



Environmentally Endangered Lands Program Selection and Management Committee Meeting & Procedures Committee Joint Meeting

April 21, 2023, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Meeting Minutes Final

Attendance

SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT (SMC) MEMBERS

James Burney, Jason Miller, Jennifer Thompson, Doug Sphar (Recreation and Education Advisory Committee), Maryann Civil, Liz Becker, Jon Shepherd, Jim Swann, Lisa Toland, and Mark Bush.

SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT (SMC) EMERITUS MEMBERS

Ross Hinkle.

PROCEDURES (PC) MEMBERS

Rick Follet, Diane Stees, Sil Crespo.

ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS (EEL) PROGRAM STAFF

Mike Knight, Petra Geretz.

GUESTS

Catherine Vecchio.



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

Meeting Minutes

Mike informed the members the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners did not reappoint both Chair (Tamy Dabu) and Vice Chair (Oli Johnson). Both positions will need to be filled by the Committee.

MOTION 1

Lisa Toland made a motion to appoint Doug Sphar as interim Chair for the April 21, 2023, meeting. Jennifer Thomson second. Motion to approve Doug Sphar as Chair passed unanimously.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Doug Sphar called the meeting to order at 9:36 am.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Katherine Vecchio who is a long time Brevard County community volunteer, currently volunteering for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), informed the committee that many Florida shorebirds and seabirds nest on the open beach, where they lay eggs in shallow scrapes in the sand or sea shells. Due to heavy development around Brevard County beaches beach-nesting birds are sometimes forced to fly or run from their nests, their eggs and chicks are left vulnerable to the elements and to predators. Disturbances that cause birds to take flight or leave their young may threaten their survival. Black skimmers, Least terns, American oystercatchers, Wilson's plovers and Snowy plovers are protected birds that nest on Florida's beaches. The FWC and its volunteers are asking public and private landowners for open lands that would be available for the birds. Mike Knight will look what land would be available in South Beaches area. Mike also asked if the need is for a specific size of the land the birds would need. James Burney asked if the land must be on the beach or off the beach? Katherine answered the land doesn't have to be specifically beach land if there is a water source for the birds. Lisa asked Mike Knight if there is way to give the list of EEL properties to FWC to screen what might be viable. Mike answered he will look into it.



MINUTES

The SMC January 20, 2023, minutes were presented for approval. Doug Sphar mentioned misspelling of his name.

MOTION 2

Lisa Toland made a motion to approve the minutes with correct spelling of Doug Sphar's name. Jennifer Thompson seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Mike Knight provided the Administrative Review. Mike planned to give an EEL presentation at the budget hearing on February 16, 2023, however, the meeting was canceled. In order for the EEL program to avoid a funding gap year, the assessment and bonding would have to be approved in current budget year. As of this SMC meeting there was no plan for bonding. Mike mentioned that the EEL program can't bond for maintenance or operating expense. Bond proceeds can be used only for acquisitions of land and capital improvements. Bonding is required to be able to assess an additional millage for operations and maintenance. Mike is working with the Parks and Recreation Director to prepare for a funding gap year where the Program will need to be funded out of the Parks and Recreation budget. The EEL program has some reserve funds that will help reduce the funds needed from the Parks budget if no bonding is done. A discussion between committee members was carried to understand what a funding gap year means for the EEL program. Jon Shepherd asked if there is a deadline for the bond hearing. Mike answered the bond hearing is scheduled for May 31, 2023. Jon Shepherd suggested to educate the commissioners how development might be beneficial to the EEL program.

MOTION 3

Lisa Toland made a motion for the EEL staff to prepare a bullet point presentation for the SMC committee members to deliver to the county commissioners regarding benefits of economic development. James Burney second. Motion passed unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 1

Mike Knight gave a presentation about the St. Johns River Water Management District Critical Wetlands Inventory. Mike recommended that some of these lands should be considered as additions to the EEL proposed lands list. Mike showed a map of Canaveral Marshes. Mike mentioned the area is about 1152 acres, five owners, fourteen parcels. The next property reviewed was Tucker Ranch, Lake Poinsett which is



about 670 acres with one owner and eight parcels. Next Mike reviewed the lands near the Indian River Lagoon Preserve State Park which represents 106 acres, three owners, four parcels. Land can be considered for coastal wetlands and flood protection. Finally, Mike reviewed two other parcels that have historically been on the EEL Proposed list which includes the Jakubcin and Honey Hole Ranch properties, 788 acres, thirteen parcels. Land would be acquired for preservation of imperiled habitats, but also the land connects multiple conservation areas. Lisa Toland asked if the EEL program can propose wetlands? Mike answered yes since the 2022 ballot language includes “acquire, improve and maintain wildlife habitat, wetlands, woodlands, and lands that protect Indian River Lagoon and St. Johns River.”

MOTION 4

Liz Becker made a motion to approve the four proposed properties to the proposal list. Jon Shepherd second. Motion approved unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 2

Mike Knight provided an update on the Malabar scrub restoration. Mike mentioned the Malabar Scrub was purchased under the EEL referendum for the specific purpose of protecting the Florida Scrub-Jay and other scrub species. Mike explained the optimal scrub habitat is mostly treeless expanses of low shrubs with bare sandy openings. The EEL program restoration efforts have included prescribed fire, roller chopping and private development mitigation. Mike showed on the map the overall restoration plan that will include the area north of the creek bottom. The level of tree thinning will vary depending on location. Mike also explained that all restoration work will be consistent with the Florida Natural Area Inventory. Mike highlighted the recent PVA (population viability analysis) data that indicates timeline for species stabilization which is shorter than previously expected and that Malabar Scrub plays a key role in contributing to the stabilization of the Scrub-Jay population in southern Brevard County. Mike explained that the Malabar Trails and Greenway Committee recommended no removal of overgrown oaks and minimal pine and palm overstory removal along trails, no tree removal by Country Cove and relocation of two trails into shaded areas. Mike showed six compromise options that the County (EEL) has offered, and the options do not conflict with maximizing optimal scrub habitat. However, the Malabar Trails and Greenway Committee was not supportive of the trail modification / compromise proposals. The Malabar Trails and Greenway Committee has also requested a 25’ wide preserved tree buffer around entire perimeter of the property and the lake along with continued recommendation to not remove oak curtains along the trails. They are also



advocating for 300' forest edge buffer instead of a 1000' buffer. The EEL program cannot support these requests because they are inconsistent with the State guidelines the EEL program follows to maximize optimal scrub habitat conditions. The County received judicial direction to first complete the Chapter 164 Conflict Resolution Process with the Town of Malabar before proceeding father through the courts.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Mike Knight provided the EEL Annual Report presentation. First, he talked about the history of EEL referenda. The EEL program mission statement is “To protect and preserve biological diversity through responsible stewardship of Brevard County’s natural resources. The EEL program acquires, protects, and maintains environmentally endangered lands guided by scientific principles for conservation and the best available practices for resource stewardship and ecosystem management. The EEL program provides passive recreation and environmental education opportunities to Brevard’s citizens and visitors without detracting from the conservation goals of the program. Mike gave an overview of responsibilities of the EEL committees and the purpose of the Annual Joint Meeting. In the annual program overview 2021/2022 fiscal year, Mike reviewed the accomplishments related to land management, land acquisition, public access and environmental education activities.

Mike reviewed the overall operational expenses of the EEL program including the millage history, operations millage rate history and operations millage revenue history.

A question was asked if there would be a way to get more accurate data regarding visitors at the educational centers? Mike answered as of right now we only have the sign-up sheet and there are no available tools to count the visitors. Lisa Toland mentioned the importance of accurate visitors report for the purpose of advocating for the future funding of the program.

Members also discussed the funding gap and how the members could be more involved to avoid the funding gap for the EEL program.

COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORTS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

None



MOTION 5

A motion to adjourn was carried unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

June 23, 2023, at 9:30 am

ADJOURNED

Doug Sphar adjourned the meeting at 12:53 pm.

ACTION ITEMS

None