

**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
SEPTEMBER 8, 2025**

Present were:

Kate Horne, Vice-Chairman
Mike Burton
Robert Brown
Scott Childress
Eric DiSilvestro
Kyle Fisher
Ruth Lawler
Merrie Lynn Parker
Charles Richards
Brian Searcy
Scott Tussing

Absent were:

Mason Gravley, Chairman
Alyssa Gay
Richard Larsen
Jonathan Lynch

There are two vacant seats.

Also present was:

Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director
Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager
Kendall Carson, Environmental Lands Program Coordinator
Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager
Vicki Tessmer, Board Records Supervisor, Deputy Clerk, Clerk of the Circuit Court

Vice-Chairman Horne called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

AGENDA

EL20250908DOC001

1. **WELCOME**



Vice-Chairman Horne welcomed all in attendance and Members introduced themselves.

2. **MINUTES**

A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member DiSilvestro, and carried 11-0, with Chairman Gravley and Members Gay, Larsen, and Lynch absent, to approve the minutes of July 14, 2025, with changes noted.

4. **BIG WATERS LAND TRUST 2030 CONSERVATION PLAN**




Brooke Langston, Big Waters Land Trust, used a slide presentation to provide her background, the Big Waters Land Trust mission and evolution, conservation priorities include clean water, imperiled species, coastal resiliency, sustainable agriculture, access

for all, and carbon sequestration, strategic conservation, data driven planning, conservation focus areas sub-watershed, conservation lands, conservation opportunities, Manatee County priorities, external and internal content, conservation goals, measurable metrics for each goal, measurement will shift each year, and information available on the website: <https://bigwaterslandtrust.org/>. EL20250908DOC002


Discussion ensued regarding overlaps in priorities, connectivity between conservation lands, targeted parcels, will not buy above fair market value, and looking at corridors.

3. **STAFF REPORTS**


ELMAC recommendations for Technical Assistance from Trust for Public Land (TPL)

 Charlie Hunsicker, Environmental Lands Director, used a slide presentation, to review the works of the Trust for Public Land for and noted the County is seeking their support again to continue the environmental land millage and go back for another ballot initiative. This must go before the Board of County Commissioners for a vote. EL20250908DOC003

Mr. Hunsicker continued the slides to review anticipated cost re-allocation in FY2025, cost savings of \$1,329,864 for staff, that was spent from the environmental land millage.

 Discussion ensued regarding there are no tradeoffs for the positions, but different funds are being used to pay for the positions, amount paid each year to bring down the debt, ask for \$50 million more for bonding, only borrow what is needed, have to spend 80 percent of what borrowed within three years, request for remaining \$15 million bond capacity on the September 16, agenda, staff positions provide several environmental tasks throughout the County preserves and conservation lands, biggest drawback is that citizens do not trust government, difficult decisions are being made at budget time, fee-simple acquisitions, citizens want conservation lands, if bond capacity is not increased, would have to rely on millage for future purchases, debt service on the millage, restoration and long term management, and grants received throughout the years have paid for preserves.


Prescribed Fire Agreement with Land Trust

 Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager, displayed a map and discussed a partnership for performing prescribed burns for Big Waters. The County burns approximately 10,000 acres a year. There is a lot of land in east county that does not have residences nearby, making it easier to burn, although there are some complaints of smoke. Big Waters is looking for a leadership role from Manatee County and Manatee entered into agreements to protect the County interests. Costs for equipment and labor for the burns is covered.

Discussion ensued regarding as long as costs are covered, it should be a seamless process to assist with maintaining properties owned by other entities, when Manatee can help, they will, goal is not to make money but to ensure the work will be done, and it is challenging for Manatee County to get the work done, on top of taking care of County owned properties, it is not the goal of the County to maintain private property, and there is a schedule for burnings.

5. **CONSERVATION ACQUISITION CANDIDATE PROPERTIES**

New Candidate Properties


 Ms. Woithe reviewed the acquisitions to date, and noted three properties were purchased with other funds, there are still some funds left. There are seven properties still on the list for potential purchase:

- Anson Road Properties - Florida Forever could provide funds
- Mossy Island Ranch - Staff is working on a Memorandum of Understanding for approximately \$1.5 million.
- Betts property – Waiting on appraisal
- Thundercloud Ranch - Could be a conservation easement
- North Crooked River Preserve and B Squared Ranch – Appraisals underway
- Prairie View - May have a purchaser
- Sweet Bay Property - Owners reviewing a conservation easement

She provided a timeline for acquisitions.

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6. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

 Matthew Nadu spoke to protecting Florida, and encouraged ELMAC to continue their work, and he offered assistance through his company for sustainable/regenerative soil/agriculture.

Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, stated there are steps being taken by Manatee County regarding sustainable/regenerative soil.

There being no further citizen comments, Vice-Chairman Horne closed citizen comments.


7. **PRIORITATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were no recommendations.

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

Member Lawler questioned when the bonding issue is going before the Board.

Mr. Hunsicker stated the ELMAC Chairman will make the presentation regarding the ballot initiative.

 Ms. Woithe explained the remaining \$15 million bond funding will go before the Board on September 16. The Trust for Public Land appreciates being compensated for their work, private organizations paid for the compensation in the past.

Member Parker noted noted Manatee Fish and Game made a contribution to assist the Trust for Public Land to perform the polling prior to the 2020 referendum. There were also other funding sources.

Discussion ensued that Big Waters is willing to meet regarding the Trust for Public Land.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, Vice-Chairman Horne adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Minutes Approved: November 3, 2025