

## **Conservation Collier Update**

### **Marco Island City Councilman Rich Blonna**

Conservation Collier was created in 2003, after a November 2002 voter referendum in which voters approved creating a taxpayer-funded conservation land acquisition program. To pay for the program, taxpayers agreed to a property tax increase of up to .25 mills for up to ten (10) years and bonding for up to \$75 million. CC's mission is “ *To acquire, preserve, restore and maintain vital and significant threatened natural lands, forest, upland and wetland communities located in Collier County, for the benefit of present and future generations.* ”

The first preserve ever created by Conservation Collier is located on Marco Island. The first section (1.77 acres) was acquired on July 30, 2004. An additional .68 acres was acquired on June 18, 2007. The total cost for this preserve was \$2,234,000 (\$1,347,500 for the 1.77-acre parcel and \$886,500 for the .68-acre parcel). Unfortunately, that was the first and last property on Marco Island acquired by Conservation Collier.

As many of you know, one of my campaign promises in 2020 was to support the re-authorization of the Conservation Collier referendum and, if passed, to try to get as many properties on Marco island preserved as part of this program as possible. In 2020 I got elected and the citizens of Marco Island overwhelmingly voted to re-authorize the program for an additional 10 years.

During my first year in office, working independently and with Audubon of the Western Everglades and a few key citizen stakeholders, we identified close to 30 Marco Island properties that were high value in terms of protecting native species (particularly Gopher Tortoises and Burrowing Owls) and historical and archaeological sites. However, over half of these property owners did not wish to enroll their properties in the Conservation Collier acquisition program. Fortunately the rest of the properties moved forward and were given support from the Marco Island City Council and District 1 Commissioner Rick Lo Castro. Commissioner Lo Castro was instrumental in moving the Marco Island properties forward despite their high price compared to the majority of the other, more rural Collier County properties that also came before the Collier County Board of Commissioners.

There are seven basic steps involved in preserving land under the Conservation Collier referendum:

1. Owners or other citizens nominate properties for acquisition by Conservation Collier.
2. Conservation Collier staff contact owners to verify that they are “willing sellers” who want to have their property evaluated for possible acquisition.
3. Field environmentalists representing the Conservation Collier Land Acquisitions Committee (CCLAC) perform a detailed assessment of the property to evaluate whether or not it meets specific criteria related to habitat, wildlife, wetlands, passive and active recreational potential, access, and other items.

4. Staff ranks the properties as A (highest priority), B, or C list parcels.
5. The CCLAAC Board confirms the rankings and sends the list to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) for their approval.
6. Approved properties are appraised and bids are offered to willing sellers.
7. The BCC approves the purchase of the approved properties.

As you can see, the process is comprehensive, takes over a year to complete, and can result in some willing sellers removing their properties from the process and selling them privately to developers.

Each year a new “Cycle” begins with a new batch of properties being reviewed. In 2020, my first year in office, Cycle 10 was underway. I have been involved in Cycles 10, 11, and most recently, Cycle 12. As mentioned, Cycles 10, 11, and 12 resulted in close to 30 properties being nominated and evaluated. Of those, nine properties made it to Conservation Collier’s A, B, or C lists. These properties were appraised and are in the final stages of negotiation with the willing sellers.

**Cycle 10 & 11 (2021 & 2022) Marco Island Properties**

<b>Property</b>	<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Status</b>
Addison Fischer Trust	A	Initial Ranking
WISC (Inlet DR)	A	Initial Ranking
Agua Colina	A	Initial Ranking
WISC (Dade Ct.)	C	Initial Ranking
WISC (Inlet DR)	A	Initial Ranking
Agua Colina	B	Initial Ranking
Annercy Marco LLC (4 lots)	A	Initial Ranking
Diane Chestnut	A	Initial Ranking
South Terra Corp.	A	Initial Ranking
S & B Properties of Marco LLC	A	Initial Ranking
Otter Mound Preserve Khoury	A	Initial Ranking

**Current Status 4/17/23**

Addison Fischer Trust	A	Owner not willing seller
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WISC (Inlet DR)	A	Offer Made & Accepted
Agua Colina	A	Appraisals received, under review
WISC (Dade Ct.)	C	CCLAC wasn't interested
WISC (Inlet DR)	A	Offer Accepted, Awaiting Closing
Agua Colina	B	Appraisals received, under review
Annercy Marco LLC (4 lots)	A	Appraisals received, under review
Diane Chestnut	A	Appraisals being obtained
South Terra Corp.	A	Appraisals being obtained
S & B Properties of Marco LLC	A	Appraisals being obtained
Otter Mound Preserve Khoury	A	Property sold privately

I will continue to follow the progress of the Cycle 10, 11, and 12 properties under review. I am working on identifying a new group of properties to be nominated for Cycle 12 and 13. I will keep you posted on the progress of our Marco Island properties.

Sincerely,

Councilman Blonna