

The Collier County Rural Lands Stewardship Area Overlay: November 20, 2002 Update

Mission

- To create a long range (25 year plus) strategic plan for 300 square miles of Collier County's rural lands that promotes agriculture, protects wetland flowways and upland habitat, and directs growth to suitable locations using an innovative incentive process based on the principles of rural land stewardship.

The Immokalee Study process

- The Study was a 3-year, 4 stage community-based planning process with oversight from a 15 person Citizen Committee.
- WilsonMiller was hired by rural owners to lead the planning team and create the plan with endorsement of the Collier County Commission and technical support of 9 agencies.
- The Committee reached unanimous agreement on their recommendations to the County Commission after 33 public meetings over the course of 2.5 years.
- Major rural landowners volunteered a temporary development moratorium on area development during the process to allow sufficient time without threat of end-runs.
- Collier County Commission unanimously approved transmittal and adoption of Comprehensive Plan amendments to implement the program, known as the Rural Lands Stewardship Area (RLSA) Overlay.

Stage 1 - Data Gathering

- This data-gathering phase involved comprehensive research on existing land cover, land use, and natural resources of the rural lands. It yielded current, accurate information, significantly correcting and updating data available as the basis for long term planning.
- Data was collected and assimilated by WilsonMiller into a GIS system, analyzed, field verified and summarized in maps and tables. GIS became the analytic software and implementation tool for the Overlay.

Stage 2 – Alternative Scenario Design

- Prioritized a set of tools, techniques and strategies through brainstorming, three alternate scenarios were prepared by WilsonMiller and reviewed by the Rural Lands Committee.
- Scenarios were based on a new, incentive-driven strategy called "Rural Stewardship" that enables the transfer of specific property rights for "stewardship credits," as well as defining suitability factors and characteristics for "receiving areas."
- The first scenario assumed only private incentives, while the second assumed that public funding and outside private funding sources could become available. The third incorporated refinements, including an accurate delineation and means for protecting Flow way and Habitat Stewardship areas.

Stage 3 – Alternative Scenario Testing

- Impact analysis testing by WilsonMiller and economic analysis by Fishkind demonstrated that the Rural Stewardship strategy would have minimal impact on agriculture, would protect the vast majority of existing wetlands and upland habitat.
- While dramatically reducing the required development footprint, it would also produce higher residential values, create a substantial, long-term positive effect on employment and produce a positive net fiscal impact on Collier County.

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Stage 4 – Growth Management Plan Amendment

- Goals, Objectives & Policies were prepared by WilsonMiller in accordance with the recommended Scenario to articulate the plan's purpose, framework and outlining specific steps for implementation.
- The Plan also assure through supplemental regulations that owners who choose not participate in the Overlay will meet requirements for natural resource protection on their land.
- The Plan garnered unanimous support from the Board of County Commissioners, and the endorsement of the Florida Wildlife Federation, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and Collier County Audubon Society.
- RLSA Growth Management Plan amendment was forwarded to the Department of Community Affairs for compliance review. DCA's ORC report led to revisions to address issues such as greater specificity of receiving area characteristics, and more extensive restrictions on land that is not included in the overlay.
- Final adoption of the RLSA Overlay occurred on October 22, 2002; DCA is currently reviewing the plan for compliance. LDC Stewardship District to be adopted within one year.

Innovations and features of the RLSA Overlay

- RLSA Overlay was created through a collaborative process that gave landowners and other stakeholders a major role in the design and analysis of the plan. Involvement built credibility, allowed greater level of accuracy of data, brought additional resources to the process and ultimately achieved a unanimous consensus of all participants.
- RLSA Process led to the creation of a new method of evaluating land based environmental resource values by organizing a series of six discrete resource attributes into a blended natural resource index score that is then used to direct land use decisions and incentivise preservation.
- RLSA Overlay overcomes the inherent weakness of many TDR systems that rely on one-dimensional approaches by the creation of a new multidimensional tool to organize and assess complex data. This enables implementation of a unique resource based credit system that deals with the multiplicity of land use layers and provides greater selectivity.
- RLSA Overlay relies primarily on incentives to protect extensive natural resources areas, not additional regulations. It enables public benefits to be achieved without significant public funding, as the market value based system drives the Stewardship Credit process.
- RLSA Overlay allows long term beneficial and sustainable development forms that were not previously allowed in traditional rural land districts. Opportunities for economic development and diversification can be accommodated in new system, were prohibited by former plan.
- RLSA Overlay establishes criteria that allow for the design and approval of specific compact rural development areas through a streamlined implementation process that does not require repetitious and time consuming plan amendments. This creates greater reliability and efficiency for significant investment backed decisions.
- RLSA Overly works in concert with the Area of Critical State Concern program to incentivise a more sustainable form of development to accommodate residents within the ACSC.

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Final Order Directive #1: Direct incompatible uses away from wetlands and upland habitat in order to protect water quality and quantity and maintain the natural water regime as well as to protect listed animal and plant species and their habitats.

- Incentivizes landowners to voluntarily protect environmentally valuable land.
- Places 100,000 acres of flowways and habitats into environmental protection designations.
- Protects 90% of native upland and wetland vegetation in a 300 square mile area.
- Incorporates 91% of panther telemetry points in habitat areas.
- Reduces the development footprint by 90% from baseline conditions.
- Establishes strict environmental protection standards in all Stewardship Areas.
- Incentivizes private planning and funding for restoration of impacted land.
- Works with or without public funds.

Final Order Directive #2: Identify & propose measures to protect prime agricultural areas. Such measures should prevent the premature conversion of agricultural lands to other uses.

- Protects 75,000 acres of agricultural land and 18,000 acres of water retention areas.
- Allows rural owner flexibility in use of entitlements and land-based rights.
- Eliminates a primary market based cause of premature conversion of ag. land.
- Maintains inherent underlying value of land for long-term rural use.
- Protects private property rights through incentive-based program.
- Creates an Agricultural Advisory Committee for Collier County.

Final Order Directive #3: Assess the growth potential of the Area by assessing the potential conversion of rural lands to other uses, in appropriate locations, while discouraging urban sprawl, directing incompatible land uses away from critical habitat and encouraging development that utilizes creative land use planning techniques.

- Accommodates projected 2025 population in mixed-use rural towns and villages as primary form of compact development rather than sprawling low-density single use development. Allows higher densities in selected areas based on suitability factors.
- Protects 5-10 acres of flowways, habitats and water retention stewardship areas for each acre of compact rural development.
- Allows controlled growth and economic diversification of the rural area in manner that assures a positive net fiscal impact to Collier County.