In August 2024, the Naples Airport Authority released a Draft Study dated July 2024 and titled Naples Airport Exploratory Study. The primary goal for this study was to identify potential sites for a new airport in Collier County that may warrant further evaluation.[1] The study states that there was an effort to find large enough areas (2400+ acres) that would minimize environmental impacts and incompatible land uses.[2] While the document states the following site characteristics were considered[3], in our evaluation, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida found no substantive discussion of these factors:

- Natural resources such as wetlands, endangered species, etc.
- Conservation Easements or other protective covenants
- Wildlife Management Areas or other public lands
- Panther Habitat (primary and secondary)
- Florida Wildlife Corridor and critical habitat

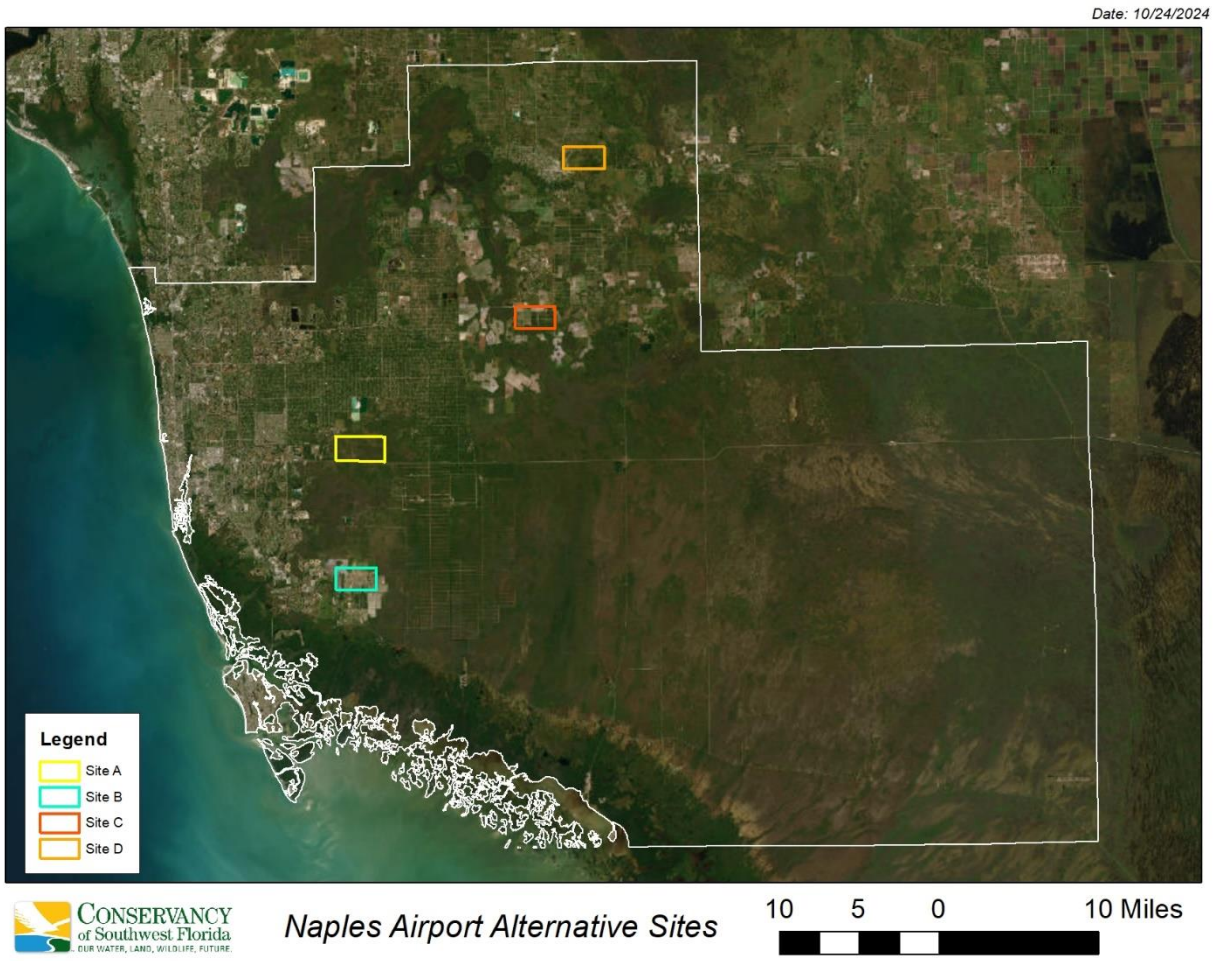
Because each of the potential sites contains significant environmental resources, we conducted a high-level ecological analysis and are pleased to share the results in this white paper.

The Conservancy is not offering any opinion on whether the relocation of the Naples Airport is prudent, necessary, or practical. This document is to provide decision makers and the public with additional environmental information regarding the four proposed potential relocation sites. Please note that this document does not comprehensively analyze the potential sites, and only considers the factors listed above and the number residential units within 5 miles of the site.

Four potential sites, as generally shown below, were identified. These have been labeled simply by their straight-line distance from the current Naples Airport. [4]

Site A - Property East of the County Landfill (±9 miles)
Site B - Lipman Farms Northeast of Marco Island Executive Airport (±11 miles)
Site C - Sunripe Land South of Oil Well Road (±23 miles)
Site D - Immokalee Regional Airport (±30 miles)

[1] https://www.flynaples.com/wp-content/uploads/Feasibility-Detailed-Report-August-2024.pdf, pg. 2
[2] https://www.flynaples.com/wp-content/uploads/Feasibility-Detailed-Report-August-2024.pdf p. 35
[3] https://www.flynaples.com/wp-content/uploads/Feasibility-Detailed-Report-August-2024.pdf p. 35
[4] https://www.flynaples.com/wp-content/uploads/Feasibility-Detailed-Report-August-2024.pdf p. 37


Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Site A
Site B
Site C
Site D
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE.
Naples Airport Alternative Sites
10 5 0 10 Miles

SITE A: Property East of the County Landfill

Listed Species:

- 100% primary zone panther habitat (2,987 acres).
- 85.5% (2,555 acres) is adult panther breeding habitat.
- 96% (2,869 acres) is part of the panther least cost pathways.
- Red Cockaded Woodpeckers are also found on this site, based on previous data.

Florida Wildlife Corridor:

- 99% (2,952 acres) of the site is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Florida Managed Lands:

- 9% (256 acres) of the site is the publicly managed land called North Belle Meade Preserve. Please note that some areas of this site may have been used for mitigation or had development rights transferred off making the site unsuitable for development.

Wetlands Coverage:

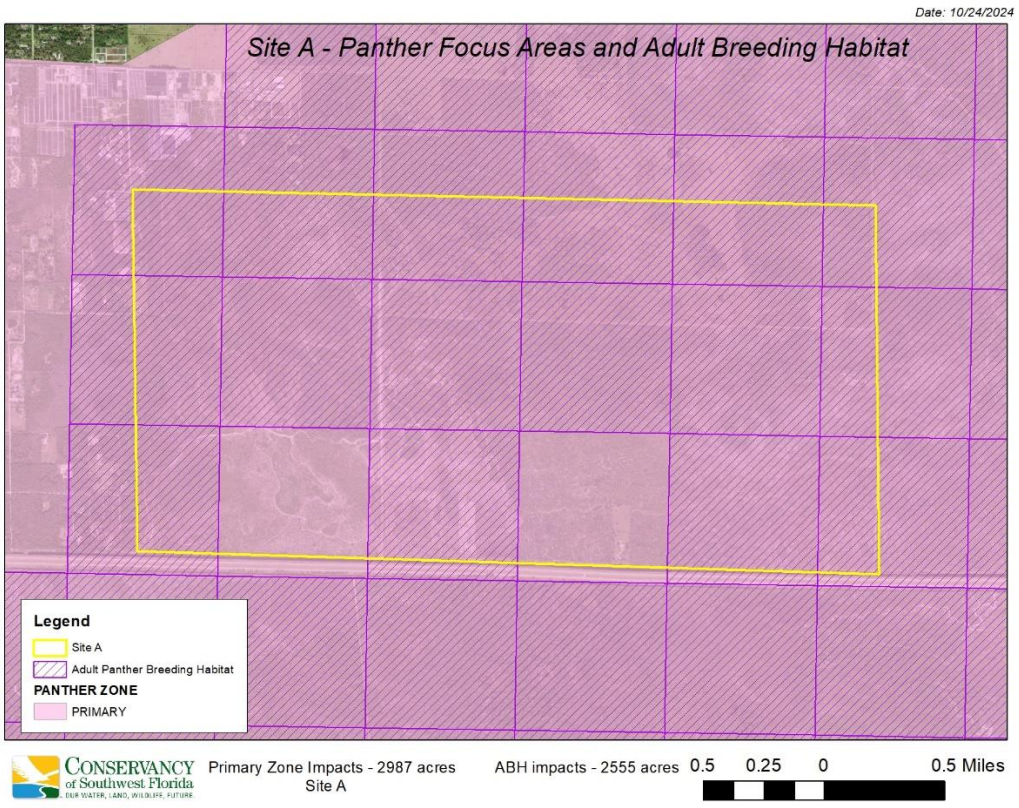
- 90% (2,692 acres)

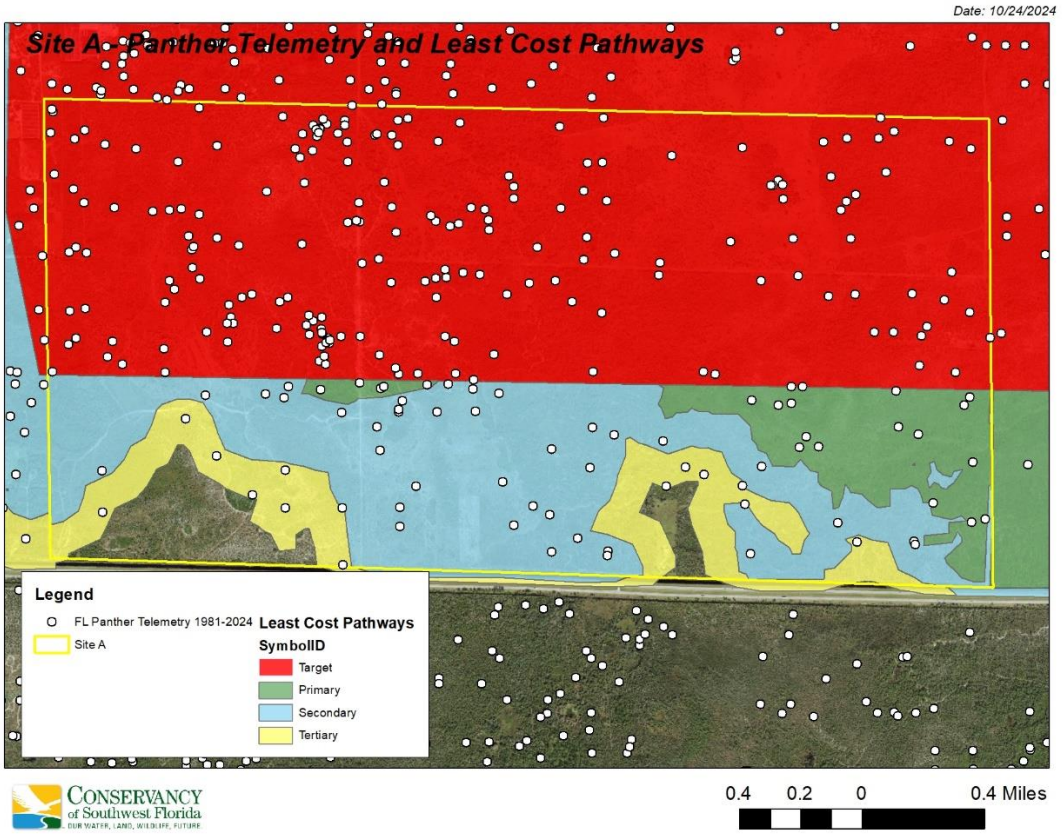
Storm Surge:

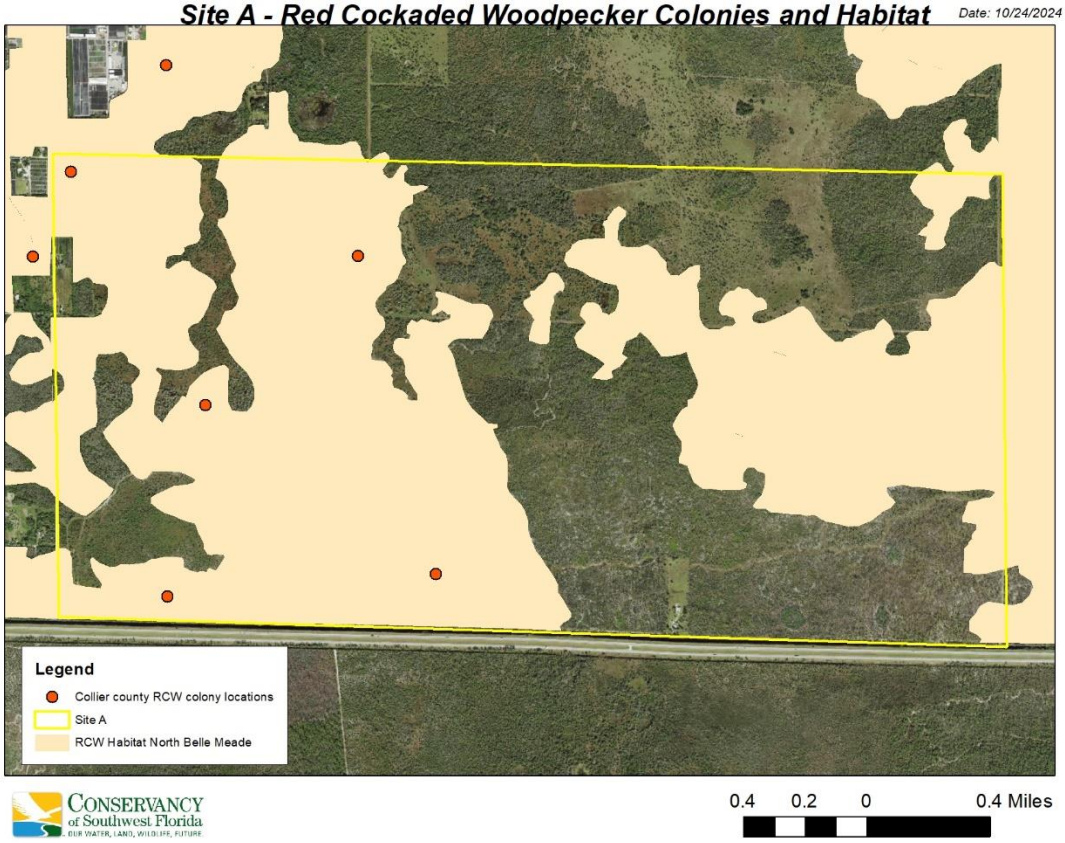
- Site is in surge area 2, meaning there are potential impacts from a Category 2 storm or greater. This puts the site outside the coastal high hazard area.

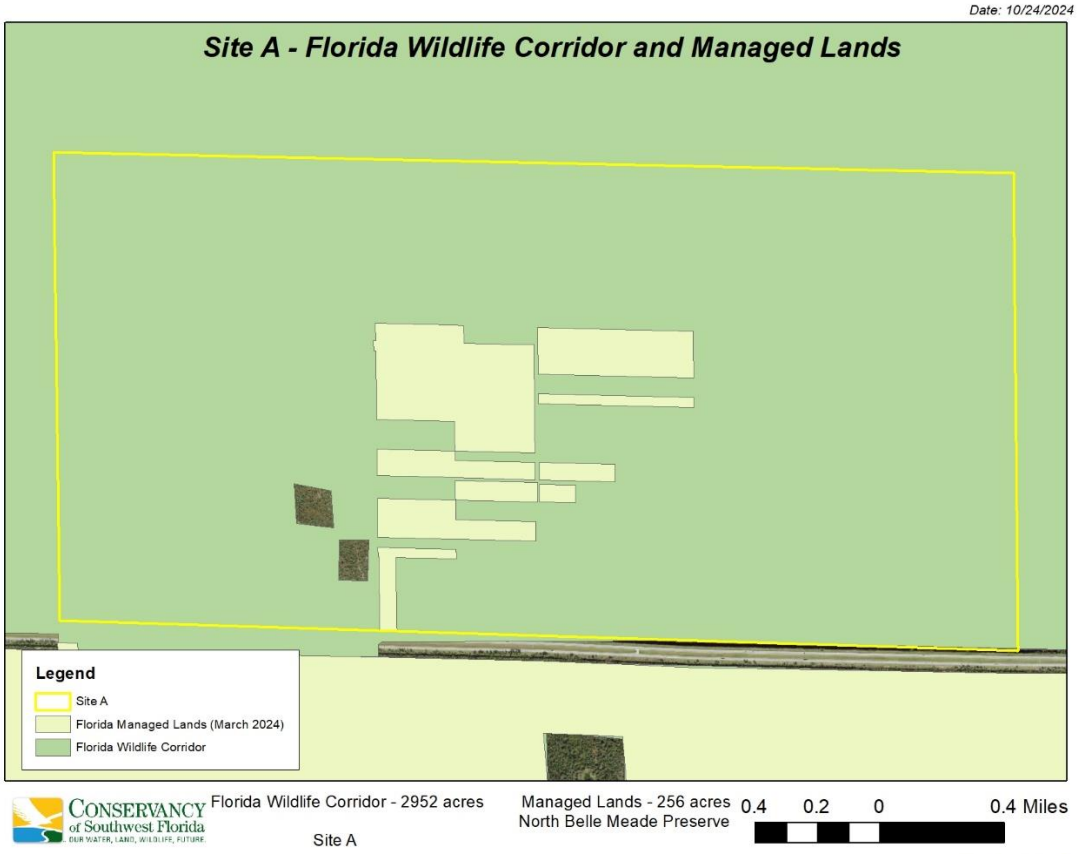
Housing:

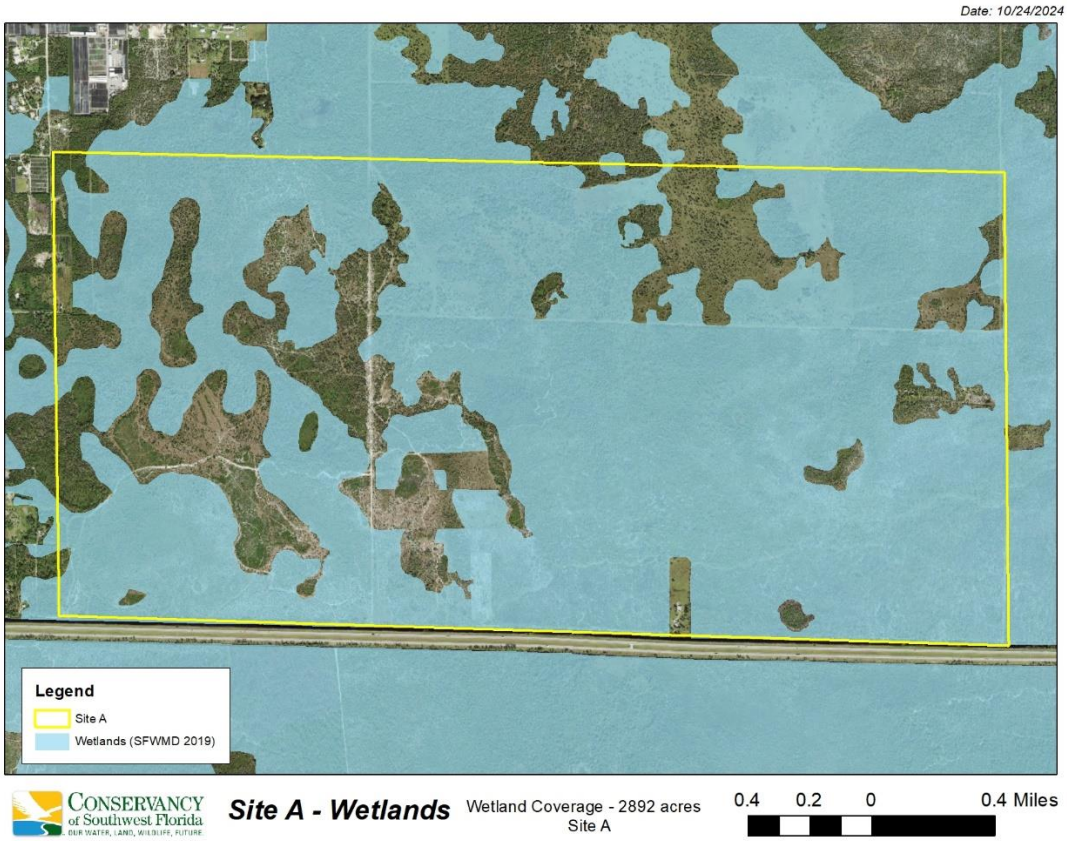
- There are 29,819 residences within 5 miles




Site A - Panther Telemetry and Least Cost Pathways
Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
FL Panther Telemetry 1981-2024
Site A
Least Cost Pathways
SymbolID
Target
Primary
Secondary
Tertiary
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
0.4 0.2 0 0.4 Miles


Site A - Red Cockaded Woodpecker Colonies and Habitat
Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Collier county RCW colony locations
Site A
RCW Habitat North Belle Meade
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
0.4 0.2 0 0.4 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Site A - Florida Wildlife Corridor and Managed Lands
Legend
Site A
Florida Managed Lands (March 2024)
Florida Wildlife Corridor
Florida Wildlife Corridor - 2952 acres
Site A
Managed Lands - 256 acres
North Belle Meade Preserve
0.4 0.2 0
0.4 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Site A
Wetlands (SFWMD 2019)
Site A - Wetlands
Wetland Coverage - 2892 acres
Site A
0.4 0.2 0
0.4 Miles

SITE B: Lipman Farms

Listed Species:

- 13% primary panther zone (292 acres)
- 87% secondary panther zone (1,932 acres).
- 41% of site (910 acres) acres is adult panther breeding habitat.

Florida Wildlife Corridor:

- 4%(85 acres) of the site is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor

Wetlands Coverage:

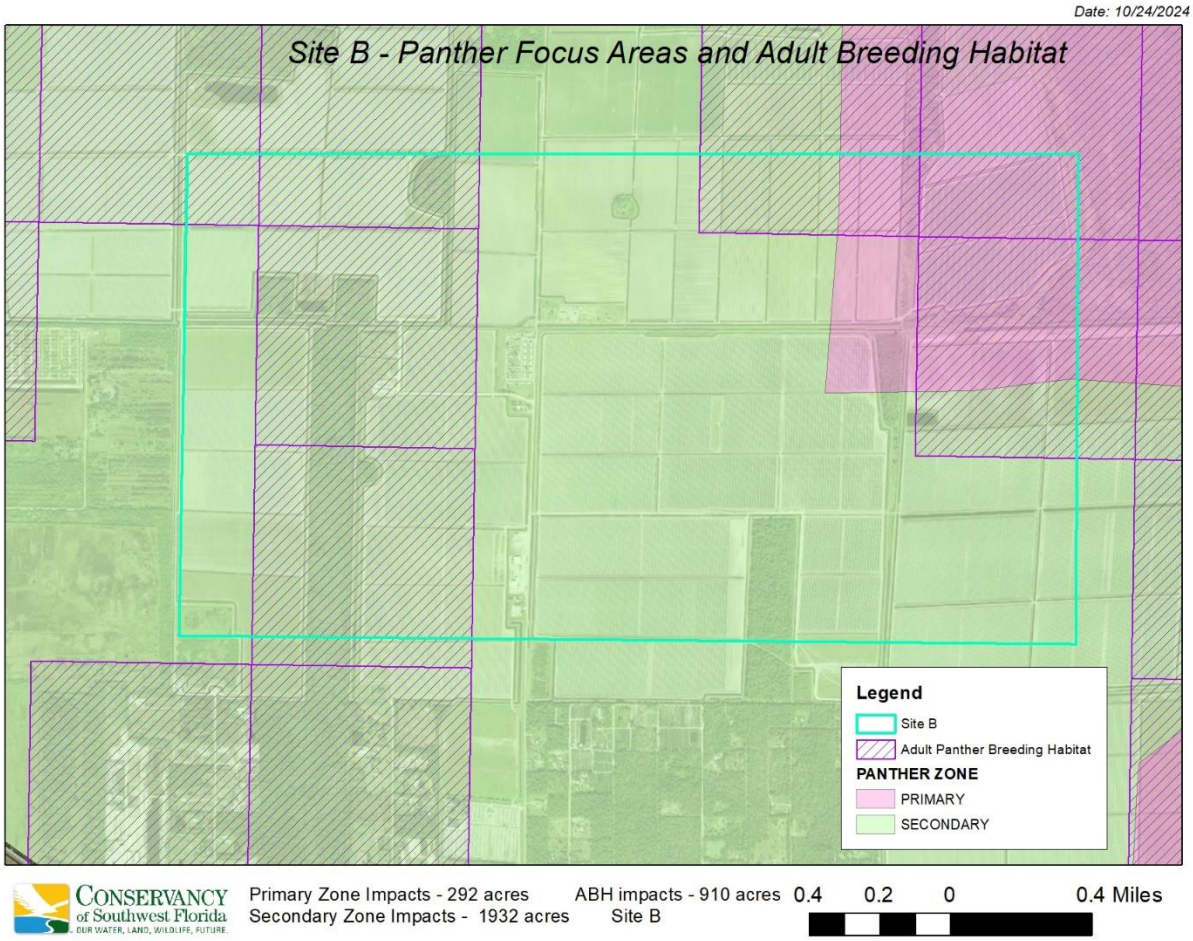
- 9% (194 acres)

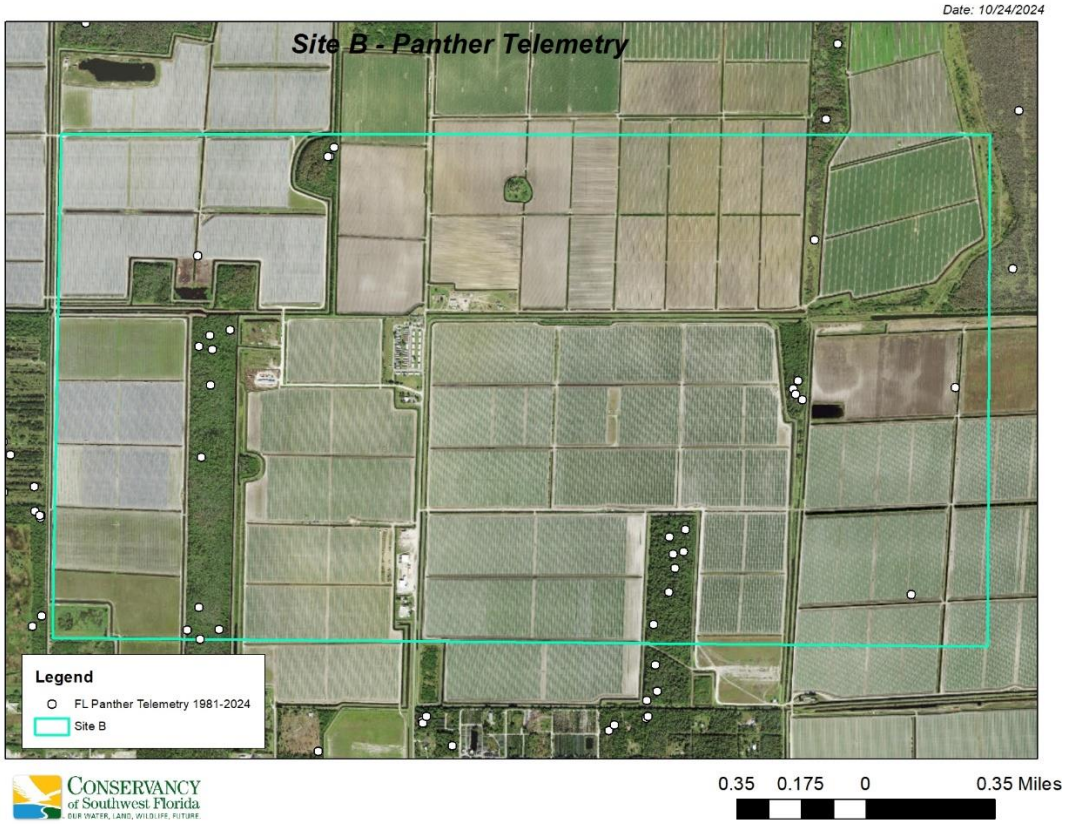
Storm Surge:

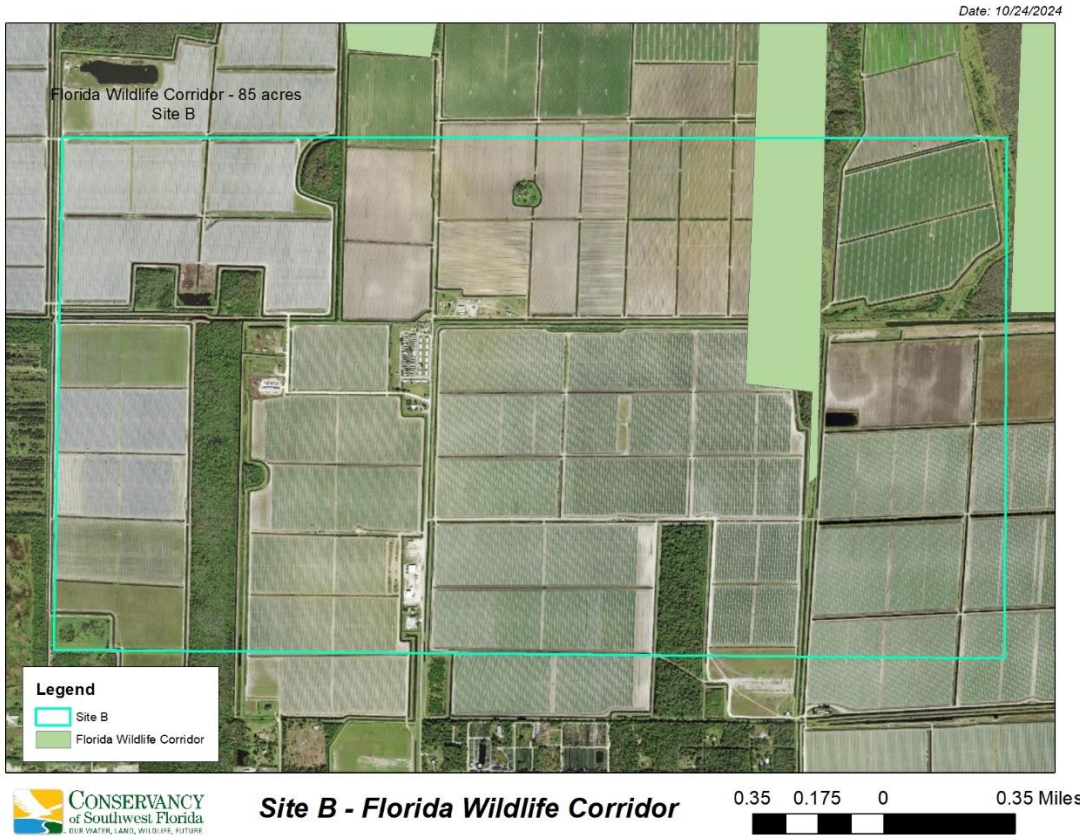
- This site is split between storm surge area 1 and storm surge area 2. This puts part of the site (the part in storm surge 1) in the coastal high hazard area.

Housing:

- There are 19,935 residences within 5 miles.




Date: 10/24/2024
Site B - Panther Telemetry
Legend
FL Panther Telemetry 1981-2024
Site B
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Florida Wildlife Corridor - 85 acres
Site B
Legend
Site B
Florida Wildlife Corridor
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
Site B - Florida Wildlife Corridor
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Site B
Wetlands (SFWMD 2019)
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE.
Site B - Wetlands
Wetland Coverage - 194 acres
Site B
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles

SITE C: Sunripe, South of Oil Well Road

Listed Species:

- 79% primary panther zone (1,664 acres)
- 21% secondary panther zone (470 acres)
- 63% of site (1,411 acres) is adult panther breeding habitat.
- 45% (999 acres) of site is part of the panther least cost pathways.

Florida Wildlife Corridor:

- 90% (1,915 acres) of the site is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor

Wetlands Coverage:

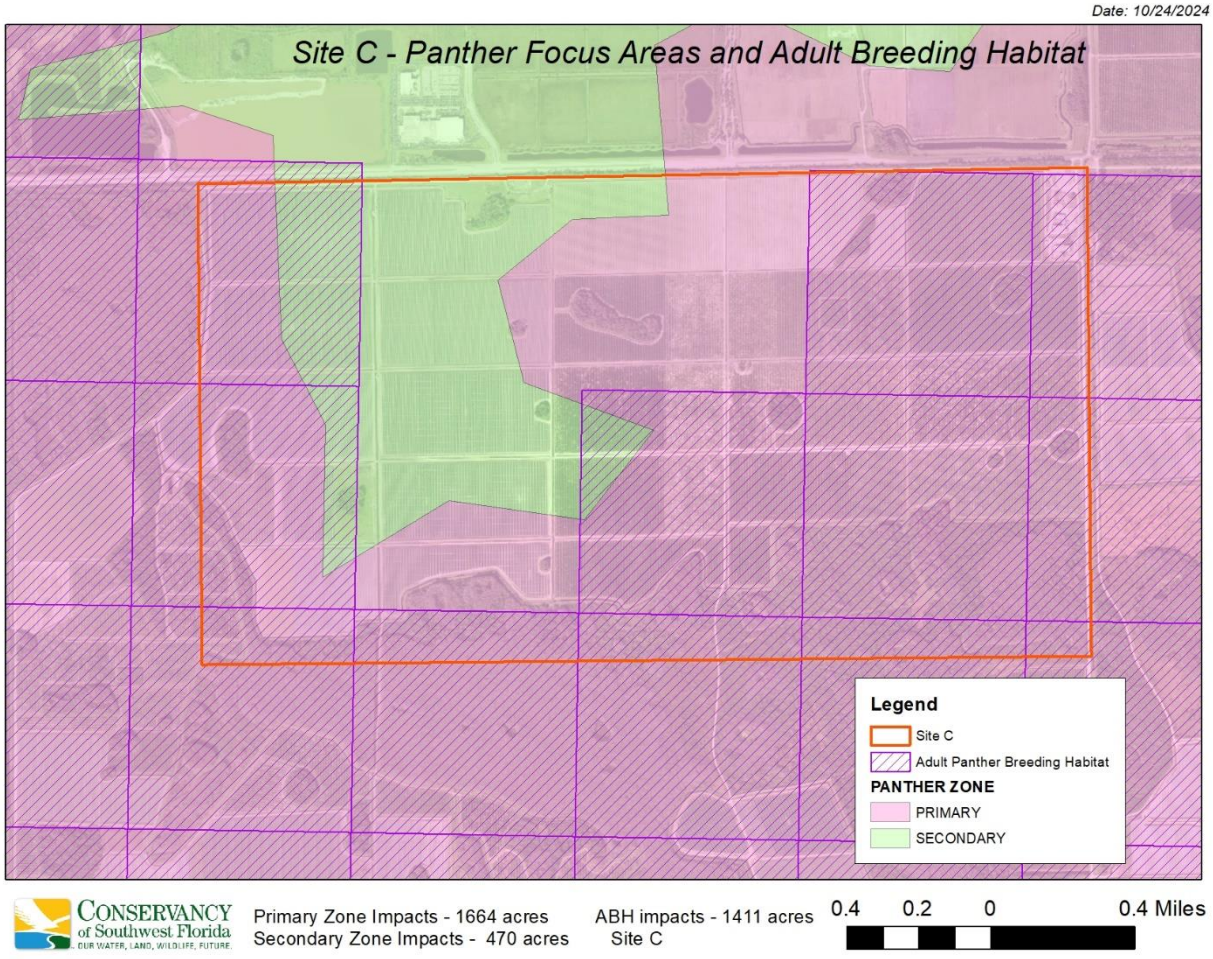
- 18% (388 acres)

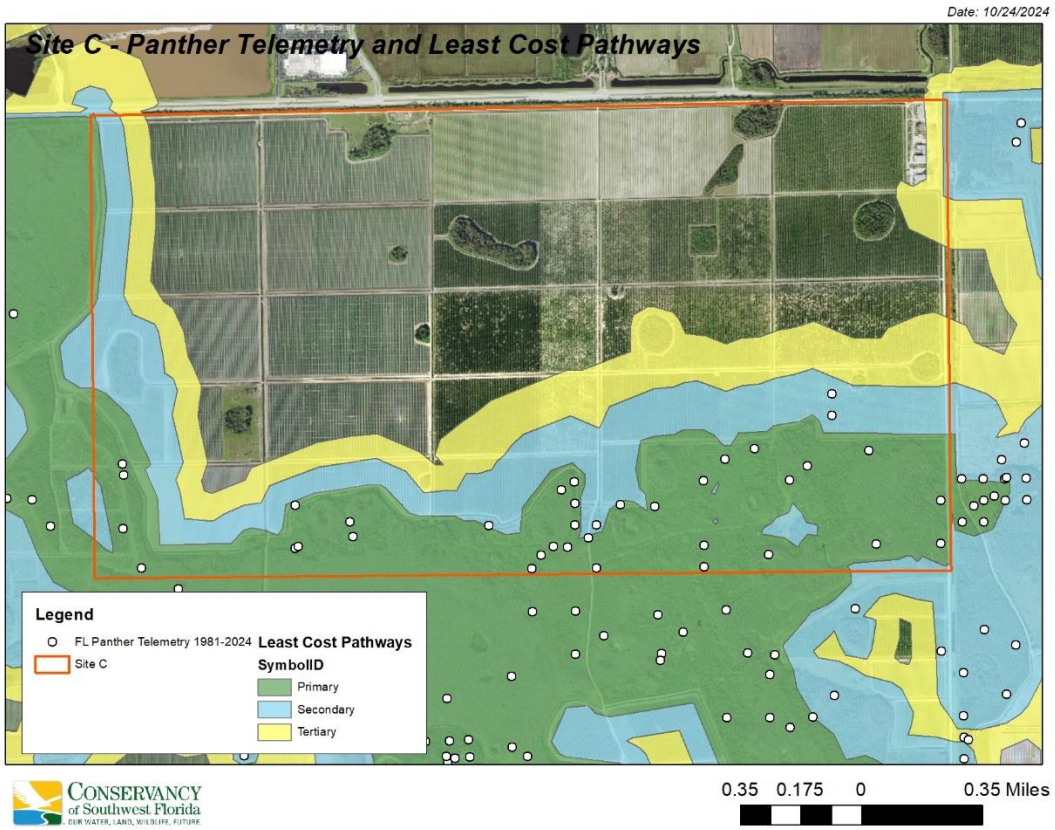
Storm Surge:

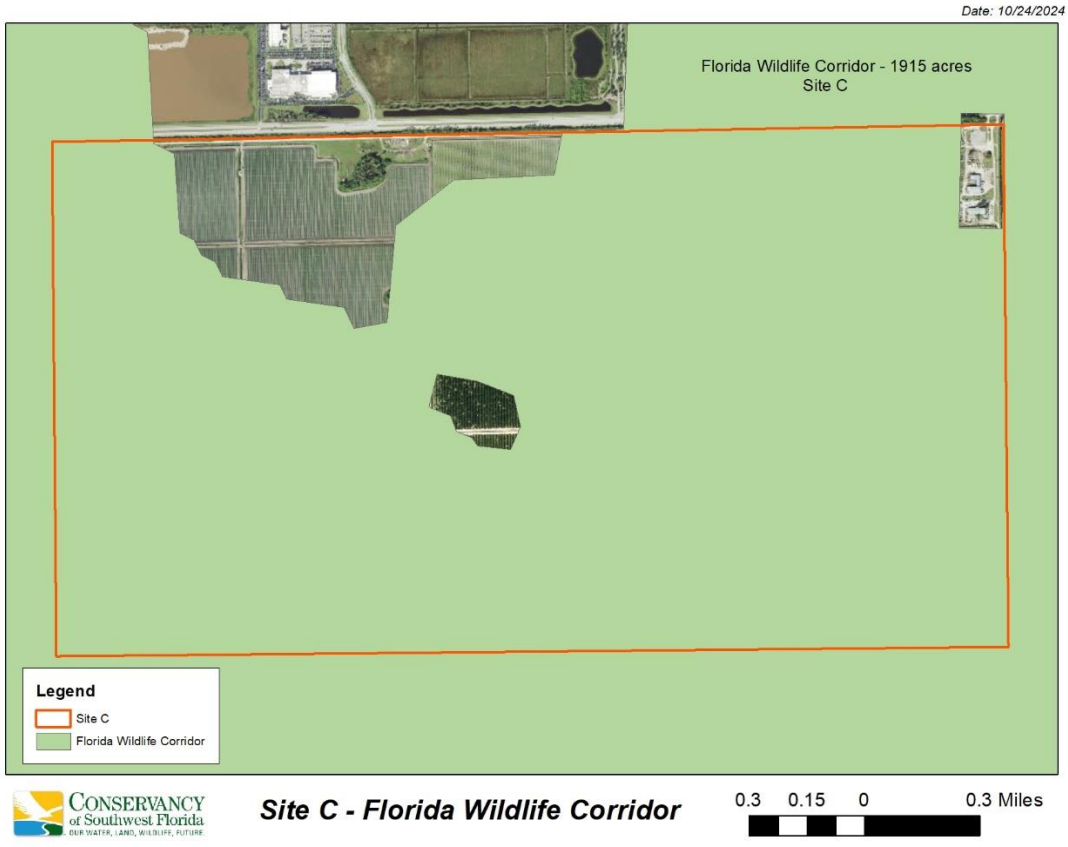
- Site is in surge area 4 meaning there are potential impacts from a Category 4 storm or greater. This puts the site outside of the coastal high hazard area.

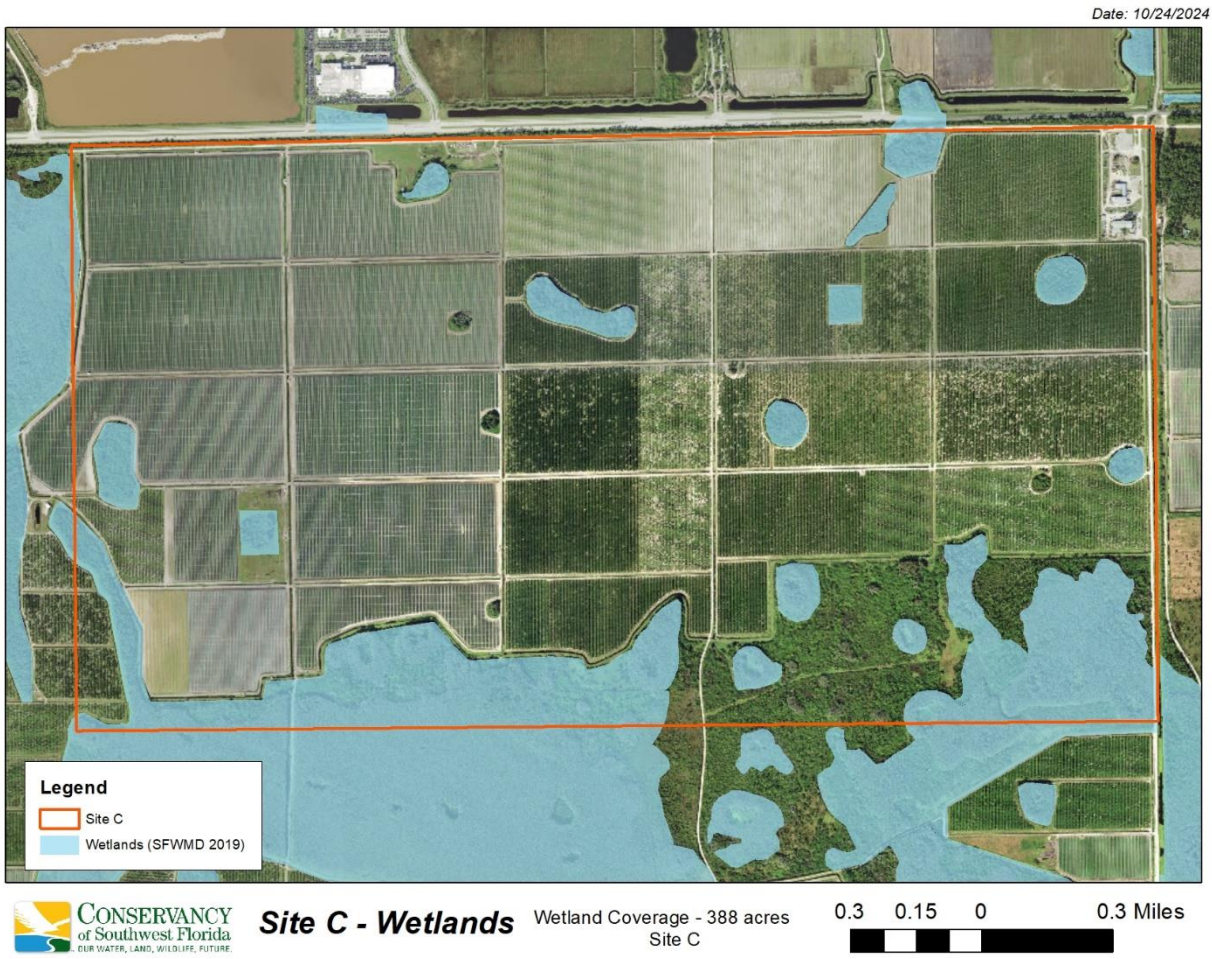
Housing:

- There are 6,076 residences within 5 miles. Please note that the proposed villages of Rivergrass, Longwater, and Bellmar are proposing to build at least 8,350 units that would be within 5 miles of this site. The extended Town of Big Cypress would add another 1,500 units. Additionally, there are 6,500 units in Ave Maria that could be built. This would bring the residences within 5 miles of the site to 22,476.




Date: 10/24/2024
Site C - Panther Telemetry and Least Cost Pathways
Legend
FL Panther Telemetry 1981-2024
Site C
Least Cost Pathways
SymbolID
Primary
Secondary
Tertiary
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Florida Wildlife Corridor - 1915 acres
Site C
Legend
Site C
Florida Wildlife Corridor
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
Site C - Florida Wildlife Corridor
0.3 0.15 0 0.3 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Site C
Wetlands (SFWMD 2019)
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE.
Site C - Wetlands
Wetland Coverage - 388 acres
Site C
0.3 0.15 0 0.3 Miles

SITE D: Immokalee Regional Airport

Listed Species:

- 46% primary panther zone (1,027 acres)
- 13% secondary panther zone (290 acres).
- 11% (247 acres) adult panther breeding habitat.
- 75% (1,672 acres) is part of the panther least cost pathways.
- There is also historic scrub jay habitat

Florida Wildlife Corridor:

- 74% (1,644 acres) of the site is part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor

Wetlands Coverage:

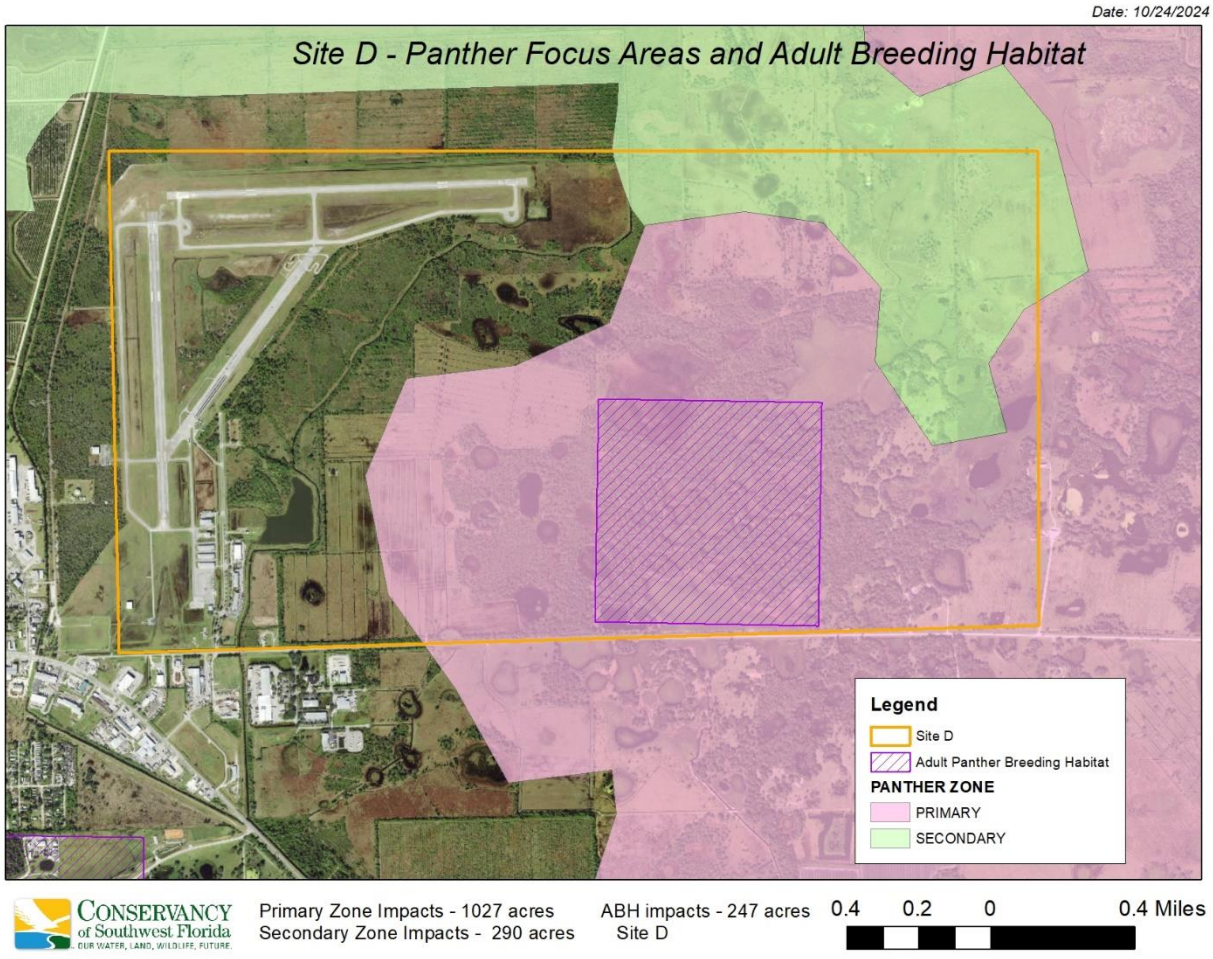
- 19% (416 acres).

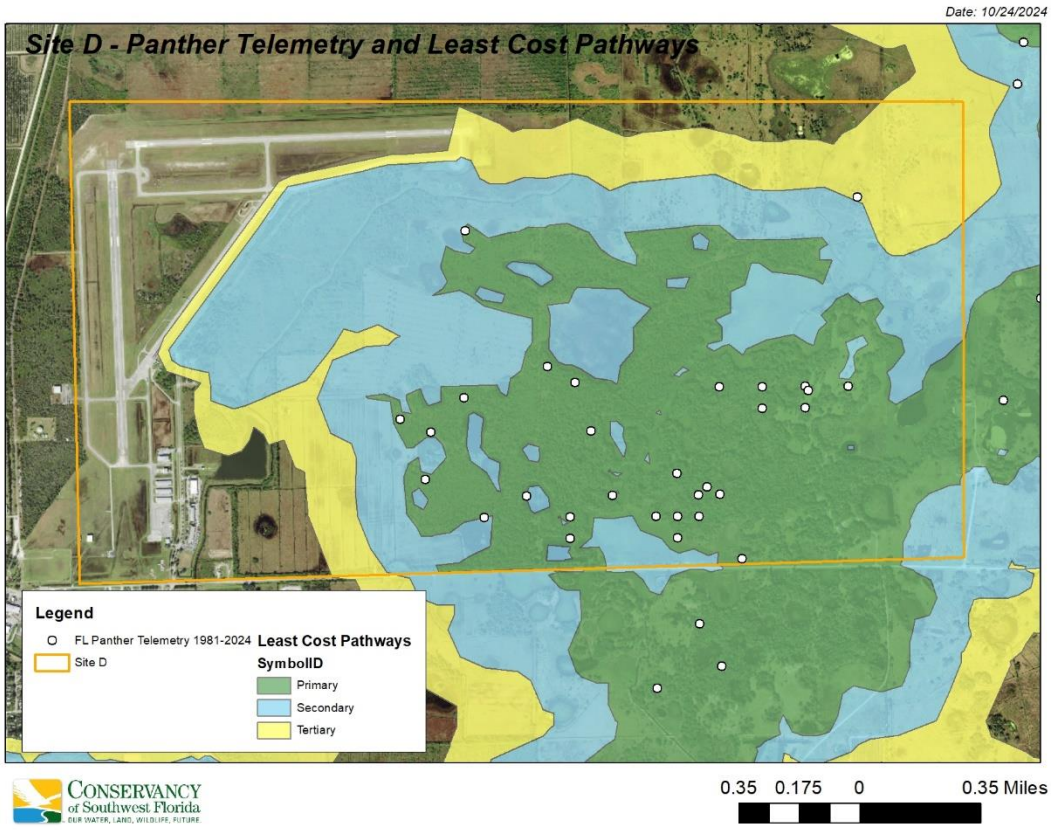
Storm Surge:

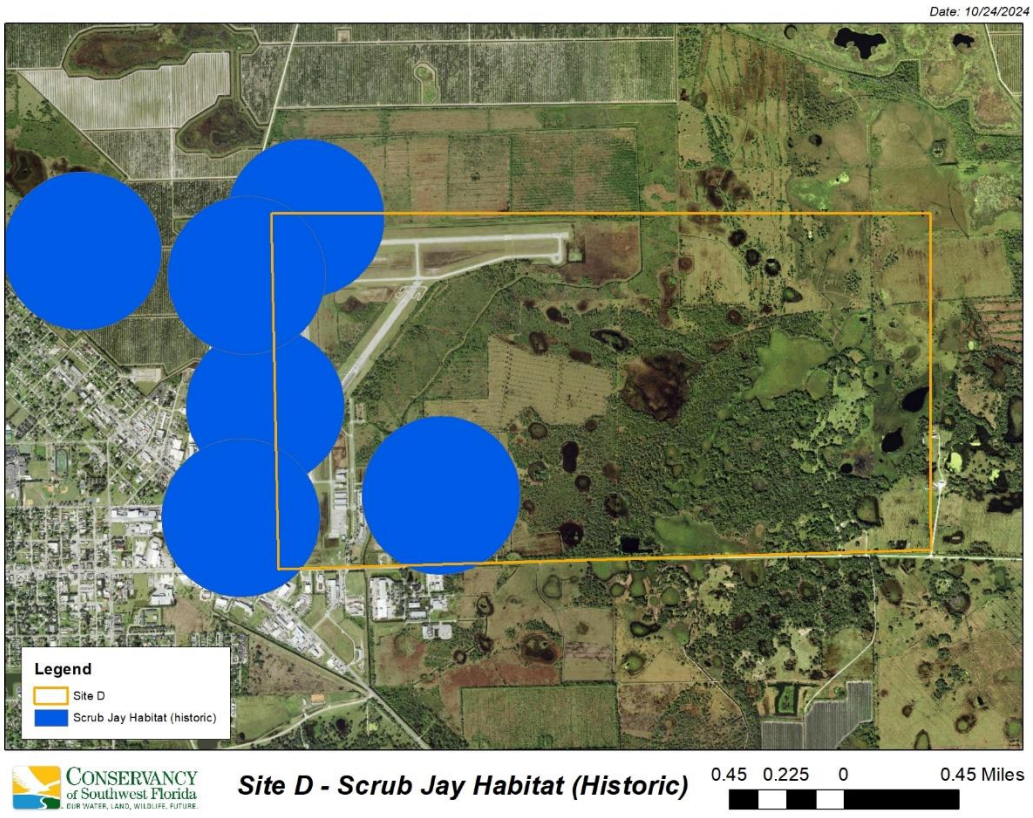
- Site D is outside of the storm surge zone for Collier County.

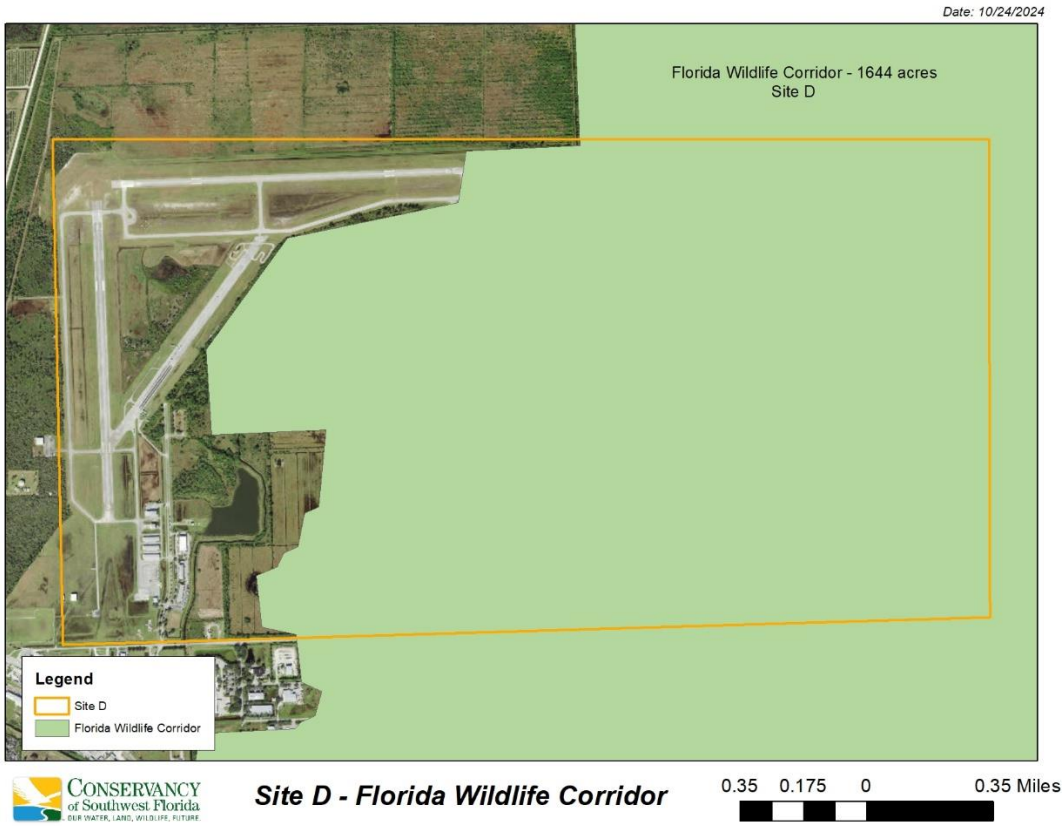
Housing:

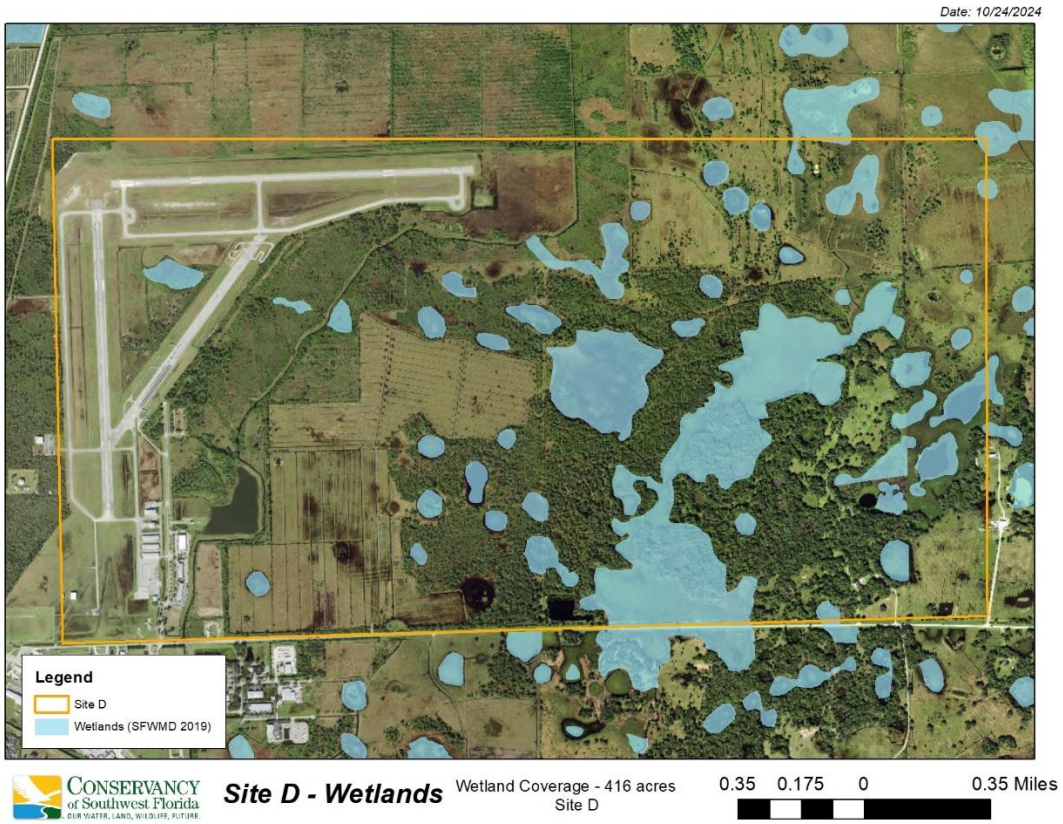
- There are 5,291 residences within 5 miles




Date: 10/24/2024
Site D - Panther Telemetry and Least Cost Pathways
Legend
FL Panther Telemetry 1981-2024
Site D
Least Cost Pathways
SymbolID
Primary
Secondary
Tertiary
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Site D
Scrub Jay Habitat (historic)
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
Site D - Scrub Jay Habitat (Historic)
0.45 0.225 0 0.45 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Florida Wildlife Corridor - 1644 acres
Site D
Legend
Site D
Florida Wildlife Corridor
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
Site D - Florida Wildlife Corridor
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles


Date: 10/24/2024
Legend
Site D
Wetlands (SFWMD 2019)
CONSERVANCY of Southwest Florida
OUR WATER, LAND, WILDLIFE, FUTURE
Site D - Wetlands
Wetland Coverage - 416 acres
Site D
0.35 0.175 0 0.35 Miles

Conclusion

The four sites identified for possible further consideration to relocate the Naples Airport all contain significant natural resources. Based on our review of each of these sites, the Conservancy has significant concerns about the environmental compatibility of a future airport on any of these parcels.

As the Naples Airport Authority considers whether to pursue evaluation of any of these sites, the important ecological features of these properties should be part of the decision-making process. In addition, a new airport will have environmental impacts beyond the actual footprint of the facility – noise, traffic, etc., and while our analysis did not delve into these, this should also be considered by the Naples Airport Authority as the decision is made to either move forward with further analysis or not.

Source of Data Layers:

- Panther Focus Area

Shapefile provided by Florida Department of Environmental Protection showing panther habitat zones as defined by the US Fish and Wildlife Service's panther subteam of Multi-Species/Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT).

Panther habitat zones were developed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service's panther subteam of MERIT, and published in the study by Kautz et al, 2006[5]. Members of the MERIT panther recovery subteam identified lands essential to the long-term survival of the Florida panther. The MERIT subteam defined the Primary Zone as "all lands essential for the survival of the Florida panther in the wild."[6] A Secondary Zone includes "lands contiguous with the Primary Zone, and areas which panthers may currently use, and where expansion of the Florida panther population is most likely to occur".[7]

https://geodata.dep.state.fl.us/datasets/florida-panther-focus-area/about

- Adult Panther Breeding Habitat

Shapefile provided by Dr. Robert Frakes represents the characteristics of the occupied area and used those attributes in a random forest model to develop a predictive distribution map for resident breeding panthers in southern Florida south of the Caloosahatchee River. This model should be useful for evaluating the impacts of future development projects, in prioritizing areas

[5] R. Kautz et al.How much is enough? Landscape-scale conservation for the Florida panther Biological Conservation (2006)
[6] https://geodata.dep.state.fl.us/datasets/f7c0e1e739414bc9931a44d2242b04d4_1/about

[7] https://geodata.dep.state.fl.us/datasets/f7c0e1e739414bc9931a44d2242b04d4_1/about

for panther conservation, and in evaluating the potential impacts of sea-level rise and changes in hydrology. These methods were published in Frakes et al., 2015.

https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0133044

- Panther Telemetry

This dataset from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission represents Florida panther (Puma concolor coryi) radio-telemetry data collected February 1981-January 2024. These data were collected by three entities: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Everglades National Park (ENP), and Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP). Methodology for the collection of telemetry locations was described by Land et al. (2008). Many of these panther locations were collected during the diurnal resting period (i.e., during early to mid-morning [Comiskey et al., 2002; Beier et al., 2003])

https://geodata.myfwc.com/datasets/myfwc::florida-panther-telemetry/about

- Panther Least Cost Pathways

This layer was developed by the University of Central Florida for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team. The aim of this data is to identify potential pathways and corridors that panthers are likely to use under existing land cover/land use conditions from the current species core range (south of the Caloosahatchee River) to large habitat hubs north of Interstate 4 (The Green Swamp and Ocala National Forest). The focus is on predicted panther movements and natural range expansion within the south-central Florida region. These methods are described in the report by Smith, 2022.

This layer is available through the Florida Geographic Data Library.

- Scrub Jay Habitat

This dataset plots the locations of all Florida Scrub-Jays in 1992-1993 including the size (numbers) of individual families wherever possible. Participants in this project revisited known Florida Scrub-Jay localities to determine their current status; searched new, previously unsurveyed scrub patches for the presence of Florida Scrub-Jays; and compiled and attempted to confirm all existing information on recent Florida Scrub-Jay localities. Information was compiled from reliable, published or unpublished Florida Scrub-Jay surveys.[8] We acknowledge that this data could be considered outdated by some, however, it is the best publicly available data. Additionally, scrub jays have been documented in the Upland Management Area (UMA) of the Immokalee Regional Airport as recently as 2019[9] and the 1992-1993 dataset are still relied on by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.[10]

[8] https://www.geoplan.ufl.edu/agol/metadata/htm/scrubjay.htm
[9] https://www.swflroads.com/project-files/215/007_41754012201-EA-D1-SR_29_Immokalee_NRE__Addendum_2-2019-0809.pdf
[10] https://www.swflroads.com/project-files/215/007_41754012201-EA-D1-SR_29_Immokalee_NRE__Addendum_2-2019-0809.pdf

- Florida Wildlife Corridor

The Florida Wildlife Corridor (layer name Florida_Wildlife_Corridor_2021.shp): This vector layer was created from the original raster grid 2021 version of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) by selecting the Priority 1, Priority 2, and Priority 3 values in the raster layer and converting to a shapefile using the Raster to Polygon command with the simplify option to remove the jagged edges of the original raster layer, reduce file size, and then make conversion to a kml file feasible. It is also used as the primary data layer to inform Florida Forever and other state and regional land acquisition programs regarding the location of the most important wildlife and ecological corridors and large, intact landscapes in the state. The FEGN identifies areas of opportunity for protecting a statewide network of ecological hubs (large areas of ecological significance) and linkages designed to maintain large landscape-scale ecological functions including priority species habitat and ecosystem services throughout the state.

This shapefile is available in the Florida Geographic Data Library

- Red Cockaded Woodpecker

This shapefile contains location information on the Red Cockaded Woodpecker collected by various state and federal agencies including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. There is no attribute data for these RCW locations. Data were compiled by requesting information from a variety of federal, state, and local biologists, RCW researchers, and area managers who provided the information they had on hand. None of the data were collected in any standardized format nor under any certain protocol. Similar data, e.g., date recorded, location accuracy level, active/inactive status, were not collected or maintained between sites. The data set includes locations of active and inactive nest trees and centroids of cluster locations. The best description of those data would be as general locations of where RCWs have previously occurred.

This shapefile is available in the Florida Geographic Data Library

- Wetlands

This data set serves as documentation of land cover and land use (LCLU) within the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) as it existed in 2017-2019. The minimum mapping unit for classification was 0.5 acres for wetlands and 5 acres for uplands. The mapped layer was created by selecting all features in the dataset classified as 6000 or wetland.

The entire dataset is available in the Florida Geographic Data Library.