

State of Our Lands

Division of State Lands



Governor Bush and Cabinet Approve Babcock Ranch Project

On November 22, 2005 Governor Bush and the Cabinet approved buying 73,476 acres of the Babcock Ranch project, a stretch of ranch lands, flatwoods and wetlands between two fast-growing areas of Southwest Florida. It is the biggest single acquisition in the history of the Florida Forever program. The cost, \$350 million, will be spread over several years, through several agencies and only one county, Lee.

Florida will acquire a working ranch on the property that will, under current proposals, remain in operation. The land will be available to the public for hunting, camping, biking, horseback riding, cabins and other outdoor recreational activities.



Oak Hammock is near Jack's Branch on the Babcock Ranch Florida Forever site.

To the south, Fort Myers is quickly spreading toward Charlotte County. To the north, Punta Gorda and

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Governor Jeb Bush
Secretary Colleen Castille
Deputy Secretary Bob Ballard
Director Eva Armstrong

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Port Charlotte have created cities where there were pastures. Between these areas are ranchlands, pastures and woods that have become a refuge for threatened and endangered wildlife such as the crested caracara, the Florida black bear and the Florida panther. Babcock Ranch has pine and scrubby flatwoods along with a freshwater swamp known as Telegraph Swamp.

One reason the ranch is so attractive to wildlife is that it adjoins other natural areas, giving wildlife a greater area to roam. Some species need large areas to hunt and forage. East of Babcock Ranch is Fisheating Creek, another Florida Forever project. To the west is a major wildlife management area and the Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Florida Forever project. Once Babcock Ranch is secured, it will become part of a 65-mile corridor from Lake Okeechobee to the Charlotte Harbor Estuary.

Kitson and Partners, Inc., worked with DEP to develop a plan to preserve most of the historic ranchlands while some segments, such as those closest to Fort Myers, would be retained by Kitson for development.

The contract required a multi-year financing arrangement. The first installment will be the State's purchase of 32,500 acres for \$162.5 million. The following year, 13,659 acres will be purchased for \$62.5 million. In 2008 and 2009, 13,659 acres will be acquired each year for another \$62.5. While it's a big purchase, it is \$29 million less than the appraised value.



Telegraph Creek, flowing south out of the Telegraph Swamp, eventually makes its way to the Caloosahatchee River

The Governor is requesting in his budget recommendation and the Legislature is giving serious consideration to fully funding the State's share of the Babcock purchase price (\$310 million). This would free up \$200 million of Florida Forever funds for other important acquisitions around the state and will allow the ranch to be bought in one closing instead of over four years.

How big is the Babcock Ranch project?

People unfamiliar with Florida's wide-open spaces might find it hard to grasp the size of the great ranches and farms that spread across Florida.

The part that will be preserved by the State of Florida is 73,476 acres. That equals almost 115 square miles. It would make a perfect square, 10.7 miles on each side.

- ~ It is almost as large as St. Petersburg, which is 133.1 square miles.
- ~ It is more than twice the size of Miami, which is 55.3 square miles.
- ~ It is more than three times the size of Manhattan, which is 33.8 square miles.
- ~ It is almost half the size of the Kennedy Space Center in Brevard County.

Florida Forever News

IN OCTOBER Jim Farr of the Office of Environmental Services briefed the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) about the progress the state has made using conservation easements to preserve natural lands. He described 46 easements preserving about 124,000 acres, and reported that the easements monitored to-date are in compliance.

IN NOVEMBER the State of Florida closed on an 880-acre conservation easement to protect part of Lake Wales Ridge scrub ecosystem. Lake Wales Ridge is a sandy highland stretching south from Orlando to Lake Okeechobee, home to many rare and unusual species. Included in this conservation easement is Avon Park gunnery and bombing range. This added public benefit keeps sprawling growth from creeping up to the edge of a military reservation and compromising its main purpose.



Lake Wales

IN DECEMBER the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) approved its priority list for the coming year. The Searcy Estate and the Letchworth Mounds



projects have been successfully completed. The Harris School project in Key West stalled this year, and ARC kept it on the list in case a successful agreement is reached. The Pumpkin Hill Creek project, near Jacksonville, was moved up to the A List for acquisition, and so were parts of Clear Creek/Whiting Field project near Milton.

Letchworth Mounds

Kissimmee River restoration considered for International Award

Restoring the Kissimmee River to its pre-dredged state was one of five river-restoration projects considered for a worldwide award this year. The International Thiers Riverprize recognizes excellence in river management during each year's Brisbane, Australia "Riverfestival." The grand prize is \$150,000 (Australian).

This year's grand prize winner was France's Drome River, another river hit hard by pollution and water diversion. Lynette Maxwell, manager of the "Riversymposium," said the judges were very impressed by the Kissimmee River project. "They would be keen to see it re-entered once the project is further advanced and more results of its impact are available," she said.



A South Florida Water Management District photo shows how the artificial river channel on the right short-circuited the original winding river.

The Kissimmee River originally flowed south from Osceola County over a shallow and widely meandering channel. After the hurricanes of the 1940s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers routed the river through a 56-mile 30-foot deep channel, speeding its way to Lake Okeechobee. But the channel ruined the wildlife habitat on the river, and also hurried manure runoff from farms into Lake Okeechobee. In 1992, Congress authorized the Corps to start restoring part of the river by filling 22 miles of channel, rerouting the river through original channels and removing two dams.

Real estate boom, exotic animals and restoration were topics at the PLAM Conference

This year's Public Land Acquisition and Management Conference was held in Stuart, where Hurricane Wilma had made a mess while crossing south Florida. Visitors witnessed up-rooted trees and storm damage. The hotel, still getting back in shape, provided a professional and comfortable atmosphere for conference goers. South Florida Water Management District hosted this year's conference with 500 attendees participating.

The conference was organized along three tracks: land acquisition, natural areas management and water resource development. Two of the land-acquisition seminars dealt with the current high-powered real estate boom. Other sessions looked at ways to properly appraise fast-changing values, and whether the "Transfer of Development Rights" technique of planning really works.

Management topics examined the dilemmas posed by public access to archeological sites, the challenge of ATVs on public lands, and the nuisance posed by exotic animals, including imported pythons that are abandoned by disenchanted owners and wind up in the Everglades. One speaker reported that on the day Hurricane Wilma swept through the Everglades it flushed out so many pythons that rangers were able to shoot 72 of the snakes.

The water-resources seminars looked at the Kissimmee River restoration, using stormwater sites for parks, and designing alternate water supplies for cities. Other case histories for restoring water-resource areas came from Mallory Swamp in Levy County and from the ongoing Everglades Restoration project.

Outdoor topics included field trips to Jonathan Dickinson State Park and to a stormwater-treatment area in Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge. Florida Forever funding also helps acquire architectural and historic sites, and a last-minute field trip showed conferees examples of such sites in the Stuart area.

Look for the 2006 Conference date in the next newsletter.

"Operation Slow Speed" enforced by FWC

Hurricane Checklist: Restore power, clear
to watch their speed in manatee zones. The manatees are on their way south again, signs or no signs. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is taking to
the waterways in "Operation Slow
channels are full of debris

The



Calendar of Events 2006

Upcoming Lessons in Land Acquisition and Management

February 14 - 15

PLASTICS RECYCLING CONFERENCE AND EXPO at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, with discussion of legislation, new technology, and trends in North America. For info, contact Sarah Austria, Conference Coordinator, at Resource Recycling, (503) 233-1305, or send a request to plastics@resource-recycling.com.

March 22-26

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES (IAFWA) North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Columbus, OH. Information, call 336-644-1888 or visit: www.iafwa.org.

April 8 - 12

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HYDROLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF FORESTED WETLANDS, New Bern, NC, organized by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers. For info, contact Michael Chesser, Director of Meetings and Conferences for the ASABE, by e-mail at chesser@asabe.org, or call 269-428-6327.

April 20 - 21

FLORIDA FOREVER ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION COUNCIL, public hearing and council meeting at the Douglas Building in Tallahassee.

April 20 - 21

GLOBAL WARMING CONFERENCE & EXPO at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge in Miami, dealing

with water-resource management, domestic emission trading, how to sequester carbon dioxide, international technology and price-induced technologies. For information, e-mail gw17@globalwarming.net or go to the www.globalwarming.net/ website. TION COUNCIL, public hearing and council meeting at the Douglas Building in Tallahassee.

April 23 - 26

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS 31st Annual Conference in Albuquerque, NM. The 2006 conference will focus on balancing the needs of the natural and human environments and finding solutions that can bridge competing interests. For information contact Donna Carter at 863-679-3852, or e-mail conference@naep.org.

May 14 - 19

THE INVADERS! 14TH Annual Conference on Invasive Aquatic Species in Key Biscayne. Featuring seminars on impacts of aquatic invasive species, latest field research and data, new technologies in control and mitigation, and policy and approaches to effective public education and outreach. For information, contact Elizabeth Muckle-Jeffs at 800-868-8776, or go to www.icaais.org.

June 21 - 23

MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION at the Sheraton Society Hill in Philadelphia. Topics include federal-state-local partnerships, balancing security, privacy and access, monitoring to target problems. Information available by calling 866-271-9450, or email to Governing@ConferenceDepartment.com.



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