

PRESS RELEASE

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Caption: DDWS seeks to acquire the 68-acre Wulfert Bayous parcel to complete a wildlife corridor between refuge, city, county, and SCCF conservation lands.

‘Ding’ Darling kicks off 68-acre land acquisition campaign

At its annual Go Wild for “Ding” fundraiser on Feb. 13, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) announced its campaign to raise \$9.5 million to purchase 68 acres of Sanibel property adjacent to the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

“The ‘Ding’ Darling Wildlife Society has identified an exciting opportunity to further the land preservation legacy of ‘Ding’ Darling, but we need your help, and quickly,” a video presentation announced.

The parcel, known as Wulfert Bayous, is currently permitted by the city of Sanibel for the owner to develop up to 29 large homes. DDWS has been working for several years behind the scenes to partner with funding sources and private donors toward the acquisition.

As a result, on Nov. 6, 2018, the Lee County Board of Commissioners voted in favor of exploring the acquisition and has asked county staff to pursue the possibility. DDWS also is looking into state funding and grants from the BP Horizon Spill as other alternative funding sources toward the remaining \$6.5 million needed.

From private donors, DDWS has to date raised \$2 million toward the minimum \$3 million it will need to raise in order to receive support from other funding sources.

“There’s a possibility that the \$3 million goal may change, depending upon the amount of funding received from the other sources we are investigating,” said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director.

The acreage along Wulfert Road and Sanibel-Captiva Road is home to a number of species, including eagles, bobcats, gopher tortoises, and rare plants. It is also a stopover for migrating neo-tropical birds. Resident and seasonal birds alike would be seriously threatened by development, say refuge officials.

The conservation and planned restoration of the Wulfert Bayous property will protect a 4-acre lake, 16 acres of existing mangroves, hardwood uplands, and 22 active gopher tortoise burrows. Wulfert Bayous contains 15 acres of wetlands that can be restored and enhanced to create a wading bird colony of roseate spoonbills, wood storks, white ibis, and other egrets and herons. Improvements would also include limited, passive public access for wildlife viewing.

“The 68-acre parcel will complete a wildlife corridor connecting surrounding conservation lands while stemming development and water quality degradation via natural filtration,” said John McCabe, DDWS land acquisition committee chair. “As the largest parcel of unprotected undeveloped land on Sanibel, it’s the vital piece of the puzzle that will ensure Sanibel’s future as the protected, pristine natural treasure we all love.”

“We are turning to private support to meet our required \$3 million campaign goal,” said Miller. “Time is of the essence for raising the money. If we do not meet the deadline, conservation could lose the parcel to residential development. We are looking for donations and pledges large and small within the next three months.”

For more information or to make a donation, visit www.savewulfertland.org. To pledge funds to save the Wulfert Bayous’ 68 acres from development, donors should contact Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop profits.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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