

12. VEGETATION & WILDLIFE

SUMMARY

Because the Project Site has been farmed continuously for many years, it contains no significant vegetation or wildlife features. Further, there is no evidence that the Project Site provides significant habitat for any listed wildlife or plant species.

In accordance with the decision made at the Pre-Application conference, the requirement for surveys was determined to be limited to a single visual survey.

A. Identify the dominant species and other unusual or unique features of the plant communities on Map F. Identify and describe the amount of all plant communities that will be preserved in a natural state following development as shown on Map H.

Using the Florida Land Use and Cover Classification System (FLUCCS) to describe the cover types, the Project Site can best be categorized as Row Crops, FLUCCS Code #214. Historically, the Site has been farmed for malanga, tomatoes, and pole beans. Miami-Dade County aerials indicate that the Project Site has been farmed continuously since 1963 and has remained active for the production of row crops to the present day. This was confirmed by a Site visit conducted on August 4, 2005.

Due to the lack of natural vegetative communities on the Project Site, no preservation of vegetation on the Site is proposed.

B. Discuss the survey methods were used to determine the absence or presence of state or federally listed wildlife and plants. (Sampling methodology should be agreed to by the regional planning council and other reviewing agencies at pre-application conference stage.) State actual sampling times and dates, and discuss any factors that may have influenced the results of the sampling effort. Show on Map G the location of all transects, trap grids, or other sampling stations used to determine the on-site status of state or federally listed wildlife and plant resources.

Based upon the present condition of the Project Site and its long history of agricultural use, a single visual survey constituted the site assessment methodology agreed to at the Pre-Application.

The fauna potentially occupying the property would be those tolerant of man's activities, highly adaptive, and opportunistic---those usually considered pest species. Of these, one might expect: among the mammals - house mice, roof rats, racoons, opossum, feral cats, feral dogs, and foxes; among the birds - mourning doves, ground doves, cattle egrets, and grackles; among the reptiles - anoles, geckos, racers, ring-neck snakes and possibly rat snakes; among the amphibians - marine toads and greenhouse frogs.

Tilling of land typically attracts birds and other predators because the activity uncovers insects and small animals such as rats and mice, which then become easy prey.

- C. List all state or federally listed wildlife and plant resources that were observed on the site and show location on Map G. Given the plant communities on-site, list any additional state or federally listed wildlife and plant resources expected to occur on the site and show the location of suitable habitat on Map G. Additionally, address any unique wildlife and plant resources, such as colonial bird nesting sites and migrating bird concentration areas. For species that are either observed or expected to utilize the site, discuss the known or expected location and population size on-site, existence (and extent, if known) of adjacent, contiguous habitat off-site, and any special habitat requirements of the species.**

One Bald Eagle, which is designated as a threatened species pursuant to state and federal regulations, was observed on the afternoon of August 4, 2005. This species is an opportunistic feeder, willing to feed on carrion as well as live prey. Based upon the numbers of other bird species foraging the site at the time, it is suspected that the eagle was foraging for prey killed or wounded by the farming activities. This behavior is not unusual for this and other species. No eagles were sighted in prior or subsequent Site visits.

There are no trees, live or dead, on the Site to provide suitable perch or nesting habitat for the eagle, and no nest was identified. It is believed that this individual was an episodic visitor targeting the easy source of prey. Based upon the urbanized nature of the surrounding area, it is presumed that the Bald Eagle transmigrated from more suitable habitat such as the Bird Drive Basin to the north of Kendall Drive or from the East Everglades to the west of Krome Avenue.

No listed plant species was identified on the Project Site.

- D. Indicate what impact development of the site will pose to affected state or federally listed wildlife and plant resources.**

Due to the historic and continuous farming activities within the Project Site, and the lack of listed species habitat, no direct impacts are expected to occur to any state or federally listed wildlife and plant resources. Most listed plant species known to occur within Miami-Dade County are associated with pine flatwoods (a diminishing habitat within the County) and are perpetuated by fire (either natural or prescribed).

The Bald Eagle that was observed was seen within the areas of recently tilled soils where, in all cases, tractors were actively working the land. The eagle appeared to be foraging for small prey that may have been exposed, killed, or injured by the farming activities.

The development of the Project Site will remove the attraction of the agricultural activities but will in no way impact the natural habitat of these species, which likely come from the nearby natural areas within the Bird Drive Basin to the north or the East Everglades near Krome Avenue to the west.

- E. Discuss what measures are proposed to be taken to mitigate impacts to state and federally listed wildlife and plant resources. If protection is proposed to occur on-site, describe what legal instrument will be used to**

protect the site, and what management actions will be taken to maintain habitat value. If protection is proposed to occur off-site, identify the proposed amount and type of lands to be mitigated as well as whether mitigation would be through a regional mitigation land bank, by acquisition of lands that adjoin existing public holdings, or by other means.

Based upon the historic agricultural use of the Project Site and the complete absence of any natural habitats, including trees as potential perching or nesting sites, and thickets for refuge for native, non-nuisance animal species, no mitigative measures are proposed.