

## **CONSERVATION 20/20 PROGRAM HITS 100 CONSERVATION LAND ADDED TO CREW IN BONITA SPRINGS**

The Lee County Conservation 20/20 Program purchased its 100<sup>th</sup> property today.

The 15-acre parcel (Nomination 428) is located at the northeast corner of Terry Street and Bonita Grande Drive in Bonita Springs and catty corner from the Pine Lake Preserve, a 131-acre Conservation 20/20 acquisition in 2000. (See attached location map.)

The acquisition of this property adds to the protection of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). The CREW is a vast 60,000 acre area of interconnected swamps that spans Lee and Collier Counties. Its preservation is essential if such wildlife as the Florida panther and black bear are to survive. It also provides aquifer recharge, natural flood protection and water purification. About 15,500 acres of CREW lie in Lee County; an area that locals call the Flint Pen Strand after the Flint family who ran cattle there.

In 1989, the CREW Land & Water Trust was established as a nonprofit organization to coordinate the land acquisition, land management, and public use of the CREW. That same year, the Lee County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) dedicated 0.2 mil for 3 years (\$9 million) to acquire land from willing sellers in the Flint Pen Strand. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) provided matching acquisition funds and has taken the lead as land manager. Twenty years later, and with various other state and local funding programs, the vast majority (13,330 acres) of the Flint Pen area has been acquired.

Most remaining parcels to acquire in the Flint Pen Strand are small, platted lots from the 1960's Sun Coast Acres land development. Although it is time consuming to buy small parcels, some individual lots are strategic for management and the collective whole is important to complete. In 2007, the CREW Trust initiated a multi-party agreement to try again to buy remaining lots. The Conservancy of SW Florida sought willing sellers for the Lee County Conservation 20/20 environmental land acquisition program, and the SFWMD agreed to manage new acquisitions. This acquisition is the first success from that effort.

The owners wanted \$750,000 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 \$150,000.

The Conservation 20/20 program buys environmentally important lands for preservation. It is 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 100 land purchases, and the land inventory now stands at 22,508 acres.