

Environmental Science Forum (ESF)
Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center
Thursday, August 9, 2007
3:30 pm

Meeting Minutes

Approved by Forum at October 4, 2007 Meeting

Attendees:

1.	Holly Greening	Forum Member, Co-Chair
2.	Darden Rice	Forum Member, Co-Chair
3.	Howard Rutherford	Forum Member
4.	Tom Muntz	Forum Member
5.	Mark Mueller	Forum Member
6.	Dr. Gabriel Vargo	Forum Member
7.	Ann Paul	Forum Member
8.	Cathy Harrelson	Forum Member
9.	Dr. Randy Runnels	Forum Member
10.	Jake Stowers	Forum Member
11.	Joe Maier	Forum Member
12.	Bruce Hasbrouck	Forum Member
13.	Doug Robison	Forum Member
14.	Barbara Hoffman	Forum Member
15.	Liz Warren	PC Assistant County Administrator
16.	William Davis	PC Environmental Management
17.	Andy Squires	PC Environmental Management
18.	Dr. Steve Harper	PC Environmental Lands Division
19.	Lisa Baltus	PC Environmental Lands Division
20.	Pam Leisure	PC Environmental Lands Division
21.	Lynn Smith	PC Environmental Lands Division
22.	Joseph Morrissey	PC Attorney
23.	Sgt. Glenn Wilson	PC Sheriff LIMA Unit
24.	Cpl. Kent Johnson	PC Sheriff LIMA Unit
25.	Devesh Nirmul	PC Extension Services
26.	Walt Hoskins	Citizen
27.	Mike Flanery	Citizen
28.	Chris Claus	Citizen
29.	Dave Kandz	Citizen
30.	Tom Reese	Citizen
31.	Anthony Bernardi	Citizen

Handouts: Environmental Science Forum (ESF) Agenda, Draft ESF meeting minutes, Nominated Co-Chair Bios, List Of Voting And Alternates, Project Timelines For Pinellas County Environmental And Park Lands, Recommendations And Changes As Per Shell Key Subcommittee Summary, Recommendations And Changes By ESF Subcommittee

Of Shell Key Preserve Management Plan, Shell Key Preserve Management Plan Update Timeline.

I. Welcome and Introductions:

- Co-chair Ms. Darden Rice welcomed Forum members and the public, reminding the public they may address an agenda item by completing the appropriate form found at the entrance table.

II. Additional Agenda Items:

- Co-chair Ms. Darden Rice asked for additional agenda items from the Forum.
- Ms. Holly Greening recommended that, at the end of the meeting, staff give an update on the decision of the board concerning the Ordinance.

III. Approval of July 12, 2007 Meeting Minutes:

- Motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Jake Stowers and seconded by Dr. Gabriel Vargo. The motion carried unanimously.

IV. Election of New Co-Chairs:

- Co-chair Ms. Holly Greening introduced the nominated co-chairs for the next year. Science nominee is Mr. Doug Robison and policy nominee is Ms. Cathy Harrelson.
- Ms. Greening asked the Forum if there was any discussion. Mr. Tom Muntz asked if the nominees had provided biographical sketches listing their qualifications. He was given a copy of the sketches.
- Mr. Bruce Hasbrouck made a motion to accept Mr. Doug Robison as the new Science Co-chair and Ms. Cathy Harrelson as the new Policy Co-chair. Mr. Jake Stowers seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.
- It was noted that the new Co-chairs will begin presiding at next month's meeting.

V. Shell Key Management Plan Update:

- Ms. Cathy Harrelson chaired the subcommittee that reviewed the Draft Shell Key Management Plan. Other subcommittee members included Ms. Ann Paul, Mr. Jake Stowers, Dr. Randy Runnels, and Dr. Gabriel Vargo. The following were the subcommittee's recommendations:

Pets and Other Domestic Animals (No Pets in the Preserve in accordance with Ordinance 2-6) – Recommended As Is.

- Forum members briefly discussed whether pets on boats and that no pets allowed in Preserve could be viewed as too restrictive. County staff explained that the intent of the no pet proposal was not to cite boat operators with pets passing through the preserve.

Problematic Nest Predators (Continue to remove raccoons and implement innovation ideas for predator deterrence) – Recommended As Is.

- No Forum discussion.

Control of Invasive Exotic Species (Continue to remove exotics from the island as needed. The Australian-pine will be removed from the island by 2012. Continue to replant with native species to provide shade in the camping area) – Recommendation: Change 2012 TO 2010. Add as last sentence on page 48: *THIS PROGRAM MAY CONTINUE TO RECEIVE MATCHING LAND FUNDS. RECOMMENDED*

REPLACEMENT WOULD INCLUDE, BUT NOT BE LIMITED TO, GUMBO LIMPO, STRANGLER FIG, SOUTH FLORIDA SLASH PINE, SABAL PALMS AND SEA GRAPES.

•Forum discussion followed as to why the original date was changed from 2010 to 2012. The reason was due to citizen complaints to staff and commissioners about shade, especially for campers. Discussion included that raccoons are using the Australian-pines to rest in the daytime and forage at night. The committee, therefore, thought removing the pines in the original 10-year time-frame would help with the raccoon issue, but not the shade issue.

Research (Continue research and monitoring efforts. Continue to encourage outside research projects.) *RECOMMENDATIONS: CHANGE CATEGORY TO: RESEARCH/APPLIED LAND MANAGEMENT SCIENCE; ADD AS 1ST SENTENCE (PAGE 48) "EXTENSIVE RESEARCH AND APPLIED LAND MANAGEMENT SCIENCE PROVIDES A SOUND BASIS FOR DECISIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE FORUM AND THE BOCC. STAFF OUTREACH TO FORM PARTNERSHIPS AND UTILIZE VOLUNTEERS FROM OTHER AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS AND UNIVERSITIES. ALSO PROVIDES A SOUND AND ROBUST UNDERSTANDING OF SHELL KEY PRESERVE, PARTICULARLY THE NATURAL AND ANTHROPOGENIC IMPACTS IT FACES." REMOVE "IN ADDITION, PARTNERSHIPS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED WITH RESEARCHERS FROM OTHER AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS."*

•Forum discussion included researchers who continue to be in partnership with agencies, institutions and universities. Forum members expressed a strong concern to continue the scientific research since the development of the draft Plan has greatly benefited on data collected over the last seven years.

Law Enforcement (Contract agreements with the PCSO will continue as the primary enforcement. New or improved means of law enforcement will be pursued. Due to budget cuts the number of ELU officers will drop from 10 to 2 deputies) – *RECOMMENDATION: ADD AS LAST SENTENCE (PAGE 50) ENFORCEMENT IS CRITICAL TO THE LAND MANAGEMENT BECAUSE THE DEDICATED STAFF OF THE LIMA UNIT HAS SPECIALIZED TRAINING, EQUIPMENT AND SITE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION, AND THEY PROVIDE A LEVEL OF SERVICE NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES ON THE COUNTY'S ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS.*

•Forum discussion centered on dedicated officers for Environmental Lands. The contract is paid through an intergovernmental transfer. It was also decided that the Forum Co-chairs would construct a letter to the County Administrator and the Sheriff in support of retaining the Environmental Lands LIMA Unit in full.

Signage (Update and improve existing regulatory signs to incorporate education and interpretation and a clear understanding of the Preserve rules and conservation goals) – *RECOMMENDATION: ADD TO 1ST SENTENCE (PAGE 50): "IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE APPROVED PLAN."*

Habitat Mapping and Protection (Habitat mapping will be carried out periodically, using aerial photo-interpretation of images provided by SWFWMD. Staff will ground-truth maps through fieldwork. The resultant maps provided data that facilitate the adjustment of the Bird Preservation Area (BPA) prior to the nesting season.

Ephemeral islands will be mapped using GPS. When practical the islands will be posted to protect the resource and wildlife. Monitor the foredunes and manage accordingly. *RECOMMENDED AS IS.*

Education (ELD staff members will coordinate a combined education effort about the Preserve by enlisting support from its volunteer network and from such groups as the St. Petersburg Audubon Society, National Audubon Society, Tampa Bay Watch, and local colleges and universities. Staff will update existing regulatory signs and provide other signs that include interpretive information about the Preserve's ecology and stewardship. Staff will coordinate with commercial shuttle transport vessels to provide captains and crew with education materials for distribution to passengers. *RECOMMENDED AS IS.*

Land Acquisition (The County will continue to evaluate parcels currently under private ownership for potential purchase.) – *RECOMMENDED AS IS.*

Alcohol Use (In accordance with Ordinance 2-6, the possession and or consumption of alcoholic beverages will not be allowed in the Preserve (including the islands and waterways), - *RECOMMENDATION: ADD (PAGE 60) 2ND SENTENCE: "BOUNDARY DEFINITION IS TO BE ESTABLISHED AND WELL-DEFINED WITHIN 12 MONTHS OF PLAN ADOPTION."*

•Forum discussion followed about the boundaries of Shell Key Preserve. Forum members discussed putting the following comment in the cover letter to the County Administrator: "based on ownership documents a well-defined boundary survey needs to be completed."

Overnight Activities on Shell Key (The overall camping experience at the Preserve will be improved in accordance with acceptable guidelines for sustainability and for public health and safety, including a requirement for campers to remove all refuse, waste, and trash. Camping and campfires will be restricted to the southern "Public Use Area" of the island in designated locations, an approach that will limit overall human disturbance, promote protection of native wildlife, facilitate efforts to ensure compliance, and encourage public safety. Further, beginning May 2008, all overnight uses will require a "license to use" agreement or permit issued by the County. Fees may apply.) *RECOMMENDATION: ADD AS THE 3RD SENTENCE (PAGE 61): "CAMPERS WILL BE EXPECTED TO BRING, USE, AND REMOVE PORTABLE TOILETS."* *RECOMMENDATION: ADD AS LAST SENTENCE (PAGE 62): "A FEE WILL BE ASSESSED FOR LARGE GROUPS. THIS FEE PROGRAM WILL BE MANAGED BY FORT DESOTO PARK DEPARTMENT CAMPING STAFF."*

•Forum discussed large group fees being established for Shell Key Preserve.

Public Use Areas (The areas for public use within the Preserve have changed very little. The public-use designation for the east side of the island's mid-section will be eliminated so that this area will be included in the BPA. Any other official changes in delineated public-use areas will be in response to storms, wildfires, and other significant ecological events.) *RECOMMENDED AS IS.*

Liveaboard Vessels (ELD will continue to prohibit liveaboard vessels moored in the Preserve for more than 14 days in any 30-day period.) *RECOMMENDATION: ADD AS LAST SENTENCE (PAGE 63): "ALL VESSELS ARE PROHIBITED FROM DISCHARGING WASTE WITHIN PRESERVE BOUNDARIES."*

Noise Standards (The ELU will continue to enforce the Pinellas County Code, Article XII.) *RECOMMENDED AS IS.*

Commercial Activities (Commercial activities within Shell Key Preserve will not be allowed unless permitted as a concession or other appropriate license from the County that specifies uses consistent with the 20007 Plan. A schedule for permits and fees will be developed by the County for vendors and concessions so that they may comply with Pinellas County Ordinance 2-6. Vendors will need to apply for a license through the County.) *RECOMMENDATIONS: CHANGE 2ND SENTENCE (PAGE 64) TO: “A SCHEDULE FOR PERMITS, FEES, AND RULES WILL BE DEVELOPED BY THE COUNTY FOR VENDORS AND CONCESSIONS”*

ADD AS LAST SENTENCE: “COMMERCIAL OPERATORS AND VENDORS WITH A PERMIT OR LICENSE TO OPERATE IN THE PRESERVES SHALL PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATION ACTIVITIES TO FURTHER THE PROTECTION OF THE RESOURCES OF SHELL KEY.”

- Forum members discussed types of education referenced by the subcommittee. The following suggestions were given: provide garbage containers for litter, literature, pamphlets and brochures.

Large Groups (ELD will continue to utilize a permitting process for groups of 50 or more people visiting the island. Each permit will be reviewed and permission granted on a case-by-case basis and dependent upon consistency with the management plan. Permits will not be issued during known nesting periods to protect nearby shorebirds.) *RECOMMENDATION: ADD AS LAST SENTENCE, IF CONSISTENT WITH STATE LEASE (PAGE 65): “A FEE WILL BE ASSESSED FOR LARGE GROUPS. THIS FEE PROGRAM WILL BE MANAGED BY FORT DESOTO PARK DEPARTMENT CAMPING STAFF.”*

Optimum Carrying Capacity (Carrying capacity is an estimate of the number of users who can be accommodated by a resource or facility while also providing a high quality experience for visitors and protecting the natural values of the site. In the case of the Preserve, strictly controlling the numbers of visitors to the island is impossible since it has multiple points of access along several miles of shoreline in an area with a large boating population. At this time, the ELD does not plan to restrict human access to the island other than from the BPA as outlined in this Plan. Rather it intends to monitor the results described to determine if they are sufficient to protect the Preserve’s natural resources. The Plan will be revisited and amended if it is found that conservation methods are not effective or if specific public activities are found to be inconsistent with natural resources management.) *RECOMMENDED AS IS.*

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL CATEGORIES: WATER QUALITY TESTING, THE COUNTY WILL PROVIDE REGULAR WATER QUALITY TESTING TO DETERMINE HUMAN FECAL INDICATOR ORGANISM LEVELS. WAKE ZONES, MODIFY CURRENT MINIMUM WAKE AREA IN THE NORTHWEST PORTION OF THE PRESERVE TO IDLE SPEED.

- Forum briefly discussed the areas to be included in the wake zone.

- Ms. Cathy Harrelson and subcommittee members talked about the various stakeholders’ suggestions. They found that items 1-17 have been addressed in the Management Plan. *It is recommended that item 18 not be implemented as it is unreasonably restrictive and/or damaging to the environment. For item 19, the*

subcommittee believes the intent of this stakeholder request has been met to the extent feasible through the research/applied land management science element of the draft plan. Reports should be produced as needed and as appropriate. Items 20 through 24: Do not include these elements in the plan since they are unreasonably restrictive and/or damaging to the environment.

- There was no further Forum discussion.

- Public Comments:

- Mr. Walt Hoskins, viewing funding as an issue, provided two comments: first, with regard to invasive exotic species including Australian-pines, it seems the goal is to get rid of them and still provide some shade for the campers. He suggested two possible means to accomplish this: have campers contribute voluntarily to a fund for shade trees, and encourage environmental groups to sponsor fund-raisers for replacement trees. Mr. Hoskins' second issue concerned the liveaboards. He recommended a simple comprehensive statement that would include a provision that trash, human waste, and all kinds of garbage to be disposed of properly. This would apply to liveaboards, day trippers, campers and boaters.

- Mr. Dave Kandz agreed with Mr. Hoskins in that it all comes down to the ability to enforce the rules. He also addressed a question to Dr Randy Runnels about the way the State of Florida handles enforcement when a local authority (e.g., Pinellas County) is the manager of a state-owned property such as Shell Key Preserve. He also suggested that it might be helpful to extend the "No Combustion Exclusion Zone" to help protect seagrasses.

- Mr. Sid Crawford commented about exotic vegetation and about breeding vs. wintering populations of shorebirds.

- Mr. Anthony Bernardi, an attorney representing Mr. David Reynard, a stakeholder for the boating community. Mr. Bernardi stated that laws exist already on what is acceptable behavior and what isn't in terms of alcoholic use. According to Mr. Bernardi, some boaters are against drinking on the land portion of Shell Key Preserve but do not support a complete ban. He also suggested that wording is vague in the draft plan concerning alcohol on boats, which is not illegal in the State of Florida. He also asked a series of questions. Are the larger boats, considered by some to be their "second home," that carry overnight campers going to be searched? What about wine in their refrigerators? By saying no alcohol on boats whatsoever makes the plan extremely vague. Will police actually board boats to search for alcohol? He further added that having alcohol on a boat is not an illegal activity. In summary, he said that the law is vague and we would like the County to reconsider the proposal to ban alcohol on boats in the preserve.

- Co-chair Ms. Holly Greening read the entire list of recommendations and recommended changes to the Shell Key Management Plan and asked for a motion. Mr. Doug Robison made a motion to accept the recommendations as discussed. Dr. Gabriel Vargo seconded the motion. The vote was 12 to 0 in favor of accepting the recommendations. Ms. Cathy Harrelson was out of the room and did not vote.

VI. Helipad near BCP, Update and Discussion:

•Attorney Joseph Morrissey informed Forum members that it would not be appropriate for them to make suggestions/comments concerning the helipad. No further discussion on this agenda item occurred.

VII. Law Enforcement on Preserves:

•Sgt. Glenn Wilson spoke about the LIMA Unit. When the unit was established in February 2001, there were seven original members. This unit enforces the County Ordinance that includes preventing trash dumping, keeping ATV's out of the Preserves, stopping intrusions into the preserves, assisting patrons on horses and hiking trails, recording and assisting in emergency situations, dealing with lost and injured public, enforcing speed limits, protecting natural resources, patrolling Shell Key on foot and by boat, conducting vessel safety checks, providing assistance for special events, and other activities. Some of the unit's accomplishments include:

- *2,596 offenses/incidences reports
- *1,089 felony and misdemeanor arrests
- *1,163 Ordinance violations
- *1,678 boating citations
- *56,164 citizen contacts
- *17,430 boat boarding and warnings
- *2,224 criminal and Ordinance warnings

Enforcement issues include limited manpower, changing rules, and increasing numbers of visitors in the preserves. The LIMA UNIT will have many challenges ahead (in terms of time and manpower) when the Shell Key Management Plan becomes effective, especially with the banning of alcohol in the Preserve. Sgt. Wilson explained the Unit currently has a "non-call for service" status which means the unit's officers are not normally dispatched for assistance outside of County environmental lands and are primarily dedicated to the preserves and management areas.

•Ms. Ann Paul made a motion to adopt the following wording both for the Shell Key Management Plan (under the alcohol use element) and for the cover letter to the County Administrator on the Forum's recommendations for the Shell Key Management Plan. *Enforcement is critical to the land management efforts and public safety. The LIMA Unit contract should be renewed at the current level of 10 officers or higher for all Environmental Lands. The dedicated staff of the LIMA unit has specialized training, equipment and site-specific information, and they provide a level of service necessary for effective enforcement activities on the County's environmental lands.* Barbara Hoffman seconded the motion.

•Public comments followed.

•Mr. Walt Hoskins spoke about law enforcement and the importance of keeping our LIMA Unit at the present level to have "optimum law enforcement." He also spoke about a study of the outcomes of various levels of staffing for law enforcement protection.

•Co-chair Ms. Holly Greening called for a vote on the motion. The motion passed unanimously 13-0.

- Mr. Tom Muntz made a motion requesting the Forum to send a letter of support for the LIMA Unit to the Sheriff and County Administrator prior to August 28, 2007. The motion was seconded by Bruce Hasbrouck. Vote carried unanimously 13-0.

VIII. Next Meeting Agenda Topics

- Co-chair Ms. Holly Greening asked the Forum if the recommended topics for next months meeting agenda were acceptable. Mr. Bruce Hasbrouck requested that Ms. Lisa Baltus be added to the next agenda. Mr. William Davis added that Ms. Baltus' information with regard to the parking and wetland/floodplain mitigation (Agenda Item VIII) project will be made available on the ESF web site with an electronic notice sent to the Forum members.

IX. Public Comment

- Mr. Walt Hoskins requested that Sgt. Wilson's PowerPoint presentation be put on the ESF website.
- Mr. Devesh Nirmul announced an all-day "Sustainable Florida" meeting will be held at Pinellas County Extension on Monday, August 27, 2007.
- Mr. Tom Muntz asked that Mr. Kevin Cronin, Ms. Faye Baynard, and Mr. David Bruzek be considered as Forum members.
- Assistant County Administrator Ms. Elizabeth Warren made a presentation to Co-chairs Ms. Darden Rice and Ms. Holly Greening in appreciation for all their hard work as Co-chairs of the ESF this year.
- Meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.