

## **Beaches of Ft. Myers & Sanibel to Address Habitat Loss and Climate Change**

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### **The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel, The Conservation Fund launch partnership to offset carbon footprint of meetings, restore habitat for wildlife**

LEE COUNTY, FL – To help address habitat loss and climate change, The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida is making donations to The Conservation Fund's Go Zero<sup>SM</sup> program to offset the carbon footprint of meetings in the destination. The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), which markets the destination for leisure travel and meetings, is the first to offer such a partnership with the Fund – one that is designed to serve as a model for the nation.

Specifically, the VCB has agreed to donate to The Conservation Fund 100 percent of the cost of offsetting the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that result from any event within the destination, including attendee travel, facility energy use and off-site functions. The VCB already offsets its own events with the Fund and is encouraging meetings properties and meeting planners to do the same. Participation is simple and free for planners. The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel provides interested planners with a worksheet, which the Fund uses to estimate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with the meeting. Once complete, the VCB will make a donation to the Fund to offset those emissions. The worksheet is available by visiting the destination's meetings Web site at [www.FortMyersSanibelMeetings.com](http://www.FortMyersSanibelMeetings.com) or by request from any participating meetings property.

The VCB already has offset the carbon footprint of several meetings in the destination, including the annual Everglades Coalition conference held earlier this year at South Seas Island Resort. In addition, the VCB has offset its own carbon footprint for fiscal year 2007 encompassing items such as air and auto mileage by staff members, energy output of its headquarters office, solid waste output, and electricity usage.

"Given our organization's mission of balancing tourism growth with the protection of our natural resources, we have a long history of responsible environmental stewardship," said Tamara Pigott, VCB deputy director. "From our beach and shoreline initiatives to our ongoing conservation efforts, we remain keenly dedicated to do all we can to minimize our environmental

footprint. Fostering green meetings is a logical next step for us."

"Often, the places that travelers visit are also the most vulnerable," said The Conservation Fund's Jena Thompson. "The Fund commends The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel for its industry leading approach to promoting eco-friendly travel. Together with the VCB and the meeting planning industry, we can help tackle two of our planet's most pressing challenges -- habitat loss and climate change -- while still supporting sustainable economic development."

In addition to its new partnership with The Conservation Fund, the VCB has operated a long-standing Beach and Shoreline program to foster resource protection along the destination's 590 miles of coastline. Recently, it has formed a Green Team of key staff members who look for more green efficiencies at the VCB and find ways to help hoteliers go green, including promoting the state's green lodging certification program and encouraging the use of native plants and flowers for meeting room decor. The Green Team also seeks volunteer opportunities for VCB staff members to contribute to local environmental initiatives.

Moreover, the organization is reducing waste by eliminating paper and Styrofoam cups; recycling paper, aluminum cans and bottles; using recycled copy paper; car pooling to events; utilizing one hybrid vehicle; renting hybrid vehicles whenever possible when traveling; and using all fluorescent lighting. "Green meetings make good business sense," said Pigott. "They save money by conserving resources, and they create and enhance an organization's competitive advantage and reputation. Plus, green meetings help preserve the host destination for future generations to enjoy."

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel offers a variety of meeting room options via its many hotels and resorts. A total of 256,129 square feet of meeting space, encompassing 167 meeting rooms, is available throughout the county, with area properties offering from 600 square feet up to 73,000 square feet at one venue.

There also are meeting options in myriad off-site venues, including one-of-a-kind museums, parks and other attractions. The area offers a full range of properties from inexpensive motels to idyllic cottages to condominiums and full-service resort properties. Many are located within 30 minutes of Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), featuring 21 carriers making 130 daily non-stop flights to 37 domestic and five international destinations.

For details on how to plan a meeting on The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel and to participate in The Conservation Fund partnership to offset CO2 emissions for the meeting, visit [www.FortMyersSanibelMeetings.com](http://www.FortMyersSanibelMeetings.com) or call 1-800-237-6444.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres.

