The Facts Behind Eastern Collier County’s Growth Machine and Why You Should Pay Attention
Rural Lands Stewardship Area (Eastern Collier County)

- 300 square miles (similar geographic size as New York City)
- Consists mostly of farm fields, pastures, orchards, and wetlands
- East of Golden Gate Estates
- Extends past State Road 29
- Very little existing infrastructure
- Important mammal corridors and natural flowways
The RLSA provides habitat for these protected species.
When the RLSA was adopted, the public was told that only 9% would be developed.

Instead, the RLSA program allows nearly half of the RLSA to be developed.

When the RLSA was adopted in 2002, the public was told less than 10% of the 182,000 acres would be intensified and over 90% would remain in Agriculture and Conservation.

During the county’s 2007 review, it was determined that the RLSA could actually result in much more development and much less Agriculture.
Landowners have plans for 45,000 acres of development, as towns and villages, which is the same geographic size of two Fort Lauderdales. That much development could easily add over 300,000 people and over 135,000 homes.
Here is the landowner-developer’s proposed road map, which shows that the county would need to build many new and widened roads to connect the new towns and villages:

- 200 miles of road projects needed
- 800,000 daily vehicle trips!
- $billions in cost, most at taxpayer expense
- Roads would bisect panther and large mammal corridors

The Technical Review of the Panther Protection Program, provides a lot of information on the landowner (Eastern Collier Property Owners – ECPO) proposed road network. Although the review is from 2009, their review sheds light on the amount of traffic anticipated for the 200 mile road network that ECPO wants built. Daily trips in Eastern Collier will go from 71,160 a day to 800,000 daily trips. (Table 6.3-1 and 6.3-1 continued), a more than 10 time increase in traffic in the RLSA. ECPO’s habitat conservation plan claims that MPO and FDOT (taxpayers) are to be responsible for environmental mitigation costs, even though it is ECPO’s plan that calls for new and widened roads within panther habitat and wetlands.
Development has begun . . .

APPROVED
Rivergrass (2020): 2,500 homes
Longwater (2021): 2,600 homes
Bellmar (2021) 2,750 homes
Skysail* (2021): 1,800 homes
Ave Maria* (2005): 11,000 homes
(about 7,400 homes yet to be built)

PENDING APPROVAL
Town of Big Cypress (Town Core): 1,382 homes
Brightshore Village: 2,400 homes
Immokalee Road Rural Village (just outside RLSA): 4,042 homes

TOTAL: 28,474 homes

* Under construction. Others are in permitting phases.
How many will live in just the approved/pending towns and villages?

- **74,845 residents and workers**
- This is over **3 times** the population of the City of Naples!

*Includes pending applications of Immokalee Road Rural Village (IRRV); Brightshore Village, and TOBC town core. IRRV is just outside the RLSA. The population estimates are from the applicant’s economic assessments, based on seasonal population and employment, except for Ave Maria, which is from Metro Forecasting. Populations: Town of Big Cypress = 23,644 (includes Rivergrass, Longwater, and Bellmar); Town of Ave Maria = 33,000; Skysail = 4,468; Brightshore Village = 4,893; IRRV 9,840. 2021 Population of City of Naples = 22,265 U.S. Census*
How large will the villages be?

Just these three villages will extend about the same distance as Clam Pass to Naples Botanical Garden.
is allowing their own rules to be broken. The following slides explain how.
What are the Goals of the RLSA?  

(Supported by Conservancy)

1. Retain agriculture

2. Direct incompatible uses away from wetlands and habitat

3. Discourage Sprawl with innovative planning (smart growth)
The RLSA program requires smart growth, which looks like this . . .
Instead we will see more of this . . .
RLSA GOAL: Direct incompatible uses away from listed habitat?

REALITY:
Most of the Villages, and all of the Town Core, are planned within Primary Panther Habitat (pink)
REALITY:
Nearly 400 acres of wetlands are planned to be destroyed by just three villages.

RLSA GOAL: Direct incompatible uses away from wetlands?
The RLSA allows for approximately 90,000 acres* of agricultural lands to be converted to towns, villages and low-density ranchette-style development.

- This is an area larger than the land mass of Tampa!

REALITY: Huge losses of agricultural lands are proposed

*The cross hatch area shows the proposed location of 45,000 acres for towns and villages. The agricultural lands outside the cross-hatched area equate to over 40,000 acres and are vulnerable to 1 unit per 5 acre ranchette sprawl.”
RLSA GOAL: Avoid sprawl by complying with these smart growth rules?

- Innovative
- Compact
- Walkable/Bikeable
- Interconnected Street Network
- Mix of Uses
- **Town or Village Center** – as focal point
- **Housing diversity** - housing styles to accommodate all ages and incomes
- **Self sufficient** – jobs, housing, and internal traffic
- **Fiscally neutral** – No taxpayer subsidies
REALITY: Collier County Planning Staff recommends approval of projects even though they state that the projects do not abide by the required smart growth policies.

Collier County Staff’s Final Report for Rivergrass provided to Board of County Commissioners at adoption. Staff admitted that Rivergrass breaks many rules of the RLSA program.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of Petition SRA-PL20190000044, Rivergrass Village SRA, to the Board of County Commissioners subject to the following Conditions of Approval:

1. The companion Landowner Contribution Agreement pertaining to transportation facilities is required to be approved with this SRA request.
2. Interconnections shall be addressed in the companion Landowner Contribution Agreement.
3. Prior to issuance of the first SDP and/or PPL, a Listed Species Management Plan must be provided for review, with approval from FWCC and/or USFWS for management of the Florida panther and all other listed species.
4. The negotiated Intergovernmental Agreement between Collier County Water-Sewer District and the Big Cypress Stewardship District must be adopted concurrently with the SRA Resolution.
5. The following CCPC requested revisions shall be incorporated into the SRA Document:
   - Add “as depicted on Master Plan” after the Clubhouse and Amenities reference in Section 5.1.1 A. 6);
   - Increase the front yard setbacks for all land uses to 12 feet to avoid utility easement conflicts;
   - Make the lake symbol on the Master Plan one color, not two colors;
   - Add the words “at least” to Note 2 on Page 3 of the Master Plan;
   - Change the minimum width of the Right-of-Way Cross Section from 48 feet to 50 feet.

Even though staff stated that Rivergrass does not meet the RLSA’s rules, staff still recommended approval of Rivergrass, if certain conditions are met. However, these conditions were not responsive to the major issues raised by staff.
At a minimum, the assessment shall consider the following public facilities and services: transportation, potable water, wastewater, irrigation water, stormwater management, solid waste, parks, law enforcement, and schools.” (RLSA Policy 4.18)
REALITY: Fiscal Impact Assessments are *not* being done for water, wastewater, and irrigation, even though . . .

A **new** $200 Million+ water-wastewater treatment plant is being built to serve:
- Rivergrass Village
- Longwater Village
- Bellmar Village
- IRRV Village
- Skysail Village
- Brightshore Village
- Town of Big Cypress
Even though Collier County has an affordable housing crisis:

Skysail, Rivergrass, Longwater, and Bellmar Villages are *not* required to provide affordable housing units for Essential Services Personnel.
Developers are not paying their fair share of traffic impacts

$125 Million deficit = NOT FISCALLY NEUTRAL

Preliminary Cost Allocation
$125 Million Not Covered (2019 $)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rivergrass</th>
<th>Longwater</th>
<th>Bellmar</th>
<th>County</th>
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Provided by Norm Marshall of Smart Mobility, Inc.
Longwater and Bellmar Villages were approved even when traffic expert, Norm Marshall of Smart Mobility, stated that the developments “will cause significant traffic impacts to deficient Immokalee Road”. Mr. Marshall further stated that Immokalee Rd will be “An Avoidable Train Wreck.”

Figure 1: Collier County LRTP Network Deficiency Plot (from LRTP Figure A-9)

Key: Red extremely deficient (V/C > 1.15), Orange deficient (V/C 1.0 to 1.15) and Yellow barely adequate (V/C 0.9 to 1.0).

The blue highlights in the figure show planned MPO road expansion projects which are generally designed to serve development as discussed below.

Figure from Collier MPO 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan Technical Compendium
is allowing developers to tip the scales in their favor.
But it could get worse:

36 *more* villages or 12 *more* towns are possible!

Approximately 9,000 acres of SRAs (towns and villages) have been approved to date. The RLSA’s rules cap SRA development at 45,000 acres, so 36,000 more acres could be developed as SRAs. This could be in the form of 36 more villages, at 1,000 acres each, or 12 more towns at 3,000 acres each, or even more if the towns and villages are smaller. In addition, there is room for about 45,000 acres of low-density ranchette-style development.
Can we stop this new wave of growth from becoming a tidal wave?

- High taxes
- Traffic congestion
- Dangerous roads
- Overcrowding
- Lack of affordable housing
- Loss of wildlife and habitat
- Loss of wetlands
- Polluted waters
- Loss of agricultural lands
Recommendations for Collier County:

1. Require towns and villages to adhere to all smart growth rules
2. Update RLSA with best available science to protect panther
3. Charge HIGHER impact fees for RLSA development (especially for roads and pipes)
4. Deny projects if the project adds traffic to failing roads
5. Require towns and villages to provide affordable housing units, not merely sell land for Collier County or others to provide
6. Improve transparency - Require fiscal impact analysis of developments served by new NE $200M+ water-sewer plant
7. Financing costs for infrastructure can be significant and should be included in all fiscal impact analyses
8. Make wiser investments: Instead of building massive new expensive infrastructure for eastern Collier, direct tax dollars toward projects that protect existing communities from impacts of climate change, sea level rise, and flooding.
What **you** can do:

**Informed citizenry:**
1. Attend or watch hearings, learn about development process

**Ask our elected officials, advisory committees and county staff the tough questions:**
1. Do they understand the importance of the RLSAs rules?
2. Do they prioritize environmental protection?
3. Are they only concerned with property rights of large landowners, or do they also respect property rights and quality of life of all other homeowners in Collier County?
4. Are they willing to stop putting the cart before the horse? (Paying for infrastructure that assumes developments are already approved)
What you can do

Ask the Tough Questions:
5. Do they understand that not all decisions should be based on maximizing profits, but instead what is right and good for the community?
6. Are they willing to change the affordable housing rules, so AH is no longer subsidized in RLSA?
7. Are they willing to improve transparency regarding the costs for the new NE treatment plant?
8. Are they willing to deny projects that add traffic to failing roads?
9. What are they willing to do to stop subsidizing growth in eastern Collier?

Get the word out:
Educate friends and neighbors
Protecting Southwest Florida’s unique natural environment and quality of life…now and forever.