



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

Date: February 25, 2025
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, Parks, Recreation & Conservation Assistant Director
Subject: ELAP Ranking List of Environmental Lands Acquisition Properties for
the Initial Nomination Period

BACKGROUND:

On March 8, 2022, the County Administrator provided the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners (“BCC”) with a proposed resolution authorizing an Environmental Land Bond Referendum for the November 8, 2022, ballot. Resolution 2022-016 was passed by majority vote. The Resolution calls for a Bond Referendum Election for the issuance of general obligation bonds as follows:

- To acquire and permanently preserve environmentally significant lands to restore the Indian River Lagoon, protect water resources, natural areas, wildlife habitat, drinking water resources, and construct public access improvements related thereto, shall Indian River County be authorized to issue general obligation bonds up to \$50,000,000, maturing within 20 years from each issuance, not exceeding the legal maximum interest rate, payable from ad valorem taxes, with full public disclosure of all spending through annual independent audits?

On December 12, 2023, the BCC approved the Environmental Lands Program Guide (ELP Guide). The Guide is the primary document that contains policies, standards, and procedures relating to environmentally significant land acquisition and management activities. One of the procedures outlined in the ELP Guide is the establishment of a group responsible for reviewing and ranking nominated parcels. The BCC established the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel (ELAP) as a nine-member group to review information provided during the application process and provide recommendations to the BCC regarding the prioritization of the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands. The ELAP has held fifteen meetings between August of 2023 and January of 2025.

DESCRIPTION AND CONDITIONS:

The County’s environmental bond process allows the public to nominate properties for acquisition at any time during the year. Each nomination period is six months, at which time that period closes and nominated properties are ranked by the ELAP. The close of the first ranking period was on August 31, 2024.

Throughout the process, staff and consultants have reached out to landowners to determine which parcels had owners wanting to have their property considered for acquisition through the environmental bond process (“willing sellers”). Parcels nominated by owners, and agents for owners, are considered as having willing sellers. Owners of parcels nominated by the public were contacted via letter, email and telephone to determine whether the owner was a willing seller. The initial nomination period identified twenty-three nominations with willing sellers. Of these twenty-three nominations, sixteen nominations were submitted as “fee simple” nominations (County purchases the property outright), and seven were nominated as potential conservation easements.

The November 19, 2024, meeting of the ELAP included a presentation by staff providing an overview of the twenty-three willing seller nominations. The ELAP met on December 17, 2024, to discuss the ranking process and provide an opportunity for staff to respond to comments and questions. At the December 17, 2024, meeting the ELAP voted and approved to include a separate ranking for the fee simple vs. the easement nominations. At the December meeting the ELAP also voted and approved cumulative scoring for each nomination instead of an average scoring of all nine members.

The ELP Guide outlines the process for how individual projects are to be ranked by the ELAP. The ranking process includes a scoring matrix with ten weighted evaluation factors relating to ecological factors and purchase factors. The scoring matrix was completed by each of the nine ELAP members and provided to staff prior to the January 21, 2025, ELAP meeting. Prior to the January 25, 2025, ELAP meeting, staff assembled the ELAP nomination scores and produced a summary of the scoring to be presented to the ELAP at the January 21, 2025, meeting.

The January 21, 2025, meeting of the ELAP focused on discussion of the project rankings and adoption of a final ranking and tiered list of projects for consideration by the BCC (Attachment 1). The tiering of the nominations reflects the scoring of the ELAP; Tier 1 properties would be the first group of nominations prioritized for potential acquisition. Tier 2 and Tier 3 nominations would be pursued once the Tier 1 nominations have moved through the process.

FUNDING:

There are no operational or expense funding requirements associated with this item.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff respectfully request that the Board of County Commissioners approve the attached ELAP Final Ranking and Tiered List of Nominations. Staff further requests the Board authorize staff to pursue Tier 1 Ranked Properties for acquisition consistent with the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel’s recommendation including the authority to make conditional offers of purchase and sale subject to approval by the Board of County Commissioners and in accordance with Florida Statute Section 125.355.

ATTACHMENTS:

- ELAP Final Ranking and Tiered List of Nominations

APPROVED AGENDA ITEM FOR MARCH 11, 2025