

LEE COUNTY EXPANDS SIX MILE CYPRESS SLOUGH PRESERVE

Lee County added 56 acres to the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve today bringing the total acres of the preserve up to nearly 2,500 acres. The acquisition was funded by the Lee County Conservation 20/20 Program. The parcel is located in the eastern arm of the Slough just west of I-75 and north of Penzance Road.

Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve is Lee County's most visited preserve. When the first protective purchases were made, this unique natural feature was in a rural setting. Thirty years later it is in the City of Fort Myers surrounded by urban development.

This acquisition contains both uplands and wetlands. The upland wet season refuges are needed for larger upland species to escape the rising water, such as panthers, black bears, bobcat, deer, fox, and other mammals. This acquisition protects one of the last undeveloped upland areas around Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve. The area is also home to freshwater wetland species such as wide ranging wading birds, otters, alligators and many other types of wetlands-loving wildlife.

The Slough is one of the oldest natural lands preservation projects in Lee County. The original preservation effort was begun by a high school group known as the "Monday Group". The Monday Group's work led to voters passing a tax to create the first land acquisition project in Lee County. Since then, acquisitions have been made by the South Florida Water Management District and Lee County. The District's land acquisition funds now focus on the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed and Everglades, so Lee County has been using the Conservation 20/20 Program to continue the project.

The owners wanted \$6,725,000 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 \$1,500,000.

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 Lee County Conservation 20/20 program has made 101 land purchases and the land inventory now stands at 22,564 acres.