



Caracara Prairie Preserve

Management Update 2024



Background

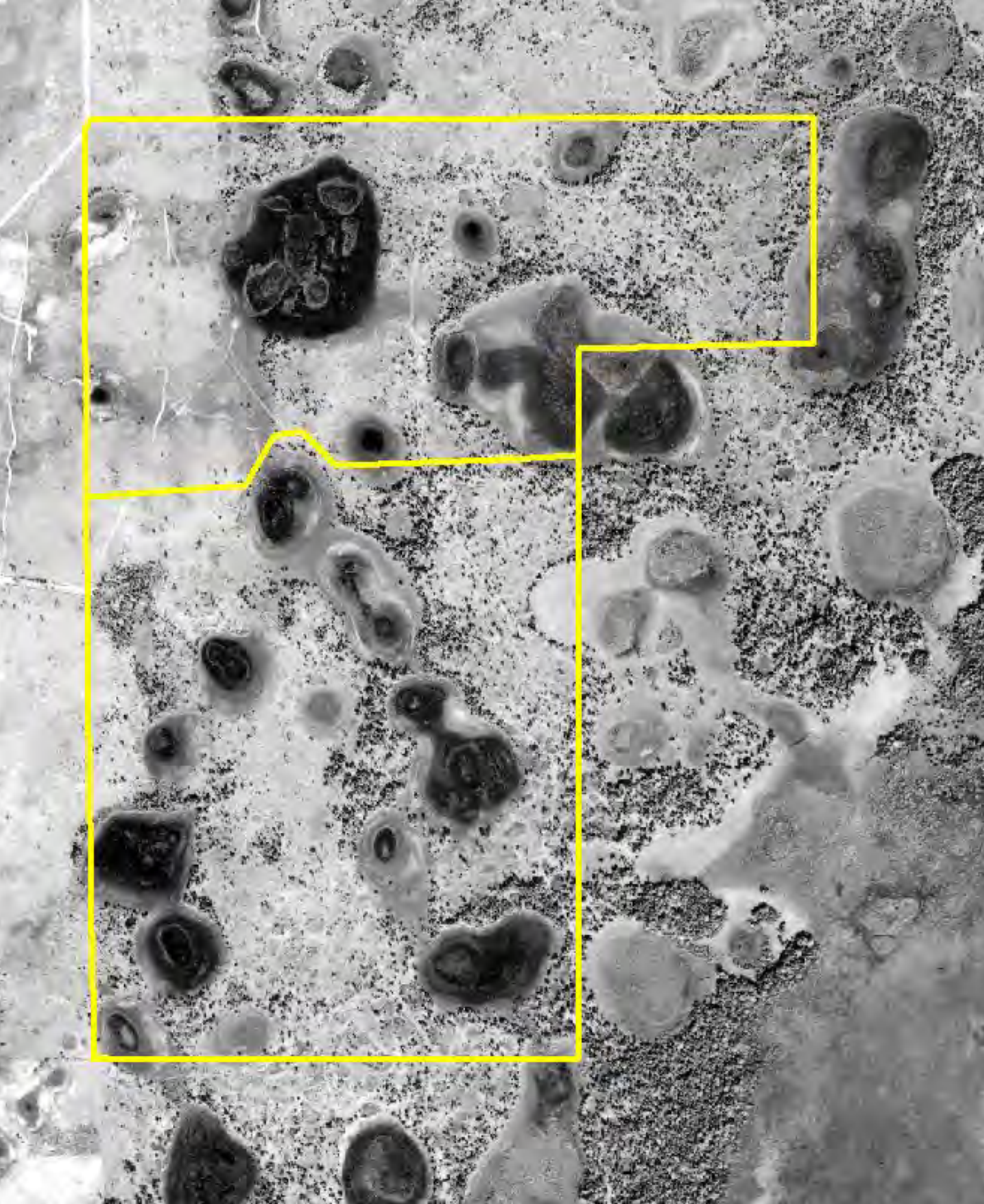
Caracara Prairie Preserve- 368 acres in Immokalee, FL

- cattle grazing records from the 1940s
- row cropping in the 1960s
- significant alterations to site hydrology and plant communities for decades
- acquired by Conservation Collier in 2007
- Panther Habitat Conservation Bank

-Development and land use pressure along Corkscrew Rd corridor intensifying

- New grassland species occurring at preserve in higher densities from loss of adjacent habitat over past 5 years
- Kingston Ranch- 6700 acres/10,000 homes adjacent to Caracara Prairie Preserve

Providing quality habitat for wildlife more important than ever in this area





Cattle Ranching

Cattle have been grazed on the site since 2007 via lease agreement

- Previous lessee: 120+ AU per 200 acres pasture, no revenue, one annual mowing service
- Current lessee: 35 AU, \$7875.35 revenue, annual mowing service

Feasibility: Lessees run cattle companies and need to be able to make a profit on beef and stock at a higher rate than is compatible for smaller sites like Caracara Prairie to make the venture profitable and worthwhile for the annual investment/input to get calves to auction.

When applied at appropriate intensity and duration for a site, cattle grazing is highly effective for achieving management goals of large grassland sites and compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation.

Current Management Concerns/Compatibility at Caracara Prairie Preserve



Despite 70% reduction of AU in latest lease, pastures are overgrazed—support less wildlife/plant species than they should= loss of valuable acreage

Intensive grazing in wetlands reduces listed species nesting success and reduces wetland habitat quality

Cattle spread of nuisance/exotic vegetation challenging exotics control and increases management costs

Overgrazed understory impacts successful application of prescribed fire across landscape— multiple burns unable to achieve objectives

Public access trail impacts from cattle fencing & cow pats along walking paths

Upcoming Management Approach

Existing 5 year cattle lease expires in March 2024

- staff recommending against renewal for a trial period of 2-5 years
 - provide opportunity for historically overgrazed habitat to recover
 - provide opportunity for exotics control without extensive seed source spread
 - monitor for improvements in nesting success for imperiled sandhill crane
 - rotational mowing of pastures 1-2x per year during recommended seasons to support ground nesting species and maintain grassland features
 - fuel reduction and continued habitat management through prescribed burns
 - investigate opportunities for native ground cover restoration to support wildlife and plant diversity
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- Condition assessment and review within 2 years to determine future need for reintroduction of grazing
 - Staff recommend if grazing is considered for subsequent leasing in the future, no more than 5-8 cattle be utilized on the site per the acreage requiring management.



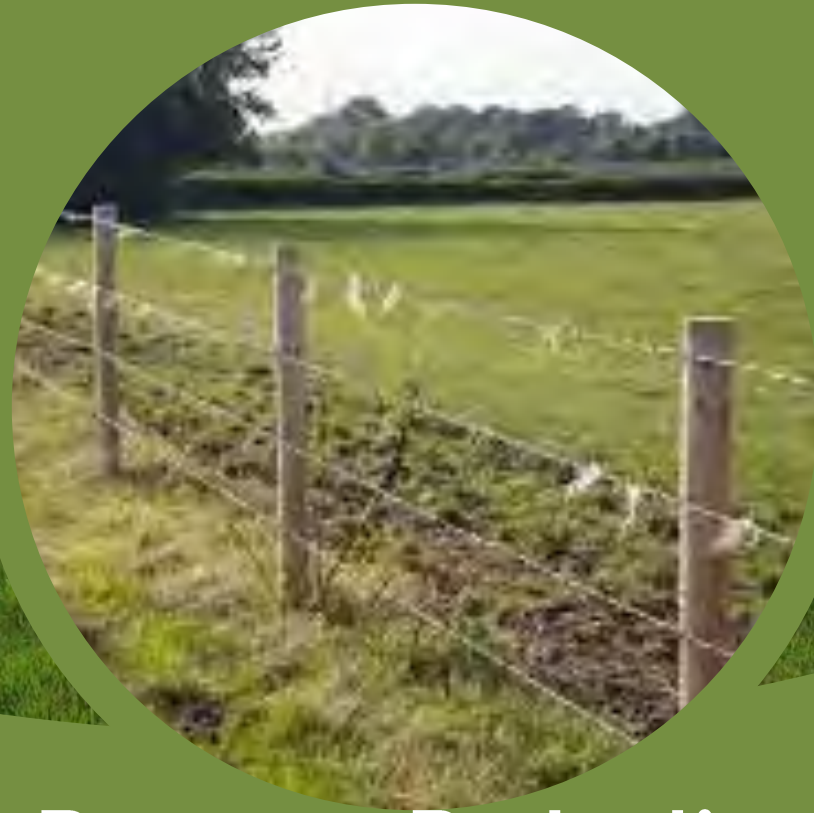
Anticipated Fiscal Impact



In-House Mowing

\$1200 annually

- opportunity to apply mowing during season to benefit wildlife management goals of preserve
- opportunity to apply for funding assistance through wild turkey program to cover costs



Revenue Reduction

- Reduction of \$7875.35 annually for cattle lease
Consideration: 75% of revenue collected throughout duration of lease was spent maintaining infrastructure to support compatibility of site with cattle lease
Fencing: \$20,487
Fence crossings for public visitors/repairs: \$3000



Exotic Control Cost Reduction

- Anticipated reduction in exotics control cost and density overtime and improved capacity to remove exotics from site and restore native habitat

