

CONSERVATION COLLIER 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



CONSERVATION
COLLIER



Collier County

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INTRODUCTION

Responsibilities

The Conservation Collier Program (Program) is responsible for implementing the mandate of the electorate of Collier County as provided by public referendum vote in November 2002, and again in November 2006 confirming that mandate, to levy a 0.25 mill ad valorem property tax for a period not to exceed 10 years for acquisition. Most recently, on November 3, 2020, the electorate voted to implement another 10-year ad valorem tax not-to-exceed 0.25 mill. The implementation of this ad valorem tax started in FY22 (October 2021). Once acquired, protection, restoration, and management of environmentally sensitive lands acquired by the Program in Collier County continues in perpetuity for the benefit of present and future generations.

History of Acquisition & Lands Inventory

After the passing of the **referendum in 2002**, the initial acquisition phase occurred from 2004 to 2011. During that time, 4,055 acres of preserve land were acquired. In 2011 available funds were appropriated into the maintenance trust fund as the program moved into a preserve management phase, including opening the preserves for public access and managing and hosting visitors. Therefore, **between 2011 and 2020 there was not a regular funding source for acquisition of conservation land.**

The Program remained in a management phase until 2017 when the Board authorized the use of management funds for the acquisition of more land. In 2018 and 2019, three (3) properties totaling 237 acres were purchased for \$3.1 million. These funds were subsequently paid back to the management fund in FY22 after the initial funds from the 2020 referendum were received.

Since the re-establishment of the funding source for acquisition after the **referendum in 2020**, an additional 97 parcels totaling 685 acres have been acquired for a total of 5,036 through FY24 (September 2024). Thirteen (13) Conservation Collier preserves are currently open for public use with various amenities for public passive recreational use.

Program Costs FY24

Program expenses for FY24 totaled \$11,855,420 including land management costs for all preserves of \$1,233,395, program administration and acquisition operations costs of \$299,486, and \$10,322,539 for land acquisition. In addition, FY24 funding assistance, in the amount of \$155,315, was received for land management. The increase in budget was due to the acquisition of new preserves.

Public Activities

Public activities at preserves during FY24 included adult and youth hunts, hiking, camping, biking, horseback riding, volunteering, guided hikes, and presentations.

Conservation Collier Program Milestones

REFERENDUMS

- Approved in 2002 referendum by 60% of voters.
- Affirmed in 2006 referendum by 82% of voters.
- Approved in 2020 referendum by 77% of voters.

REFERNDUM TAX COLLECTION

- 2004 – 2013: Ad valorem tax of 0.25 mills collected
- 2021 - Ad valorem tax of up to 0.25 mills collection started in tax year 2021 (FY22) for 10 years.

ACQUISITION PHASES

- 2004 – 2011: Acquired 21 different preserves for a total of 4,055 acres.
- 2011 – 2022: No funding source; acquired with borrowed maintenance funds and off-site preserve donations
- 2022 – ongoing acquisition; acquired additional 685 acres and counting

ACQUISITION CYCLES

- February 2021: Acquisition Cycle 10 started accepting applications February 2021 for ranking January 2022 by BCC
- January 2022: Acquisition Cycle 11 started accepting applications
- April 2022: BCC requested “acquisition acceleration” – moved to ranking properties twice per year
- October 2023: BCC requested further streamlining – moved to ranking properties as applications received

Please accept this report on the activities of Conservation Collier calendar year 2024.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The primary purpose of the CCLAAC, as defined by the Conservation Collier Ordinance, has been to assist the Board in establishing an Active Properties Acquisition List with qualified purchase recommendations consistent with the goals of Conservation Collier. This is a 9-member committee. Membership of the CCLAAC is intended to be comprised of broad and balanced representation of the interests of Collier County citizens, including:

- Environmental, land management, and conservation interests
- Agricultural and business interests
- Educational interests
- General civic and citizen interests throughout the county.

Members serving as of during 2024, and their backgrounds and areas of expertise are:



Michele Lenhard - Vice Chair now Chair as of January 2023
(Educational/General Civic/Ecology/Conservation)

Ms. Lenhard was reappointed on February 28, 2025, for a 3-year term. Ms. Lenhard relocated to Collier County 10 years ago from Ridgewood, NJ. She currently serves as the Naturalist Program Chair for the Friends of Barefoot Beach having completed the Florida Master Naturalist Program training. While living in New Jersey she served on the local Board of Education for many years. During her tenure on the Board, she was the liaison to several State educational initiatives and achieved certification as a Master Board Member from New Jersey School Boards. She and her husband owned and operated a records and information management company as well as several commercial real estate entities in New Jersey. Michele's educational background is in environmental science. Early in her career She worked in the scientific instrument industry.



Ron Clark - (Environmental/Conservation/Ecology/Land Management)

Mr. Clark was first appointed to fill the remainder of a vacant Advisory Committee member term on February 11, 2022, and reappointed a to three-year term on January 24, 2023. He has a Bachelor of Science in Resource Management and is a retired Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources for Big Cypress National Preserve following a 44-year career with the National Park Service that included assignments in ten national park units throughout the country. Ron arrived in south Florida in 1989 as an Environmental Specialist and in 1995 began to undertake his role as Principal Advisor and Supervisor of the team of scientists and technicians of the Preserve's Natural and Cultural Resource Management programs. Ron has also served on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Florida Panther Recovery Team, is a past Chair of the National Park Service Southeast Regional Natural Resource Advisory Committee and volunteered in a six-year program as a Senior Technical Advisor for the U.S. Agency for International Development

to protect orangutans and hawksbill sea turtles on the island of Borneo, Indonesia. Ron is also the current Chair of the Land Evaluation and Management Subcommittee and served as Vice-Chair of the CCLAAC this past year.



Gary Bromley - (General Civic/Citizen)

Mr. Bromley was reappointed on January 23, 2024, for a 3-year term. Mr. Bromley has lived in Collier County for 6 years, originally from Westchester, NY, where he served as an environmental educator. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in social science work and is currently retired. This is Mr. Bromley's first time serving on a county board, but he is a member of the League of Women voters where he participates on the Environmental and Government Committees. He has also participated in efforts to place constitutional amendments on voter ballots and has participated with the

Stone crab Alliance on environmental issues.



Rhys Watkins - (Conservation/Real Estate)

Mr. Watkins was reappointed on February 28, 2025, for a 3-year term. Rhys was born and raised in Collier County where he spent time learning about the natural beauty of Collier County through exploring the Big Cypress Preserve and the Ten Thousand Islands. His first involvement with Conservation Collier came as a volunteer while in middle school for the original campaign to pass the referendum in 2002. Rhys currently works in real estate and investments in Naples and has prior experience in

the hospitality industry in Naples and the defense industry in Washington, D.C. Rhys has a master's degree in business administration and a bachelor's degree in mathematics.



John Courtright - (General Civic/Conservation/Environmental)

Mr. Courtright was appointed on September 13, 2022, for a 3-year term and currently is serving as the Outreach Subcommittee Chair. John retired November 2009 from Miami-Dade Fire & Rescue Department. He worked for 30 years as a Fire Fighter/Paramedic. John volunteers with Big Cypress National Preserve, CREW Trust, Paddle Florida, Conservation Collier, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, UF-IFAS and Collier County. John has been a resident of Collier County since 1986.



Nick Pearson - (Environmental/Real Estate/Conservation/Ecology)

Mr. Pearson was appointed in July of 2023 for a 3-year term. Nick is a lifetime resident of South Florida, growing up and appreciating the outdoors in the Naples area since 1991. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology from Eckerd College (2013), during and after which he spent time working with both Mote Marine Lab and the Florida Aquarium. He has spent the last 8 years working as an environmental consultant in the Collier County area.



Christopher Satter (Ecology/Conservation/Environmental/Educational)

Mr. Satter was appointed to the Conservation Collier Land Acquisition Committee on April 23, 2024, for a 3-year term. Born and raised in Miami-Dade and Broward County, he spent many weekends as a child visiting his cousin in Golden Gate Estates, Naples, where they cut trails through the woods, found fishing spots, and searched for native wildlife. He earned a BS in Zoology from the University of West Florida and an MS in Population Ecology from Virginia Tech, where he studied ocelot population dynamics in Belize, Central America. He continued at Virginia

Tech for his PhD, focusing on the spatial ecology and resource selection of wild pigs in Southwest Florida. Currently, he is a research associate on The Florida Panther Project, focusing on panther population trends and spatial ecology.



Austin Howell - (Real Estate/Appraisal/Conservation/Environmental)

Mr. Howell was appointed on February 27, 2024, for a 3-year term. Austin was born and raised in Naples and is an avid outdoorsman who loves to spend time doing any outdoor activity with his two children, Kinsley & Ryder, and his wife, Angie. Austin is Vice President of Soltura Development Group where his everyday job roles allow him to truly appreciate the need for Conservation in our County. In addition to being a part of Conservation Collier, Austin is a graduate of both Leadership Florida and Leadership Collier programs, as well as a founding member of Habitat NextGen.



Oriany Brito - (General Civic/Interest/Real Estate)

Ms. Brito was appointed on February 27th, 2024, for a 3-year term. Raised in the rural heart of Collier County, Oriany developed a deep love and admiration for the natural beauty that surrounds her, from the serene Picayune Strand State Forest to the vast expanses of the Florida Everglades. These early experiences fostered her lifelong passion for conservation and the preservation of our unique environment. A dedicated advocate for nature, Oriany has actively contributed to numerous environmental initiatives, lending her time and energy to organizations such as CCA FL, STAR, Captains for Clean Water, and various local

nature awareness events. In her professional life, Oriany serves as a property manager and realtor in Collier County, where she combines her expertise in real estate with her commitment to sustainability. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Florida Gulf Coast University.

PROGRAM LANDS ACQUISITION STATUS

The FY24 budget included a Conservation Collier Program tax levy of .2242 mil that generated approximately \$31,089,400. Twenty-four (24) percent of annual gross tax receipts were deposited into the Conservation Collier Management Trust Fund to provide for long-term management of lands managed by the Conservation Collier Program. The balance of tax receipts was deposited into the Conservation Collier Acquisition Trust Fund and Project Fund for use in acquiring environmentally sensitive lands and providing amenities.

Acquisition Cycle Process:

The Active Acquisition Lists (AAL) for each Cycle from 2003 to 2022 were taken to the Board on an annual basis for ranking Cycles one (1) through ten (10). In April 2022 the Board requested staff to accelerate acquisition, which resulted in the AAL being taken to the Board two times a year. In April 2024, the Program moved to taking the AAL to the Board for review as applications are received. Once the Board approves an AAL, by Ordinance staff obtains appraisals and perform due diligence for the A-category properties on the AAL.

Status of Acquisition Cycles

Below is the status of each acquisition since the passing of the referendum in 2020:

Acquisition Cycle	Cycle opened	Approved by the Board	# of properties acquired)	# of properties scheduled	Acreage	Total spent/scheduled	Status
Cycle 10	February 2021	January 25, 2022	48		456	\$5,395,650	Acquisitions complete
Cycle 11A	January 2022	December 13, 2022	16	1	45	\$5,828,800	
Cycle 11B		February 28, 2023	9	1	120	\$2,884,275	
Cycle 12A	January 2023	October 10, 2023	18	12	239	\$5,801,464	150-acre property approved by BCC pending closing by June 2025; in due diligence phase
Cycle 12B		June 25, 2024		11	753	\$10,047,510	8 properties of 86 acres are scheduled for closing or purchase agreement pending BCC; 3 in negotiation
Cycle 13 (2024)	January 2024	May 28, 2024		1	1,410	\$11,980,000	1,410 acres of Williams Farms in due diligence phas
TOTAL			91	26	3,023	\$41,937,699	

History of recent Acquisition Cycles

There was a considerable response from sellers starting with Cycle 10 as this was the first time target letters were sent county-wide (with the exception of two multi-parcel project areas) since 2010. Cycle 12A target letters were delayed in sending from February to October 2023 due to

a backlog in closings from Cycle 10. This delay resulted in less applications for Cycle 12A than previous cycles. Now that Cycles have moved from once a year ranking to ranking as application are received this will help with distribution of workload on closings.

Multi-Parcel Project Areas:

Multi-Parcel project areas are a way to accelerate acquisition of parcels within a defined project boundary. These properties have been ranked on the Active Acquisition list as A-category and approved for market studies to be completed and offers made. Because properties are already ranked as A-category, staff sends offer letters annually. Final approval of the purchase is done by the Board purchase agreement. There are currently four (4) multi-parcel project areas.

The Red Maple Swamp and Winchester Head were established in 2004 and 2005.

- Red Maple Swamp - 246 acres (80%) of the project area of 305.8 acres has been acquired
- Winchester Head - 109 acres (69%) of the project area of 158.4 acres has been acquired

The most recent multi-parcel project areas established in February 2023 after Board approval are Panther Walk preserve and Dr. Robert H. Gore III preserve. These are both expansions of existing preserve areas.

- Panther Walk - 66 acres (15%) of 426.1 acres has been acquired
- Dr. Robert H. Gore III - 259 acres (44%) of 590.7 acres has been acquired

The current status of all Conservation Collier acquisitions since Cycle 10 is on the Conservation Collier website here: [Acquisition Status Report \(colliercountyfl.gov\)](https://www.colliercountyfl.gov/conservation/acquisition-status-report)

PROGRAM LAND MANAGEMENT STATUS

Staff is working with contractors for the initial removal of exotic vegetation removal for newly acquired properties including the recently acquired properties:

- Dr. Robert H. Gore – original 170 acres acquired 2018; additional 100 acres acquired through FY24 with more being added
- North Belle Meade – new 256-acre preserve acquired in FY24
- Pepper Ranch – 84 acres added to this existing preserve in FY24

After initial exotic vegetation removal, contractors are hired mostly on an annual basis or biannually depending on budget availability to perform maintenance exotic vegetation treatments on twenty-four (24) of the preserves. After acquisition, trails are also installed by contractors to provide public access where feasible. Access may not be feasible where a public roadway does not yet exist or listed species need to be protected. Once trails are installed, mowing occurs two to three times per month depending on the growing season. The Program currently has one (1) Landscape Technician to perform these duties.

Management Funds are used to restore and maintain natural lands through activities including:

- Trail Maintenance
- Treatment and Removal of Exotic Plant Species
- Restoration of native plant communities through plantings
- Preserve Security and Resource Protection
- Prescribed Burning
- Vegetation Mowing



Staff conducting prescribed burn at Caracara Prairie Preserve.
Photo by staff, Christal Segura

All preserves except for Camp Keais Strand are actively managed. Camp Keais is not currently accessible for management. Table 2 below (page 13) provides the status of each preserve including whether it is open to the public.

Table 1. Preserve Status

Preserve Name	Preserve Acreage	Preserve Status
Alligator Flag Preserve	18.46	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Brewers Landing	14.78	Resource Protection
Camp Keais Strand Preserve	32.50	Resource Protection
Caracara Prairie Preserve	367.70	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Cocohatchee Creek Preserve	3.64	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Dr. Robert H. Gore III Preserve	265.54	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Fred W. Coyle Freedom Park	11.64	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Boardwalk, Parking, Restrooms
Gordon River Greenway	51.05	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Boardwalk, Parking, Restrooms
Logan Woods Preserve	6.78	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
McIlvane Marsh Preserve	385.89	Resource Protection
Nancy Payton Preserve	71.50	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking
North Belle Meade Preserve	295.83	Resource Protection - may provide public access in future
Otter Mound Preserve	2.45	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking
Barfield Burrows	2.13	Resource Protection; viewing from sidewalk
Otter Mound Preserve – Caxambas Dr. Tract	0.56	Resource Protection
Panther Walk Preserve	69.84	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails

Pepper Ranch Preserve	2,655.20	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking, Restrooms, Visitor Center, Biking
Railhead Scrub Preserve	135.36	Resource Protection - will open when road is built
Rattlesnake Hammock Preserve	37.16	Resource Protection - in process of permitting parking lot for public access
Red Maple Swamp Preserve	246.22	Resource Protection - may provide public access in future
Redroot Preserve	9.26	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails
Rivers Road Preserve	96.64	<u>OPEN</u> - Trails, Parking
Shell Island Preserve	130.61	Resource Protection - adjacent to State lands with boardwalk
Wet Woods Preserve	26.77	Resource Protection
Winchester Head Preserve	113.35	Resource Protection - may provide public access in future when more parcels acquired
TOTAL PROGRAM ACREAGE	5,050.86	

For more information about the Conservation Collier preserves go to:

www.ConservationCollier.com

PROGRAM FINANCIAL STATUS

Conservation Collier spent approximately \$122,900,801 on properties between 2004 and 2024, acquiring and managing 5,050 acres in 24 locations throughout Collier County. Acquisition and management funds are generated annually for up to another 10 years (starting from FY22) from an ad valorem property tax of up to .25 mil, or \$25 for each \$100,000 in taxable property value for property owners in Collier County. Additional income is derived from investment and banking interest, grants, cattle leases, hunt fees, and the sale of Panther Habitat Units (PHUs).

At the Board's September 21-22, 2023, final FY 2024 Budget Hearing, the Board approved a reduction in taxes from the proposed millage neutral budget. As part of the strategy to achieve rolled back millage rates for the coming year transfers of funds within the Conservation Collier Acquisition Trust Fund and the Conservation Collier Management Trust Fund were established. A total of \$53,522,300 was initially budgeted for transfers to the General Fund (0001), the Unincorporated General Fund (1011), and the Water Pollution Control Fund (1017). However, this amount was reduced, with \$28,895,864.75 transferred in FY 2024 from the Land Acquisition Fund and \$723,532.15 from the Conservation Collier Maintenance Fund to the General Fund. No transfers are budgeted to the General Fund in FY 2025.

The Conservation Collier Program utilizes five active funds to manage Program financial resources.

- **Fund 1061, Land Acquisition Fund:** for property acquisition activity.
- **Fund 1062, Land Maintenance Trust Fund:** the primary Conservation Collier operating and maintenance fund. This fund also contains long-term Conservation Collier Maintenance Trust reserves.
- **Fund 1063, Conservation Collier Capital Improvement Fund:** significant infrastructure improvements.
- **Fund 0673, Pepper Ranch Conservation Bank:** was created in October 2018 to hold funds for the Conservation Bank at this preserve.
- **Fund 0674, Caracara Preserve** endowment funds and Caracara Preserve maintenance costs are accounted for in Caracara Preserve Trust .

The Program is sustained from the ad valorem collected between 2004-2013 and starting again in 2022. Funds collected between 2004-2013 were used to acquire and manage 4,345 acres of preserve land in 21 different locations throughout Collier County and to open 13 of those preserves to the public. Approximately 20% of the taxes collected were put into a fund for management of existing preserve lands in perpetuity so that no additional tax collections would be required for the management of those existing preserves.

Since FY22 an ad valorem property tax of up to .25 mil for 10 years has provided the Program with a new funding source. Previously, Conservation Collier Ordinance 2002-63 provided that up to seventy-five percent (75%) of all revenues collected for Conservation Collier may be used for acquisition and that management funds shall be no less than twenty-five percent (25%) of revenues collected in one year. In any given year, the land management operational costs are far less than the 25% collected. The balance of funds collected are deposited into the Conservation Collier Land "Trust" Fund 1062 reserves so that the Program can manage preserve lands off the interest revenue of a minimum fund balance in perpetuity (if practicable).

Prior to FY24, the goal of the Program was to maintain \$40 million as the reserve minimum fund balance to allow for funding the management of the preserves in perpetuity. Therefore, the FY23 Management Trust Fund reserve balance was approximately \$40 million. On October 10, 2023, the Board approved an amendment to the Ordinance allowing for the use of the Conservation Collier Acquisition and Management Trust Funds for any County Purpose deemed to be in the best interest of the public. On March 26, 2024, the Board approved a subsequent amendment to the Ordinance deleting the provision added by the October 10, 2023, amendment, and adding language allowing for withdrawal of funds from the Conservation Collier Acquisition and Management Trust Funds in the event of an emergency as determined by the Board of County Commissioners. As a result, the Management Trust Fund reserve balance was reduced to approximately \$23 million in FY24. Section 6 of the ordinance was also revised in 2024 to state that "the Board will set the millage rate for the Conservation Collier Program, which may not exceed 25 mills and set the percentage of revenues each Fund will receive for that fiscal year."

With the goal of funding the management of the preserves in perpetuity with the ad valorem tax collected within the established 10-year period(s), the established minimum Conservation Collier Management Trust Fund balance will be reviewed and adjusted after each acquisition

cycle. Annual preserve management operating expenses will be programed at or below annual revenues from interest, leases, and other revenue to ensure this minimum fund balance is maintained.

Table 2. Land Maintenance Expenses 5-year Average

Conservation Collier Program Land Maintenance Expense & Funding Sources (5 Year Average)	
Land Maintenance Expenses	<u>Actual</u>
Average Acres (FY20-FY24)	4,557
Maint Exp/Acre (CC Program funded)	\$190.90
Maint Exp/Acre (Grant funded)	\$37.65
Combined Maint Cost/Acre	<u>\$228.56</u>
Average Annual Land Maintenance Expense	\$1,041,548
Funding Sources	
CC Program Interest Earnings	\$1,195,980
Leases & Other Sources	\$156,757
PHU Sales	\$353,182
Sub Total	<u>\$1,705,919</u>
Grant Sources	\$171,578
Average Annual Funding Sources	\$1,877,497
Coverage ratio including average PHU proceeds	180.26%
(1) does not include LDC Program off-site preserve maintenance contributions because they are intended to provide purpetual maintenance funding. Off-Site preserve maintenance contributions have averaged \$45,415 during the FY20-FY24 period.	
Coverage ratio without average PHU proceeds	146%

Table 3. – Summary of Conservation Collier Financial Activity for FY24**FY 24 Budget to Actual Comparison****Funds 172(1061), 174 (1062), 179 (1063), 673 (0673) , 674 (0674)**

Expenditures	Adopted Budget	Amended Budget	Commitment	Actual	% Consumed
Personal Services	863,200	903,200	-	827,034	91.6%
Operating expenses	1,376,100	1,650,267	39,481	899,775	56.9%
Capital Outlay	580,000	793,950	1,500	-	0.2%
Land Acquisitions	27,103,400	22,951,835	120,760	10,128,611	44.7%
Transfers	62,819,500	55,445,800	-	31,184,658	56.2%
Reserves	16,120,900	29,549,465	-	-	0.0%
EXPENSE Total	108,863,100	111,294,517	161,741	43,040,078	38.7%

Sources	Adopted Budget	Amended Budget	Commitment	Actual	% Consumed
Operating Rev.	(31,140,300)	(31,140,300)	-	(30,117,795)	96.7%
PHU Sales	-	-	-	-	n/a
Interest	(1,834,600)	(1,834,600)	-	(3,221,176)	175.6%
Dev. Contribution	(37,500)	(37,500)	-	(162,149)	432.4%
Carry Forward	(69,443,000)	(79,258,117)	-	-	0.0%
Transfers	(8,058,700)	(675,000)	-	(1,071,464)	158.7%
Revenue Res.	1,651,000	1,651,000	-	-	0.0%
Revenues	(108,863,100)	(111,294,517)	-	(34,572,584)	31.1%

Expenditures	Adopted Budget	Amended Budget	Commitment	Actual	% Consumed
Program Administration	430,050	410,050	-	299,486	73.0%
Land Acquisitions	27,278,550	23,146,985	120,760	10,322,539	45.1%
Preserve Mgt	2,214,100	2,742,217	40,981	1,233,395	46.5%
EXPENSE Total	29,922,700	26,299,252	161,741	11,855,420	45.1%

Conservation Collier Programs

Events, and Community/Educational Outreach

Pepper Ranch Hunt Program

Two separate hunt programs exist at Pepper Ranch Preserve - a public hunt program that is open to all Collier County residents, regardless of age, and an FWC sponsored youth hunt program that is open to youth aged 12-17 (12-15 for youth turkey hunts). Although youth from Collier County are given first choice of youth hunt participation, youth hunts are open to all Florida youths if openings cannot be filled by Collier County residents. Hogs are considered a nuisance species and are hunted without limit. Staff conduct annual deer surveys to set quotas.

2023-2024 Hunt Season

One hundred twenty-seven (127) applications were received for the public hunting season. Twenty (20) public hunter permits were utilized. A total of 2 deer, 5 turkeys, and 5 hog were harvested from the public and youth hunt that took place during the 2023-2024 hunting season.

A total of 8 hunts are scheduled at Pepper Ranch Preserve during the 2024-2025 hunting season, including 5 public and 3 youth hunts. Four (4) of the public hunts are hog hunts, 1 for deer, and 1 for turkey. Youth hunts include 1 turkey hunt, 1 deer hunt, and 1 squirrel/hog hunt.

Caracara Prairie Preserve Hunt Program

Caracara Prairie Preserve is established as part the Corkscrew Marsh Unit of the CREW Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA). This allows for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regulated public hunting for hog and spring turkey to occur within Caracara Prairie Preserve as part of the CREW Corkscrew Marsh Unit. FWC manages these quota hunts. Beginning in 2022, CREW Corkscrew Marsh Unit check stations are no longer staffed and harvest results are reliant on hunters self-reporting.

MITIGATION PROGRAMS

Conservation Collier has followed 2007 Board direction (6/26/07, Agenda Item 10A) in pursuing both wetland and Panther Habitat Unit (PHU) mitigation credit for those properties where the opportunity exists. Wetland mitigation credit generation has not been economical for the Program to pursue. The costs associated with wetland mitigation bank establishment within Conservation Collier lands are high, because only hydrologic restoration can provide the “lift” or “functional gain” necessary to generate credits. Credits are not provided by state or federal agencies for exotic vegetation removal since this restoration activity is already required as part of the Conservation Collier Program. The Program has pursued PHU mitigation credits at Caracara Prairie and Pepper Ranch preserves.

Caracara Prairie Preserve - All PHU credits have been consumed. The Conservation Collier Program received a total of \$1,301,600 in revenue over FY14 and FY15 for the PHU credits. This revenue is estimated to fund 25% of routine management costs and 100% of costs associated with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) PHU mitigation requirements. Interest generated from the dedicated Caracara Prairie Preserve Management Fund is allocated annually for exotic vegetation removal and restoration of Caracara Prairie Preserve.



Photo by staff, Angel Kelley

Pepper Ranch Preserve - The Pepper Ranch Preserve Panther Habitat Conservation Bank was certified by the USFWS on January 29, 2019. The Panther Habitat Conservation Bank allows multiple County projects to be mitigated through the preservation and enhancement of Pepper Ranch Preserve. The agreement provided for 8,669 PHU credits expected to be used for development of future County projects at a cost savings of \$1,077,123.25.

Since 2019, 2,703.61 PHUs have been purchased from County Divisions to mitigate for four different County projects generating a total of \$1,518,450 in revenue for management of Pepper Ranch Preserve. There are currently 5,965.39 PHUs remaining in the Conservation Bank. Interest generated from the dedicated Conservation Bank Trust Fund is allocated annually for exotic vegetation removal and restoration of the Conservation Bank portions of the Pepper Ranch Preserve.

GRANTS AND FUNDING ASSISTANCE

Conservation Collier has actively pursued grants and funding assistance for both acquisition and management purposes. Currently, there have been no awards for land acquisition, but many for management, primarily for the removal of invasive, exotic species but also for needed equipment and plant community restoration. Exotic removal grants and funding assistance have come from state and federal government agencies, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Partners Program) and the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) through the Invasive Plant Management Section (IPMS). The table below shows the amount of funding assistance obtained during FY24. The total value of grants awarded to the Program for land management since 2003 is \$1,401,231.

Preserve	Agency	Grant or Funding Assistance	Amount Awarded	Fiscal Year Funding Assistance
Pepper Ranch (707 acres)	State	Funding Assistance	\$129,599	2024
Red Maple Swamp (114.72 acres)	State	Funding Assistance	\$25,717	2024
		Total 2024	\$155,316	2024

Looking ahead to FY25, in addition to the funding assistance applied for annually staff has requested Board approval to apply for additional types of funding assistance with FWC for FY24 and FY25. The details of these applications will be provided with the 2025 Annual Report.

VOLUNTEERS

During 2024, Conservation Collier was the grateful recipient of 1,349.75 volunteer hours.

Volunteer tasks accomplished include:

- Preserve monitoring and maintenance
- Trail (including mountain bike trails) creation and maintenance
- FWC Youth Hunt guides
- Wildlife surveys
- Vegetation management
- Restoration Plantings
- Workdays to assist with Special Projects

One Conservation Collier volunteer workday in 2024 included working with the Oracle corporation to conduct trail maintenance at the Pepper Ranch Preserve.



Work Day at Pepper Ranch Preserve with Oracle



Conservation Collier continues to partner with local Scout troops to enhance preserve amenities on public trails. The above does not include Eagle Scout projects where total hours worked are not collected. The following are Eagle Scout projects completed for Conservation Collier during 2024:

- **Joshua Segura**- Alligator District, SW Florida Council Troop, 243 Pepper Ranch Preserve.
Installed 100 trail markers, trail blazes, and two map boxes on the Pepper Ranch Preserve Sunflower Trace trail in March 2024.



Scout project at Pepper Ranch Preserve

2025 OBJECTIVES

1. Acquire newly approved lands as and place them under management.
2. Continue to accept donation properties under the Land Development Code Offsite Preservation Option.
3. Continue to develop public access for acquired properties as directed by the Board of County Commissioners.
4. Continue to implement land management practices at all preserves as outlined in each Board-approved Land Management Plan.
5. Continue to implement the Collier County Hunt Program at the Pepper Ranch Preserve.
6. Secure grant funding and funding assistance wherever possible.
7. Look for any and all ways to reduce expenditures without sacrificing quality of land management and public access amenities.
8. Continue to pursue mitigation opportunities on acquired lands.



Cocohatchee Creek Preserve Photo by staff, Angel Kelley

EXHIBITS

Exhibit A. 2024 Map of Conservation Collier Program Lands

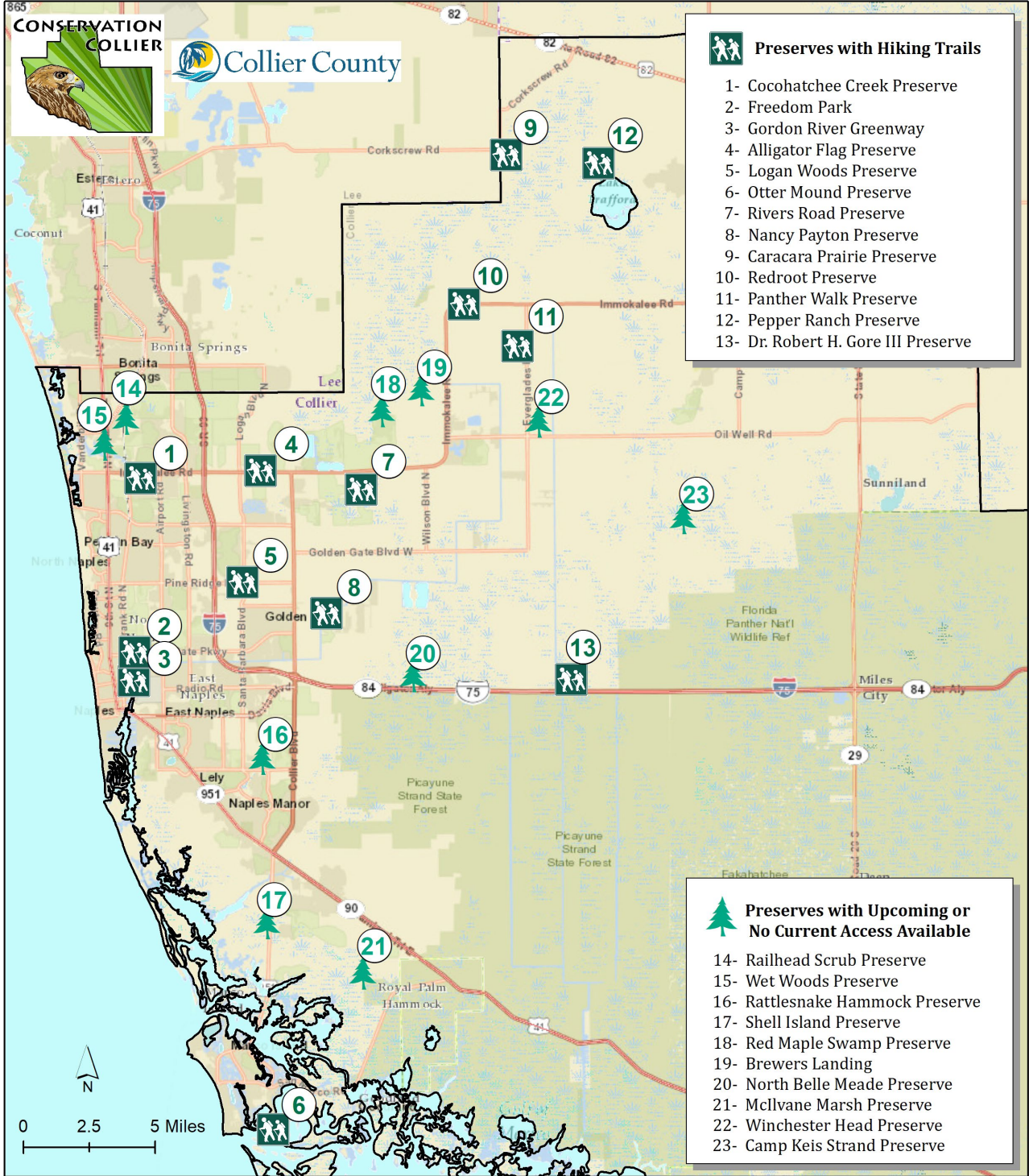


Exhibit B. Conservation Collier Preserves by Commission District

