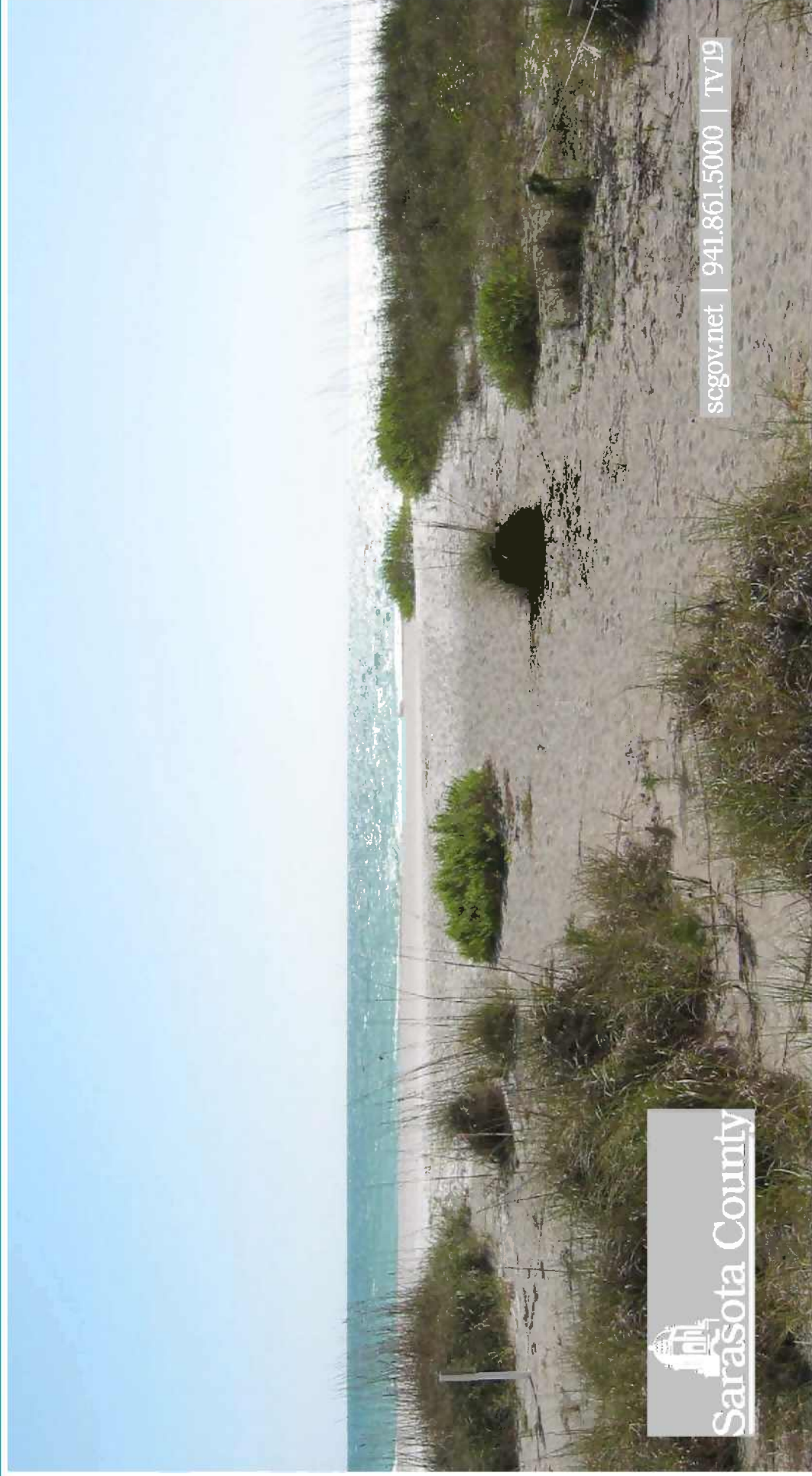


Environmentally Sensitive Lands and Neighborhood Parklands Acquisition Status Report

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SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Environmentally Sensitive Lands and Neighborhood Parklands
Acquisition Status Report

Program History

The Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP) was created to protect lands through acquisition and less-than-fee simple methods with willing sellers. The program is funded by a 0.25 mill ad valorem tax that passed by referendum in March 1999.

After protecting over 14,500 acres within the first six years, the program was approaching the original \$53 million bond limit set by the referendum. To maintain flexible program funding, the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) authorized a referendum in November 2005 that was passed by 80% of the voters. Its passage extended and expanded the program

- ❖ to collect up to 0.25 mil of ad valorem through 2029
- ❖ to include the purchase of Neighborhood Parklands
- ❖ and to authorize new related debt not to exceed \$250 million.

The County implements acquisition activities by contracting land acquisition agents to negotiate with property owners. Currently, both the Sarasota Conservation Foundation and The Trust for Public Land contract with the County. The Environmentally Sensitive Lands Oversight Committee (ESLOC) provides review and recommendations on environmental lands while the Parks Advisory and Recreation Council (PARC) provides review and recommendations on parklands to the BCC.

Program Status & Past Year highlights

During the past year, the land acquisition program team from Office of the County Attorney, Parks and Recreation, Natural Resources and Real Property met monthly to coordinate negotiations, due diligence, and closing issues. From July 2006 through June 2007, eight parcels closed bringing ESLPP purchases to 14,914 acres protected in 57 parcels within 20 protection priority sites. There were notable ESLPP acquisitions this past year: 1) a 100-acre parcel in the Myakka State Forest Addition site in North Port protected submerged, wetland and upland habitats; 2) an additional 61 acres were protected along the east bank of the Myakka River in the Myakka Pines site; 3) four small parcels were acquired within the Warm Mineral Springs Creek site connecting with previous acquisitions along this unique, warm water creek; and 4) an additional 11 acres were protected on Lemon Bay. Land and associated acquisition costs for all ESLPP properties protected to date are \$100,651,418.

The first parcels purchased through the Neighborhood Parklands (NP) program totaled 4.36 acres in two sites this past year. The Longboat Key site acquired 3.9 acres of gulf-to-bay property adjacent to an existing public recreation/community center. The Town of Longboat Key has proposed to partner on development and operation of the site. The 2.3-acre Englewood Waterfront site was acquired in partnership with the Englewood Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). The CRA contributed two-thirds of the acquisition costs, or approximately \$2.2 million, for this project. Neighborhood Parklands funds for these parcels and associated acquisition costs total \$9,246,356. **Appendix A** contains site descriptions and maps.

Several parcels have been protected by private donations, conservation easements, State agencies, non-profit organizations, and other County business centers bringing the total protected acreage within designated program sites to approximately 16,600. Grant awards and cost sharing partnerships have resulted in a significant recovery of acquisition funds from Florida Communities Trust (FCT) and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). FCT reimburses through grants while SWFWMD shares costs for lands acquired within both agencies' approved protection sites. To date, FCT and SWFWMD funding have contributed \$23,800,417 for land acquisition programs.

This past year, the FCT grant for Lemon Bay Park Addition reimbursed the County \$1,186,342 while the FCT Sleeping Turtles grant for ESLPP land along the Myakka River reimbursed \$1,985,684. **Appendix B** contains a listing of both environmental lands and neighborhood parklands that have been acquired and the cost per site.

Trends and Looking Forward

While this referendum-authorized acquisition program has been successful in protecting lands and receiving outside funding, the anticipated trends and challenges that the program faces in the coming year are:

- ❖ Due to recent trends in the real estate market, a lag exists between comparable sales values and market conditions. Owners' expectations of their property values often do not reflect current market conditions.
- ❖ Actions by the state legislature and the pending January 2008 referendum may impact available revenue.
- ❖ Public access and outreach for County-managed lands may be limited by recent and future budget constraints.

Program Finance

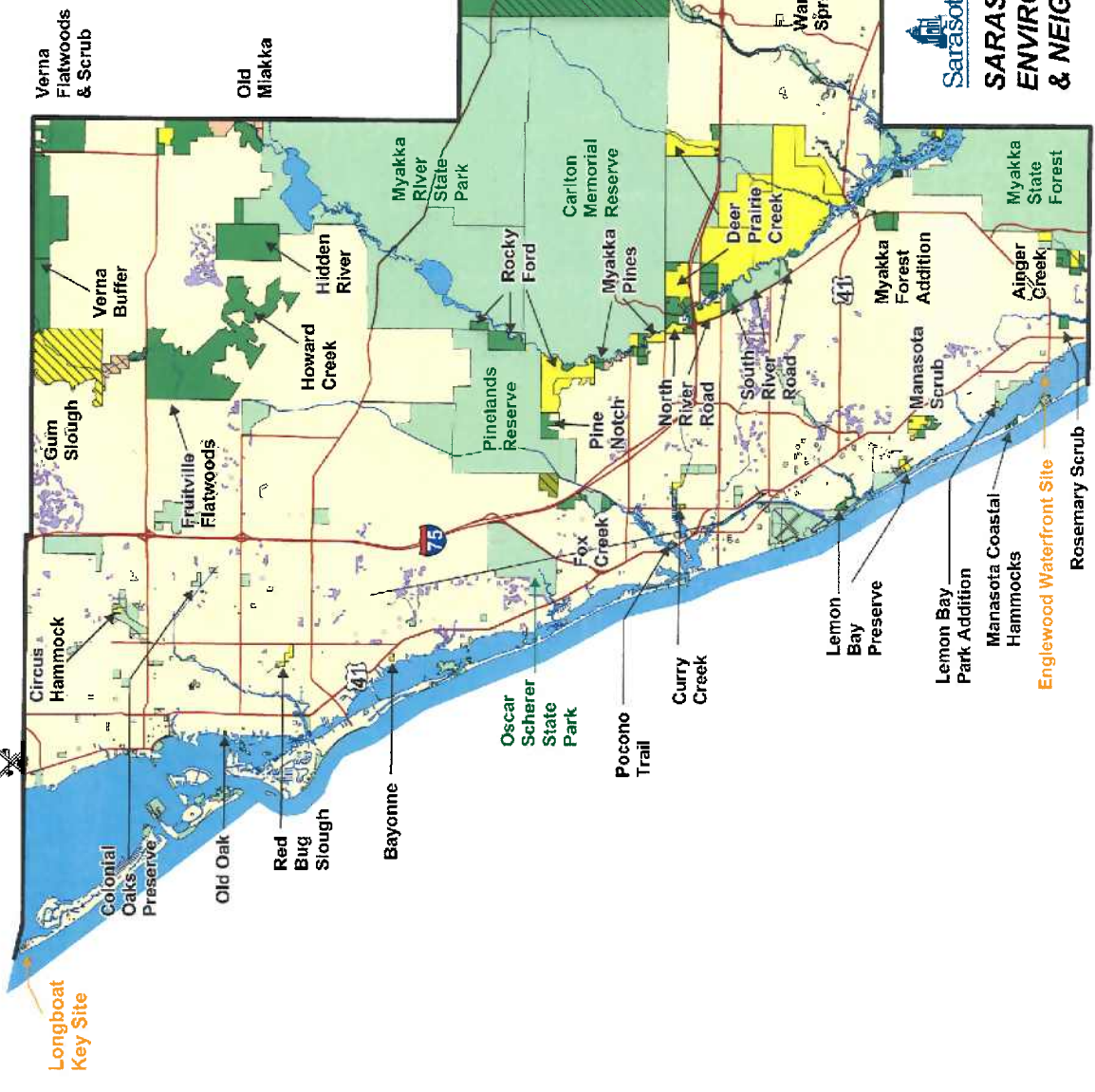
From the approval of the original referendum in 1999 to mid 2005, the County issued \$52.9 million of debt in various increments to acquire Environmentally Sensitive Lands; this debt will be retired by 2019. In accordance with BCC policy, 90% or 0.225 mill of the pledged 0.25 mill can be used to pay debt service and to acquire qualified properties. The remaining 10%, 0.025 mill, is set aside to fund the current and future maintenance costs associated with the properties being acquired.

Appendix C is an analysis of the land acquisition program's anticipated revenue and a projection of current and proposed debt service. The following major assumptions were used to generate the analysis:

The total taxable assessed value as of January 1, 2007 was used to project the FY08 revenues. Assuming the January 2008 constitutional amendment referendum regarding the super homestead exemption passes, a further 6 % reduction of this total taxable assessed value was made to reflect that revenue loss. Revenues after FY08 are projected to increase at an annual rate of 3%. In the twenty-year period since 1987, the County's annual increase in total taxable assessed value has grown approximately 9.3% per year. The interest rate on the debt for the proposed long term bonds and loans was estimated between 4.25 % to 5.25% - depending on the length and the timing of the bond issue or loan.

Legend

- Protected with ESLEPP Funds
- Neighborhood Parks
- ESLEPP Protection Priority Site
- Conservation Easement Overlay
- Protected Private Lands (ESLEPP Site)
- Protected Private Lands
- Public Lands
- Required Protected Lands
- Sarasota County Boundary
- Gulf, Bays, Rivers, etc.
- Major Roads



**SARASOTA COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS
& NEIGHBORHOOD PARKLANDS**

Appendix A
Part 1

Environmentally Sensitive Lands

**Protection Priority Site
Maps and Updates**

Ainger Creek

Description:

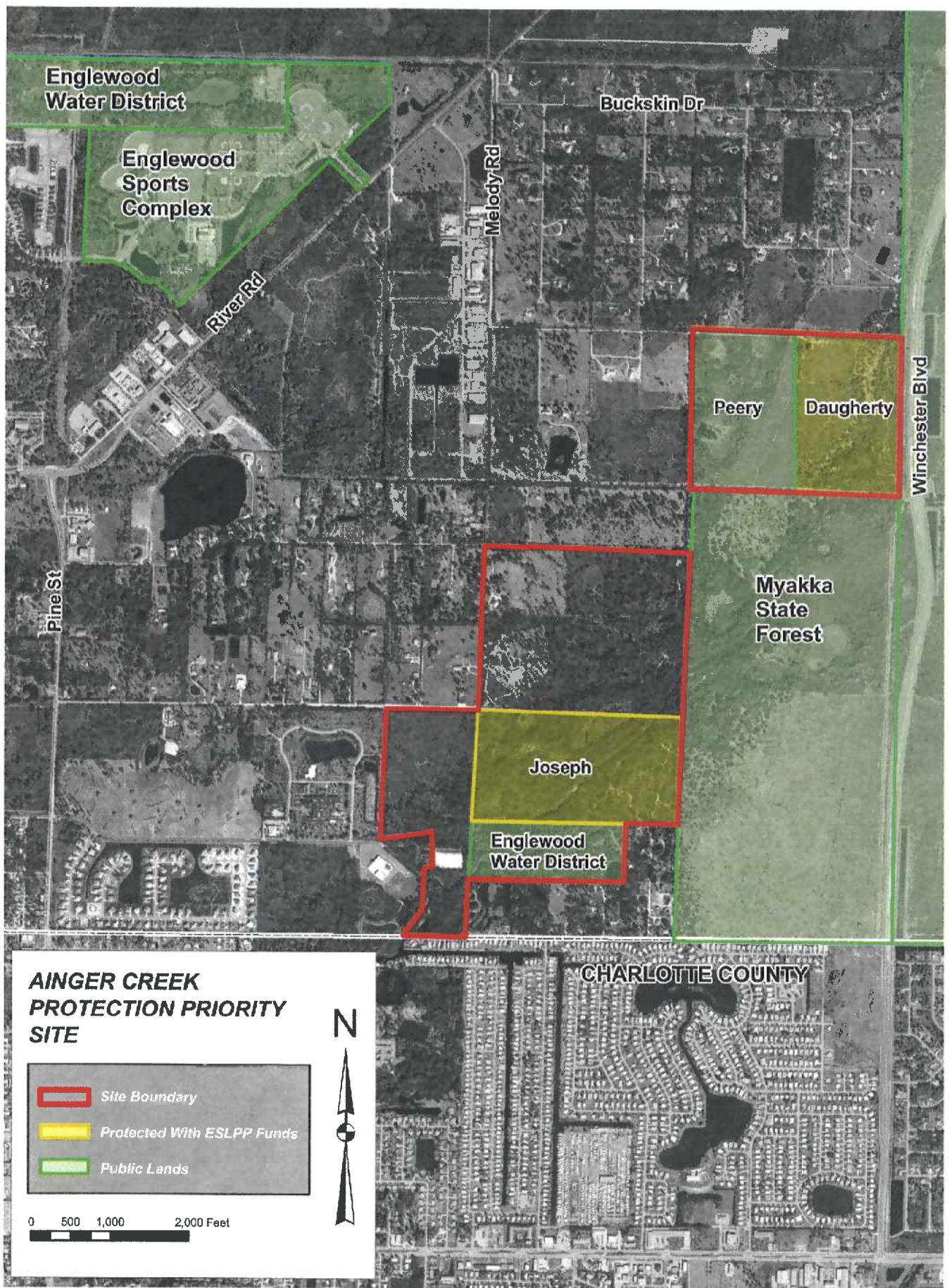
The 420-acre site is adjacent to the western boundary of Myakka State Forest. The site contains riverine wetlands, hammock, and pine flatwoods and supports a variety of wading birds.

Importance:

Protection of this site would help buffer the State Forest and Charlotte Harbor State Buffer Preserve and protect the water quality of Lemon Bay.

Status:

Sarasota County has acquired a 61-acre tract adjacent to the State Forest. The Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) purchased an adjacent 60-acre tract at no cost to the County. An 80-acre parcel was acquired in 2006 that protects quality habitat directly along the creek.



Bayonne

Description:

The 11.3-acre site consists of pine flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods. Due to a lack of fire, Florida scrub-jays no longer inhabit the site.

Importance:



This is one of the last undeveloped areas of coastal scrub habitat north of Osprey in Sarasota County. The surrounding areas have been or are proposed to be developed as commercial and high-density residential areas.

Status:

Acquisition of this Protection Priority Site is complete. Fire buffers have been cleared in cooperation with DOF and the County's Firewise program to help prevent wildfires. There is an active bald eagle's nest on site.



**BAYONNE
PROTECTION PRIORITY
SITE**

-  Site Boundary
-  Protected With ESLPP Funds



Circus Hammock

Description:

The 22-acre site has two parcels located between the City of Sarasota's Bobby Jones Golf Course on the south and west and Sarasota County's 17th Street Park to the east. The western parcel is within the City of Sarasota while the eastern parcel is outside the city limits. These parcels have very poorly drained soils subject to ponding six to nine months during a typical year, with a high water table for the remainder of the year. The site is dominated by hydric and mesic hammock habitats.

Importance:

The site contains diverse tree species that are more typical of northern Florida. Recreational opportunities and trail connections may also benefit the larger community. Further, the acquisition of this site completes a City and County-owned urban public lands corridor extending from Fruitville Road and Beneva Road northeast to the 17th Street and Honore Avenue neighborhood.

Status:

Acquisition of this site is complete. Two parcels totaling 22 acres were acquired in June 2006.



Colonial Oaks

Description:

The 43-acre site is northwest of the existing Colonial Oaks Park. The site is mostly mesic hammock and pine flatwoods in good condition.

Importance:


This site is an urban wildlife refuge in a highly developed area surrounded by single-family home development.

Status:

Acquisition of this site is complete. Sarasota County Public Works acquired the site in October 2003 for mitigation and stormwater treatment.

**COLONIAL OAKS PRESERVE
PROTECTION PRIORITY
SITE**



	Site Boundary
	Public Lands
PW	Acquired by Sarasota County Public Works



Curry Creek Preserve

Description:

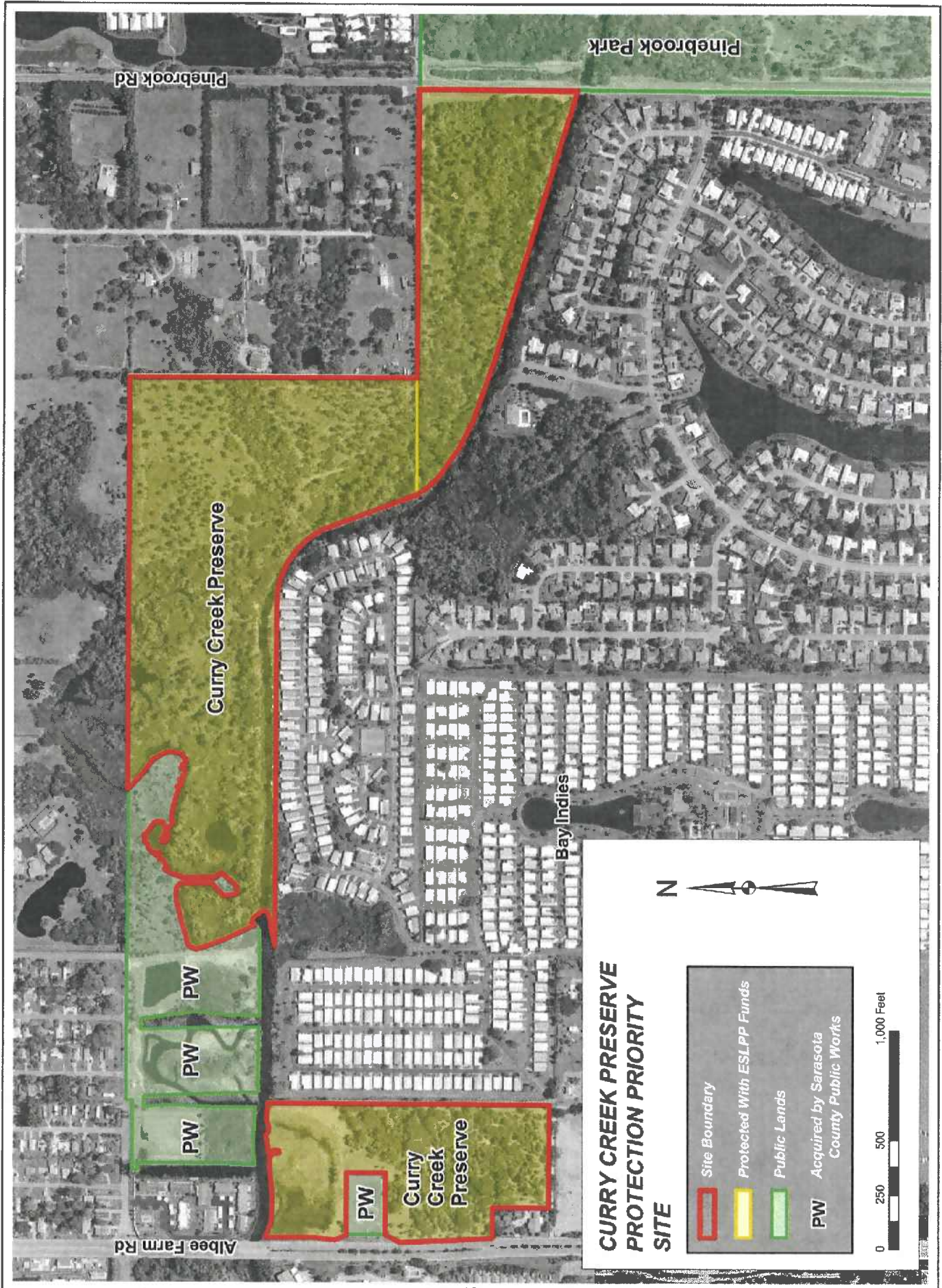
The 80.5-acre site contains sections of Curry Creek that are still in a natural condition. The natural, high creek bluffs are an unusual feature in the County. The 36 acres of rare coastal longleaf pine are in excellent condition. The scrubby flatwoods support gopher tortoise, foraging habitat for the Florida scrub-jay, and a variety of wading birds. The site is also adjacent to the City of Venice's 80-acre Pinebrook Park and a 15-acre preserve owned by the Pinebrook South Homeowners Association.

Importance:

Nationwide, only 2% of our original longleaf pine flatwoods remain. This site provides an ecologically valuable open space for a growing urbanized community.

Status:

Acquisition of this site is complete. A Florida Communities Trust grant was awarded for 40% (\$1,301,774) of the acquisition costs for all three properties acquired. The Board of County Commissioners approved Curry Creek Preserve as the official name for this site in January 2004.



Deer Prairie Creek

Description:

The 8,022-acre site contains the full extent of Deer Prairie Creek, except for the headwaters just north of the County line. This creek is a tributary of the Myakka River and protected within the County's T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve and Myakka River State Park. Pristine pine flatwoods, hammock, depression marshes, dry prairie and scrub occur on the site.

Importance:

Acquisition of this site would protect a large area along the eastern bank of the River: from US 41 in south county, through Myakka River State Park to the north. Wildlife includes Florida scrub-jays, gopher tortoises, eastern indigo snakes, Florida sandhill cranes, wood storks, and numerous other wading birds. In addition, the site is potential habitat for the Florida black bear and the Florida panther.

Status:

Total acreage protected now totals over 7,300 acres and includes the entire length of Deer Prairie Creek within the county. Much of the remaining acreage has been developed and no longer meets program criteria; therefore, the Deer Prairie Creek site is now substantially complete.

Site acquisitions have also protected the County's second largest extant scrub habitat and over seven miles of Myakka River frontage. In June 2007, the Board of County Commissioners approved Deer Prairie Creek Preserve as the official name for the area south of I-75 that is jointly owned with the Southwest Florida Water Management District. The north entrance to the Preserve is now open to the public with a parking lot for both cars and horse trailers, two new equestrian loop trails, and access to over 60 miles of hiking trails.

