

ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS ACQUISITION TASK FORCE SUMMARY REPORT

Presented to:
The Board of County Commissioners
of Pasco County, Florida

Prepared by:
Eva Bailey
Patricia Fesmire
J. Ben Harrill
Lisa Henningsen
Mike Mahagan
Jon Moody
Anne Schmidt
Wilton Simpson
David Sumpter
Robert J. Tietz
and Jack Vogel



Facilitated by:
Jay H. Exum, Ph.D.
Glating Jackson
33 East Pine Street
Orlando, FL 32801

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Eva Bailey

Senior Ecologist/Vice
President
Biological Research
Associates
3910 US Highway 301 N.
Suite 180
Tampa, FL 33619

Patricia Fesmire
Senior Resource Analyst
Tampa Bay Water
2535 Landmark Drive
Suite 211
Clearwater, FL 33761

J. Ben Harrill
Figurski & Harrill
2435 U.S. Hwy. 19
Suite 350
Holiday, FL 34691

Lisa Henningsen

Environmental Scientist
SWFWMD
2379 Broad Street
Brooksville, FL 34604

Mike Mahagan
Real Estate Broker
17017 Spring Branch Road
Dade City, FL 33523

Jon Moody
5340 Merkin Place
New Port Richey, FL 34655

Anne C. Schmidt

Environmental Scientist
6327 Barcellona Road
Land O'Lakes, FL 34639

Wilton Simpson

P.O. Box 721
Trilby, FL 33593

David Sumpter
8511 Mourning Dove Pl.
Wesley Chapel, FL 33544

Robert J. Tietz

Biologist
Pasco County Government
7530 Little Road
New Port Richey, FL 34654

Jack Vogel

President
Natural Resource Planning
Services, Inc.
P.O. Box 564
San Antonio, FL 33576

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FIGURE

1. ELATF Proposed Conservation Linkages

ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS ACQUISITION TASK FORCE SUMMARY REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pasco County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) established, by Resolution No. 02-236, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Task Force (ELATF) on August 27, 2002. The ELATF was charged with numerous tasks, including:

- To assess the economic feasibility and validity of an environmental lands acquisition program,
- To recommend an overall monetary figure for all potential acquisitions,
- To evaluate options for funding sources and potential partnerships,
- To define the criteria for selection of acquisition lands,
- To recommend acquisition methods best suited to Pasco County, and
- To establish a program structure.

The ELATF addressed these tasks in a series of meetings held between October 2002 and September 2003.

The ELATF made an assessment of similar environmental lands acquisition programs. A survey of comparable counties including Alachua, Brevard, Hernando, Hillsborough, Polk and Sarasota counties was completed. Information obtained from each of these counties' environmental lands programs was particularly useful in the development of this report, and the crafting of the proposed program. The table below summarizes relevant information from several counties adjacent to Pasco. (Pinellas County information was obtained verbally for inclusion in this Table.)

Summary of Comparable Counties' Program

County	Funding Mechanism	Bonded Y/N	Per Annum Yield	Length of Program	Date of Inception
Hernando	0.10 mil ad valorem	Y	\$300,000	30 years	1988
Hillsborough	0.25 mil ad valorem	Y	\$5.25 M	20 years	1989
Polk	0.2 mil ad valorem	Y	\$2.8 M	20 years	1995
Pinellas	Series of sales tax referenda	N	\$10 M	35 years	1974

In addition, Ms. Jennifer Seney, of Pascowildlife.com, organized and facilitated a seminar in which numerous of these counties provided a summary of their programs and gave advice to the ELATF as to how to proceed with this analysis.

As required by the Resolution, other useful data were compiled in the assessment of the appropriateness of an environmental lands program in Pasco County. This information included the report prepared by Glatting Jackson, March 2002, entitled Assessments of Measures to Protect Wildlife Habitat in Pasco County, the Southwest Florida Water Management District 5-Year Acquisition Plan, the Pasco County Plat Book depicting land ownership, and numerous Geographic Information System (GIS) files including data such as:

- Southwest Florida Water Management District land cover maps,
- Property Appraiser data,
- 1994, 1999 and 2002 aerial photography,

- Future land use maps,
- Soils maps,
- Wetland maps,
- Public lands, and
- Biodiversity hotspots.

The ELATF established target acquisition criteria and a proposed ranking system for Pasco County conservation lands. The objectives of Pasco County's land acquisition programs included the following:

- a) Protection of Natural Communities,
- b) Connection of Natural Linkages,
- c) Conservation of Viable Populations of Native Plant and Animals,
- d) Protection of Water Resources and Wetland Systems,
- e) Enhancement of Resource-Based Recreation Opportunities,
- f) Expansion of Environmental Education Opportunities,
- g) Incorporation of Best Management Practices.

The ranking system proposed for target acquisition parcels was modeled after the system used in Alachua County. Scores for each category were established from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the highest quality.

The ELATF made recommendations as to the structure and execution of the Pasco County land acquisition program. The structure of the proposed Environmental Lands Acquisition Selection Committee (ELASC) included the following:

- a) 9 to 11 members,
- b) Qualified personnel with experience in natural resource and environmental science, and
- c) Recommended members from other professions within the County.

Recommendations pertaining to the process of identifying target lands were also provided by the ELATF. This included an assessment of the scientific criteria established by the ELATF, methods of recommending parcels for acquisition, and the process of review of potential acquisition parcels by the ELASC.

The ELATF conducted a detailed assessment of potential methods of funding the land acquisition program. Options included:

- Ad valorem taxes,
- Local option sales tax,
- Specific assessments, user charges,
- Matching funds from external agencies,
- Mitigation banking, and
- Impact fees.

Through lengthy discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these options, the ELATF recommended consideration of a portion of the proposed Penny for Pasco sales tax as the preferred means of funding a future environmental lands acquisition program. Other non-monetary acquisition mechanisms were recommended as supplements to funding received in the proposed Penny for Pasco sales tax. These mechanisms included:

- Voluntary contributions,

- Density credits,
- Incentives for county quality developments,
- Consolidated mitigation programs,
- Developer contributions/incentives, and
- Developer extractions.

The ELATF conducted an extensive review of the probable costs of proposed acquisition lands. A part of this review included an assessment of recent purchases, and the probable percentage of lands that would be purchased for less than fee options. Ultimately, the ELATF estimated an annual need of \$6.9 million per year to acquire target acquisition lands important to the land acquisition program. Recent estimates for funding by the proposed Penny for Pasco sales tax will generate less than \$6.9 million per year. As a result, the ELATF emphasized the importance for non-monetary funding options, incentive programs to developers and agricultural interests, maximizing the funding from external sources and matching grants, and consideration of other, innovative strategies to ensure the conservation of natural lands identified by the ELATF.

The ELATF completed assignments associated with the BOCC Resolution and conducted a workshop with the BOCC on August 26, 2003. At that workshop, the ELATF presented the results of its findings and made the following recommendations to the BOCC.

- Prior to September 15, 2003, submit the maps depicting proposed acquisition study areas to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) for inclusion in their five-year plan; the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) for the Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund; and other potential partners.
- Establish, by Resolution, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Selection Committee (ELASC) by March 31, 2004.
- By March 31, 2004, hire, or contract with a land acquisition manager to focus on the land acquisition program, and to facilitate meetings with the ELASC.
- Send a copy of the ELATF report to potential land acquisition partners with a request for consideration of future funding priorities.
- Consider the ELATF's proposed draft language for the Penny for Pasco referendum, and continue to prioritize the funding for natural lands.
- Provide guidance to the ELATF as to how it can assist in promoting the upcoming sales tax referendum.
- Accept the final ELATF summary report and its recommendations.

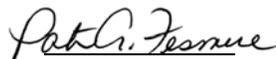
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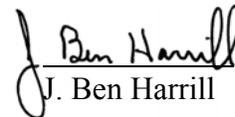
The ELATF wishes to thank the Board of County Commissioners for their support and their participation during the workshop on August 26, 2003. We appreciate their acceptance of this report, and look forward to fulfillment of incredible opportunities of a land acquisition program.

We would also like to thank Jennifer Seney for instigating the land acquisition program in the first place, and for hosting an informative seminar at the outset of this project. We further appreciated the energy provided by Ms. Seney and other "Pasco Wildlifers" at all of the public meetings of the ELATF. Since most of the ELAFT workshops extended up to the 8:30 p.m. timeframe, the representatives from the Clerk's office were almost always kept until at least 9:00 p.m. – we appreciate their diligence in documenting these meetings. Donna Wirt provided great support during the course of the project, and Elizabeth Blair provided input on several issues relating to legal aspects of the program. We appreciate John Gallagher's insight into the best methods of funding land acquisition in Pasco County, and wish him well in administering its progress.

The ELATF, September 2003


Eva Bailey


Patricia Fesmire


J. Ben Harrill


Lisa Henningsen

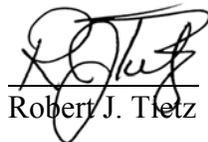

Mike Mahagan

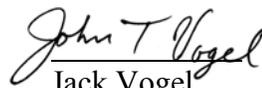

Jon Moody


Anne Schmidt


Wilton Simpson


David Sumpter


Robert J. Tietz


Jack Vogel



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 History of land acquisition in Pasco County

Blessed with acres of open agricultural lands, natural landscapes, and recognized for its abundant water resources, Pasco County has attracted much attention and investment from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) acquisition program. Past coordination with this agency's efforts, has resulted in the acquisition of two county parks within state lands: the 8,069 acre Starkey Wilderness Park and the 408 acre Withlacoochee Park in the Green Swamp. Two other parks, the 101-acre Key Vista Nature Park and the 111-acre Crews Lake Park are considered "resource-based" recreation parks, which are defined as offering passive activities such as hiking, biking and canoeing. The SWFWMD will soon complete the purchase of a portion of the Connerton Ranch, and has delineated a large "less than fee" area termed Pasco 1 for future conservation purchases.

Depending on whose numbers are used and what lands are counted, the estimated percent of Pasco County land in conservation ranges from 11.2% (Wade-Trim, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, April 2001) to 16.4% (using acreage from county appraiser's records). SWFWMD estimates are higher; at just less than 19% - these estimates include the Cross-Bar wellfield and the Connerton acquisition. Included in all the percentages are the Serenova tract (not currently open to public use) and the Boyce-Werner Salt Springs State Park, which is developed as a passive recreational park. While the area encompassed by conservation lands in the County is significant, a great deal of the County's most important natural resource is under pressure from development. In a Pasco Tribune article on April 17, 2003 Pasco County was listed as the 100th fastest growing county in the United States (out of a total of 3,141 U.S. counties). Pasco County faces a real challenge to balance growth and the associated increase in the tax base, with quality of life issues and a desire to preserve some of Florida's natural environment.

1.2 Wildlife Habitat Protection Study

The protection of environmentally sensitive lands, wildlife and flora was written into Pasco County's first Comprehensive Plan in 1989. A recent impetus to move forward on these initiatives came from a Settlement Agreement initiated by a citizen's administrative challenge to the County's Comprehensive Plan. The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) accepted this Settlement Agreement in September of 2000. One of several positive actions that came from this Settlement was the County's commitment to contract for an extensive Wildlife Habitat Protection Study. The study was completed by a consultant and accepted by the BOCC in March 2002. The resulting report included a recommendation to pursue a natural lands acquisition program.

1.3 BOCC Resolution establishing the ELATF

Carrying forward from the recommendations from the study, a citizens group commissioned a professional poll to assess the public's interest in preserving environmental lands. What they discovered is consistent with other trends across the United States. People want their local governments to watch out for and protect sensitive environmental lands in their communities – for now and for future generations. Encouraged by this support, the citizens group petitioned the Pasco County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to establish a task force to research and provide advice about the potential for an environmental lands acquisition program. The

Environmental Lands Acquisition Task Force (ELATF) was established by Resolution of the BOCC on August 27, 2002. The Task Force was charged with numerous tasks, including:

- To assess the economic feasibility and validity of an environmental lands acquisition program,
- To recommend an overall monetary figure for all potential acquisitions,
- To evaluate options for funding sources and potential partnerships,
- To define the criteria for selection of acquisition lands. (The full Resolution is included as **Appendix 1** of this report),
- To recommend acquisition methods best suited to Pasco County, and
- To establish a program structure.

1.4 Other local land acquisition programs in Florida

In Florida, 25 counties currently have environmental land acquisition programs and several more are in the process of developing programs. Many of these programs began over 15 years ago.

The reasons that led each of the counties to recognize the need for such an environmental land acquisition program are very similar. Each county had a desire to:

- Preserve environmentally sensitive lands and habitats;
- Avoid the loss of habitat for endangered species of plants and animals;
- Protect wetlands and the water resources of the area;
- Provide corridors and linkages between larger tracts of preserved lands; and
- Provide for public recreation, and education with parks, green spaces and trails.

Many surrounding counties, including Hillsborough, Pinellas, Hernando and Polk counties, have successful environmental land acquisition programs. The potential for cost-sharing partnerships in land acquisition projects is increased greatly by the existence of local programs, and such partnerships can often facilitate successful completion of projects. Also, the existence of a local acquisition program can serve as a powerful catalyst for securing state funds, such as Preservation 2000 / Florida Forever / Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) programs, the SWFWMD, and The Florida Communities Trust program.



2.0 THE ELATF STUDY

This report is the result of the collaborative efforts of the ELATF. The ELATF researched other land acquisition programs in counties across the State, compiled other useful data, and made preliminary recommendations on land acquisition criteria and land acquisition committee structure and function.

2.1 Comparable Counties' Approaches

During February 2003, the ELATF, through its consultant Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin Lopez & Rinehart, conducted a survey of other environmental lands acquisition programs in the state in an effort to compare and contrast programs similar to that proposed for Pasco County. Respondents included the counties of Alachua, Brevard, Hernando, Hillsborough, Polk, and Sarasota. Specifically, we prepared a survey of comparable counties' land acquisition programs that included the following:

- Land acquisition selection criteria;
- Land acquisition committee descriptions;
- Staffing plans for implementation (including staff responsibilities, subcontractors, and an annual budget);
- Similar task force reports; referendum language;
- Funding sources from successful programs;
- Land management procedural manuals;
- Vehicles for referendum development; and
- Comprehensive plans.

We have referenced much of that compiled information below, and in other sections of this report. The following summarizes the Land Acquisition Target Criteria, Funding Mechanisms, Dedicated Staff, and Lands Acquired for the six responding counties.

2.1.1 Alachua County

Alachua County began the "Alachua County Forever Program" in 2000.

Land Acquisition Target Criteria: The Alachua County Forever Land Conservation Board developed a "Land Conservation Decision Matrix" for use in choosing lands for acquisition. Their approach is largely quantitative, with a weighting and ranking of numerous criteria. Three main categories are established: environmental values, management issues, and economic/acquisition issues, each having several factors for consideration. For example, the environmental values section contains several sub-categories: protection of water resources, protection of natural communities and landscapes, protection of plant and animal species, and social/human values. Each of the environmental sub-categories receive weighting of relative importance, from 0 –1, depending on the project type (e.g. large preserve, corridor, etc.) totaling 1, which becomes normalized to have equal weighting with management issues and economic/acquisition issues categories. Each factor is assigned a value 1(worst)-5 (best). Each value is accompanied with a descriptive statement. Overall site quality has a minimum score of 2 (least desirable) and maximum of 10 (most desirable).

Funding Mechanism: Alachua County's main funding mechanism is the issuance of interest-bearing bonds not exceeding \$29 million, payable through 0.25-mil ad valorem tax over the next

20 years. Other funding sources include grants and partnerships commitments totaling \$10 million.

Partnerships/Other Funding Sources: The County also seeks matching funds from federal and state sources. Alachua County was recently awarded \$1.5 million from the Florida Communities Trust Florida Forever allocation. The County is willing to own land in partnership with other agencies. Ten percent of acquisition funds are set aside for land management. The County General Fund is used for certain administrative and operating expenses.

Committee and Staff: The land acquisition committee “Alachua County Forever Land Conservation Board” consists of eleven volunteer board members who serve staggered four-year terms. Five members represent diverse community interests, four members have education and experience in the natural resources. The program includes three full-time paid employees. Volunteers, county staff, contractors, and interns are used to supplement the effort. Staff, and the percentage of time spent on associated duties, includes:

- Program Manager:
 - Program administration: 25%
 - Project evaluation: 10%
 - General acquisition: 10%
 - Site-specific acquisition: 45%
 - General stewardship: 5%
 - Special projects: 5%
- Senior Environmental Planner
 - Program administration: 25%
 - Project evaluation: 35%
 - General acquisition: 5%
 - General stewardship: 15%
 - Site specific stewardship planning: 15%
 - Site specific stewardship implementation: 5%
- Senior Environmental Specialist
 - Program administration: 15%
 - Project evaluation: 45%
 - General stewardship: 5%
 - Site specific stewardship planning: 10%
 - Site specific stewardship implementation: 25%

Lands Acquired: http://environment.alachua-county.org/Land_Conservation/Download_Files/ACF_AAList_projects_9-27-02.htm

2.1.2 Brevard County

Brevard County’s Environmentally Endangered Lands Program (EEL) was adopted by Resolution 90-273 by the Board of County Commissioners on July 24, 1990. The program’s goal is “Protecting and Preserving Biological Diversity Through Responsible Stewardship of Brevard County’s Natural Resources.” The citizens of Brevard voted to tax themselves by approving a referendum in September of 1990, giving authorization to the County to acquire, protect and maintain environmentally endangered lands, and make improvements as appropriate

for passive recreation and environmental education. The EEL program encourages active citizen participation and community involvement.

Land Acquisition Target Criteria: EEL developed the “Land Acquisition Manual for Environmentally Endangered Lands Program”. Their approach is relatively qualitative, non-numeric, and context-based. Three ecosystem-based categories are recognized: value for species, natural communities present, and landscape values.

- Value for species: important sites will have endemism, high biodiversity, and minimum viable population of target species.
- Natural Communities present: High priority (rare, unprotected), medium priority (fairly common, unprotected), and low priority (common, essentially protected) communities.
- Landscape value: Degree of disturbance, habitat connectivity, and maintenance of ecosystem function (e.g. fire and hydrological regimes).

Additional goals include educational and recreational potential, economic feasibility, and threat of conversion.

Funding Mechanism: Voters approved a referendum authorizing the county to issue up to \$55 million in bonds. These bonds are paid for by a .25 mil ad valorem tax, levied annually for 20 years until 2011.

Partnerships/Other Funding Sources: Preservation 2000/CARL/ Florida Forever awarded a total of more than \$19 million. St. John’s River Water Management District provided \$10 million matching funds. Ninety percent of lands acquired were funded with these awards and matches.

Committee and Staff: Brevard County has two separate land acquisition committees: The “EEL Procedures Committee” establishes rules for EEL Selection and Management Committee and reports to Board of County Commissioners. This committee consists of ten members (one representative from each of five Commission Districts, one from financial sector, one from development community, two from environmental community, and one at-large member). Members have knowledge of environmentally sensitive lands, and land acquisition experience. A maximum of five Brevard County staff members may be (shall be) non-voting. The chair and co-chair of the committee is elected by committee. The second land acquisition committee is the “EEL Selection and Management Committee”, which makes recommendations to EEL Procedures Committee. The Management Committee consists of seven volunteer members who serve a minimum term of two-years. All hold graduate degrees in biology or environmental science, are active in conservation, and have familiarity with Brevard ecosystems. One full-time county staff Program Coordinator (may be from Parks and Recreation) is part of the Management Committee. There are seven staff members in EEL, two of which are full time. Their titles and the time spent at associated tasks are as follows:

- Program Manager (1):
 - Land acquisition: 50-99%
 - Land management: 1-50%
- Land Managers (4 total):
 - Land management and administration: 75-100%
 - Grant administration, education, extension: 0-25%
- Secretary (1):
 - Land acquisition: 50%

- Volunteer Coordinator (1):
 - Assisting managers, coordinating volunteers: 75%
- Environmental Education Specialist:
 - Education and public programs: 50%

Lands Acquired: <http://www.eelbrevard.com/eel/faq/intro.htm#Conservation>

2.1.3 Hernando County

The Hernando County Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) Program was approved by bond referendum on November 8, 1988. The County has thirty years to pay back the bond from ad valorem taxes. The goals of the program are to build an East-West corridor across the county linking large conservation tracts of the Withlacoochee State Forest and to develop a North-South Coastal Corridor that will continue into Citrus County and south into northern Pasco County. The primary objective of the program is resource protection with secondary goals of providing passive and or active recreational opportunities.

Land Acquisition Target Criteria: Hernando County initially ranks nominated properties by evaluating ‘Requisite Conditions For Designation as Environmentally Sensitive Lands’ Fourteen basic criteria are evaluated prior to designation as an ESL. Projects on the ESL shortlist are further evaluated in order to determine which projects receive priority for acquisition. Three main categories are further broken down into sub-categories:

Protection of Vegetative Communities and Wildlife

- The project site contains predominantly native vegetative communities that have not been subjected to significant disturbances or alteration as a result of current or past human activities. (1 point)
- The project site contains native vegetative communities or plant species that are recognized as rare or threatened within Hernando County. (2 points)
- The project site contains types of vegetative communities recognized by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory as “imperiled” or “critically imperiled”. (1 point)
- The project site contains habitat recognized by appropriate state or federal agencies as typically suitable for one or more listed animal species. (1 point)
- One or more listed animal species have been documented by professionally accepted methods to use all or a portion of the project site as habitat. (1 point)
- The project site supports, or is critical to, the recovery or maintenance of regionally significant populations of one or more listed animal species or migratory birds. (2 points)

Protection of Water Resources

- The project site borders or encompasses surface water resources that are designated as Class II waters, Outstanding Florida Waters, a National Estuary or Marine Sanctuary, Aquatic Preserve, Wild and Scenic River or other special designation intended to protect the water quality of the waterbody. (2 points)
- The project site borders or encompasses other natural surface waters. (1 point)
- The project site protects high aquifer recharge areas, wellhead protection areas,
- Or potable water supply areas as recognized by local, state or federal agencies. (1 point)

Other Features

- The conceptual management plan provides for educational facilities and/or outdoor recreational opportunities that will promote protection of natural resources while not endangering the integrity of the ecological systems present on the site. (1 point)
- The conceptual management plan could be effectively administered in a manner that would protect and enhance the resource. (1 point)
- The project site represents an ecological community (or communities) that is (are) poorly represented in public ownership, especially in Hernando County. (2 points)
- The current land use surrounding the project site is compatible with the proposed management and preservation of the project site. (1 point)
- The project site more than adequately meets several of the ranking criteria and is in imminent danger of development. (2 points)
- The project site satisfies a goal, objective or policy of the adopted Comprehensive Plan. (2 points)
- The project will enhance a local or regional network of linked greenways/wildlife corridors, by connecting, extending or closing gaps in existing greenway/wildlife corridors. (2 points)
- The project site contains significant historical, archaeological or cultural sites as recognized in the Comprehensive Plan or by a federal, state or local authority. (2 points)
- The proposed project provides for alternatives to the acquisition of fee interests in land, including, but not limited to, acquisition of less than fee interest of all or a significant portion of the project site through conservation easement, purchase of development rights, leases, and leaseback arrangements. (1 point)
[Source: “Hernando County’s Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program—Acquisition Manual” Section 3: Nomination, Evaluation and Acquisition]

Funding Mechanisms: The program is funded by a 0.10 mil ad valorem tax for 30 years. This tax provides \$300,000 annually. Management provisions are not included.

Partnerships/Other Funding Sources: The Hernando County ESL Program includes “Shared Projects” which are any parcel and/or projects included within other public or private programs such as, CARL, SWFWMD, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Lands and Florida Communities Trust. Ninety percent of lands were acquired with matching funds from partners.

Committee and Staff: The Environmentally Sensitive Lands Committee (ESLC) consists of eight volunteer members of different environmental backgrounds, plus one layperson, and one realtor. Depending on budget, County staffing has varied from one to two environmental planners. Currently there are two environmental planners on staff with approximately 20% to 25% of their time spent on ESL or ESL related work. The Environmental Planner has at least a B.S. in natural sciences and five years experience, and Planner I has at least a B.S. in natural sciences. The ESL Program is managed within the Hernando County Planning Department. Under Section 1, E. Role of Hernando County Staff, of the Hernando County’s Acquisition Manual referenced above, County staff (The Planning Department staff or other County staff as designated by the County Administrator) plays a major roll in the acquisition process. County staff:

- Is responsible for taking the lead in drafting and maintaining the ESL Acquisition Manual;

- Provides support to the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Committee (ESLC);
- Serves as liaison between the ESLC and the BOCC;
- Initiates the site selection process;
- Advertises initiation of nomination cycles and serves as contact with the public for receipt of nominations for evaluation;
- Provides the preliminary evaluation of potential purchases;
- Manages the contracts of any consultant hired to evaluate the sites;
- Prepares annual reports summarizing the feasibility of potential purchases;
- Coordinates all negotiations, contracts, and agreements;
- Develops all conceptual and final management plans;
- Is responsible for managing each acquired Parcel; and
- Prepares an annual budget and coordinates bond issues.

In addition, the County Attorney's Office provides legal services associated with the program.

Lands acquired: Cypress Lakes Preserve; Fickett Hammock Preserve; Oak Sound (Participation in Acquisition)/aka Weekiwachee Preserve; Rancho del Ciervo (Participation in Acquisition); Leisure Hills (Participation in Acquisition); Jenkins Creek Expansion (Participation in Acquisition); Bayport (Participation in Acquisition). Current Activities include access and development improvements for the Bayport and Pedersen Park projects.

2.1.4 Hillsborough County

Hillsborough County's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP), was funded in 1987 and began in 1989. The length of the program was initially for four years, but was extended in 1990 for 20 years. Administration of the program is the responsibility of the Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Department. "To ensure citizen involvement, three teams were established for the purpose of assessing, analyzing, and selecting sites." Any citizen can nominate a site, which is then evaluated consecutively by these three teams: site assessments, site review, and site selection (see descriptions below).

Land Acquisition Target Criteria: Hillsborough County's acquisition criteria includes environmentally unique and irreplaceable lands; unique natural habitat with native, unaltered flora and fauna; habitat important to protection of endangered/protected species; unusual geologic features; water quality; buffer zones; connectedness; archeological; any project with at least 50% matching funds. Lands are selected by a point system ranking of five categories: environmental importance, ease of acquisition, cost and size, endangerment of development, and public interest.

- Environmental importance: point scale of 0 to 5 for eleven factors (e.g. habitat quality, water quality protection, corridor linkage, educational and recreational value).
- All other categories: point scale 1 to 10 for three factors each.
- Total points calculated, and site is placed into Class "A" (most desirable) to "D" (least desirable)
- Class A: 60 or more total points, limited to ten sites in this classification at any one time, additional qualifying sites temporarily placed in Class B;
- Class B: 45 – 59 total points, limited to 20 sites, additional qualifying sites temporarily placed in Class C;
- Class C: 30 – 44 total points, no limit to number of sites in this classification;

- Class D: 29 points or less, no limit to number of sites in this classification.

Funding Mechanisms: The program was funded by 0.25 mil ad valorem tax for the first four years to raise \$21 million dollars. In 1990, voters approved a referendum to issue up to \$100 million in bonds to be retired by levy of ad valorem taxes not to exceed 0.25 mil for up to twenty years.

Partnerships/Other Funding Sources: 33% of total acquisition costs have been or will be funded by Preservation 2000/Florida Forever or by partnerships with agencies, including Florida Communities Trust and SWFWMD's Save Our Rivers Program. ELAPP has also coordinated with the City of Tampa, City of Temple Terrace and Plant City to acquire funding. Total funding from other agencies exceeds \$45.6 million. Funding also comes from sale of certain property rights (e.g. water rights). Management partially funded by a phosphate severance tax, lease revenues, and restoration grants.

Committee and Staff: Hillsborough County's ELAPP program has 12 permanent and up to six temporary positions in the Land Management Division. The land acquisition committee, "Environmentally Sensitive Lands Committee", housed in the Resource Management division of Parks and Recreation, is comprised of four subcommittees:

- Site Assessment Team (ten members) receives site nominations, makes site assessments, produces Preliminary Assessment Report to the Site Review Team, and produces complete assessment reports for sites approved by the Site Selection Team. This team currently consists of three citizens, three Parks and Recreation, two City of Tampa, one Southwest Florida Water Management Department, one Environmental Protection Commission.
- Site Review Team (14 members, most having one or more staff representatives) determines qualifying sites for acquisition. Currently all are public agents from Parks and Recreation, Planning, two in County Real Estate, County Administrator's Office, Temple Terrace Parks Department, Temple Terrace Community Development, City Manager of Plant City, Tampa Parks Department, Southwest Florida Water Management District, City Attorney, and County Attorney.
- Site Selection Team (nine members) produces and presents an annual site acquisition Program recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Board. This team currently consists of four citizens, and five persons from non-profit organizations, city or county agencies, or academia.
- ELAPP Advisory Committee (nine members). Currently three are County Administrators, one is from Tampa Parks Department, and five are Attorneys (County and private practice). This Committee was established to guide the preservation and acquisition process.
- County Real Estate Site Acquisition Manager
- Parks and Recreation Resource Management Team (four permanent, four limited duration, six temporary staff members). Their duties include site security, prescribed burning, exotic control, species recovery, and public access.

Lands acquired: The ELAPP program has acquired or participated in the preservation of nearly 37,000 acres at a cost of approximately \$132.9 million.

2.1.5 Polk County

Polk County, with a population of 550,000, began its program in November of 1994, by voter referendum. The program was funded in October of 1995 by an Ad Valorem tax of 0.2 mil. To date, the county has purchased 12,766 acres.

Land Acquisition Target Criteria: The major selection criteria for the Polk County program are Water (30 points); Wildlife (30 points); Plants (30 points); and Management (10 points). Technical scores are determined based on the criteria and these are reviewed by a citizen committee for recommendation.

- Water resources. Three factors - major water body protection, aquifer recharge, wetland protection.
- Wildlife resources: Three factors -biodiversity, endangered species, viable populations.
- Wilderness resources: Nine factors such as uniqueness, threat of development, corridor or buffer, recreational opportunities.
- “Other” (up to 10 points): Manageability and sustainability.

Each factor has three or more descriptive statements with associated point values. Factors (and hence categories) are weighted in relative importance by the maximum point value possible in each factor (e.g. “scenic beauty” which has 2 possible points is weighted less heavily than “level of endangerment” which has 5 possible points). Total points are calculated, and site is placed into Class “A” (most desirable), “B”, or “C” (least desirable).

- Class A: 50 or more points, or sites fewer than 35 points that can be obtained at 50% or less than appraised value, or sites less than 20 points acquirable through donation.
- Class B: between 35 and 50 points, or fewer than 20 points that can be acquired through donation.
- Class C: fewer than 35 points.

Funding Mechanisms: The program is funded by the issuance of interest-bearing bonds in one or more series not exceeding \$20 million, accruing interest, and payable by a 0.20 mil ad valorem tax for 20 years. This generates \$2.8 million annually; \$1.8 is used for acquisition, and \$1.0 million is placed annually into a trust fund for land management, per “Ordinance No. 94-40”.

Partnerships/Other Funding Sources: Polk County seeks matching funds from the SWFWMD and the Florida Communities Trust. Eighty four percent of acquired lands were funded with a match by the SWFWMD, and Florida.

Committee and Staff: Polk County’s land acquisition committee: “Polk County Conservation Land Acquisition Selection Advisory Committee” (CLASAC) consists of twelve voting members, all volunteer, who can make a long-term commitment, are active in conservation, are familiar with local ecosystems, and are knowledgeable of other acquisition programs in the state. Voting membership includes representatives from business community, local environmental groups, agricultural community, phosphate industry, engineering or land use professional, and member of Polk County Board of Commissioners.

Polk County has four paid staff members including:

- Environmental Lands Coordinator:
 - Land acquisition: 70%
 - Land management: 30%
- Operations Assistant:

- Land acquisition 50%
- Land management 50%
- Environmental Lands Foreman:
 - Land management: 100%
- Natural Resources Service Worker:
 - Land management: 100%

Lands acquired: http://www.polk-county.net/Environment_Services/Natresources/Acquired.htm

2.1.6 Sarasota County

The name of Sarasota County’s land acquisition program is “Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program” (ESLPP)

Land Acquisition Target Criteria: ESLPP’s selection process is a qualitative ranking of six unweighted categories including community rarity, connectedness, ecological quality, manageability, water resources, and species rarity. Each category is ranked from 1-4, with “1” being lands most desirable for acquisition. Each ranking is accompanied with a descriptive statement. The site with lowest total is most desirable for acquisition.

Funding Mechanisms: The main funding mechanism is the issuance of interest-bearing bonds not exceeding \$53 million payable through 0.25 mil ad valorem tax over the next 20 years. This generated \$5.6 million in FY 2002.

Partnerships/Other Funding Sources: ESLPP receives matching funds from Florida Communities Trust and SWFWMD, and seeks matching funds from public and non-profit agencies. Ten percent of funds are set aside for land management

Committee and Staff: The “Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program Oversight Committee” (ESLOC) consists of nine members: three with knowledge of business and development interests in Sarasota County, three with knowledge of environmental interests in Sarasota County, and three other residents from Sarasota County. One member from each category serves either one, two, and three year term. None can hold publicly-elected office. There are currently 17.5 full time staff members:

- Land Acquisition (1):
 - Project Scientist (full time):
 - Program Specialist (as needed)
 - Administrative staff (as needed)
 - County attorney and real estate agent (as needed)
- Land Management (16.5):
 - Division manager (1)
 - Land Manager (all Environmental Specialist III) (4)
 - Field Assistants/ Map Technicians (two Environmental Scientist I and two Environmental Scientist II) (4)
 - Telemetry Technician (Environmental Scientist I) (1)
 - Operations Supervisor (1)
 - Tractor/ Equipment Operator (1)

- Emergency Services Staff for prescribed burns (2)
- Parks Attendant for public access areas (1)
- Administrative Support (1.5)

Lands acquired: http://www.co.sarasota.fl.us/environmental_services/esloc/

2.2 Other resources used in this Report

Other data were collected and evaluated to provide information for Committee members, or as a supplement to technical information used in preparing this Report. All of these data are available for review by the public. Copies have been provided to the Growth Management Department of Pasco County for dissemination to the public. This information is referenced below, and, where relevant, the Internet address for electronic data is provided.

1. SWFWMD five-year acquisition plan, including the identification of alternative methods for acquisition,
2. Assessments of Measures to Protect Wildlife Habitat in Pasco County (report prepared by Glatting Jackson and accepted by the Board of County Commissioners in March 2002),
2. Pasco County plat book showing land ownership,
3. Potentiometric surfaces for Pasco County, USGS and SWFWMD Maps.
4. Florida Forever Needs Assessment, and
5. Tampa Bay Water Annual Comprehensive Reports – Ecological and Hydrological Monitoring of the Cypress Creek and Cross Bar Ranch Wellfields.
6. Geographic Information Systems. In addition, much of the data used in this report come from digital sources, particularly Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data. The path names for GIS, or other web-based information useful to the Task Force included:
 - Property Appraiser Data – Downloadable GIS zip files by section, township, and range. <ftp://ftp.pascogov.com/pub/Arcshape/> Parcel information also available interactively. <http://maps.pascogov.com/maps/search.asp> Parcel Section (first two numbers), township (middle two numbers), and range (last two numbers) can be found here by entering parcel street address, choosing *Full Info* for *When I click on the map*, then clicking on parcel from map output.
 - Future Land Use Maps – Viewable in Pasco County’s Comprehensive Plan. <http://pascocountyfl.net/devser/gm/complan/cpindex.htm> Select *Map Appendix*, which contains many future land use maps. Look at *Future Land Use Map for the Year 2015* which references to zoom-in detail maps on Sheets 1-24.
 - Or, Download GIS shapefiles from SWFWMD’s website under *Cultural* as a shapefile *future_lu.shp*. http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/data/gis/shape_search.htm
 - Development of Regional Impact (DRI)/ Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) for Existing and Proposed Projects – Check with Pasco County Government; not downloadable from website. <http://pascocountyfl.net/> (DRIs and PUDs for many individual projects within Pasco County can be found by performing a web browser search)
 - Florida Land Use Cover and Forms Classification System (FLUCFCS) Maps – Download GIS shapefiles from SWFWMD’s website under *Physical Dense* as a shapefile *lu99.shp* or *lu95.shp*. http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/data/gis/shape_search.htm
 - Or, Use Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL) interactive mapping utility “Florida Mapper”. <http://map.fgdl.org/mapserver/start/thememaps.html>. Choose



Pasco County under *Spatial Extent*. Pertinent *Map Themes* include: *Habitat/Land Cover* and *Forest Type*. Click on *Make New Map*.)

- Soils Map – Download GIS shapefiles from the Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL) under the name *Specific Soils – SSURGO*. <http://map.fgdl.org/download/>
- Wetland Maps - Download GIS shapefiles from SWFWMD’s website under *Physical Dense* as a shapefile *lu99.shp* or *lu95.shp* and use the 5000 and 6000 classifications in FLUCFCS to represent wetlands.
http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/data/gis/shape_search.htm
 - Or, Use FGDL “Florida Mapper”. Choose *Pasco County* under *Spatial Extent*; under *Map Themes* choose *Priority Wetlands*. Click on *Make New Map*.
<http://map.fgdl.org/mapserver/start/thememaps.html>.
 - Or, Use National Wetlands Inventory’s Interactive Mapper Tool. Click on “*County*” tab on right hand side if screen.
<http://wetlands2.nwi.fws.gov/sites/nwiquad/viewer.htm?Title>.
- Public Lands, including utility easements and corridors - Download GIS shapefiles from SWFWMD’s website under *Land Resources*. All of the shapefiles are useful.
http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/data/gis/shape_search.htm.
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory Element Occurrences – Download *EOQUAD.zip*.
http://www.fnai.org/gis_data.cfm
- Potential Habitat for Rare Species in Pasco County – Send for the *Biodiversity Hot Spots grid file*. http://www.floridaconservation.org/oes/habitat_sec/GIS/gis_home.htm
 - Or, Use FGDL “Florida Mapper”. Choose *Pasco County* under *Spatial Extent*, pertinent *Map Themes*: *Biodiversity Hotspots* and *Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas*. Click on *Make New Map*.
<http://map.fgdl.org/mapserver/start/thememaps.html>.
- Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Depictions of Future Roadways – Available on the Pasco County website. Maps (pdf format) contained in “*2025 Transportation Plan MPO Adoption Package Document A*”. <http://pascocountyfl.net/menu/gminde.htm>.

3.0 PROPOSED ELATF IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCEDURES

Section 3 of the BOCC Resolution addresses the tasks that the committee was charged to complete. Tasks g and h deal with the process of land acquisition, including parcel nomination criteria and the structure of the committee that will recommend specific parcels. These items are addressed in the sections below.

3.1 Target Acquisition Criteria for Pasco Conservation Lands

3.1.1 Goals and Objectives

1. Identification criteria: The identification of the best parcels of land for acquisition is one of the most important aspects of a successful land acquisition program. The process of delineating appropriate parcels must be rigorous, objective, and based upon clearly defined objectives that are scientifically based, and economically prudent. The objectives of a Pasco County land acquisition program would include the following:

- a) Protection of Natural Communities,
- b) Connection of Natural Linkages,
- c) Conservation of Viable Populations of Native Plant and Animals,
- d) Protection of Endangered Species,
- e) Protection of Water Resources and Wetland Systems,
- f) Protection of Unique Natural Resources,
- g) Enhancement of Resource-Based Recreation Opportunities,
- h) Expansion of Environmental Education Opportunities.

2. Evaluation criteria: Each parcel of land that is identified for potential acquisition should meet certain minimum criteria for environmental significance. The Environmental Lands Acquisition Selection Committee (ELASC) will conduct a fatal flaw analysis to assure that each parcel can meet the minimum criteria, and conduct a more detailed assessment to score each parcel on its contribution to the goals and objectives for environmental protection. In addition, each parcel must meet the test for fiscal prudence prior to initiating detailed negotiations with landowners.

Each parcel will be evaluated to determine whether, and to what degree, it is characterized by each of the following statements relating to natural resource value:

1. Protection of Natural Communities
 - The property contains relatively intact natural plant communities.
 - The property supports a diverse assemblage of natural plant communities.
 - The property's size or position in the landscape will allow it to provide significant habitat functions worthy of protection.
 - The property has habitat restoration or enhancement potential.
2. Connection of Natural Linkages
 - The property is adjacent to, or links existing preserved lands.
 - The property could act as a buffer to existing preserved lands and improve the ability to manage those environmentally sensitive lands.
3. Conservation of Viable Populations of Native Plant and Animals
 - The property supports, or potentially supports, a diverse assemblage of native plant and animal species

- Animals could use the property as a corridor for movement between existing preserved lands to enhance long-term viability of a population, and sustain, or enhance genetic diversity.
 - The property is relatively free of non-native, undesirable species
4. Protection of Endangered Species
 - The property provides, or has the potential to provide, habitat for state and/or federally protected plants or animals.
 - The property could be used by listed species seasonally, e.g., for breeding/denning/nesting, foraging, over-wintering, roosting, or migration.
 5. Protection of Water Resources and Wetland Systems
 - The property contains headwaters, wetlands, lakes, streams or rivers that connect to other water bodies
 - The property provides significant aquifer recharge
 - The property contains significant water resources that would be degraded if the property is not preserved
 - Protection and management of the property would greatly enhance the water resources of the property or down stream water-bodies.
 6. Protection of Unique Natural Resources
 - The property contains significant, unique or rare geological features.
 7. Enhancement of Resource-Based Recreation Opportunities
 - The property possesses urban green space/aesthetic value
 - The property can be effectively managed and still allow for passive or resource-based recreation such as: trail systems, boat ramps, parking lots, restrooms, foot traffic only, etc.
 8. Expansion of Environmental Education Opportunities
 - The property has the potential to be used for environmental education or research purposes.
 - The property can be managed to further natural resource education or research.
 9. Financial considerations after the assessment of environmental significance, the ELASC will evaluate the financial prudence of purchasing the property. Considerations for this assessment include the following:
 - The purchase can be effectively negotiated with owners of the property.
 - The property is available for at, or below market value.
 - Matching funds are available for the purchase.
 10. Management Considerations
 - The property can be effectively managed and, if necessary, restored to native plant communities.
 - The property can be burned.

- Nuisance exotic species on the property can be eradicated or controlled.
- Appropriate hydrologic restoration can occur without affecting off site properties.
- Land management can be accomplished at a reasonable cost. (Land management could include: development of a comprehensive management plan, restoration actions, site security, nuisance exotic species eradication, ecological burning, custodial actions, provisions for appropriate recreation, and other tasks pertinent to the maintenance of natural systems).

11. Other Considerations

- a. The property is in danger of imminent development.
- b. There are other less-than-fee options available.
- c. Cost-sharing options are available.

3.1.2 Proposed Ranking Strategy

Each piece of property that may meet the selection committee’s criteria will be scored based on the degree to which the criteria are met. Scores for each category will be from one to five, with five indicating the highest quality or degree to which the criterion is met.

1. Natural Community

- a. Diversity
 - very low diversity 1
 - low diversity 2
 - moderate diversity 3
 - high diversity 4
 - very high diversity 5
- b. Quality
 - very poor quality 1
 - poor quality 2
 - moderate quality 3
 - relatively unaltered natural communities 4
 - unaltered or nearly unaltered natural communities 5
- c. Community Uniqueness
 - ubiquitous habitat type(s) 1
 - very common habitat type(s) 2
 - common habitat types(s) 3
 - rare habitat type(s) 4
 - very rare or critically imperiled habitat type(s) 5
- d. Ecological Landscape Value
 - very low value 1
 - low value 2
 - moderate value 3
 - high value 4
 - very high value 5
- e. Restoration Potential

- restoration potential very low or restoration impossible 1
 - restoration potential low 2
 - restoration potential moderately low 3
 - restoration potential high 4
 - restoration potential very high 5
2. Natural Linkages
- a. Connectivity
 - very isolated from existing preserved lands 1
 - isolated from existing preserved lands 2
 - very near or only partially connected to existing preserved lands 3
 - shares much of its boundary with existing preserved lands 4
 - directly connects existing preserved lands or is located within a corridor between parcels of existing preserved lands 5
 - b. Value of Connection/Buffering
 - provides very little protection to existing preserved lands 1
 - provides little protection to existing preserved lands 2
 - provides moderate protection to existing preserved lands, little or some enhancement of management potential 3
 - provides good protection to existing preserved lands, enhances management potential 4
 - provides very good protection to existing preserved lands, makes management of existing preserved lands possible 5
3. Floral and Faunal Functions
- a. Diversity
 - very low diversity 1
 - low diversity 2
 - moderate diversity 3
 - high diversity, potential (or documented use by species with large home ranges) 4
 - very high diversity, potential (or documented use by species with large home ranges) 5
 - b. Value as a Corridor
 - has no potential to act as a wildlife corridor 1
 - has low potential to act as wildlife corridor 2
 - could be used as a corridor, however, use could be limited because of habitat type(s), corridor width or movement obstacles 3
 - could be used as a corridor by larger mammals, has adequate width and good cover 4
 - would act as a very good corridor, would be used by larger mammals based on documented use, and is within a County targeted corridor area 5

- c. Exotic/Undesirable Species Presence
 - very high cover by numerous invasive exotics that are very difficult or impossible to control 1
 - high cover by a small number of exotic species, control could be difficult or expensive 2
 - moderate cover by exotic species, control moderately expensive 3
 - low cover by exotic species, control practical and moderately inexpensive to control 4
 - very low cover by one or two exotic species, very easy to control, little follow-up maintenance needed, or no exotic species present 5

- d. Listed Species Presence
 - habitat not expected to support listed or rare species, no listed or rare species present or expected to occur 1
 - habitat not likely to support many listed or rare species, very few listed or rare species present or expected to occur 2
 - habitat likely to support some more common listed or rare species, moderate number of listed or rare species present or expected to occur 3
 - habitat very likely to support several listed or rare species, several listed or rare species present or expected to occur 4
 - rare habitat type(s) very likely to support very uncommon listed or rare species, very uncommon listed or rare species present or expected to occur 5

- 4. Water Resources/Wetlands
 - a. Wetlands and Water Quality
 - property contains very degraded wetlands or very contaminated uplands and contribute pollutants to off-site downstream water bodies; wetlands or uplands have little potential for restoration 1
 - property contains degraded wetlands or contaminated uplands that contribute pollutants to off-site downstream water bodies; wetlands or uplands have moderate potential for restoration 2
 - property contains slightly degraded wetlands or slightly contaminated uplands that contribute pollutants to off-site downstream water bodies; wetlands or uplands have good potential for restoration 3
 - property contains high quality wetlands that are isolated or uncontaminated uplands that do not contribute pollutants to off-site downstream water bodies; no need for restoration 4
 - property contains very high quality wetlands or uplands that contribute high quality water to off-site downstream water bodies; no restoration needed 5

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Aquifer Recharge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure this value primarily by using water management district Floridan Aquifer recharge maps combined with percent of ultimate stream destination, which flows into the Florida Aquifer. Evaluation will range from little value for the confined zone to great importance for the unconfined zone. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ little value for aquifer recharge ▪ good value for aquifer recharge ▪ significant importance for most values for aquifer recharge ▪ great importance for aquifer recharge, some Karst features ▪ Karst watershed, stream to sink system 	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Unique Geologic Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no unique natural features ▪ unique features expected to occur, none documented ▪ unique features present but in degraded condition ▪ unique features present and easy to preserve ▪ significant, unique natural features present and in good condition 	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Resource-Based Value <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Urban Green Space/ Aesthetic Value <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ very low value ▪ low value ▪ moderate value ▪ high value ▪ very high value b. Resource –Based Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ property would not support resource-based recreation ▪ property would support very passive use, i.e., foot traffic, no trails or facilities ▪ property would support passive use, i.e., foot trail system, no facilities ▪ property would support moderate use, i.e., canoe launch, bike or horse trails, parking, no facilities ▪ property would support moderate to high use, i.e., boat ramp, bike or horse trails, parking, facilities and staff c. Environmental Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no potential for environmental education ▪ low potential for environmental education ▪ moderate potential for environmental education ▪ good potential for environmental education and can be managed to improve education and research opportunities ▪ excellent potential for environmental education, can be managed to improve education and research opportunities 	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>

7. Management Potential

a. Management Potential

- impossible 1
- difficult 2
- moderately difficult 3
- good 4
- excellent 5

b. Management Cost

- management is cost prohibitive 1
- management is very expensive, with low return on habitat value 2
- management is moderately expensive, with low to high return on habitat value 3
- management is inexpensive, with moderate to high return on habitat value 4
- management is very inexpensive with high return on habitat value 5

All categories are weighted evenly with a total score of 95 points. A property's score can be increased if it meets certain financial parameters. Five points are added if: 1) matching funds are available; 2) a less-than-fee option is available; or 3) management responsibilities would be assumed by another entity.

3.2 Structure and Execution of Pasco County Land Acquisition Program

All of the counties responding to the Comparable Counties survey included an environmental lands selection or nominating committee consisting of members of the community with varying experience, professional background and expertise. Committee membership ranged from seven to twelve members serving terms between one and four years. Typical committees consisted of members with education and experience in the areas of natural sciences, real estate, finance, engineering, agriculture and law. In some cases, membership also included a representative from the county staff and or an elected county commissioner. Consistent with similar programs throughout the state, the proposed Environmental Lands Acquisition Selection Committee (ELASC) for Pasco County should consist of the following:

- 1) Nine to eleven members (an odd number being preferable in order to avoid voting deadlock).
- 2) Members should be residents of Pasco County.
- 3) At least 5 members should have a degree in Natural and Environmental Sciences. Collectively, these members should be able to assess target acquisition criteria relevant to botany, ecology, land management, wildlife biology and wetland science. These individuals shall comprise the scientific subcommittee.
- 4) A diversity of other backgrounds would also be beneficial. Other members should have expertise in the following fields:
 - a) Real Estate
 - b) Business and Finance

- c) Law (with an emphasis in land use or real estate)
 - d) Agriculture
 - e) Governmental Affairs (with an emphasis in funding sources)
 - f) Engineering and Environmental Permitting
- 5) Other members might include:
- a) A Representative from county staff (from development review, natural resources, and/or parks and recreation)
 - b) Layperson
 - c) County Commissioner
- 6) All members of the ELASC should be volunteers with confirmation by the Pasco County Board of County Commissioners.
- 7) Members should serve a term of at least two years. (It may be desirable to stagger the terms in order to maintain continuity).
- 8) Members shall nominate or select all potential lands targeted for acquisition in accordance with selection criteria defined in Section 3.1 of this report, Target Acquisition Criteria for Pasco County Conservation Lands.
- 9) An external agent, or Pasco County staff member assigned to the land acquisition process will be necessary for compilation of materials, detailed assessment of properties, and preparation of certain financial data on potential acquisition parcels for review by the ELASC.

3.2.1 Process of Review of Potential Acquisition Parcels

The process of assessing potential acquisition parcels would include the following:

- 1) Any person, including representatives from the ELASC, can nominate parcels for consideration. Since this program is completely voluntary, unwilling sellers can have their parcels removed from further consideration.
- 2) The full ELASC will conduct an initial review of each parcel, and determine whether it meets the general criteria for acquisition. This “fatal flaw” analysis will be conducted in accordance with the criteria identified in Section 3.1 of this report, Target Acquisition Criteria for Pasco County Conservation Lands.
- 3) The Scientific Subcommittee will then review parcels that were not excluded in the “fatal flaw” review to score the conservation value of each parcel. Lands that do not meet the basic test of environmental significance as defined in Section 3.1 of this report, Target Acquisition Criteria for Pasco County Conservation Lands, will be excluded from further consideration. All other parcels will receive a score for environmental significance from the Scientific Subcommittee, and be re-evaluated by the full ELASC.
- 4) Parcels that are re-evaluated by the ELASC will be given an overall score in keeping with the criteria set forth in Section 3.1 of this report, Target Acquisition Criteria for Pasco County Conservation Lands, and the parcels will be ranked for presentation to the Pasco County Board of County Commissioners.
- 5) The ELASC will meet quarterly, or more frequently, if warranted. Parcels may be placed in nomination at any ELASC meeting. The Scientific Subcommittee will meet prior to each ELASC meeting in which there are parcels that must be given a score for environmental significance.
- 6) Rankings of potential acquisition parcels will typically be presented to the Pasco County BOCC two times each year.



4.0 FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR ELATF ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Assessment of funding options

The ELATF reviewed a variety of funding sources that might be available to Pasco County for both the purchase and management of environmental lands that have been identified by the program as potential acquisition targets. Based upon the ELATF's review of other successful programs throughout the State, this task originally seemed it might be one of the easier aspects of the ELATF's work effort. However, it soon became apparent this task would be one of the more challenging faced by the ELATF.

The ELATF was looking for a sufficiently reliable source of revenue that would fund the acquisition of the target properties. In addition, it was decided early on that some appropriate source of funding for both program management and property maintenance would be necessary if the program were to succeed. Sufficient funding for the proper maintenance of those properties acquired is an essential ingredient of any successful program. Initially, the ELATF evaluated the following revenue sources for use in the Environmental Lands Acquisition Program:

1. Real Property (Ad Valorem) Taxes;
2. Local Option Sales Tax;
3. Assessments;
4. User Charges;
5. Impact Fees;
6. Available Matching Funds; and,
7. Revenues from Mitigation Banking.

Each revenue source was then reviewed to determine its suitability for use in an environmental lands acquisition program. Advantages and disadvantages were defined as follows:

1). Ad Valorem Taxes

a.) Advantages:

- Typically most reliable source of local government revenue;
- Easily bondable;
- May be used for both capital and recurring maintenance;
- May be voted millage tied to specific purpose;
- Has proven track record of success in environmental lands programs; and
- Requires voter approval, gives public voice in process.

b.) Disadvantages

- Public hesitant to approve new property taxes;
- Maintenance and non-bonded amount may be counted in ten mill cap;
- Amount of payment not tied to benefit received; and
- May compete with other public needs.

2). Local Option Sales Tax

a.) Advantages:

- Reliable source of revenue;
- May be bonded or pledged for debt service; and

- Requires voter approval, gives voter voice in process.
- b.) Disadvantages:
- Only available for capital expenditures;
 - Competition with other programs;
 - Currently being considered for schools, roads, parks; and
 - Requires voter approval, which may be difficult to get.
- 3). Assessment
- a.) Advantages:
- Ties benefit to burden;
 - Once implemented, reliable stream of income;
 - Easy to administer once established; and
 - May be bonded, but not as easily as other taxes.
- b.) Disadvantages:
- Must show specific benefit to assessed property;
 - Difficult to equitably assess; and
 - Not conducive to land acquisition program.
- 4). User Charge
- a.) Advantages:
- Viewed as one of the most equitable forms of financing;
 - Direct beneficiary pays the cost;
 - Easily implemented and changed;
 - Politically popular; and
 - May be used for capital and maintenance.
- b.) Disadvantages:
- Environmental lands project not “fee” type service;
 - Fees insufficient to support program; and
 - Fees would be difficult to bond.
- 5). Matching Funds
- a.) Advantages:
- State and SWFWMD have active programs with successful track records for acquisitions;
 - May effectively expand acquisition program funded by primary revenue source;
 - Publicly popular, can enhance case for use of other revenues; and
 - Free money, well not quite...see Disadvantages, below.
- b.) Disadvantages:
- Matching funds and grant money more easily acquired with primary funding source available;
 - Administrative costs of acquiring grants or funds;
 - Administrative cost of grant administration, reporting and accounting;
 - Additional costs of operations from funding requirements; and
 - Possible loss of local control.
- 6). Mitigation Banking
- a.) Advantages:

- Creation and subsequent sale of mitigation credits;
 - Scientific based selection aspects of land acquisition program;
 - Would direct mitigation efforts to appropriate projects;
 - Little burden on taxpayer, trade-off may be less on-site mitigation;
 - If implemented successfully could be self-supporting; and
 - Few restrictions on revenues generated.
- b.) Disadvantages:
- Difficult permitting issues;
 - Not reliable source of revenue until bank is established; amount and frequency of revenue cannot be predicted;
 - Cost of administering program, including creation and maintaining banks; and
 - Competing onsite or off-site mitigation projects.
- 7). Impact Fees
- a.) Advantages:
- Enjoys public support;
 - No election required; and
 - Reliable source of partial funding as long as growth continues;
- b.) Disadvantages:
- Can only be based on needs attributable to growth;
 - Must be backed by study justifying amount of fee to impact of growth;
 - Not readily bondable; and
 - May only be used for capital to offset impact of new growth.

4.2 Selection of the recommended option

Ultimately, the ELATF had to recommend a single option as the primary source of funding for land acquisition. Although the ad valorem tax seemed the best way to obtain maximum funding that would allow the greatest flexibility of use, the ELATF did not consider it to be the most palatable political option at this time. Because of the sales tax that had appeared to gain momentum with the BOCC, and, presumably some favor from the residents of Pasco County, the ELATF focused discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the proposed Penny for Pasco sales tax referendum. While the revenues generated from the proposed sales tax cannot be used for long-term management of lands that may be acquired, the ELATF discussed other options for assuring appropriate management and maintenance of these properties. Extensive discussion was held as to whether the anticipated funding should be bonded in order to pool anticipated funds for near term use. It was determined that no decision on bonding of these funds needed to be made at this time, though the general consensus of the ELATF was that bonding (perhaps after the first year of the program) was the most efficacious way of generating substantial funding dollars at the outset of the program.

The ELATF concluded that participating in the Penny for Pasco sales tax would improve the likelihood of passage of this referendum, and discussed ways of assuring that a large portion of the revenues generated from the sales tax would be earmarked for land acquisition. At a BOCC workshop shortly after these discussions were initiated, the BOCC tentatively defined where the anticipated revenue in the projected program would be allocated. The BOCC agreed that 25% of

those funds available for use by the County would be earmarked for land acquisition. This results in projected revenue of \$4.15 million per year, or \$41.5 million over the life of the 10-year sales tax. At future ELATF workshops, the consideration given to environmental land acquisition was heralded as confirmation that the Penny for Pasco sales tax was the prudent recommended funding option by the ELATF. Consideration of other funding mechanisms in the future, especially for land management, was also deemed important to the long-term success of the land acquisition program. In addition to funds that are expected to be generated from partnerships with other agencies, the ELATF considered non-monetary options to supplement the success of funds generated from the proposed referendum.

4.3 Funding Partners

Virtually all of the comparable counties that were surveyed for this study leveraged the benefits of their acquisition program with funding from other partners. The multiplier for these efforts in most cases has at least doubled the contributions from local revenue-generating plans. Consequently, a key component of the acquisition program for Pasco County must be to secure funding from outside sources. Money is available from state and federal agencies to supplement acquisition programs and to restore/manage lands that have already been acquired. In the report entitled “Assessment of Measures to Protect Wildlife Habitat in Pasco County” accepted by the Board of County Commissioners in March 2002, Table 7 summarized many of the state and federal programs that should be considered by Pasco County as a component of the land acquisition and management program.

The SWFWMD and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection/Florida Division of State Lands will be key partners in the acquisition of lands in Pasco County. A coordinated effort to prioritize future acquisitions, and to pool funds for these acquisitions will undoubtedly result in an enhanced ability to acquire the lands identified in this study. The U.S. Department of Agriculture/Natural Resource Conservation Service has numerous programs that can be used to provide incentives to existing landowners, purchase long-term and perpetual easements, and provide cost share programs for management of natural lands. Some of these programs include the Wetland Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Forestry Incentives Program and Farmland Protection Program. Millions of dollars have already been allocated for conservation and management of natural lands, and a coordinated effort to encourage private landowners to seek these funds, and for the County to leverage acquisition efforts with these funds should be initiated.

The U.S.D.A./Forest Service has a forest legacy program that was established to provide federal funding for up to 75% of the cost of conservation easements or fee acquisitions for forest lands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. For lands that have threatened or endangered species on them, there are numerous programs of the USFWS associated with land acquisition, conservation easements and management funding that could be used to supplement Pasco County’s program. The FFWCC land acquisition program acquires lands that are adjacent to state-owned or FFWCC managed areas. This program may be of benefit to Pasco County in the future. In addition, the FFWCC has purchased lands for the conservation and management of protected species through their Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund. Individuals in charge of this program are currently looking for lands in the Pasco County area for the large-scale conservation of gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and their commensals.

Finally, municipalities within Pasco County may be ideal partners for conservation acquisition measures. This partnership might include shared funding of acquisition parcels, or pursuit of non-monetary acquisition mechanisms. Some funding options might be best suited for purchase of conservation lands that are found within urban areas, outside of the areas encompassed by **Figure 1**.

In combination, all of these programs contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to conservation efforts in the United States each year. Attaining these funds requires competition with dozens of other land acquisition programs, and vigilance towards soliciting funds that contribute to the overall objectives of the program. Focusing the efforts of the ELASC, County volunteers, and staff will be needed to maximize the benefits of funding options from external sources.

4.4 Other available non-monetary acquisition mechanisms

4.4.1 Voluntary Contributions

This mechanism for acquiring environmentally sensitive lands would include both the donation of land and transfers of less than fee interests to the County without charge, typically in the form of a conservation easement. These donations and gifts would not necessarily be done in connection with developments.

Program Requirements: The County's Acquisition Program would provide promotional material in the form of brochures and other information, demonstrating income tax benefits, ad valorem tax benefits, and other estate tax benefits associated with such programs. In addition, the County program would provide documents and forms for various types of conveyances to prospective donors. Large landowners might be contacted directly regarding estate tax planning benefits of bequest to the program. For significant donations the County may want to consider "naming" the conservation parcel after the grantor, such as "The _____ Preserve."

4.4.2 Density Credit

This mechanism is often referred to as a "density transfer" but it may take a number of other forms. It envisions a trade of more favorable development rights in exchange for the transfer of conservation land or rights to the County program. This more favorable treatment may take the form of allowing density from the area to be conveyed to the County to be transferred to another parcel of property. It may take the form of a "density bonus" whereby conveyances of targeted properties in areas such as critical linkages would convey perhaps double densities from the area to be used in areas of appropriate development.

Program Requirements: This type of acquisition method is used normally in the development process, but it could just as easily be used in negotiations with affected landowners long before development pressures push the value of the property beyond the reach of the program. Both the Comprehensive Plan and the County's Land Development Code would need to be amended to specify the mechanisms for density transfers, bonuses and variances for those offering lands to the program.

4.4.3 County Quality Development

This mechanism would identify development projects, which elect to establish sizeable preserve and conservation lands within the development when such establishment furthers the goals and objectives of the land acquisition program. These developments would, through their design features and engineering innovations provide a greater commitment to the natural environment. Such projects would be identified by the County as quality developments entitling them to priority in review, permitting and processing for approval.

Program Requirements: The County would need to draft a county quality development incentive section and include it in its environmental lands and wildlife habitat ordinance.

4.4.4 Consolidated Mitigation Program

The concept of mitigation banking has been used successfully in the past, but has been difficult to implement for small projects. The County may wish to review the establishment of a consolidated mitigation program which might allow monetary contributions from development projects for offsite mitigation. The County's program might use existing selection criteria along with option contracts for acquisitions needed for the program. Due to the somewhat labor intensive efforts necessary for the program, it might be used for larger projects where engineering and permitting expenses can be justified by the project.

Program Requirements: The County's wetlands protection policies, as well as those of the SWFWMD would need to consider large-scale mitigation projects such as these.

4.4.5 Developer Contributions/Incentives

There are a number of mechanisms other than density credits that the County might use in the development review process to secure environmentally sensitive areas within properties slated for development. For example, the conveyance of environmentally sensitive lands might be exchanged for discretionary development orders. There is a tendency for developers and large landowners to be much more cooperative with the County in the planning process when incentives for such donations are made available. The type, nature or extent of incentive would depend upon the importance of the particular parcel to be secured. These mechanisms could include:

- 1) priority processing of the development application;
- 2) credit toward landscaping requirements;
- 3) impact fee credits where appropriate;
- 4) credit toward tree replacement requirements;
- 5) authorization, in conjunction with the SWFWMD and US Army Corps of Engineers, to fill and use non-critical wetlands as replacement property; and
- 6) authorization for smaller lot sizes and reduced setbacks.

4.4.6 Developer Extractions

This method would involve pressuring developers to donate lands important to the conservation program without specified incentives to the developer. This strategy may lead to contentious battles and foster controversy for the environmental lands acquisition program.

Program Requirements: Establish protocol for the designation of properties to be protected, along with the standards to be applied and manner of preservation.

5.0 RURAL & FAMILY LANDS PROTECTION ACT: ITS STATUS AND RELEVANCE

Because conservation of agricultural reserves is one of the objectives of ELATF, the funding potential of the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act was researched. This Act is contained in Chapter 2001-279, Laws of Florida and was passed in the 2001 legislative session. The implementation of this act is with the Department of Agriculture and Department of Consumer Affairs, not the Department of Environmental Protection, which has the largest land acquisition program in the state.

This act is intended to address:

1. Conservation of agricultural lands.
2. Easements that will allow agricultural production.
3. Sustaining economically viable agricultural operations.

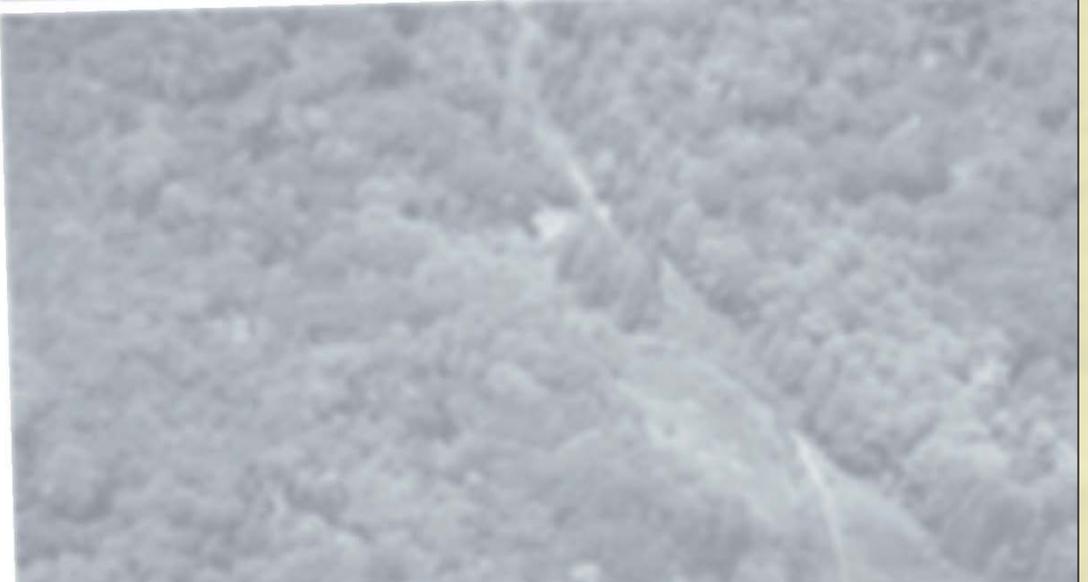
This program was not funded by the 2001 legislature. A feasibility report was required and delivered to the legislature on 12/19/01. Projected funding needs statewide were estimated at \$146 million dollars for each of the next 10 years. However, the recommendation was made that first year funding be restricted to \$25 million dollars statewide.

To date, no funding has been authorized for this program, and the 2003 legislature did not provide funding. When and if funded, 90% of any approved funding must be used for perpetual conservation easements (per F.S. 704.06) and perpetual rural lands protection easements prohibiting the subdivision of the land. The remaining 10% of any approved funding can be used for less-than-perpetual easements.

At this time, this program offers little benefit for Pasco County's land acquisition program. This is because:

- To date, funding has not been provided,
- Implementation of the program is fairly complicated,
- It would require a commitment to substantial land use changes, and modifications to the Comprehensive Plan, and
- It allows for easements only, and public use of these lands would be minimal.

However, the ELATF realizes the importance of agricultural lands in the overall conservation program in the long- and short-term. Other local, state and federal programs offer conservation strategies that could fund the maintenance of agricultural land for conservation purposes, the purchase of development rights, or, when appropriate, outright purchase with allowances for sustaining agricultural uses. The ELATF encourages active participation in these programs, and continued monitoring of the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act for future opportunities.



6.0 PROBABLE COSTS OF ACQUISITION LANDS

One of the main requirements of the BOCC Resolution was to determine the funding levels and sources that would be required to purchase, enhance, and maintain environmentally sensitive lands with the County. This topic generated extensive discussions within the ELATF.

6.1 Rationale

As a basis for identifying the most desirable lands for acquisition, the Task force referred to the principles initially identified in the “Assessment of Measures to Protect Wildlife Habitat in Pasco County submitted to the BOCC in March, 2002”. The lands identified in this report were determined to represent “critical linkages” connecting existing public and conservation lands. Other extensive areas of environmental importance were termed ecological planning units, and extensive areas of agricultural lands were identified as the agricultural reserve. The footprint of these areas was considered in the identification of potential acquisition lands.

Aerial photographs and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data were used to identify areas that met target acquisition criteria so that potential acquisition areas could be identified, and probable funding needs could be assessed. Ultimately, the ELATF identified six conservation linkages (**Figure 1**) within which acquisition would be likely. Any parcels within these, or other areas would be required to be reviewed by the ELASC prior to consideration for purchase.

From these conservation linkages, the ELATF designated study areas where acquisition might occur so that comprehensive costs of acquisition could be generated based upon land costs for specific tracts of land (**Appendix 2**). These areas were not designated to imply that specific parcels were candidates for acquisition, nor was there an intention to limit the rightful use of any lands within these study areas. It was concluded that estimates of acquisition costs needed to be based on estimates of property values for tracts of land that might meet acquisition criteria after detailed assessments on properties owned by willing sellers. The ELATF summarized the criteria that were used in designating these acquisition study areas. These included:

- Connectivity to existing public or conservation lands,
- Compatible current land use,
- Knowledge of development patterns in the vicinity,
- An assessment of the aerial photography to identify lands in “natural” condition (this included agricultural lands),
- Consideration of the target acquisition criteria developed by the ELATF, and
- Knowledge of large areas of single ownership.

6.2 Methodology

The ELATF completed this assessment of potential acquisition lands to attempt to determine the range of costs associated with acquisition lands. Section 3.C of the BOCC Resolution required the following:

The Task Force will recommend a dollar figure for all potential acquisitions considered critical, using the data from Task A to guide them to such lands. The Task Force will also recommend a dollar figure for those lands deemed important, but not necessarily critical, and lands that might be considered for an agricultural reserve. Included in that dollar figure shall be an estimate of program and land management costs.

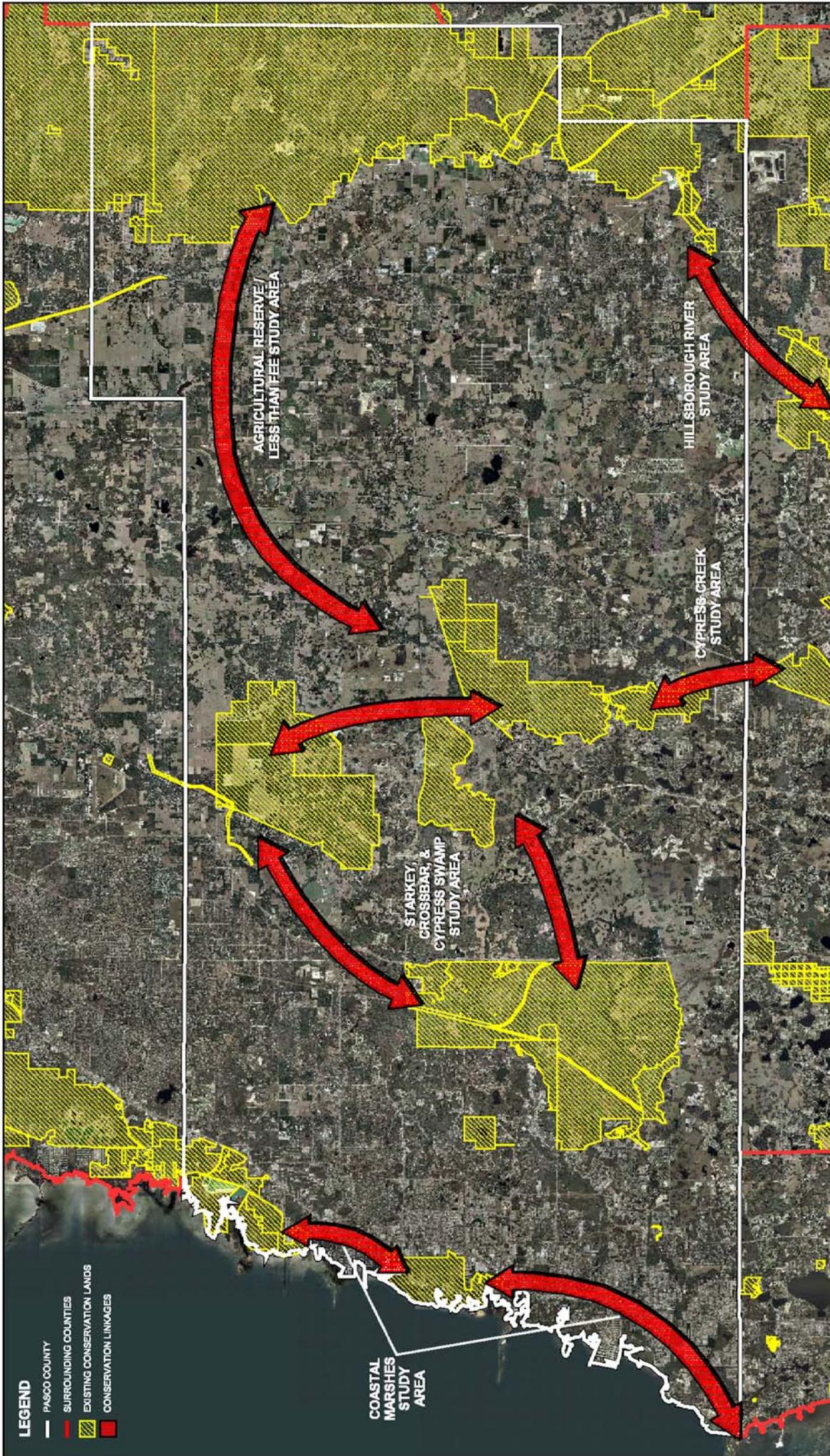


FIGURE 1
ELATF Proposed Conservation Linkages

GJ# 17010
 Date: August 2003
 Aerial Source: Aerials Express (1/2002)
 Data Sources: SWFWMD Land Resources Dept, ELATF Study Area Delineation (5/2003)

GLATTING
 JACKSON
 KERCHER
 ANGLIN
 LOPEZ
 RINEHART



The ELATF also defined the methodology for calculating costs of acquisition lands. These methods included the following:

1. An estimate of the acreage within the acquisition study areas,
2. Use of the appraised value of the land from the Pasco County Property Appraiser's Office, with a multiplier of 30% for the likely actual market value,
3. An estimate of the percentage of the study areas that could likely be acquired over time (this would exclude unwilling sellers, land that is likely to be developed, lands that don't meet the target criteria, and lands for which the price is too low for the owner to ever agree to a deal),
4. An estimate of the portion of these lands that would be acquired by fee and by less than fee options,
5. An estimate of the amount of money that could be provided by other partners,
6. An estimate of the number of years that it would take to acquire these tracts, and
7. The average annual need from the County for the land acquisition program.

6.2.1 Critical Linkage acquisitions

The ELATF determined that an estimate of the average annual costs for land acquisition required several steps. The first step was to define the minimum area of land that would be acquired in a successful program. This area was concluded to be best represented by the extent of "Critical Linkages" identified in the March 2002 study.

Calculating these costs required the following assumptions:

- 7 different Critical Linkages exist totaling 6,200 acres,
- Using data from the Property Appraiser's Office, the total purchase price for these lands is \$27,656,828.00,
- 50% of these lands would hopefully be purchased through partnerships with other resource agencies,
- All of these lands (or a comparable area of suitable lands) are required for the program, and
- There would be a 10-year program to acquire these lands (based on the 10- year time frame for the Penny for Pasco sales tax referendum).

Using these assumptions, the costs for this program included the following:

\$27,656,828 (the price of the 6,200 acres of Critical Linkages)
X 0.5 (partnership contribution)
= \$13.8 million
÷ 10
= **\$1.4 million per year for the lands considered critical** to the acquisition program.

6.2.2 Less than fee acquisitions

The ELATF determined that the Pasco One area defined by the SWFWMD and the area in the Agricultural Reserve Study Area represented a good estimate of the extent of "less than fee" acquisition lands that could be acquired. These areas total 40,000 acres of the 90,000+ acre study area. In order to estimate the costs associated with this less than fee purchase, the ELATF assumed the following:

- 50% of these lands would be acquired through the less than fee strategy (other lands would not be available through this option),
- The ELATF concluded that a range of 40% to 80% of the appraised value would be used for calculating costs of less than fee purchases. The recent Connerton purchase was determined to be an appropriate example of a fee purchase. The \$3,285.00 purchase price was used as the likely fee for acquisition of lands in Pasco One. Given the 40% to 80% range for less than fee purchases, the ELATF concluded that conservation easements would range from \$1314 - \$2628. The midpoint of this range, \$1971.00 was used to estimate an average price for less than fee purchases,
- Other partners hopefully could provide 50% of the less than fee price (the Task Force agreed that this was a conservative estimate), and
- The ELATF assumed a 10-year program to acquire these lands (based on the 10-year estimate for the sales tax referendum).

As a result, the following costs were determined for less than fee acquisitions:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &40,000 \text{ acres} \\
 &X 0.5 \text{ (percent of lands that can be acquired)} \\
 &= \underline{20,000.00 \text{ acres}} \\
 &X \$1,971 \text{ (costs per acre for the conservation easement)} \\
 &= \underline{\$39.4 \text{ million}} \\
 &X 0.5 \text{ (partner contribution)} \\
 &= \underline{\$19.7 \text{ million}} \\
 &\div 10 \text{ (number of years of funding)} \\
 &= \mathbf{\$1.9 \text{ million per year for less than fee acquisitions}} \text{ in Pasco County.}
 \end{aligned}$$

6.2.3 Fee acquisitions

For the fee purchases of the remaining acreage, the ELATF assumed the following:

- 43,800 acres of land could be purchased,
- 50% of the lands can be acquired fee simple,
- \$3,285 per acre would be the purchase price, based on the recent acquisition of Connerton lands by the SWFWMD. (It was presumed that this cost is appropriate, even for lands such as the Connerton Tract that had an approved DRI, and expectations of development),
- Partner contributions would hopefully provide 50% of the funding, and
- There would be a 10-year program to acquire.

As a result, the following costs were determined for fee acquisitions:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &43,800 \text{ (total area of land that could be acquired in fee)} \\
 &X 0.5 \text{ (likely area of land that can be acquired)} \\
 &= \underline{21,900 \text{ acres}} \\
 &X \$3,285 \text{ (cost per acre for fee acquisitions)} \\
 &= \underline{\$71.9 \text{ million}} \\
 &X 0.5 \text{ (partner contributions)} \\
 &= \underline{\$36 \text{ million}} \\
 &\div 10 \text{ (number of years of funding)}
 \end{aligned}$$

= **\$3.6 million per year for fee acquisitions** in Pasco County.

6.3 Total anticipated costs

Therefore, the Task Force concluded that \$6.9 million represents the annual cost of lands assessed by the ELATF that meet the acquisition criteria. Since \$6.9 million exceeds the estimated amount of money that the BOCC allocated from the Penny for Pasco Referendum (\$4.15 million per year), the remainder must be obtained through a focus on non-monetary strategies and future funding mechanisms. These cost estimates represent present day dollars. Inflation could affect the extent of land that can be purchased unless comparable increases in sales tax revenue meet future costs. As an alternative, other methods of obtaining additional funds such as greater matching dollars, or an extension of the acquisition time period could make up the difference in acquisition needs.

The BOCC Resolution also called for an estimate of costs associated with the Agricultural Reserve. The ELATF concluded that there was intimation in the Resolution that these lands would be paid for by funding from the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act. Since this funding does not appear to be available in the near future, the ELATF added lands within the Agricultural Reserve to potential acquisition areas (in the less than fee category). The \$6.9 million estimated annual needs includes these areas.

7.0 ANTICIPATED MANAGEMENT COSTS

Mr. Jack Vogel, of the ELATF, has extensive experience in land management. He was assigned the task of assessing management costs for natural lands using information from private entities and other resource agencies in central Florida. During one of the ELATF meetings, Mr. Vogel provided a summary of information that he had obtained from various resource management entities. Included in his discussions was a telephone conversation with Mr. Kevin Love, Land Management Manager of the SWFWMD. Mr. Love indicated that SWFWMD land management costs were \$8.08 per acre for 2001, and the assessment for the year 2002 is going to be very close to that figure. These costs include all administrative overhead, costs for burning, salaries, etc. Mr. Love indicated that sometimes this cost approaches \$10.00 per acre, but the costs never exceed this general range.

Mr. Vogel also spoke with a representative of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC). This person indicated that the agency typically budgets \$20.00 per acre for management, but typically spend \$15.00 to \$17.00 per acre. Mr. Vogel indicated that this estimate included costs of recreation that should not be a component of the expected management costs for environmental lands acquired by Pasco County.

Mr. Vogel also provided estimates of land management costs on private lands. For industrial foresters, or large landowners, Mr. Vogel estimated a cost of \$8.50 per acre for management conducted in 2002. Mr. Vogel estimated \$8.00 per acre for private, non-industrial timberlands, and for Timberland Investment Management Organizations (TIMO), Mr. Vogel estimated a price of \$10.72 per acre.

Based on this information, the ELATF concluded that a range of management costs of \$8 to \$10 per acre would be appropriate for environmental lands purchased in Pasco County. These costs included lands that are undergoing substantial restoration.

8.0 STAFFING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The ELATF discussed staffing of the land acquisition program with Mr. John Gallagher during one of the regularly scheduled meetings. In that meeting, Mr. Gallagher committed to providing real estate professionals that currently work in the right-of-way acquisition program for the land acquisition program, at least in the initial stages. Mr. Gallagher indicated that these individuals had extensive experience in real estate transactions, and that they could participate in the process after lands had been targeted for acquisition, and negotiations with landowners were appropriate.

The ELATF concluded that, other than these experienced professionals, additional expertise would be necessary to implement, and sustain the program. The ELATF considered the staffing plans for comparable counties with similar demographics to Pasco County. It was concluded that the staffing that is in place for Alachua and Brevard Counties seemed to be an appropriate number of acquisition professionals that Pasco County should expect to employ at some time in the next few years. The Alachua County program includes 3 full time employees, a program manager, a senior environmental planner, and a senior environmental specialist. Brevard County's environmental lands program includes 2 full time staff members, along with other participants in the EEL program. These staff members participate in management of the program, land management and administrative tasks.

The ELATF presumed that, over the next few years, 2 to 3 full time staff members would be required to implement the program, given adequate funding for a concentrated focus on the acquisition of natural lands. This program should be initiated with the hire of a program manager within the next year. An additional staff member, with a concentration on an appropriate environmental specialty, should be hired if the Penny for Pasco sales tax is approved, and a land acquisition program is assured. The focus of these individuals would be on program implementation, development of management strategies for natural lands that are likely to be acquired, and, most importantly, coordination with other agencies that can provide matching funds. Since the Penny for Pasco sales tax referendum will not provide management funding, these individuals will also coordinate the work of an extensive network of volunteers, and assist other agencies in the implementation of appropriate management programs that have been developed in association with Pasco County.

9.0 IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

The ELATF study will be submitted prior to December 1, 2003. Since the land acquisition program as recommended in this study depends upon funding through the Penny for Pasco sales tax, the information used in this report should supplement the actions of the referendum committee and emphasize the importance of the sales tax referendum for the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands.

Because of the length of time required for establishing a land acquisition committee, identifying target lands, and negotiating with willing sellers, the ELATF recommends the establishment of the ELASC immediately after acceptance of the ELATF study. The establishment of the ELASC

by the first quarter of 2004 will allow participation in education of potential voters about the Penny for Pasco sales tax, and the further development of the target acquisition selection criteria. This committee should apply these target acquisition criteria, accept proposals from willing sellers, and begin to develop priorities for the initial acquisitions within the County. In addition, the ELASC could immediately help evaluate partnership contributions and non-monetary actions for land acquisition.

With the ELASC in place, and the supposed approval of the Penny for Pasco sales tax in the fall of 2004, the ability to implement an acquisition program in early 2005 can be realized. The ELASC should prioritize contact with partnership agencies so that, possibly, some land acquisition strategies in association with other local governments, the State of Florida, or federal agencies could be implemented prior to 2005.

The ELATF assessed other programs and previous ballot language to understand the possible language for a future vote on the penny sales tax issue. Though the ELATF understood that this language would have to be carefully assessed and, ultimately, created by the Pasco County Attorney's office, the ELATF determined that draft ballot language for the referendum would be included in the Summary Report. Ms. Sue Mullins of The Nature Conservancy provided an earlier draft for this ballot language. The draft reviewed and edited by the ELATF is as follows:

Shall Pasco County be authorized to levy a one cent local option sales tax for a period of ten (10) years to: a) issue bonds in an amount not exceeding \$_____ million to fund at the following percentages: school construction and renovations (50%); roads and transportation improvements (25%); purchase environmental lands (12.5%); public safety improvements (10%); municipal infrastructure (2.5%); and, b) provide Cities within the County ten percent of revenues raised from the tax.

____ For the one cent sales tax

____ Against the one cent sales tax

10.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

10.1 The need for an acquisition program

Pasco County has a wealth of natural areas that are environmentally unique, irreplaceable, and that harbor valued ecological resources. An environmental lands acquisition program in Pasco County will provide the county with the ability to combine the vital and essential role of conserving biological diversity with open public use for resource-based recreation and educational purposes. The proposed land acquisition program in Pasco County will also provide a means by which to implement environmental protection consistent with Pasco County's Comprehensive Plan. Vast tracts of natural areas in Pasco County are rapidly becoming fragmented or vanishing altogether. The greatest benefit of environmental lands acquisition programs, such as Florida's Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever (its replacement), and the programs that have been adopted by many other counties in Florida, is that they provide a means for a sustainable growth strategy that will ensure the preservation of natural resources.

10.2 Benefits of an acquisition program

The implementation of the goals and objectives of the proposed Pasco County's environmental lands acquisition program will produce a multitude of benefits for the County's citizens as well as for the native flora and fauna that are interwoven into the unique biodiversity of the county's natural communities. Acquiring lands with intact ecosystems offers the best strategy for the long-term protection and preservation of biological diversity. This is especially important for the many species occurring in Pasco County that are listed as rare, endangered, threatened, or species of special concern.

Conserving intact natural ecosystems can provide many important environmental services along with indirectly providing habitat for wildlife. Protection, restoration and maintenance of healthy freshwater and marine wetland ecosystems, and their surrounding upland ecosystems, play a pivotal role in the enhancement and protection of water quality and quantity. Pasco County is a vital link in Florida's aquifer recharge system. Drinking water comes from the aquifer, which requires large, undeveloped and unpolluted areas to recharge its supply. Uplands and wetlands purify water by filtering pollutants before they reach our drinking water supply. Freshwater and marine wetlands and their associated uplands also help to buffer the potentially catastrophic impacts from storms as well as help to control flooding. Conservation of the associated forests and green spaces of these ecosystems will help to prevent soil erosion, reduce air pollution by filtering dust, smoke and other fine particles, and balance atmospheric temperatures and precipitation.

The environmentally sensitive lands, acquired, preserved and managed by Pasco County's land acquisition program, will provide the citizens of Pasco County, visitors, tourists and the general public with networks of greenways and open spaces. These groups will have access to these lands, for many forms of high quality, low-impact resource-based recreation opportunities that will further promote the protection of the county's natural resources. Some of the numerous resource-based recreation opportunities that the county's lands can provide are trail systems for hiking, biking, and horseback riding; access areas and/or boat ramps for canoeing, kayaking, general boating and fishing; areas for hunting; beaches and areas for swimming, picnicking, bird/wildlife watching, and nature photography/painting. By providing public access to the environmentally sensitive lands acquired by Pasco County's land acquisition program, the

county's school systems, citizens and the general public will have an opportunity to learn about the uniqueness and importance of Pasco County's natural areas, natural communities, flora and fauna, and the intricacies of their ecological systems. These lands can offer citizens significant and unlimited opportunities for natural resource and environmental education. Access to these lands can also provide students and scientists, of all disciplines, natural areas for important research opportunities.

Agriculture is a significant part of Pasco County's heritage and is an important part of Pasco County's economy. The large acreages of lands necessary for agriculture and other working landscapes, as well as those lands that are owned by private large-land owners, often serve as low density, compatible buffers to preserved lands. Pasco County's land acquisition program can provide an opportunity to protect this part of Pasco County's heritage in helping these large landowners keep their lands in their rural, undeveloped condition by offering them conservation easements, transfers of development rights or other less than fee methods of conservation.

There are a multitude of financial benefits that Pasco County can gain by having an environmentally sensitive lands acquisition program. Despite the concern of possible losses in the county's tax rolls, studies in other counties, with similar programs, have shown that there have been, in fact, very minimal impacts on a county's tax roll. Taxpayer's can also save money when lands are set aside for conservation because they will not have to pay for the extensive infrastructure that is needed to support the development of these lands. Preserved lands have invariably increased the value of surrounding properties. People are drawn to development projects and homes that are in close proximity to conservation lands, due to the serenity and recreation opportunities these lands have to offer close to home. It has also been shown that acquiring, preserving and managing environmentally sensitive lands has been much more effective than seeking to protect them through regulation. Conservation lands and their intact ecosystems can save tax dollars with the above mentioned environmental services they can provide, such as naturally averting floods and destruction from storms and by naturally providing clean air and water.

Through Pasco County's land acquisition program and its ability to acquire, preserve and manage large tracts of natural areas in perpetuity that are open for public use, there will be many opportunities for the creation of an eco-tourism industry. This industry can create jobs and can have a positive economic effect on other businesses. The pristine freshwater and marine coastlines, beaches, estuaries, forests, clean air and water are important to Pasco County's tourism economy and are vital for the county's commercial and recreational fishing economies. The conservation of environmentally sensitive lands has the great potential to lead to sustainable economic growth and a net financial gain for the county and its communities.

The environmental selection and/or nomination committee of this program will consist of members of the community: any person can nominate parcels for consideration. The program is also completely voluntary, unwilling sellers can have their parcels removed from further consideration if they wish. Citizens will be assured public ownership of the county's natural areas for purposes of maintaining Pasco County's unique natural resources.

Pasco County's environmentally sensitive lands acquisition program will protect and preserve the unique biological diversity that is found in Pasco County through responsible stewardship of Pasco County's natural resources and natural areas for generations to come, thereby, ensuring the future sustainability of the county's natural resources, quality of life, clean air and water, recreation, and economic health for all its citizens in perpetuity. Most importantly, a sense of this special place will be preserved forever for the citizens of Pasco County.

10.3 Recommendations

A workshop was held on August 26, 2003 with the BOCC in Dade City, Florida. At that workshop, the ELATF made recommendations for actions beyond the scope of this report. These recommendations included the following:

- Prior to September 15, 2003, submit the maps depicting proposed acquisition study areas to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) for inclusion in their five-year plan; the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) for the Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund; and other potential partners.
- Establish, by Resolution, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Selection Committee (ELASC) by March 31, 2004.
- By March 31, 2004, hire, or contract with a land acquisition manager to focus on the land acquisition program, and to facilitate meetings with the ELASC.
- Send a copy of the ELATF report to potential land acquisition partners with a request for consideration of future funding priorities.
- Consider the ELATF's proposed draft language for the Penny for Pasco referendum, and continue to prioritize the funding for natural lands.
- Provide guidance to the ELATF as to how it can assist in promoting the upcoming sales tax referendum.
- Accept the final ELATF summary report and its recommendations.



Appendix 1

BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

RESOLUTION NO. ~~02-236~~

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA, ESTABLISHING THE PASCO COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LAND ACQUISITION TASK FORCE; ESTABLISHING MEMBERSHIP AND PROCEDURES; ESTABLISHING THE TASKS OF THE TASK FORCE; PROVIDING FOR A FINAL REPORT; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners of Pasco County ("Board") recognizes the potential public benefits of an environmental lands acquisition program such as, but not limited to, the opportunity to acquire environmentally sensitive lands, including water resource protection areas, habitat for endangered species, coastal preservation areas, and providing for public recreation and land management; and

WHEREAS, the Board desires to determine the best procedures, policies and priorities of such a program; and

WHEREAS, the Board desires to utilize a Task Force composed of citizens to evaluate options and establish procedures, policies and priorities for a comprehensive environmental land acquisition program and make recommendations to the Board; and

WHEREAS, the Board wishes to delineate the membership and the responsibilities and duties of the Task Force;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA:

Section 1. There is hereby established the Pasco County Environmental Land Acquisition Task Force, the purpose of which is to recommend the economic feasibility and validity of an environmental lands acquisition program ("program"), to compile all useful information available to identify potential acquisitions, recommend an overall monetary figure for all potential acquisitions, analyze all methods of acquisition and recommend those best suited to a program, evaluate options for funding sources and partnership potentials, establish a program structure and the criteria for selection of lands, and any other task that the Board may assign for analysis.

Section 2. Membership and procedures.

- a. The Task Force shall consist of eleven (11) Pasco County citizens appointed by the Board. These appointees shall have knowledge, experience or expertise in public land acquisition, environmental evaluation or assessment, real estate financing or large land development, land management or agricultural operations. One (1) appointee shall be from the current membership of any environmental group with at least one year of existence and 25 or more members residing in Pasco County (ENVIRO), one (1) appointee shall be from the Technical Advisory Committee for the Wildlife and Habitat Study (TAC), and at least one (1) appointee shall be a professional whose expertise is in land acquisition. One appointee shall be a Pasco County Staff member. Appointments to the Task

Force shall be representative of expertise in the environmental / biological sciences, banking/financing, real estate / land development, agriculture, and business. The choice of environmental group will be at the discretion of the Board.

- b. Meetings. Meetings of the Task Force shall be held in County Commission Boardrooms, be open to the public and the media, be noticed on the County's Public Notice Agenda, and shall be conducted in compliance with the Sunshine Law, Section 286.011, Florida Statutes. The Clerk's office shall audio tape the meetings and prepare annotated minutes in accordance with the Public Records Act, Section 119.001, Florida Statutes. The minutes shall be distributed through the County Administrator or his designee. The Task Force shall meet according to a set regular schedule and arranged through the County Administrator's Office. Special meetings may be called by the Task Force Chair and coordinated through the County Administrator or his designee. Meetings of the Task Force shall not extend beyond 11 p.m.
- c. Agenda. The County Administrator or his designee shall distribute the meeting agenda, which shall be prepared by the Task Force Chair and follow the work plan and time table set forth by the Task Force.
- d. Quorum. A simple majority of the Task Force shall constitute a quorum. Recommendations and decisions of the Task Force must be made by a majority vote of those present and voting. Action on the Final Report/Recommendations shall be taken by an affirmative vote of the majority of the eleven task force members.
- e. Attendance. A member of the Task Force shall voluntarily resign membership as soon as it is apparent to him or her that he or she will not be able to attend meetings regularly. Automatic removal shall occur if attendance is less than 50% during a six-month period. When a vacancy occurs, the Task Force Chair shall notify the County Administrator, and the Board shall take appropriate actions as soon thereafter as possible to appoint a replacement.
- f. Compensation. Members of the Task Force shall receive no compensation for the performance of their duties and responsibilities.
- g. Reports. There will be a final report that shall include recommendations for action on all task assignments. Interim reporting shall be determined by the work plan and time table. Recommendations of the Task Force shall be in writing and shall be forwarded to the Board and County Administrator, or his/her designee. The County Administrator may provide to the Board, under separate cover, any comments he or she may have regarding the Task Force's report.

Section 3. Tasks.

- a. The Task Force shall develop a work plan and time table for implementing its charge.
- b. The Task Force will compile all useful data identifying potential acquisitions of environmentally sensitive lands. Using all sources including, but not limited to:

“The Assessment of Measures to Protect Wildlife Habitat in Pasco County”, the Southwest Florida Water Management’s five (5) year acquisition plan, the Department of Environmental Protection’s land acquisition priorities, Florida State land acquisition priorities, the Pasco County Parks and Recreation Master Plan acquisition needs, and other outside private and /or public organization or agency’s priorities for land protection in Pasco County.

- c. The Task Force will recommend a dollar figure for all potential acquisitions considered critical, using the data from task A to guide them to such lands. The Task Force will also recommend a dollar figure for those lands deemed important, but not necessarily critical and lands that might be considered for an agricultural reserve. Included in that dollar figure shall be an estimate of program and land management costs.
- d. The Task Force will analyze all possible methods for acquisition and management of environmentally sensitive lands available including, but not limited to fee simple purchase, less-than-fee purchase, transfer of development rights, donation and contribution, mitigation banking and / or credits, public / private partnerships and incentive for private land management of natural communities. The Task Force will recommend which methodologies best suit a Pasco County Environmental Land Acquisition Program.
- e. The Task Force will analyze the various methodologies of payment for acquisition and management, and the funding sources available that can be reasonably expected for Pasco County. This exploration should include, but is not limited to, various tax reduction or exemption possibilities and taxation methods or other funding sources that are available and would encourage the public acceptance of a program.
- f. The Task Force shall analyze the Florida Rural and Family Lands Protection Act and recommend its value and use for furthering the goals of an environmental lands acquisition and management program.
- g. The Task Force will recommend the committee structure and procedures for the environmental land acquisition nomination and selection process.
- h. The Task Force will recommend specific criteria to determine the environmental value of land for acquisition to be used in the selection of nominated lands, the basis for rejection of nominated lands, the basis on which to accept easements or donations, and the basis on which to encourage or facilitate transfer of development rights, and the criteria for any other method of acquisition determined in Section 3c.

Section 4. Final Report.

- a. The Task Force shall prepare and submit interim reports as determined by the work plan and time table. The Task Force shall prepare and submit a final report to the Board which evaluates the options for establishing a program for acquisition and management of environmentally sensitive lands in Pasco County, and makes recommendation including, but not limited to, initial identification of

potential acquisitions, acquisition and management methodologies, program costs and revenues (funding sources), and the structure and selection criteria of a program. The Task Force will make a recommendation of its findings and further action to the Pasco Board of County Commissioners no later than December 31, 2003.

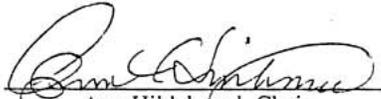
Section 5. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption.

DULY ADOPTED in regular session, this 27th day of August in the year of 2002.




Jed Pittman, Clerk

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA

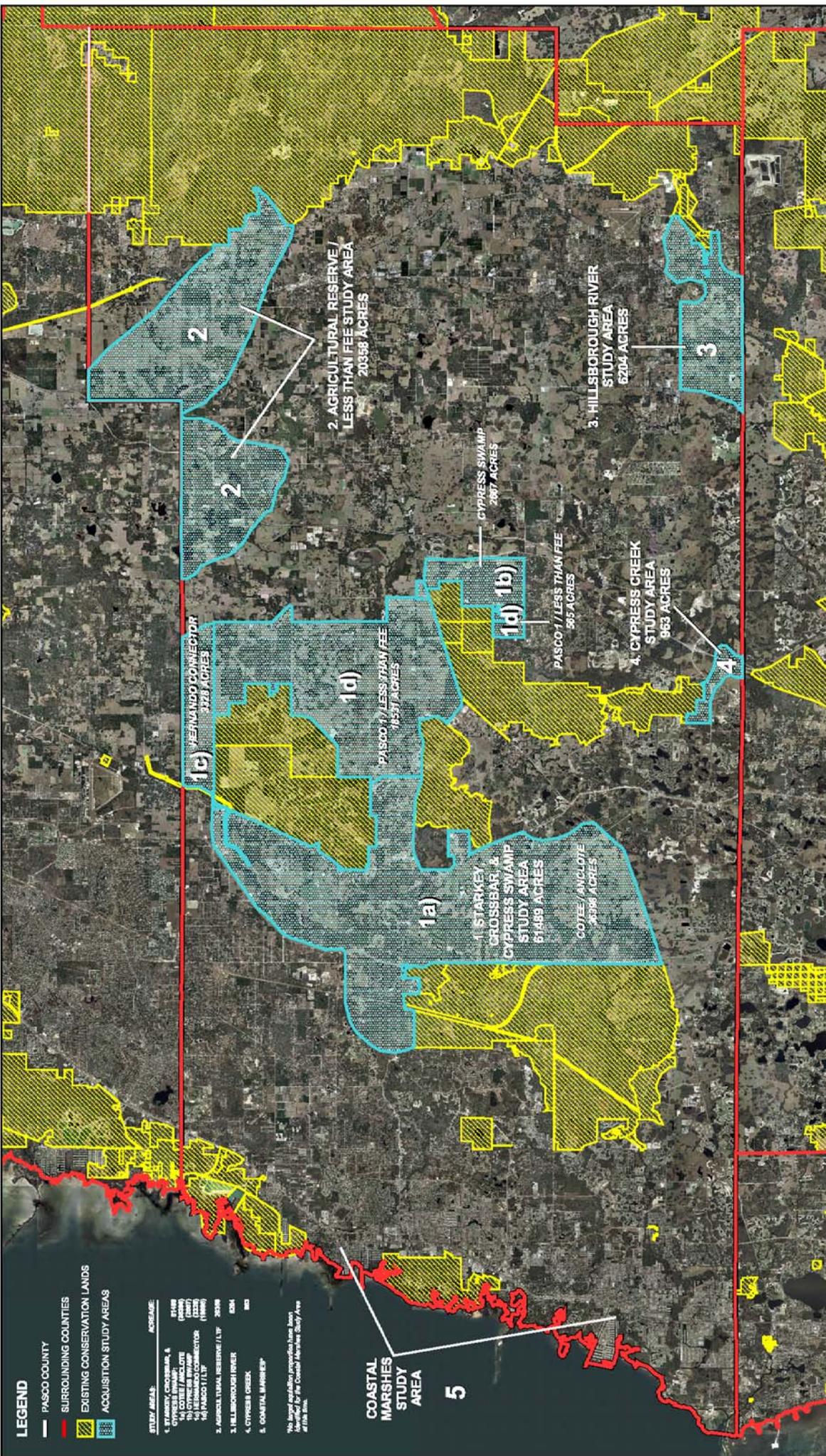
By 
Ann Hildebrand, Chair

APPROVED

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGAL SUFFICIENCY
Office of the County Attorney

AUG 27 2002


Attorney



LEGEND

- PASCO COUNTY
- SURROUNDING COUNTIES
- EXISTING CONSERVATION LANDS
- ACQUISITION STUDY AREAS

STUDY AREA:	ACRES:
1. STARKEY CROSSBAR & CYPRESS SWAMP (1a)	61489
1b) COTEE/ANCLOTE (1b)	20396
1c) HERNANDO CONNECTOR (1c)	3328
1d) PASCO 17 (1d)	62597
2. AGRICULTURAL RESERVE / LESS THAN FEE (2)	20358
3. HILLSBOROUGH RIVER (3)	6204
4. CYPRESS CREEK (4)	963
5. COASTAL MARSHES*	ND

*No larger acquisition proposals have been identified for the Coastal Marshes Study Area at this time.



GJ# 17010