



**FIVE-YEAR REVIEW OF THE RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM
[VOLUME 1]**

**PHASE I REPORT-TECHNICAL REVIEW
[Five-Year review of activities under the Rural Lands Stewardship Program]**

AND

**PHASE II REPORT- REVIEW OF THE RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP AREA OVERLAY
[Five-Year review and recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the RLSA Overlay]**

**COLLIER COUNTY RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP AREA OVERLAY
OF THE
FUTURE LAND USE ELEMENT OF THE COLLIER COUNTY, FLORIDA GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN**



Prepared by: The Collier County Rural Lands Stewardship Area Review Committee
Date: March, 2009



April 21, 2009

The Honorable Donna Fiala, Chairman
and Members of the Collier County Board of County Commissioners
3301 East Tamiami Trail
Naples, Florida 34112

Dear Chairman Fiala and Commissioners:

In February 2008, the Rural Lands Stewardship Area Review Committee (the "RLSA Committee"), of which I am privileged to serve as Chairman, transmitted out the Phase I Technical Review (the "Phase I Report") to the Board of County Commissioners. The Phase I Report contained a quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of the Rural Lands Stewardship Area (the "RLSA Overlay") in meeting its prescribed goal of protecting natural resources, retaining valuable agriculture and promoting compact rural mixed use development through an incentive based land use system on approximately 195,000 acres in eastern Collier County.

The Phase I Report concluded that significant progress had been made in achieving the RLSA Overlay goal and validated the extraordinary recognition the program has received in garnering awards from the following organizations during the first years of its existence:

- 1000 Friends of Florida, Better Community Award, 2005
- FICE, Engineering Excellence Awards, Honorable Mention, 2004
- Economic Development Council of Collier County, Innovation Awards, 2003
- Sustainable Florida Council, Award-Winning Best Practices, 2003
- American Planning Association, Florida Chapter, Awards of Excellence, 2003

The Phase I Report also provided the foundation for the RLSA Committee's Phase II qualitative evaluation of ways in which the RLSA Overlay Growth Management Plan Policies could be improved to more effectively implement the program's overriding Goals and Objectives and achieve the RLSA Committee's Project Management Plan mandate to consider "potential opportunities and amendments to the Growth Management Plan". As a result of exhaustive public input and expert testimony, the RLSA Committee unanimously approved the following proposed amendment to the Goal for the RLSA Overlay:

"Collier County's goal is to retain land for agricultural activities, to direct incompatible uses away from wetlands and upland habitat, to protect and restore habitat connectivity, to enable the conversion of rural land to other uses in appropriate locations, to discourage urban sprawl, and to encourage development that employs creative land use techniques through the use of established incentives."

As the RLSA Committee considered this reconstituted Goal in the context of existing Growth Management Plan ("GMP") Policies, the Committee developed strategies to create

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incentives to encourage rural landowners to voluntarily agree to:

- eliminate their right to convert agricultural land to non agricultural uses in exchange for compensation;
- retain agriculture within Open Lands as an alternative to conversion of such lands using Baseline Standards (and thereby reduce the size of the “development footprint” and the threat of urban sprawl in the RLSA Overlay);
- create, restore and enhance panther corridor connections;
- restore flow ways and habitat through a credit generating system that considers cost, difficulty and benefit value of each restoration type through a newly adopted tiered system;
- impose a cap of 45,000 SRA acres in the RLSA Overlay and recalibrate the credit system to ensure the balance essential to the sustainability of a voluntary incentive based program which generates significant public benefits without incurring public expenditures; and
- cooperate with Collier County in its creation of a plan for a county transportation network that meets the adopted Level of Service through build out of the county and considers the location of public services needed to accommodate the build out population.

The RLSA Committee also engaged the public and various interest groups in a rigorous assessment of each and every RLSA Overlay policy to ensure internal consistency, thoughtful precision and careful scrutiny of the data, analysis and justification for each of the proposed Policy amendments. The work product of the RLSA Committee for its Phase II Report therefore actually consists of proposed GMP Policy amendments. Further, after intensive discussion, we concluded that the public proceedings embodied twenty three [23] public meetings and thousands of man hours of work expended by scores of interested parties should be appropriately recognized.

The RLSA Committee’s Five Year Review of the Rural Lands Stewardship Program incorporates two volumes. Volume I incorporates both the earlier Phase I Report and the Phase II Report. **Volume I** of the Report is organized and respectfully submitted in the following sections:

- **Phase I Report** previously delivered to you as the basis for our qualitative evaluation of ways to more effectively implement the RLSA Goal and Objectives.
- **Phase 2 Report, Section 1** contains the RLSA Committee’s recommended substantive policy amendments.

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- **Phase 2 Report, Section 2** contains all of the RLSA Committee's recommended policy amendments, whether substantive or insubstantial.
- **Phase 2 Report, Section 3** contains the supporting documentation for the amendments.
- **Phase 2 Report, Section 4** provides an account of public participation and comments, committee deliberations, and committee action.
- **Phase 2 Report, Section 5** contains the RLSA Committee's recommended new Policy 3.7 of the Transportation Element of the GMP based on a proposal for a county transportation network initiated by Collier County Transportation Planning Director Nick Casalanguida.

In summary, based upon the adopted RLSA Overlay and the RLSA Committee's recommended policies as contained in Volume I of the Five Year Review of the Rural Lands Stewardship Program, the RLSA will:

1. Achieve a balance of natural resource protection, agriculture and sustainable community development at the planning horizon year and at build-out.
2. Provide new and meaningful economic incentives for agriculture to remain as a viable component of the economy of Collier County.
3. Increase the total area of lands expected to be placed into Stewardship Sending Areas from 92,000 acres to 134,300 acres.
4. Enable protection and restoration of critical natural resources on private land using incentives that do not require public dollars for acquisition or management.
5. Align the RLSA program with the Florida Panther Protection Program's objectives.
6. Establish a maximum SRA development footprint of 45,000 acres-less than 1/4 of the total RLSA; or 15% when open space within new communities is accounted for.
7. Reduce the potential for conversion of open lands to non-RLSA baseline development, thereby reducing urban sprawl.
8. Accommodate forecasted population growth in a substantial manner and ensure that supporting public facilities, services, and infrastructure are provided.
9. Create new opportunities to site economic development driven new businesses in proximity to places for employees to live.
10. Accommodate a long range interconnected transportation network plan that serves Eastern Collier County.

Volume II of the Five Year Review of the Rural Lands Stewardship Program includes all support information including major documents, presentations, minutes, etc. considered by the Committee during the course of its twenty three [23] public meetings.

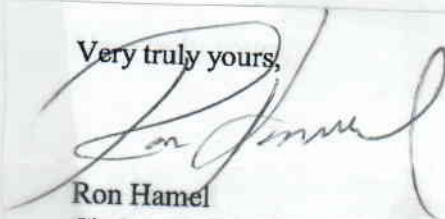
Finally, immediately following this transmittal letter is an overview of the RLSA Supporting Documentation [see Phase 2 Report, Section 3] which was presented to the

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Committee.

Given that the RLSA Committee's work effort has resulted in specific recommended policy amendments to improve the RLSA program, and in keeping with the Board's vote to expedite the review process, the RLSA Committee recommends and respectfully requests that the Board of County Commissioners initiate a special cycle for Growth Management Plan RLSA Overlay amendments to consider the recommendations found within the Phase II Report.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve the Board of County Commissioners and stand ready to proceed in whatever way you believe best serves the people of Collier County.

Very truly yours,



Ron Hamel

Chairman, Rural Lands Stewardship Review Committee

cc: County Manager James V. Mudd