

**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 9, 2024**

Present were:

Mason Gravley, Chairman  
Scott Childress  
Randy Cooper  
Carol Ann Felts  
Kate Horne  
David Landers  
Richard Larsen  
Jonathan Lynch  
Lorraine Prosser  
Brian Searcy  
Scott Tussing

Absent were:



Terry L. McKamey, Vice-Chairman  
Mike Burton  
Chris Conley  
Craig Copeman  
Barry Grooms  
Keith McMahon

Also present was:

Commissioner Jason Bearden  
Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator  
Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director  
Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager  
Hannah Turbiville, Environmental Lands Program Coordinator  
Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager  
Vicki Tessmer, Board Records Supervisor, Clerk of the Circuit Court


**AGENDA**


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1.  Chairman Gravley called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.  
  
 Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, presented challenge coins to Debra Woithe and Hannah Turbiville for their dedication and hard work.
2. **MINUTES**  
A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member Lynch, and carried 11-0, with Members Burton, Conley, Copeman, Grooms, McKamey and McMahon absent, to approve the minutes of July 1, 2024.
3. **CONSERVATION ACQUISITION CANDIDATE PROPERTIES**  
**New Projects**  
**North Crooked River Ranch**  
Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, noted this 53-acre property will provide an opportunity for wetland restoration, and connects to three properties to the east via easements. The owners want to be sure the property is held as conservation land in

perpetuity. There will be no camping or trailer parking, and land will be open dawn to dusk. The Crooked River Preserve Capital Improvement Project has begun. The Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund (TBERF) Grant was received. The water resource values are good, and will connect to property to the south. The property is impaired with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). She responded to questions that the land to the west had cattle on it, and the owner has no intention to sell the property, because he wishes to keep it natural.


### B Squared Ranch

 Ms. Woithe continued the slides to review the property which is 547 acres, just south of S.R. 64, and the owners will wait while staff submits an application to Florida Forever. The home was built in 1956, and is unoccupied. There are 195 acres of upland forest, with good scrub land to support scrub species including scrub jays, and restoration is not needed right away. There are good wetlands and the property is located in the Myakka River and Peace River watersheds. The property is next to Southwest Florida Water Management District proposed acquisition land. It is 76 percent in the State's Florida Wildlife Corridor. The property has Manasota pawpaw on it, and there is a DEP permit for the sand.

 Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, is hopeful that if there are mineral rights, the State would consider waiving those rights.

 Hannah Turbiville, Environmental Lands Program Coordinator, stated the scrub is excellent quality and really beautiful.

Discussion ensued regarding there is mining to the north of this property, the mineral rights in Florida were given for oil and gas, and the existence of phosphate does not mean there is a right to mine.


 Ms. Woithe continued to note the sand is very valuable with the sand mining permit. Once approval is given to move forward, they will begin the title search regarding any mineral rights.


### Anson Road Properties


Ms. Woithe discussed this 555-acre site is adjacent and north of Triple Oak Preserve, and there are existing conservation easements, and there are two shooting ranges. Anson Acres is a rural subdivision of five, 20-100 acre lots. She reviewed the on-site amenities, current land cover, the Myakka River Watershed (Tatem Sawgrass Slough), natural resource value, rarity, water resources, and connectivity. A Florida Forever application will be submitted in October for potential spring 2026 funding. She responded the owner asked if he could still have access to remove his equipment, and the shooting range could be a bargaining point.

Mr. Hunsicker explained the conversation regarding the property started with Ms. Woithe contacting the property owner.


### Rattlesnake Key Properties

 Ms. Woithe reviewed the 800 acres, and noted the Board of County Commissioners and ELMAC supported up to \$3 million for the State to purchase Rattlesnake Key in December 2021. The Knott Cowen Tract is excluded from the sale, but the southern portion is available for purchase, and there are State appropriated funds available. The current asking price is not realistic, but with the expensive part excluded it may reduce the asking price. It is hopeful the State contribution would cover the cost.

 Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator, noted there is no appraisal and they still need to contact the owners.

 Discussion ensued regarding there is an outparcel that belongs to someone in St. Petersburg, and another small portion that would not be part of the sale.

**Existing Project Updates**


 Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, used a slide presentation to review current projects and noted they closed today on Triple Oak Preserve. She referenced the updated table with a general estimate including the four properties discussed today would be an approximately \$80 million, and they would have enough to cover this with the referendum, and State funds/grants. She suggested readdressing the millage in two years, which would allow achieving objectives to connect current conservation lands. Staff will pursue the bond funds, and timing is key for acquisition. There are other commitments that can provide funding as well.

The Golf Course Road property is important since it is a flow way and would take future development out of the picture. A second appraisal is being done on Gamble Creek Preserve. The only property that was purchased over the appraisal was Emerson Preserve.

Discussion ensued regarding equestrian uses, get parcel ID for the properties, Mossy Island Ranch, and the Crane Park Addition would be good for more uplands and improving the banks of the river.

4. **STAFF REPORTS**

Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, mentioned A Night for Nature on October 12, at the Palma Sola Botanical Park, benefitting Manatee Fish and Game.

 There could be incentive for Grand Tree protection, and a link will be sent to members.


The SWFWMD SWIM program finds restoration projects, and Ms. Woithe is in contact with the program. The grass is growing at Emerson Point, and there are tarpon in the cattle pond. There is an FWC program to move tarpon.

Ms. Woithe mentioned an article in the Observer regarding Manatee County’s conservation program. [Manatee County's land conservation program races to protect special spaces | Your Observer](#).

5. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Mark Vanderee noted the work of ELMAC is viewed by residents as a positive effort.

6. **PRIORITIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

 Discussion ensued that all four properties discussed tonight are positive properties, and the size of the properties is a bonus,

A motion was made by Member Lynch, seconded by Member Prosser, and carried 11-0, with Members Burton, Conley, Copeman, Grooms, McKamey and McMahan absent, to recommend staff to proceed with due diligence in anticipation of a purchase contract review and approval by the Board of county Commissioners for all four properties North crooked River Preserve, B Squared Ranch, Anson Road Properties, and Rattlesnake Key Properties.

7. NEW BUSINESS/COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Chairman Gravley noted the next meeting will be in November 4, 2024.

8. ADJOURN

There being no further business, Chairman Gravley adjourned the meeting at 7:27 p.m.

Minutes Approved: \_\_\_\_\_