



PALM BEACH COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Natural Resources Stewardship Division Status Report

September 2009

Annual Benefits to County Provided by Natural Areas Valued at \$136 Million

The Palm Beach County Green Task Force has provided its report to the Board of County Commissioners on how the County could become more “green” by being more environmentally and fiscally responsible.

ERM staff members were asked to analyze the recommendations in the draft report. They determined that the natural areas provide an annual economic benefit of \$136 million, based on studies that calculated what it would cost society to obtain the services provided by natural lands if those lands did not exist. The economic benefit to the County reflects a 20:1 benefit-to-cost ratio. For more information on the value of South Florida habitats and the research used to make the cost-benefit calculation, visit: http://www.defenders.org/resources/publications/programs_and_policy/science_and_economics/conservation_economics/a_preliminary_assessment_of_the_economic_benefits_of_land_conservation_in_florida.pdf?htm.

One recommendation in the report is to have the Board establish a consistent funding source for the management and maintenance of the natural areas managed by the County. Staff analyzed the recommendations and proposed several ways to secure this management funding, including voter approval of a half-cent sales tax for two years. For more information on the Green Task Force, visit: <http://www.co.palm-beach.fl.us>.

Five Prescribed Burns Completed During Summer of 2009

ERM completed five prescribed burns on natural areas this summer – at Delaware Scrub, Limestone Creek and Hungryland Slough in July, and at Acreage Pines and Pine Glades in August. Fire is an important factor in the preservation of Florida’s ecosystems; many rare plants and animals live in fire-maintained communities and depend on periodic fires for their survival.

Prescribed fires benefit people as well. Land managers use prescribed burns to reduce heavy fuel loads and clear underbrush to prevent a devastating wildfire from occurring. A prescribed burn can be difficult to accomplish because of the specific weather conditions required to safely conduct the burn.

Seven other natural areas have been prepared for prescribed burns. These sites will be burned as soon as the weather conditions are suitable.



Prescribed burn at Delaware Scrub

Cypress Creek Natural Area

Restoration activities on this 2,083-acre site during 2010-2012 will include initial removal of nonnative vegetation and hydrological restoration in the 251-acre Jupiter Ranch tract, contouring of old shell mining pits on this tract to more natural wetlands grades, and planting of native vegetation in these areas. The restoration work is being funded by a \$625,000 grant from the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative (LRPI).

Delaware Scrub Natural Area

The permits have been issued for the construction of the public use facilities at this site, and staff is developing specifications for construction and initiating the bid process. These facilities are being funded with an LRPI matching grant.

Juno Dunes Natural Area

The pond creation work in the area south of Donald Ross Road has been completed, and a weir has been installed to separate the freshwater and estuarine systems. A contractor has installed plant materials in the wetland and transitional areas near the weir and installed a plug as part of the hydrologic restoration work.



Location of weir at Juno Dunes

Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail Trailhead

Staff has installed several large trees and a significant amount of groundcover plants around the trailhead facility on State Road 98, adjacent to Lake Okeechobee. These plants were provided as mitigation by Republic Sanitation under the County's vegetation preservation program.



New plantings at LOST trailhead

Limestone Creek Natural Area

The contract for the construction of two oxbows on the south side of the C-18 Canal was approved by the BCC. Staff has met with the contractor, and work is underway.

Loxahatchee Slough Natural Area

Two crews have begun to clear exotic vegetation in the eastern portion of the Sandhill Crane tract. This work is funded by a \$1.5 million Natural Resources Conservation Service grant. During the dry season, the cleared berms will be pushed back into the on-site drainage canals to restore the overland sheet flow. Staff is working with the South Florida Water Management District to replace the PC-17 culverts that are in disrepair and plans to apply to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a grant to help fund the culvert replacement work.

Pine Glades Natural Area

Initial exotic plant removal has been completed within the restoration area in the eastern part of the site, and 50% of the wetland restoration work has been completed within that area. A 150-foot-long section of a berm was removed this year to restore a more natural water flow over 340 acres. Restoration efforts during the next two years will be focused in the northern part of the site and will include continued follow-up treatment of nonnative vegetation, creation of 35 acres of wetlands and 40 acres of uplands, and removal of over 3 miles of berms and 1-1/2 miles of asphalt roads.



Berm removal area at Pine Glades

Pondhawk Natural Area

ERM has received the environmental resource permit for the restoration work and the installation of the public use facilities. Staff is working with the City of Boca Raton to obtain any necessary building permits to begin the restoration work on the lakeshore and the creation of the approximately 5-acre wetland. Staff submitted a grant application to obtain funds for the restoration work, and planned to begin the restoration project during the 2010 dry season, but the grant was not awarded. The project may be delayed until another funding source has been identified.

Winding Waters Natural Area

The wetland creation work is moving forward at a fast pace. As of September 14, 2009, the contractor had moved 43,927 truckloads (1,012,750 tons) of fill to the Solid Waste Authority. Approximately 45% of the excavation work is complete.

An interlocal agreement has been approved with Florida's Turnpike Enterprise for the County to clear the canal/ditch on the east side of the Turnpike and to manage the adjacent right of way located on the west side of the natural area. Staff is working with the Northern Palm Beach County Improvement District to obtain a permit for work within the canal right of way.



Removal of fill at Winding Waters