

**MANATEE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS MANAGEMENT AND ACQUISITION  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ELMAC)  
REGULAR MEETING  
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER, 5TH FLOOR, MANATEE ROOM  
1112 Manatee Avenue West  
Bradenton, Florida  
July 14, 2025**

Present were:

Mason Gravley, Chairman  
Kate Horne, Vice-Chairman  
Mike Burton  
Randy Cooper  
Kyle Fisher  
Alyssa Gay  
David Landers  
Richard Larsen  
Jonathan Lynch  
Brian Searcy  
Scott Tussing

Absent were:

Scott Childress  
Eric DiSilvestro  
Barry Grooms  
Merrie Lynn Parker  
Charles Richards

There is one vacant seat.

Also present was:

Commissioner Carol Ann Felts  
Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director  
Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager  
Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager  
Vicki Tessmer, Board Records Supervisor, Clerk of the Circuit Court



Chairman Gravley called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

**AGENDA**

EL20250714DOC001

1. **WELCOME**

Chairman Gravley welcomed Members and citizens.

2. **MINUTES**

A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member Searcy, and carried 10-0, with Members Childress, DiSilvestro, Grooms, Landers, Parker, and Richards absent to approve the minutes of May 5, 2025.

(Enter Member Landers)


3. **STAFF REPORTS**




Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, used a slide presentation to address staff updates including ELMAC memberships, the possibility of reducing the

membership, reimbursement of \$11.9 million was pulled from the Florida Forever Board of Trustees agenda regarding the Emerson Point reimbursement, but there is still the opportunity to obtain the funding, and the State Rural and Family Lands program is well funded. Ms. Woithe announced that Hannah Turbiville is no longer with Property Acquisition, but is now working in the grants department, but the open Coordinator position was filled today.

EL20250714DOC002

 Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, clarified the deferment of the Florida Forever funds, is better than the funding being completely denied.

 Ms. Woithe continued the slides to provide a summary of the Corridor Connect Summit, changes in land use, updates and incentives planned for the Comprehensive Plan, preserving open space, meeting landowner needs, local knowledge and relationships, and supporting capitalizing conservation.

4. **CONSERVATION ACQUISITION CANDIDATE PROPERTIES**


Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, continued the slides to review the existing candidate properties that have been purchased including Golf Course Road and North Pine Island, and closing are scheduled in August for Crane Park Addition, Rye Cemetery Buffer, and the Rye Road Property. She continued to review the other candidate properties that are under reviewed.

5. **CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, continued the slides and distributed a handout from Florida's Future Landscape regarding conservation easements, Section 2-25-56 of the Code of Ordinances regarding acquisition, management, and protection methods for Conservation Easements, and the difference between fee simple purchases and conservation easements.


EL20250714DOC003


 Mike Elswick expounded on Manatee County properties that are conservation easements.

 Discussion ensued regarding evaluating options to conserve land, ELMAC has no regulatory ability, Manatee County cannot "take" properties for conservation using eminent domain, there are limitations on land use, conservation easements are a tool in the tool box, not every property owner wants a conservation easement, easement holders need to follow the rules, value of the land is less, every property acquired needs management, there is a need for private land owners to manage their lands, agricultural use may be allowed in a conservation easement, Florida panther sighting in a tomato field, funding for purchases is not solely from the County, as the State can also provide dollars, conservation corridor function, Manatee County now owns 17 miles of shoreline along the Manatee River, institute wildlife crossings over State roads, but need protected land on either side of the road, there is a place holder for a wildlife crossing on S.R. 70, land owners make their own decisions, and Manatee County is fortunate to have a Board that is currently leery of development.


Ms. Woithe continued the slides to address more funding for conservation lands, Trust for Public Lands (TPL) provides technical service and advise, and determines the willingness of the voters to pay for conservation lands. TPL needs 18 months to prepare for a ballot

measure, and they work on finding out what type of support the citizens are willing to give. The current millage allows the County to bond no more than \$50 million, and there is the ability to bond an additional \$15 million, which can be used to purchase additional properties. The first opportunity to ask for more funding is 2026.

 Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, stressed polling votes is necessary to get the funding.

 Discussion continued regarding what debt is manageable, still need to keep property taxes manageable, and move forward with a recommendation to the Board.

A motion was made by Member Burton and seconded by Member Fisher to recommend the Board of County Commissioners request assistance from the Trust for Public Lands to go forward with an effort to poll the county.

 Mr. Hunsicker reviewed the process the last time TPL performed this service, and it was informal, with individual discussions with Commissioners.

Discussion ensued regarding TPL can review other types of funding and compare the differences, smart to reuse the same team as before, this is a good time to get the ball rolling, and there is a template letter to request services by TPL. EL20250714DOC004

The motion carried 10-1, with Member Searcy voting nay and Members \*\*\* absent.

6 **CITIZEN/GUEST COMMENTS**

 There being no citizen comments, Chairman Gravley closed citizen comments.


7. **PRIORITAZITON AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were no recommendations.

8. **NEW BUSINESS AND COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

 Member Cooper expressed his gratitude for the time he served on ELMAC.

Chairman Gravley announced he has a podcast, Adventure Sports Podcast.

 Commissioner Felts announced she is available for site visits to potential properties, noted her assistant may attend future meetings, and is encouraged with the discussion today. She noted a stormwater budget is in the talks with the Board, and taxpayers may need encouragement by combining information regarding conservation lands and flooding.

Discussion ensued regarding having language combined with the stormwater program to purchase conservation lands.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Chairman Gravley adjourned the meeting at 7:48 p.m.

Minutes Approved: September 8, 2025