Lee Board of County Commissioners closes on landmark preserve purchase

Fort Myers, FL, Dec. 5, 2017 – Lee Board of County Commissioners has completed the purchase of about 4,000 acres in southern Lee County – commonly known as Edison Farms – as a Conservation 20/20 preservation site.

The $42.4 million purchase ranks as the second-largest single parcel purchased by the Board since the Bob Janes Preserve, which is 5,620 acres.

County commissioners have made preserving Edison Farms a top legislative priority for the past two years and voted unanimously for the purchase on Sept. 19.

It is an example of the type of environmentally critical land that the Conservation 20/20 program was created to protect and that voters overwhelmingly endorsed with an 84 percent majority late last year.

Edison Farms is adjacent to Hidden Cypress Preserve, a Conservation 20/20 preserve, and lands maintained by the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed. The land includes habitat for listed species such as the Florida panther and the woodstork.

The acquisition of the Edison Farms parcel will:
- Protect a significant, diverse population of wildlife and plant communities.
- Assist with the distribution of freshwater flows in a natural wetland slough system and adjacent uplands that are part of the headwaters to Estero Bay, the state’s first aquatic preserve.
- Help sustain the region’s groundwater levels, a vital component to the area’s drinking water supply.
- Facilitate the restoration of historic flow-ways in the region, providing flood relief to those impacted from the existing altered system.
- Provide opportunities for nature-based recreation in the southern part of Lee County.

Next steps include an inventory and assessment of the land for restoration options and public access options. The Conservation Land Acquisition and Stewardship Advisory Committee (CLASAC), which was a valuable partner in the acquisition process, will continue to provide input on management of the site.

Here is what Lee County Commissioners said about the Edison Farms purchase:

District 1 John Manning:
“This purchase, many years on the horizon, is as monumental for the environment of Lee County as there has ever been by a local government in Florida. I have been blessed to have helped start Conservation 20/20 and now this acquisition is the pinnacle of the accomplishments of this program.”

District 2 / Chairman Cecil Pendergrass:
“It’s an exciting time for Lee County and the Conservation 20/20 program. For years, the county was unsuccessful in acquiring Edison Farms and I am proud to be a part of the current Board of County Commissioners that was successful in achieving this property for conservation. Edison Farms, roughly
4,000 acres, will serve as the second-largest public asset in Lee County and will ultimately deter urban sprawl."

District 3 / Vice Chairman Larry Kiker:
“Lee county citizens have been very consistent with their direction to Lee County: Purchase properties for preservation and conservation. As a result of this strategic purchase, future generations will enjoy and benefit from this historic accomplishment, a legacy for Lee County to be proud of.”

District 4 Commissioner Brian Hamman:
"From the moment I joined the board, my colleagues and I have been working to make this purchase happen in a way that makes sense to the taxpayers of Lee County. With this purchase, the current commissioners have preserved our most sensitive environmental lands in the DRGR, essentially going from zero to now having 80 percent in conservation. Opportunities like the purchase of Edison Farms are exactly what voters were thinking of when they approved, by an overwhelming majority, continuing our 20/20 program."

District 5 Frank Mann:
“In the many years I have been allowed to serve the citizens of Lee, preservation of environmentally sensitive lands has remained for me a personal priority. In all of the thousands of acres we have successfully saved for future generations, few would equal the size and quality of the Edison Farms purchase. This is a fantastic day for Lee County and its yet-to-arrive citizens of tomorrow."

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Note to media: Commissioners will be celebrating the closing at their regularly scheduled 9:30 a.m. meeting today. Or if you are unable to make it by 9:30, commissioners typically are available immediately following the BoCC meeting for interviews and comments.