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Sarasota County closes deal on Walton Ranch

Sarasota County has completed the purchase of the 3,759-acre Walton Ranch in east Sarasota County, in partnership with the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD).

The acquisition creates a conservation corridor linking environmentally sensitive land in Sarasota County to land in DeSoto County that's protected by SWFWMD.

The conservation easement will cover marshes, pine flatwoods and hardwood hammocks, which will safeguard water supplies and water quality and provide natural flood protection. The purchase also creates an ecological corridor that will provide regional connections for wildlife, including the endangered Florida panther.

The Sarasota County Commission in April approved the \$22.5-million deal negotiated by the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, acting as the County's land acquisition agent. SWFWMD contributed \$12.8 million of Florida Forever funds to protect the tract with a conservation easement.

"Today Sarasota County signed on the dotted line to take ownership of this key piece of the ecological corridor puzzle," said Theresa Connor, executive director, Sarasota County Environmental Services. "By working together with the community, the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast and the Southwest Florida Water Management District, we are providing opportunities for eco-tourism and nature education that will benefit everyone for generations."

For more information contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 or visit the Sarasota County Environmental Services Web site at www.scgov.net/EnvironmentalServices.

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