

Marco Island Burrowing Owl Starter Burrow Incentive Program

Summary: City of Marco Island City Council has directed the Beach and Coastal Resources Advisory Council to investigate and develop specific elements of an incentive program for private landowners in the City to attract and sustainably maintain the presence of nesting Florida burrowing owls on their properties. The primary means of attracting breeding pairs of owls is appropriate installation of starter burrows. This incentive program was described by Councilor Jared Grifoni in general terms and includes a pilot program of financial incentive as well as collaboration and technical assistance from Audubon Western Everglades' Owl Watch Program and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Another important element of the conceptual incentive program is creation of an FWC Safe Harbor Agreement between COMI, FWC and AWE that will give assurances to landowners that successfully attracting Florida Burrowing Owls to their property will not penalize the landowner if circumstances change and at some point in the future they wish to return their land to the "baseline condition" without owls. BACRAC will host a workshop with FWC, AWE, COMI staff, and other stakeholders to consider the details of the starter burrow incentive program and its necessary components.

Components to be considered:

1. AWE Owl Watch Program – monitoring and data collection and BUOW Starter Burrow Program, plus research and policy support. This includes starter burrow siting criteria, staffing for installation of starter burrows, maintenance requirements, and monitoring and reporting methods.
2. COMI Pilot Starter Burrow Incentive Program – staff and financial support for private lands participation in AWE starter burrow program.
3. FWC Safe Harbor Agreement with COMI – legal state program absolving private landowners from regulatory penalties and costs for participating in the AWE BUOW Starter Burrow Program.
4. Incidental Take Permit (ITP) vs. Safe Harbor on starter burrows
5. Outreach and education
6. Enforcement
7. Starter Burrow Agreement with Landowner Participant, as part of COMI Incentive Program and FWC Safe Harbor Program – drafting
8. FWC-COMI-AWE Safe Harbor Agreement - drafting