



June 7, 2010

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Ray Eubanks, Administrator
Plan Review and Processing
Department of Community Affairs
2555 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100

RE: Martin County Comprehensive Plan Amendment Submittal (DCA 10-1)

Dear Mr. Eubanks:

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Division of Habitat and Species Conservation's Habitat Conservation Scientific Services Section, has coordinated our agency's review of the Martin County 10-1 comprehensive plan transmittal package and is submitting comments and recommendations in accordance with Chapter 163, Florida Statutes, and Chapter 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code. FWC staff considers seventeen of the proposed changes, CPA10-02, CPA10-03, CPA10-06, CPA10-07, CPA10-08, CPA 10-10, CPA10-11, CPA10-12, CPA 10-13 and 10-14(text), CPA10-15, CPA10-16, CPA10-17, CPA 10-18, CPA 10-19 and 10-20 (text), and CPA10-21 to be relatively minor in terms of potential impacts to fish and wildlife resources. We do not consider these amendments to be in conflict with the goals of the Growth Management Plan's Conservation Element or Coastal Management Element as they relate to fish and wildlife resources and therefore have no additional comments on them at this time. The FWC considers four of the proposed amendments, CPA 10-01, CPA10-04 and 10-05 (text), CPA 10-09 to have potential impacts to fish and wildlife resources and our comments follow.

The proposed amendments of concern contain habitats that support a diverse array of wildlife species, including 15 that are protected by federal and/or state law (Table 1).

Table 1. List of Potentially Occurring Protected Wildlife Species

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Status*</u>
Gopher frog	<i>Rana capito</i>	SSC
American alligator	<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	SSC; FT
Gopher tortoise	<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	ST
Eastern indigo snake	<i>Drymarchon corais couperi</i>	ST; FT
Crested caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>	ST, FT
Snail kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus</i>	SE, FE
Red-cockaded woodpecker	<i>Picoides borealis</i>	SSC, FT

Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>	SSC
Tricolored heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	SSC
Little blue heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	SSC
Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	SSC
White ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	SSC
Florida scrub jay	<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	ST, FT
Florida sandhill crane	<i>Grus canadensis pratensis</i>	ST
Sherman's fox squirrel	<i>Sciurus niger shermani</i>	SSC

* SSC - Species of Special Concern; ST - State Threatened; SE - State Endangered; FT - Federally Threatened; FE - Federally Endangered; **While the bald eagle has been both state and federally delisted, it is still governed by the state bald eagle management plan and the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

CPA 10-01 St. Lucie Partners LLC

Description and Location: The property totals approximately 3,902 acres and is located south of the St. Lucie Canal at the intersection of State Road 76 and SW Bridge Road. The subject property contains three parcels. Parcels #1 and #2 constitute 1,450 acres (the northern part of the property) and are proposed to be changed from Agricultural to Rural Density with a concurrent zoning change. Parcel #3, a 2,452-acre tract, is proposed to change from Agricultural to Institutional, Public Conservation concurrent with a zoning district change. The applicant is proposing perpetual preservation and restoration of 2,452 acres through a land-use change from Agricultural to Institutional, Public Conservation; dedicating a perpetual conservation easement over this acreage; and providing funds for perpetual management of the land under easement.

Current uses include cattle grazing (improved pasture), tree farming and related nursery operations. A large portion of the site contains undisturbed native upland and wetland habitats. We understand that the land has been targeted for acquisition by the South Florida Water Management District as part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

Potential Impacts to Fish and Wildlife Resources: Fish and wildlife resources on the site include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Snail Kite, Crested Caracara, and Scrub-Jay consultation areas;
- Potential habitat for several listed species including the Sherman's fox squirrel, eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, gopher frog, little blue heron, white ibis, snowy egret and Florida sandhill crane, and limpkin (see Table 1, above);

- Florida Natural Areas Inventory-designated under-represented communities that include large acreages of pinelands (674 acres) and freshwater marsh/wet prairie (592 acres); and
- Priority wetlands for the Florida sandhill crane, tricolored heron, and little blue heron.

Comments: The 2,452 acres proposed for conservation contains most of the native and listed species habitat on the site. Placing the acreage proposed for Public Conservation under a perpetual conservation easement and perpetually managing the conservation lands should offset the potential impacts to fish and wildlife resources caused by the increased density on the other 1,450 acres contained in this proposal. We therefore support the requirement for a perpetual conservation easement with funding for land management to be used for the conservation portion instead of a time-limited (20-year) conservation easement. We believe the proposed conservation is in line with Objective 9.4.A.7, Policies 9.4.A.11.b-d, and Policy 9.4.A.11.1 of the Martin County Comprehensive Plan Conservation Element.

CPA10-04 and 10-05 (text) Sunrise Groves

Description and Location: This amendment proposes a new future land-use designation (AgTEC) that permits both agricultural activity and phased conversion of agricultural lands to non-residential, urban development on 1,717 acres located west of the Interstate 95/ County Road 714 interchange in northwestern Martin County. The property is currently in active citrus production and is proposed for industrial, commercial, retail, and office development, active agriculture, and restoration. While this property may be located away from existing development in Martin County, it is located adjacent to two approved Developments of Regional Impacts and an existing development in St. Lucie County. The applicant is proposing to keep 30% of the site as agriculture or open space and is proposing to restore or enhance the southwestern portion of the site.

Potential Impacts to Fish and Wildlife Resources: Fish and wildlife resources on the site include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Snail Kite, Crested Caracara, and Scrub-Jay consultation areas; and
- Potential habitat for the eastern indigo snake and gopher tortoise.

Comments: The text amendment concerning the new land use category “AgTEC” is written to be site specific, thus precluding it from use on other sites in Martin County. The category encourages clustering along Interstate 95 with gradually decreasing land use intensity approaching the conservation and restoration areas producing a density buffer to further the effectiveness of adjacent conservation areas for wildlife use.

The project proposes to maintain acreage in active agricultural and to restore acreage immediately adjacent to Save Our Rivers Program acquisition lands. The proposed restoration along the southwestern portion of the property could benefit the Save Our Rivers Program and would maintain connectivity with public conservation lands.

We encourage the applicant to continue working with the FWC to identify appropriate areas for restoration and conservation, to maximize benefits to wildlife species, to ensure connectivity through the site where appropriate, and to enhance the existing wildlife corridor through the property.

CPA10-09 Canopus Sound

Description and Location: This Future Land Use Map amendment proposes to change 500 acres from Agricultural (allowing one unit per 20 acres) to Institutional-Public Conservation concurrent with a zoning change. The applicant is proposing perpetual conservation of the 500 acres through a land-use change to Institutional, Public Conservation and by donating the property to Martin County. The same application proposes to change the adjacent 2,581 acres from Agricultural to Agricultural Ranchette (allowing one unit per five acres). The site is located south of Bridge Road, east of Interstate 95, and adjacent to the western boundary of Jonathan Dickinson State Park. The site is currently being used as improved pasture (1,139 acres), and a large portion of the site consists of native wetland and upland habitat including pinelands (591 acres), dry prairie (387 acres), freshwater marsh and wet prairie (285 acres), cypress swamp (154 acres), and shrub and brushland (135 acres).

Potential Impacts to Fish and Wildlife Resources: Fish and wildlife resources on the site include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Snail Kite, Crested Caracara, Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, and Scrub-Jay consultation areas;
- Potential habitat for the Sherman's fox squirrel, little blue heron, Florida sandhill crane, eastern indigo snake, and gopher tortoise;
- Priority wetlands for Florida sandhill crane, little blue heron, and tricolored heron;
- Entire property is targeted for either the Atlantic Ridge Ecosystem or Pal-Mar Florida Forever Acquisition; and
- Is located immediately adjacent to Jonathan Dickinson State Park.

Comments: This property is part of a significant wildlife corridor connecting several public conservation lands including the Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Park, John C. and Marianna Jones/Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area, Cypress Creek/Loxahatchee, and Jonathan Dickinson State Park. The property contains a large amount of native habitat that is actively being used by listed wildlife species. A residential development in this area at the proposed densities would fragment habitat for listed species in the area and likely interfere directly with wildlife movement between the nearby public conservation lands. Residential development could also inhibit prescribed fire management on adjacent public conservation lands. Even with the donation of 500 acres to Martin County for conservation, the net effect of the residential development on 2,581 acres in this area would still fragment the habitat corridor and impede movement of listed wildlife.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on these Comprehensive Plan amendments as they pertain to fish and wildlife resource conservation and natural resource-based economic development. If you or your staff has any specific questions regarding our

comments, I encourage them to contact Dr. Joseph Walsh at 772-778-6354 or by email at joe.walsh@myFWC.com.

Sincerely,



Mary Ann Poole
Commenting Program Administrator

map/jw/jdg

Martin County 10-1_2797_060410
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