

# COMPASS

Navigating our region's future together



CONSERVANCY  
of Southwest Florida  
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE.

FISCAL YEAR 2022 - 2023



**COVER STORY**

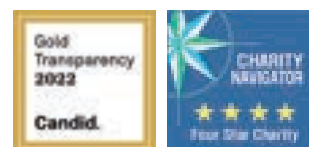
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This Annual Report reflects activities October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023.  
Please contact us if there are omissions or errors: (239) 403-4207.





**NOTE FROM CHAIR**

Just over a year ago, our community was impacted by the worst natural disaster in its history. As long predicted, the effects of a changing climate on our region's well-being is being tested through the presence of more intense and rapidly intensifying hurricanes, unpredictable patterns of weather, increased localized flooding and intensifying heat.

The role of nature to help mitigate the worst of these effects was apparent once again following Hurricane Ian, as it had also been with Hurricane Irma. The presence of open, natural lands that can absorb flood waters helped our community. The large swaths of mangroves that enrich

our Paradise Coast once again mitigated storm surge, protected homes and communities adjacent to these forests and protected native fish and bird species from the worst impacts of the storm. Dune systems, though damaged in many locations, did withstand the worst brunt of the storm and protected our coastline from this historic surge. These storms remind us once again of the immeasurable value of investing in, restoring and protecting our natural environment.

The Conservancy has increasingly engaged in research into the matter of a changing climate and the need for our community to protect our natural environment as one of the key strategies to sustain our community, our economy and our treasured way of life.

As board chair, I am proud of the ability of the Conservancy to lead on the most challenging of issues with strong science, solid policy and meaningful educational endeavors.

Sustainability also means investing in the people at the Conservancy who are so committed to pursuing our mission on a daily basis. Not only must we retain the best and the brightest staff, but we must also continue to attract and celebrate our volunteers. We must engage the next generation of environmentalists through our intern program.

Your support has allowed your Conservancy to respond to the needs of protecting nature, of being nature's advocate and helping our community recover in the past year. With a recently reconfirmed 4-star Charity Navigator rating, and a Gold GuideStar rating – among the highest in the country – you can be assured that your investment in the Conservancy's mission is deeply appreciated and well stewarded.

With gratitude,

**John Walter**  
 Chair of the Board



**PRESIDENT'S UPDATE**

This year's Compass Report displays a compelling set of accomplishments powered by two unstoppable forces – our passionate teams of staff, volunteers and interns, and you, our equally determined and generous supporters.

As we prepare to embark on our 60th year of service to our community, one thing remains abundantly consistent and clear: protecting our water, land and wildlife is the only way we can sustain our future quality of life here on the Paradise Coast.

The Conservancy has always invested in science-based policy work, common sense conservation initiatives and solutions-oriented mission work. We have met the current challenges of the day, while also playing the long game of investing in education and sustainability planning. The Conservancy is willing to stand for what we believe in, when the mission of protecting our region's natural resources requires it – even if it poses significant risks.

The stories of the achievements in this report are a reflection of this tenacity, but also our interest in being creative and innovative in the pursuit of our mission work. It is a look into the efforts of our unique and talented team members, who day in and day out, overcome small and large challenges to protect water resources, sustain habitat for

endangered species, care for and rehabilitate native wildlife and seek to engage students, residents and the broader public in the need for protecting nature. When we protect nature, nature protects us.

Sincerely,

**Rob Moher**  
 President & CEO



# growing THE FUTURE



Our new Environmental Studies Dormitory building is a testament to the Conservancy's commitment to sustainability and growth. The building features a variety of sustainable design elements, including solar panels, electric vehicle charging stations, and a "bird-strike prevention" design for the windows. The building also provides additional green space on campus, which is a welcome addition to the Conservancy's commitment to environmental stewardship.

We offer a broad range of internships, including environmental education, science exploration, sea turtle research, Burmese python research and wildlife rehab in the von Arx Wildlife Hospital. Each year, around 30 interns venture their way to Southwest Florida to work directly with one of our departments and live on campus in our dormitory.

The new Environmental Studies Dormitory allows our internship program to grow by 20%. "As we compete for regional, national and global talent for conservation interns, this wonderful new facility puts the Conservancy on the cutting edge to be competitive in attracting the best candidates," Rob Moher, Conservancy president and CEO.

The dormitory features sustainability including all LED lighting, highly energy efficient design, extensive day lighting,

electric vehicle charging stations, and solar panels. In addition, each window showcases a "bird-strike prevention" design due to the fact that millions of birds die each year from flying into windows.

Among the excitement of growth and expansion, we said goodbye to a piece of the Conservancy's story. In October 2023, the demolition of the Blair Dormitory began, closing the door on its 35 years of housing history. The Blair Dormitory had been a home away from home for the estimated 875 interns from all over the country who worked directly with our four programmatic departments. The building also provided offices for the education department for many years. The demolition of this building has provided our campus with additional green space. As we look back fondly on the memories of the Blair Dormitory, we move forward with enthusiasm and momentum for all that is to come.





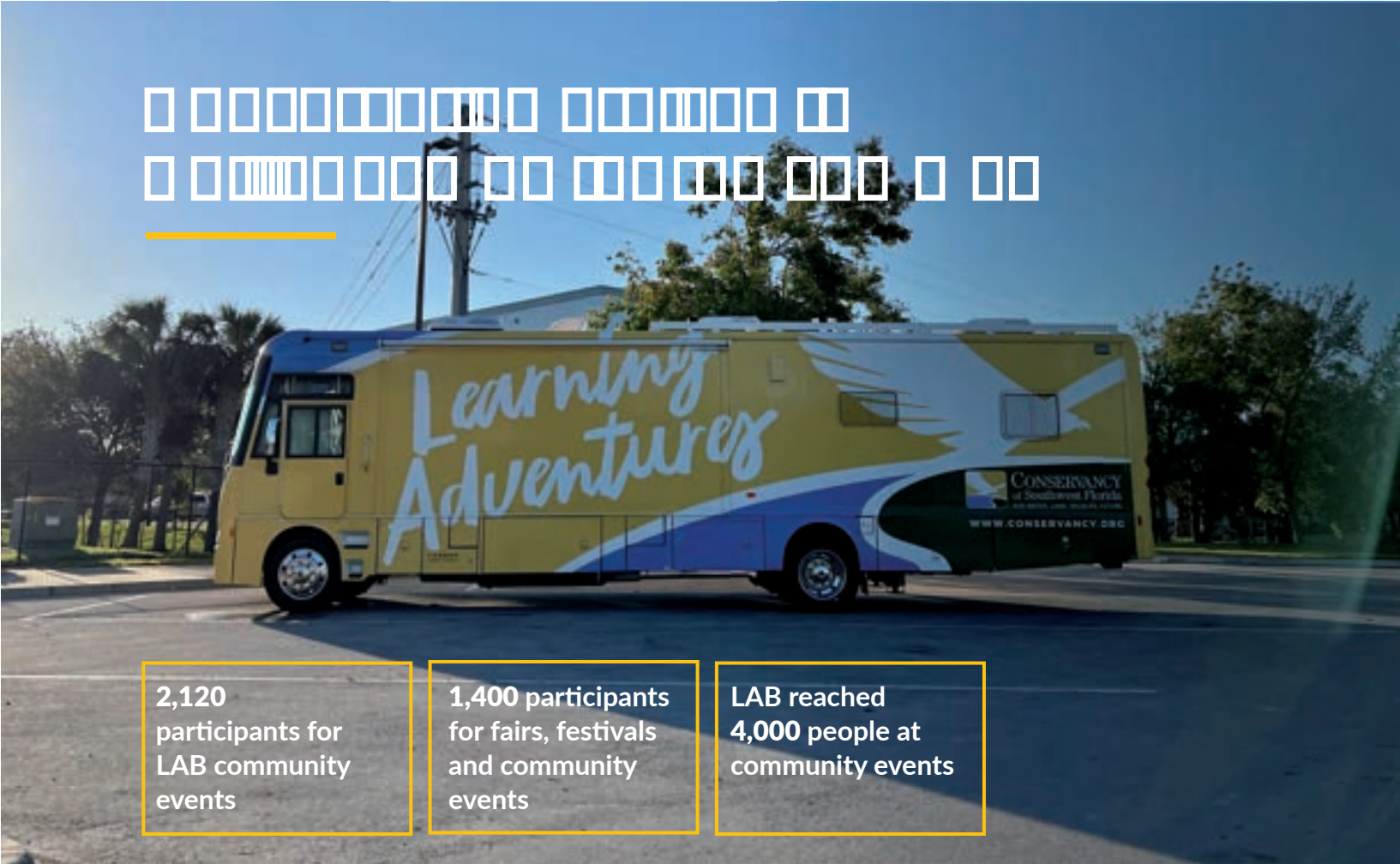
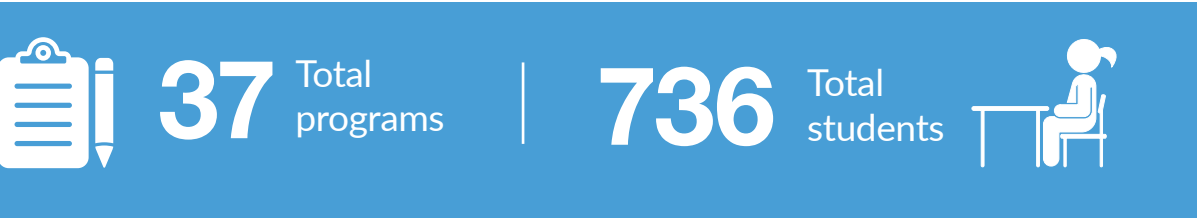
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Summer SLAM (Summer Learning Adventure Modules), supported by Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF) grant funding, is a dynamic two-part program that combines the Learning Adventures Bus (LAB) and our Nature Center. With 37 total programs, Summer SLAM reached more than 700 students this summer.

From the new interactive sea turtle nesting game on the LAB's touch table to a mock sea turtle nest excavation, campers had the chance to immerse themselves as future field scientists. They were also invited to our campus for a tour and other learning activities. As an added bonus, campers received a take home science kit.



Final summer SLAM numbers:



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2,120 participants for LAB community events	1,400 participants for fairs, festivals and community events	LAB reached 4,000 people at community events
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Our Learning Adventures Bus (LAB) programs bring hands-on science learning to schools that otherwise cannot travel to the Conservancy for an on-campus field trip. In January, we launched two new programs for third and seventh graders about harmful algal blooms. The LAB provides fun STEM activities that are accessible to Collier County students and beyond.









# Pier closure impact

## Pelican admissions drop significantly after Hurricane Ian.

After Hurricane Ian impacted Southwest Florida, an unexpected positive outcome emerged. Following the storm, the Conservancy’s von Arx Wildlife Hospital reported fewer admissions of injured pelicans.

This change can be linked to the damage to the Naples Pier, a popular fishing spot in Collier County. With its temporary closure, there were fewer fishing hooks and lines, reducing hazards for pelicans and other birds.

The data suggests a connection between decreased fishing activity and the lower number of pelican injuries.

The Conservancy’s von Arx Wildlife Hospital has witnessed a significant decrease in the admissions of injured pelicans.



Joanna Fitzgerald, director of the von Arx Wildlife Hospital, shared her thoughts on the broader implications of the hurricane’s aftermath. “It was heartbreaking to witness not just the destruction of the Naples Pier, but the widespread devastation throughout Southwest Florida. However, in the wake of such destruction, we noticed a drop in pelicans with fishing hook and line injuries. That gave a small comfort for this team that is very dedicated to wildlife care.”

Now, while the community continues to grapple with rebuilding and reflecting on the hurricane’s aftermath, there’s a heightened awareness about the delicate balance between urban structures and the surrounding ecosystem.

As a stakeholder at several meetings conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, in collaboration with other environmental groups, continued to advocate for tighter regulations on fishing bridges, notably at the Skyway Fishing Pier State Park. Collaboration continues with efforts to increase pelican protection and angler education requirements at the Gulf Pier at Ft. De Soto State Park. This action addresses concerns over birds frequently harmed by intense fishing activities at fishing piers statewide. Our combined efforts highlight the importance of protecting local habitats and ensuring safe recreational activities across Florida’s key locations.

Conservancy of Southwest Florida  
Wildlife Rehabilitation Center

Jan 1, 2020 -  
Mar 30, 2021

152 injured pelicans  
admitted

Jan 1, 2021 -  
Mar 30, 2022

169

Jan 1, 2022 -  
Mar 24, 2023

71



\* HURRICANE IAN AND THE DAMAGE TO THE PIER IN LATE 2022





**Hospital staff provided continued education and outreach efforts in various forms:**



- ▶ The teams presented a Rookery Bay ecotour training series to teach and train ecotour operators about proper wildlife rescue techniques and increase environmental ethics.
- ▶ Staff shared comments at multiple Naples City Council meetings regarding the Naples Pier design to ensure pelican protection and rescue requirements are considered in the rebuild. There are opportunities for continued input to make the pier more user friendly for the public and for the rescue of pelicans.
- ▶ Joanna Fitzgerald presented information and data to the Beach and Coastal Resources Advisory Committee on Marco Island regarding burrowing owl mortality due to second generation anticoagulants. The goal is to educate and increase awareness of the dire consequences of SGARs and change rodenticides used on the island.

## Wildlife rescues just got a little easier on Marco Island



Brittany Piersma, field biologist at Audubon Western Everglades, has done tremendous work for the native wildlife in Southwest Florida and for the von Arx Wildlife Hospital. Observing the public's need for tools and comfort when assisting an animal, Piersma created rescue stations at several locations in Collier County.

Now, if someone finds an injured animal, they can use the net and towels to rescue and contain it in the crate provided. Piersma provides her contact information to assist with the rescue if needed and ensure the animal is transported to the Conservancy. Piersma has our thanks as she has gone above and beyond to aid the Conservancy in our mission.



[conservancy.org/wildlife](http://conservancy.org/wildlife)

# Year in Review

**Over the past year, the von Arx Wildlife Hospital has seen 3,594 animals.**

Gopher tortoise admissions increased by 70% in the three months after Hurricane Ian compared to the same timeframe in previous years. Rehabilitation efforts and care required by staff and volunteers for this threatened species were staggering. Tortoise populations where flooding occurred from Hurricane Ian (coastal and near-coastal areas) were decimated.

Gopher tortoises across the state are being displaced and relocated due to continued habitat loss from development. Residents with tortoises on their property can help protect this threatened species by making their yards gopher tortoise friendly. This includes planting species of plants that gopher tortoises forage on and ensuring dogs don't interact with tortoises or their burrows.





Wildlife Hospital Baby Shower

The annual Wildlife Hospital Baby Shower kicked off in June in support of injured, sick and orphaned native baby animals during the breeding season. During the month-long event, donations were accepted from the Wildlife Hospital Amazon Wish List, including items such as paper towels, soaps, writing utensils and more that allow the hospital to provide the best care possible. The event wrapped up with a family-friendly day at Ankrolab Brewing Co. on June 17, which featured a specialty beer benefiting the Conservancy. In total, hundreds of wish list items and cash donations were accepted to aid our hospital teams in working more efficiently to support native wildlife.



Hurricane Ian

Hurricane Ian caused damage to numerous wildlife facilities. Our von Arx Hospital staff immediately stepped in to support our neighbors. Over 300 animals were transferred to us from other centers, including these 15 chimney swifts. We continue to help CROW on Sanibel Island and Peace River Wildlife Center.

Rescue, Rehab and Release

At the von Arx Wildlife Hospital, we support our patients through their journey of rescue, rehab and release.



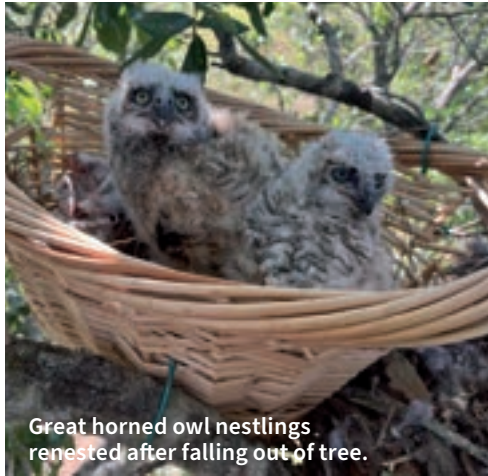
Armadillo hit by a car receiving wound care.



4 eastern screech owls renested after their nest tree was cut down



Orphaned otter being hand fed.



Great horned owl nestlings renested after falling out of tree.



Peninsula cooter covered in barnacles.



Osprey juvenile pairs with adult osprey during rehab for comfort.



Over 1,100  
Burmesese pythons  
removed from  
the wild

Native to Southeast Asia, hundreds of thousands of pythons were brought to Florida through the pet trade in the 1970s. Pythons have since become an established apex predator across the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and are thought to be responsible for a 90 percent decline in native mammal populations.



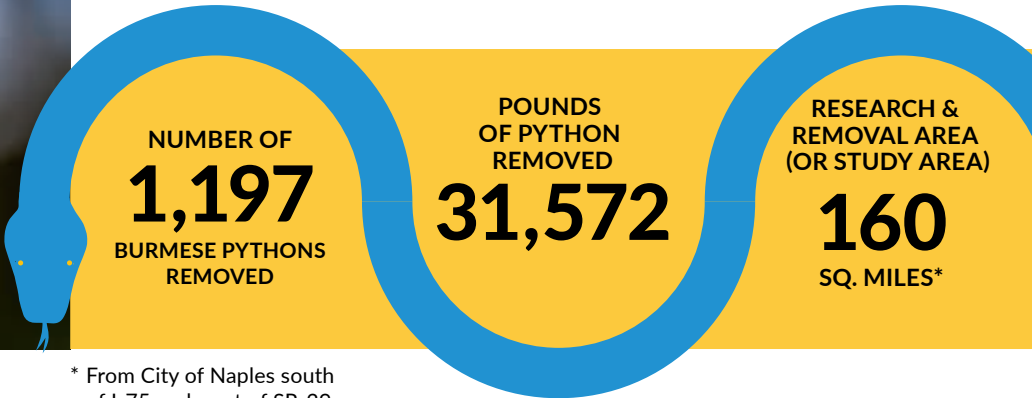
To keep this invasive species from multiplying and to protect native wildlife populations, the Conservancy began its python research and removal efforts in 2013. In the decade since, the team has eliminated over 1,100 invasive snakes weighing in excess of 31,500 pounds from 160 square miles of public and private land in southwestern Florida.

Using radio transmitters implanted in male “scout” snakes, the research program aims to understand python movements, breeding behaviors and habitat use. Scout snakes can lead biologists to elusive reproductive females, allowing researchers to remove them and their developing eggs from the wild.

“These efforts are significant in fulfilling our mission of protecting Southwest Florida’s unique natural environment and quality of life by reducing the overall impact on our native wildlife populations,” said Rob Moher, president and CEO of the Conservancy.

Recognizing the importance of this research and removal, people around the world have engaged with a spectrum of media coverage on the team’s efforts. In the past three years, there has been over 20 billion views of the Conservancy’s python media coverage and features recognizing the Conservancy’s python research and removal efforts.

Program funded by Naples Zoo Conservation Fund, Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, United States Geological Survey, South Florida Water Management District, Private Philanthropy



\* From City of Naples south of I-75 and west of SR-29



During the 10 years of Burmese python research and removal, the team has published 18 scientific articles across a wide-range of peer reviewed journals. One in particular has been a major feat and success. The most recent scientific journal, *Burmese pythons in Florida: A synthesis of biology, impacts, and management tools*, published by NeoBiota, is full of relevant and useful information on the Burmese python and puts the vast majority of what is known to date under one publication.

This was many years in the making and our contributions, made by Environmental Science Coordinator, Ian A. Bartoszek and Biologist, Ian Easterling, were incorporated and cited extensively. Burmese pythons have negatively impacted Florida’s ecosystem and native wildlife. The Conservancy is researching every day for new and improved ways to manage this invasive species across Southwest Florida.



The Conservancy has been monitoring the restoration of mangrove die-off areas on Marco Island since 2012 by comparing pre and post mangrove re-establishment. Data sets are used to evaluate restoration success (if any) and can be subsequently used to adaptively manage the restoration moving forward. The aquatic faunal component of the study assesses species richness and abundance over time based upon the total number of individuals. Aquatic faunal composition is often used as an indicator to evaluate the health of the mangrove system.



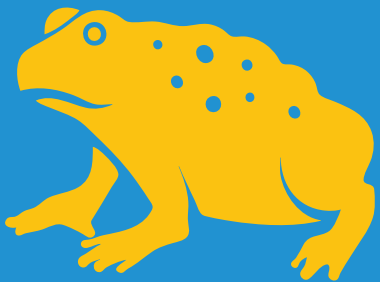
Mangrove Rivulus, a fish species indicative of a healthy mangrove ecosystem.

“The Conservancy has been monitoring the restoration of mangrove die-off areas on Marco Island since 2012 by comparing pre and post mangrove re-establishment. Data sets are used to evaluate restoration success (if any) and can be subsequently used to adaptively manage the restoration moving forward. The aquatic faunal component of the study assesses species richness and abundance over time based upon the total number of individuals. Aquatic faunal composition is often used as an indicator to evaluate the health of the mangrove system.”

– Julia Galante, 2023 summer science intern.

As the project concludes after three years of research, Conservancy biologists Melinda Schuman and Dr. Jeff Schmid, along with Conservancy volunteers Susan Snyder and Copley Smoak, have submitted their findings on the diet of cane toads in Southwest Florida golf course communities to the online scientific journal “Animals.”

Their article was part of a special issue highlighting the effects of urbanization on herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles). It reveals that within the golf course communities studied, cane toads mainly fed upon yellow-banded millipedes, hunting billbug weevils and bigheaded ants - which are all considered pests in systems.







2023

This year we performed our annual mangrove forest health surveys within Clam Bay and Goodland Fruit Farm Creek mangrove systems. The results this year were particularly poignant, since it was performed 3-4 months post Hurricane Ian. The Clam Bay mangrove system absorbed an 8 foot tidal surge that deposited acres of sand into the mangrove forest and caused mangrove mortality. This was not unexpected as these mangroves form our first line of defense during hurricanes, protecting the interior developed areas from the brunt of the storm. The surge would have been much higher and more intense if these mangroves were not in place. The Clam Bay mangrove system suffered more damage than the more southern Fruit Farm Creek system as the hurricane intensity and tidal surge was much more intense at Clam Bay. this year the mangroves were not as robust or as healthy as in past years, but some areas were showing early signs of resilience. Next year's health check will hopefully reveal more signs of recovery.

In September 2022, Southwest Florida was devastated by Hurricane Ian. The beaches were littered with debris that created obstacles for female turtles emerging from the Gulf to nest this summer. This hurricane also flattened most of the dune habitat where turtles often lay their eggs. Nonetheless, loggerhead and green sea turtles began crawling ashore to find just the right spot to bury their eggs.

This year, a new challenge emerged. Keewaydin Island was split into two north and south regions by storm surge from Hurricane Ian that reopened an old pass that had not been open in decades. This made turtle season logistically difficult as Conservancy science staff and interns could no longer traverse the entire island, but rather had to patrol two islands.

Despite difficulties, the team continued, first determining if a turtle indeed nested or whether she abandoned the attempt as a “false crawl” (a non-nesting emergence on the beach). When nests were found, the team located the egg chamber by gently digging into the sand. The eggs were then covered back up with sand and a cage placed over the nest to protect it from hungry predators such as raccoons, coyotes and hogs.

Aided by a new digital dashboard system that allows the team to track nests and present a summary of data in real time, the Science staff and interns documented more than 526 nests and 34,499 hatchlings this season. Undeterred by beach conditions following Hurricane Ian, some nest predation (mainly by coyotes), and topped off by Hurricane Idalia which washed out some nests, these numbers reflect a successful and busy sea turtle nesting season on Keewaydin Island.



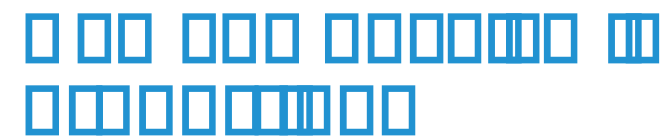




Therefore, we entered settlement discussions with Collier Enterprises focused on negotiating an agreement that would result in benefits that span the entire RLSA. We are pleased to share with you that we succeeded in securing such positive settlement terms.



**Aerial view of proposed Rivergrass development in Eastern Collier County.**



The Conservancy and our partners remain steadfast in documenting the damage due to seismic exploration caused by Burnett Oil Company in Big Cypress National Preserve, providing detailed technical reports to the preserve management and permitting agencies, and demanding that Burnett be held fully accountable for the impacts of their activities. The good news is that there is a proposal for the privately held subsurface mineral rights to be publicly acquired to create a unified preserve, which would help protect our cherished public lands from future new drilling.





# Florida Panther Habitat Loss Due to Development

The Conservancy’s Policy & Advocacy Department has spent the past 10+ years opposing projects that would impact habitat for the endangered Florida panther, including the controversial Bellmar development in eastern Collier County.

Located precariously close to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Bellmar and other similar developments threaten the dwindling habitat of the panther and other native species.

Bellmar would also cause increased traffic and deadly vehicle strikes. With a vision of safeguarding the region’s natural ecosystems, our team places a heavy emphasis on the importance of the Florida Wildlife Corridor and smart growth principles.

The Conservancy remains resolute in championing the protection of wetlands, public lands, and wildlife habitats.



## Conservancy’s Policy & Advocacy Department

In June 2023, the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) provided an “array of alternatives” for a storm mitigation plan in Collier County, based on the discussions in the stakeholder charrettes that took place in April. The Conservancy was very pleased to see that the massive surge barrier at Wiggins Pass was screened out of the study and that the Corps stated they are committed to prioritizing nature-based solutions.

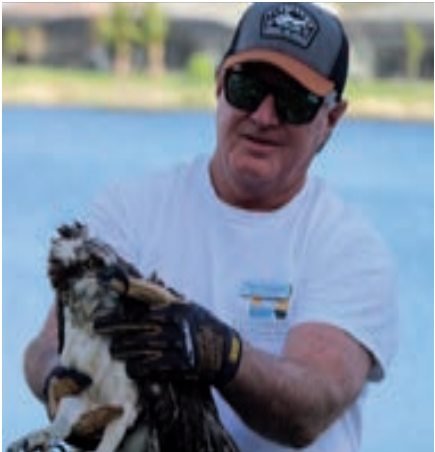
In the lead-up to these discussions, the Conservancy took proactive steps to engage and inform the public. Recognizing the potential implications of the massive surge barriers, the Conservancy disseminated crucial updates and highlighted ways the public could participate in vital meetings and ensured that residents were well-equipped to voice their concerns.

Thanks to these efforts, subsequent meetings saw the removal of other proposed gates and walls from the study. However, the study is far from over.

The Conservancy is still concerned that environmentally destructive measures having serious consequences on our coastal environment and quality of life could later be included in the study as potential solutions.

The Corps is in the process of modeling and evaluating proposed measures, so it is still too early to tell which measures will move forward to the “Tentatively Selected Plan” (TSP), to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners in 2024.





Volunteer

TIM THOMPSON

As an extraordinary volunteer for wildlife conservation in Southwest Florida, Tim Thompson has been one of our trusted Critter Couriers since 2006. Thompson has helped with renesting birds, rescuing wildlife no matter the trek and releasing animals back to the wild. Aside from his help in the von Arx Wildlife Hospital, he’s been a spokesperson on behalf of our mission and beyond.



Leadership Collier

AMBER CROOKS

Environmental policy manager Amber Crooks graduated in April from Leadership Collier Class of 2023. Over 11 annual sessions, participants explored local government, education, economic development, agriculture, arts and more. Leadership Collier Foundation’s mission is to activate the potential of leaders to build a stronger Collier County.



Community

LEMONADE STAND

By setting up a lemonade stand in her neighborhood, young Emery and her family were able to raise over \$5,000 to help the injured, sick and orphaned animals in our care at our von Arx Wildlife Hospital.



MAN OF THE YEAR

The Conservancy’s President and CEO Rob Moher was featured in Gulfshore Life’s 2022 Men and Women of the Year, celebrated for his work in shaping the community through leadership and advocacy. Moher has been a part of the Conservancy for 25 years.



Eagle Award Winner 2023

SUE DALTON

The Conservancy bestowed its highest honor, the Eagle Award, to Sue Dalton for her immense contributions to our environmental education, community and fundraising engagement efforts. The award was presented at the Conservancy’s Annual Meeting for members on January 17, 2023.

CLIMATE SUMMIT

The first Southwest Florida Climate & Community Summit was held on January 17, 2023 at Arthrex. Despite Hurricane Ian postponing the original date, the core partnerships saw the importance of this Summit and pushed to have it rescheduled early the next year. The Southwest Florida Climate & Community Initiative, a partnership between FGCU, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Collier Community Foundation, Collaboratory, WGPU, The News-Press/Naples Daily News/Gannett, and Growing Climate Solutions, was first established to elevate the public discourse on climate challenges. The Summit was a culmination of the Initiative’s work, in support of Hertz Corporation, based on science-based climate and resilience research. The sold out event was attended by over 250 individuals, including 20 local government officials, 29 civic and NGO organizations, regional residents and leaders in business, education, health and faith sectors.

Throughout the one-day event, attendees came to understand our climate challenges and opportunities, addressed the impacts of Hurricane Ian and how to rebuild wiser, and prioritized the actions for our community to protect paradise moving forward. As a restorer sponsor, the Conservancy and other sponsors banded together after the summit to create an extensive and informative report regarding the outcomes of the event. There is no straightforward



formula for advancing climate resilience objectives as localities’ priorities, budgets, and political contexts vary widely within our region. Yet, the goal of the summit was to establish a direction for this region and it was an impetus for starting the journey. The Summit outcomes report clarifies the challenges we face, demonstrates the value of participatory planning, and inspires our community to take collective action.



[conservancy.org/swfl-climate-community-summit/](https://conservancy.org/swfl-climate-community-summit/)



2023 ANNUAL REPORT



The 19th annual Magic Under the Mangroves gala held March 2 raised more than \$1.4 million net for programs to protect the water, land, wildlife and future of Southwest Florida. Going back to the original theme of “Magic Under the Mangroves,” guests were reminded of the importance of mangrove forests to the ecosystems of Southwest Florida.

“In the aftermath of Hurricane Ian, it has been a difficult year for many of our supporters, but knowing of the importance of the work we do in protecting nature, they stepped up in a big way,” said Rob Moher, Conservancy president and CEO. “We all recognize that if we protect nature, nature will protect us. On behalf of our staff, volunteers, and board, I’m grateful for the outpouring of support during Magic.”



Toni and Charlie Mueller chaired the event and led a team of volunteer committee members and staff. Magic Under the Mangroves has raised more than \$18 million since its inception in 2004.

Presented by

 **NORTHERN TRUST**

Supporting Sponsor

 **WILLIAM RAVEIS**

Community Sponsor

 **WATERSIDESHOPS**



 **WINK**



2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida’s 2022 RedSnook Catch & Release Charity Fishing Tournament netted more than \$250,000 to benefit the Conservancy’s Fight for Clean Water. Due to impacts from Hurricane Ian, the event was postponed from October to December. In addition, the kickoff party also included a special dedicated fundraiser for Hurricane Ian relief. In less than 10 minutes, more than \$45,000 was raised for the YMCA of Marco Island to support residents and businesses on Isles of Capri as they recovered from Hurricane Ian. The Collier Community Foundation matched with \$25,000, raising a grand total of around \$70,000. In the 17 years the Conservancy has put on this event, more than \$2 million has been raised to support water policy efforts. The tournament Chair was Jon Kuk, assisted by former Chair Wayne Meland and devoted committee members.

Sponsors

**TOMPKINS FAMILY**









EARTH DAY 2023

On Saturday, April 22, we welcomed nearly 1,700 guests to our campus for our Earth Day Festival. This admission-free celebration featured live presentations and animal encounters, crafts and activities, department tables, nature walks and electric boat tours, over 20 local vendors, and much more.



EVERGLADES COALITION CONFERENCE

The 38th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference was hosted on January 26-28 by the National Parks Conservation Association. The event was attended by the Conservancy’s policy team. Amber Crooks, the Conservancy’s environmental policy manager, was a featured panelist in the conference’s Everglades Restoration and Wildlife Corridors discussion. The Conservancy is hosting the 2024 conference in Bonita Springs in January.



SCCF PARTNERSHIP - EDEN OAK

For 11 years, our policy team and the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) advocated for Eden Oak’s protection in Lee County. This land, near the Sanibel Causeway, faced a development proposal threatening 40 acres of mangroves and wetlands. Given the area’s vulnerability, evidenced by Hurricane Ian’s damage, these ecosystems are vital for storm protection. On April 5, 2023, our efforts paid off when the Lee County Board of County Commissioners unanimously rejected the development request.

MARISSA COLLECTIONS

**A collection of community support**  
Marissa Collections, in partnership with Angelink, raised \$43,500 for the Conservancy. After seeing social media posts about the rehab at von Arx Hospital for injured and sick wildlife from Hurricane Ian, Marissa Collections stepped up to support our mission, along with five other local non-profits supporting the community after the storm.



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD MEETING

The South Florida Water Management District monthly governing board meeting was held at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida on May 11. During this meeting, the SFWMD approved the historic “Green Heart of the Everglades” land acquisition, which will protect more than 11,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land. The Conservancy had identified this area as important for protection and will connect Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve and the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve.

RESERVOIR GROUNDBREAKING

On May 18, our Water Policy Manager Michele Arquette-Palermo, attended a Central Everglades Planning Project CERP groundbreaking. CERP is a component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and the groundbreaking of CERP North was the last of the 4 phases of CERP to break ground.  
  
This critical project will capture water and send it into the central Everglades and out into Florida Bay. Historic levels of funding for Everglades Restoration is resulting in many projects that are making a measurable difference to restore America’s Everglades.





## Reflecting on six decades

In April 2024, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida turns 60. Though we may be approaching the age that most of us are looking to retire, we know we're just getting started. As a collective part of a dedicated and passion-filled group of individuals always looking toward the future, we think it's important to take this time to reflect on where we've been and to celebrate what brought us here.

Nearly 60 years ago, surrounded by a handful of visionaries led by Lester Norris, local attorney George Vega rolled a scroll of names across a table at the Collier County Commission Chamber proclaiming, “these are the names of the people who want to protect Rookery Bay.” He then demanded to see the list of names of those who didn’t.

It was a momentous time for the early days of our community and this insightful organization that showcased the strength that we have when we join together. That foundation of perseverance and tenacity brought about our first victory and it's one we've grown from ever since.

In the years since we were founded, we've been fortunate to have so many talented team members and personalities to help to accomplish our range of work. The people behind the places, the ones that work in these buildings and in the field, have changed over time, and will always continue to do so. From our passionate staff, interns and volunteers to our dedicated donors and supporters – each one working to move the mission forward in their own unique way.



In the many ways 60 years have brought countless lessons, we know that there will never be a shortage of people who care about protecting the wild and beautiful heart of this region.

The Conservancy will forever be an integral part of the steady foundation that those passionate visionaries put in place.

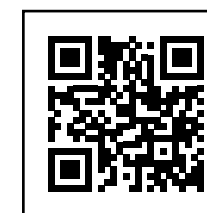
That scroll of names rolled out six decades ago has made a lasting impact, but if we could add all the names of those of us who have joined us since, championing for the Conservancy and our irreplaceable efforts preserving our paradise, it would keep rolling off the table, out the door, and right on down Tamiami Trail.

We don't know all of the new challenges that lie ahead. But we know we are here to work together for the longevity of a sustainable future for our region.



**LEARN MORE ABOUT  
HOW YOU CAN PROTECT  
OUR PARADISE.**

- ▶ Donate
- ▶ Events
- ▶ Take Action
- ▶ Volunteer



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# COMPASS



CONSERVANCY  
of Southwest Florida  
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE.

Protecting Southwest Florida's unique natural  
environment and quality of life ... now and forever.

1495 Smith Preserve Way | Naples, FL 34102  
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Aerial view of mangrove restoration research in Fruit Farm Creek.