



# ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LANDS PROGRAM

## Indian Mound Station Sanctuary

### Conceptual Public Access Plan Public Meeting

September 23, 2009

### Minutes

#### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Xavier de Seguin des Hons, EEL Program North Region Land Manager welcomed the group and called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

#### **PRESENTATION:**

Xavier presented an overview of the EEL Program and the Conceptual Indian Mound Station Sanctuary Public Access Plan, and he explained that the purpose of the meeting was to receive input from the public regarding plans for the Sanctuary.

#### **EEL Program and Management Plan Process Overview**

- EEL Program's Mission: To Protect and Preserve Biodiversity through Responsible Stewardship of Brevard County's Natural Resources.
- EEL Program's Vision: The EEL Program acquires, protects and maintains environmentally endangered lands guided by scientific principles for conservation and the best available practices for resources stewardship and ecosystem management. The EEL Program protects the rich biological diversity of Brevard County for future generations. The EEL Program provides passive recreation and environmental education opportunities to Brevard's citizens and visitors without detracting from the primary conservation goals of the program. The EEL Program encourages active citizen participation and community involvement.
- Four Management Regions
  - North: 5,348 acres
    - 9 sanctuaries, 1 Management and Education Center
  - Central: 3,002 acres
  - South: 6,695 acres
  - South Beach: 328 acres
- Land Management
  - Prescribed Fire
  - Control of invasive exotic plant and animal species
  - Planting native vegetation
  - Property includes an Indian burial mound which has been affected by looting and vandalism in previous years. Tom Penders, a local archaeologist is working with the EEL Program to fence and secure the mound in order to protect it from further harm.
  - The site is currently fenced.
  - Most of the public access since the site was acquired in 2006 has been from citizen volunteers during public work days to remove trash from the site.
- Public Access
  - When the property was purchased in 2006, consideration was given to attempting to purchase additional property located between this site and the

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Parks & Recreation Department's Holder Park in order to expand the property in conservation and to provide a convenient access point to the Sanctuary. That acquisition was not completed. Current plans are to move the Parrish Road fire line gate inside the sanctuary property and create a small, crushed shell parking lot (8 cars maximum). The new gate will be a walk through gate which will allow people and bikes to pass through, but not cars.

- **Management Plan approval Process**

- Interim Management Plan drafted by EEL Program Staff within 3 months of acquisition
  - Approved by Selection and Management Committee
- Public Access Site Assessment completed by Staff
- Conceptual Public Access Plan
  - Drafted by Staff
  - Reviewed at public meeting
  - Reviewed by Recreation and Education Advisory Committee
  - Becomes part of formal Management Plan
- Management Plan drafted by Staff
  - SMC review
  - 30 day public review
  - Selection and Management Committee approval
  - Board of County Commissioners approval
  - State of Florida Acquisition and Restoration Council approval (if property was purchased in partnership with the State.)

### **Indian Mound Station Sanctuary**

- Approximately 85 acres
- Acquired by the EEL Program in 2006
- East of I-95, and south of Parrish Road in Titusville
- Resources Identified
  - Protected Species: Gopher tortoise, Bald eagle
  - Ecosystems: Scrub, Scrubby flatwoods, Floodplain marsh, Floodplain Swamp
  - Existing Trails
- Stakeholders Identified
  - Sanctuary neighbors
  - Hikers
  - Birders
  - Nature Lovers
  - Bicyclists
  - Native American community
  - Archaeology group
- Recreation Plan
  - Parking area inside the Sanctuary, along Parrish Road
  - Walk through gate on Parrish Road
  - 1.06 miles of hiking and biking trails
  - Educational interpretive signs along the trail at the Indian Burial Mound, and potentially at the old Tramway railroad.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

- Concerns were expressed regarding the possible use of firebreaks adjacent to neighboring properties as trails, due to the potential for loss of privacy and possible security issues.
- Clarification was provided by staff that these concerns were understandable and will be taken into consideration. In the past the Program has usually been able to move trail locations, or close some firebreaks to hikers when this type concern has been received.
- Concerns were received regarding the possible increase of illegal activity occurring in the area when the site is opened for public access.
- Clarification was provided that EEL Program staff will check on the site, as funding resources allow, and that citizens have the option of contacting EEL Program staff at the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary in Titusville, or contacting local law enforcement, if there are specific concerns or events that require follow up.
- Clarification was also provided that historically, when legal and appropriate use of properties purchased by the Program becomes established, inappropriate activity levels drop significantly.
- A question was received as to why the Program didn't concentrate hiking trails on the large tract of land recently purchased in the north part of the County, instead of on this site.
- Clarification was provided that the EEL Program guidelines provide for passive recreational opportunities on properties, without detracting from the conservation goals of the Program.
- Concerns were received regarding the number of trees that were removed from the site during part of the habitat restoration process.
- Clarification was provided that a large part of this sanctuary had historically been scrub habitat, which requires large open areas with few trees, and that fire was a normal part of natural scrub habitat. The site had been so overgrown that it would not have been safe to burn the site without mechanical reduction of the existing high fuel load. In addition, some of the trees that were removed were taken down during the establishment of the fire line, which is created to protect neighboring homes.
- Concerns were expressed regarding possible injury of wildlife on the site during the prescribed fires.
- Clarification was provided that it is understood that sometimes existing wildlife can be hurt during prescribed fires, but that the overall improvement to the natural area allows for greater populations to become established. Care is taken to avoid injury to existing wildlife as much as possible.
- Concerns were received that the site would not grow back to the same level of density for a long time.

- Clarification was provided that scrub habitat regenerates quickly, and that although the natural area would not look the same as it had before, it would still be a natural area, and it would be better habitat for the plants and animals that had historically been there. Additional clarification was provided that the area no longer contains the high fuel load which could be very destructive in the event of a wildfire.
- Concerns were expressed that some residents did not feel that sufficient notice had been given to sanctuary neighbors regarding plans for habitat management and prescribed fire.
- Clarification was provided that all homeowners who lived directly adjacent to the sanctuary have been sent notification regarding the January 31<sup>st</sup> public meeting and that staff had unsuccessfully attempted to locate a homeowners association. Citizens in attendance at the meeting provided the homeowners association contact information. In the future, staff will work to establish signs on site, and hold neighborhood informational meetings so that folks can become more informed.
- Concerns were received that some areas of the Sanctuary received significant clearing and removal of vegetation and others did not.
- Clarification was provided that there are different types of habitat on the Indian Mound Station Sanctuary and that the Scrub and Scrubby flatwoods require a more extensive tree removal than the Floodplain marsh or Floodplain swamp areas. There is also an eagle's nest in the scrubby flatwoods, and habitat restoration of that area will need to be scheduled outside of the eagle's nesting season.
- A question was received as to why some of the trees that appeared to be burned were left standing and not cut down.
- Clarification was provided that they were not cut down because some of the burned trees will eventually die, but some will not, and that this is normal for this type of habitat management. Additional clarification was provided that the dead trees have a biological benefit to insects and other plants and animals. Additional clarification was provided that the scrub oaks that do come back will not be allowed to grow as tall as they were previously, because historically fire frequency in scrub habitat prevented the majority of oaks to reach such height.
- A suggestion was received to place signs around the Sanctuary borders ahead of time that explained the site would be receiving habitat management as part of the habitat restoration process.
- Clarification was provided that there are a few signs of this type, but that it would be very beneficial if there were more signs, and if there was additional information provided to the public prior to future management activities of this type at other sites.
- Clarification was provided that reducing the fuel load on this site, to ensure the safety of neighboring homes, was one of the first priorities in the management process.
- A concern was received regarding air quality during future prescribed fires.

- Clarification was provided that citizens could sign up for a prescribed fire notification list and they would receive advance notice of planned prescribed fires.
- Clarification was requested as to whether or not the Board of County Commissioners had formally approved the prescribed fire at the Indian Mound Station Sanctuary before it was done.
- Clarification was provided that staff had obtained all required permits through the County's Natural Resources Department in order to conduct the prescribed fire and that formal approval from the Board was not part of the permitting process.
- Citizens asked if they could be notified when a prescribed fire was planned.
- Clarification was provided that citizens could sign up for a prescribed fire notification list and they could receive a few days advance notice of planned prescribed fires.
- A question was received asking if fire trucks would be on hand for future prescribed fires.
- Clarification was provided that fire and brush trucks, and a tractor plow are available if it is determined they are needed during prescribed fires and that the EEL Program works with the Florida Division of Forestry as well as county and local fire fighters during prescribed fires.
- A question was received regarding the type of surface of the trails and if they could be used by bicycles.
- Clarification was provided that the internal trails would be mowed and that hiking and biking would be allowed on site. External firebreaks/trails will be disked routinely and internal firebreaks/trails will be disked prior to future prescribed fires, which are scheduled to be done approximately every 3-5 years.
- A question was received regarding the name of the Indians who lived in the area and whether or not they should be involved.
- Clarification was provided that the site was being restored and protected with the help of an archaeologist and that it is thought that the Ais tribe who formerly occupied this area were no longer in existence.
- A request was received to send a map of the public access trails to the local homeowner's association.
- Staff will send the map.
- Clarification was provided that there has been documented history of the Indian Burial Mound being damaged in the past and that the EEL Program plans to protect the grave site.

- Clarification was provided that this site was originally brought to the attention of the EEL Program by citizens who felt the site had biological and cultural value and felt it should be protected.
- Concerns were expressed by some of the homeowners in attendance that when they purchased their homes, they were told that the land behind their houses would never change.
- Clarification was provided that this was an unfortunate situation, but that the information had been inaccurate, and that it had not come from the EEL Program.
- Additional concerns were received regarding the possible increase of illegal activity occurring in the area when the site is opened for public access.
- Clarification was provided that EEL Program staff will check on the site, as funding resources allow, and that citizens have the option of contacting EEL Program staff at the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary in Titusville, or contacting local law enforcement, if there are specific concerns or events that require follow up, and that historically, when legal and appropriate use of properties purchased by the Program becomes established, inappropriate activity levels drop significantly.
- A comment was received from a citizen in attendance at the meeting that he had first hand knowledge that scrub oaks would come back after being cut down or burned.
- Clarification was provided that in the future, when the vegetation does come back, it will be kept to a lower height which will provide better habitat for the scrub species in the area, and be safer to the neighboring homes.
- Information on the EEL Program's South Lake Conservation Area which received previous mechanical treatment and prescribed fire was provided as an example of how the habitat will recover as it is restored.
- Information was provided on the *Scrub Management Guidelines for Peninsular Florida: Using the Scrub-Jay as an Umbrella Species* which was prepared by environmental scientists and approved by the Selection and Management Committee and copies of the document were offered to anyone who requested one.
- Information on the next stage of management activities was provided. It is anticipated that management activities for at least a portion of the scrub and scrubby flatwoods remaining in the sanctuary is planned during the next year.
- Aerial photos of the Indian Mound Sanctuary from 1943, 1958, 1972 and 2006 and photos of the South Land Sanctuary from 1943, 2006, 2008-2009 were displayed to provide information on the open, sandy scrub habitats that existed prior to the time when Brevard County started becoming developed.
- Clarification was provided that staff would be willing to work with the neighborhood homeowners' association to provide information regarding future plans for the Indian Mound Station Sanctuary.

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- Clarification was provided that during transition stages of restoration, the landscape can appear to be severely damaged, but that the purpose of the EEL Program referendum is to increase biodiversity, not take it away, and that the Program's goal is to make the site far more biologically diverse than it is now.
- Citizens expressed their appreciation for staff's willingness to contact folks prior to future prescribed fires and to provide additional information to the community regarding future plans for the sanctuary.
- Clarification was provided that minutes of the meeting would be prepared and posted to the EEL Program's web site and that additional opportunities for public input would be advertised as part of the Management Plan development process.

**ADJOURNED:**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.