



HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ADMINISTRATION

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Grassy Lake Scrub

The 55-acre Grassy Lake Scrub was purchased by Highlands County in 2017. An agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) established 50 acres of the property as a Permittee Responsible Off-Site Mitigation Area (PROMA), authorizing this area as a certified source of mitigation credits for the federally threatened sand skink (*Neoseps reynoldsi*) and blue-tailed mole skink (*Eumeces egregious lividus*) for future County development projects

The sand skink is small “sand swimming” lizard that grows up to 5 inches long. The skinks are adaptive to “swim” through the sand just below the surface hunting for insects.

As part of the agreement with USFWS, the County will manage the property in perpetuity meaning it will remain conservation land forever. The management plan established and approved by the USFWS for Grassy Lake Scrub includes maintenance items such as continual invasive plant treatment, exotic removal, plant and species surveying and monitoring. Our goal is to maintain the natural scrub habitat for the native plants and animals, some of which are only found in this scrub ecosystem.

County staff are actively searching for and eradicating exotic species. Most recently, staff removed all the melaleuca trees within the property boundary along the Lake Grassy shoreline. Staff have already removed eucalyptus trees and ear trees on the property. Next, Australian pine trees located on the shoreline of the lake will also be removed.

An invasive-exotic plant species is an introduced species shown to displace the native vegetation. Without the limiting factors that normally keep invasive plants under control in their native homes (diseases and insects), invasive exotics overwhelm and displace existing native vegetation to form dense, single species stands dominating and altering the original natural community.

Please contact Natural Resources Team, 863-402-6529, if you would like to know any additional information.