

**MANATEE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS MANAGEMENT AND ACQUISITION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ELMAC)
REGULAR MEETING
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER, 5TH FLOOR, MANATEE ROOM
1112 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, Florida
MAY 4, 2026**

Present were:

Mason Gravley, Chairman
Kate Horne, Vice-Chairman
Mike Burton
Robert Brown
Scott Childress
Kyle Fisher
Richard Larsen
Ruth Lawler
Jonathan Lynch
Merrie Lynn Parker
Charles Richards
Scott Tussing

Absent were:

Eric DiSilvestro
Alyssa Gay

There are two vacant seats.

Also present was:

Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator
Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director
Kara Koenig, Environmental Lands Program Section Manager
Tal Siddique, Board of County Commissioner
Kendall Carson, Environmental Lands Program Coordinator
Caitlin Dixon, Board Clerk, Clerk of the Circuit Court
Vicki Tessmer, Board Records Supervisor, Clerk of the Circuit Court

Chairman Gravley called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

AGENDA

1. **WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Gravley welcomed all to the meeting.

2. **MINUTES**



A motion was made by Member Brown, seconded by Member Parker, and carried 13-0, with Members Gay and Member DiSilvestro absent, to approve the minutes of March 2, 2026.

Chairman Gravley, informed the committee about the Florida Wildlife Corridor expedition that took place in North Florida this year. During the expedition, a documentary focusing on elected officials was produced and is expected to be released in the fall. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) was one of the primary partners in the expedition.

 Vice-Chairman Horne, read the speech she delivered at the Arbor Day festivities.

3. **TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND (TPL) FEASIBILITY STUDY UPDATE**

 Will Abberger, Vice President and Director of Conservation Finance, used a slide presentation to review the role of the Trust for Public Land's (TPL) Conservation Finance Program, which focuses on creating and protecting public funding for land conservation, parks, and restoration through research, design, and the passage of ballot measures and legislation. He presented a map showing successful ballot measures supported by the Trust for Public Land.

Jessica Welch, Senior Conservation Research Analyst II, continued the slide presentation by reviewing the key steps for successful ballot measures, including feasibility research, a public opinion survey, program recommendations, ballot language development, and the campaign process. Feasibility research was conducted for Manatee County and included finance options, overview of the County's conservation program, fiscal capacity, election requirements, ballot language requirements, pathways to the ballot, best practices and election history. The focus is on four primary revenue sources available for conservation funding: bonds, bonds with additional property tax, property tax, and sales tax. The first option would be a bond, with a 4.5 percent interest rate for 20 years, costing the average homeowner in Manatee County \$35 a year. Bonds with additional property tax would levy a certain millage.

Mr. Abberger continued the presentation displaying a table of potential 2026 ballot measures for conservation measures in other jurisdictions. The next step is a public opinion survey, to gain an understanding if this viable for Manatee County.

 Discussion ensued regarding sales tax, advantages and disadvantages, acquiring properties, cannot use General Obligation (GO) bonds, appraisal process, utilizing the remaining bond amount, funds available in millage for conservation, increase purchasing compass, millage tax cut in the County, additional millage for conservation land, repercussions of increasing sales tax, bond more than what is being presented, escalation of property values, campaign management for the voters, appropriate election, methodology for voters response, deadline for check-ins, taxes used for good cause, verbiage on the ballot.

A motion was made by Member Parker, seconded by Member Horne, and carried 13-0, with Members Gay and DiSilvestro absent, to approve draft Feasibility Study.

4. **STAFF REPORTS**

 Kendall Carson, Environmental Lands Program Coordinator, utilized a slide presentation to review the type of trees planted for Arbor Day at Hidden Harbor Park and Ole Mae Sims Park, a plaque made in honor of late Commissioner Felts, and thanked property management for everything they did to help.

 Kara Koenig, Environmental Lands Program Section Manager, continued a slide presentation to review the Inspector General Audit, Conservation Easement funding, and possible cuts to the Florida Forever program.

5. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Mary Foreman, raised concerns about whether this is the appropriate time to place the measure on the ballot, noting that it could be in competition with an item the School Board of Manatee County plans to include this year.

There being no further citizen comment, Chairman Gravley closed citizen comment.

6. **COMMITTEE MEMBER APPOINTMENTS**

 Kara Koenig, Environmental Lands Program Section Manager, provided an update on committee membership, noting Member Searcy resigned, a current vacancy in the District 4 seat, upcoming term expirations in June 2026, and planned advertising in December 2026 for Districts 1, 2, 4, and 6 seats.

7. **CONSERVATION ACQUISITION CANDIDATE PROPERTIES**

 Nominated Lands

Kara Koenig, Environmental Lands Program Section Manager, presented a slide on the Quality Metal Fabricators (QMF) parcel, a 71-acre property surrounded by Duette Preserve. The property consists of mixed hardwood and coniferous areas, unimproved woodland pasture, wet prairie, and other surface waters. The parcel is located within the Lake Manatee watershed, and staff have not yet visited the site.

A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member Burton, and carried 13-0, with Members Gay and DiSilvestro absent, to direct staff to proceed with due diligence in anticipation of a purchase contract review and approval by the Board of County Commissioners for the QMF parcel.

 Discussion ensued regarding land use, forest cover, connection to Duette Preserve, and acreage for wildlife.

Ms. Koenig, noted the 2026 ELMAC Approved Candidate Properties, which include Pope Ranch, LMR Connector 1 and 2, City of Bradenton Scrub Parcel, and Taylor Grade Road are in the appraisal process.

Existing Candidate Property Updates

 Kara Koenig, Environmental Lands Division Manager, reviewed the following updates:

- Anson Road (557 acres) – \$13.9 million highest appraisal
- Mossy Island Ranch (438 acres)- County to be co-deed holder
- Thundercloud West (1,045 acres)- The Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP) anticipates an offer at the same time as Mossy Ranch, first quarter of 2026
- The Taylor Ranch (183 acres)- Awaiting Memorandum of Understanding from Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP)
- Sweet Bay Property (25 acres) – Appraisal to be revised to reflect the conservation easement

Candidate Property Prioritization

- Anson Road Properties
- City of Bradenton Scrub Habitat
- LMR Connector #1

- Pope Ranch
- Sweet Bay Property
- Taylor Grade
- QMF parcel

8. **PRIORITIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

 A motion was made earlier in the meeting. Motions made during meeting.

9. **NEW BUSINESS AND COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

Member Parker, requested additional details regarding the City of Bradenton Scrub Habitat.

 Member Burton, raised concerns regarding the Sweet Bay Property.

Discussion ensued regarding concerns with the County buying City of Bradenton properties, and the benefits of those properties, having a meeting in late June or early July, and the Special Session regarding property taxes.

 Member Parker, followed up on her memo regarding Environmental Lands Millage money and the audit by Inspector General's Office.

 Commissioner Siddique, thanked the committee for all the work they have done and the unique strategies this committee will have for the future.

The next meeting will take place at 6:00 p.m., on July 13, 2026, in the Fifth Floor, Manatee Room, Manatee County Administration Building, 1112 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton.

10. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Chairman Gravley adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Minutes Approved: June 13, 2026