

**ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM
RECREATION AND EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
February 12, 2009
Attendance List**

RECREATION AND EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Bob Champaigne
Jim Durocher
Murray Hann
Mark Nathan
Bruce Wechsler

SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Barbara Meyer, Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization
Paul Schmalzer, Selection and Management Committee

EEL PROGRAM STAFF

Laura Clark
Brad Manley
Mike Knight

GUESTS

Kenneth Leggins, Citizen
David Isnardi, District 3 Commission Office

ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS PROGRAM RECREATION AND EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

February 12, 2009

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER:

Murray Hann, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM.

Public Comment

Kenneth Leggins, citizen, asked if information would be provided during the meeting related to types of outdoor recreational uses like hunting, motorcycle riding and camping.

Mike Knight, EEL Program Manager confirmed that this would be covered in his presentation and explained there would be additional opportunities for discussion and questions on those topics later in the meeting.

Additional Discussion

Murray welcomed Bruce Wechsler as the newest member of the REAC Committee. He suggested that each of the members provide a brief overview of their history and reasons they joined the Committee.

Bob Champaigne stated that he had been a teacher for 38 years and that he had a strong interest in environmental education.

Murray Hann stated that he was a mountain bike enthusiast; that he lived in Malabar near EEL Program lands, and that he was interested in many possible uses of EEL Program sites.

Bruce Wechsler stated he was a long time hunter and fisherman, as well as an organic gardener and that he considered himself a conservationist. He added that he had spent 5 years in the Soviet Union and had seen the effects of government owning property, so he was highly suspicious of it. He stated that he felt it was the responsibility of the taxpayers of Brevard County to make sure that this land was not preserved in a way that made it unavailable for citizen use and that he felt there were situations where property was locked up and not accessible. He added that he is hoping that EEL Program property will become accessible for all kinds of recreation.

Jim Durocher said that he was very interested in kayaking, hiking, and off road biking. He stated that the reason he was part of the REAC Committee was because of the Program's Mission Statement, which focuses on preservation of ecological value. He added that EEL Program Sanctuaries are not meant to be recreation parks, and while there were some places where public access might be established or increased once restoration and management goals are reached, the land was purchased to preserve and protect ecological value and species diversity.

Paul Schmalzer stated that he is a Plant Ecologist at KSC and that he attends the REAC

meetings as a representative from the EEL Program's Selection and Management Committee.

Mark Nathan stated that he was an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys running, biking, and kayaking, among other activities. He stated he agreed with Jim Durocher and that EEL Program land is set aside to preserve plant and animal species, as well as water reclamation. He stated that because of that, any impact or footprint that people leave on the sites should be as small as possible and that it was important to remember that conservation came first.

Public Comment and Additional Discussion

Kenneth Leggins stated that he previously used his boat off Hall Road in Merritt Island, but signs had been posted recently that indicated motorized vehicles were no longer authorized in the area, and he asked for clarification on the reason behind this change.

Mike explained that he would have staff research this topic and contact Kenneth with additional information.

Bruce Wechsler stated that it was his understanding that the EEL Program Referendums contained ballot language that stated the land would be available for use.

Kenneth Leggins said that a long time ago, there was a lot of hunting in Brevard County.

Bruce Wechsler stated that the March 8, 2005 Board of County Commissioners Resolution which formed the REAC Committee stated members should *"have interest and/or experience in public access and recreation uses such as hiking, nature observation, photography, primitive camping, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, bicycling, wildlife observation, canoeing, kayaking, eco-tourism, and environmental education"*, and that it didn't make any sense to have people with those interests if you're not considering them as a possible activity.

Mike clarified that his presentation would provide additional information on that topic.

Barbara Meyer stated that she attends the REAC meetings as a representative of the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization (formerly Metropolitan Planning Organization) and that she has been working on plans for a paved trail through Brevard County that would provide for transportation as well as recreational opportunities.

MINUTES:

The November 12, 2008 minutes were presented for approval.

Murray asked for comments to the November minutes.

MOTION ONE

Bob Champaigne moved to approve the November 12, 2008 minutes as presented.

Mark Nathan seconded the motion.

The motion carried unanimously.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW:

Mike Knight, EEL Program Manager, provided an overview of the history of the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program including:

- EEL Program formed, and then extended, by public approval of two voter approved referendums
 - 1990 Public Referendum up to \$55 million in bonds
 - 2004 Public Referendum up to \$60 million in bonds
- 25 Counties in Florida have conservation land acquisition programs
- EEL Program Mission: *“Protect and Preserve Biodiversity through Responsible Stewardship of Brevard County’s Natural Resources.”*
- Brevard County is located between the Temperate and Subtropical zones which results in over 20 different natural habitats.
 - Approximately 65 Endangered or Threatened Plant and Animal Species in Brevard
- Land areas become fragmented with development, which effects species ability to sustain viable populations.
 - Corridors between conservation lands become critical so that the areas can remain population “sources” instead of “sinks”.
- Willing Seller Program:
 - Land can only be purchased from people who want to sell their land.
 - EEL Program does not control or restrict private land rights, or condemn land.
- Science Based Acquisition Plan
 - Original 1989 referendum failed.
 - 1990 referendum included addition of Science Committee to determine which lands would be acquired, with the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) having final authority to purchase, or decline acquisition. 1990 referendum passed.
 - The BOCC approved Land Acquisition Manual and Sanctuary Management Manual are the Program’s guiding documents.
- Nearly 23,000 acres in conservation
 - Includes partnership funding acquisitions.
- Land Management
 - County divided into 4 regions for management purposes
 - Florida has historically had a significant amount of lightning
 - Fire exclusion has resulted in very overgrown habitats which require management to become suitable for native species
 - Management tools
 - Prescribed Fire
 - Maintains the health of certain habitats and their species
 - Controlled burns lessen the danger of wildfires.
 - Mother’s Day Wildfires in the south part of the County stopped at EEL Program sites which had recently received control burns.
 - Landscapes which have been burned come back very quickly.
 - Control of invasive, exotic plant and animal species
 - Planting of native vegetation
 - Hydrological Restoration
 - Trash Removal – tremendous volunteer effort in sanctuary clean ups.

- Many EEL Program sites have been used as illegal dumping areas. This makes site security very important.
- Public Access
 - The EEL Program provides access to the sanctuary network through passive recreation activities.
 - Passive Recreation, as defined in the Sanctuary Management Manual is defined as: *“a recreational type of use, level of use, and combinations of uses, that do not individually, or collectively degrade the resource values, biological diversity, and aesthetic or environmental qualities of a site”*.
 - Currently 12 EEL Program sanctuaries are open to the public
 - Universal Access
 - Category I – Center for Regional Management
 - Category II – Intermediate Use
 - Category III – Primary Conservation and Research Area
 - Management and Education Centers
 - Enchanted Forest Sanctuary
 - Opened in 2002
 - Barrier Island Center
 - Opened May 2008
 - Sams House at Pine Island Conservation Area
 - Restoration underway
 - Fossil find from the Ice Age will be part of the exhibit
 - There are plans for a Center in the South Region at some time in the future.
 - Under consideration due to budget cuts.
 - Trails
 - During the public access planning process, existing trails are used as often as possible to avoid additional reduction of habitat.
- Conservation Lands Need You
 - Many ways to volunteer
 - Trash Clean Ups
 - Research Assistance
 - Hike Guides
 - School Programs

Public Comment and Additional Discussion

Mike Knight provided information on attempts to control feral hogs on some sites.

Kenneth Leggins stated he would be willing to consider paying an annual fee for hunting the hogs. He also expressed a desire to drive ATVs on EEL Program Sanctuaries and stated that he knew that some ATV activity was reckless, but stated his feeling that all ATVs should not have to suffer for the few reckless ones.

Clarification was provided that ATVs are not considered an acceptable use of EEL Program sanctuaries because of the damage they cause to the habitats.

EEL Program Recreation and Education Advisory Committee Meeting

February 12, 2009

Page 4 of 7

Approved May 14, 2009

Clarification was provided that many sanctuaries have a large urban interface which is not compatible with hunting.

Consideration of bow hunting in urbanized areas was suggested.

Clarification was provided that the EEL Program is covered under a Parks & Recreation policy which does not allow guns on properties.

Clarification was provided that the EEL Program uses adaptive management planning and that it may be possible that some time in the future, hunting might be considered as a management tool, as part of the Management Plan, if wildlife populations become too large, but that is not the case at any sanctuary at this time.

Clarification was provided that hunting is allowed at several locations within Brevard County, including Buck Lake Conservation Area, (for which the EEL Program provided a portion of the partnership funding), Salt Lake Wildlife Management Area, and the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Clarification was provided that hunting was previously allowed on an experimental basis, at the EEL Program's Pine Island Conservation Area (PICA), as that was a historical use of the area, but that due to habitat changes in other parts of the County, the numbers of ducks at PICA declined, interest in the hunting program dropped off, and it eventually became too expensive to pursue.

Bruce Wechsler requested clarification of funding available for land management.

Clarification was provided that bonded funds can be used for first time capital improvements, like first time fencing, or first time treatment for exotics, but that recurring land management expense, and general operating expenses come from the excess ad valorem tax that is not needed to repay the bond debt. Clarification was also provided that the 2004 referendum ad valorem taxes will be collected for 20 years from the date of the referendum. After that time, additional funding will need to be established, perhaps through a referendum which would be much smaller than the previous two, because funding would only be needed for management instead of acquisition.

Clarification was provided that when new properties are acquired, they are fenced to establish boundaries and provide site security. Sometimes trails are blocked off, as when they connect to private property, because the EEL Program can not encourage the use of trails which run through private property. Most sites include trailheads; now or in design plans, and efforts are made to provide public access at locations which do not interfere with private property locations.

Clarification was provided that in accordance with the EEL Program's passive recreation guidelines, visitors are requested to stay on established trails.

Murray Hann stated that as a south Brevard County resident, he had a new understanding of, and appreciation for, the benefits of prescribed fire after the Mother's Day wildfires last year.

AGENDA ITEMS:
Capron Ridge Sanctuary Public Access Plan

Brad Manley, EEL Program Public Access Coordinator provided information on the proposed Public Access Plan for the Capron Ridge Sanctuary in Viera including:

- This site was accepted as a mitigation donation for the Capron Ridge subdivision in Melbourne.
- It is made up of two parcels (17± and 5± acres) totaling 22 ± acres.
- A site this small would not normally be considered for acquisition, but the property is adjacent to the southern end of the Viera CDD Conservation Easement in Rockledge, and it is an active Florida Scrub-Jay territory.
- Additional listed species on this site include Gopher tortoises, Scrub lizards, plus nodding pinweed and large flowered rosemary.
- Management Plans
 - Property is currently scrub habitat and will be managed as scrub which includes the application of Prescribed Fire
 - The northern portion was burned in October 2006
 - Removal of invasive exotic plants
 - Removal of trash from construction activity
- Public Access Plans
 - ½ mile hiking trail
 - Information kiosk
 - Minimal trail signage
 - No parking
- A Public Stakeholder Meeting was held on February 4, 2009. Citizens in attendance expressed their support for the public access plan as presented by staff.

Additional Discussion:

- This sanctuary provides a great educational opportunity for citizens.
- Consideration will be given to adding additional information on the Florida Scrub-Jay in the informational kiosk.
- The Cruickshank Sanctuary, which is approximately 140 acres, and is located to the north of the Viera CDD Conservation Easement, has expanded opportunities for passive recreation. Florida Scrub-Jays, historically present in the general area, have returned to the Cruickshank Sanctuary, after management efforts were recently completed.
- Because the Capron Ridge Sanctuary is part of the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program, it is considered to be public land.
- It is anticipated that most of the visitors to this site will be from the adjacent neighborhood.

MOTION TWO

Jim Durocher moved to support the proposed Capron Ridge Sanctuary Public Access Plan as presented by staff.

EEL Program Recreation and Education Advisory Committee Meeting

February 12, 2009

Page 6 of 7

Approved May 14, 2009

**Mark Nathan seconded the motion.
The motion carried unanimously.**

REAC Field Trips

Consideration was given to visiting the recently acquired Scottsmoor Sanctuary property in the North Region. Staff will work with REAC members to schedule a date for this field trip. A target date of the end of March or the beginning of April was discussed.

NEXT MEETING

The next REAC meeting will be held on May 14, 2009. Location to be determined.

ADJOURNED:

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 PM.

SUMMARY OF MEETING MOTIONS:

- Motion to approve the November 12, 2009 minutes as presented.
- Motion to support the Capron Ridge Sanctuary proposed Public Access Plan as presented by staff.