

**Charlotte County**  
**Annual County-wide Scrub Jay**  
**Habitat Conservation Plan Report**

Prepared for:

United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
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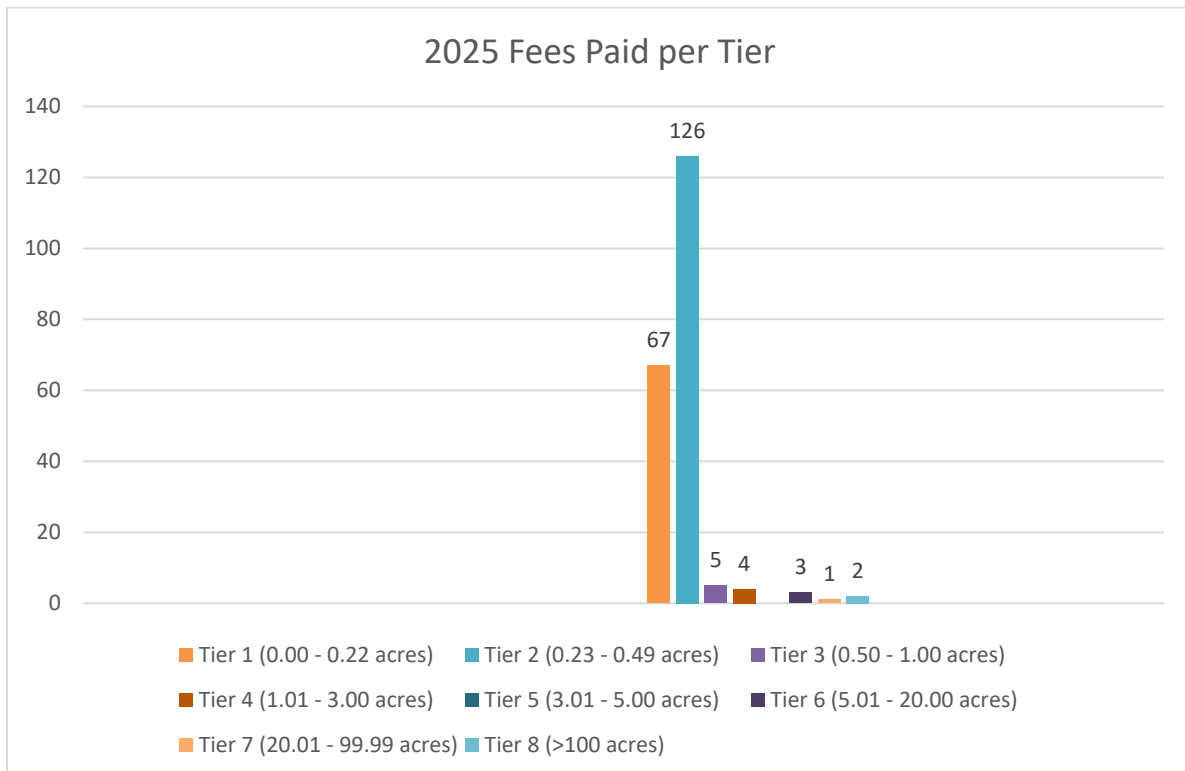
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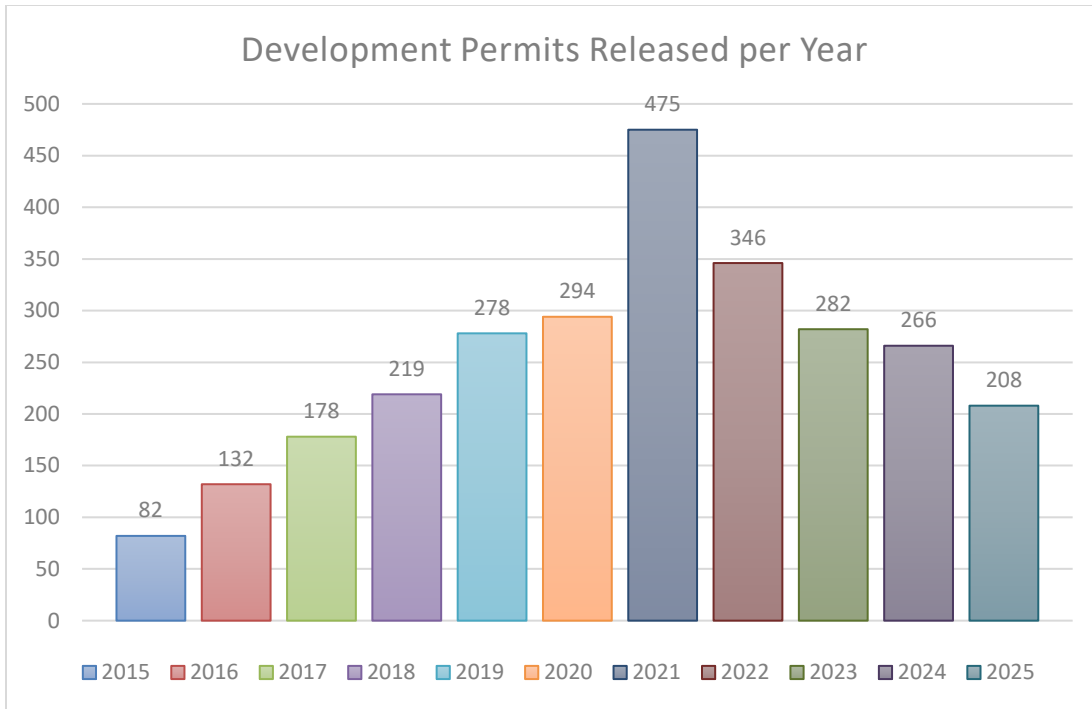
**December 2025**

## Overview

The Charlotte County County-wide Florida Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) was approved by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service through Incidental Take Permit # TE09117B-0 on December 12, 2014 and was subsequently approved by the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) through Ordinance number 2015-003 on February 10, 2015. For calendar year 2025 Charlotte County received and issued two hundred eight (208) development applications and has approved development activities on ±438 acres. Two spreadsheets, as well as point maps have been provided for reference (**Appendix 1**). The first spreadsheet shows all parcels where development permits have been issued and HCP fees have been paid. The second shows all parcels that have not had their development permits issued/fees paid. These spreadsheets are provided as a way to track funding projections and to prioritize acquisition timing to be concurrent with available funding.

The following tables list the total number of parcels by development acreage tier for year 2025 as well as all development permits that have that have elected to participate in the county-wide HCP per year (i.e. the application has been submitted and the fees have been paid). See **Appendix 2** for all fees paid per year since the inception of our plan.





\*Note that the figures shown above may vary due to development permits that were canceled due to unforeseen circumstances. The applicant reserves the right to request a refund of their HCP fee pending the ability for staff to confirm that no disturbance has taken place on site. If any disturbance has taken place the fee is non-refundable.

### **Funding**

In 2025 a total of \$4,751,081 was received through issued development permit applications with an additional \$32,000 received through the settlement agreement process associated with code violations. We continue to audit for annual fee increases per the plan periodic audit and assessment of development fees. The fourth fee increase became effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026; see **Appendix 3** for copy of memo.

### **Avoidance, Minimization & Mitigation Measures**

To be certain that each property is receiving a Scrub jay review, the Charlotte County GIS department created and maintains a scrub jay layer within our permitting database which ensures that every permit submitted on a parcel located within the designated Scrub jay area will be flagged for a review. Parks & Natural Resources staff also updates the Scrub-jay Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Application as needed. This application not only allows staff to track all permits that receive a Scrub Jay HCP review, but it also ensures that the applicant has acknowledged all of the habitat conservation plan conditions including no clearing during nesting season as well as acknowledging the Eastern Indigo Snake precautions and guidelines. In addition, all parcels that apply for development permits in Charlotte County receive either a site inspection by Charlotte County environmental staff or a protected species assessment is

requested from a qualified environmental consultant. If Gopher tortoise burrows are identified on site, the development permit is rejected until proper avoidance or relocation activities have taken place following FWC protocol.

### **Biological Objectives**

#### *Objective #1 Maintain and manage existing County owned scrub*

Charlotte County actively manages numerous properties which are now components of the Scrub jay reserve area design. As a component of environmental land management, staff has monitored and surveyed the habitats within Amberjack Environmental Park, Anne & Chuck Dever Environmental Park, Oyster Creek Environmental Park, Prairie Creek Preserve, Tippecanoe II, Tippecanoe Environmental Park and Washington Loop Parcels (formerly Biscayne Trust).

All land management plans have been updated. The updated plans now define clear goals and objectives for the appropriate management of each environmental park and can be found on our website under their respective park page.

As contracted, Artemis Consulting Collective completed management plans for all newly acquired parcels; see **Appendix 4** for management recommendations.

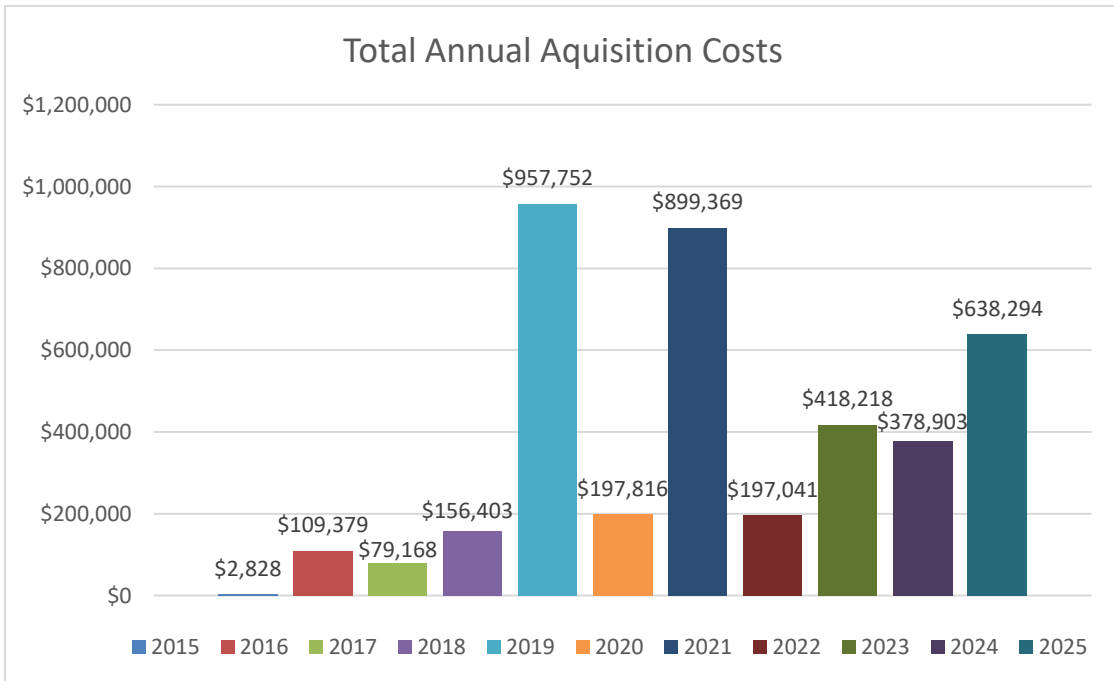
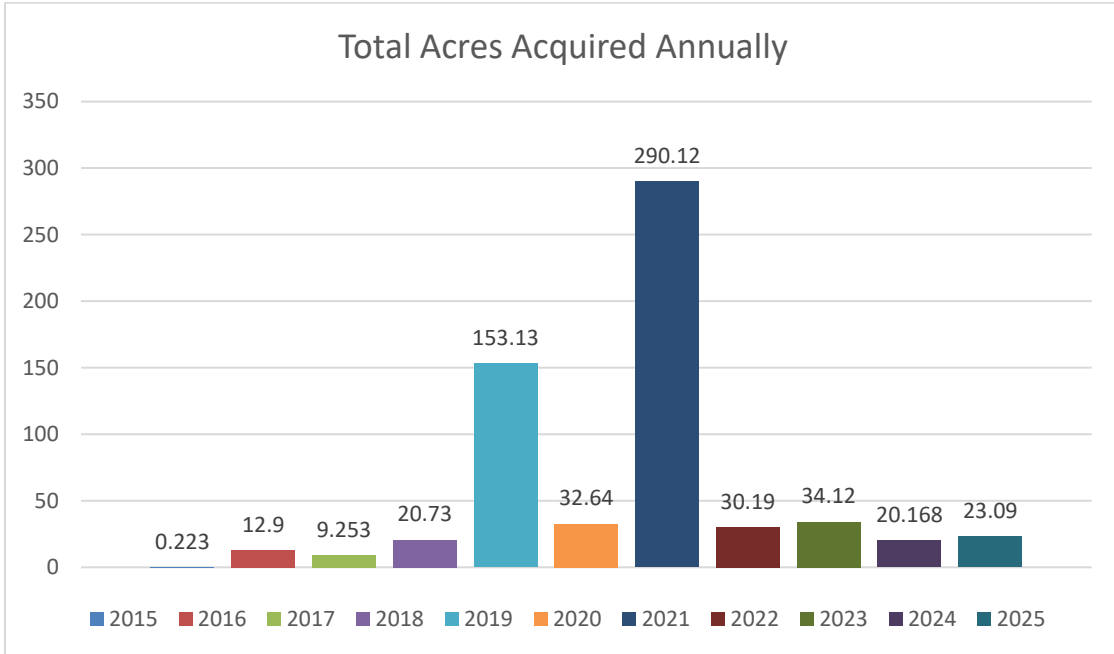
Staff completed their annual vegetation surveys at Amberjack Environmental Park, Anne & Chuck Dever Environmental Park, Bill Coy Preserve, Charlotte Flatwoods, Oyster Creek Environmental Park, Peace River Addition, Prairie Creek Addition, Prairie Creek Preserve, Tippecanoe II, Tippecanoe Environmental Park and Washington Loop Parcels in 2025; see **Appendix 5**. The vegetation surveys consist of 10 x 10 metered plots representative of each habitat type and the data recorded includes percent canopy cover, canopy height, dominant tree species, oak scrub height and percent open space. This data will be used to guide management needs in order to meet Scrub-jay requirements within the designated habitat.

In addition to the vegetation surveys described above, the following management activities took place on existing County public conservation lands in 2025.

| Preserve Name                             | Management Type                            | ±Acres Managed             |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| Amberjack Environmental Park              | Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment       | 7.97 acres<br>14.65 acres  |
| Ann and Chuck Dever Regional Park         | Mulch/Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment | 1.45 acres<br>14.65 acres  |
| Bill Coy Preserve                         | Exotic treatment                           | 7.69 acres                 |
| Charlotte Flatwoods                       | Exotic treatment                           | 190.3 acres                |
| Tippecanoe Environmental Park             | Mulch/Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment | 31.09 acres<br>6.19 acres  |
| Tippecanoe II                             | Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment       | 0.5 acres<br>8.66 acres    |
| Peace River Addition (formerly Burcher's) | Exotic treatment                           | 0.61 acres                 |
| Oyster Creek Regional Park                | Exotic treatment                           | 42.57 acres                |
| Prairie Creek Preserve                    | Mulch/Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment | 126.6 acres<br>145.3 acres |
| Shell Creek Preserve                      | Exotic treatment                           | 119.38 acres               |
| Peace River Preserve                      | Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment       | 2.08 acres<br>0.34 acres   |
| Washington Loop Parcels                   | Mulch/Canopy reduction<br>Exotic treatment | 6.77 acres<br>1.66 acres   |

*Objective #2: Acquire a minimum of 1300 acres as identified in the Reserve*

For year 2025 a total of five (5) parcels were acquired fee simple and one (1) parcel dedicated a conservation easement to Charlotte County. Total acquisition costs and acreages shown by year in charts below.



See **Appendix 6** for the parcel's geographical locations as well as the warranty deeds and conservation easement documents for all parcels acquired through the HCP program.

In addition to the parcel acquisition costs, any parcels acquired within the Prairie Creek Park Community is required to pay an annual Property Owners Association (POA) fee. For calendar year 2025, a total of \$29,900 in association fees were paid for 46 parcels (\$650/parcel) located within Prairie Creek Park.

*Objective #3: Coordinate with other public lands*

County staff maintains a strong working relationship with various public conservation entities including but not limited to the Florida Forest Service (FFS), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). One of our most recent large land acquisitions is surrounded by existing SWFWMD conservation lands. Staff has already established contact with the land manager for that region and is working with them on collaborative land management opportunities in the near future.

When controlled burns are scheduled on county conservation lands, the FFS is sent notice and a copy of the burn prescription is made available. FFS staff may also be present on site during the burn as well. Staff partners with Jay Watch, a birding group under Florida's Audubon Society for annual Scrub jay surveys on county owned lands. Staff continues to work on expanding communication with public lands coordinators at various environmental workshops offered throughout the state.

*Objective #4: Increase the baseline population of scrub-jays within the reserve*

Annual Scrub jay surveys take place on existing county conservation lands to establish baseline populations within the reserve area. Scrub jay surveys are also conducted on all newly acquired parcels as outlined in the plan. For more information on family group numbers for year 2025 see *Jay Status Reporting* chart on page 11 of this report.

*Objective #5: Conduct scrub-jay translocations as appropriate*

Not enough long-term population information available to justify translocations at this time.

*Objective #6: Conduct scrub-jay population monitoring*

Staff has an open contract with Pritchett Steinbeck Group, Inc (PSG) for all newly acquired parcels to receive an initial Scrub jay survey as well as management recommendations. See **Appendix 4** for Scrub jay survey results on parcels acquired in 2025.

In addition to baseline and staff population monitoring, a full county-wide survey was required to this year. Per HCP section 4.5, Monitoring and Reporting '*Long term SJ population monitoring outside the review area will need to be conducted to assess the take and overall county population decline. Full county-wide surveys will be conducted every 10 years for the duration of the 30 year ITP.*' A county-wide survey request was put out to bid and Ian Vincent and Associates (IVA) was granted the contract. A total of 1,901 call stations were created based on criteria established by staff and the consultant. Final results showed 254 positive confirmations throughout Charlotte County. More details including the criteria used to establish the survey locations, final map of locations surveyed as well as the results can be found in **Appendix 7**.

Environmental staff conducted Scrub jay surveys on the acquisition parcels which have been grouped by location and titled as follows; Washington Loop Parcels (formerly Biscayne Trust Acquisition Parcels), Peace River Addition (formerly Burcher's Parcel), Prairie Creek Addition (formerly Park) South and Prairie Creek Addition (formerly Park) North. To consistently relay survey data as well as management plan information, staff renamed the acquisition parcels based on their geographic location to existing conservation lands. The existing conservation lands surveyed include Amberjack Environmental Park, Biscayne Trust, Peace River Preserve, Prairie Creek Preserve (East and West), Rotonda Mitigation Area, Shell Creek Preserve, Tippecanoe Environmental Park and Tippecanoe II. See **Appendix 8** for the full survey results.

The results of the Scrub jay surveys are as follows:

| Preserve Name                                    | Survey Results                        |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Amberjack Environmental Park                     | No jays observed out of 4 survey days |
| Washington Loop (formerly Biscayne Trust)        | Jays observed 3 out of 5 survey days  |
| Washington Loop Parcels                          | Jays observed 5 out of 5 survey days  |
| Peace River Addition (formerly Burcher's parcel) | Jays observed 5 out of 6 survey days  |
| Peace River Preserve                             | Jays observed 2 out of 5 survey days  |
| Prairie Creek Addition North                     | Jays observed 5 out of 5 survey days  |
| Prairie Creek Addition South                     | Jays observed 5 out of 5 survey days  |
| Prairie Creek Preserve East                      | Jays observed 5 out of 5 survey days  |
| Prairie Creek Preserve West                      | Jays observed 5 out of 5 survey days  |
| Rotonda Mitigation Area                          | No jays observed out of 4 survey days |
| Shell Creek Preserve                             | No jays observed out of 4 survey days |
| Tippecanoe                                       | Jays observed 5 out of 5 survey days  |
| Tippecanoe II                                    | No jays observed out of 5 survey days |

### Jay Status Reporting

| Site                                     | # of Families | Max # of Adults | Max # of Juveniles | Comments  |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|---|
| Washington Loop Addition                 | 2             | 6               | 1                  | Acquisition parcels and Biscayne trust surveyed, increase in adults for acquisition parcels from last year. |
| Peace River Addition (formerly Burchers) | 3             | 15              | 5                  | Increase in adults and family groups. Minor decrease in juveniles   |
| Peace River Preserve                     | 1             | 1               | 0                  | Minor decrease in adults.   |
| Prairie Creek Preserve                   | 15            | 86              | 19                 | Decrease in all categories.   |
| Prairie Creek Addition North and South   | 9             | 47              | 11                 | Increase in adults and juveniles.   |
| Tippecanoe                               | 3             | 10              | 0                  | Decrease in adults and juveniles.   |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>33</b>     | <b>165</b>      | <b>36</b>          | Increase in adults, large decrease in juveniles compared to last year.                                      |

## **Non-Compliance**

When unpermitted development activities (i.e. clearing, filling, mulching, tree removal, construction, etc.) are documented on a parcel that is located in Scrub jay a stop work order is placed on site and a code case is opened by the county's certified environmental code officer. A certified letter is then sent to the owner notifying them that they are in violation of the Charlotte County Code and the Endangered Species Act. The owners are provided two options to comply; (1) They can allow their case to continue as non-compliance and they will be seen by the special magistrate who will make a determination based on the applicable county codes and ordinances. A fine is recommended by staff based on the HCP minimization requirements. These fines are in addition to the base Scrub jay HCP development fee. (2) Alternatively, the owners can opt for a settlement agreement in which they are offered a 50% reduction of the fines should they pay their standard HCP development fee and apply for any other outstanding permits that would be required by County Code.


In 2025, nineteen (19) Scrub jay code cases have complied and signed settlement agreements. All nineteen (19) were able to comply before being sent to the Special Magistrate (SM) therefore they received a 50% reduction in their violation fees. Note that no reduction in violation fees is offered when an individual signs the HCP application acknowledging the HCP conditions and doesn't follow them or for anyone who has been to the Special Magistrate (SM). There are currently a total of nineteen (19) open code cases in various stages (i.e., liens assessed, SM continuance, preparing for SM). This includes all prior cases that are still open since the inception of the plan.

Agreements continue to be recorded by the Charlotte County Clerk of the Circuit Court in addition to being saved in the county online permitting database.

In addition to the above referenced process for private property owners, staff continues to update the internal spreadsheet for parcels that are inadvertently released when mitigation fees should have been collected prior to permit issuance. The same fee structure is applied but instead of collecting monetary fees from the building department, the outstanding fees are used towards internal processing fees such as re-zoning applications for acquired parcels, fence permit applications for acquired parcels, etc. In calendar year 2025 one (1) permit was released and was charged the 2023 HCP fees. This was due to an internal error where a shed permit was released in 2023 without the HCP fees being added to the permit. When the same owner applied for another permit in 2025 staff noted the fees were never paid. The owner requested to pay the 2023 fees due to the internal error.

Statement of Compliance per FWS take permit #TE09117B-0 condition K.

Under penalty of law, I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, after appropriate inquiries of all relevant persons involved in the preparation of this report, the information submitted is true, accurate, and complete.

|   |             |               |
|---|-------------|---------------|
|  | PNR Manager | 01/25/2026    |
| _____<br>Name / Job Title   |             | _____<br>Date |

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Permits Issued Spreadsheet w/ Maps & Pending Permit Issuance Spreadsheet

Appendix 2 – HCP Fee Tier Info per Year

Appendix 3 – Fee Increase Memo

Appendix 4 – Acquired Parcel Management Recommendations

Appendix 5 – Annual Vegetation Surveys

Appendix 6 – Acquired Parcel Info/Maps with Deeds

Appendix 7 – IVA County-wide Survey Results

Appendix 8 – Staff Scrub Jay Surveys