


## CASE STUDY

## ENVIRONMENTALLY ENDANGERED LAND PROGRAM

CATEGORY	Wetlands Conservation Watershed Protection	
LOCATION	Miami-Dade County, Florida	
CONTACT	Emilie Young, EEL Program Director (305) 372-6471, <a href="mailto:younge@miamidade.gov">younge@miamidade.gov</a> Miami-Dade County, Department of Environmental Resources Management (305) 372-6789, <a href="mailto:derm@miamidade.gov">derm@miamidade.gov</a>	
SYNOPSIS	In 1990, Miami-Dade County voters approved an ad valorem property tax for a 2-year period from 1990 to 1992 to fund the acquisition, protection, and maintenance of environmentally endangered lands for purposes of conserving them for this and future generations. A total of \$90 million was raised for land acquisition and management. The county established an Environmentally Endangered Land (EEL) program to administer the funds. EEL is administered by the county's Department of Environmental Resources Management.	
SITUATION	Although Florida's County Land Conservation programs lead the nation in funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition, the state's rapid growth rate is causing many communities to fall behind in securing adequate land for parks, natural areas, open space, and public recreation. Local conservation program planning is not keeping pace with development and population pressure. Miami-Dade County is the most populous county in Florida, growing by 16.3 % from 1990-2000. It is crucial that communities assess their past efforts toward preservation and create and implement a plan for preserving land and water to maintain a healthy balance.	
PROJECT APPROACH	The EEL program reviews sites that are proposed by the public on an annual basis and reviews sites that are proposed by government agencies on a semiannual basis. County staff evaluates the proposed sites for biological quality, restoration potential and manageability, development pressure and vulnerability. A committee whose membership is entirely composed of citizen volunteers, Land Acquisition Selection Committee, inspects sites and reviews the staff evaluations. Through a publicly noticed process and following a public hearing, the committee recommends sites for purchase to the Board of County Commissioners. Once approved for acquisition, a purchase is negotiated with the owner. The program works only with willing sellers and uses matching funds and partners.	
Land and	The program aims to reach many goals for the acquisition, protection, and maintenance of environmentally endangered lands. The goals focus on lands that contain irreplaceable natural resources or that function as an integral component of an existing ecosystem. Emphasis is also put on adjacent properties that may threaten other sensitive lands. In addition, where feasible financially and without risking the environmental integrity of the site, the program intends to educate Dade County's school age population and the general public about the uniqueness and significance of the county's subtropical ecosystems and natural communities.	

**RESULTS/  
IMPACTS**

Since the EEL program began, Miami-Dade County has brought 16,227 acres of wetlands, tropical hardwood hammocks, and globally endangered rockridge pinelands into public ownership at a total cost of \$75.4 million. A few of the most significant acquisitions in partnership with the state have been the addition of 70 acres of bayfront to the Charles Deering Estate, a riverfront inholding in Oleta State Recreation Area, and the largest privately owned rockridge pineland remaining in the country. Together with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), EEL has acquired thousands of acres of wetlands that will contribute to the restoration of the Everglades.

**PARTNERS**

Successful acquisition partners include SFWMD, the state's Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) program, Florida Forever, and Florida Communities Trust programs. EEL also cooperates with other similar programs such as the state's Conservation and Recreation Lands Program, Land Acquisition Trust Fund, and Save Our Rivers program, in addition to other programs.

**FUNDING**

The County set aside \$10 million of the \$90 million raised for land acquisition to pay for site management. Each year, the interest from this \$10 million is used to secure, restore, and care for the sites acquired by the EEL. Of the total cost of \$75.4 million, the County's portion was only \$42.1 million as a result of the help from partnerships and private donations.

**KEYS TO  
SUCCESS**

The program sought out other programs with purposes consistent with the purpose of EEL. By cooperating actively with other acquisition, conservation and resource management programs, EEL was able to reach its goals. The program also built in a land management element from inception, a distinction that has proved crucial in ensuring the long-term viability of the conserved lands adding to the success of the program overall. Convincing voters to tax themselves requires a carefully designed measure, political expertise, and a well-designed, well-timed, and well-executed campaign.

**SOURCES**

- The Trust for Public Land, *Florida's County Land Conservation Programs: A Trust for Public Land Survey of 35 Florida Counties*  
[http://www.tpl.org/content\\_documents/fl\\_county\\_survey\\_report.pdf](http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/fl_county_survey_report.pdf) (page 14)
- Miami-Dade County, Department of Environmental Resources Management, Land Resources, [http://www.miamidade.gov/derm/land/eel\\_program.asp](http://www.miamidade.gov/derm/land/eel_program.asp)

