



Environmentally Endangered Lands Program Selection and Management Committee Meeting

September 6, 2023 Meeting Minutes FINAL

Attendance

SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT (SMC) MEMBERS

Jennifer Thompson, Lisa Toland, James Burney, Mark Bush, Doug Sphar, Jon Shepherd, Jason Miller, Maryann Civil, Mark Bush, Jim Swann, Paul Schmalzer (Emeritus Member)

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

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Doug Sphar called the meeting to order at 9:31 am.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Catherine Vecchio, with the Florida Shorebird Alliance, shared efforts to protect shorebird species like the black skimmer, American oystercatcher, and least tern. She emphasized challenges, especially for the least tern due to the loss of rooftop nesting sites. She proposed revisiting EEL management plans to accommodate these species on lands. The need for open sandy areas was emphasized, but committee members expressed concerns about converting ecosystems that already provide habitat to other species.

Discussions covered a variety of topics including private companies clearing habitats, changing environments, and the struggle to find suitable shorebird nesting sites. The importance of the Florida Coastal Scrub ecosystem project was mentioned, and maintaining optimal conditions for the Florida scrub jay population was emphasized as a program priority.

Mike Knight discussed challenges in accommodating shorebirds in current conservation plans, considering potential habitat removal for other species. The focus then shifted to the Thousand Islands as a potential site that could be explored further by staff.



MINUTES

July 21, 2023, minutes were presented for an approval. Jennifer Thompson raised a concern about the phrasing in the public comment section, particularly regarding Vince's statement that the 70% support for the EEL program referendum wasn't quite enough. The member suggested rewording to better convey the message that while the referendum passed, additional financial support is needed.

MOTION 1

Doug Shpar moved the motion to approve the minutes.
Maryann Civil second the motion.
Motion passed unanimously.

LAND ACQUISITION REPORT

None

Mike Knight briefly provided an update on the Malabar scrub restoration work, stating that it's progressing well, with a recent 100-acre prescribed fire. Observations indicate increased scrub jay population in Jordan, extending into the pine flatwoods. A graph illustrated bird numbers on the four-mile trail which is part of the current species survey. Addressing a question about the budget, Mike Knight clarified there's no proposed reduction to the EEL operations budget but explained the millage rates did change due to increased property values. Plans for the last year of the 2004 referendum were discussed, anticipating a funding gap year before implementing the new referendum.

The discussion moved to combining Malabar Scrub and Jordan Scrub under one management plan, simplifying future updates. The next meeting will feature a preliminary presentation on this topic.

AGENDA ITEM 1

David DeMeyer introduced Cruickshank and Capron Ridge as the last plans in the central region awaiting approval for the next ten years. Cruickshank, located in Rockledge, and Capron Ridge, south of Viera Boulevard, were reviewed and discussed.



Topics of discussion included recreation opportunities, herbicide use, rare plants, gopher tortoise and scrub jay surveys, and prescribed fire. The overall process of plan approval was explained, with the committee receiving a preliminary presentation before individual review and feedback.

AGENDA ITEM 2

Damien Keene discussed the Dicerandra Scrub Sanctuary management plan and emphasized that it's a ten-year update to the existing plan. The sanctuary is 44 acres in Titusville, part of the Brevard Coastal Scrub Ecosystem Project. Adjacent to the Titusville Wellfield, the sanctuary is surrounded by development on three sides.

The natural resources include 75% uplands and 25% wetlands, featuring scrubby flatwoods and a depression marsh. Documented species include Florida scrub jays, gopher tortoises, Titusville Balm, and historically, an eastern indigo snake.

Topography and soils were discussed, illustrating low points around the depression marsh. Surveys include scrub jay monitoring, bird surveys, and *Dicerandra thincicola* research. Gopher tortoise surveys reveal a desirable density of 2.7 tortoises per acre. Management needs involve exotic species control, fence repair for site security, and addressing issues like homelessness and drug use.

Burn units, tree density goals for scrub jays, and challenges in burning the depression marsh were outlined. It was noted the property's status as a Category 3 site, managed for conservation and research. Public access details included an existing hiking trail, street parking, and restrictions on biking and horseback riding. Plans for a wildlife observation deck were discussed, along with a grant-funded educational signage project. Damien concluded by highlighting the need for future construction of the observation deck and its potential as an Eagle Scout project.

It was suggested utilizing iNaturalist for documenting species by encouraging visitors to upload images. Suzanne Kennedy was mentioned as actively working on creating profiles for different sites, and efforts have been made to establish boundaries for properties on iNaturalist. However, staff turnover has affected the continuity of the project. Despite challenges, there is a commitment to further develop and implement iNaturalist for documenting natural observations and boundaries, both at the specific site and organization wide.

AGENDA ITEM 3



Mike Knight mentioned the vacancy of the chair and vice-chair roles. The SMC members nominated Doug Sphar for vice-chair and Jason Miller for chair, both of which passed unanimously. Jason expressed willingness to take on the role of chair and was subsequently nominated and approved. The committee proceeded to nominate Doug for the vice-chair position, which was also approved.

MOTION 2

James Burney made a motion to approve Jason Miller as a chair.
Jon Shepherd second.
Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION 3

Jason Miller made a motion to approve Doug Shpar as a vice chair.
Mark Bush second.
Motion passed unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM 4

Mike Knight discussed the AT&T proposal for a fiber optic easement at the Micco Scrub Sanctuary. The easement involves an underground fiber optic cable for a cell tower outside the sanctuary boundaries. The tower would be a single-pole structure without guy wires and the cable would be buried four feet below the surface. The committee considered the potential ecological impacts and staff felt confident there would be no negative impacts to the site. The proposal requires committee approval before proceeding to the county commission. After discussion, a motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to recommend approval of the AT&T fiber optic easement request.

During the meeting, the committee discussed the need to send a letter expressing concern about the funding shortfall. The conversation revolved around the timeline for securing funds, and the importance of having something on the record. They discussed the possibility of sending the letter before the final budget hearing on the 19th and made edits to the letter. The committee agreed to send the letter to all commissioners, the county manager, and others. A motion was made and approved for Jim Burney to finalize and send the letter. Paul Schmalzer emphasized the importance of pushing for next year's funding. The economic impact of EEL-related activities, amounting to \$496 million, was also discussed as a key point to include in the letter.



NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for October 18th, 2023, and there was a suggestion to explore successful examples of island scenarios with shorebird nesting for reference.

ADJOURNED

The meeting concluded with a motion to adjourn at 11:51 A.M.