscilla agreed that many folks who moved from the southern part of the state would be supportive of conservation efforts as they had first hand understanding of total build-out results.

Randy spoke of the original referendum's grass-roots efforts to get the EEL Program approved and stated the same type of effort would be required to gain further support for additional funding.

Ross stated the SMC's responsibilities included reporting on the success of the EEL Program, providing the SMC's collective opinion of where the EEL Program needs to go in order to continue to meet the goals of maintaining biological diversity in perpetuity and providing recommendations on estimated costs to meet these goals.

Kim stated the Land Acquisition Manual indicates the SMC responsibilities also include making scientific and management recommendations for land acquisition and caring for those lands. One of the responsibilities of the PC is to recommend funding sources after considering recommendations by the SMC and EEL staff. She stated that although there were three options, the SMC had stated its support in the Sales Tax option and suggested the PC recommend to the Board that they move forward with the Sales Tax Referendum with the EEL Program included in the referendum package. She stated that she presented the SMC's recommendation to the Board at a recent sales tax workshop that 20% of the County's portion of the sales tax referendum proceeds be allocated to the EEL Program.

Rocky spoke of the importance of a back up plan in the event the sales tax referendum did not move forward.

Sharon spoke of the benefits that would be provided in the event funding dollars could be bonded.

After further discussion, it was determined that the consensus of the group would be to support the inclusion of the EEL Program in the Sales Tax referendum in the event that the Board decided to move forward with the referendum and to provide for a back up plan in the event the referendum did not move forward.

It was suggested that it would be appropriate for the SMC and PC to have their next joint meeting as soon as possible after the BOCC Referendum workshop in July.

NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next joint meeting of the SMC/PC will be determined after the BOCC Referendum Workshop in July.

ADJOURNED:

The meeting was adjourned at 4:20 PM.

SUMMARY OF MEETING MOTIONS:

- Motion One approved Rocky Randels as Committee Chair.
- Motion Two approved Priscilla Griffith as Committee Vice Chair