

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lake Park Scrub Natural Area is located in the Town of Lake Park in Palm Beach County, Florida. This 56.51-acre site in the northeastern portion of the county has been acquired as a natural area by Palm Beach County. The natural area was purchased in July 2000 and January 2001. Funds were provided from the Palm Beach County Conservation Lands Bond Issue Referendum of March 9, 1999. Matching funds for the acquisition have been approved by the Florida Communities Trust through its Florida Forever Program. The primary purpose of acquiring this natural area is to preserve important remnants of high-quality scrub, scrubby flatwoods, and mesic flatwoods vegetation communities. The secondary purposes are to provide for passive recreation, environmental education, and scientific research.

The acquisition of the project site and associated activities will assist the Town of Lake Park and Palm Beach County to implement several policies within their respective Comprehensive Plans. The natural area is located in the Eastward Ho! Corridor, and a low income community. Portions of the site are located in a Community Redevelopment Area, as designated by the Town in 1996. All of these areas are considered to be priority investment areas.

Scrub and scrubby flatwoods are the predominant natural communities found on the site, with smaller areas of mesic flatwoods, former wet prairie and disturbed scrub communities present. Scrub is one of the rarest natural communities in the state of Florida. Scrubby flatwoods also are considered to be very rare in the state. The acquisition and management of this site preserves important habitat for rare plant and animal species, including six plant and three animal species that have been listed by at least one government agency or nonprofit environmental organization.

Fire exclusion, off-road vehicle (ORV) trespass, exotic pest plant invasions, soil removal, industrial development, hydrological modifications, placement of fill materials, illegal dumping and construction of adjacent roads and buildings have all impacted this site. The managers of this site also face special challenges unique to fragmented natural communities located within urban and suburban environments. In recognition of the significance of the natural vegetation communities on the site, public use must remain limited to passive, non-consumptive recreation, and environmental education, and scientific study. Footpaths, a handicapped-accessible nature trail, ~~and covered~~ wildlife observation platform, uncovered wildlife observation area and interpretive displays will provide a valuable opportunity for the public to observe the site's distinctive natural communities and species, while also imparting an appreciation of their biological uniqueness. Scientific research will include monitoring of populations of rare and/or endemic species and evaluation of restoration and management activities.

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3. STRUCTURES AND IMPROVEMENTS

3.1 EXISTING AND PROPOSED PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The only structures and improvements currently on the Lake Park Scrub Natural Area are concrete slabs, vaults, and foundations in the northeastern portion of the site, along with a short brick wall. These structures were left over from Kelsey City industrial buildings destroyed in the 1928 hurricane. They are located in the Baxter tract, which is not part of the FCT project site. A short section of the shellrock road Industrial Avenue is located within the project site. Water mains and fire hydrants are located along Industrial Avenue and 12th Street, with storm sewers present along 12th Street.

Disturbed areas exist mostly on the perimeter of the site, and the perimeter firebreaks and fencing will be located within these areas as much as possible. No listed species were found in these disturbed perimeter areas, except for a few scattered plants of wild pine species and large-flowered rosemary, and an occasional foraging gopher tortoise. Many of the proposed improvements, including the hiking trail and nature trail, will be sited within disturbed areas and on existing trails where possible. Although listed species have not been observed within the areas proposed for the public use facilities, these improvements will be sited to minimize impacts to any listed species that may subsequently be observed in these areas. Listed plants will be relocated on the site as necessary.

The major proposed structures and improvements are described in the following sections and shown on the ~~master-conceptual~~ site plan (Figure 3). Only structures and improvements that will help to achieve the goals of preserving and restoring the natural resources of the Lake Park Scrub Natural Area and providing for compatible public uses are proposed. Restroom facilities are not planned for this site as they are readily available in nearby commercial businesses. Proposed public-use facilities (i.e., the accessible nature trail and the parking ~~arealot~~) will fulfill Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. All proposed site improvements shall be designed and located to minimize or eliminate the long term risk of storm damage or flooding in conjunction with appropriate hazard mitigation agencies and experts.

Written approval from FCT will be requested prior to the construction or installation of any buildings, structures, improvements, or signs and for any removal of native vegetation or major land alteration not discussed in this management plan, and for any other significant revision of the management plan. All improvements and major land alterations will comply with applicable local, state, regional and federal laws and regulations. All required licenses and permits will be obtained prior to the commencement of any construction or major land alterations. A Town building permit is

needed for construction of the public use facilities. An environmental resource permit from the South Florida Water Management District may be necessary for wetland restoration activities.

3.1.1 Fencing and Gates

Due to the previous incidence of undesirable off-road vehicle traffic, as well as the illegal dumping of trash, the entire natural area will need to be fenced. Fencing, together with boundary roads and firebreaks, will shut off ORV access to the site and help to control the dumping of debris. Nearly all of the existing fencing on the site is not located on the natural area's boundaries and will be removed. Field fencing was installed on the western boundary of the site (Figure 3). A 6-foot green-vinyl-coated chain-link fence was installed in March 2003 along the eastern boundary of the site where no chain-link fencing is present. Where the sheet metal fencing/concrete wall along the automobile junkyards is present and in good condition, no chain-link fencing will be installed. Three-rail post-and-rail fencing with wire mesh backing will be installed along the northern border of the site adjacent to the right-of-way for the proposed extension of Park Avenue and has been installed on the southern boundary adjacent to Silver Beach Road. Two-rail post-and-rail fencing will be installed around the perimeter of the parking area-lot to limit vehicles to the parking area-lot only. All fencing and gates will be installed within disturbed perimeter areas whenever possible, to minimize impacts on intact natural communities.

Eight gates are proposed (Figure 3). Management access gates will be installed in the chain-link fence at the end of Industrial Avenue and at the easternmost corner of the site just north of Industrial Avenue. These gates will allow vehicle access to the boundary firebreaks and other management roads. Two steel farm gates will be installed in the post-and-rail field fencing along Silver Beach Road at the southeast and southwest corners of the site to provide management access to the perimeter and interior management road/firebreaks. When the parking area-lot is constructed, steel farm gates will be installed placed in the northern and southern ends as needed along the edges of the parking area-lot to provide management access from the parking area-lot to the perimeter and interior management road/firebreaks. ~~An existing steel farm gate at the intersection of 12th Street and Jule Road will be maintained until the parking area gates are installed.~~ Two 16-foot-wide steel swing gates will be installed in the perimeter post-and-rail fence on the entry and exit drives to the parking area-lot from ~~12th Street~~Silver Beach Road.

3.1.2 Signs

Six types of signs are proposed for the Lake Park Scrub Natural Area. All will identify the site as being publicly owned and operated as a natural area and passive outdoor recreation site. Temporary

signs identifying the site as a natural area were installed on each corner of the site one month after each individual tract was acquired. A permanent recognition sign at least 2 by 3 feet in size will be maintained in the entrance area on the project site that identifies the site as a natural area open to the public, as having been purchased with funds from Florida Communities Trust and the County, and as being managed by the County and the Town. An entrance sign will be co-located with the permanent recognition sign. A main gate sign will be installed to specify the hours of operation and provide general information about the site. Perimeter signs have been placed along the site's boundaries at intervals of no greater than 500 feet; these signs state that the Lake Park Scrub Natural Area is a protected natural area and cite appropriate Town and County ordinances. Markers will be installed along the nature trail, with station numbers corresponding to an interpretive guide. Sign installations will not significantly disturb any natural communities on the site.

3.1.3 Interpretive Facilities

~~Two~~One educational kiosks will be constructed on the project site - one adjacent to the public parking ~~area~~lot and near the entrance of the nature trail and one near the northernmost reach of the natural-surfaced hiking trail (Figure 3). ~~These~~is kiosks will provide general information about the natural area, such as the geologic origins of the site, its topographic features, aquifer recharge significance, natural communities, listed species and their habitat, and or other natural and historical features of interpretive value. The kiosks will be constructed within disturbed areas as much as possible to minimize impacts to any intact natural communities.

3.1.4 Boundary and Management Roads and Firebreaks

A boundary management road and firebreak system will be established on the perimeter of each of the three management units (Figure 4). These roads will be accessed from the six maintenance access gates. All boundary/management roads and firebreaks will be located in disturbed perimeter areas or on existing trails as much as possible. Prior to construction, all boundary/management road/firebreak locations will be surveyed for listed species. Any listed species present within the proposed road/firebreak area will be avoided if possible, or relocated on the site if necessary.

Boundary/management roads/firebreaks will provide numerous benefits, including more rapid access in the event of a wildfire, protection of adjacent areas from wildfire, and facilitation of the monitoring of dumping and other illegal activities along the preserve edge. These roads/firebreaks will be unimproved sand roads and will be no more than 15 feet wide, which is the standard width of boundary firebreaks used by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) on state lands. The firebreak/management roads are to be used primarily for resource management and onsite

monitoring. Prior to a prescribed burn, the roads will be widened beyond a minimum 10-foot maintenance width to serve as firebreaks. After the prescribed burn, these firebreaks will be allowed to regenerate and the roads will be maintained at the minimum width. Routine maintenance of the management roads/firebreaks will be accomplished by periodic mowing of these roads. Disking of management roads will occur only around management units where a prescribed burn is planned in the near future, or where the management road borders residential or commercial development and a disked fire line is needed for safety reasons.

3.1.5 Trails

The primary interpretive feature for public access will be a handicapped-accessible nature trail. The nature trail will be approximately 1,000-1,737 feet long, and will originate at the public parking arealot. From the parking arealot, it will extend eastward in a general northwesterly direction to one of the highest points in the natural area. The nature trail will consist of 6-inch-thick poured and formed concrete with a non-slip finish and will be approximately 5 feet wide to accommodate wheelchairs. through mesic flatwoods community and then northeastward and southeastward through scrub until it emerges at the edge of the wetlands restoration area. A covered, elevated wildlife observation platform with a shade shelter, benches, and interpretive signage will be constructed at the northern terminus of the nature trail and overlooking the restoration area (Figure 3). In addition, an uncovered wildlife observation area consisting of a bench and wheelchair accessible concrete slab will be constructed near the mid-point of the nature trail. The nature trail will consist of 4 inch thick poured and formed concrete with a non slip finish and will be approximately 5 feet wide to accommodate wheelchairs. The observation platform is expected to be a raised wooden structure accessed by a ramp. Markers will be installed along the nature trail indicating station numbers corresponding to a trail guide with interpretive information. Handicapped-accessible interpretive facilities will be developed to fulfill federal requirements.

An approximate 3,989-foot-long-0.7-mile natural-surfaced hiking trail will originate from the wildlife observation platform parking lot and form a large loop that extends throughout most of the central and southern portion of the project site natural area. It will terminate at the informational kiosk at the beginning of the nature trail (Figure 3). The hiking trail will skirt the wetland restoration area and run through the former wet prairie, mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods and scrub natural communities. The hiking trail will have a natural soil base and will be maintained at a width of at least 10 feet, where the trail coincides with a firebreak/management accessway. Any non-firebreak/management accessway sections of the hiking trail will be maintained at a width of 3 feet. The hiking trail is available for public use, but will not be improved or marked for interpretive purposes. All other firebreak/management roads accessways in the southern and central portions of

the natural area also will be available for public use, but will not be improved or marked for interpretive purposes. The nature trail and the hiking trail will be constructed on existing paths, trails, and disturbed areas on the site as much as possible. Public use of existing secondary trails leading off the nature trail, the hiking trail, and management roads will be discouraged. Prior to construction, all trail locations will be surveyed for listed species. If listed species would be impacted by the construction of the trails, the trails will be rerouted or the listed species relocated on the site.

3.2 EASEMENTS AND CONCESSIONS

There are no active easements on the natural area. A record of a 1920s-era 10-foot road easement exists, but the record is too sketchy to determine the location of this easement or who has rights to use it. Two utilities are present on the natural area, apparently without any easement rights. A water line on the north side of Industrial Avenue does not have an easement where it crosses through the site, and a fire hydrant associated with the water line may encroach into the natural area. An overhead electric line on the north side of Industrial Avenue also crosses through the site, but the poles are located outside the natural area. An electrical service line from the Industrial Avenue line to the Throop junkyard inholding crosses through the site and a pole is located within the natural area. ERM will request that Florida Power and Light relocate this pole onto Throop's property, although some of the aerial encroachments may be allowed to continue.

No additional easements, concessions, or leases are anticipated. Any easements, concessions, or leases must be approved by FCT prior to execution. Certain activities may have negative legal and tax consequences under Florida law and federal income tax law. If the Lake Park Scrub Natural Area is to be subject to any of the following activities or interests, the County will provide FCT with at least 60 days prior written notice and will provide information to FCT, upon reasonable request, in order to evaluate the legal and tax consequences of the activity:

1. any lease or sale of any interest in, or operation of any concession on the project site by any person or organization;
2. any sales contract or option to buy things attached to the project site to be severed from the site, with any person or organization;
3. any use of the project site by any person other than in such person's capacity as a member of the general public;

4. a management contract for the project site with any person or organization for activities other than those specified in the management plan;
5. such other activity or interest as may be specified from time to time in writing by FCT to the County.

3.3 PUBLIC ACCESS

~~The main p~~Public access to the natural area will be provided via 12th Street Silver Beach Road to an on-site parking lotarea. ~~When the proposed Park Avenue extension is built adjacent to or on portions of 12th Street, the public access will be switched to Park Avenue, but the parking area will be unaffected.~~ Bicycle racks will be provided adjacent to the parking lot to encourage the use of alternative transportation to the site. ~~A~~Cconcrete sidewalk and bike path exist north of Silver Beach Road and will connect to the natural area parking lot.s are currently not present on 12th Street, but they are present along Watertower Road and Old Dixie Highway. ~~When the extension of Park Avenue is constructed, pedestrian-oriented walkways and bike paths will be built along the road to provide pedestrian and bicycle access to the site.~~ The natural area will be open to the public during daylight hours. The hours of operation will be posted at the site and will be determined in consultation with the Town. Accessible parking and an accessible nature trail will be provided. There are no permanent water bodies on or adjacent to the site; therefore, no water body access is planned.

A parking ~~area~~lot containing ~~five~~ten automobile parking spaces and ~~one~~two bus parking spaces will be constructed off Silver Beach Road 12th Street in the southwest-central portion of the site (Figure 3). ~~The parking area is located in an area filled in with concrete rubble and fill dirt to help stabilize the 12th Street roadbed. If soil tests reveal that the fill area cannot be compacted enough to support a stable parking area, then portions of the fill area may have to be removed and replaced with compactable materials. The use of pervious materials as part of the parking area will be investigated.~~ Very little native vegetation is present in the proposed parking lot~~fill area~~ and impacts to good-quality native vegetation will be negligible. A survey will be conducted within the proposed parking ~~area~~lot to verify that its construction would not impact any listed species. Based upon previous listed species surveys of the site by County staff, it is unlikely that the construction of the parking ~~area~~lot will impact any listed species. If any listed species are present within the proposed parking ~~area~~lot, the parking ~~area~~lot location will be adjusted to avoid impacts. If impacts are unavoidable, then these species will be relocated on the site. If a stormwater retention facility is required as a result of the parking ~~area~~lot construction, it will be designed to provide recreation open space or wildlife habitat. If changes to public access or parking facilities are required, the proposed changes

will be submitted to FCT for review and approval.