

PASCO COUNTY WETLAND MITIGATION

RIDGE ROAD EXTENSION



Submitted November 2, 2011

Pasco County Ridge Road Extension – Compensatory Wetland Mitigation Concept

The 2000 public notice featured a compensatory mitigation plan that included: 1) Hydrological enhancement of wetlands, exotic/nuisance vegetation control, and re-forestation of cleared pastures and cypress domes within the 1,308-acre Anclote River Ranch Tract of the Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Preserve; 2) The transfer of the ownership of the previous Ridge Road right-of-way (approximately 205 acres) within the Serenova Tract to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). Certain components of the 2000 plan were determined, by County Staff and the assigned ACOE reviewer at that time, as financially impractical and ecologically not viable. Hence, the 2000 plan was abandoned.

Pasco County would like to propose the following compensatory wetland mitigation concept to offset unavoidable functional loss to the wetland environments resulting from impacts of the proposed road project. A detailed mitigation plan in accordance with 33 CFR 332.4(c)/40 CFR 230.92.4(c) guidelines will be provided for review at a later date. The current proposal includes preservation of the River Ridge site and (1) one of three (3) alternatives or portions thereof as additional preservation: 4G Ranch, Crockett Lake, or Starkey Ranch. These areas are depicted on the attached exhibits. A brief summary of each site is listed below.

River Ridge Preservation

The River Ridge mitigation site consists of two areas that are located immediately south of the River Ridge subdivision and north of the Starkey Wilderness Area in New Port Richey, Pasco County, Florida (See Exhibit A). Both parcels are within the floodplain of the Pithlachascotee River. In the original application, the mitigation acreage for River Ridge was 247 acres. During the compilation of information for the second notice, staff found that a conservation easement in favor of the Florida Department of Transportation was placed over 27 acres of the site. The easement area, shown on Exhibit A, has been deducted from the mitigation area. Therefore, the combined acreage minus the easement acreage is approximately 220.84 acres. These areas are comprised primarily of undisturbed floodplain swamp with small upland islands of Pine Flatwoods.

FLUCS Description (2009)	Acreage
Stream and Lake Swamps	216.05ac
Pine Flatwoods	4.79ac

The site occupies the Coastal River Basin. Because of limited access and the pristine condition of the plant communities no management of these areas is proposed with the expectation of minor maintenance of exotic plant species. Pasco County offers to grant a conservation easement in favor of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. SWFWMD has agreed to accept maintenance of the areas. However, if the SWFWMD is unable to assist with maintenance the County’s Environmental Lands Division shall assume the monitoring and maintenance responsibilities of these areas.

4G Ranch Preservation

The 4G Ranch alternative mitigation site is located on a 1,300-acre privately-owned cattle ranch (See Exhibit B). The ranch abuts SR-52, is approximately 2 miles east of US-41 and is due north of the SWFWMD Conner Preserve in Land O’ Lakes, Pasco County, Florida. Cross Bar/ Al Bar Ranch, owned by Pinellas County, borders the site to the north and includes over 12,000 acres of natural and managed plant communities. Cross Bar/ Al Bar also contains a wellfield managed and monitored by Tampa Bay Water. Conner Preserve, located

south of 4G Ranch across SR52, is approximately 2,980 acres and is owned and managed by SWFWMD. Another privately owned ranch borders the 4G Ranch to the east and ranchette style residential development borders it the west. The area proposed for preservation is a modification to the Crossbar to Connerton Critical Linkage (wildlife corridor) as identified in the 2002 report published by Glatting Jackson, Inc., titled “Assessment of Measures to Protect Wildlife Habitat in Pasco County”. The original alignment of the wildlife corridor was modified during negotiations with the property owner. Prior to proposing this modification, County staff ensured that the new alignment:

- a) Continued to maintain the width of the Critical Linkage;
- b) Does not adversely affect any adjacent property owners;
- c) Continued to connect the publicly owned parcels, and
- d) Continued to maintain a contiguous network of wildlife habitat between existing public lands to protect native vegetative communities, listed species, and the natural functions of wildlife habitats

Preservation shall consist of acquiring, fee simple, the entire wildlife corridor that was planned to connect the Conner Preserve to the Crossbar/ Al Bar Ranch. This proposal will allow the County to secure, in its entirety, one of seven such wildlife corridors identified in its Conservation Strategy. The corridor is approximately 830 acres and runs north and south over an estimated length of 2.5 miles. Of that acreage, the property contains 472 acres of uplands and 359 acres of wetlands. It occupies both the Coastal and Hillsborough River Basins. A mosaic of habitat comprises the site that includes wet prairie, freshwater marsh, improved pasture, pine flatwoods and dome swamps. The County will propose a conservation easement in favor of the SWFWMD with the County’s Environmental Land Division assuming the management and maintenance responsibilities of project site. Consistent with County policy for all environmental lands, a management plan will be developed at a later date.

FLUCS Description (2009)	Acreage
Cropland	220.72ac
Cypress	52.88ac
Freshwater Marshes	148.08
Hardwood Conifer Mixed	12.16ac
Other Open Land	62.67
Reservoirs	0.90ac
Shrub and Brushland	167.84
Tree Plantations	8.40ac
Wet Prairies	157.08ac
Wetland Forested Mixed	0.20ac

Crockett Lake Preservation

The Crockett Lake alternative mitigation site consists of three contiguous pieces of property totaling an estimated 519 acres (See Exhibit C). The project area is located east of Moon Lake Road and north of the proposed Ridge Road Extension right of way in New Port Richey, Pasco County, Florida. Single-family development lies to the north of the proposed preservation and the Starkey Wilderness Area borders it to the east. Of the 519 acres, the property contains 324 acres of uplands and 195 acres of wetlands. Plant

communities on the site include high quality sand pine scrub, scrubby flatwoods, dome swamp and floodplain swamp. It occupies the Coastal River Basin and portions of the Pithlachascotee River floodplain. It also is located partially in the Anclote/Cotee Ecological Planning Unit as identified in the 2002 Glatting Jackson Report. Protection of habitat associated with the riparian systems connected to Upper Pithlachascotee River along with the conservation of scrubby flatwoods, scrub and mature forests is a priority of this planning unit.

FLUCS Description (2009)	Acreage
Cropland	89.97ac
Cypress	32.89ac
Emergent Aquatic Vegetation	12.00ac
Freshwater Marshes	28.48ac
Longleaf Pine-Xeric Oak	36.90ac
Pine Flatwoods	158.13ac
Residential Medium Density	2.95ac
Stream and Lake Swamps	122.16ac
Tree Plantations	34.56ac
Wet Prairies	0.30ac

This alternative site would add a significant block of habitat to the existing Starkey Wilderness Area. In addition, it would assist the County in achieving its environmental protection objectives for the Anclote/Cotee Ecological Planning Unit. The County will propose a conservation easement in favor of the SWFWMD with the County’s Environmental Land Division assuming the management and maintenance responsibilities of the project site. Consistent with County policy for all environmental lands, a management plan will be developed at a later date. Minimal management is anticipated for this property with the exception of developing a prescribed burn plan and exotics species control.

Starkey Ranch Preservation

The Starkey Ranch alternative mitigation site consists of a portion of the Starkey Ranch Development of Regional Impact (DRI) that was recently nominated for fee simple acquisition through the County’s Environmental Lands Acquisition and Management Program (See Exhibit D). The DRI is located northeast of SR54 and Starkey Boulevard intersection in Odessa, Pasco County, Florida. To the immediate north of the site is the Starkey Wilderness Area. Starkey Boulevard borders the site to the west and SR 54 borders it to the south. The Starkey Ranch DRI encompasses approximately 1,787 acres or more. The portion proposed to be utilized as an alternative mitigation site covers approximately 881 acres located within the DRI boundary. Primary plant communities onsite include high quality dome swamps, floodplain swamp, pine flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods and pasture. The site also borders the Anclote River and South Branch floodplains. Of the 881 acres making up this area, 588 acres are uplands and 293 acres are wetlands.

FLUCS Description (2009)	Acreage
Bay Swamps	3.59ac
Cropland	145.05ac
Cypress	220.60ac
Freshwater Marshes	6.37ac
Hardwood Conifer Mixed	32.29ac
Pine Flatwoods	406.33ac
Reservoirs	15.59ac
Stream and Lake Swamps	41.87ac
Wet Prairies	1.47ac
Wetland Coniferous Forest	7.15ac
Wetland Forest Mix	0.69ac

The site is located in the Starkey to Hillsborough Ecological Planning Unit as identified in the 2002 Glatting Jackson Report. Protection of lands adjacent to the Starkey Wellfield and other public ownerships along with protecting mature forested systems are priorities in this planning unit. It should be noted that the inclusion of this property into the public notice does not alter the landowners development related responsibilities and commitments, specifically for schools, parks and major County roads, as required under the approved Starkey Ranch DRI (or future MPUD), nor does it constitute a finding by the Board that the Starkey Ranch land planned for schools, parks and major County roads is inappropriate for such public facilities. Similar to Crockett Lake, this alternative will add a significant block of habitat to the existing Starkey Wilderness Area. As with the previous preservation alternatives, the County will propose a conservation easement in favor of the SWFWMD with the County's Environmental Land Division assuming the management and maintenance responsibilities of project site. A management plan will be developed for the area at a later date. Minimal management is anticipated for this property with the exception of developing a prescribed burn plan and exotics species control.









