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The Conservancy's Solutions for a Smarter Way to Grow in Eastern Collier County: Recommendations to improve the Rural Lands Stewardship Area program (RLSA)

- The current RLSA program will lead to sprawl with steep environmental and economic costs. In order to build truly sustainable developments, the RLSA program should be updated to require smart growth design standards as provided in "Toward Better Places: The Community Character Plan for Collier County". Collier County's Community Character Plan provides the framework for the way citizens of Collier County said they would like their community to grow, which is based on "traditional neighborhoods" similar to Old Naples.
- The RLSA program is outdated. The values and data relied upon when determining where new towns and villages would be appropriate are no longer based on best available science. The result is that thousands of acres of environmentally critical lands are vulnerable to development. Therefore, the entire RLSA program must be updated to include data from best available science to better protect natural resources.
- Development areas should not be permitted within habitat of the endangered Florida Panther. The entire RLSA program must be updated so that the primary and adult breeding habitats for the Florida panther are protected.
- The RLSA landowners' consultants, not Collier County, hold the underlying data for which the entire RLSA program is based. Since the RLSA program is supposed to be a public program, subject to transparency and analysis by all citizens, Collier County must obtain the underlying data and the methodology for the RLSA program. If that is not possible, the entire system needs to be revamped based on publicly available data that Collier County can house.
- Recommendations proposed during the first "5-year" review (2007-2008) should be denied, as they do not direct development away from critical natural resource areas and would further increase the excessive amount of credits that could translate to even more low-density towns and villages. This could result in additional sprawl.
- The RLSA program must be publicly reviewed every five years, as it is important to frequently assess whether the program is meeting the goals it aims to achieve. Changes to the program may be needed as more developments are approved, based on changing demographics and population projections, relevant scientific findings, budgetary



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constraints, updated assessments of water supply and quality, and to assess any unintended consequences to natural resources, including habitat of listed species.

- The current RLSA program states that developments do not need to be fiscally neutral until build-out, but build-out could be 30 years or more. To protect taxpayers, the program should be amended back to the original requirement that fiscal neutrality must be demonstrated at the end of each phase of development or at the end of every five years, whichever occurs first.
- To greater protect natural resources; the program must be amended to encourage infill and re-development of Collier County's urban areas. A policy should be added that allows credits from RLSA lands to be used toward development within the urban area.
- Development should be prohibited from encircling and surrounding preserves. Light and noises from development significantly diminishes value of the preserves for endangered species, especially when the preserve is functionally disconnected from other habitat areas due to the development footprint. This type of development plan should be prohibited in the RLSA, as that is the antithesis of preservation.
- Landowners can receive credits for restoration and preserving lands. However, the current RLSA program relies on the landowner to calculate how many credits they could earn. The County or outside consultant should determine how many credits could be earned, not the landowner.
- The current credit system on which the RLSA program is based encourages "double dipping" of credits, where landowners can be compensated twice on the same lands without giving up any more rights. Landowners should not be compensated twice on the same lands without giving up any more rights, nor should they be given credit for merely stating their land can be restored, without actually committing to that restoration.
- All RLSA developments should be required to achieve a Florida Green Development Certification Standard through Florida Green Building Coalition or equivalent designation.
- Include within each homeowner association covenants and/or deed restrictions a requirement that all homes built in the RLSA must earn a Florida Green Building Certificate or equivalent. Require energy efficient appliances and indoor and outdoor water efficiency standards for new construction and major remodeling.
- Require "Complete Street Design Policies" for development, which include an interconnected street system for pedestrians and bicyclists. This would result in safer travel for all users including pedestrians and bicyclists, it would offer greater transportation choices, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it would improve health, and will ease traffic congestion.
- Require use of 100% Florida Friendly Plantings with low irrigation requirements for new development in RLSA.

For more information, go to our webpage on Eastern Collier:

<https://www.conservancy.org/our-work/policy/eastern-coller-county>

Or you may contact:

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