



THE CONSERVANCY Of Southwest Florida

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Gopher Tortoise Relocation on Caracara Prairie Preserve

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida provides the following comments in regards to Conservation Collier's proposal for the Caracara Prairie Preserve to become an FWC certified gopher tortoise recipient site. Public comment was given to the BCC on June 23rd, 2009 addressing our concerns. The Conservation Collier subcommittees were also addressed on April 12th, 2010. If you have any further comments or questions please contact Jessica Stubbs at jessicas@conservancy.org or at (239) 403-4231. Thank you.

The Conservation Collier Program should only accept Gopher Tortoises from public projects because:

- Growth should pay for growth, with land acquisition for mitigation associated with private developments being the responsibility of the developer
- Conservation Collier lands were purchased with public dollars and we support their use for the mitigation associated with public projects
- Opportunities still exist within the county for private developers to purchase suitable mitigation lands for gopher tortoises and those resources should be exhausted first before even considering the utilization of public lands
- Allowing private development to mitigate on public lands will accelerate habitat loss through allowing already preserved habitat areas to be the offset for newly destroyed areas – rather than acquiring additional vulnerable habitat areas as compensation.
- We support Caracara Prairie Preserve becoming an FWC certified gopher tortoise recipient site to accept tortoises in mitigation associated with public projects
- The true cost of maintaining the Caracara Prairie Preserve for gopher tortoises into perpetuity is difficult to estimate, and therefore; Conservation Collier should “bank” this resource for future county projects, as well as to allow Gopher Tortoise populations to increase naturally on the Preserve
- We believe that in order to preserve the long-term viability of the gopher tortoise and its habitat, their habitat needs to be replaced whenever it is destroyed.