

ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS PROGRAM
Malabar Scrub Sanctuary
Public Access Plan Review Public Meeting
January 31, 2006
Minutes

CALL TO ORDER:

Brad Manley, EEL Program Public Access Coordinator, called the meeting to order at 8:06 PM. He introduced Chris O'Hara, South Region Land Manager, and Laura Clark, Administrative Secretary. He thanked the Marine Resources Council for making the room available for a public meeting. Brad explained that the purpose of this meeting was for EEL staff to present the Draft Public Access Plan for the Malabar Scrub Sanctuary, so that the public could provide input to be considered by staff in developing the Plan.

PRESENTATION:

Chris O'Hara gave a 25-slide PowerPoint presentation describing the Malabar Scrub Sanctuary, the EEL Program's Mission, proposed restoration work, and the proposed Public Access Plan. The presentation included maps, photos and site plans.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Dave White spoke of his support for dedicated trails and requested the addition of more dedicated bike trails. He indicated his feeling that horses and hikers could successfully use a trail together, and that hikers and mountain bikers could successfully use the same trail, but that horses and bikes on the same trail can be problematic.

Murray Hann gave a PowerPoint presentation and indicated several additional trails that he would like to see made available for mountain bikers and he urged the EEL Program to put restoration and preservation on equal footing with passive recreation. He expressed concern that the plan for the property in the southwestern portion of the Sanctuary did not include plans for any trails. He also asked that trails not be used as fire breaks.

Ben Elliott spoke of his support for the Program. He indicated his feeling that there was a lot of potential for additional trails and voiced his support for the creation of as many trails as possible. He indicated his feeling that horse trails and mountain bike trails were best kept separate. Mr. Elliott also indicated he had questions regarding the benefit of controlled burns.

Ginger Twigg expressed her feeling that different types trails should be created for passive, recreational off road bikers, and serious off road riders. She also indicated her preference that horse trails and mountain bike trails be kept separate.

Mike Gordon voiced his support for the addition of mountain bike trails and expressed his preference that the trails should be kept shaded and overgrown. He suggested research the Spruce Creek Trail System in Daytona Beach where he understands they have successfully placed a large number of multi-use trails in a small area.

Sue Hann requested clarification of: the process for closing trails; who makes the decisions to close trails; when the trails were closed before improvements or restoration efforts; what the different categories assigned to sanctuaries stood for; and why there were plans for so many trees to be cleared.

Ms. Hann also spoke of her concerns that: in her opinion trails on the eastern property were no longer suitable for mountain bikers due to the amount of sugar sand; the clearing of additional trees might leave some trails sandy and degraded; and regarding the quality of work done previously by contractors within the Sanctuary. She requested that future meeting dates be published so citizens could be involved in the decision making process.

Chris Howard spoke of his support for the opportunities that exist for families to use the trails together and indicated his biggest concern was related to multi-use trails. He suggested a possible east-west division of trails for different user groups.

Andrea Gimon said she made a trip from Indialantic every day as there were only two places left to ride in Brevard County. She thanked Brad and Chris for making themselves available and being responsive. She indicated she did not understand how removing trees and restoring sand and palm bushes supported the EEL Program's goal of conserving wildlife and asked for clarification. Ms. Gimon stated there appeared to be an imbalance between multi-use trails and mountain bike only trails and spoke of her support for the creation of additional non-horse trails where possible.

Paul Graves expressed his concern that the map which was presented might not indicate all of the trails that were in use, as well as his desire to see as many bike trails as possible protected.

Rob Jarrell stated he had been riding the trails for about 10 years and had been involved in creating many of them. He indicated his feeling that horse trails and mountain bike trails should be kept separate and expressed his feeling that some multi-use trails were no longer usable by mountain bikers. He said he did not understand the reasons behind the removal of trees, or controlled burns, and suggested posting notices on all sanctuary entrance points in anticipation of controlled burns.

Andrea Gimon spoke of her concerns regarding possible safety issues in multi-use trails.

Brad asked if anyone else wanted to provide public comment. No one requested to come to the microphone.

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

General discussion ensued regarding citizen's preferences for the proposed Public Access Plan including:

- It was the opinion of some of the group that horses do more damage to trails than mountain bikes.
- It was suggested that the EEL Program open the area that is planned for future restoration to mountain bike trails until the restoration begins.
- It was suggested that trails be rated to indicate appropriate use or level of expertise required.
- Benefits of mountain bike riding were discussed.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the 10 year review schedule for management plans.

- Clarification was provided that amendments to plans can be submitted if deemed appropriate by staff, the Recreational and Education Committee (REAC), and the Selection and Management Committee (SMC).
- Clarification was provided that some of the existing trails were not on the proposed trail map as EEL could not endorse a trail when the access point was on private property.
- Clarification was provided that efforts have been made to ensure that each trail is used by the appropriate user group, but that this is difficult to control.
- Clarification was provided that concrete was installed at Malabar East to provide additional access to the area for people with limited mobility, and families using strollers or roller blades.
- Clarification was provided regarding the Category Ratings used for each sanctuary.
- Clarification was provided that EEL staff provides draft recreation plans, including determination of trails that should be opened or closed, to the public, and REAC, before providing the Public Access Plan to the SMC for review as part of the Management Plan for the site. Temporary closings may be initiated by staff and Risk Management as deemed appropriate for safety reasons.
- Clarification was provided that there are no plans to use trails as fire breaks.
- Clarification was provided that the unauthorized clearing of trails on private or public property constitutes illegal activity.
- Clarification was provided that the Mission Statement of the EEL Program, which was approved by Brevard County voter's referendums during 1990 and 2004, is protection and preservation of biological diversity through responsible stewardship of the County's Natural Resources. There are plans for some of the areas in the South part of the County to be managed for Red Cockaded Woodpecker and Florida Scrub Jays. These species can not thrive in overgrown areas and require a more open landscape, which was previously provided by frequent natural fires caused by lightening. Fire suppression has caused some of these landscapes to change from their previous habitats into thick forests with heavy undergrowth. These changes have impacted the plants and animals that have historically lived in the areas. Restoration efforts, including controlled burns, are planned to restore some areas to their previous natural state in the hope that the plants and animals that used to thrive there will return.

The Malabar Scrub Sanctuary Draft Public Access plan will also be presented to the REAC on February 9, 2006.

ADJOURNED:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 PM.