



# SECTION 3 INVENTORY OF EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES, ACTIVITIES AND USES

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## 3A. INVENTORY OF EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES, ACTIVITIES AND USES

The Babcock Ranch Preserve (BRP) embodies one of the most unique agricultural landscapes in Southwest Florida. Its value will not only contribute significantly to resource protection but will also provide the opportunity to conserve, enhance and maintain its intrinsic resources for public enjoyment. The lure of this vast expanse of land relates to its history of timber and cattle and its diversity of plant and animal habitats.

Today, formalized recreation activities on the preserve are available in the form of hiking trails, eco-tours and hunting.



Footprints Trail is located on the northwest corner of the Preserve and provides approximately 6.7 miles of trails through pastures, open grazing land and through the fringes of wetland habitats.

Eco-tour Trail located in the vicinity of Wilderness Adventures offers 1.5 miles of additional hiking opportunities through pine flatwoods.

Wilderness Adventures, Inc., facilitates interpretive tours on the Preserve providing insight into the history of ranching and timber activities and provides opportunity for visitors to observe and interact with the natural habitats on the property.

One of the most significant environmental features of the BRP is Telegraph Swamp. This wetland system nearly spans the entire north-south length of the Preserve and at its widest point measures over two miles. The hydrologic cycles of this wetland influence conditions on many parts of the Preserve. To reduce the impacts of seasonal fluctuations in rainfall, a system of weirs was constructed in the 1970's. The weirs help reduce flooding in the summer months and retain



water through the fall and winter. The construction of these weirs created infrastructure which provides the opportunity to access a core area of this swamp and experience this exceptional ecosystem. The swamp along the weirs is a host to a multitude of wading birds and other wildlife and provides wildlife viewing within Telegraph Swamp.

A network of roads and trails (*See Appendix A, Exhibit 1*) was created to support initial timber and cattle operations. Tram Grade and Oil Well Grade are two examples of roads that have evolved into high-quality access ways. Additional roads were constructed as needed to support the expansion of ranching and timber operations. When agriculture was added to the property, other graded roads were constructed to support the farmer's needs. Not all roads on-site are graded. Most are primi-

tive trails or fire breaks and some are impassable to ordinary two-wheel drive vehicles during certain times of the year. This network of existing roads and trails will be valuable in providing access to recreation opportunities on the property.

A public hunting area has been identified and provided on 17,000 acres of land located in the northeast section of the preserve. Hunting activities are currently being managed by FWC. To date, the Preserve has hosted youth hunts for quail and turkey and special opportunity quota hunts for wild hogs. Hunting has been a longstanding tradition on preserve lands. Prior to the acquisition, several hunting camps were strategically located for hunting needs. These sites, in addition to agricultural fields in Lee County, will be assessed in support of a potential tiered hunting structure.



## 3B. IDENTIFICATION OF ADDITIONAL RECREATION OPPORTUNITY SETTINGS

The Management Plan identifies potential recreation activities for the BRP. The current list of activities includes hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, wildlife viewing and hunting. Each of these activities will require an appropriate setting to achieve the desired user experience. As directed by the Management Plan, Genesis Group has applied the principles of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (Clark and Stankey, 1979), to identify and delineate land areas into recreation opportunity classes. These classifications will be based on their current state of remoteness, naturalness and expected social experience.

These classifications are assessed for appropriateness to support recreation by applying the ROS Activity, Setting, and Experience Characterizations.

*See Section 4A for the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Characterization Tables.*

In addition to the ROS, Genesis Group has further assessed the appropriateness of settings based upon the natural resource values of the Preserve. As a result of this assessment, a range of land use zones have been identified.

These recreational land use zones are described on the following page:



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## Recreation Land Use Zones (See Appendix A, Exhibit 6)

**Zone A:** Areas provide settings most appropriate for nature-based recreation. These areas present the fewest limitations with regard to accessibility and generally present high quality natural aesthetics character.

**Zone B:** Areas may support nature-based recreation, but contain a limiting factor relating to either accessibility or a lack of natural aesthetic value.

**Zone C:** Lands are sensitive, natural areas that should not be significantly disturbed or impacted. Opportunities to provide recreation activities will be limited, and when provided should be done with stringent guidelines to assure protection of the ecosystem.

**Zone D:** Features offer very little to no opportunity for recreation. These areas are typically associated with the more intense cattle ranching and agricultural operations of the BRP.

**Note:** Each land use zone contains a diversity of habitats, environmental features and natural communities. In-depth analyses should be conducted to finitely identify areas containing endangered or threatened species and delineate imperiled plant communities prior to proceeding with the siting and/or design of any new recreation element.

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See Appendix A, Exhibit 6 for Recreation Land Use Zones



## 3C. IDENTIFY RESOURCE CONCERNS AND SENSITIVE AREAS

Currently, no sensitive areas relative to historical or archeological resources have been found or identified.

However, areas containing endangered and threatened species and imperiled plant communities have been identified within the Preserve. The Management Plan requires “that recreational uses are managed so as not to cause degradation of listed species habitats.” All plant and animal communities within future recreation areas must be carefully assessed to ensure proposed recreation will not adversely affect long-term sustainability of sensitive plan communities and habitats.



## 3D. EXISTING RECREATION RESOURCES MAP

**A**t this time, recreation activities on the BRP exist primarily in the form of hiking trails, eco-tours, and hunting.

**Trails:** Footprints Trail, open since June of 2008, is located in the north-west corner of the property and provides opportunity for a 2 mile and 4.7 mile hiking loop. There are considerations to expand this trail to further enhance opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing.

**Eco-tours:** Wilderness Adventures, Inc., provides guided tours on the preserve. These tours overview the history of BRP ranching and timber operations and allow visitors to experience the abundance of natural features and habitats that exist on the property.

**Hunting:** Currently, 17,000 acres of the Preserve have been designated for public hunting. This area is located in the northeast corner of the property with Oil Well Grade defining the southern boundary.

**Wildlife Viewing:** Although not formalized as a recreation activity at this time, several locations on the Preserve provide extraordinary opportunities for wildlife viewing. These areas include lands of the upper Telegraph Swamp, and weir crossings on Telegraph Swamp. During the site visits, individuals were observed viewing wildlife from the Eco-tour entrance road and from SR 31.



A significant network of improved roadways exists on the Preserve to support ranching, silviculture, and agricultural operations. Although many of these roads can be utilized to provide access to recreation-sites, others provide access to core ranching activity areas, and should not be considered for public use.

Genesis Group has evaluated the roadway systems in consideration of existing land uses and proposed recreation activities and has provided a recommendation for access and road routes to negate operational conflicts.

Genesis Group has also identified BRM activity nodes on the property that must be considered operationally, pending expansion of public recreation on the Preserve. These nodes include the BRM headquarters, the Juvenile Justice Facility, intensive cattle management areas, and a

remote cowboy residence off CR 74 adjacent to the former sporting clays site.

BRP activity nodes have also been identified. These sites present less conflict with ranching operations and have potential to support recreation opportunities. BRP activity nodes include the Cypress Lodge, Footprints Trail, Wilderness Adventure; currently designated FWC controlled hunting areas, and former hunt camp locations.

*See Appendix A, Exhibit 2 for the location of the BRM and BRP activity nodes.*

The Preserve is traversed by a number of primitive roads and trails that were created to support land management operations. These roads and trails have been assessed and ranked in accordance with the ROS to assist in the definition of Recreation Opportunity Zones.

