

SWFRPC Resolution #2014-04

**A RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL
SUPPORTING THE PURCHASE OF CORKSCREW REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM
WATERSHED (CREW) PROJECT LANDS, ESPECIALLY THE GARGIULO LAND TRUST
PARCELS, UNDER THE FLORIDA FOREVER PROGRAM**

WHEREAS, Florida Forever is Florida's premier conservation and recreation lands acquisition program, authorized pursuant to a blueprint for conserving natural resources and renewing Florida's commitment to conserve the state's natural and cultural heritage, implementing Section 259.105, Florida Statutes, the Florida Forever Act;

WHEREAS, Florida Forever replaced Preservation 2000, the largest public land acquisition program of its kind in the United States;

WHEREAS, of the approximately 9.9 million acres managed for conservation in Florida, more than 2.5 million acres were purchased under the Florida Forever and Preservation 2000 programs;

WHEREAS, since its inception in July 2001 to the present, the Florida Forever program has acquired more than 707,740 acres of land with \$2.89 billion;

WHEREAS, there is a project proposed for purchase under Florida Forever, the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) project, which contains excellent examples of cypress swamps and marshes, and will connect the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve with the National Audubon Society's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, thereby securing important habitat for the Florida panther and Florida black bear;

WHEREAS, purchase of the CREW project will conserve connections between three conservation areas, provide critical protection for rare wildlife, and protect the flow of water feeding the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand, and other areas;

WHEREAS, the large, interconnected swamps of southwest Florida must be preserved if critically imperiled wildlife such as the Florida panther and black bear are to survive;

WHEREAS, the project is designated as a wildlife and environmental area, with such uses as hiking, camping, and environmental education;

WHEREAS, the Gargiulo Land Trust (GLT) property is comprised of two parcels of land totaling 619.93 acres adjacent to Immokalee Road in North Central Collier County, which are located within the Florida Forever project boundary;

WHEREAS, the GLT property is an essential remaining parcel for the South Florida Water Management Districts CREW project;

WHEREAS, the GLT property is currently for sale for potential development;

WHEREAS, development of the GLT property would have a significantly negative impact on regional water resources, since surface run-off drains into Corkscrew Canal North #2 and eventually outfalls into Wiggins Pass and Naples Bay;

WHEREAS, the GLT parcel is primary Florida panther habitat and within the Core Foraging Area for an important nesting colony of endangered wood storks;

WHEREAS, the natural wetland communities and agricultural ditches within the GLT property provide important wetland functions supporting foraging of endangered wood storks nesting within the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary along with other rare species including the little blue heron, snowy egret, yellow-crowned night-heron, tri-colored heron, and great egret, in addition to rare upland species such as the endangered Florida panther and Florida black bear;

WHEREAS, restoration of the GLT property holds the potential to improve water quality in the overburdened Golden Gate Main and East Naples basins by storing water on site that currently flows through the Big Cypress Basin drainage network starting at the Corkscrew Canal North, with eventual outfalls in Naples Bay and Wiggins Pass and out into the Gulf; protection and restoration of the GLT could help ameliorate the high nutrient loads and high water volumes experienced in these two sensitive areas;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council supports the purchase of CREW lands, and the Gargiulo Land Trust parcels in particular, by the Florida Forever Program.

DULY ADOPTED by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council this 14 day of August, 2014.

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL



Teresa Heitmann (for)

Teresa Heitmann, Chair

M. Wuerstle

Margaret Wuerstle, Executive Director