



SECTION 1 PROJECT RESEARCH

1A. DATA GATHERING

Genesis Group has reviewed the Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Plan and understands that management activities for the Babcock Ranch Preserve (BRP) will be the responsibilities of the partnership between Babcock Ranch Management, LLC (BRM), Babcock Ranch, Inc. (BRI), the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF), Charlotte and Lee counties.

The current management agreement with the BRM was initiated with a five-year term and includes provisions for automatic renewal for an additional five years. Approximately two years remain within the time

frame of the initial five-year term of the agreement. For the duration of the management agreement, BRI will serve as advisor to the BRM who will become the manager of the BRP when the management agreement terminates. FWC and DOF will remain lead managing agencies acting in a technical advisory role to the BRI. Lee County, being an ownership partner in the BRP, will also serve in a technical advisory role to the BRI for the Lee County portion of the BRP.

Success in managing the BRP will require achieving balance among the protection of resources and the necessity to be a financially self-sustaining cattle ranch. The Master Plan for recreation is an integral component of this success.



1B. SITE REVIEW

Genesis Group conducted an on-site review of the Babcock Ranch Preserve in late November 2008, and again for a two day period during the week of February 23, 2009. The purpose of the site review was to evaluate the existing uses, character, conditions, and features that may be unique to the property or influence recreation planning objectives.

At this time, the primary public access to the Preserve is provided from SR 31. Located approximately six miles south of the intersection of SR 31 and CR 74 is the entry to Wilderness Adventures, an eco-tourism business which operates on the Preserve and is a function of BRM. Approximately two miles north of this entry is the original entry to the Crescent B Ranch and remains today as the main entry to BRM headquarters and the Cypress Lodge.

The Preserve is also accessible from the north off CR 74, from CR 720 through the community of Muse and with limited access from CR 78 near the Lee County line. These access points are normally gated and serve as control points for management operations.



Primary uses of the property relate to cattle ranching, silviculture, and agricultural production. Cattle ranching operations are evident throughout the property with the more intense core located on the north central portion of the property, south of CR 74, and west of the upper northeast property boundary.

Various stages of silviculture production occur throughout the property and are intermixed among native grazing ranges, improved pastures, and more intense agricultural production fields.



The property is diverse in natural features. Vegetative communities range from cypress swamps to dry prairie with Telegraph Swamp being the most prominent wetland system. Jack's Branch, a small blackwater stream near the eastern boundary, is another exceptional wetland tributary which supports a myriad of plant and animal species.

Throughout the property, wildlife habitats are extraordinary with sightings of white-tailed deer, wild turkey, hogs, fox squirrel, gopher tortoise, bald eagle, red-tailed hawk,

and an abundance of wading birds and alligators in swamp areas.

With exception given to those areas currently being utilized for intensive cattle management and agricultural production, the balance of the property provides physical settings for a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities and experiences.

As the recreation activities and experiences are refined, zoning of these areas should be assigned to assure the use is compatible with the land form and with each other where overlapping may occur.



1c. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Genesis Group initiated the formal stakeholder interview process by hosting a series of workshops at the Babcock Ranch Cypress Lodge on February 23-25, 2009. The purpose of the workshop series was to conduct interviews with management partners and other stakeholders with interest in the RMP.

Day one included representation from the FWC, Lee County, DOF, BRM, and BRI Board Representative Dr. Hillary Swain.

Day two provided opportunity for discussions with hunter user groups and non-hunter stakeholders, which included off-highway bicycle riders, bird watchers, hikers, campers, and representatives within the ecotourism industry. These sessions also included representation from FWC, Lee County, and BRI Board Representative Bill Wilcox.

Day three provided opportunity for interview with Babcock Ranch Community representatives to gain an understanding of their long-term development programs along with the anticipated growth patterns and connections to the preserve. This session also included representation from FWC and BRI Board Representative Bill Hammond.

The remainder of day three was utilized to continue field review of the BRP. Representation included Genesis Group personnel and FWC staff.



Courtesy of Nigel Morris

Following the February workshop, Genesis Group, along with the FWC, provided a formal presentation to the Babcock Ranch, Inc. Board on March 19, 2009. This presentation coincided with the regularly scheduled board meeting and was held at the Charlotte Campus of Edison State College in Punta Gorda, Florida. The purpose of this presentation was to introduce to the Board the RMP project team, overview the approach and methodologies being utilized to create the plan, and to summarize the research and analysis efforts that have been completed to date. At this public meeting, stakeholders representing various user groups were also given the opportunity to express their hopes and desires for management of activities on the Preserve.

A second workshop was held in the Tallahassee offices of Genesis Group on March 27, 2009. The pur-



pose of this workshop was to gain additional input from management partners and stakeholders that could not attend the initial workshop held in February at the Babcock Ranch Cypress Lodge, and to provide an update on the progress of the RMP to date. Representation included Genesis Group team members, FWC personnel, DOF personnel, and the Office of Greenway and Trails.

An equestrian user group teleconference was conducted April 16, 2009, to obtain direct input regarding the potential equestrian recreation opportunities. Two people representing equestrian interests participated along with FWC and the Genesis Group team. The meeting agendas and notes have been compiled and are included in the Research Summary Report dated April 15, 2009.



Additional opportunities for public input took place in June, 2009. The DRAFT Recreation Master Plan was presented and discussed during the

June 10, 2009 BRI Board Meeting and during public meetings conducted on June 17, 2009 in Lee County, and June 18, 2009 in Charlotte County.

