

Pasco County Ecological Corridors Ordinance FAQs – August/September, 2015

Why is Pasco County seeking an Ecological Corridor ordinance?

- In 2000, Pasco County legally settled on an agreement to require a wildlife habitat protection study and corresponding Comprehensive Plan policies to implement the study.
- Ecological corridors provide valuable ecoservices that humans rely on daily, such as water purification, flood and erosion control, jobs, disease, pollutant and toxic chemical filtration, storm surge protection, sediment trapping, groundwater recharge, recreation, etc.
- Ecological corridors provide ways for nutrients, plant populations, and animal populations to stay robust, genetically strong, and move back and forth between existing conservation lands, such as Starkey Park, Conner and Cypress Creek Preserves, and the Green Swamp. This especially applies to Threatened and Endangered species and Species of Special Concern.

Does Pasco County have money for this? Yes, for environmental lands purchase only. State and federal grants are pursued to assist with land management expenses.

- The Penny for Pasco generated \$36 million for environmental lands from 2004 to 2013.
- The 2014-2024 Penny for Pasco is projected to generate \$46 million to buy environmental lands.

How many corridors are there? Seven: One in west Pasco, five in central Pasco, and one in east Pasco.

Is Pasco County going to take my land? Force me to move? Force me off of my property? No. The ordinance does not propose eminent domain or any other taking. The only time the ordinance will apply is if you seek to rezone to greater density or intensity.

I have a home, and it's zoned Residential. Will the ordinance affect my application to put in a shed? No, the ordinance will not affect established homes, yards or developments.

Will there be public trails through my property? No. Public use would only be planned for land in public ownership and only if deemed suitable for that use.

When would the new ordinance apply? Only when an applicant wants to rezone to greater density or intensity.

What is "density?" The number of allowable dwelling units authorized per acre.

What is "intensity?" How much office, industrial or commercial activity there is per parcel - measured by use, size, traffic generated, or floor-to-area ratio.

- **What is an example of density increase?** Rezoning from Agricultural to Residential or from Res-1 to Res-9.
- **What is an example of intensity increase?** Rezoning from Agricultural to Office, Industrial or Commercial.

Who is exempt? Prior Development Approvals in Accordance with Existing Zoning; All Development Applications not Increasing Density or Intensity; All lawfully permitted uses and structures within a corridor existing prior to the effective date of the ordinance.

If I want to rezone to greater density or intensity, what I am going to get in return? You will get increased density or intensity permitted outside of the land within the corridor, payment, or a combination of both. The ordinance also provides for other potential incentives outside of the land within the corridor (e.g. increased height, reduced setbacks or lot size, reduced neighborhood parks, reduced landscaping, or reduced tree replacement requirements).

How will my land in the corridor be valued if the County pays me for it? Amount paid will be based on averaging two appraisals of the land within the corridor, taking into account highest and best use. The ordinance will not be considered in the appraisal process.

Why does a corridor have to be 2200 feet wide? A team of expert biologists studied the existing conservation lands, the distances between them, and habitat systems connecting them. To be effective in preserving critical ecosystem services and biodiversity, corridors must consist of a combination of wetland and upland habitats. Also, the widths were based on the life history needs of the wildlife and plant species expected to use the corridors for movement and long term persistence of species populations.

Can the corridor boundaries be modified? Modifications and reductions can be proposed. Corridors can be shifted so long as width is maintained, adjacent property owners are not affected, and ecological integrity of habitat is maintained. Corridors can be reduced based on existing density, or on a portion of land that is highly disturbed, or if the land receives a low site selection score as determined by the Environmental Lands Acquisition Selection Committee scoring criteria.