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# INTRODUCTION

## Responsibilities

The Conservation Collier Program (Program) is responsible for implementing the mandate of the electorate of Collier County as provided by public referendum vote in November 2002, and again in November 2006 confirming that mandate, to levy a 0.25 mill ad valorem property tax for a period not to exceed 10 years for acquisition. Once acquired, protection, restoration, and management of environmentally sensitive lands in Collier County continues in perpetuity for the benefit of present and future generations. Most recently, on November 3, 2020, the electorate voted to implement another 10-year ad valorem tax not-to-exceed 0.25 mill. The implementation of this ad valorem tax started in FY22 (October 2021).

## History of Acquisition & Lands Inventory

After the passing of the **referendum in 2002**, the initial acquisition phase occurred from 2004 to 2011. During that time, 4,055 acres were acquired. In 2011 available funds were appropriated into the maintenance trust fund as the program moved into a preserve management phase, including opening the preserves for public access and managing and hosting visitors. Therefore, **between 2011 and 2020 there was not a regular funding source for acquisition of conservation land.**

The Program remained in a management phase until 2017 when the Board authorized the use of management funds for the acquisition of more land. In 2018 and 2019, three (3) properties totaling 237 acres were purchased for \$3.1 million. These funds were subsequently paid back to the management fund in FY22 after the initial funds from the 2020 referendum were received.

Since the re-establishment of the funding source for acquisition after the **referendum in 2020**, an additional 520 acres have been acquired for a total of 4,870 acres (as of December 2023). Thirteen (13) Conservation Collier preserves are currently open for public use with various amenities for public passive recreational use.

## Program Costs FY23

Program expenses for FY23 totaled \$6,326,320 including land management costs for all preserves of \$1,177,351, program administration and acquisition operations costs of \$226,775 and \$4,922,195 for land acquisition. In addition, FY23 funding assistance, in the amount of

\$106,645, was received for land management. The increase in budget was due to the acquisition of new preserves and the initial costs for exotic vegetation removal.

## Public Activities

Public activities at preserves during FY23 included adult and youth hunts, hiking, camping, biking, horseback riding, volunteering, guided hikes, and presentations.

## Looking Ahead

Staff is working on initial removal of exotic vegetation removal, restoration, and installation of amenities for recently acquired properties. Staff have also been working with an engineering consultant to obtain permits to build a parking lot for the Rattlesnake Hammock Preserve acquired in August 2020. Opening of this preserve is dependent on initial removal of exotic vegetation, permitting, and trail and parking lot installation.

The FY23 budget included a Conservation Collier Program tax levy of .25 mil that generated approximately \$30,577,600 for acquisition and management.

Please accept this report on the activities of Conservation Collier calendar year 2023.

## Conservation Collier Program Milestones

### REFERENDUMS

- Approved in 2002 referendum by 60% of voters.
- Affirmed in 2006 referendum by 82% of voters.
- Approved in 2020 referendum by 77% of voters.

### REFERNDUM TAX COLLECTION

- 2004 – 2013: Ad valorem tax of 0.25 mills collected 2004-2013.
- 2021 - Ad valorem tax of up to 0.25 mills collection started in tax year 2021 for 10 years.

### ACQUISITION PHASES

- 2004 – 2011: Acquired 21 different preserves for a total of 4,055 acres.
- 2011 – 2022: No funding source; acquired with borrowed maintenance funds & off-site preserve donations
- 2022 – ongoing: Acquired 622 acres and counting

### ACQUISITION CYCLES

- February 2021: Acquisition Cycle 10 started accepting applications February 2021 for ranking January 2022 by BCC
- January 2022: Acquisition Cycle 11 started accepting applications
- April 2022: BCC requested "acquisition acceleration" – moved to ranking properties twice per year

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The primary purpose of the CCLAAC, as defined by the Conservation Collier Ordinance, has been to assist the Board in establishing an Active Properties Acquisition List with qualified purchase recommendations consistent with the goals of Conservation Collier. This is a 9-member committee. Membership of the CCLAAC is intended to be comprised of broad and balanced representation of the interests of Collier County citizens, including:

- Environmental, land management, and conservation interests
- Agricultural and business interests
- Educational interests
- General civic and citizen interests throughout the county.

Members serving as of during 2023, and their backgrounds and areas of expertise are:

**Michele Lenhard** - Vice Chair now Chair as of January 2023 (Educational/General Civic/Ecology/Conservation) Ms. Lenhard was reappointed on February 23, 2022, for a 3-year term. Ms. Lenhard relocated to Collier County 9 years ago from Ridgewood, NJ. She currently serves as the Naturalist Program Chair for the Friends of Barefoot Beach having completed the Florida Master Naturalist Program training. While living in New Jersey she served on the local Board of Education for many years. During her tenure on the Board, she was the liaison to several State educational initiatives and achieved certification as a Master Board Member from New Jersey School Boards. She and her husband owned and operated a records and information management company as well as several commercial real estate entities in New Jersey. Michele's educational background is in environmental science. Early in her career she worked in the scientific instrument industry.



**William Poteet, Jr.** - Chairman through January 2023 (Business Interest) Re-appointed for a sixth term in February 2020, Mr. Poteet is a local realtor and business owner who has been a member of the CCLAAC since its inception in March 2003. He has served as Chairman of the CCLAAC since August 2005 with unanimous re-election as Chair each year. He also served as a member of the Outreach Subcommittee and as Chairman of the Ordinance, Policy, and Rules Subcommittee during active acquisition phases. He currently serves as the Chair of the Lands Evaluation and Management Subcommittee. Mr.



Poteet is an outstanding leader, assisting with the development of many program policies. Bill concluded his 20 years of service with his last meeting on February 1, 2023. We thank Bill for his contributions!

**Gary Bromley** - (General Civic/Citizen) Mr. Bromley was reappointed on **January 23, 2024**, for a 3-year term. Mr. Bromley has lived in Collier County for **5** years, originally from Westchester, NY, where he served as an environmental educator. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in social science work and is currently retired. This is Mr. Bromley's first time serving on a county board, but he is a member of the League of Women voters where he participates on the Environmental and Government Committees. He has also participated in efforts to place constitutional amendments on voter ballots and has participated with the Stone crab Alliance on environmental issues.



**Brittany Patterson-Weber** - (Environmental/Conservation/Education) Ms. Patterson-Weber was reappointed on February 11, 2021, for a 3-year term. She is currently the Vice President of Education & Interpretation at Naples Botanical Garden, and a member of the Garden's executive team. She has spent the last **21** years in Florida and the Caribbean working in environmental education as both an educator and program/center Director at the Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium (Ft. Myers), Pigeon Key Marine Science Foundation (Marathon), South Seas Island Resort (Captive), and Ambassadors of the Environment by Jean-Michel Cousteau at the Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman. She also has done graduate work in Agricultural Extension Education. She has collaborated closely with professional partners like Collier County Public Schools, Collier County Pollution Control, and Rookery Bay's Coastal Training Program to educate both adults and children about living in Southwest Florida's environment.



**Karyn Allman** - (Environmental & Conservation/Ecology/Land Management) Ms. Allman was **reappointed on January 23, 2024**, for a 3-year term. Karyn is a Biologist/Ecologist who has lived in Collier County for over **16** years. She has a master's degree in Conservation Biology from the University of Kent Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology. Karyn grew up in Maine and spent her life exploring the outdoors as a part of her professional and personal life. She is a Professional Wetland Scientist (PWS), and recently worked as a Land Manager for Lee County Parks and Recreation Conservation 2020 program for almost 5 years. Currently, Karyn is a lead Scientist for the South Florida Water Management District, helping to restore over 6,000 acres of citrus groves in Hendry County into wetlands.





**Rhys Watkins** - (Conservation/Real Estate) Mr. Watkins was appointed on June 14, 2023, for a 3-year term. Rhys was born and raised in Collier County where he spent time learning about the natural beauty of Collier County through exploring the Big Cypress Preserve and the Ten Thousand Islands. His first involvement with Conservation Collier came as a volunteer while in middle school for the original campaign to pass the referendum in 2002. Rhys currently works in real estate and investments

in Naples and has prior experience in the hospitality industry in Naples and the defense industry in Washington, D.C. Rhys has a master's degree in business administration and a bachelor's degree in mathematics.



**Ron Clark** - (Environmental/Conservation/Ecology/Land Management) Mr. Clark was appointed on February 23, 2022, for a 3-year term. Ron has a Bachelor of Science in Resource Management and is a retired Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources for Big Cypress National Preserve following a 44-year career with the National Park Service that included assignments in ten national park units throughout the country. Ron arrived in south Florida in 1989 as an Environmental Specialist and in 1995 assumed the role as

Principal Advisor and Supervisor of the team of scientists and technicians of the Preserve's Natural and Cultural Resource Management programs. Ron has also served on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Florida Panther Recovery Team, is a past Chair of the National Park Service Southeast Regional Natural Resource Advisory Committee and volunteered in a six-year program as a Senior Technical Advisor for the U.S. Agency for International Development to protect orangutans and hawksbill sea turtles on the island of Borneo, Indonesia. Currently, Ron is the Lands Evaluation & Management Subcommittee Chair for the Land Acquisition Advisory Committee.



**John Courtright** - (General Civic/Conservation/Environmental) Mr. Courtright was appointed on September 13, 2022, for a 3-year term. John retired November 2009 from Miami-Dade Fire & Rescue Department. He worked for 30 years as a Fire Fighter/Paramedic. John volunteers with Big Cypress National Preserve, CREW Trust, Paddle Florida, Conservation Collier, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, UF-IFAS and Collier County. John has been a resident of Collier County since 1986.

# PROGRAM LANDS ACQUISITION STATUS

The FY23 budget included a Conservation Collier Program tax levy of .25 mil that generated approximately \$30,577,600. Consistent with Ordinance 2002-63 as amended, twenty-five (25) percent of annual gross tax receipts were deposited into the Conservation Collier Management Trust Fund to provide for long-term management of lands managed by the Conservation Collier Program. The balance of tax receipts was deposited into the Conservation Collier Acquisition Trust Fund for use in acquiring environmentally sensitive lands. Including rollover funds \$33,219,600 was allocated for Acquisition in FY23.

## Acquisition Cycle Process:

The Active Acquisition Lists (AAL) for each Cycle were previously taken to the Board on an annual basis for ranking for Cycles one (1) through ten (10). In April 2022 the Board asked staff to accelerate acquisition which resulted in the AAL being taken to the Board two times a year. Once the Board approves an AAL, by Ordinance staff obtains appraisals and perform due diligence for the A-list properties on the AAL.

## Status of Acquisition Cycles

Below is the status of each acquisition cycle as of January 2024 since the passing of the referendum in 2020:

Acquisition Cycle	Cycle opened	Approved by the Board	# of properties acquired)	# of properties scheduled	Acreage	Total spent/scheduled	Status
Cycle 10	February 2021	January 25, 2022	48		456	\$5,395,650	Acquisitions complete
Cycle 11A	January 2022	December 13, 2022	16		41	\$5,578,800	Acquisitions complete
Cycle 11B		February 28, 2023	9	2	200	\$3,324,725	includes 81 acres pending acquisition 17 properties scheduled BCC, 6 offers accepted
Cycle 12A	January 2023	October 10, 2023	1	24	232	\$8,714,854	
Cycle 12B		pending June 25, 2024		21	843	\$12,768,504	pending Board ranking 2024
Cycle 13 (2024)	January 2024	May 28, 2024		1	1,410	\$11,980,000	Williams Farms in due diligence phase
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>73</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>3,182</b>	<b>\$47,762,533</b>	

There was a considerable response from sellers starting with Cycle 10 as this was the first time target letters were sent county-wide (with the exception of two multi-parcel project areas) since 2010. Cycle 12A target letters were delayed in sending from February to October 2023 due to a backlog in closings from Cycle 10. This delay resulted in less applications for Cycle 12A than

previous cycles. Now that Cycles have moved from once to twice a year, there are less applications in each Cycle which will help with distribution of workload on closings. Moving forward, a concept of Cycle rankings more often than twice a year is being considered and would help expedite acquisition.

#### Multi-Parcel Project Areas:

It is important to note that the concept of multi-Parcel project areas is a way to accelerate acquisition of parcels within a defined project boundary. Because properties are already on the A-list, this staff is able to send offer letters annually. Therefore, these properties are essentially “pre-approved” and can skip the Cycle process since they have already been ranked on the A-list. There are currently four (4) multi-parcel project areas.

The Red Maple Swamp and Winchester Head were established in 2004 and 2005.

- Red Maple Swamp - 245 acres (80%) of the project area of 305.8 acres has been acquired
- Winchester Head - 109 acres (69%) of the project area of 158.4 acres has been acquired

The most recent multi-parcel project areas established in February 2023 after Board approval are Panther Walk preserve and Dr. Robert H. Gore III preserve. These are both expansions of existing preserve areas.

- Panther Walk - 55.74 acres (13%) of 438 acres has been acquired
- Dr. Robert H. Gore III - 215.44 acres (36%) of 598 acres has been acquired

The current status of all Conservation Collier acquisitions since Cycle 10 is on the Conservation Collier website here: [Acquisition Status Report \(colliercountyfl.gov\)](https://www.colliercountyfl.gov/conservation/acquisition-status-report)

# PROGRAM LAND MANAGEMENT STATUS

Staff is working with contractors for the initial removal of exotic vegetation removal for newly acquired properties including the recently acquired properties:

- Dr. Robert H. Gore – original 170 acres acquired 2018; additional 20 acres acquired through FY23 with more being added
- North Belle Meade – new 256-acre preserve acquired in FY23
- Rivers Road – 20 acres added to this existing preserve in late FY22
- Pepper Ranch – 84 acres added to this existing preserve in FY23

After initial exotic vegetation removal, contractors are hired mostly on an annual basis or biannually depending on budget availability to perform maintenance exotic vegetation treatments on twenty-one (21) of the preserves. After acquisition, trails are also installed by contractors to provide public access where feasible. Access may not be feasible where a public roadway does not yet exist or listed species need to be protected. Once trails are installed, mowing occurs two to three times per month depending on the growing season. The Program currently has one (1) Landscape Technician to perform these duties.

Management Funds are used to restore and maintain natural lands through activities including:

- Trail Maintenance
- Treatment and Removal of Exotic Plant Species
- Restoration of native plant communities through plantings
- Preserve Security and Resource Protection
- Prescribed Burning
- Vegetation Mowing



Staff conducting exotic removal inspection  
Photo by staff, Molly DuVall



Staff conducting land maintenance  
Photo by staff, Molly DuVall

All preserves except for Camp Keais Strand are actively managed. Camp Keais is not currently accessible for management. Table 2 below (page 11) provides the status of each preserve including whether it is open to the public.

**Table 1. Preserve Status**

Preserve Name	Preserve Acreage	Preserve Status
Alligator Flag Preserve	18.46	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Camp Keais Strand Preserve	32.50	Resource Protection
Caracara Prairie Preserve	367.70	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Cocohatchee Creek Preserve	3.64	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Dr. Robert H. Gore III Preserve	215.44	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Fred W. Coyle Freedom Park	11.64	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Boardwalk, Parking, Restrooms
Gordon River Greenway	51.05	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Boardwalk, Parking, Restrooms
Logan Woods Preserve	6.78	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
McIlvane Marsh Preserve	380.89	Resource Protection
Nancy Payton Preserve	71.50	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking
North Belle Meade Preserve	282.46	Resource Protection - may provide public access in future
Otter Mound Preserve	2.45	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking
Otter Mound Preserve – S. Barfield Rd. Tract	2.13	Resource Protection
Otter Mound Preserve – Caxambas Dr. Tract	0.56	Resource Protection
Panther Walk Preserve	55.74	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails

Pepper Ranch Preserve	2,655.20	<b><u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking, Restrooms, Visitor Center, Biking</b>
Railhead Scrub Preserve	135.36	Resource Protection - will open when road is built
Rattlesnake Hammock Preserve	37.16	Resource Protection - in process of permitting parking lot for public access
Red Maple Swamp Preserve	246.25	Resource Protection - may provide public access in future
Red Maple Swamp Preserve – Brewer Tract	14.78	Resource Protection
Redroot Preserve	9.26	<b><u>OPEN</u> - Trails</b>
Rivers Road Preserve	96.64	<b><u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking</b>
Shell Island Preserve	130.61	Resource Protection - adjacent to State lands with boardwalk
Wet Woods Preserve	26.77	Resource Protection
Winchester Head Preserve	108.79	Resource Protection - may provide public access in future when more parcels acquired
<b>TOTAL PROGRAM ACREAGE</b>	<b>4,963.76</b>	

For more information about the Conservation Collier preserves go to:

[www.ConservationCollier.com](http://www.ConservationCollier.com)

# PROGRAM FINANCIAL STATUS

Conservation Collier spent approximately \$114,259,452 on properties between 2004 and 2023, acquiring and managing 4,866 acres in 22 locations throughout Collier County. Acquisition and management funds are generated annually for up to another 10 years (starting from FY23) from an ad valorem property tax of up to .25 mil, or \$25 for each \$100,000 in taxable property value for property owners in Collier County. Additional income is derived from investment and banking interest, grants, cattle leases, hunt fees, and the sale of Panther Habitat Units (PHUs).

At the Board's September 21-22, 2023 final FY 2024 Budget Hearing, the Board approved a reduction in taxes from the proposed millage neutral budget. As part of the strategy to achieve rolled back millage rates for the coming year transfers of funds within the Conservation Collier Acquisition Trust Fund and the Conservation Collier Management Trust Fund were established. **The budgeted transfers will be addressed in the forthcoming 2024 Annual Report.** The Conservation Collier Program utilizes five active funds to manage Program financial resources.

- **Fund 1061, Land Acquisition Fund:** for property acquisition activity.
- **Fund 1062, Land Maintenance Trust Fund:** the primary Conservation Collier operating and maintenance fund. This fund also contains long-term Conservation Collier Maintenance Trust reserves.
- **Fund 1063, Conservation Collier Capital Improvement Fund:** significant infrastructure improvements.
- **Fund 0673, Pepper Ranch Conservation Bank:** was created in October 2018 to hold funds for the Conservation Bank at this preserve.
- **Fund 0674, Caracara Preserve** endowment funds and Caracara Preserve maintenance costs are accounted for in Caracara Preserve Trust .

Sustained low interest rates and resulting low earnings on Conservation Collier Trust Funds are an ongoing financial concern. In FY14 and FY15 using conservative projections, a Ten-Year Financial Plan was developed which focused on reducing and containing expenditures, establishing a combined Conservation Collier Program minimum fund balance of \$40,000,000. The Program will continue to have the \$32 million as the reserve "floor" with the goal of funding the management of the preserves in perpetuity.

Since FY21 the Program has a new funding source of an ad valorem property tax of up to .25 mil for 10 years. Previously, Conservation Collier Ordinance 2002-63 provided that up to seventy-five percent (75%) of all revenues collected for Conservation Collier may be used for acquisition and that management funds shall be no less than twenty-five percent (25%) of revenues collected in one year.

On October 10, 2023, the Board approved an amendment to the Ordinance allowing for the use of the Conservation Collier Acquisition and Management Trust Funds for any County Purpose deemed to be in the best interest of the public. On March 26, 2024, the Board approved a subsequent amendment to the Ordinance deleting the provision added by the October 10, 2023, amendment, and adding language allowing for withdrawal of funds from the Conservation Collier Acquisition and Management trust funds in the event of an emergency as determined by the Board of County Commissioners. Section 6 of the ordinance was revised in 2024 to state that “the Board will set the millage rate for the Conservation Collier Program, which may not exceed . 25 mills and set the percentage of revenues each Fund will receive for that fiscal year.”

With the goal of funding the management of the preserves in perpetuity with the ad valorem tax collected within the established 10-year period(s), the established minimum Conservation Collier Program fund balance will be reviewed and adjusted after each acquisition cycle. Annual preserve management operating expenses will be programed at or below annual revenues from interest, leases, and other revenue to ensure this minimum fund balance is maintained.

**Table 2. Land Maintenance Expenses 5-year Average**

<b>Conservation Collier Program Land Maintenance Expense &amp; Funding Sources (5 Year Average)</b>	
<b>Land Maintenance Expenses</b>	Actual
Average Acres (FY19-FY23)	4,461
Maint Exp/Acre (CC Program funded)	\$168.32
Maint Exp/Acre (Grant funded)	\$36.53
Combined Maint Cost/Acre	\$204.85
<b>Average Annual Land Maintenance Expense</b>	<b>\$913,846</b>
<b>Funding Sources</b>	
CC Program Interest Earnings	\$591,531
Leases & Other Sources	\$47,680
PHU Sales	\$379,612
Sub Total	\$1,018,823
Grant Sources	\$162,980
<b>Average Annual Funding Sources (1)</b>	<b>\$1,181,803</b>
Coverage ratio including planned PHU proceeds	129.32%
<p>(1) does not include LDC Program off-site preserve maintenance contributions because they are intended to provide perpetual maintenance funding. Off-Site preserve maintenance contributions have averaged \$45,068 during the FY19-FY23 period.</p>	
Coverage ratio without average PHU proceeds	88%

**Table 3. – Summary of Conservation Collier Financial Activity for FY23**

<b>FY 23 Budget to Actual Comparison</b>					
<b>Funds 1061, 1062, 1063, 0673, 0674</b>					
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Adopted Budget</b>	<b>Amended Budget</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>% Consumed</b>
Personal Services	799,200	812,900	-	804,768	99.0%
Operating expenses	1,067,300	1,164,596	145,167	708,158	73.3%
Capital Outlay	320,000	468,546	119,420	59,108	38.1%
Land Acquisitions	33,445,600	33,445,600	-	4,754,286	14.2%
Transfers	8,427,100	8,437,100	-	8,350,591	99.0%
Reserves	46,627,500	46,623,800	-	-	0.0%
<b>EXPENSE Total</b>	<b>90,686,700</b>	<b>90,952,542</b>	<b>264,587</b>	<b>14,676,911</b>	<b>16.1%</b>
<b>Sources</b>	<b>Adopted Budget</b>	<b>Amended Budget</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>% Consumed</b>
Operating Rev.	(30,628,500)	(30,628,500)	-	(29,251,732)	95.5%
PHU Sales	-	-	-	-	n/a
Interest	(374,800)	(374,800)	-	(1,828,267)	487.8%
Dev. Contribution	(37,500)	(37,500)	-	(20,366)	54.3%
Carry Forward	(53,691,700)	(53,947,542)	-	-	0.0%
Transfers	(7,506,300)	(7,506,300)	-	(7,884,327)	105.0%
Revenue Res.	1,552,100	1,552,100	-	-	0.0%
<b>Revenues</b>	<b>(90,686,700)</b>	<b>(90,942,542)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(38,984,691)</b>	<b>42.9%</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Adopted Budget</b>	<b>Amended Budget</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>% Consumed</b>
Program Administration	329,100	375,750	-	226,775	60.4%
Land Acquisitions	33,608,100	33,604,450	-	4,922,195	14.6%
Preserve Mgt	1,694,900	1,901,442	264,587	1,177,351	75.8%
<b>EXPENSE Total</b>	<b>35,632,100</b>	<b>35,881,642</b>	<b>264,587</b>	<b>6,326,320</b>	<b>17.6%</b>

# Conservation Collier Programs

## Events, and Community/Educational Outreach

### Pepper Ranch Hunt Program

Two separate hunt programs exist at Pepper Ranch Preserve - a public hunt program that is open to all Collier County residents, regardless of age, and an FWC sponsored youth hunt program that is open to youth aged 12-17 (12-15 for youth turkey hunts). Although youth from Collier County are given first choice of youth hunt participation, youth hunts are open to all Florida youths if openings cannot be filled by Collier County residents. Hogs are considered a nuisance species and are hunted without limit. Staff conduct annual deer surveys to set quotas.

### 2022-2023 Hunt Season

One hundred twenty-eight (128) applications were received for the public hunting season. So far, 12 public hunter permits have been utilized. A total of 2 deer, 12 grey squirrel and 5 hog have been harvested to date from the public deer hunt, public hog hunts, and youth squirrel/rabbit hunt that have taken place during the 2023-2024 hunting season. Harvest results for the youth turkey and public turkey hunts are pending hunt completion in February and March.

A total of 7 hunts are scheduled at Pepper Ranch Preserve during the 2023-2024 hunting season, which is still ongoing including 5 public and 2 youth hunts. Three (3) of the public hunts are hog hunts, 1 for deer and 1 for turkey. Youth hunts include 1 turkey hunt and 1 squirrel/rabbit/hog hunt.

### Caracara Prairie Preserve Hunt Program

Caracara Prairie Preserve is established as part the Corkscrew Marsh Unit of the CREW Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA). This allows for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regulated public hunting for hog and spring turkey to occur within Caracara Prairie Preserve as part of the CREW Corkscrew Marsh Unit. FWC manages these quota hunts. Beginning in 2022, CREW Corkscrew Marsh Unit check stations are no longer staffed and harvest results are reliant on hunters self-reporting.

## MITIGATION PROGRAMS

Conservation Collier has followed 2007 Board direction (6/26/07, Agenda Item 10A) in pursuing both wetland and Panther Habitat Unit (PHU) mitigation credit for those properties where the opportunity exists. Wetland mitigation credit generation has not been economical for the Program to pursue. The costs associated with wetland mitigation bank establishment within Conservation Collier lands are high, because only hydrologic restoration can provide the “lift” or “functional gain” necessary to generate credits. Credits are not provided by state or federal agencies for exotic vegetation removal since this restoration activity is already required as part of the Conservation Collier Program. The Program has pursued PHU mitigation credits at Caracara Prairie and Pepper Ranch preserves.

**Caracara Prairie Preserve** - All PHU credits have been consumed. The Conservation Collier Program received a total of \$1,301,600 in revenue over FY14 and FY15 for the PHU credits. This revenue is estimated to fund 25% of routine management costs and 100% of costs associated with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) PHU mitigation requirements. Interest generated from the dedicated Caracara Prairie Preserve Management Fund is allocated annually for exotic vegetation removal and restoration of Caracara Prairie Preserve.

**Pepper Ranch Preserve** - The Pepper Ranch Preserve Panther Habitat Conservation Bank was certified by the USFWS on January 29, 2019. The Panther Habitat Conservation Bank allows multiple County projects to be mitigated through the preservation and enhancement of Pepper Ranch Preserve. The agreement provided for 8,669 PHU credits expected to be used for development of future County projects at a cost savings of \$1,077,123.25.

Since 2019, 2,703.61 PHUs have been purchased from County Divisions to mitigate for four different County projects generating a total of \$1,518,450 in revenue for management of Pepper Ranch Preserve. There are currently 5,965.39 PHUs remaining in the Conservation Bank. Interest generated from the dedicated Conservation Bank Trust Fund is allocated annually for exotic vegetation removal and restoration of the Conservation Bank portions of the Pepper Ranch Preserve.



## GRANTS AND FUNDING ASSISTANCE

Conservation Collier has actively pursued grants and funding assistance for both acquisition and management purposes. Currently, there have been no awards for land acquisition, but many for management, primarily for the removal of invasive, exotic species but also for needed equipment and plant community restoration. Exotic removal grants and funding assistance have come from state and federal government agencies, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Partners Program) and the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) through the Invasive Plant Management Section (IPMS). The table below shows the amount of funding assistance obtained during FY23. The total value of grants awarded to the Program for land management since 2003 is \$1,401,231.

Preserve	Agency	Grant or Funding Assistance	Amount Awarded	Fiscal Year Funding Assistance
Gore Preserve	State	Funding Assistance	\$50,000	2023
Red Maple Swamp	State	Funding Assistance	\$56,645	2023
		<b>Total 2023</b>	<b>\$106,645</b>	<b>2023</b>

Looking ahead to FY24, in addition to the funding assistance applied for annually staff has requested Board approval to apply for additional types of funding assistance with FWC for FY24 and FY25. The details of these applications will be provided with the 2024 Annual Report.

# VOLUNTEERS

During 2023, Conservation Collier was the grateful recipient of 2,305 volunteer hours.

Volunteer tasks accomplished include:

- Preserve monitoring and maintenance
- Trail (including mountain bike trails) creation and maintenance
- FWC Youth Hunt guides
- Wildlife surveys
- Vegetation management
- Restoration Plantings
- Workdays to assist with Special Projects

Conservation Collier Volunteer Workdays include restoration plantings of native shrubs and trees with community partners to enhance plant diversity and wildlife habitat. One workday completed in November 2023 at the Pepper Ranch Preserve included 33 Oracle Hospitality employees.



Workday at Pepper Ranch Preserve with Oracle

Conservation Collier continues to partner with local Scout troops to enhance preserve amenities on public trails. The above does not include Eagle Scout projects where total hours worked are not collected. The following are Eagle Scout projects completed for Conservation Collier during 2023:

- **Julio Rodriguez** - Alligator District, SW Florida Council- Pepper Ranch Preserve.  
Removed fence damaged by Hurricane Ian and replaced with a new wooden fence in March 2023.
- **Preston Colo** - Alligator District, SW Florida Council- Pepper Ranch Preserve.  
Built 12 new picnic tables for the Group Campsite in April 2023.
- **Owen McGourty** - Alligator District, SW Florida Council- Pepper Ranch Preserve.  
Built 6 new benches for group fire ring, built 2 new picnic tables and one bench for Mountain Bike Trailhead, and performed maintenance on the butterfly garden in August 2023



Julio Rodriguez- new fence installation



Preston Colo- group campsite picnic tables



Owen McGourty- benches & butterfly garden enhancement

## 2024 OBJECTIVES

1. Acquire newly approved lands as part of Acquisition Cycle 12 and place them under management.
2. Continue to accept donation properties under the Land Development Code Offsite Preservation Option.
3. Continue to develop public access for acquired properties as directed by the Board of County Commissioners.
4. Continue to implement land management practices at all preserves as outlined in each Board-approved Land Management Plan.
5. Continue to implement the Collier County Hunt Program at the Pepper Ranch Preserve.
6. Secure grant funding and funding assistance wherever possible.
7. Look for any and all ways to reduce expenditures without sacrificing quality of land management and public access amenities.
8. Continue to pursue mitigation opportunities on acquired lands.



Freedom Park preserve by staff Molly DuVall



### Exhibit B. Conservation Collier Preserves by Commission District

