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Land Management Review: Babcock Ranch Preserve

by Rick Joyce and Dave Feagles

On June 7-8, 2010, Rick Joyce, FNPS Director-at-Large, and Dave Feagles, President of the Serenoa Chapter, participated in a land management review at the Babcock Ranch Preserve, located in southeast Charlotte County and northwest Lee County.

At 73,239 acres, Babcock represents one of the single largest purchases of conservation land in Florida's history. Located in fast growing southwest Florida, its preservation protects important water resources, diverse natural habitats, and scenic landscapes as well as historic and cultural resources.

Rick and Dave found their experience on the land review team interesting, and were excited to be a part of the process. Rick says "I thoroughly enjoyed the time

I spent on the ranch during the land review and learned a lot about land management on a working ranch. Babcock Ranch is in many ways a great model for the future. It's an example of using public lands in an ecologically responsible way that produces food and materials (forestry) and those uses provide meaningful revenue to pay for land management practices like prescribed fire and exotic pest plant control."

Dave Feagles was impressed by the ranch and the learning experience the review afforded. He comments, "The ranch/preserve is enormous – about 114 square miles. We had two full days of driving around inspecting and took the third morning to complete the checklist and bounce ideas off each other.

Since this was my first time on a land review I acted as an observer – however, my comments were well received and included in the commendations and recommendations section of the review."

Dave goes on to say "The entire experience was the most rewarding and interesting thing I have done this year. The diverse perspectives and the depth of knowledge of the 20 participants were enlightening and frequently required a stretch for me to keep up. It was very exciting. I haven't learned that much in such a short time – probably ever! I'm still smiling."

Citation: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2010. www.myfwc.com/recreation/WMASites_Babcock-RanchPreserve_index.htm



Fig. 4 – Large, old growth bald cypress trees and associated knees inhabit the floodplain of Jack's Branch, a picturesque creek that flows south to the Caloosahatchee River on the eastern side of Babcock Ranch. Considered one of the most beautiful places within the Preserve, the area is a canopy oasis.

Fig. 5 – Dave Feagles on the rear porch of Jack's Branch Hunting Camp overlooking the surrounding temperate hardwood hammock and freshwater hardwood swamp.



5.



6.



7.

Fig. 6 – Cows have been part of this working cattle ranch for more than 100 years, and are an important source of revenue for funding ranch management. This cow is an example of a historically significant breed, Florida Cracker Cattle, which are descendants of livestock first brought to Florida in the 1500's by the Spanish. Babcock Ranch is one of several ranches in Florida that retain this heritage breed.

Fig. 7 – The review team met for lunch at Jack's Branch Hunting Camp to discuss on land management issues. This camp was one of several privately leased hunting locations within the ranch that provided significant revenues to help fund ranch management. With the public purchase of the ranch in 2006, how to best manage these hunting camp sites is a challenge to land managers.



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We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

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Official definition of native plant:

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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