



MORE STEWARDSHIP CREDITS = MORE RLSA DEVELOPMENT

Excess Credits = More Homes, Less Wetlands, Loss of Wildlife Habitat

The RLSA Footprint Explosion

In 2002, when Collier County's Rural Lands Stewardship Area (RLSA) program was adopted, everyone thought they were getting a plan for compact growth, where only 10% of the RLSA would be developed and the rest would be preserved as farmlands, wetlands and habitat. Instead, the plan allows a sprawling development pattern, which will accommodate 43,300-acres worth of towns and villages, a geographic size equal to Washington D.C. Instead of 36,000 homes, as expected, well over 100,000 homes could be built.



How did this happen?

The issue all boils down to how many Stewardship Credits can be generated. Stewardship Credits are the RLSA's currency. They are granted to landowners for setting aside land in preservation. In exchange, the RLSA program allows landowners to use those credits toward more cost-efficient compact development and they can build 20 times more homes per acre than the underlying zoning allows.

In 2002, at the final hour before the RLSA's adoption, two policies were added that infused a tremendous number of Stewardship Credits. Because the County failed to carefully analyze those two policies, no one had a clear understanding of just how drastically different the program would become because of the added credits, until it was too late. It is not too late for 2021.



Avoiding Another Blunder

We do not want history to repeat itself. Collier County currently proposes amendments to the RLSA that will add a heap of Stewardship Credits. In an attempt to quell the public's concerns, County staff and landowners have proposed a cap on both credits and a cap on development acreage to 45,000 acres. Staff has assured the public that there will be no excess credits that would result in development beyond the 45,000-acres. However, we know that a cap can only work if the credits are correctly calculated. The Conservancy has taken a deep dive into the County's credit analysis and found a multitude of errors that will lead to excess credits, possibly doubling the proposed 45,000-acre development footprint. Beyond the 45,000 acres, the RLSA has tens of thousands of acres of additional farmlands that would still be vulnerable to development, so it is only a matter of time before the cap is popped open to build on those lands.



What's next?

The three year restudy process for the RLSA is coming to a head, and we expect the final adoption hearings for the proposed amendments to start in March or April. There will be two hearings, at both the planning commission and the Board of County Commissioners and we urge you to attend.

For more information, visit
www.conservancy.org/RLSA