

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for 2020: DDWS and refuge representatives cheer the 20/20 vote outcome: DDWS board member Bill Valerian, DDWS president Doris Hardy, DDWS immediate past president John McCabe, DDWS vice president Mike Baldwin, and Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik.

Caption for WulfertProperty: The new Wulfert Tract is outlined on this map.

‘Ding’ Darling’s Wulfert land acquisition a success

By unanimous vote, Lee County Commissioners on Tuesday, March 21, gave their final approval to funding \$1.4 million toward the purchase of 8.15 acres on Sanibel Island’s Wulfert Road, a crucial wildlife corridor for the J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. As part of a unique partnership and collaboration, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) raised the remaining \$600,000 of the \$2 million needed to purchase the parcel, which lies between Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) land and the refuge.

The refuge, by agreement with the county, will maintain the property, which provides habitat for 80 different land and marine species that live or feed on or near this property. The county funding comes from its Conservation 20/20 program, which voters helped create to preserve sensitive environmental lands locally.

“We are thrilled that the commissioners voted to use Conservation 20/20 funds to purchase this land, and that the society could help to make it possible,” said Doris Hardy, DDWS board president. “A special thanks to our past president and island resident, John McCabe, for his time and dedication in working on this collaborative approach -- a win-win for everyone, including the wildlife who need this land to survive and thrive.”

If not preserved by the refuge, the land could have been developed with as many as five dwellings and one major boat dock with direct access into Pine Island Sound, as already approved by the City of Sanibel.

Species that would have been seriously threatened by development of the uplands, mangrove, and estuarine habitat include the gopher tortoise, American oystercatcher, black skimmer, little blue heron, reddish egret, mangrove cuckoo, Florida manatee, smalltooth sawfish, and green and loggerhead sea turtle.

In 2013, DDWS successfully completed a \$1.4 million land acquisition campaign for the historical Woodring Homestead, which protected the water entrance to the Refuge on Tarpon Bay. In late 2015, it accepted a land donation of 9.1 acres near Clam Bayou.

“The board feels it’s important to help the refuge preserve as much of the dwindling island habitat as it can, since federal budget cuts preclude the refuge from government acquisitions in this area,” said Hardy. “We are extremely grateful to the donors who help us meet these goals.”

Anyone interested in contributing to future land acquisition campaigns should contact DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller at [239-292-0566](tel:239-292-0566) or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at [239-292-0566](tel:239-292-0566) or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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