

THE
TRUST
for
PUBLIC
LAND



Southwest Florida Office
1595 Bay St., SE
Suite 3
St. Petersburg, FL
33701
T: 727-895-5090
F: 727-895-5190
www.tpl.org

July 1, 2010

Ms. Lynda Thompson
Conservation 20/20 Program Coordinator
Lee County Division of Public Lands
2115 Second Street
Fort Myers, Florida 33901

Dear Ms. Thompson:

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) supports the Edison Farms Trust and Agripartners Limited Partnership nomination of the approximately 4,000-acre tract commonly referred to as Edison Farms. Presuming the Lee County Conservation 20/20 Program places the property onto its acquisition list as a high priority, the landowners have indicated their desire to work with TPL to structure an agreement for the purchase of the property by TPL as an interim buyer. Understanding Conservation 20/20's financial limitations regarding such a substantial acquisition and the potential advantages a single purchase can provide, TPL believes it is uniquely positioned to assist. With Lee County's support, TPL anticipates we would work as an independent partner helping to facilitate the necessary private-public partnerships to ultimately reconvey the property into public ownership for its perpetual public management.

TPL is a national nonprofit land conservation organization founded to conserve land for public enjoyment. TPL connects people to land through parks, recreation areas, working lands, and natural open spaces, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. Since 1972 we have protected over 2.8 million acres of land in 47 states, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands and Canada. Our work includes conserving wildlands in Montana and the headwaters to the Everglades to urban parks in New York and Orlando, from the Hernando de Soto winter encampment in Tallahassee to Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven or the backdrop to the famous "Hollywood" sign in Los Angeles.

TPL buys land from willing landowners who wish to preserve their land for public benefit. Since our inception, TPL has saved taxpayers over \$1 billion by conveying properties into public ownership for less than their appraised values. As an independent nongovernmental organization, TPL acts as a principal, on behalf of itself, and is not an agent or a broker for anyone else. TPL works with government officials, public agencies, communities, and willing landowners at their invitation.

We are excited about the opportunity to work as a partner toward the successful acquisition of this property for its perpetual protection as conservation lands. We look forward to working with Lee County, other public entities, interested groups and individuals and the ownership for this signature protection project.

Sincerely,


Doug Hattaway, AICP
Senior Project Manager

RECEIVED

JUL 12 2010

COUNTY LANDS





July 12, 2010

RECEIVED

JUL 13 2010

COUNTY LANDS

Lynda Thompson and CLASAC
Division of County Lands
1500 Monroe Street, 4th Floor
Fort Myers, FL 33902

1450 Merrihue Drive

Naples, Florida 34102

RE: Lee County Conservation 20/20, Edison Farms Application

239.262.0304

Dear Ms. Thompson and CLASAC Members:

Fax 239.262.0672

www.conservancy.org

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida, representing our over 6,000 members, would like to offer the following letter of support for the acquisition of the over 4,000 acre parcel known as Edison Farms, located east of I-75 directly north of the City of Bonita Springs, Florida. The Conservancy of Southwest Florida, founded over four decades ago with the mission of protecting our unique natural resources and quality of life in Collier, Lee, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry counties, has been a steadfast supporter of Lee County's 20/20 program and believes acquiring this property fulfills the 20/20 program's objectives. The Conservancy has looked for opportunities to preserve this exceptional property for almost a decade and now with a willing seller, an invaluable prospect has arisen to protect a large piece of the remaining Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed.

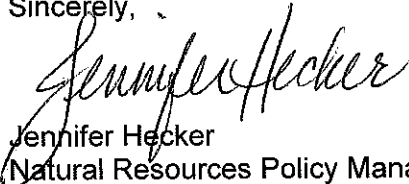
The 4,000 acre Edison Farms parcel has long been identified as having exceptional ecological value. Both the South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corp of Engineers have identified the site as a high priority restoration area. The four eastern sections of the property have also been targeted by the state Florida Forever land acquisition program as part of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed project area. Additionally, Lee County's Density Reduction Groundwater Resource study recently identified the entire property as a Priority 1 restoration opportunity. These designations are in recognition that over 80% of the property is functional wetlands that are directly connected to the wetlands of the CREW as well as the property being located entirely within Primary Panther Habitat zone (habitat which scientists have deemed essential for the continued survival of the endangered Florida panther). As such, there are significant wetland and panther mitigation credit values that could be gleaned from Edison Farms.

Furthermore, this area is extremely important for water resources. There are two public wellfield protection zones that overlap the property and studies indicate the area is already adversely impacted by existing drainage. In fact, the Density Reduction and Groundwater Resource Study as well as the South Lee Watershed Plan Update Study support that the wetlands on the Edison Farms site have been significantly drained from their historical conditions as a result of the existing culvert system adjacent to the property under I-75. Subsequently, water retention east of I-75 could be significantly enhanced, and there are opportunities for payment of services for doing so.

In addition, 99% of the Estero Bay watershed in which the Edison Farms site is located is impaired, meaning that it is currently not meeting state water quality standards. The Hendry Creek tributary has an adopted Total Maximum Daily Load pollutant threshold and is in the process of having a Basin Management Action Plan developed for it to be brought back into compliance. Given that Edison Farms is in the headwaters of this watershed, the site poses a strategically important opportunity to provide the critical additional water retention and treatment needed to enhance the wetlands on-site and within the Corkscrew Ecosystem Watershed, provide greater flood protection and water supply for Lee County, and cleanse waters entering the Estero Bay and its tributaries.

In conclusion, from a cursory review based on the 20/20 evaluation system (see attached), we estimate that this property would receive approximately 43 out of 56 points total – indicating a high priority project. While we understand that due to the large size of the parcel as well as its location, it represents a significant investment – we believe that it to be worthy and feasible through a phased acquisition approach. Therefore, the Conservancy respectfully requests the CLASAC members' and staff's support for acquisition of the entire 4,000 acre property known as Edison Farms. Thank you for your service in protecting Florida's outstanding natural areas for Southwest Floridians, and future generations. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (239) 262-0304 x250 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Hecker
Natural Resources Policy Manager
(239) 262-0304 x250
jenniferh@conservancy.org

CRITERIA		SCORE	COMMENTS	MAXIMUM POINTS FOR CATEGORY
A. SIZE AND CONTIGUITY				
1. Size of Property				
a.	> 500 acres	6	Approximately 4,000 acres	6
b.	400 to < 500 acres	5		
c.	300 to < 400 acres	4		
d.	200 to < 300 acres	3		
e.	100 to < 200 acres	2		
f.	50 to < 100 acres	1		
g.	< 50 acres	0		
2. Contiguous to:				
a.	Coastal waters/other sovereignty submerged lands	4	0	4
b.	Existing preserve area, c.e., wma or refuge	4	4	4
c.	Preserve areas officially proposed for acquisition	2	2	2
B. HABITAT FOR PLANTS AND ANIMALS				
1. Native Plant Cover				
a.	≥ 75% of the property has native plant cover	8	Approximately 97% Native	8
b.	50% to < 75% has native plant cover	4		
c.	25% to < 50% has native plant cover	2		
d.	< 25% has native plant cover	0		
2. Significant for wide-ranging species				
	Panther Habitat, wetlands, ponds, grass lands, etc.	2	2	2
3. Rare and Unique Uplands				
a.	Scrub, hammock, old growth pine	2	~75 acres	2
b.	Mature, second growth pine flatwood	1	pine flatwoods	
4. Diversity				
a.	5 or more FLUCFCS native plant community categories	2	2	2
b.	3 or 4 FLUCFCS native plant community categories	1	Dry Prairie, Cypress, Pine Flatwoods, Cypress/Pine/Cabbage	
c.	2 or less FLUCFCS native plant community categories	0	Wet Hard Pine Freshwater Marsh	

D. LAND MANAGEMENT/RECREATION/PLANNED LAND USE			
1.	Good Access for Public Use and Land Management Parcel can be accessed from a freeway, expressway, arterial street, or major collector	3	
		2	
		1	
		0	
2.	Recreation/Eco-Tourism Potential Score depends upon the variety or uniqueness of potential public uses. Examples of appropriate public uses include paddling sports, fishing, hiking, equestrian, mountain biking, photography, nature study, and environmental education about native plants and animals, eco-archaeological resources, land restoration, etc.	0-2	2
3.	Land Manageability 75% or greater of the perimeter of site is surrounded by low impact land uses 50%-75% of the perimeter of site is surrounded by low impact land uses 25%-50% of the perimeter of site is surrounded by low impact land uses Less than 25% of the perimeter of the site is surrounded by low impact land uses	3	
		2	2
		1	
		0	
4.	Development Status (Maximum 4 points) The Parcel is Approved for Development or is Exempt from a. Clearing Regulations b. The Parcel is Zoned for Intensive Use c. Future Land Use Map: Intensive Land Use Category	4	0
		2	0
		1	0
		MAXIMUM TOTAL POINTS	
STAFF RECOMMENDATION			
CRSC RECOMMENDATION			
CLASAC RECOMMENDATION			
			56

Possibly could access through eastern boundary or may have some access off I-75

Western boundary is I-75 and there is mining to the South

no development permit zoning is Bigger wetlands