



INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA
AGENDA ITEM
Parks, Recreation & Conservation Department
Conservation Lands Division

Date: December 18, 2023
To: The Honorable Board of County Commissioners
Thru: John A. Titkanich, Jr., County Administrator
Michael C. Zito, Deputy County Administrator
Beth Powell, Parks, Recreation & Conservation Director
From: Wendy Swindell, Conservation Lands Manager
Subject: St. John's River Water Management District Cost Share Agreement
Contract #38600 – Indian River County South Oslo Riverfront
Conservation Area Floodplain Restoration Project

BACKGROUND:

The South Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area (SORCA) was acquired through cost-share funding with Florida Communities Trust. SORCA consists of three parcels: (1) the 66-acre Salama & Emerson Tract that was acquired in 2000; (2) the 6.69-acre “South Link” which was acquired in 2004, and serves to connect the Audubon house to SORCA; and (3) the 70-acre Diamond Tract which was acquired in 2005. The property is located on the south side of Oslo Road directly across from the 298-acre Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area (ORCA). Similar to ORCA, the site contains pedestrian trails and a wetland overlook. Dominant plant communities on the site include mesic pine flatwoods, coastal hammock, and estuarine wetlands.

Over the past 10 years, hydrologic conditions within several of the plant communities abutting the coastline along the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) have been negatively affected by increased inundation from storms and king tides, as well as the duration of this inundation. Shifting hydroperiods have resulted in fringing coastal upland hammock communities transitioning into wetlands, with a complete loss of mature oaks and other hardwoods. The Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRLNEP) and other scientific research organizations have reported that this trend is occurring throughout the IRL. Coastal hammocks and maritime hammocks provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife species, and many protected plants are found in these vegetative associations.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has allocated extensive funding, including funding through the St. John's River Water Management District (SJRWMD), to encourage development and implementation of projects that will further resiliency and sustainability efforts along the IRL. In January 2021, staff was contacted by the SJRWMD Estuaries Section to solicit potential projects to meet these resiliency goals for the stretch of the IRL in Indian River County, specifically on conservation lands.

Staff proposed a restoration project that includes the removal of the County-owned portion of the dike that separates the IRL from the impounded mangroves within SORCA. Staff have worked with SJRWMD to develop a plan to remove the dike (to the extent feasible), and re-connect wetlands west of the dike directly to the IRL. Improved exchange of waters between the open water portion of the IRL and mangroves to the west will be a great benefit to wildlife habitat, especially fisheries, in this

portion of the Lagoon. In addition, restoring a natural connection between the IRL and the uplands along the eastern portion of SORCA is anticipated to provide increased resiliency to uplands in the conservation area by reducing the potential for long-term inundation after storm events. One of the long-term goals for the project will be for the westernmost portions of the mangroves to transition into a high marsh habitat (which is a rare resource in this portion of the IRL).

DESCRIPTION AND CONDITIONS:

Throughout 2022 staff worked with the SJRWMD to provide a grant proposal to the FDEP to fund the removal of the SORCA dike and the re-connection of the impoundment. The FDEP awarded the grant to the SJRWMD in January 2023. In December 2023, the SJRWMD sent a Cost-Share Agreement to Indian River County to jointly fund the project (Contract #38600 – included as Attachment 1). Should the Board approve and execute Contract #38600, staff plan to engage Carter Associates, Inc. (CAI) under the continuing consulting engineering services contract (#2023015) to work with Ducks Unlimited (DU) on the design and engineering of the project. DU has extensive experience in habitat restoration work, and has recent experience on similar impoundment work in Brevard County. County staff, with the assistance from the project engineer, will prepare and submit any necessary permit authorizations required.

FUNDING:

Funding for this grant, in the amount of \$50,000.00, is provided in the Capital Improvement Element of the Comprehensive Plan (CIE) that will be presented to the Board at a later date, through the Tree Ordinance/Parks/South Oslo Riverfront CA Impoundment Restoration, account number 11721072-066510-22002.

Account Description	Account Number	Amount
Tree Ordinance/Parks/South Oslo Riverfront CA Impoundment Restoration	11721072-066510-22002	\$50,000.00

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff respectfully request that the Board of County Commissioners accept the South Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area Floodplain Restoration Project Cost-Share Grant and authorize the Chairman to execute the Agreement between the St. John’s River Water Management District and Indian River County, Contract #38600 after review and approval by the County Attorney.

ATTACHMENTS:

80Attachment 1 – Agreement between the St. John’s River Water Management District and Indian River County, Contract #38600.

APPROVED AGENDA ITEM FOR JANUARY 9, 20240