2401 SE Monterey Rd
Stuart, FL 34996

Martin County
Environmental Land Oversight Committee (ELOC)
Minutes

Thursday June 18, 2026 **2:00 P.M** **BOCC, Chambers**

1. CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order at 2:02 PM by Jim Snedeker, Chair.

2. ROLL CALL
Jim Snedeker, Chair, called roll.

Members Present-

Dan Brady
David Hafner
Jim Snedeker
Merritt Matheson
Scott Turnbull
Tom Campenni
Beth Kacvinsky

Members Absent-

John Keller
Vicki Davis

OLD BUSINESS

APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND AGENDA

- Environmental Lands Oversight Committee April 1, 2026

Motion to approve the Meeting Minutes from April 1, 2026 was made by Tom Campenni and seconded by Dan Brady. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion to approve the agenda for June 18, 2026 was made by Tom Campenni and seconded by Merritt Matheson. The motion passed unanimously.

UPDATE ON TAX REVENUE GENERATED FROM SALES TAX COLLECTION

Stephanie Merley, Director of the Office of Management and Budget for Martin County, gave an update on the tax revenue from the half-cent sales tax initiative and where it was spent. To date, Martin County has collected about $11.2 million, with a three-month state collection lag. Martin County has spent approximately $21.2 million cumulatively between FY25 and FY26. On the website, there is a breakdown of where all the money has been spent, but it does not reflect anything that is currently in the pipeline to be closed or coming up. Martin County has sufficient cash, about $5.1 million to be spent, and is anticipating about 1.5 to 1.8 million monthly to be collected going forward through the end of the Fiscal Year. All the information is available on the public website. Stephanie is available by email for any further questions. Michael Yustin, Senior Project Manager, reminded the Committee that after the properties are acquired, Martin County can spend up to 5% of the acquisition cost on Habitat Restoration and Habitat Management. The website will reflect the expenditures associated with the properties once they have been acquired.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Approved Acquisitions Presentation

Michael Yustin, Senior Project Manager, provided a presentation on the 11,000 acres that were previously evaluated and approved for recommendation. The properties represent all four different acquisition zones, and the acreage varies from 3,500 to 1 acre in size. The map he shows highlights all the properties that were approved by the Board of County Commissioners; they were represented in yellow. Based on the metrics, the County acquired about 1,325 acres in fee simple, protected 1,699 acres through a conservation easement via the Florida Forever Program. There is about 58 acres under contract and are either awaiting BOCC approval to close or are in the process of closing. In addition to that, 799 acres are queued up for conservation easements through our partnership with the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. Properties that have been recently acquired: The 315-acre Elise J Property during the month of May. The property is a key connector between Hungry Land Wildlife and Environmental Area and Harmony Ranch. Michael Yustin explained that if an additional property were to be acquired, it could be added to Hungry Land and would be managed by the state as one contiguous property. Poinciana Gardens, it has a mixture of publicly and privately owned lots. The County closed on 32 acres during the month of April; the cost was roughly $3 million. It is an important wetlands system. The third recent acquisition is the Rodgers Atlantic Ridge Parcel, at 3.5 acres. It’s adjacent to and can help buffer Atlantic Ridge as well as the Metalist Property. The County closed on the property in May for roughly $200,000.It's a fairly disturbed property, but it does have a small area of scrubby flatwoods. And it's important because once again, it links to the Metalist property. The next slide shows approved properties that have not closed or are in the process of negotiation. The Jane Wild Property was removed from consideration due to the asking cost per acre. If the cost comes down, we would still work on acquiring but at the moment we are not. As the properties move into negotiations and contracts is when the money is earmarked. The County is under active negotiation for J.R. Stewart Lands, which is a 642-acre property that is an important regional connectivity to the recently acquired Elise J. Property that is just to the north. J.R. Stewart is under a conservation easement as a private mitigation bank. If the property is acquired, it would still have the conservation easement, and it would have the mitigation requirements. The realtor is stating that the landowner is working on having the conservation easement removed from the parts that weren't used for mitigation, but there is no guarantee. There were two credits taken on the property for mitigation, so the plan is to hopefully remove the conservation from a portion of the property. The Rogers Conservation Fund Parcel is another active negotiation. The map was incorrect, and the property is two parcels with a total area of 20acres. This would help with the Kitching Creek Project. Ideally, the County would draw water out from 138th St in the roadway system and have it flow through the property. The County would scrape it down to create a wetlands system and then eventually put it back into the ditch.

B. STAFF PRESENTATION ON NOMINATED PARCELS

Nine new properties are up for consideration that total roughly 2,800 acres. The properties are throughout each of the different project zones and a wide swath of the areas that have been up for consideration before. The 2026 Nomination Cycle slide of the presentation showed the properties that are up for consideration. It reflects which program area each property is in. The slide shows the possible acquisition type, the acreage, and the potential partners in acquiring the properties.

Five properties were nominated but are not up for consideration due to not being within our acquisition program boundaries or the willing seller letter was received too late to make it to this meeting. The five properties consist of Walpole, Pagoda Groves, Danforth Creek, Robert Rose, and Floridian Golf Course.

Solo Properties Parcel:

139-acre property with good habitat quality. It is within the footprint of the IRL South with possible CERP Natural Land Property. It is adjacent to Bar B Ranch but would need further acquisitions to form a greenway. There is a privately owned parcel in the middle that has a cell tower and would remain privately owned. The private owner would have access to the property by an existing easement. The property is completely within the Florida Wildlife Corridor segment between WPB to Central Florida. It is listed as a Priority 2 according to the Florida Natural Ecological Greenway network (FEGN). State funds could be credited to the state's ledger in the CERP Cost- Share Agreement. No Partner has been identified but has potential as an IRL South Project to receive future funding. Habitats appear to be in good condition with little apparent exotic vegetation and only 14% listed as being "impacted by humans." Hydrology is influenced by drainage and surrounding canals, and no evidence of prior fire management. There are no rare habitats, and there are several rare species consistent with flatwoods/marsh areas. For recreational opportunities, it would be challenging to provide access given the distance from roads and lack of connection to existing trail network. If we were to provide access, features would focus on hiking, biking, and equestrian users. In terms of development potential, quite a bit of the property is upland. Due to that, quite a bit of it would be available for development. With the current agricultural land use and zoning, it would consist of 20-acre ranch heads.

Committee questions-
Merritt Matheson wanted to know if the tower precluded public access. Is the tower fenced off, or do people have to keep a certain distance away if the property was acquired? There would be no access to the public to private property, as the owners would not want people trespassing, but there would be public access to the surrounding area.
Dan Brady questioned whether there are no potential funding partners. Michael explained that there is potential, but there are no current partners. Dan Brady asked if the County buys the property, does the County manage it? Michael explained that if the County can buy the properties and let the State manage it. In essence, the County would be the managing entity. Scott Turnbull questioned if the tower was a cell tower or a radio tower. Michael explained that it was a radio tower; he believes it to be Sinclair Broadcasting. Scott and Michael discussed whether the tower was leased or if it was owned outright by Sinclair Broadcasting. Jim Sneadeker asked if Michael could research whether the radio company owns the tower outright.

Hawks Hammock Addition:
380-acre property adjacent to a 432-acre County Preserve. It is not in the boundary of the IRL South but part of the drainage for the St. Lucie Canal and has a high probability of development. In terms of the IRL South Program and the Everglades Restoration Plan, we received word from SFWMD that the project is consistent with IRL South and could be used for CERP Project. The CERP project captures runoff that is severely impacting the St. Lucie River Estuary, and State funds can be credited to the ledger in the CERP Cost-share Agreement. In terms of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, it does not fall within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, but it does fall as a low priority within the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. No funding partners are currently identified, but there is potential in the future to get funding through the IRL South SER Project. In terms of Habitat Quality, there is a borrow pit lake, but otherwise habitat is in good condition; there are active cattle leases. The hydrology is mostly intact and is in pretty good condition. In terms of management considerations, there are smoke management issues due to I95, but not impossible due to the already existing smoke management at Hawks Hammock Preserve. In terms of listed species, there are no rare habitats, but there are several rare species. We went ahead and put together a plan if we were to acquire the property. The County would expand the existing Hawks Hammock trail system, which the area is popular with equestrian users. The amenities would include a pavilion and shell rock parking area. In terms of development potential, back in 2006, the property successfully went through the development review process and had a site plan approved for development. They would most likely need to start over to get development on the property, but it does show that this area could be developed if the right owner came along as 42 agricultural ranchettes.

Big Cypress Ranch:
851- acre cypress and wetland-dominant property that is a part of a potential link between Hungryland and Corbet, and it could be a potential fee simple or conservation easement

acquisition. The Project is within the boundaries of the Florida Forever Program and is listed as an essential acquisition by Florida Forever. The property is within the Florida Wildlife Corridor segment connecting Corbet and Hungryland. It is also listed as a priority 2 by the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. The main potential funding partner would come from the Forever Florida Program. In terms of habitat quality, less than 10% of the property appears to be impacted. Wetlands appear to be in excellent condition, upland areas appear to show evidence of "grazing", and dense pine canopy indicates fire suppression history. In terms of management considerations, cattle grazing and upland understory impacts are making dense vegetation fuels that could be problematic in terms of a burn program. Due to the lack of development around the property, it can make it easier to manage. In terms of rare/listed species, 6% of the property is considered rare habitat, with several rare species. In terms of recreational opportunities, this will depend on the type of acquisition, fee simple or a conservation easement. There could also be challenges with the railroad crossing that would need to be navigated to get into the property. If public access was available, it would focus on hiking, biking, and equestrian users. In terms of development potential, the property has a PAMP on it now, but the features were never built into the PAMP. The County can make the request to have the PAMP removed to do it. It has agricultural land use and zoning. The property is mainly wetlands, which would make it hard to develop most of the property, but there is some development potential long-term.

Palmar Chimney:
1,238 acres similar to Palm Beach Heights with small parcels (1/4 – 1 acre). It is part of a large greenway connecting Hungryland to the C44 and Allapattah Flats. It is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor segment between WPB to Central Florida. It is listed as a priority 2 on the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. In terms of funding partners, this is a possible IRL Natural Lands Project. It is adjacent to the Florida Forever Palmar Project and could be added to that program. In terms of habitat quality, there is substantial grazing in the area with substantial improved pasture. There is hydrologic impacts from ditches that run through the property and canals. In terms of management considerations, the small parcel sizes would make management difficult. There would be challenges controlling off-road vehicles, and there are extensive levels of invasive plants. Restoring the natural communities would be challenging. In terms of rare/listed species, there is no rare habitat. There are several rare species consistent with flatwoods/marsh areas and potential for red-cockaded woodpeckers. In terms of recreational opportunities, it could be a potential link between Palmar /Hungryland and the C44 Project. It's adjacent to the Historic Jupiter Indiantown Road, and features would focus on hiking, biking, and equestrian users. In terms of development potential, there are a significant number of uplands on the property. The property has agricultural land use and zoning. It could be possible with current land use to build 20-acre ranchettes.

Break at 3:39 pm for 5 minutes.

First Methodist Parcel:

Small parcel at 6.1- acres which could be used as an access point to get into the Medallist Property. The property is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor connecting Atlantic Ridge SP and Jonathan Dickinson SP. It is within Priority 2 of the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. No funding partners have been identified at this time. In terms of habitat quality, the scrub habitat is in good condition with open sandy areas and vegetative structure. There is also a small cleared area here on the South side of the property as well. In terms of management considerations, the small size of the property and surrounding land uses would make prescribed fire management difficult. With properties this size, it can be difficult to manage the invasive plants, with the edge effect. In terms of rare/listed species, there is a high potential for rare endemic species that are typical of that scrub habitat. This property is some of the last privately owned scrub habitat in the Loxa Lucie footprint. In terms of recreational opportunities, it has the potential to be a trailhead for the 900 acre Medallist Property that currently has no public access, since the Medallist property is landlocked. There is potential for a small parking lot and trail system. In terms of development potential, the scrub area could be developed. It is in a CRA Land Use/zoning district, with potential for several homes in upland areas.

Committee questions:

Jim Snedeker wanted to know if the church would give us access to the property from that road? Michael Yustin explained that would be part of the discussion during negotiation.

Tom Campenni wanted to know where the parking lot would go. Michael explained it would go on the east side of the preserve. The County could also speak with the church about whether or not it can take a portion of their parking lot and acquire that. Jim Snedeker questioned if the County would need to have access to the road through the church property. Michael explained that the County would need the access to the road to connect the parcel to the Medallist property, but the County would only need a conservation easement if not.

Beth Kacvinsky wanted to know how long the Medallist property has been in public ownership.

Datillio Parcel:

12.2-acre heavily impacted property. The County is interested in the property because they believe it will help expand the footprint of the Kitching Creek Central Flow Way Project. It could create a potential trail connection from Atlantic Ridge to Jonathan Dickinson State Park. It is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor connecting Atlantic Ridge and Jonathan Dickerson State Park. It is listed as a priority 2 on the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. The property is within the Florida Forever Program, and it's listed as an essential acquisition part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, within the Florida Forever Program. Listed as a property in an essential acquisition area for the Florida Forever program. The County could submit for funding through the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative. In terms of the habitat quality, there is little in the way of native plant communities. The property is currently being used to stockpile fill and road building materials. In terms of management consideration, the County would use the property to expand the existing Kitching Creek Project. It would take a substantial investment, but the end goal would be to add to a flow way that captures water from the adjacent drainage system.

In terms of rare/listed species, there are no rare habitats or listed species present due to the current land use. In terms of recreational opportunities, it could be a bridge to connect the trail systems at Atlantic Ridge and Jonathan Dickerson State Park. In terms of development potential, there is already a house , and the land use is rural density which could allow up to 1 house per acre.
Committee questions:
Tom Campenni asked, since they are not funding Florida Forever, are they just going to throw out the program? John Maehl, Environmental Resource Administrator, agreed that was the posture we've taken. The County has met with leadership from Florida Forever specifically about the issue

MTN Ranch:

139-acre property south of Bridge Road in the Kitching Creek watershed. It is adjacent to the Leonard Parcel (approved sales tax project), and there is a large cypress slough on the property. Most likely move forward as a conservation easement, not as a whole acquisition. It is within the Florida Wildlife Corridor Segment between WPB to Central Florida. It is listed as a priority 2 in the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. It is adjacent to the Atlantic Ridge Florida Forever Program. A boundary amendment can be done to get the property added to the project. No funding partner has been identified, but it would qualify for an easement with the Rural and Family Lands Program. In terms of the habitat quality, a substantial portion of the property is improved pasture. There is a large cypress slough and marsh areas that appear to be in good condition with intact hydrology and some invasives in pine forest areas. In terms of management considerations, if the property is acquired under a conservation easement, then there is no County management required. If it is a fee simple acquisition, then restoring the pasture areas would be very challenging. In terms of rare/listed species, there are no rare habitats, but there are several rare species consistent with flatwoods and marsh areas. In terms of recreational opportunities, there would be no public access if the County acquires a conservation easement. If the County takes ownership of the property, features will include parking, a trail system, and a pavilion. In terms of development potential, the property is zoned A1 (small farm district) while it has agricultural land use and would allow for 1 house per 20 acres.
Committee questions-
Jim Snedeker wanted to know the probability of the two scenarios: the fee simple compared to the conservation easement? Michael Yustin gave his opinion that the owner doesn't want to see the property, which would be a conservation easement acquisition. Tom Campenni wanted to know what would happen if the owner doesn't keep the easement after they receive the money? Michael explained that there is annual monitoring required for the property that the County is involved in, but the County wouldn't be the ones with enforcement rights. It would be up to the Rural and Family Lands program to enforce those rights.

Justin Wilson Addition:
20-acre property linked between County conservation areas and a park conservation area. There is drainage that feeds into Bessey Creek and the St. Lucie Estuary, and it includes important and rare baygall swamp habitat. The property is not within any state-recognized program, and there is no funding partner identified. It could also be difficult to find grant funding for this area. In terms of habitat quality, most of the property has not been cleared and contains native habitat. It does tend to have a very dense pine canopy and understory, and there are extensive levels of exotic vegetation throughout the property. In terms of management consideration, due to the surrounding development, it would be difficult to utilize fire, and it would probably be necessary to use mechanical clearing/ harvesting to reduce the height of the dense vegetation. There are also extensive levels of invasive vegetation throughout that would require significant resources to treat and control. In terms of rare/listed species, there is 6 acres of basin swamp (endangered in Martin County). The rare species are consistent with flatwoods/ swamp areas. In terms of recreational opportunities, amenities would focus on a trail system and educational signage. It would connect with the current trail system throughout Justin Wilson. In terms of the development potential, it is very high considering the property has an approved site plan that would allow for the construction of 12 homes.

Avonlea:
18-acre property that drains into the Haney Creek Watershed and some of the last undeveloped land in the area. It is contiguous to areas preserved through a Preserve Area Management Plan (PAMP). It is not within the Boundary of any state-recognized program. In terms of funding partners, the City of Stuart is interested in partnering on the acquisition using their Sales Tax Fund allocation. In terms of habitat quality, a significant portion of the parcels have been cleared of vegetation. There are extensive levels of invasive plants, especially around the exterior of the parcels. The parcels are also overgrown with exotics. In terms of management considerations, the properties are small, which creates management challenges. The invasive plant management will be costly, and will require mechanical fuel reduction and restoring the cleared areas will be very difficult. In terms of rare/listed species, 40 % of the properties are rare scrub habitat. There is an extensive list of species associated with that habitat type. In terms of recreational opportunities, the cleared areas could be used for parking, picnic pavilions, and to create a trail network. Features would focus on hiking and wildlife viewing. In terms of development potential, there is an approved site plan with a mix a residential and commercial development.
Committee questions:
Tom Campenni asked how much the property cost? John Maehl explained the per-acre cost was very expensive. Michael Yustin Ballparked 8 to 10 million. Tom Campenni questioned how much Stuart received with their Sales Tax. John Maehl explained that they receive 10% of what the County gets. So in the ballpark of $20 million over the 10 year period. Beth Kacvinsky wanted to

know who would be responsible for management. Michael Yustin expressed that in the past the City has taken on management of the properties in the city limits.

Tom Campenni made a motion to remove the property from ranking and bringing it forward to the Board of County Commissioners. Scott Turnbull seconded the motion. Motion passed 4 in favor and 2 opposed.

C. STAFF PRESENT RANKING RESULTS

Michael Yustin discussed the rankings of each nominated parcel. They are as follows:

1. Big Cypress Ranch
2. Hawks Hammock Addition
3. Solo Properties
4. PalMar Chimney
5. MTN Ranch
6. First Methodist
7. Justin Wilson Addition
8. Datillio Parcel
9. Avonlea was removed from consideration.

D. ELOC VOTES ON SCORING AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO FORWARD TO THE B.O.C.C.

Tom Campenni made a motion to approve the scoring. Seconded by Beth Kacvinsky. Motion moved unanimously.
Tom Campenni made a motion to move forward with presenting the nominated parcels to the board. Seconded by Beth Kacvinsky. That motion moved unanimously.

SET DATE FOR NEXT ELOC MEETING **September 17th 2:00pm**

COMMENTS

A. PUBLIC

Public Comment on Solo Properties Parcel:
Sharon McGinness- What would be the probability that someone develops on the property with the cell tower on it even as a ranch head. I just don't look at it as a desirable place that people would want to build their homes. So I would actually give it a very low priority, if anything. I know it attaches to a lot of properties that we're already conserving, but I just think there's little opportunity for somebody to start putting houses on that property. That's my own comment.

No Public Comment on Hawks Hammock Addition.
No Public Comment on Big Cypress Ranch.
No Public Comment on Palmar Chimney.

No Public Comment on First Methodist Parcel.
No Public Comment on Datillio Parcel.
No Public Comment on MTN Ranch.
No Public Comment on Blueway Acquisition Zone
No Public Comment on Avonlea

B. COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Merritt Matheson wants to know if we can review the last item on the ranking form since most of these will be at zero. Michael Yustin explained that we would have to take the change to the manual to the board since this is a board-approved manual**.** Michael would like the committee to suggest the change of wording at the next meeting. After which it will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for adoption of the new wording.

Beth Kacvinsky moved to replace the cost per acre category with a category relative to wetland value and aquifer recharge. Seconded by Merritt Matheson. Motion moved unanimously.

C. STAFF

No Comments from staff.

ADJOURN

There was no further business. The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 pm

Recorded and prepared by:

________________________________ ____________

Sarah Cornelius, PWD Administrative Coordinator Date

________________________________ ____________

Jim Snedeker, Chair Date