

## Gopher Tortoise A Species of Special Concern



The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) belongs to a group of land tort-

toises that originated in western North America nearly 60 million years ago. Today they are found in upland habitats throughout the coastal plain of the Southeastern United States.

Gopher tortoises live in extensive underground burrows that can be up to 40 feet long and 10 feet underground. These burrows are also refuge to more than 360 species, including some threatened and endangered varieties such as the indigo snake, gopher frog and burrowing owl.

Gopher tortoises eat mainly low growing herbaceous plants and berries, from which they also get all their water! They can live to be up to 60 years old, taking 15 to 20 years to reach maturity. An adult female will typically breed once a year, producing a clutch of 3-15 eggs that will hatch in 80-100 days.

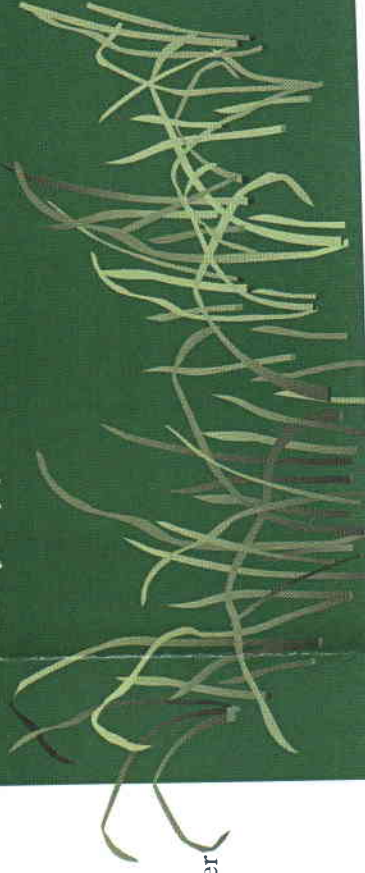
Until they are adults, they have many predators, but once they reach maturity, they have few enemies besides humans and domestic dogs.

# Self-Guided Interpretive Walk Cocohatchee Creek Preserve



## A Conservation Collier Property

Preserving environmentally sensitive  
lands within Collier County for the  
benefit of present and future generations.



Collier County Cocohatchee Creek Preserve  
Scale: 2002 Aerial - Collier County Environmental Department  
© Conservation Collier Land Management Department

### Conservation Collier Land Acquisition Program

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# Cocohatchee Creek Preserve



*Shoe-string fern  
and Gold-foot  
fern growing on  
Cabbage palm*

Cocohatchee Creek Preserve is a 3.64-acre nature preserve along the Cocohatchee Creek, located just off Immokalee Road along Veterans Park Drive, across from the entrance to Veterans Park. This land was chosen for preservation because it contains several types of native habitats and a number of protected plant and wildlife species.

Live oaks and cabbage palm groves along the creek itself are found. Upland areas contain pine flatwood and scrub vegetation communities. A trail, the northern section with wheelchair access, winds along the creek and through the different plant communities. Halway, a picnic area has been placed, where visitors can relax along the Cocohatchee Creek under the shade of massive live oaks.



## Preserve Sights

Starting at the southern end of the trail, closest to the parking lot at Veterans Park, visitors will enter the Preserve through the pine flatwood community on a mulched trail. To the right is a marsh and wetland associated with the creek, where laurel oaks and willows predominate. Leather fern and Swamp lilies grow among the sawgrass, wetland sedges and herbaceous groundcover. Wax myrtle, Pond apple and St. John's wort can also be found here. As the trail turns toward the uplands, visitors will pass by a mound covered with Muscadine grape vine, where several Gopher tortoise burrows are located. The tortoises are usually found foraging in the scrub vegetation closer to Veterans Park Drive. Rounding the corner, the trail begins to hug the west bank of the Cocohatchee Creek, passing through a plant community dominated by Laurel and Live oaks and Cabbage palms. The understory here consists of many native shrubs including:

American beauty-berry, Myrsine, Hog plum, Palmetto, and Shiny blueberry used as food by wildlife. Other common shrubs include Sumac and Persimmon.

To the left is the scrub community, dominated by Live and Scrub oaks. Sparse ground vegetation contains many grasses and flowering plants, including: Goldenaster, Prickly-pear cactus and Butterflyweed.



## Visitor Access

Parking for the Cocohatchee Creek Preserve is at Veterans Park, a short walk from the Preserve. Visitor hours are from 8:00 am to dusk. Restroom and handicapped parking facilities are available at Veterans Park. Approximately half the trail, or 350 feet, starting at the northern entrance, is wheelchair accessible from the sidewalk along the east side of Veteran's Park Drive, ending at a shady picnic area. Because the Preserve is a home for wildlife, pets are not permitted. Domestic dogs, in particular, are a threat to Gopher tortoises. Trash receptacles are provided at the picnic area and bench. Consumption of alcohol is not permitted.

*Please enjoy and remember to  
"take only pictures*

*and leave  
only  
footprints."*



## Conservation Collier

Program goals are to acquire, protect, restore and manage environmentally sensitive lands. Program criteria include:

- Biological value, including biodiversity, listed species habitat, connectivity, and restoration potential
- Protection of wetlands and surface water resources
- Enhancement of flood protection
- Social and recreational value, including equitable geographic distribution, potential for natural resource-based recreation and education opportunities, enhancement of local ecological awareness and enrichment of the aesthetic setting of Collier County.



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# Conservation Collier A Land Acquisition Program



*Preserving environmentally sensitive  
lands within Collier County for the  
benefit of present and future generations.*



# What is Conservation Collier?



The rapid development of Collier County is presenting challenges in preserving valuable ecosystems, protecting ground and surface water resources, providing a broad range of high quality outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and managing growth

**H**ow are potential acquisitions selected? Potential acquisitions are selected in three ways:

- Staff screening of county databases to select lands within Target Protection Areas that have environmental qualities supporting program goals
- Citizen nomination of a property
- Property owner application.



For staff-screened and nominated properties, owners are contacted to ask if they are interested in selling lands.

The County will only work with willing seller property owners.

**What are the Program criteria?**

To be considered for acquisition, a property must support at least 2 of the following qualities: rare habitat, aquifer recharge, flood control, water quality protection, and listed species habitat. Additionally, each property will be evaluated based on vulnerability to development, overall resource ecological quality, potential for providing educational and natural resource-based recreational use and estimated feasibility and cost of management.



**How is the Program funded?**

The Program is funded by through ad-valorem taxes of one-quarter mill over 10 years. The County is authorized to issue \$75 million dollars in bonds to buy properties. The Program will seek to leverage local dollars through grants and matching funds from state and fed-

eral conservation land acquisition and conservation programs.

**How much will the County pay?**

For fee-simple land purchases, the County will offer fair market values as determined by an independent state-certified appraiser. Conservation easements, as well as partial or entire donations of land, are also viable alternatives.

**Who can use these lands?**

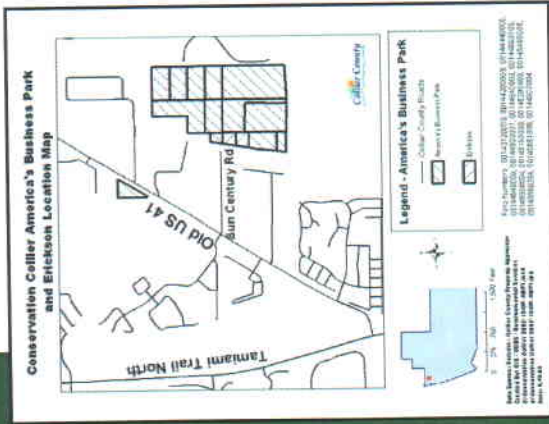
Lands acquired in fee-simple title will be managed for the enjoyment of present and future generations to use for natural resource-based recreation in a manner appropriate to each property, including but not limited to hiking, nature photography, bird-watching, kayaking, canoeing, swimming, hunting and fishing.

**Who decides what to buy?**

County Commissioners make the final decision after a recommendation by a nine-member citizen advisory committee, called the Conservation Collier Land Acquisition Advisory Committee (CCLAAC). Public input is desired and welcomed during all phases of the program. Monthly Advisory Committee meetings are at 9:00 a.m. on the second Monday of each month in the Commission Board Room, Administration Building, Government Center, 3301 Tamiami Trail East. Meetings are also televised



## Railhead Scrub Preserve



Railhead Scrub Preserve is 83 acres containing numerous native plant communities, including scrub, wetland forest, cypress, pine and wet prairie. Listed plant and wildlife species are present, including native orchids, bromeliads and gopher tortoises. Plans for this preserve include restoration of native habitats and creation of walking trails for public access

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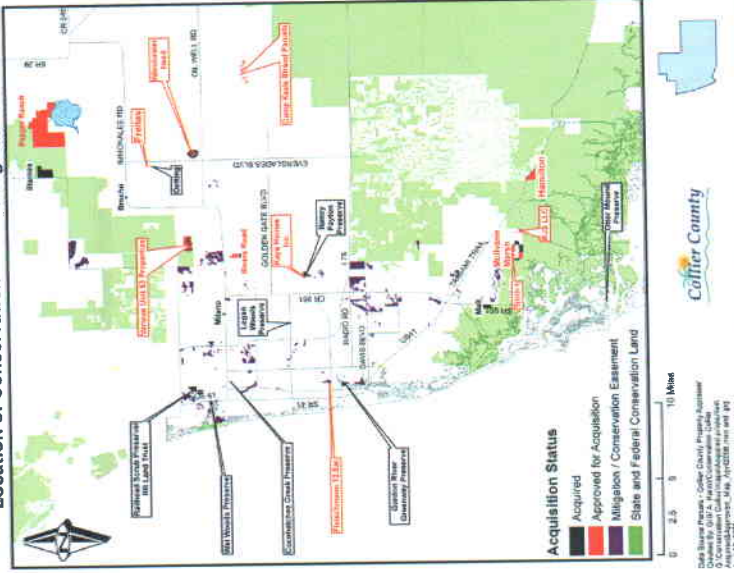


Gopher Turtle



Railhead Scrub

Location of Conservation Collier Program Lands



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6/30/08

# Conservation Collier Land Acquisition Program

# Milestones



Preserving environmentally sensitive lands within Collier County for the benefit of present and future generations.



# What is Conservation Collier?



Cocohatchee Creek Preserve

Conservation Collier is a taxpayer-funded willing-seller land acquisition program approved in a county-wide referendum by voters in November 2002 with the goal of providing a long-term acquisition and management program to meet conservation and green-space needs expressed by citizens.

Objectives include the preservation of unique subtropical plant communities and native wildlife habitat, protection and recharge of ground and surface water resources, establishment of



Malt Parcel

a broad range of high quality outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and protection of Collier County's natural heritage for present and future generations.

Properties must offer at least 2 of the following qualities: rare habitat, aquifer recharge, flood control, water quality protection, and listed species habitat. Properties are evaluated based on vulnerability to development, overall ecological resource quality and management feasibility.

Obtained approval to purchase 835 acres in the first 2 years

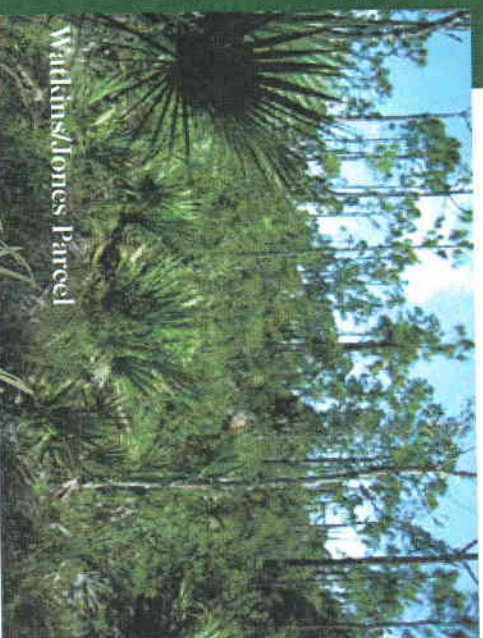
- Acquired/under contract 305 acres as of August 2005 in 12 different locations;

- Preparing to open first preserve for public use—Cocohatchee Creek Preserve;

- Partnering with US Fish and Wildlife Service, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Florida Gulf Coast University, Marco Island Historical Association, Southwest Florida Archeological Society and the City of Marco Island for funding, research and protection of archeological resources;
- Conserving biodiversity of orchids, wading birds, endangered species and native plant communities;
- Creating public recreational opportunities including nature trails, boardwalks and natural history education.



Otter Mound Preserve



Waddins/Jones Parcel

