

CONSERVATION 20/20 PROGRAM BUYS LAND IN BONITA SPRINGS

The Lee County Conservation 20/20 Program purchased four acres of conservation land along the north and south sides of Oak Creek. It is located in the City of Bonita Springs on the west side of Matheson Avenue, south of Dean Street, and north of Bonita Beach Road. (See attached location map.) In June 2008, the City of Bonita Springs adopted a Resolution of Support for its acquisition by the Conservation 20/20 Program and offered to restore and manage the property. The Conservation 20/20 Program provided the funds for the purchase of the property.

According to local historians, Oak Creek was once the Imperial River's major tributary, and many pioneer families settled along its banks. Just a few decades ago, boats traveled up Oak Creek. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection designated Oak Creek as an Outstanding Florida Waterway in recognition of its importance as a tributary to the health of Estero Bay. Native species in this oak palm hammock include slash pines, cypress, live oak, sable palm, laurel oak, native ferns, bromeliads, resurrection ferns, coral vine and Spanish moss.

The owners wanted \$1.2 million for the property, but the Division of County Lands, the County Office which negotiates land purchases for the County, was able to acquire the property for \$400,000.

The Conservation 20/20 program buys environmentally important lands for preservation. It's funded by a property tax, which was approved by referendum in 1996. It is 50 cents for every \$1,000 of taxable property value. Since the first purchase in 1997, the County's Conservation 20/20 program has made 102 land purchases and the land inventory now stands at 22,392 acres.