

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: [images available upon request]

Lee County commissioners approve Wulfert Bayous Conservation 20/20 contribution

On Aug. 20, the Lee County Board of Commissioners voted in favor of supporting the acquisition of the 68-acre Wulfert Bayous parcel located on Sanibel Island. The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) and the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge have been working with the county on the collaboration for more than a year, to make the acquisition a reality.

Lee County's Conservation 20/20 program will fund \$6.5 million of the total \$9.5 million cost to purchase the property. DDWS has raised the additional \$3 million through private donations. The refuge, for its part in the collaboration, will manage the property as part of its complex.

The city of Sanibel had already approved development of the land with up to 28 new homes. To preserve the tract from such development, DDWS, in February 2019, kicked off its public campaign to preserve the acreage.

Located along Wulfert Road and Sanibel-Captiva Road and adjacent to refuge boundaries, the property is home to a number of species that would be seriously threatened by development of the habitat. The preserved acreage will also help protect water quality by maintaining its qualities as a natural filter.

The community quickly stepped up to support the land's preservation, meeting, by June 2019, the \$3 million private philanthropic goal needed to help make the purchase possible.

The conservation and planned restoration of the Wulfert Bayous property will forward the goals and objectives of the Gulf of Mexico and the Greater Everglades Ecosystem restoration plans. In addition to 16 acres of existing mangroves, Wulfert Bayous contains 15 acres of wetlands that can be restored and enhanced to create a wading bird colony of roseate spoonbills, wood storks, white ibis, and other egrets and herons, while serving as a natural filter for water.

“We were simply overjoyed to hear the commissioners’ decision,” said John McCabe, who led the Wulfert Bayous acquisition effort for DDWS. “Having partnered with the 20/20 program back in 2013 with the purchase of the Woodring Point property on Sanibel and again in 2017 for the 8.15-acre Wulfert parcel, we know what a win-win proposition this turns out to be for all parties concerned.”

As with the other two properties, the refuge will manage the Wulfert Bayous acreage in return for the county’s role in acquiring it.

To donate or pledge funds to restore the Wulfert Bayous’ 68 acres, donors should contact DDWS executive director Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232 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 profits.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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