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## MEMORANDUM

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To: File  
From: Thomas Hawkins, Policy and Planning Director  
Date: Tuesday, May 22, 2018  
Re: 1000 Friends of Florida position on Collier County Rural Land Stewardship Area

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### Background

On June 14, 2005, 1000 Friends of Florida (1000 Friends) granted Collier County, owners of property in eastern Collier County, and WilsonMiller, Inc. a 2005 Better Community Award for the Rural Lands Stewardship Area (RLSA) Overlay. On January 30, 2014, 1000 Friends completed a critique of the RLSA plan that recommended changes to the plan. Because the award and subsequent recommendation for changes may seem inconsistent, this memorandum addresses both.

### 2005 Better Community Award

In recognizing the RLSA in 2005, 1000 Friends of Florida noted the following.

The plan's first overlay was approved by the county in 2002, and is now being implemented. 1000 Friends was particularly impressed with provisions that will enable the accommodation of long range population growth within compact, mixed-use, pedestrian friendly rural towns and villages that occupy one tenth of the land formerly needed to serve an equivalent population. In addition, the RLSA will result in the permanent protection of approximately 90,000 acres of private land through incentives and private land stewardship.

1000 Friends of Florida, *Collier County Rural Lands Stewardship Plan to Receive Award From 1000 Friends of Florida*, PRESS RELEASE (June 13, 2005).

That statement was based on the belief that the RLSA plan would not result in an increase of the total number of residential units that Collier County would allow to be built in the RLSA. Rather, 1000 Friends — and others, including Collier County — believed that the RLSA program would permit a comparable amount of development but require that development to be compact and clustered. In this way, the RLSA plan would maintain the development potential of the RLSA while protecting existing agriculture and conservation uses. The only “loss” would be the inability of property owners to convert land to residential uses at a density of one unit per five acres.

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## **2014 critique and recommendation**

On January 30, 2014, 1000 Friends of Florida completed a study with critiques of and recommendations for the RLSA plan (2014 Study). The 2014 Study acknowledges that, in actual application, some of the initial beliefs about the RLSA plan had proved incorrect.

In 2007, Collier County conducted a review of the RLSA as a retrospective assessment of the program. In doing so, it became clear that more intensive development, in the form of towns and villages (called SRAs), was much greater under the RLSA than was initially anticipated by the County Commissioners and the original RLSA committee. This initial RLSA committee was told that the program would not significantly increase the amount of density available in the Eastern lands, but that it would allow for this density to be compressed onto a smaller footprint, with the addition of necessary infrastructure.

Specifically, the 2014 Study recognizes that the RLSA plan provided too much development potential.

The complexity of the system resulted in excessive credits beyond what was initially anticipated and well outside the land planning and management goals and objectives of the RLSA program. Importantly, the spatial extent of Open Land available for SRAs is too large and much greater than the original 16,805 acres of development footprint.

Because of this new knowledge about the RLSA plan, the 2014 Study advises, “[m]oving forward, Collier County must reassess this land development and conservation tool... .” To that end, the 2014 Study recommends eight changes to the RLSA plan.

- Re-evaluate RLSA credit system,
- Sustain rural and agricultural working lands,
- Consider panther habitat in protection of rural agricultural landscapes,
- Identify appropriate locations for new towns,
- Address infrastructure costs,
- Limit infrastructure in Big Cypress Area of Critical State Concern,
- Incorporate Immokalee with RLSA planning, and
- Limit extensions of stewardship agreements to one year exemptions.

## **Going forward**

Collier County is currently conducting a RLSA Restudy. That process includes a public workshop series that invites the public and stakeholders to plan the future of eastern Collier County. This process presents an opportunity to evaluate the 2014 Study recommendations and make changes to the RLSA plan so that, as applied, it meets the original objective of accommodating the long-term population growth of eastern Collier County within compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly rural towns and villages while protecting existing agriculture and conservation uses.