

News Release

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HABITAT PLAN SPARKS UNPRECEDENTED PRIVATELY-FUNDED WILDLIFE CROSSING

VERO BEACH, Fla. – Ground will be broken on Florida’s first privately-funded wildlife crossing Dec. 7. Construction on the crossing -- which is costing \$1.27 million to build -- should be completed by April 2011. This crossing is one of the hallmarks of a pioneering U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service habitat conservation plan (HCP) for a new 240-acre mixed used development in Collier County called City Gate.

The HCP offers strategies to mitigate the impacts to endangered Florida panthers and red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) posed by City Gate. Under the terms of the HCP the developers (850 NWN, LLC and CG II, LLC) agreed to:

- Substantially fund a study to identify wildlife crossing sites to reduce Florida panther vehicular mortality in Collier County;
- Build a privately-funded wildlife crossing along County Road 846 in the Okaloachoochee Slough [eastern rural Collier County], a location known for high Florida panther vehicular mortality;
- Acquire, manage for a five-year mitigation period and preserve into perpetuity 102 acres of Florida panther and occupied red-cockaded woodpecker habitat; and
- Restore 324 acres of Florida panther and red-cockaded woodpecker habitat in south Florida where five RCW recruitment clusters will be established.

“The privately-funded wildlife crossing is the groundbreaking result of an unprecedented and creative public-private partnership. It shows what can happen when developers, conservation groups and government agencies work together,” said Paul Souza, Field Supervisor of the

Service's South Florida Ecological Services Office. "The county had no plans to modify this road, which has been very deadly for panthers. The crossing wouldn't have happened without the forging of creative partnerships that emerged from the HCP."

Groups such as the Florida Wildlife Federation and Collier County Audubon Society, as well as agencies such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the South Florida Water Management District and Collier County worked with the Service and the developers to coordinate this plan. Barron Collier Companies, owner of the conservation land on both sides of the road, provided essential cooperation for the installation of the wildlife crossing. In addition, Tom Logan of Breedlove, Dennis and Associates and Roy DeLotelle of DeLotelle and Guthrie, were instrumental in the success of the HCP.

"This HCP provides so many benefits for Florida Panthers, red-cockaded woodpeckers and other wildlife," said Nancy Payton, southwest Florida field representative for the Florida Wildlife Federation. "It's been a pleasure working with the folks at City Gate. They're committed to doing what's best for our wildlife. Both the Service and City Gate must be commended for running an inclusive process that speaks well of the use of an HCP to reduce impacts to endangered species' habitats."

Payton was especially complimentary of the developers' outreach efforts to the environmental community. "They worked hard to include us in the planning process and kept us in the loop on a regular basis," she said.

Attorney Roger B. Rice represents the developers. He said they decided to work with the environmental groups and the Service early on because of the woodpeckers at the site. Later, they discovered the development could also pose potential impacts to Florida panthers. But that didn't deter them. The developers agreed to incorporate conservation and mitigation measures for Florida panther into their HCP.

"We set about on a course to do the right thing for Florida's wildlife back in April 2004 when we had our first meeting with the environmental groups," Rice said. "The crossing is significant

as private mitigation monies may well be the only source of future funds to build panther crossings needed on less-traveled roads not scheduled for widening or related improvements.”

The construction plans for this wildlife crossing were prepared by Davidson Engineering, Inc. of Naples, Fla. Boness, Inc., also of Naples, is overseeing the actual construction.

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Editor’s note: The groundbreaking ceremony will take place Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2010 at 2 p.m. at the wildlife crossing site on CR-846 east of the town of Immokalee in rural Collier County, approximately three miles west of the Hendry County line.