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CORRECTION: This revised release contains the correct amount Sarasota County is paying for the Longino Ranch – \$1,455,900.

Sarasota County buys Longino Ranch to create environmental corridor

Sarasota County, in partnership with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), has approved the purchase of the 3,900-acre Longino Ranch, completing a five-year process to create one of the largest protected areas for eco-tourism on the gulf coast.

The Sarasota County Commission approved moving forward with a deal put together with the help of Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, which acted as the acquisition agent. The purchase price is \$14,559,000, with the county paying \$1,455,900 and SWFWMD paying \$13,103,100.

The acquisition follows the recent purchase of the 3,800-acre Walton Ranch, which abuts the Longino Ranch. The two parcels create a natural lands corridor linking core conservation lands in Sarasota County to SWFWMD-protected lands in DeSoto County.

The conservation easement will cover marshes, pine flatwoods and hardwood hammocks, which will safeguard water supplies and water quality and provide natural flood protection. The purchase also creates a critical ecological corridor that will provide regional connectivity for wildlife, including the endangered Florida panther.

“Today’s approval by the county commission completes a process approved by the voters in 1999 with their support of the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program,” said Theresa Connor, executive director, Sarasota County Environmental Services. “By working together with SWFWMD and Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, we will be able to connect more than 106,000 acres of natural land and provide opportunities for eco-tourism and education that will benefit the community for generations.”

For more information contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 or visit the Sarasota County Environmental Services Web site at www.scgov.net/EnvironmentalServices.