

# Florida Gulf Coast University Campus Land Use

*Submitted by the ESC and presented to the PBC April 16, 2013*

*Approved by the Planning and Budget Council to be reviewed by the President's cabinet – April 30, 2013.*

## Introduction

Environmental sustainability is critical to our university mission, yet practices often undertaken by the university commonly proceed without proactively considering issues of sustainability in a comprehensive fashion. The Environmental Sustainability Committee (ESC) is often involved in a reactionary way or is never consulted. This year's land forums and the work of the ESC over the last two academic years indicate the greatest concern among faculty, staff, and students is the disconnect between our stated mission of environmental sustainability, our practices, and the public perception of those practices. It is evident that Land use on campus cannot be dealt with in isolation. The ESC brings together individuals with the intellect and experience to ensure our mission of environmental sustainability is honored in a shared governance manner. Our ultimate recommendation is that the university fully engages this committee's counsel and provides the resources and to serve in this capacity.

We recommend that the structure of the committee and its relationship with other campus constituents be redefined. We envision a central office that houses these functions and serves as a facilitator for the institution.

## Background and Charge

One of the Environmental Sustainability Committee's purposes and charge is to provide advice and recommendations to the Planning and Budget Council (PBC) on all matters concerning environmental sustainability. Dr. Toll met with the committee in early September 2012 and charged the committee to gather data from the university community regarding land use with consideration on how we use our campus and determining what the land use issues are by compiling a comprehensive list over the next few months.

Frequently questions concerning campus land use come to our committee. Some examples include:

1. How do we manage nature trail use?
2. Should other uses of habitats frequently used for research be restricted?
3. Who should decide if a course-related campus project is permissible or best for the university community?
4. Are landscaping practices on the developed portions of campus appropriate?

5. Is the campus's long-term management plan consistent with best practices and needs for the greater region?

The Land Use forums were held on September 18 and 19, 2012 and a survey was sent out to the university community to help better understand the university community perspective on campus land use. We had approximately 60 in attendance over the two days of forums and 191 responses to the survey. The forums were intended to collect and account for the various concerns that all university user groups have about land use. This past year the committee has continued discussion of the data and also invited key experts from around campus to share their specific perspectives. The ultimate goal of this process was to develop a collection of best land use practices and recommendations to be shared with the PBC.

During the FGCU Land Forums we facilitated conversations and responses about the following questions:

1. How should our campus land and ecosystem be used to best serve the university?
2. What recommendations do you have for coordinating land use practices between students, faculty and staff?
3. How should campus-use influence the watershed and our regional ecosystems' functions?
4. How is student life best served by university land?
5. What are the developmental constraints given our projected growth?

Our objectives for the forums and analysis of the data were to:

1. Identify and prioritize concerns with respect to land use; these include: how conserved lands might be used in the future and how already developed and natural lands are treated.
2. Develop a process for determining the best land-use practices.
3. Inform the Planning and Budget Council (PBC), Campus Operations, and the future master planning process.
4. Make recommendations to the PBC, through the ESC, on matters of importance to the university community and to the greater Southwest Florida region.

The key principles and themes that resonated throughout the forums and survey data demonstrate that we need a common plan to manage our actions and projects with respect to environmental sustainability.

1. Give the ESC, this group, greater opportunity with respect to all campus planning and development.
2. A key theme is that FGCU should "practice what we preach" with regard to land use. As one respondent put it, we should "live what we teach." There seems to be a subtext that we need to demonstrate environmental sustainability in the development of campus lands.

3. Consistency with FGCU's mission of environmental sustainability is, perhaps, the major theme. There are many ways in which this mission statement is interpreted by various respondents. Environmentally sustainable land use is referenced with regard to research, education, land restoration, land preservation, and other topics.
4. Another key theme is to "ensure protection of conservation lands". Here again there are many ways in which this is interpreted by various respondents. Protection is mentioned for wildlife habitat, including wildlife corridors; public access; learning spaces; recreation; provision of ecosystem services; and nature study.
5. There seems to be a sense that we need a land use plan to balance competing uses, and that the plan needs to include keeping our commitment to natural areas.

## **Recommendations for Land Use Practices**

### **1. Uphold Mission Statement and Philosophy based on the History of the Institution.**

- a. Develop a guiding mission/philosophy for land-use decisions and practices that is part of a comprehensive and wide-reaching environmental sustainability plan.

### **2. Establish Campus Land Use Inventory.**

- a. Create **a Clearinghouse** to compile, coordinate and collaborate on land-use decisions. The clearinghouse will:
  - i. Empower the 'clearinghouse' entity to approve, recommend or deny proposed land uses (for events).
  - ii. Produce and maintain interactive GIS maps of campus lands that identify current and archive academic, research, operational and other uses.
    1. The maps should contain links to the "Campus Ecosystem Model" projects and data, construction projects, courses, research, recurring events and projects on campus lands (e.g., Food Forest), the trail system and places for outdoor classes and events.
  - iii. Add ALL campus lands to the Events and Planning System and the GIS maps.
    1. Clearly outline what types of uses are appropriate on all lands on campus.
    2. Create guidelines that identify who, what and how uses of these lands occur and include these details in the reservation system.
  - iv. Categorize the lands by type:
    1. Recreational lands - common space for multiple uses (e.g., play, gathering, sports, etc.).
    2. Natural land categories:
      - a. Teaching lands - for demonstrations, field trips.
      - b. Experimental lands - for manipulative experiments.
      - c. Conservation lands - for observational and monitoring research including multiple instances of cypress domes, wet prairies, pine uplands, ponds.

### **3. Implement Best Management Practices of FGCU Land:**

- a. Land use should:
  - i. Be guided by principles of sustainable development.

- ii. Promote and support academic programs.
  - iii. Be guided by the campus master plan.
  - iv. Be guided by a shared governance process where all parties concerned have ample time and opportunity to review and offer input on the process.
- b. Adopt a policy that affirms that the Master Plan is a **document to be adhered to** (rather than one that offers guidance on land use decisions). Before any changes to land uses outlined in the Master Plan occur, get buy-in from ALL constituents (Students, Faculty, Staff, and Administration).
- c. Implement best management practices to maintain a healthy watershed and campus ecosystem. Utilize the best practices optimal for all species (human and non-human) that come in contact with that area. This includes:
  - i. Adopting wildlife friendly road construction (e.g., curbs and overpass design).
  - ii. Lowering speed limits on campus to 20 or 25 for human safety and wildlife protection.
  - iii. Setting up mechanisms to monitor our energy and water uses and educate users as to the importance of this.
  - iv. Maintaining all upland communities.
  - v. Building up, if additional construction is necessary.
  - vi. Keeping the built environment to less than 50% of campus.
  - vii. Avoiding off-campus mitigation.
  - viii. Implementing fire management of conservation lands.

#### **4. Examine Institutional Size:**

- a. Determine our stable carrying capacity.
- b. Forecast thoughtful growth in line with our master plan and our environmental sustainability and teaching mission.
  - i. Many students felt the school size was at the right enrollment level. They did not want the University to expand and felt the enrollment size was correct for a proper learning environment. Enrollment increase means a decrease in the academic comfort zone of the students. In most cases it would lead to more development of sustainable conservation land.
- c. Consider how to move growth away from main campus, however keep this growth in line with our master plan, environmental sustainability and teaching mission.

#### **5. Ensure Education of all Campus Constituents.**

- a. Acculturate students, staff and faculty on our mission, master plan and environmental sustainability focus.
- b. Provide a communications forum for the greater university community and its partners to foster partnerships across divisions and ensure consistent sustainability messages for students, staff, faculty and our partners.
  - i. Create an obvious web presence of university's commitment to environmental sustainability.

1. Showcase the inventory, virtual tour and sustainable practices at this website and highlight environmental/green campus initiatives and research (academic, student operational enhancements).
  - ii. Consider other means of communication to educate the university community (flat screens, signage, boards, workshops, educational forums, perhaps through Continuing Education, public workshops on our sustainable initiatives).
  - c. Take advantage of other educational opportunities on campus.
    - i. Account for class time spent outside for lab work and other field experiences.
    - ii. Build on the idea of the Campus Ecosystem Model; engage the potential for our conservation lands to be educational and experimental.
    - iii. Create outdoor classrooms- seating and cover from weather elements.
- 6. Invest and Subsidize Sustainable Transportation Decisions.**
  - a. Incentivize NON-automobile transportation (e.g., dollars to Lee Tran, passes for students, area shuttles, etc.)
  - b. Encourage bike and pedestrian friendly campus design.
    - i. Add a bike lane to the entrance road of FGCU and throughout all roads on campus.
  - c. Explore other alternatives for parking
- 7. Hire a Sustainability Scientist**, a person that would serve as an authoritative voice for the university. Marine and Ecological Science has such a hire on its long range plan.