EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONSIDERATION BY THE CONSERVATION COLLIER LAND ACQUISITION ADVISORY COMMITTEE AS HOW BEST TO MANAGE THE NOMINATION OF WINCHESTER HEAD, A DEPRESSIONAL WETLAND IN NORTH GOLDEN GATE ESTATES UNITS 62 AND 65

OBJECTIVE: To consider program resources and priorities of purchase and determine the best way to approach and manage the nomination of Winchester Head, an area containing up to approximately 175 individually owned parcels.

CONSIDERATION: Winchester Head is an approximately 200-acre depressional cypress head and marsh wetland located in North Golden Gate Estates in Units 62 and 65. At present it is relatively undeveloped. The center of this area appears to hold water year-round, and is likely providing floodplain storage for surrounding home sites during high rainy season. These types of depressional storage areas were included in the hydraulic modeling for the Golden Gate canal system done by the Big Cypress Basin, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and appear to be a component of flood control for the area.

In this regard, Winchester Head is providing not only environmental benefits and habitat for wetland dependent species, but is also functioning as above-ground water storage, hydrating surficial aquifers and mitigating flooding in the surrounding residential areas, all corresponding with Conservation Collier criteria.

Staff has received a nomination for Winchester Head in general, but not for specific parcels. Within this area, there are anywhere from 150 to 175 parcels, (depending on how much of the feature and its edges are included) most of them individually owned parcels 1.14 acres in size.

Conservation Collier has already selected a multi-parcel project as a long-term acquisition objective in the NGGE (Unit 53).

FISCAL IMPACT: Because there are so many individually owned small parcels, the costs for putting together contiguous acreage would be higher than for a larger, single-owner property. This is because each property would need to be individually appraised, have an environmental audit performed, and have title work done and contracts prepared.

PROGRAM IMPACT: A project of this size could overwhelm current staff resources if we attempt to acquire all or even most of the parcels during one cycle, in addition to the other properties that are nominated.

RECOMMENDATION: The pursuit of nominated properties in the Winchester Head appears to work well with Conservation Collier's environmental and human social objectives, including enhancement of flood protection. However, because of the size and number of individually owned small parcels, as a practical matter, it may be better for the Conservation Collier Acquisition Advisory Committee to focus on trying to acquire it in manageable portions, pursuant to some type of strategy. To focus on the center of the feature, where surface water is present year-round, and where it would be most difficult to develop, and where acquisition would presumably be easiest, would be one strategy to begin any overall acquisition effort. The goal of this type strategy could be to build a solid core of contiguous parcels in order to have a project that would be more substantive in terms of future applications for grant dollars. Another consideration might be to focus on the parcels around the edge that are the most threatened by development, saving efforts towards those less threatened for the future. The downside of this strategy would be the potential of acquiring non-contiguous parcels that would be harder to manage and would be riskier in terms of potential to form a contiguous area.

It is recommended that the CCLAAC have discussion and public input to determine how to proceed and then direct staff as to how to best approach outreach efforts resulting from the nomination of Winchester Head.

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