



MINUTES – July 15, 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND ACQUISITION PANEL (ELAP)

Minutes of the
Environmental Land Acquisition Panel
Indian River County Administration Complex,
Building A, Commission Chambers
1801 27th Street, Vero Beach, FL
5:30 PM Tuesday, July 15, 2025

9 members/6 for quorum

1. Call to Order

Chair Roland DeBlois called the July 15, 2025, meeting of the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel (ELAP) to order at 5:30 PM.

A full recording of this meeting is available in the office of the Board of County Commissioners.

2. Roll Call

Members Present:

Heather Stapleton	Natural Resources Representative
Roland DeBlois	Planning or Engineering Representative
John Orcutt	Real Estate or Finance Representative
Daniel Bott	District 3 Appointee
Patrick Pitts	District 4 Appointee
Joseph Earman	Commissioner, BCC Liaison

Members Absent:

Jeff Beal	Natural Resources Representative (Resigned)
Samantha McGee	District 1 Appointee
Janice Broda	District 2 Appointee
James Connaughton	District 5 Appointee

Others Present:

Wendy Swindell	Conservation Lands Manager
Beth Powell	Director - Parks, Recreation & Conservation
Kimberly K. Moirano	BCC Recording Secretary
CE Swindell	Public
Chris Hicks	Attorney

Minimum Quorum requirements were not met.

4. Discussion Items

a. Discussion of overview of all of the willing seller properties

Ms. Wendy Swindell discussed the last two willing seller properties from the second and third nomination periods: the Indian River Drive Property and the Two Dollar Bluff Property. The “Indian River Drive Property” consists of two parcels that have been combined into one project. The property is located off of Indian River Drive near Sebastian city limits. It abuts the County's Kroegel Homestead conservation area. It's about 5.9 acres and the current zoning is RM 6, multi-family residential. There are multiple structures on the property, one being Paul Kroegel's original home and various personal items. The structure is somewhat in disrepair. There's also a 1900's home that a caretaker lives in and one or two small barns. The majority of the property is mature oaks with a semi-open understory. A restoration opportunity on the site would be driven towards maritime or coastal hammock.

Eighty percent of the Indian River Drive parcel was part of what was Barker's Bluff, an archaeological midden. The property is listed as Priority 4 primarily, likely because of the fact that it's been disturbed. Corridors and greenways: the property fronts the Indian River lagoon. It abuts the Kroegel Homestead conservation area and is across from the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. What is interesting about this assemblage is it would preserve the homestead of Paul Kroegel, the first refuge manager of the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, being the first such refuge in the United States. There is a dock on the property projecting far into the lagoon, probably because of shallow water and distance to the navigable part of the waterway.

Purchase need: this is an upland track that's along the Indian River Lagoon, so it is vulnerable to be converted into a higher intensity residential use.

Cooperative acquisition: given the current economic climate, that is something we have to navigate as we move through a project.

Two Dollar Bluff Property Environmental Report indicates the property is about 2.75 acres on the west side of the lagoon, on the north side of the Wabasso causeway. The current zoning is RM 6. There are homes to the north of the property. Ms. Swindell stated she did have a meeting with Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) staff several weeks back to talk about the Causeway itself in relation to this parcel. She mentioned to FDOT that the parcel was part of the ELAP nomination. FDOT is planning improvements to the Causeway, adding a five-foot bike lane on either side. They're either going to have to fill more of the adjacent areas or they're going to have to install retaining walls or perhaps bridge the entire area with an under- bridge park. FDOT staff indicated that design and engineering, however, is a long way off.

Potential habitat: the Two Dollar Bluff property has been cleared and fairly well denuded of any native vegetation: it's generally a clear lot. Corridors and greenways: it's on the Indian River Lagoon, not directly adjacent to any other conservation areas. Landscape and water resources show clearly there are wetlands on the site.

Purchase needs versus the alternative: the areas to the north of the Two Dollar Bluff property have been turned into home sites. There is an archaeological aspect to the site that may or may not impede development. Their current asking price is \$260,000.

Vulnerability: as with anything along the west side of the Indian River Lagoon that is upland, the property is vulnerable to development. The archaeological aspect of the parcel would not eliminate any potential development, but a developer would certainly have to be very careful about how you develop to

consider the archaeological aspects to make sure that all the local and state requirements are met.

Site management: the Two Dollar Bluff property abuts the lagoon so there is an option for trying to improve the shoreline as a natural buffer to the lagoon.

Cooperative acquisition: no funding partner has currently been identified; this is something that will be looked into as we move through the process.

It has been established that the Two Dollar Bluff property meets the minimum criteria because of the lagoon frontage.

On another topic, Mr. DeBlois inquired as to what happens with a previous (first) cycle project if an owner wasn't a willing seller but now potentially is willing to entertain an offer. Ms. Swindell stated the property owners never have their name off of the list unless they've asked to be removed from the list. There would be a lag time if a property owner decided to become a willing seller due to time needed for due diligence, such as environmental reports, to be presented to ELAP.

One such property that was on the first cycle of projects that may now have an owner willing to entertain an offer is the "Hobart Scrub" property. Mr. Nick Schrode from AI South Coast, which is a commercial real estate brokerage firm, introduced himself. They represent RSG Bureau, LLC. They own the 156-acre "Hobart Scrub" property that has been on the market and is currently pending with contingencies. Pulte is under contract on this property. They do have a PD Application currently pending with the Indian River County Growth Management & Planning Department. Their zoning is RM 6. There are a lot of gopher tortoises on the property. They have had biologists look at it to quantify that. Ms. Swindell stated that when this property was nominated, we did not do a lot of the ecological review. Mr. Schrode stated a lot of that might be available through the development process. They've had environmental assessments that were done for that development so they're part of public record. He would consider talking to the County. He stated they cannot engage in negotiations because they're under contract with Pulte. He stated he had a signed Listing Agreement to sell this property, and they are currently under contract to sell it to someone else and if that doesn't go through, there will still be a desire to sell it.

Staff explained that the ELAP processes are that the panel listens to when the staff presents the environmental information and the properties get ranked. The ranking process is that the members all go independently and then they submit their information to staff and then staff assimilate all of that information and that then that ranked list comes back, and we tier the properties to see the tiers are all falling out. Mr. DeBlois thought that procedurally there's two potential ways to go. One is that it has come to our attention. We could fold it into the current review of parcels. Say we had the information that's already been done on the environmental aspects of it as presented to the panel in the next monthly meeting. There is also an emergency acquisition review when a property is eminently potentially being developed. From his perspective the cleanest way to just move it forward would be just to fold it into the reviews. Ms. Swindell stated she didn't know that staff would necessarily need a motion and all of that because we already have this as a nominated parcel for us to just assimilate all of that information that's already existing in the public record and present that at the next meeting. Mr. DeBlois stated everything 's already queued up except for the fact that they didn't rank it last cycle. Just fold it in and we can get the information for the next meeting and then include it in the evaluations under this cycle. Ms. Swindell stated we don't have a quorum tonight and we had already wanted to have quorum to make a motion about the period 2 and period 3 for the ranking. So maybe we just do all that at the next meeting and hope that we have a quorum at that time. Mr. DeBlois asked if there's a consensus among the members here to move in that direction. Commissioner Earman thought that we should ask legal, but he thought this is a very interesting property and he thought we would be missing out if we didn't. If the potential exists to acquire it, if they're willing to talk to us, he thought we needed to listen. Attorney Chris Hicks stated that there were some legal issues regarding interference. He stated he wanted to look into some aspects. As far as looking into all the information on it there is nothing wrong with that but giving it a priority because it's

pending with Planning & Development would need to be looked into. Ms. Swindell stated we can proceed with putting together for the next meeting just a summary of the ecological and other information that's available from the public record on that because we're not making any decisions. We're just presenting information at that point. She stated the issue for the environmental lands program is they're looking for the parcels that best match the resolution that the board passed with criteria for habitat and water protection and conservation. We're looking for the best environmental parcels. Procedurally, there is guidance through the state statutes. Multiple appraisals are obtained to support a fair market value. The purpose of this panel is to make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. Ms. Swindell stated her plan was just to come back to the next meeting with a summary of the site itself and then hopefully at that point we'll have some clarity.

b. Discussion of upcoming project ranking meeting

Ms. Swindell stated she was hoping that we were going to have quorum tonight because we were supposed to change our date and make our motion about combining Period 2 and Period 3 but clearly, we don't have the ability to do that. During the first ranking period we got some feedback on the criteria. Ms. Swindell indicated that the Environmental Lands Program guide is written with each of these criteria described but there is some latitude in there for subjectivity. If something simply doesn't make sense but it looks like it should be on paper, she felt that we shouldn't really be ranking it so strictly. She explained if there's a parcel in particular when we get to the point where we're getting close to ranking that may have some trickiness relative to the matrix, the Panel should probably try and talk about that as a group. She suggested maybe going through the matrix again with the current nominations and doing own preliminary rankings and see if you are having any kind of issues with that ELAP could discuss and clarify when we do get to the final ranking process.

5. Public Comment:

No public comment.

6. Next Meeting:

The next scheduled meeting of ELAP is September 16, 2025, at 5:30 PM in Building B, Room B1-501.

7. Adjournment: Chair Roland DeBlois adjourned the meeting at 6:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly K. Moirano

A copy of the full meeting recording is kept on file in the office of the Board of County Commissioners.