FLU DATA AND ANALYSIS APPENDIX B
East County Planning Guide

charlotte county

EAST COUNTY

planning guide

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EAST COUNTY

planning guide

created for

Charlotte County

SMART charlotte 2050

created by

RWA INC.

CONSULTING

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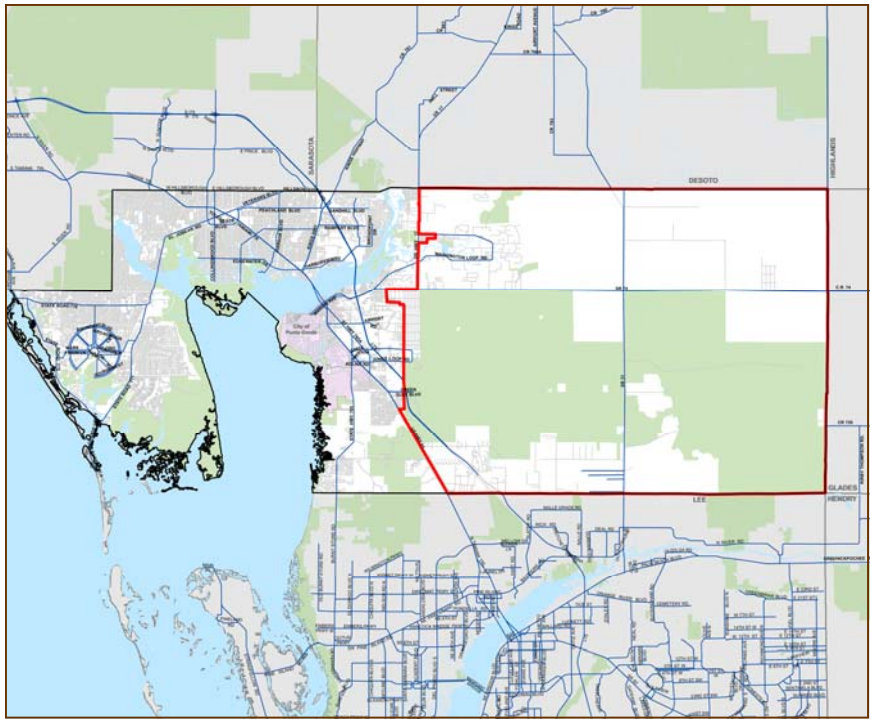
1.0 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The Area:

Charlotte County is currently undertaking an extensive community-based effort that will result in an update to the Charlotte County Comprehensive Plan. This initiative, known as *Smart Charlotte 2050*, will establish a vision for the development of the County over the next 40 years and will help guide all future planning and growth management decisions. In support of the Vision created by the *Smart Charlotte 2050* process, the County has identified the need to develop a planning guide that is specific to Charlotte County's extensive rural areas.

The *East County Planning Guide* focuses on approximately 286,500 acres located to the east of I-75 and US 17. This portion of the county is predominantly rural and agrarian. While East County comprises the majority (65%) of Charlotte County's land area, it only accommodates 1.4% of the County's permanent population. East County is characterized by improved or unimproved agriculture, extractive industry, and open space and conservation lands, with sparse and scattered residential lots. In recent years, Charlotte County has experienced an increasing amount of development inquiries within the East County area. The approval of the Babcock Ranch Overlay District, which will result in a new community of over 17,000 units in East County, has contributed to concerns about increased development pressure on lands outside of the Urban Services Area.



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- Charlotte_Bndry
- **East County Study Boundary**
- **Major Roads**
- **Secondary Roads**
- City of Punta Gorda
- **Public Conservation Lands**

The Issues:

How to direct and accommodate long-term growth and development within the County's existing rural area is the focus of this Guide. The following analysis describes existing conditions within East County, addresses land use planning issues, and recommends general actions needed to develop a comprehensive growth management strategy. Ultimately, this strategy will need to integrate a variety of goals and challenges and strike a balance between competing interests in order to develop a framework that maintains, protects, and preserves the rural character of East County while being sensitive to the needs of all landowners in the rural area.

The Guide provides general policy recommendations and outlines steps needed to develop Land Development Regulations to guide future development within Charlotte County's rural area. More specifically, these recommendations address how to maintain and enhance a viable agricultural economy; protect natural ecosystems, habitats and environmentally sensitive resources; secure wildlife corridors and refuges; and control sprawl and rural development; while ensuring that private property rights are protected and that adequate commercial and industrial opportunities exist to support the needs of East County.

2.0

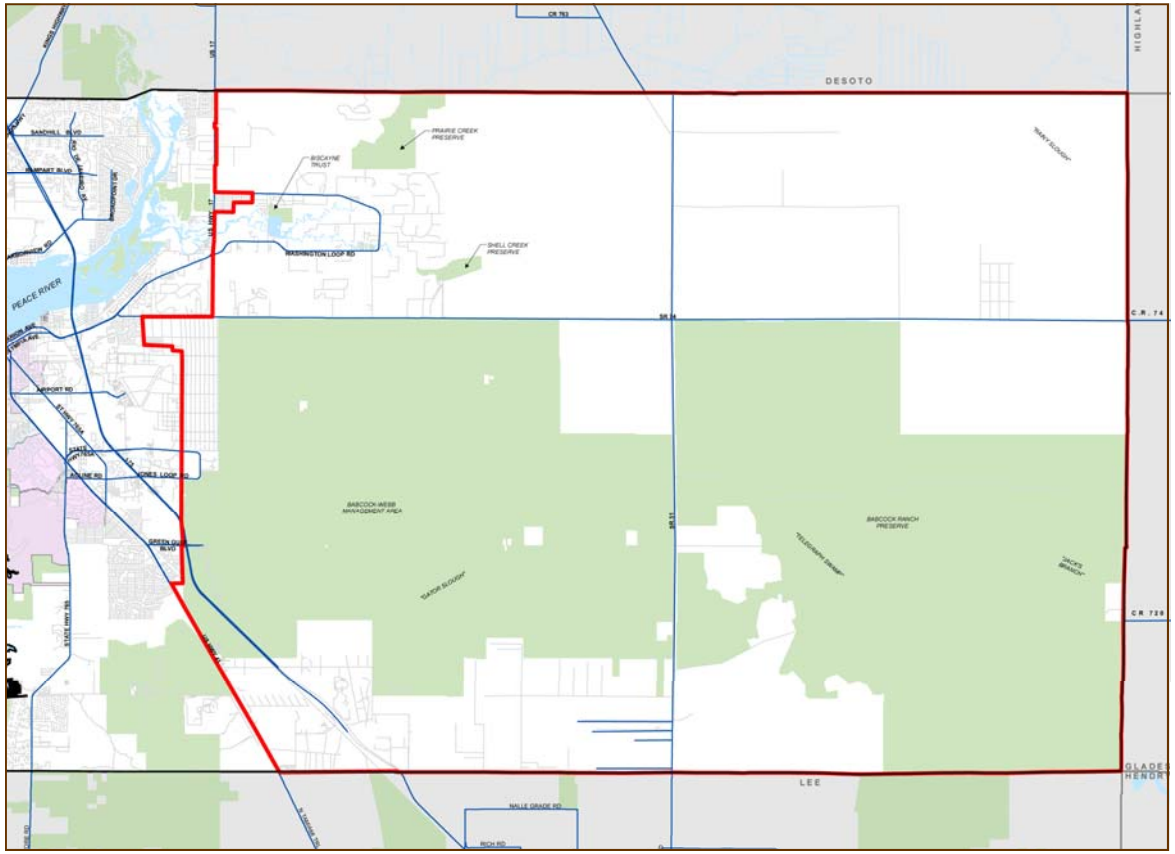
Existing Conditions

2.0 Existing Conditions

2.1 Physical Characteristics:

Charlotte County is located in southwest Florida along the Gulf of Mexico. The most prominent natural feature is Charlotte Harbor and its tributaries, including the Peace and Myakka Rivers, which bisect the County and influence the physical characteristics throughout the region. Topography ranges from sea level at the coast to a maximum elevation of 74 feet in the northeastern corner of the County.

East County encompasses the rural inland areas of Charlotte County, primarily located to the east of US 17 and I-75, and exclusively outside of the Urban Service Area. It is bordered by DeSoto County to the north, Glades County to the east, and Lee County to the south. The area predominantly consists of agricultural and pasture lands, expansive conservation areas, mining and extractive uses, and scattered pockets of residential development. The primary roads include the existing two-lane SR 31 and CR 74, which provide the main North-South and East-West corridors, respectively, and effectively divide the study area into four quadrants.



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The northwest quadrant has experienced the most development in East County. Several pre-platted communities in various stages of development are located to the east of US 17, along Washington Loop Road. These subdivisions are adjacent to Shell Creek and Prairie Creek, two important tributaries to the Peace River. South of Shell Creek is the Shell Creek Water Treatment Plant, which is the major source of drinking water for the City of Punta Gorda. The unimproved Del Verde subdivision is located at the intersection of SR 31 and 74. This 2,700 acre pre-platted community originally consisted of 2,600 individual lots, most of which have been deplatted through the Transfer of Density Units certification process. Extensive areas are used as cropland and pastureland.

The Cecil B. Webb Management Area encompasses the majority of southwest quadrant. This expansive preserve, managed by the State of Florida, protects the Gator Slough and provides valuable habitat to several listed species. Several large pre-platted ranchette subdivisions are located to the west and south of this conservation area. The Charlotte County Correctional Facility is located east of I-75. Several large limerock mining enterprises exist west of SR 31, between Cook Brown and Little Farm Roads.

The southeast portion of the study area is currently the least developed and includes the Babcock Ranch Preserve that connects the Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area to conservation land in Lee County. This preserve protects Telegraph Swamp, which drains south into the Caloosahatchee River. Existing mining areas along CR 74 have been approved for future development as the Babcock Ranch Overlay District, north of Lee County. Along SR 78, west of the Glades County line, there is a large agricultural landholding and a sparsely developed pre-platted area consisting of 2.5-5 acre lots.

The northeast quadrant includes several pre-platted areas along CR 74, with lot sizes ranging from 2,700 square feet in Dixie Estates adjacent to SR 31, to five acres in Golden Ranches near the Glades County line. Rainey Slough is located in the northeast corner of the County, adjacent to DeSoto, Highlands and Glades Counties.

2.2 Environmental Characteristics:

Charlotte County is composed of portions of the Gulf Barrier Chain, Gulf Coastal Lowlands, Caloosahatchee Incline and the DeSoto Plain physiographic provinces. East County, which primarily consists of the latter two provinces, is characterized by wet and dry prairie, cypress swamps, scrub, pinelands, flatwoods, fresh water marshes and xeric hammock. Because so much of the County's development has been focused around the coast, much of East County has been left in a natural state.

East County contains a diverse array of native upland and wetland habitats, as well as vast agricultural areas, which support an abundance of wildlife, including many species listed by the State of Florida and the Federal government as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. These include as the Florida scrub jay, bald eagle, gopher tortoise, red-cockaded woodpecker as well as the Florida panther and black bear.

2.3 Preservation Areas

Nearly half of the East County Study Area (137,370 acres) is included within an existing preservation area. The Webb-Babcock Management Area and Babcock Ranch Preserve make up the majority of Charlotte County conservation lands, and ensure that most of the land south of CR 74 will be permanently preserved. The other preservation areas are primarily located along the Shell and Prairie Creek waterways.

Conservation Area	Acreage	Description
Prairie Creek Preserve Owner: Charlotte County Manager: Charlotte County	**1,603**	This preserve is primarily a mixture of upland habitats that have been well maintained by prescribed fires. Natural communities include scrub, scrubby flatwoods, palmetto prairies and pine flatwoods, with small areas of herbaceous marshes and improved pasture. Several listed species of wildlife, including the Florida scrub-jay, gopher tortoise and eastern indigo snake, occur on site. The preserve provides passive recreational opportunities and access for fishing and non-motorized vessels to Prairie Creek.
Biscayne Trust Conservation Easement Owner: Private Manager: Charlotte County	**178**	Less-than-fee easement under private ownership
Shell Creek Preserve Owner: Charlotte County Manager: Charlotte County	**382**	This preserve contains over two miles of frontage on both sides of Shell Creek. Almost the entire site is made up of various upland habitat types, an unusual feature for waterfront lands and a function of the highly incised creek. Natural communities include high quality xeric hammock on both sides of the creek, small areas of mesic hammock and scrub, and large areas of mostly high quality mesic flatwoods dominated by longleaf pine.
Hathaway Park Owner: Charlotte County Manager: Charlotte County	**39**	Located on Shell Creek, this park contains hardwood hammock and pine flatwoods. It is undeveloped except for a small boat launch and foot trails.
Babcock Ranch Preserve Owner: TIITF/Lee County Manager: Babcock Ranch Mgmt, LLC	**73,239***	Babcock Ranch is primarily composed of pinelands, including both wet and mesic flatwoods, and dry prairie ecosystems, interspersed with cypress domes and cypress swamps. A dominant feature is the north-south oriented Telegraph Swamp, a cypress strand swamp located in the eastern half of the property. Most of the dry prairie exists on the north and eastern portions of the preserve. Freshwater marsh and wet prairie are also a major component of the natural communities on the property.
Babcock Ranch Conservation Easement Owner: Private Manager: FDEP – State Lands	**302**	Less-than-fee easement under private ownership
Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area Owner: FFWCC Manager: FFWCC	**80,335***	Large area of south Florida slash pine flatwoods containing active red-cockaded woodpecker colonies. Also supports Florida black bear, crested caracara, a bird rookery and the largest known population of the very rare beautiful pawpaw. Includes Yucca Pen s Unit.

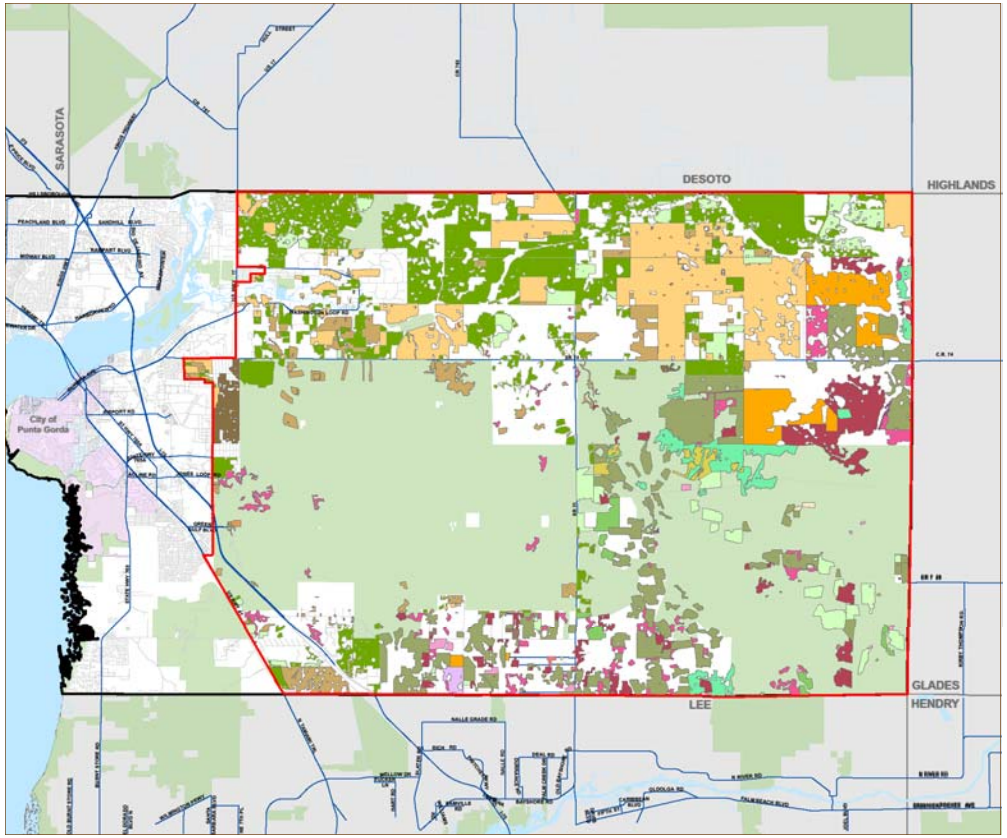
*Portions located outside of East County Study Area
SOURCE: Florida Natural Inventories Inventory

The County and State are also targeting additional areas to further preservation goals and provide wildlife linkages and corridors to existing conservation areas. The Shell Creek/Prairie Creek proposal targets over 13,000 acres around these watersheds to be acquired through the Save Our Rivers program. This proposed acquisition will protect water quality, as well as provide a habitat corridor from the Babcock-Webb and Babcock Ranch Preserve to the Peace River. Additionally, Hall Ranch is included as a future acquisition project on the Priority List prepared by the State of Florida's land acquisition program, Florida Forever. This 5,800 acre project is located at the southwest intersection of SR 31 and CR 74, adjacent to the Babcock-Webb Management Area and the proposed Shell Creek/Prairie Creek proposal. It is included as a Group B Priority, and is intended to provide additional habitat for rare animals such as the Florida black bear, Sherman's fox squirrel and crested caracara. The site is essentially in a natural condition and contains good quality south Florida slash pine flatwoods, depression marshes, basin swamp, and xeric hammock.

*Photo Credit: The New York Times

2.4 Agricultural Characteristics

The majority of Charlotte County's agricultural lands are located within the East County Study Area. More than one-third of the Study Area is identified as having an agricultural land use by the Florida Land Cover Classifications System, totaling over 140,000 acres. The primary agricultural uses include cattle, citrus and row crops. According to the 2007 Agriculture Census (USDA), about one-third of Charlotte County's agricultural land area is pasture, one-third woodland, and the remaining third is equally distributed as cropland (citrus and vegetables) and other uses, such as nurseries, hay, ornamentals, and sod farms.



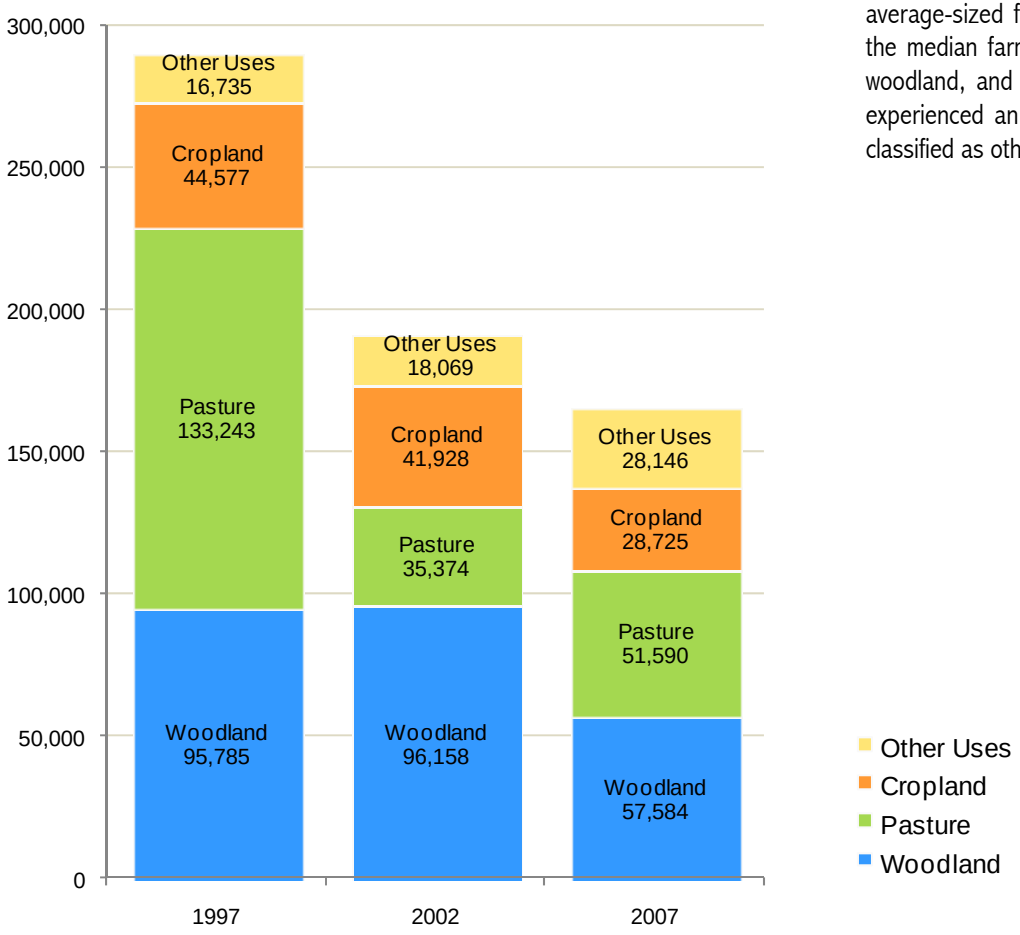
Legend

- CITRUS GROVES
- CONIFEROUS PLANTATIONS
- CROPLAND AND PASTURELAND
- DAIRIES
- FALLOW CROP LAND
- FIELD CROPS
- FOREST REGENERATION AREAS
- HORSE FARMS
- IMPROVED PASTURES
- MIXED RANGELAND
- OPEN LAND
- ORNAMENTALS
- OTHER GROVES
- OTHER OPEN LANDS <RURAL>
- ROW CROPS
- SOD FARMS
- TREE CROPS
- TREE PLANTATIONS
- UNIMPROVED PASTURES
- WOODLAND PASTURES
- CHARLOTTE COUNTY BOUNDARY
- **EAST COUNTY STUDY BOUNDARY**
- MAJOR ROADS
- SECONDARY ROADS
- CITY OF PUNTA GORDA
- **PUBLIC CONSERVATION LANDS**

SOURCE: SWFWMD, FLUCCS

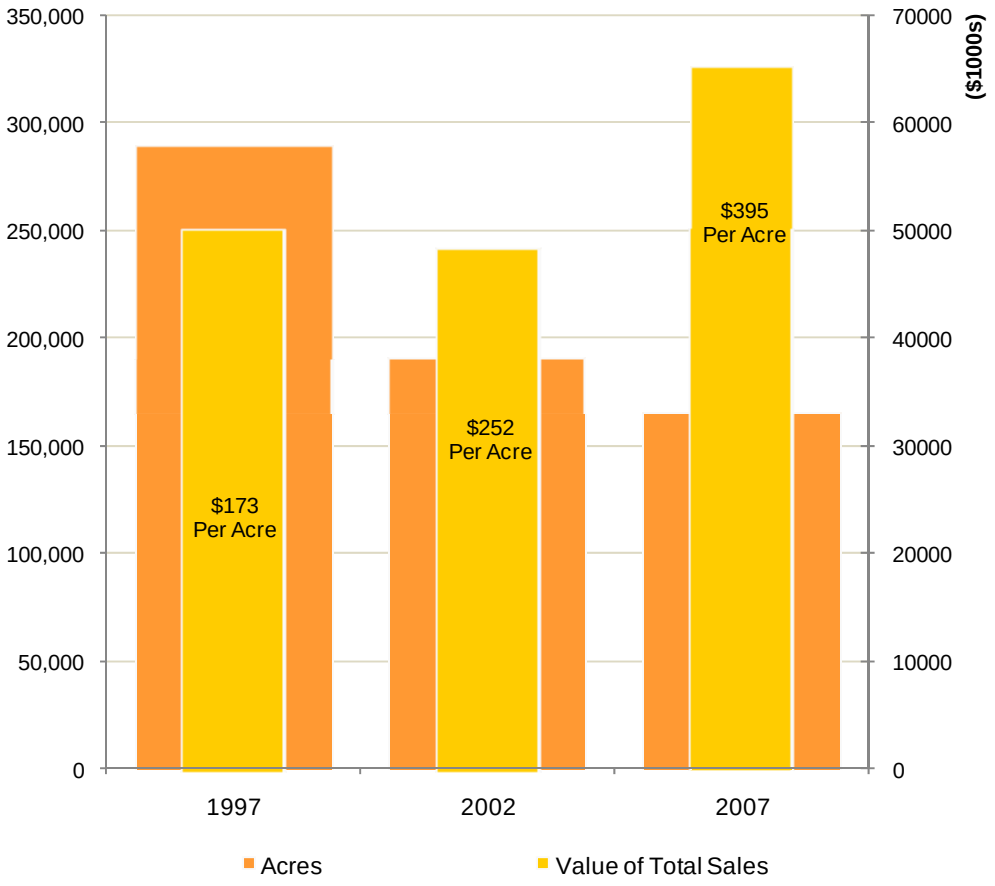
Agricultural lands provide many benefits to the community. Pasture, range and woodland supplement and complement existing preservation activities, by keeping large areas in a relatively natural state. Agricultural land also provides food and cover for wildlife; helps control flooding; maintains air quality; and provides groundwater recharge. With advances in the production of new biofuel crops, agriculture also has the potential to help reduce our dependence on non-renewable energy sources. The vast open spaces and scenic vistas associated with agricultural lands enhance a rural quality of life that is desirable to many residents. Additionally, farmland provides food security and economic stability to the area.

The amount of agricultural land in Charlotte County has significantly declined over the past decade. Based on the most recent Agricultural Census data, Charlotte County has experienced a 42% reduction in farmland, from over 290,000 acres in 1997 to 166,000 acres in 2007. During this time, the average-sized farm decreased from nearly 1,400 acres to 686 acres and the median farm size fell from 60 to 29 acres. While areas for cropland, woodland, and pastureland all experienced substantial losses, the County experienced an increase in areas used for vegetable production and land classified as other uses.



SOURCE: USDA Agricultural Census

Despite the overall loss in agricultural land, the economic impact of Charlotte County's farms has steadily increased. Over the past decade, the market value of agricultural products sold has increased 31% to over $65.5 million. Additionally, Charlotte County farmers are experiencing a higher return than ever before as the net profit from sales has nearly doubled from $12.5 million in 1997 to $23.6 million in 2007. These gains in total value of products sold and net cash returns can be attributed to an increase in higher yielding specialty crops and vegetables and overall improvements in crop management techniques.



SOURCE: USDA Agricultural Census

The following table details the changing agricultural conditions in Charlotte County over the last three Agricultural Census reporting years.

Land Use	1997		2002		% Change 1997-2002		2007		% Change 2002-2007	
	Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres
All	**209**	**290340**	**284**	**191529**	**36%**	**-34%**	**242**	**166045**	**-15%**	**-13%**
Cropland	138	44577	131	41928	-5%	-6%	119	28721	-9%	-31%
Harvested Cropland	107	28755	98		-8%		91	21663	-7%	
Woodland	34	95785	63	96158	85%	0%	65	57584	3%	-40%
Pasture (other than crop/wood)	122	133243	165	35374	35%	-73%	146	51597	-12%	46%
Pastureland (all types)			195	99998			176	110175	-10%	10%
Orchards	79	23644	69	20287	-13%	-14%	55	12564	-20%	-38%
Vegetables	6	1201	13	1487	117%	24%	11	3068	-18%	106%
Nurseries	14	N/A	14	528	0%	N/A	12	N/A	-14%	N/A
Cattle/Calves (#)	164	26159	148	21450	-10%	-18%	141	26937	-5%	26%
Hogs/Pigs (#)	6		7							
Poultry (#)	20		14							
Land for Hay			9	1217			18	4047	100%	233%
Average Farm Size		**1389**		**674**		**-51%**		**686**		**2%**
Median Farm Size		**60**		**40**		**-33%**		**29**		**-28%**
Market Value of Ag Products Sold		$50,162,000		$48,302,000		-4%		$65,563,000		36%
Value Sales/Farm		$240,010		$170,079		-29%		$270,921		59%
Value Sales/Acre		$173		$252		46%		$395		56%
Net Cash Return from Sales		$12,455,000		$9,939,000		-20%		$23,963,000		141%
Net Cash Return from Sales/Farm		$59,594		$34,873		-41%		$99,023		184%
Net Cash Return from Sales/Acre		$43		$52		21%		$144		177%

*DNA – Data Not Available
SOURCE: USDA Agricultural Census (Entire County)

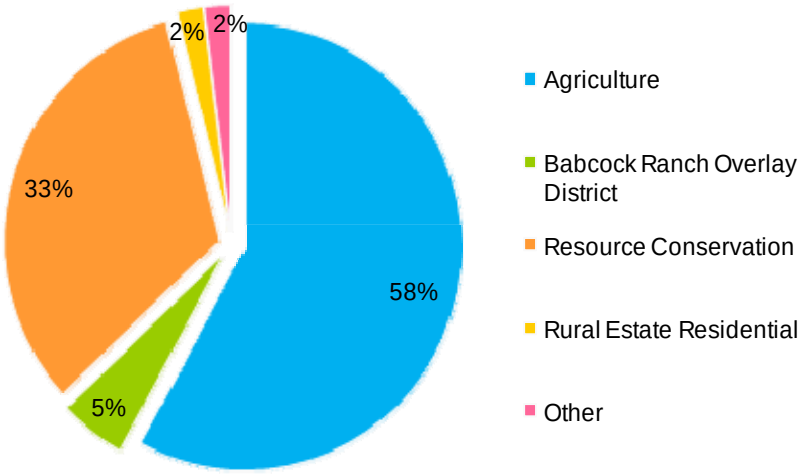
2.5 Existing Development Patterns

East County is largely undeveloped, with slightly more than 3 percent of the land area classified as improved residential, commercial, industrial or institutional. More than three-quarters of the study area (222,544 acres) is either actively used for agriculture or is part of a permanent conservation area. This is reflected within the County's Future Land Use Map, where 58% of the study area is identified as Agriculture (169,468 acres) and 33% is identified as Resource Conservation (94,817 acres). The Resource Conservation future land use designation is applied to areas with significant natural resources that should be retained and includes both public and private lands. The Future Land Use Element limits activities that can occur in these environmentally sensitive areas to low density residential and agriculture. Similarly, many of the areas designated as Agriculture on the Future Land Use Map are included in a permanent conservation area, such as majority of the Babcock Ranch Preserve.

Existing Land Use	Acres	Percentage
Miscellaneous	11,884.18	4.16%
Agricultural	118,240.17	41.42%
Government	135,085.55	47.32%
Improved Non-Residential	852.09	0.30%
Improved Residential	8,419.45	2.95%
Vacant Non-Residential	113.36	0.04%
Vacant Residential	10,850.18	3.80%

SOURCE: Charlotte County Appraisers Office, 2008

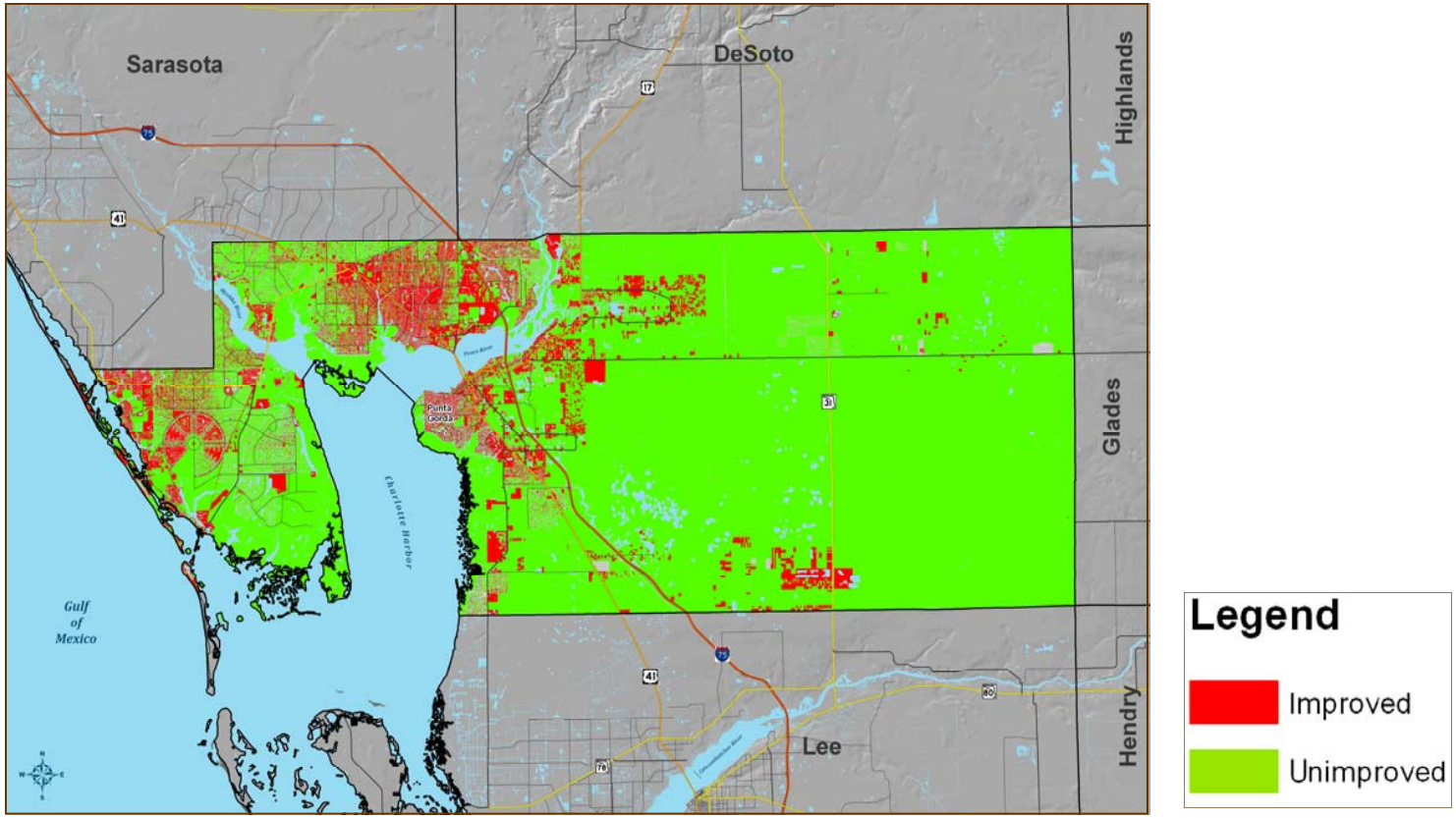
Future Land Use Areas in East County:



SOURCE: Charlotte County Appraisers Office, 2008

Developed areas primarily consist of scattered residential developments and mining uses, with very limited amounts of non-residential uses, such as the Charlotte County Correctional Facility and other public uses. Commercial uses are nearly non-existent in East County. The majority of the developed areas are located along Washington Loop Road off of US 17; around the intersection of US 17 and CR 74; and along Cook Brown Road, west of SR 31. The recent Charlotte County Population and Employment Projections estimates that East County currently has slightly more than 1,400 existing dwelling units. Based on the County Appraiser information, there are approximately 3,826 vacant residential parcels.

Almost all of the residential development in East County occurs within existing platted communities. Most of these platted lands were created prior to the State's Growth Management Act, resulting in a lot and street layout that does not consider existing environmental features. Most of the platted lands in East County are identified as Rural Estates on the Future Land Use Map, and consist of quarter-acre to half-acre lots. Some, such as Del Verde and Dixie Estates, were platted in the 1930s; have never been improved; and are now in the process of being deplatted through the Transfer of Density Units certification process.

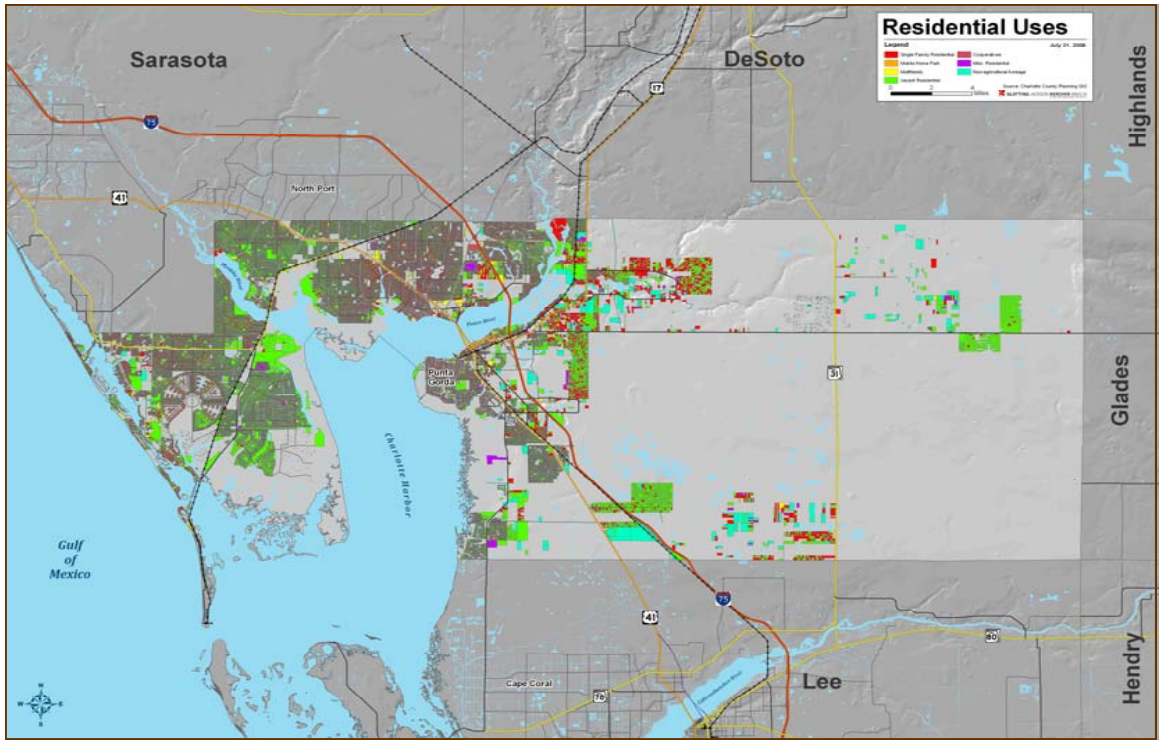


*Map provided by Glatting Jackson Kercher Aglin

The other predominant development pattern in East County is the creation of ranchette subdivisions in the Agriculture future land use category. Ranchette subdivisions are established when agricultural land is divided into five and ten acre lots, as permitted by the Comprehensive Plan. Local governments typically mandate large lot sizes in rural areas with the intention of protecting rural landscape characteristics; however, this type of single-use development pattern increases land consumption on a per capita basis and ultimately results in rural sprawl. Rural Sprawl, which contributes to the disruption of agricultural and natural habitats, increased costs to provide local services, a greater reliance on the automobile, and increased pollution, is ultimately an unsustainable development pattern.

The developed areas of East County rely exclusively on private wells and septic systems or small package treatment facilities. The Shell Creek Water Treatment Facility is located within East County, but does not anticipate extending water service to areas within the study area. There is no sewer public sewer service within the study area.

One area of anticipated development is the Babcock Ranch Overlay District (BROD), located adjacent to Lee County on the east side of SR 31. The BROD encompasses 13,521 acres (4.5% of the study area) to be developed as a self-supporting community, including a Town Center, with surrounding Villages and Hamlets. It is approved for up to 17,870 dwelling units, 4.84 million square feet of commercial, office and retail, 600 hotel rooms, 650,000 square feet of light industrial uses and 150,000 square feet of government and civic uses. This development will result in new utilities and street improvements in the southern portion of East County.



*Map provided by Glatting Jackson Kercher Aglin

2.6 Regulatory Provisions

Charlotte County has established, or is in the process of creating, several regulatory provisions to encourage more appropriate development patterns in the rural areas. These regulations seek to protect environmentally significant areas by providing an alternative to sprawling ranchette developments and by discouraging development within existing platted lots in inappropriate locations, such as productive agricultural lands, functional wetlands, native forests, species habitat, or other areas with important natural resources.

Conservation Subdivisions:

A Conservation Subdivision is a proposed alternative development pattern that requires at least half of the total site area be permanently placed into a conservation easement and that all development be clustered into smaller lots. This allows for the preservation of a substantial amount of open space and limits impacts to environmentally sensitive areas without reducing the development potential of a given site. To incentivize this development practice, Smart Charlotte 2050 allows conservation subdivisions to double the achievable density of 1 unit per 10 acres. The Smart Charlotte 2050 Comprehensive Plan update recommends conservation subdivisions to utilize the following design process:

1. *Delineate Open Space Areas: Open space must be a minimum of fifty percent of the entire site, and should include environmentally sensitive areas such as woodlands, wetlands, and habitat areas. When possible, the open space should be configured to connect to existing or potential off-site conservation areas.*
2. *Location of Development Areas: Once the open space is identified, the site developer should locate where proposed dwellings will be located. Special attention should be provided to allow for the public use of open space and scenic vistas.*
3. *Alignment of Streets and Trails: After the open space and development sites are identified, the street and trail network should be added to provide access. Streets should be interconnected and multi-use trails should used to allow for public access of open spaces. Dead end streets and cul-de-sacs should be avoided if possible.*
4. *Design Lots: The drawing of individual lot lines should be the final step in the design process.*

Rural Communities:

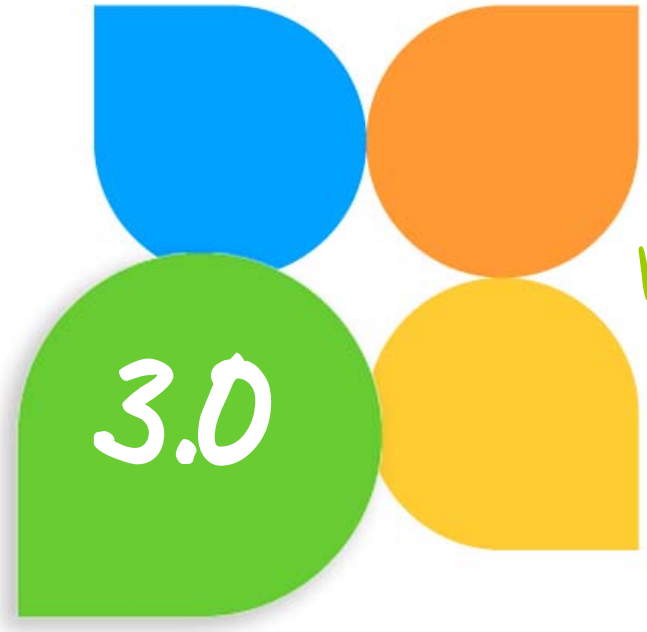
Rural Communities represent another alternative development pattern that is permitted by the existing Comprehensive Plan. Rural Communities are intended to be self-supporting, mixed-use communities that can provide residential and employment opportunities for residents in East County. This type of development preserves open space and clusters development into higher density communities. By allowing commercial uses within the development, rural communities seek to satisfy the shopping needs of the community and limit the number and length of external trips generated from the development. The rural community should be designed as a walkable community, utilizing traditional neighborhood design. The Department of Community Affairs recognizes this type of development as a workable solution to sprawl.

The Comprehensive Plan allows for Rural Communities throughout East County, with the exception of environmentally sensitive lands identified on the Future Land Use Map as Resource Conservation or Preservation. Current and proposed regulations require Rural Communities to be approved through a large scale comprehensive plan amendment or Development of Regional Impact (DRI). The comprehensive plan provides development regulations for Rural Communities, including that: the site contain a minimum of 500 acres; 55% of the site must be preserved open space; residential development cannot exceed a maximum 2 dwelling units per gross acre; and non-residential uses are limited to no more than 15 acres. The Plan requires the use of Transferred Density Units to increase the achievable residential density within a Rural Community.

Transfer of Density Units:

Charlotte County has an existing Transfer of Density Units (TDU) Ordinance, which allows for the development potential from one area (measured in dwelling units) to be transferred to more appropriate locations. The Charlotte County TDU Program was primarily established to help remove development potential from old, outdated platted lands, but is also utilized to discourage development within critical habitat areas, coastal high hazard areas, other environmentally sensitive lands, and even farmland. By designating these areas as sending zones, the potential development can be transferred to more appropriate locations called receiving zones. Currently, only Rural Communities are allowed as Receiving Zones in the Rural Service Area.

As part of the certification process, a property owner voluntarily removes the available density from the property and places a conservation easement on the land. The property owner can then sell these units to a willing buyer while retaining limited rights to use the property for cattle grazing or other limited agricultural uses. Charlotte County's TDU Program has been effective in removing achievable density from ill-suited locations, but has not been as successful in transferring these units to appropriate locations. As of December 2008, the TDU program has certified 10,811 units on over 990 acres within the East County study area. All of these units were located in substandard platted lots, such as Del Verde, Dixie Estates, Bermont Villa, Lenord Park and Country Club Manor. Despite these successes in certifying a large number of development units, only a small percentage has been transferred to an approved development.



Vision Framework

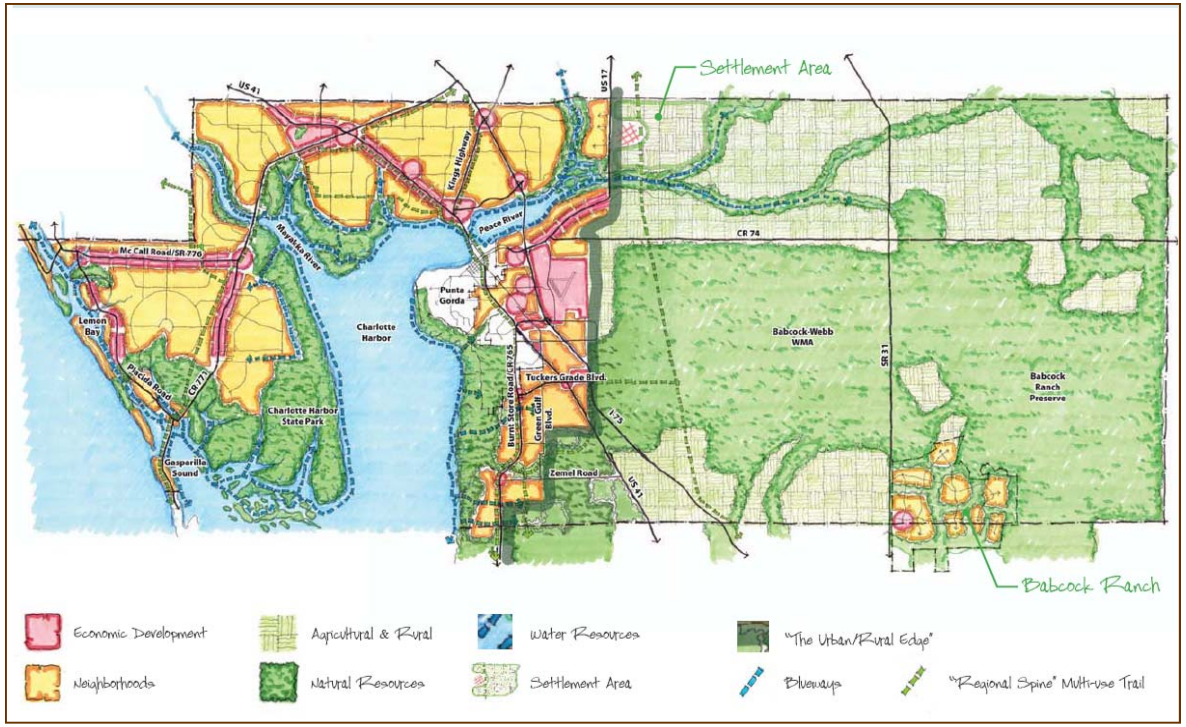
3.0 Vision Framework

3.1 Smart Charlotte 2050 Overview:

Smart Charlotte 2050 is a community based planning effort by Charlotte County to create a long-term strategy to address critical growth issues over the next forty years. This effort will result in an extensive update to the Comprehensive Plan, including an extension of the planning horizon to 2050 and a revision to the Future Land Use Map. Additionally, Smart Charlotte 2050 will introduce an interactive planning website (www.SmartCharlotte2050.com) to serve as the fundamental community involvement tool for long-range planning in the County.

3.2 Planning Framework:

The initial step in this planning effort is the creation of a Planning Framework, which provides a long-term vision for the future of Charlotte County. The Planning Framework builds upon the Policy Statement prepared by the Charlotte Assembly and through broad public outreach program that culminated in a set of community values and the identification of four distinct Framework Types. These Framework Types are identified as *Natural Resources*, *Agricultural and Rural*, *Neighborhoods*, and *Economic Development*. Each type is graphically displayed on a County Map and includes an associated policy statement or framework principle that describes the community vision as well as values that will guide amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. The Framework Types are broken down into distinct components with separate planning objectives. East County is predominately comprised of the *Natural Resources* and *Agricultural and Rural* Framework Types.



*Vision Framework Map provided by Glatting Jackson Kercher Aglin

Agricultural and Rural

The Agricultural and Rural Framework is completely located within East County study area. These areas include active citrus groves, crop production, and ranchland of various sizes; scattered residential developments, including some pre-platted lots; and existing mining operations. The guiding principle for this framework is:

> *Charlotte County shall define a future agricultural and rural landscape that recognizes agricultural uses as both an important component of our visual character and our economy. Agricultural and rural areas should be planned to protect habitat and natural resources, allow appropriately designed settlement, and support continued agricultural business activity by allowing it to adapt and change over time.*

The 'Agricultural Rural Framework' includes the following components and planning objectives:

Framework Components	Description	Objectives
Rural Character	Areas that exhibit fundamental rural character elements, such as open spaces and scenic views	• Protect Scenic Views • Protect Open Spaces • Provide Alternative Rural Residential Development Options • Support Context Sensitive Design for Infrastructure • Continued Protection of Water Supply

Agriculture	Areas of agricultural activity and use	• Define Opportunities:
		  • Set of Standards for Allowed Uses
		  • Relationship to Adjacent Resource Protection Areas
		  • Residential Opportunities through Larger Rural Estates and Settlement Areas
		  • Incentive Continued Agricultural Production through Economic Development Policies

Mining and Resource Extractive	Mining uses, including aggregate and fill extraction	• Protect Natural Resources: • Implement Guidelines Focusing on the Location, Scale and Adjacency Requirements
Settlement Area	Sustainable development form that protects significant open space while serving as a transition and edge to existing urban development	• Mixed Use Development that Provides for the Logical Extension of Urban Development in a Sustainable Form • Create a Permanent Transition and Edge from Existing Urban Development to the Rural Area • Standards for Timing of Development

Natural Resources

The Natural Resources Framework encompasses the majority of East County, including the existing Babcock-Webb WMA, the Babcock Ranch Preserve and the Shell Creek and Prairie Creek riparian corridors. The guiding principle for this framework is:

> *Charlotte County shall promote land use practices that protect natural resources within conservation lands, and target additional acquisition to close gaps in regional and state-wide wildlife corridors. The County will strive to improve the quality of water that discharges into surface waters, and educate residents about controlling the sources of pollutants. The County will seek to minimize environmental impacts within the built environment by reducing carbon emissions, minimizing water use and controlling pollution.*

To accomplish this principle, the 'Natural Resources Framework' includes planning objectives for the following distinct components:

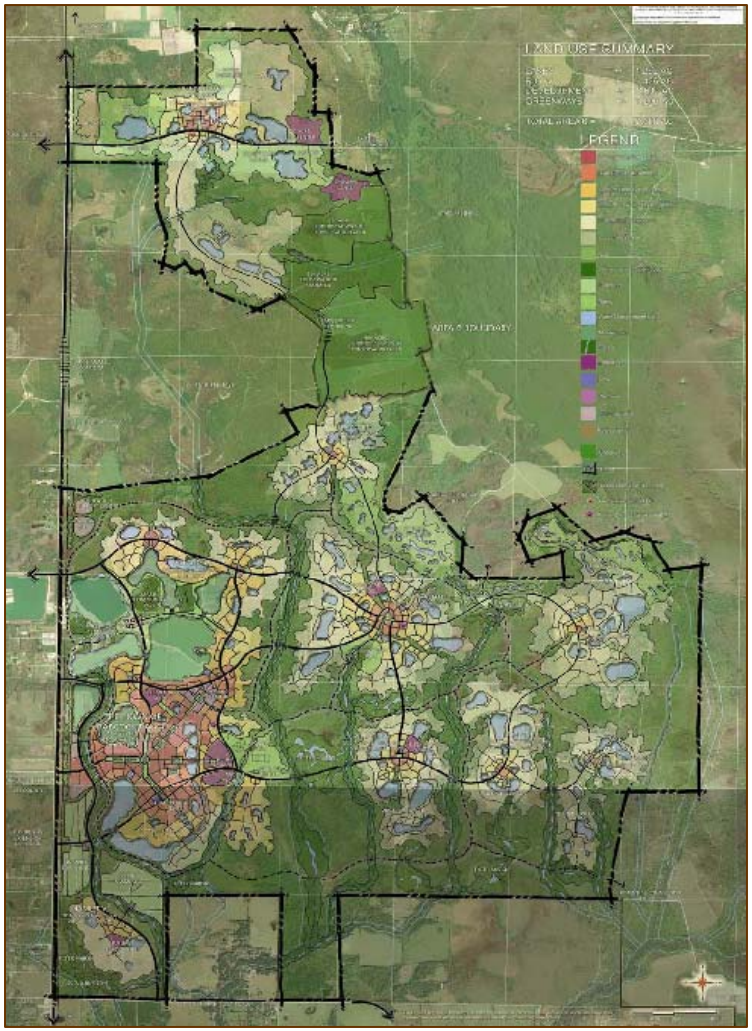
Framework Components	Description	Objectives
Conservation Lands	Existing protected areas and wildlife management areas.	• Acquire Key Tracts of Conservation Land • Oppose Incompatible Land Use Changes • Improve Access to Wildlife Management Areas
Water	The waterways, canals, estuaries and harbor, and the wetlands floodplain and buffers that protect them.	• Implement Water Quality Protection Measures • Protect Natural Lands that Buffer Surface Waters • Promote Measures to Reduce Non-Point Source Pollution
Future Wildlife Corridors	Natural areas that can provide a future linkage with regionally-significant conservation lands.	• Identify Gaps in Conservation Networks • Implement Other Measures to Protect Important Natural Lands • Minimize Road Encroachments into Wildlife Corridors
"Green" Design for the Built Environment	Sustainable design practices that protect habitat, air and water quality	• Encourage LEED, or Other Comparable Certifications for Buildings • Encourage FGBC Green Community, or Other Comparable Certifications for Communities • Consider Climate Change in County Decisions Particularly Along the Coast • Identify Ways to Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled

Babcock Ranch: Neighborhood and Economic Development

The only area within East County that is not identified as part of the Natural Resources or Agricultural & Rural Frameworks is the Babcock Ranch Overlay District (BROD). The BROD includes over 13,500 acres located east of SR 31 along the Lee County border, and allows for a well-planned, mixed use community that includes various residential types, densities and commercial and/or industrial uses that are integrated with open space and a multi-modal transportation system.

The planned villages and hamlets within the BROD have been identified as part of the Neighborhood Framework as a *Targeted & Emerging* component. Targeted and Emerging neighborhoods are located in appropriate locations, have the ability to create a sense of identity for the community, and have the ability to utilize 'smart growth' planning tools.

The BROD includes a Town Center, which is intended to serve the cultural, shopping, employment and civic needs of the residents. This area is included within the Economic Development Framework as a *Center* component, which seeks to create sustainable mixed-use developments and utilize walkable design. The Babcock Ranch Town Center is required by the BROD to meet these planning objectives through the use of a gridded street pattern, wide sidewalks and on-street parking.



*Map provided by Charlotte County

The Babcock Ranch Overlay District Conceptual Master Plan incorporates traditional development patterns in the form of a Town Center with Villages and Hamlets surrounded by expansive and connected green space.

Achieving the Vision

4.0 Achieving the Vision

4.1 Stakeholder Input:

Charlotte County has engaged the public in developing a vision for its future. Stakeholder meetings conducted as part of the Smart Charlotte 2050 planning process and the US 17 Corridor Planning Study identified several recurring themes that are relevant to the endeavors of the East County Planning Guide:

SMART charlotte 2050	US 17 Area Visioning Summary
Preserving and protecting natural resources	More access to the water
Promoting Economic Development, including Ecotourism	Provide Economic Development Opportunities, such as Hospital and/or University Campus
Reenforcing small town character	Expand Road Connections
Preserving waterfronts/shores and providing opportunities for compatible access	Establish wildlife corridors and preserve environmental connections
Addressing the Platted Lots issue	Ecotourism focus on river with mixed uses
Maintaining rural and agricultural character of the eastern half of the County	Redevelop and beautify existing neighborhoods and provide commercial nodes
Expand transportation options	Platted lots strategy that supports flexibility
Promoting quality infill and new development	Expand Urban Service Area to East of US 17

Additionally, many members of the public spoke of the need for increased flexibility and responsiveness by County government, and the utilization of density, economic or regulatory incentives to achieve desired outcomes through voluntary participation.

The East County Planning Guide sought stakeholder input through a series of large group interviews and individual meetings. The three large stakeholder groups included environmental associations, large landowners and agricultural representatives, and other landowners in East County. While there were differences of opinion among the stakeholder groups, certain ideals and themes were uniformly agreed upon. Almost all respondents stated that the open spaces, natural resources, agricultural production, and overall rural environment were positive features of the area, but identified that there is a need for additional development opportunities if done in a sustainable, appropriate and orderly manner. Participants also expressed concerns that additional regulations would be too rigid or onerous and negatively impact property rights and values.

The stakeholders were asked if they agree or disagree with various policy or value statements ranging from the types of development that should occur

in the future and the use of incentives. There was general consensus among respondents that natural systems, wildlife corridors and agricultural lands should be protected and that incentives should be available to encourage the protection of these areas. However, opinions varied when asked whether future development should be clustered, self-supporting mixed use areas or if future development should maintain the predominantly large-lot residential pattern. Opinions also differed on whether additional density should be available in East County, with the environmental advocates uniformly opposed and the landowners supportive of increased densities.

Based on the input received by the public and area stakeholders, the recommendations included in this Guide are built on the following Principles:

Guiding Principles:

- Protect Property Rights: No property will be "down-zoned" as a result of the Guide. The recommendations will not remove or lessen the achievable density rights permitted by the Comprehensive Plan.

- Provide Flexible Regulations: The Guide recognizes that conditions and ideals can, and almost certainly will, change over a fifty year period. Therefore, the recommendations of this Guide have incorporated as much flexibility as possible. Policies and Regulations are based upon the notion that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is impractical.

- Utilize Incentives: Because existing development rights will be retained and protected, the recommendations of the study utilize incentives to encourage voluntary participation from property owners and ultimately achieve the project objectives. Any incentives that increase density are incorporated into the existing TDU Ordinance.

Project Objectives:

The goal of the East County Planning Guide is to guide sustainable growth in East County over the next 50-years. To accomplish this, the Guide seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Protect Natural Resources and Habitat Corridors
- Maintain Viable Agriculture
- Preserve Rural Character
- Direct New Development to Appropriate Areas in Sustainable Forms

4.2 Protection of Natural Resources:

Charlotte County's natural resources, including coastal areas, open spaces, and abundant wildlife are an asset to the community and make Charlotte County an attractive place to live and visit. In addition to these aesthetic benefits, natural areas provide invaluable environmental services such as maintaining air and water quality, providing aquifer recharge areas and protecting water supply, minimizing potential flood risks, and ensuring that a balanced ecosystem is maintained. Charlotte County recognizes the importance of preserving environmentally significant lands and has taken measures to ensure that these lands are available for future generations. Charlotte County currently utilizes two primary protection measures for environmentally sensitive areas: Environmental Regulation and Public Acquisition.

Regulatory controls are an important tool to protect natural resources; however, they are limited in their ability to permanently protect all environmentally sensitive areas. Environmental regulations can be used to discourage development in certain areas and to minimize environmental impacts of new development, but they are only responsive to where development is proposed. Future land use and zoning designations effectively limit the amount of development that can occur in areas with high natural resource quality. As growth occurs, regulatory controls effectively ensure that new developments protect wetlands, water quantity and quality, listed species, provide protection from flood and coastal storm events, and provide for a minimum amount of open space.

The County utilizes public acquisitions, primarily through Conservation Charlotte, to permanently protect targeted natural systems. Conservation Charlotte is a county program to identify and acquire environmentally sensitive lands, and is funded through a $77 million bond referendum approved by the county in 2006. This funding is often leveraged with available state money, such as Florida Forever, and is used to acquire wetlands, rare or high-quality uplands, wildlife corridors that connect existing preservation areas, and other habitat areas for rare and endangered species. Through public acquisition efforts by the State, Federal Government and County, approximately 38% of its land area is in conservation; 137,370 acres of which are located in the East County Study Area.

While public acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands is the most effective way to protect natural resources, the costs to purchase land are prohibitive. On a statewide basis, the Florida Forever program operates on a $105 million annual budget; however, there is not enough money to acquire all of the proposed projects in their A and B Priority lists, which is well into the billions of dollars. A further examination of state acquisition expenses illustrates that the costs to acquire environmental land is increasing on a per-acre basis, from $2,400/acre for acquisitions prior to 1999 to just under $21,000/acre in 2008. This average expense is consistent with the $21,212/acre that Conservation Charlotte has spent to acquire 2,133 acres in 2007 and 2008.

Fiscal Year	P2000		Florida Forever		Total Programs	
	Acres	Expenditures	Acres	Expenditures	Acres	Expenditures
Through June 30, 1999	1,128,221	$1,931,196,210	-	-	1,128,221	$1,931,196,210
1999 - 2000	178,051	$367,102,902	-	-	178,051	$367,102,902
2000 - 2001	212,233	$406,438,299	-	-	212,233	$406,438,299
2001 - 2002	172,075	$215,063,001	95,202	$150,111,950	267,277	$365,174,951
2002 - 2003	56,211	$55,043,776	128,251	$340,309,078	184,462	$395,352,853
2003 - 2004	34,777	$274,097,717	68,811	$210,289,513	103,588	$484,387,230
2004 - 2005	-79	$37,619,402	105,561	$303,749,575	105,482	$341,368,977
2005 - 2006			54,138	$329,113,999	54,138	$329,113,999
2006 - 2007			100,801	$671,586,763	100,801	$671,586,763
2007-2008			68,462	$384,566,316	68,462	$384,566,316
2008-2009			6,252	$130,645,033	6,252	$130,645,033
Total	**1,781,489**	**$3,286,561,308**	**627,478**	**$2,520,372,226**	**2,408,967**	**$5,806,933,534**

Note: The Expenditure amount for 2003-2004 includes the $200,000,000 transferred to the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund from Surety Bond Proceeds GAA 31 & 32 and the Expenditures to date for the Florida Forever 4th Series Appropriation GAA 1518A. The negative acres amount for 2004-2005 is a result of the final reconciliation of acres. Totals may not be exact due to rounding.
SOURCE: Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Statistical Abstract

In addition to the costs to purchase the land, public acquisition projects incur secondary costs associated with lost tax revenue and maintenance expenses. Properties acquired by the State typically become exempt from property taxes, or have the taxable value significantly lowered to reflect the limited uses allowed on the property, which can have a notable impact on a community's revenues. Maintenance expenses include staffing, physical improvements for public access, and costs associated with land management, including the removal of exotic species, performing controlled burns, and hydrological management. In total, the State spends approximately $220 million dollars annually to maintain 3.28 million acres of land. State agencies spend nearly $18 million annually to manage invasive plants; a cost of $105 per acre.

Because so much of the budget for public acquisitions is allocated for the actual purchase of land, often times the effectiveness of the land maintenance is compromised. A 2007 audit by the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) found that state agencies demonstrated mixed results in land management. These agencies regularly met program standard levels for achieving the targeted number of park visitors, but were typically well below program standards for managing invasive species, implementing controlled burns, and maintaining or restoring areas in a native state.

In Fiscal Year 2006-2007, State Agencies that Manage Conservation Lands Met Targeted Standards for 7 of 13 Performance Measures Related to Land Management			FY 2006-07 Targeted Standard	FY 2006-07 Actual Performance
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services		Number of acres of state forests managed by the department	1,007,000	1,016,029
		Number of state forest visitors served	650,000	909,122
		Number of hours spent providing forest-related technical assistance to public land management agencies	13,300	9,152
		Percentage of state forest timber-producing acres adequately stocked and growing	61%	63%
		Number of acres authorized to be burned through prescribed burning[1]	2.3 million	1.8 million
Department of Environmental Protection	*State Park System*	Percentage change in the number of state parks acres restored or maintained in native state from the prior fiscal year	2%	-17%
		Percentage increase in the number of visitors from the prior fiscal year	1.30%	7.30%
	Greenways and Trails	Percentage of managed acres with invasive or undesirable species controlled	35%	25%
	Coastal and Aquatic Areas	Total number of degraded acres in National Estuarine Research Reserves enhanced or restored	1,658	3,275
		Percentage change in the number of degraded areas in National Estuarine Research Reserves enhanced or restored from those enhanced or restored the previous fiscal year	1%	250%
		Percentage change of managed lands infested by invasive plants	1%	17%
		Percentage increase in the number of visitors	3%	-0.74%
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission		Number of acres managed for wildlife[2]	5,539,815	5,663,890

[1] This measure includes all authorized prescribed burning in Florida by county, state, federal, and private land managers

[2] The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in lead manager on 1.4M acres and is a cooperating manager on an additional 4.7M acres

SOURCE: OPPAGA, 2007

An effective alternative to regulation and fee simple acquisition is the use of public-private partnerships to protect environmentally sensitive lands. Easements allow for natural areas to be protected, by having property owners voluntarily remove development rights that could have a negative ecological impact on a given area. This allows for the property to be permanently protected; however, by keeping the land in private ownership, the property remains on the local tax rolls, continues to provide economic activity, and is managed by the private landowner.

The local government can either procure conservation easements through the purchase of development rights (PDR) or they can encourage a private landowner to place land into an easement through incentives. The cost to secure an easement is significantly lower than a fee simple acquisition since the landowner retains ownership and the right to use the land in agreed upon terms. Based on reporting from the State Agencies that are active in land acquisition, the cost to acquire a conservation easement is about one third of the cost for a fee simple acquisition.

Instead of actually purchasing property or easements, Charlotte County can create the necessary incentives, such as tax incentives or additional density, to encourage landowners to voluntarily place land in an easement.

4.3 Maintain Viable Agriculture:

Agricultural lands contribute to the social, economic and physical makeup of East County. As demonstrated by the USDA Agricultural Census data (See Section 2), Charlotte County has experienced a 43% reduction in agricultural land area over the past ten years. Because of this trend, there is a strong desire by the County to adopt policies that encourage the long-term viability of agricultural lands and reduce the premature conversion of agricultural lands to other uses. While the preservation of farmland is certainly a noble endeavor, it should be noted that the viability of agriculture is largely dependant on factors outside the control of localized regulations. Therefore, the focus of this section is not to mandate the preservation of agricultural lands through regulation, but rather to focus on programs and incentives to help encourage the long-term viability of farming in Charlotte County.

Tax incentives are available to agricultural landowners to help keep farming economically feasible. Agricultural lands in Florida, like most other states, receive a reduction in property tax bills. These agricultural tax breaks are justified because farm and ranch land do not require the same level of services, such as police, fire, and infrastructure that non-agricultural lands need. On average, agricultural interests require about 25 cents of services for each dollar paid in taxes, even after the agricultural deduction has been applied. Some communities have used those general revenue savings in additional services to provide further incentives to agricultural entities. For example, Hillsborough County established the Agriculture Industry Development Program, which provides grant payments to agricultural landowners in exchange for leasing a 10-year "agricultural use" easement on their property. Additionally, farmers and ranchers who place agricultural land into a conservation easement are eligible for additional federal income tax deduction, up to 100 percent of adjusted gross income that can be carried for up to fifteen years.

THREATS TO AGRICULTURE PROFITIBALITY

The prevailing thought amongst agricultural executives is that land will remain in agribusinesses as long as it continues to be economically viable.

- **Severe Weather**, such as droughts, freezes, hurricanes and floods, can destroy entire crops and ruin a farm's slim profit margin.
- **Foreign competition** has emerged as a threat to Florida's agricultural industry due to the lower cost structure and lack of environmental and labor regulations in other nations. Free trade has enabled US orange juice producers to import citrus from foreign countries, which have significantly cheaper labor and chemical costs.
- Citrus is susceptible to **various diseases** that can significantly affect an individual harvest's success and profitability. Citrus canker and greening pose the most serious threats to Charlotte County's citrus production. Citrus canker is a highly contagious bacterial disease that causes premature leaf and fruit drop. Huanglongbing (HLB), more commonly referred to as citrus greening, is a bacterial disease with no known cure and poses a more serious threat to the agricultural industry than canker.
- **Development** poses a threat to existing agricultural industries in several ways. As Florida's population grows, many developers have targeted large agricultural lands as areas to accommodate this growth. Some farmers will sell large portions of land for the financial security it affords. As more development occurs in and around agricultural areas, land prices and associated property taxes rise, which place an additional financial strain on many farmers.
- Some **governmental regulations** have added to agricultural costs, such as increased environmental laws, requiring the provision of portable toilets, and higher permitting fees. Water management regulations and decisions, such as the lowering of lake levels, often have unintended consequences that hamper agricultural production. In addition to these regulatory impacts, recent changes to Federal Immigration policy could have a dramatic effect on the labor force utilized in agricultural operations.

Program	Description
Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP)	Voluntary program to help farmers and ranchers keep land in agriculture. Program provides matching funds to State, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations with existing farm and ranch land protection programs to purchase conservation easements
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	Receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and safeguard ground and surface water on eligible farmland
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by: •Undertaking additional conservation activities; and •Improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	Voluntary program where participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping of the land uses (10-20 year contract) while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. Requires a grazing management plan. Federal Budget of $40.5M. Eligible farms may receive up to $50K per year.
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)	Voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. Funding eligible to acquire permanent conservation easements; 30-year easements; or wetland restoration cost-share agreements (up to 75% Federal Contribution). Federal Budget of $227.6M.
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Annual payments to landowners (maximum of $300K over 6 year period) who implement strategies that address: •Impaired water quality; •Conservation of ground and surface water resources; •Improvement of air quality; •Reduction of soil erosion and sedimentation; and •Improvement or creation of wildlife habitat for at-risk species
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)	Voluntary conservation initiative through EQIP that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land for the purposes of conserving surface and ground water and improving water quality. Annual Federal Budget of $60-73M.
Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)	Voluntary program under EQIP intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. Florida has annual budget of $150K. Applicants may request up to $75K.
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)	Voluntary program under EQIP to improve wildlife habitat on agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Indian land. Priorities: •Promote the restoration of declining or important native fish and wildlife habitats. •Protect, restore, develop or enhance fish and wildlife habitat to benefit at-risk species •Reduce the impacts of invasive species on fish and wildlife habitats; and •Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats

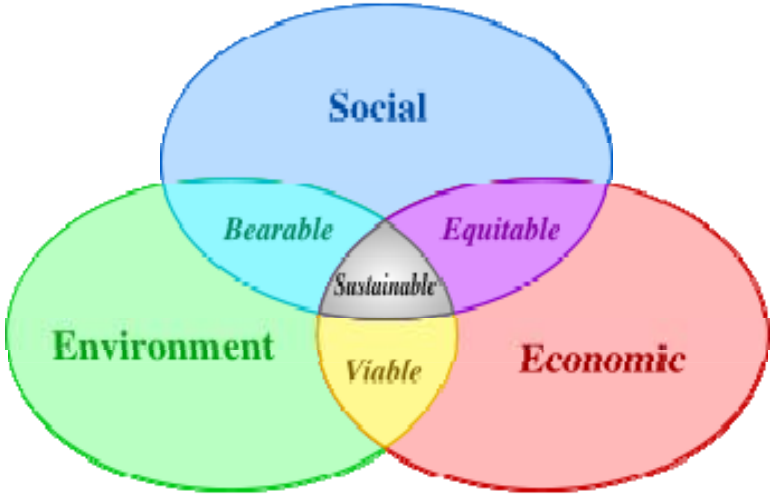
The 2008 Farm Bill introduced and reestablished a number of programs available for land owners to help maintain the long-term productivity of agricultural lands; most of which also have a natural resources and habitat preservation benefit. The State oversees many cost-share and incentive programs available through the US Department of Agriculture's Farm Bill, including the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Conservation Reserve and Conservation Stewardship Programs (CRP and CSP), and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) that provides technical assistance, grants and payments to help farmers implement programs that provide environmental benefits such as wildlife restoration, conservation and water management. Additional money is available through the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) to purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranch land in agricultural production. FRPP funding can be used in combination with money offered through Florida's Rural and Family Lands Protection Act. Once the development rights are removed, the land is placed into an agricultural easement, thereby allowing the land to remain in private ownership and use of the property, including the ability to use the land as collateral.

Other programs that can help maintain viable agricultural lands include the Rural Land Stewardship program and agritourism. Rural Land Stewardship is a form of Transfer of Development program where incentives are provided to landowners who remove the development rights from agricultural (or environmentally sensitive) areas and transfer them to areas better suited for development. The development rights can be purchased by the government or by a private developer and the resulting land is placed into an easement that can allow for the continued agricultural use. Agritourism provides another potential source of income for farmers, especially considering the extensive tourism industry in Florida. Agritourism, as well as ecotourism, allows for visitors to visit working farms and ranches to experience and enjoy the unique lifestyle and heritage found in Florida's rural lands. Specific examples of this tourism industry includes making areas available for special events, such as family reunions or weddings, participation in farm activities, exhibition of farm heritage, guided tours, "you-pick-em" operations, or seasonal events such as hay rides, pumpkin patches and corn mazes. An excellent example of an agri- and ecotourism exists at Babcock Ranch in East County. Babcock Wilderness Adventures provides ecotours for approximately 30,000 visitors each year, showcasing the property's pristine natural resources, wildlife species in native habitat, and its working ranch including cattle, pastureland, tomatoes, watermelon, and turf-grass and pine operations.

In combination with these programs, the County can review its existing policies and regulations and make any necessary revisions to help protect agricultural interests. As more development moves into rural and agricultural areas, there are increased conflicts between new residents and established farm operations. These new residents often complain about noise and odors from their agricultural neighbors. Local right-to-farm provisions can be established to provide peace of mind to farmers and ranchers that their agricultural practices will not be considered a public nuisance. Additionally, the County can require that proposed developments in East County incorporate sufficient buffers to agricultural lands and provide disclosure to potential residents of the possible inconveniences of living adjacent to a working farm. The County should also remove any regulatory impediments that may be over burdensome to agriculture and consider establishing an expedited review process for certain agriculturally related uses. This includes a careful analysis of the permitted uses in agriculturally zoned properties to ensure that new and emerging industries are allowed, such as agritourism, the production of biofuels, solar or wind ranching, or other agriculture industrial uses.

4.4 Sustainable Forms of Development:

Currently, the most common development pattern in East County is single use residential development in pre-platted areas or subdivisions consisting of ten-acre residential lots, which has significant impacts on the built environment. These "ranchette" subdivisions lead to the fragmentation of existing ecosystems and agricultural land, increase the demand for public services, result in more and lengthier vehicle trips on local roads, increase pollution, and contribute to rural sprawl. Sprawl is defined by Florida Administrative Code as scattered, single-use development that is not served by public utilities, resulting in the fragmentation of rural and natural lands. Rural sprawl is an unsustainable development pattern. Ultimately, this development pattern is tax negative, in that the costs incurred by the local government to provide additional services far exceed the tax revenue they generate. Continuing to develop in this manner will have long-term negative impacts not only to the County's agriculture and environmental systems, but its overall tax base and budget.



The model of sustainability, as adopted by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, encourages governments to balance social, economic and environmental issues in order to provide for bearable, equitable and viable development.

In response to this, Charlotte County is proactively pursuing policies that will encourage and result in sustainable development patterns. Sustainability can be defined as meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and is dependent on balancing three main goals: Long-Term Environmental Health, Economic Profitability, and Social and Economic Equitability. For East County, sustainability entails responsible, energy-efficient development that balances economic development with environmental conservation; that protects important environmental systems, species habitat, and finite natural resources; that offers a diversity of housing and employment options for local residents; that is compatible with and encourages the long-term viability of agriculture.

The County has identified several initiatives as part of Smart Charlotte 2050 to help foster sustainable practices. These initiatives are based on the following principles of Smart Growth:

- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices;
- Create walkable neighborhoods;
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration;
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective;
- Mix land uses;
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas;
- Provide a variety of transportation choices;
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities; and
- Take advantage of compact building design.

Conservation Subdivisions offer a more sustainable development pattern than the typical ranchette development, in that the environmentally sensitive areas of a site, such as woodlands, wetlands, and habitat areas are identified at the design phase of the project and placed into a permanent conservation easement. The development footprint is then clustered on the remaining land which allows for smaller lots and a more pedestrian friendly design. The proposed comprehensive plan incentives the creation of conservation subdivisions by increasing the maximum density from 1 dwelling unit per ten acres to 1 dwelling unit per five acres provided the open space enhances the creation of wildlife corridors. Also, the proposed Comprehensive Plan allows for centralized water and sewer within conservation subdivisions.

The density incentive included in Smart Charlotte 2050 will be an effective catalyst for future conservation subdivisions; however, this bonus should be achieved by utilizing Charlotte County's existing TDU Ordinance. In order for any transfer of development rights program to truly be successful, it is important that the ability to increase density be extremely limited unless doing so with transferred units. If a developer can successfully increase the number of units that can be built through other avenues, then it is less likely that the TDU program will be utilized and be successful. Therefore, the conservation subdivision provisions should be revised to work in concert with the TDU program and the TDU provisions should be amended to provide a density bonus for areas that expand or create a wildlife corridor. This will enable conservation subdivisions to achieve the higher densities recommended in Smart Charlotte 2050, while strengthening the TDU Ordinance.

While conservation subdivisions help protect and connect environmentally sensitive areas, they still result in single-use, large-lot residential developments. Conservation subdivisions can not be viewed as the only solution to unsustainable ranchette development, but rather as one tool to accommodate more appropriate growth in rural areas. Relying on them exclusively will result in a propagation of such development and could ultimately be considered "clustered-sprawl." Conservation subdivisions still result in auto-dependent, large lot developments that increase the number of long-distance commuters, require a higher cost of government services per capita, and increase the potential for conflicts with agricultural interests.

East County needs to encourage diverse land uses in order to be more sustainable. Additional **Employment Opportunities** will provide economic equity for the area and will have an overall positive impact on the environment. Currently, less than one-tenth of one percent of the land area is utilized for commercial or industrial purposes. While this ratio will improve with the development of Babcock Ranch's Town Center, the majority of residents in East County will continue to have long travel times in order to get to work or to meet their daily needs. This places additional demand and congestion on local roads and increases overall energy consumption, carbon emissions and air pollution.

One type of employment opportunity that is allowed throughout Charlotte County's residential areas is the right to conduct a **Home Occupation.** With internet access available almost everywhere, the number of Home Occupations continues to grow. It is estimated that nearly 150 million either work at home part time or operate home based businesses, which constitutes a $427 Billion a year industry. Because many of these businesses are never officially recognized or licensed, these businesses are often referred to as the "Hidden Economy." Charlotte County should expand its Home Occupations provisions and encourage these uses in the Rural Service Area, in order to provide employment and service opportunities for rural residents and reduce vehicle miles traveled. Due to larger lot sizes and increased privacy, home occupations in East County should be allowed to include light manufacturing uses, to employ people who do not reside within the structure, and to allow limited retail sales and customer visits. These types of home occupations are often referred to as **Cottage Industries.**

Currently, the only opportunity for non-residential development in the rural service area, other than agriculture-related uses, is in the form of a **Rural Commercial Center**. These can either be developed as a stand-alone commercial center or incorporated into a mixed use **Rural Community**. Rural Commercial Centers are limited to no more than 15-acres and are currently identified as "small centers…with a service area of up to 15 miles. Allowable uses shall have a functional relationship to the social and economic needs of the residents in the surrounding areas. Rural Commercial Centers offer food, retail, general, gasoline, and farm equipment and feed stores." These developments require a Future Land Use Map amendment to designate the site as

either Commercial or Rural Community Mixed Use. Proposed comprehensive plan provisions require the Rural Community to be a minimum of 500 acres, 55% of which must be preserved open space, with a maximum 2 dwelling units per gross acre. Non-residential uses are limited to no more than 15 acres. The Rural Community must utilize TDUs in order to increase density.

Although the Comprehensive Plan provides the opportunity to establish Rural Communities, no such applications have been submitted in Charlotte County. Limitations on potential commercial uses and residential density make it difficult to create self-supporting communities and effectively demonstrate that the Community is not contributing to sprawl. Also, these developments are required go through a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) even though there is no increase in net density. Charlotte County should revise the Rural Community provisions to allow additional commercial opportunities, utilize bonus density through the TDU Ordinance, and revise the approval process to eliminate the required Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

East County has the opportunity to spur economic development and increase the tax base by capitalizing on recent federal initiatives for new "green industries." These can include solar-power businesses, such as solar panel makers and makers of components and parts used for converting the sun's energy into electricity, as well as solar panel installation firms; wind-power industries; construction industries specializing in making homes and buildings more environmentally efficient; or even companies specializing in green trading for carbon emissions. Encouraging these non-residential uses will enable East County to be more self-sufficient. They should be encouraged to locate in areas that have sufficient transportation networks and that are devoid of environmentally significant features. The existing mining area along Cook Brown and Little Farm Road would be an ideal location given its proximity to Babcock Ranch.

Another sustainable practice that is being encouraged as part of Smart Charlotte 2050 is the use of **Green Building Design.** Buildings that meet measures established by the US Green Building Council's LEED standard can increase energy efficiency, lessen demand for potable water, reduce waste, and have an overall increase in productivity. The County is exploring the potential for fast track permitting or reduced permitting fees for buildings that are certified by LEED or similar energy efficient development programs in order to incentivize this practice.

The other important determinant of sustainability for the built environment is the pattern of infrastructure development. **Sustainable Infrastructure** ensures that utilities work more effectively and efficiently to improve delivery and control costs by looking at system and region-wide impacts. Examples include minimizing street pavement widths to reduce land consumption, impervious areas and the heat-island effect; the use of dual water systems to conserve potable water; and non-structural alternatives to stormwater design.

*Photo Credit: BabcockRanchFlorida.com

Targeting Green Industries in East County, such as a solar panel manufacturer, would create employment opportunities and compliment Babcock Ranch, considered to be the first eco-city in the United State. Babcock Ranch will be 100% solar powered and will incorporate green building design such as vegetated roofs.

One key element in developing sustainable sites is the use of **Low Impact Development (LID)** strategies. LID combines site design with sustainable stormwater management strategy that utilizes decentralized "source-control" technology as opposed to traditional capture and conveyance systems. This approach minimizes the amount of stormwater runoff diverted into storm drains, thereby mimicking natural systems by enabling more treated water to replenish the water table and improving the quality of natural water bodies. Strategies to achieve these goals include the use of rain gardens, bioswales, tree box filters, permeable paving, rainwater capture and planted roofs. Similar to green building design, the start up costs to design and implement these efforts are sometimes higher than traditional design; however, the lifetime costs are significantly reduced due to lower maintenance costs.

Landscaping is another design element to consider when implementing sustainable initiatives. The type of landscaping utilized on a site, and the types of irrigation provided, have a significant impact on water conservation efforts. The Environmental Protection Agency's GreenScapes program provides recommended practices for **environmentally beneficial landscaping**, such as mulching with organic matter to cool the soil and reduce moisture evaporation, grouping plants of similar water needs together, and irrigating the landscape by watering deeply, infrequently and slowly. Also, **xeric landscaping** helps save water while creating landscapes that take full advantage of indigenous plants to provide interest and beauty. This practice utilizes plants that are native to the region and able to thrive in the area's available rain supply, making irrigation unnecessary.

Charlotte County should incorporate policies that support these sustainable development practices and amend the Land Development Code accordingly. New communities and developments within the Rural Service Area should be required to meet these standards.

Photo Credit Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival, Henthorn

Development within the Rural Service Area should be designed to minimize impacts to the Natural Environment. Environmentally-friendly practices, such as the use of Bioswales, Rain Gardens, Permeable Surfaces, and Xeric Landscaping (shown above) are encouraged.

4.5 Implementation Strategies:

There are a number of strategies that can be utilized to ensure that future development in East County occurs in a manner that is consistent with the vision framework. These strategies include both regulatory and incentive-based provisions that direct and encourage anticipated growth to occur in a sustainable form; that preserve natural resources, maintain the County's rural character, and provide for the continued long-term viability of agriculture.

> "The most successful efforts to protect farmland have resulted from state and local governments' working together with private organizations, concerned citizens, using a combination of regulatory and incentive based strategies to address the challenges of farming on the edge."
>
> - American Farmland Trust

Regulatory Standards:

The proposed Smart Charlotte 2050 Comprehensive Plan and existing Land Development Regulations include many regulatory provisions to address natural resource protection, preserving rural character, and maintaining a viable agricultural economy. Regulatory policies have varying rates of success in achieving sustainable development patterns and could be strengthened in some instances.

The primary disadvantage with regulatory provisions is that they represent "command and control tools" that are discriminatory in nature and essentially dictate what can and cannot happen on a given property. As a result, regulatory strategies can be controversial as they may affect private property rights. Additionally, regulatory provisions are static in nature and lack the flexibility to account for changes in demographics and political preferences. As a result, the regulations become temporary since they are continually challenged and amended to account for changing preferences.

Incentive Based Provisions:

Incentive based provisions differ from regulatory standards, in that they reward private landowners for voluntarily achieving a specified objective. For the purposes of this Guide, developments that preserve environmentally sensitive areas, protect the viability of agriculture, develop in appropriate locations and in appropriate forms, and preserve the County's rural character, can be rewarded in the form of reduced development and impact fees, expedited review processes, or through the granting of additional density.

It is important that all incentives that result in increased density be coordinated with the County's existing Transfer of Development Unit Ordinance. In order for a TDU program to truly be successful, the ability to increase density without transferred units must be extremely limited. Policy FLU 3.1.3, as recommended by Smart Charlotte 2050, provides a density incentive for the creation of conservation subdivisions. This density bonus allows an increase from 1 dwelling unit for every ten acres to 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres when developing a Conservation Subdivision on property with an Agricultural Future Land Use designation.

The Planning Guide recommends incorporating this density bonus into the TDU program. This will ensure that there is only one mechanism for obtaining density increases and will strengthen the TDU program. Instead of rewarding the creation of Conservation Subdivisions, the bonus would be applied for the preservation of land that provides a buffer to existing conservation land, or creates, enhances or restores wildlife habitat corridors. To make it consistent with the existing recommendation, the bonus can be limited to preserved land with an Agriculture Future Land Use designation, that is a minimum of fifty contiguous acres.

As proposed in Section 5 of this Guide, the TDU Program could be strengthened to increase its effectiveness and to supplement recommendations included in Smart Charlotte 2050. The density bonus recommended for Conservation Subdivisions should be incorporated within the existing TDU Program by rewarding the preservation of environmentally sensitive lands or agricultural areas that provide, connect or restore habitat corridors. To be consistent with the existing Smart Charlotte 2050 recommendation, a density multiplier of three (3), should be applied to the established Sending Areas (minimum of 50 contiguous acres) in the Agricultural FLU designation.

Administrating the density increase through the TDU Program would yield the same result as currently proposed for Conservation Subdivisions in Smart Charlotte 2050. Also, the bonus density would no longer be limited Conservation Subdivisions, but could be transferred to any eligible Receiving Site, including infill sites within the Urban Service Area or for the establishment of Rural Communities. Because the amount of the bonus is tied to the size of the area designated as Sending Land as opposed to an automatic bonus, utilizing the TDU program would also encourage the preservation of additional habitat areas.

The Table below provides a development comparison for a 100-acre development using: 1) existing standards; 2) the Smart Charlotte 2050 density bonus for Conservation Subdivisions; and 3) two developments utilizing a TDU-based Bonus system. As can been seen from the examples provided in the table, the recommended bonus approach provides a greater incentive to permanently preserve more land.

Additionally, there should be assurances that the transferred units will be able to be developed in appropriate areas. Currently, developments proposing to utilize TDUs must go through a public hearing approval process to increase density by designating a receiving zone. While the County's position has been to encourage increased density in urban areas, proposed developments must overcome local opposition during the public hearing process, which makes the approval process very tedious. To rectify this issue, the Future Land Use designations and zoning districts that are available as receiving lands should be revised to include an increased maximum density when utilizing transferred units. For example, the maximum density/intensity for the Medium Density Residential FLU category is currently between five and ten dwelling units per acre. It is recommended that this should be expanded to allow up to twelve units per acre when utilizing transferred density units, to increase density above the current maximum of ten (10) units per acre. This would streamline the approval process by eliminating the need for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment; however, rezoning of a given property may still be required.

	1) Existing Standards	2) Smart Charlotte 2050 Conservation Subdivision	3) East County Planning Guide TDU Sending Land Bonus	
Total Project Size:	100-acres	100-acres	100-acres	100-acres
Conservation Area:	0-acres	50-acres	50-acres	80-acres
Density:		1 du / 5 acres	3 x 1 du / 10 acres	3 x 1 du / 10 acres
Dwelling Units:		10 units	15 units	24 units
Developable Area:	100-acres	50-acres	50-acres	20-acres
Density:	1 du / 10 acres	1 du / 5 acres	1 du / 10 acres	1 du / 10 acres
Dwelling Units:	10 units	10 units	5 units	2 units
Total Dwelling Units:	**10 units**	**20 units**	**20 units**	**26 units**

4.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The goal of the East County Planning Guide is to guide sustainable growth in Charlotte County's Rural Service Area over the next 40-years. The recommendations included in this Guide are intended to supplement and further the *Smart Charlotte 2050* comprehensive plan update. These recommendations will ensure that future growth in East County will be sustainable by protecting environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife corridors, maintaining the future viability of agriculture, and preserving rural character. Sustainability will be achieved by balancing:

Natural Resource Protection

- Direct Incompatible Uses Away from Natural Lands
- Protect Existing Conservation Areas
- Provide for Future Ecological Corridors and Greenways
- Incentivize the Establishment of Sending Lands that Buffer Conservation Areas or Create, Expand, or Restore Habitat Corridors and Connections

Protect Rural Character

- Preserve the Opportunity for a Rural Lifestyle for Future Generations
- Maintain Open Spaces, Visual Landscapes and Scenic Views
- Protect Areas with Existing Native Vegetation
- Incorporate Rural Lighting Standards to Promote Dark Skies
- Limit the Expansion of Urban Services and Utilities

Maintain Viable Agriculture

- Incorporate a Local Right-to-Farm Policy
- Remove Regulatory Impediments
- Minimize the Impacts of Residential Encroachment into Agricultural Areas
- Encourage Complimentary Agriculture Uses Adjacent to Conservation Areas
- Provide Incentives for the Establishment of Agricultural Easements

Sustainable Development Practices

- Encourage Low-Impact Development
- Minimize Water Consumption through Low Irrigation and Xeric Landscaping
- Allow for Flexible Design Elements to Maximize Open Space
- Establish Conservation Subdivisions and Rural Community standards
- Provide Economic Development and Employment Opportunities

Natural Resource Protection

It is important that future development in East County be sensitive to environmentally significant lands and be compatible with existing conservation efforts. Charlotte County should supplement existing natural resource protection policies and regulations, by implementing the following recommendations:

1. **Encourage the use of Conservation Easements**
   The cost of fee simple acquisitions for conservation purposes continues to rise over time. These costs not only include the initial land acquisition expenses, but also ongoing maintenance costs and lost tax revenue. Charlotte County should encourage private land owners to place environmentally sensitive lands into conservation easements to supplement acquisition efforts.

2. **Protect Existing Conservation Areas**
   Charlotte County has existing policies and regulations to direct incompatible uses away from natural areas and minimize impacts to existing conservation lands. Controlled burns are an important land management practice on these natural areas and the County shall ensure that controlled burns will be allowed in the future as new uses are introduced adjacent to conservation lands. Specifically, Charlotte County should utilize GIS Technology to map the smokesheds of these controlled burns, also known as Critical Smoke Dispersal Areas (CSDA). Once mapped, the County should introduce policies and regulations to discourage incompatible uses, such as schools, roads, airports, hospitals and nursing homes from locating within CSDAs. Residential developments within CSDAs should notify buyers and potential buyers of the impacts from fire management programs to help protect the continued practice of controlled burns on conservation lands.

3. **Provide for Future Ecological Corridors and Greenways**
   Charlotte County should evaluate ecological and habitat connectivity as part of the development review process for new development within the Rural Service Area, which may consist of waterways, greenways, or both. Proposed developments should preserve large contiguous areas of natural vegetation; maintain or restore wide corridors in a natural condition along major water courses; and maintain connectivity for movement of key species through contiguous corridors or interconnected clusters of smaller, more isolated areas of natural vegetation.

4. **Incorporate Density Incentives into the TDU Program**
   Charlotte County's TDU Ordinance should be amended to incorporate density incentives for the preservation of open space and active agricultural lands that buffer conservation land, or extend, supplement or enhance the creation of wildlife corridors or other wildlife connections. The density transferred from a Sending Area consistent with these standards shall be subject to a density multiplier equal to 3 times the achievable density for the area conserved. For example, the conservation of 100-acres with an Agriculture FLUM designation (1 du per 10 acres) would equate to 30 transferable dwelling units (3 x 1 du per 10 acres). The bonus density may be transferred to any eligible Receiving Zone, including a Conservation Subdivision or Rural Community in the Rural Service Area, or Infill Development within the Urban Service Area. Similarly, the County should revise the Land Development Code and Comprehensive Plan to allow for developments to exceed the base density by utilizing TDUs in any zoning district or Future Land Use category that is an eligible Receiving Zone.

Maintain Viable Agriculture

An active and profitable agricultural economy is, and should continue to be, an important component of Charlotte County's Rural Service Area. The County should amend the Land Development Code and Comprehensive Plan to help maintain the future viability of agriculture.

1. **Minimize Land Use Conflicts with Agriculture**
   Although the State of Florida has an existing Right-to-Farm statute, the County should adopt a local Right-to-Farm Policy within the Comprehensive Plan or as part of the LDC, in order to emphasize that Charlotte County values and encourages the continuation of local farms. The local Right-to-Farm policy would protect existing farms from being considered a nuisance as new uses and development occur within agricultural areas.

   Additionally, this Planning Guide strongly encourages Charlotte County to require new residential projects in close proximity to existing agricultural operations to notify buyers and potential buyers of the rights conveyed to farmers and that they may experience noise, dust, odors, or other inconveniences from agricultural operations.

2. **Remove Regulatory Impediments**
   Charlotte County should review the Land Development Code and eliminate any regulatory provisions that unnecessarily increase costs or otherwise overburden agricultural operations. Specifically, the County should remove regulations that are duplicative to State or Federal regulations; amend the approval process for farm worker housing; and allow agricultural-related businesses, such as produce stands, farmers markets, and agritourism related uses, throughout the Rural Service Area.

3. **Encourage Complimentary Agriculture Uses Adjacent to Conservation Areas**
   Well-managed agricultural lands can provide areas for native species habitat, and can be a compatible land use to conservation areas. Charlotte County should recognize that agricultural lands can complement and enhance environmentally significant areas and serve as a transition from Conservation land to more intensely developed areas.

4. **Provide Incentives for Agriculture**
   Charlotte County should encourage the use of agricultural easements, less–than-fee-simple acquisitions, and innovative "green payment" strategies or techniques, such as, but not limited to, water ranching, mitigation banking, and carbon sequestration, as ways to promote or conserve agricultural lands. Density Incentives should be provided to private farmers who place lands that buffer conservation areas, or extend, supplement or enhance the creation of wildlife corridors or other wildlife connections into agricultural easements.

   The County should explore the feasibility of providing economic incentives, such as a tax rebate or grant program, for private farmers to place agricultural land into short-term agricultural easements. Funding for these incentives can be provided by the cost difference between the tax revenue generated by agricultural lands and the cost to provide services to these properties. As discussed on page 33 of this report, agricultural lands typically require only 25 cents of government services for every dollar paid in taxes.

Protect Rural Character

Charlotte County wants to ensure that East County remains distinct from the Urban Service Area. The development pattern in East County should respect and reinforce the existing rural character of the area. "Rural Character" can be defined as the patterns of land use and development in which agriculture, open space, the natural environment and vegetation predominate over the built environment, and that:

- foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;
- provide visual landscapes and scenic views that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities;
- are compatible with the use of the land by wildlife;
- generally do not require the extension of urban levels of governmental services, including transportation and utilities;
- reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development; and
- are consistent with the protection of ground water and surface water recharge and discharge areas

The County should adopt provisions to ensure that the opportunity for rural lifestyles is preserved for future generations.

1. Maintain Open Spaces, Visual Landscapes and Scenic Views

The County should adopt Land Development Regulations to protect the rural character of major roadways in the Rural Service Area by maintaining open vistas of natural waterbodies, forested native vegetation, and historical features. Larger setbacks may be warranted adjacent to these roads to help protect these visual landscapes.

2. Preserve Existing Vegetation

The County should continue to enforce its Tree Protection Standards and encourage proposed developments within the Rural Service Area to preserve areas with significant native vegetation, when practicable, in order to preserve scenic views and improve air quality.

3. Rural Lighting Standards

In order to preserve the rural character and minimize effects on the behavioral and population ecology of wildlife, Charlotte County should adopt rural lighting standards for non-agricultural uses. These regulations should address artificial outdoor illumination; limit the emission of undesirable light into the night sky, glare to on-coming traffic and light intrusion onto adjacent properties; and should provide specific requirements to limit fixture height and light wavelength as well as require the use of shields or full cut-off fixtures.

4. Limit the Expansion of Urban Services and Utilities

The Rural Service area should predominantly be served by private wells and septic systems. The extension of public utilities should be limited to developments that can demonstrate that the expansion is financially supportable at rural densities, or by desired types of development, such as conservation subdivisions, rural villages, or developments that will provide employment opportunities to residents of East County. These provisions should not preclude the County or Utility Provider from providing utilities as part of a planned expansion project or to alleviate public health concerns.

Sustainable Development

Charlotte County must ensure that development opportunities exist in East County; however, it is important to have policies and regulations in place that will make certain that new development occurs in a sustainable manner. In order to be sustainable, development in the Rural Service Area must be supportive of a rural lifestyle; protect natural resources; and provide a diversity of housing and employment options for residents.

1. **Low Impact Development and Xeric Landscaping**

   Low Impact Development (LID) combines an environmentally sensitive land planning approach to minimize site or habitat impacts with a stormwater management strategy to mimic natural hydrology and improve groundwater infiltration and recharge, water quality and air quality. Developments should utilize multiple stormwater treatment techniques as opposed to conventional structural systems that utilize centralized storage and conveyance at higher volumes. Such techniques might include bio-retention areas, vegetated swales, permeable pavement materials, green rooftops, stormwater recycling, and flexible design standards for roads, parking lots, driveways, and sidewalks.

   Additionally, new development should be required to utilize xeric and native landscaping to minimize water use. Where appropriate, landscaping should utilize vegetation that supplies food sources and habitat features for native wildlife.

2. **Flexible Design Standards**

   In order to foster the long-term viability and usefulness of open space and increase the functionality of low impact development strategies such as conservation subdivisions, Charlotte County should allow for innovative planning practices and provide flexibility for proposed developments within the Rural Service Area with respect to setbacks, minimum lot sizes, street widths, parking requirements, paving materials, and other related design elements.

3. **Expand Economic Development and Employment Opportunities**

   Charlotte County needs to allow and encourage non-residential development opportunities in the Rural Service Area in order diversify the rural economy, create new opportunities for rural job creation, and to make East County more sustainable. This Guide recommends that Charlotte County do the following:

   - Develop regulatory standards for mixed-use *Rural Villages* and allow them in the Rural Service Area subject to an approved Planned Development and Master Plan process as opposed to requiring a Future Land Use Map amendment. Rural Villages are permitted to develop at two dwelling units per acre; however, this higher density must be achieved by using TDUs. Therefore, there should not be a required CPA since there is no net increase in development units. Easing the approval process, while providing more specific development standards (such as the proposed LEED ND standards) will ensure that the resulting villages are self-supporting and sustainable, and will make this a more viable development option for land owners.
   - Encourage home-based businesses, which provide employment and service opportunities for rural residents and reduce vehicle miles traveled. Additionally, the County should define and allow *cottage industries* in the Rural Service Area as an accessory use. Cottage industries can be considered a more intensive home occupation, with limited commercial and industrial uses (often with a manufacturing component). The County should amend the LDC to allow for this use and provide standards relating to the number of permitted employees (need not be restricted to residents of the dwelling), buffering and compatibility, intensity, trip generation, and property size.
   - Target and encourage new *Employment Centers* including uses that are dependent upon being in a rural area and away from major population centers; do not require urban level services; are compatible with the functional and visual character of the rural area; and meet site development and performance standards. Such uses may include agribusiness uses, eco– or agritourism and recreational uses; targeted Green Industries; and Public and Community facilities.