# Environmentally Endangered Lands ProgramPublic Access Hybrid Meeting (North Region)

## January 27, 2021 Meeting Minutes

## Attendance

### ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM STAFF

Mike Knight

Damien Keene

Jonny Baker

Amy Rivera

### GUESTS

Blake Brandon

Brigitta Hawkins (Zoom)

Mr. Hawkins (Zoom)

Bo Platt (Procedures Committee) (Zoom)

Paul Schmalzer (Selection and Management Committee) (Zoom)

Protecting and Preserving Biological Diversity
Through Responsible Stewardship of Brevard County’s Natural Resources

## Meeting Minutes

### CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Jonny Baker thanked the meeting attendees, introduced the EEL Staff, and started the meeting at 6:09.

## MINUTES

Jonny stated the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Program’s Proposed Public Access Plans for three sites in the North Region as follows: Dicerandra Scrub Sanctuary (DSS), Challenger Marsh Sanctuary (CMS), and Indian River Sanctuary (IRS). He asked the Zoom participants to utilize the raise hands functionality to ask questions or make comments after each site-specific presentation.

**Dicerandra Scrub Sanctuary**

Jonny shared the Program’s mission and vision statements. He explained EEL staff are collecting public input and these comments will be incorporated into the Public Access Plan which will be presented to the Recreation and Education Advisory Committee (REAC) for approval. Once approved, the Public Access Plan will be incorporated into the draft Sanctuary Management Plan and presented to the Selection and Management Committee (SMC) for approval. The public may provide input at any of the public meetings during the process. Once approved by the SMC, the Sanctuary Management Plan will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for final approval.

Jonny explained Dicerandra Scrub Sanctuary is a Category 3 Sanctuary. There will be little or no improvement due to the vulnerability of this site and intensive management or restoration at the site. Passive recreation is permitted during daylight hours and is limited to hiking and wildlife observation. DSS was named after the *Dicerandra thinicola* commonly known as Titusville Balm. Jonny noted this plant exists only in North Brevard and scrub-jays and gopher tortoises share this habitat. He added there is a 0.9-mile hiking trail and no changes are proposed for the kiosk, parking area, gates, or to the proposed observation deck if one were to be built.

Jonny asked for questions or comments. Mr. Hawkins raised his hand earlier in the presentation and just wanted to state the host’s microphone was muted; however, this has been resolved. Blake Brandon asked if access could be prevented because of the fragility of the site. Damien responded one of the Program’s directives is to allow passive recreation: however, bikes and horses are not permitted to preserve the site. Blake asked who operates the Program. Damien clarified the EEL Program is a Brevard County Program. Blake referenced misuse and inquired about staffing at the various sites. Damien stated the Management and Education Center is a Category 1 Site and since there are more visitors, the center requires more staff than the remote sites. He added the Program works with local law enforcement as needed and if damage is noticed after the fact, EEL Staff will clean it up. Blake noted there are three categories and asked for clarification regarding public access. Damien explained the differences between the three different site categories. Jonny stated the DSS Proposed Public Access Plan is to continue with the status quo. Blake asked how long this site has been managed. Damien stated this site has been managed for over 10 years. Blake stated her understanding is the Program staff have good judgment and a handle on management. Damien received a question from a citizen, who couldn’t attend the meeting, regarding additional parking. He stated parking will not be expanded since the site is relatively small and this would destroy a little more of the footprint of the site. Blake asked if there is a date when the Management Plan will be approved and if it will be done in three months. Jonny explained this is a long-term process and it will take longer than three months. Damien stated he is always available for questions at any time during the process.

**Challenger Marsh Sanctuary**

Jonny stated the first few slides are the approval process and are the same for each of these sites. Blake asked if the site is currently open. Jonny stated CMS is a Category 3 site which are managed primarily for conservation and research with minimal improvements and no public access. Blake asked how many acres are in this site. Jonny explained the site is 57 acres and described the site. He noted it is a mitigation property bordered by St. John’s National Wildlife Refuge to the east and south. Private property is adjacent to the north and west boundaries. Outside of limited educational opportunities, no public access is permitted. Jonny stated no public access is proposed at this site because of its size, wetness, and accessibility. A parking lot is not feasible for this site and there is not a lane off of SR 407 to access this site safely. This site is a flood plain marsh habitat with threatened avian species identified at the site. Since the resources at this site are available nearby at a safer location, the Program plans to remain with the status of no public access.

Jonny asked the participants for input or questions. Damien pointed out this site and the next site have interim management plans. Jonny stated these are new proposed public access plans that are being presented for the initial Management Plans. Blake stated she observed serious hikers earlier today and she thinks this would be hard to hike at CMS. Damien agreed and stated this area is good for conservation; but, public access is difficult because of flooding. He added a boardwalk would be needed. Jonny added sites like these are just for conservation and management such as prescribed fire and removal of exotic species. Mike clarified the County did not purchase this property, rather it was a mitigation donation from a developer. He added the County agreed to take over the management in perpetuity. Generally, public access is not possible because of the reason the property was donated for mitigation. Mike further stated the Program would most likely not be permitted to add a boardwalk even if the Program wanted to. Blake asked if there is a budget to build boardwalk, if it is expensive, and how the Program would fund this improvement. Damien responded the Program has some funds and we may get some help from AmeriCorps or from Eagle Scout Projects.

**Indian River Sanctuary**

Jonny briefly reviewed the Program’s mission statement, vision statement, and the public access approval process. He stated IRS is a Category 2 site described as an intermediate use site with minimal capital improvement permitted. Jonny stated the site has 43 acres mainly comprised of salt marsh, disturbed wetlands, some hydric hammock and an abandoned citrus grove. The Sanctuary is boarded by the Indian River Lagoon to the east, Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge Managed Lands to the south, and private property to the north and to the west. Salt marsh habitat, existing trails, and the Indian River Lagoon were identified as potential resource sites. Outside of limited educational hikes on a path maintained by the Program for maintenance and potential kayak use, no public access is proposed for this site due to its small size, proximity to neighbors, and access. Access is limited to a long, narrow public right of way that is very near to private property. It is not financially feasible to improve this road to Brevard County standards with the amount of potential traffic to this site. Also, the identified resources at this site are available at a site nearby with safer, easier access to visit a salt marsh habitat.

Jonny asked for questions and comments. Blake stated she purchased the property adjacent to the Indian River Sanctuary and asked about the history of the site. Jonny responded this property was purchased as part of Indian River Lagoon Blueway along the Indian River Lagoon. Many of these properties are owned by Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge. He added there is coordination between the agencies in terms of ownership and management. This is the only site actively managed by Brevard County’s EEL Program and the remainder are managed by Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge. Blake asked for clarification on which lands are owned by the County, State, and which are Federal. Jonny noted a valuable resource to determine ownership is Florida Natural Areas Inventory Public Lands Map and stated he would provide that information to her. Blake mentioned there a high volume of all-terrain vehicle (ATV) traffic on Orlando Avenue and shared a life threating incident she experienced. She asked what the private property owners should do if they observe persons at IRS. She asked if we should have additional no trespassing signs or a gate. Damien stated the Program will work with her and the other land owners to discuss putting up a gate. Mike clarified the Indian River Sanctuary is County owned and managed and the land to the south is State owned and Federally managed as defined by the Blueway purchase agreement. Jonny advised if she hears gunfire or observes something illegal she should call law enforcement. He will provide her with the contact information for the Federal Officer the Program works with. Jonny stated the proposed public access plan recommendation is no public access. Blake supports no public access at this site.

### ADJOURNED

Jonny thanked the attendees and concluded the meeting at 6:52.