



**KEVIN ERWIN**  
Consulting Ecologist, Inc.

2077 Bayside Parkway  
Fort Myers, Florida 33901  
Phone: (239) 337-1505  
[www.environment.com](http://www.environment.com)

## **Viera East Community Development District Conservation Areas**

The communities of Viera East are situated within hundreds of acres of preserved upland and wetland habitats. These permit-required\* conservation areas (or preserves) are owned and managed by the Viera East Community Development District (VECDD) and they are protected by Conservation Easements. A Conservation Easement is a legal document that places restrictions on a piece of property to protect its associated natural resources.

The VECDD is responsible for maintaining Viera East's conservation areas in their natural state in perpetuity. Management activities include regular exotic (non-native) vegetation control and removal; fire wise habitat management for wildfire safety (i.e., thinning of vegetative fuels directly adjacent to homes); replacement of dead/damaged native plants as needed; prevention of encroachment/trespassing into preserves through education, signage, fencing, etc.; and enforcement of compliance with Conservation Easements.

The following activities are prohibited in the conservation areas: construction or placing of buildings, roads, utilities, signs, etc.; dumping or placing of soil, trash, yard waste, or other materials; removal or destruction of native vegetation with the exception of the specific activities described above; planting of non-native vegetation, including sod and other non-native grasses; excavation, ditching, dredging or removal of soil; and activities detrimental to fish and wildlife.

In some circumstances, Viera East staff will make the executive decision to remove native vegetation from a conservation area if it may potentially be dangerous to people or property (e.g., a large, dead tree with falling limbs hanging over a sidewalk or building). These decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. To clarify, native vegetation removal from the Viera East preserves, beyond that described above, is only considered when safety or direct property damage is a real concern. Otherwise, all preserves are to be maintained with their native habitats intact, as required by the Conservation easements.

Should you have any questions please contact (321) 639-2355.

\* St. Johns River Water Management District and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits.



**KEVIN ERWIN**  
Consulting Ecologist, Inc.

2077 Bayside Parkway  
Fort Myers, Florida 33901  
Phone: (239) 337-1505  
E-mail: [kbowman@environment.com](mailto:kbowman@environment.com)  
[www.environment.com](http://www.environment.com)

September 29, 2017

Mr. Todd Mecklenborg  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
North Florida Ecological Services

**Re: Viera East Community Development District  
Florida Scrub-Jay Preserve Habitat Management  
Annual Report for 2016/2017**

Dear Mr. Mecklenborg:

This letter report is being submitted to provide an update on the habitat management activities associated with the Viera East Community Development District's (CDD) Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) conservation areas (Figures 1 and 2). Project background information, including site descriptions and full details regarding past habitat management activities, have been documented in previous reports that were submitted to the North Florida Ecological Services office (see References below).

#### Project Summary

A Florida scrub-jay habitat management plan was prepared and implemented by Kevin L. Erwin Consulting Ecologist, Inc. (KLECE) for the Viera East CDD's 1,100± acre Tracts E, F, and G project site (KLECE 1994). The project site is located in Sections 22, 26, 27, 34, and 35, Township 25 South, Range 36 East, Brevard County, Florida (Figure 1). Total scrub-jay preserve area is 422.9 acres (i.e., 153.6 acres of On-site Conservation Areas and 269.3 acres of Off-site Conservation Areas)(Figure 2).

Prior to management practices initiated in 1994, much of the scrub-jay habitat was overgrown and not useable to the Florida scrub-jay. Only three scrub-jay families were detected during our original surveys back then. That situation has been dramatically improved and many additional scrub-jay families are presently occupying territories and nesting in previously unoccupied habitat. In fact, the preserve is now saturated with scrub-jay families/territories (i.e., all available habitats within the preserve are occupied by scrub-jays).

#### Habitat Management 2016/2017

This letter report summarizes management practices during the 2016/2017 management

year (October 1, 2016-September 30, 2017). Habitat management included work within both the on-site and off-site conservation areas (Figure 2). As in previous years, fire breaks throughout the preserve were maintained as open sandy areas by disking. Cut/mulch lines were also freshened and/or newly-installed in order to prepare for prescribed fires.

Although our 2016/2017 target burn area was approximately 30 acres in size, only 2± acres were burned in February before winds shifted and the fire was extinguished due to safety concerns and the close proximity to nearby homes. The remaining portion of this target area was mechanically cut/mulched with a forestry cutter later in the year after the 2017 scrub-jay nesting season was complete (Figure 2).

The Viera East CDD will continue to conduct controlled burning of additional management units during the 2017/2018 management year. The next target burn area is approximately 55 acres in size and is located in the center of the scrub preserve directly due east of the recently cut/burned area.

Controlled fire is the preferred management tool to manage habitats for the benefit of the Florida scrub-jay, and to reduce the potential for uncontrolled wildfires. In addition, exotic vegetation removal/control has been and continues to be an ongoing management practice within the scrub-jay conservation areas. The Viera East CDD will continue to conduct best management practices that benefit the Florida scrub-jay in perpetuity.

#### Florida Scrub-Jay Surveys

Since it appears that all available habitats within the preserve are occupied by one or more scrub-jay families, intense territorial surveys for Florida scrub-jays are no longer conducted by KLECE. cursory territorial surveys were conducted during the nesting season in May 2017. As in previous years, an estimated 20+ scrub-jay territories (i.e., scrub-jay families) were identified. These surveys continue to document the fact that the preserve is saturated with scrub-jay families.

During 2009, Florida scrub-jay biologist David R. Breininger, Ph.D. recorded 21 scrub-jay families using the conservation areas by surveying color-banded birds (pers. comm.). KLECE recorded a similar number of family groups during that same year. Brevard Zoo staff also has recorded approximately 25 families on the property by surveying color-banded scrub-jays (pers. comm.).

#### Conclusion

The Viera East Tracts E, F, and G Scrub-Jay Management Plan, implemented since its approval in November 1994, has been highly successful. Over the past 23 years, prescribed fires have been conducted throughout the scrub-jay conservation areas. Most of these burns have been very successful, providing a mosaic of large, well-burned habitats with smaller unburned habitat inclusions. Mechanical treatments of oak, shrub, sand pine, slash pine, and saw palmetto habitats also have been conducted over the past 23 years. Mechanical work performed includes activities such as roller chopping, chainsawing, cutting/mulching, vegetation reduction with a front end rake, and the creation of open

sandy areas. In addition, fire lines throughout the preserve are freshened each year with a disk. Disking not only provides fire breaks for prescribed burning, but also creates open sandy areas for scrub-jays and other wildlife species. Fire lines were maintained as open sandy areas again during 2016/2017.

Plans are currently underway to continue controlled burning of additional management units during the 2017/2018 management year.

Scrub-jay territory surveys conducted since 2006, including the May 2017 survey, have concluded that the preserve's conservation areas are saturated with scrub-jay families. Past work by Florida scrub-jay biologist David R. Breininger, Ph.D. determined that approximately 20+ scrub-jay families exist within the conservation areas. Recent surveys conducted by the Brevard Zoo have re-affirmed this population size estimate.

Habitat management activities within the conservation areas have greatly benefited the Florida scrub-jay population at Viera East. Active management also has improved habitats for many other listed and non-listed wildlife and plant species. Other wildlife species benefiting from these management practices include the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), gopher frog (*Lithobates capito*), eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*), and Florida mouse (*Podomys floridanus*). Certain plants have also increased in managed areas, such as silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), greeneyes (*Berlandiera subacaulis*), gopher apple (*Licania michauxii*), Florida paintbrush (*Carphephorus corymbosus*), blazing star (*Liatris gracilis*), false rosemary (*Conradina canescens*), and palafox (*Palafoxia feayi*). The Viera East CDD will continue to conduct these essential habitat management practices in perpetuity.

An environmental education program has also been implemented for Viera East residents. Educational brochures regarding conservation areas are regularly distributed to residents. Scrub-jay habitats have been posted as wildlife conservation areas by the Viera East CDD. No trespassing signs are posted and maintained by the CDD as well.

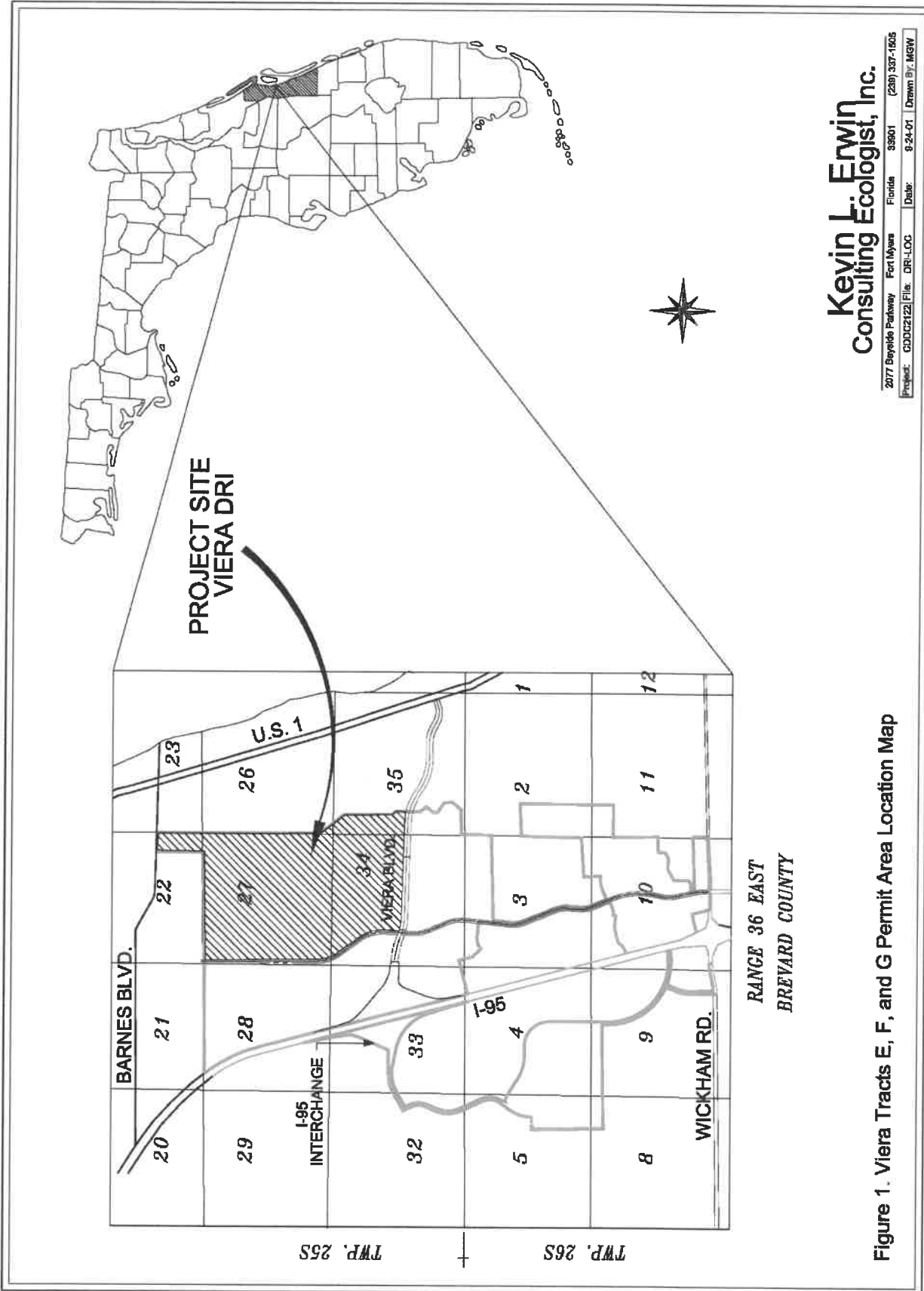
Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions regarding this report.

Sincerely,

Kristoffer T. Bowman  
Certified Senior Ecologist

## REFERENCES

- Breining, D. R. 2007-2011. Personal Communication.
- Frampton, T. 2013 and 2014. Brevard Zoo. Personal Communication.
- Kevin L. Erwin Consulting Ecologist, Inc. 1998-2016. Viera East Tracts E, F, and G Scrub-Jay Habitat Management Annual Reports. Prepared for The Viera East Community Development District.
- Kevin L. Erwin Consulting Ecologist, Inc. November 1994. Viera East Tracts E, F, and G Scrub-Jay Management Plan. Prepared for The Viera Company, Viera, Florida.
- Kevin L. Erwin Consulting Ecologist, Inc. April 1994. Viera Scrub-Jay Survey. Prepared for The Viera Company, Viera, Florida.



**Kevin Erwin**  
**Consulting Ecologist, Inc.**

2077 Bayside Parkway Fort Myers Florida 33901 (239) 337-1805  
 Project: G3DC2122 | File: DR-LOC | Date: 8-24-01 | Drawn By: MGW

Figure 1. Viera Tracts E, F, and G Permit Area Location Map

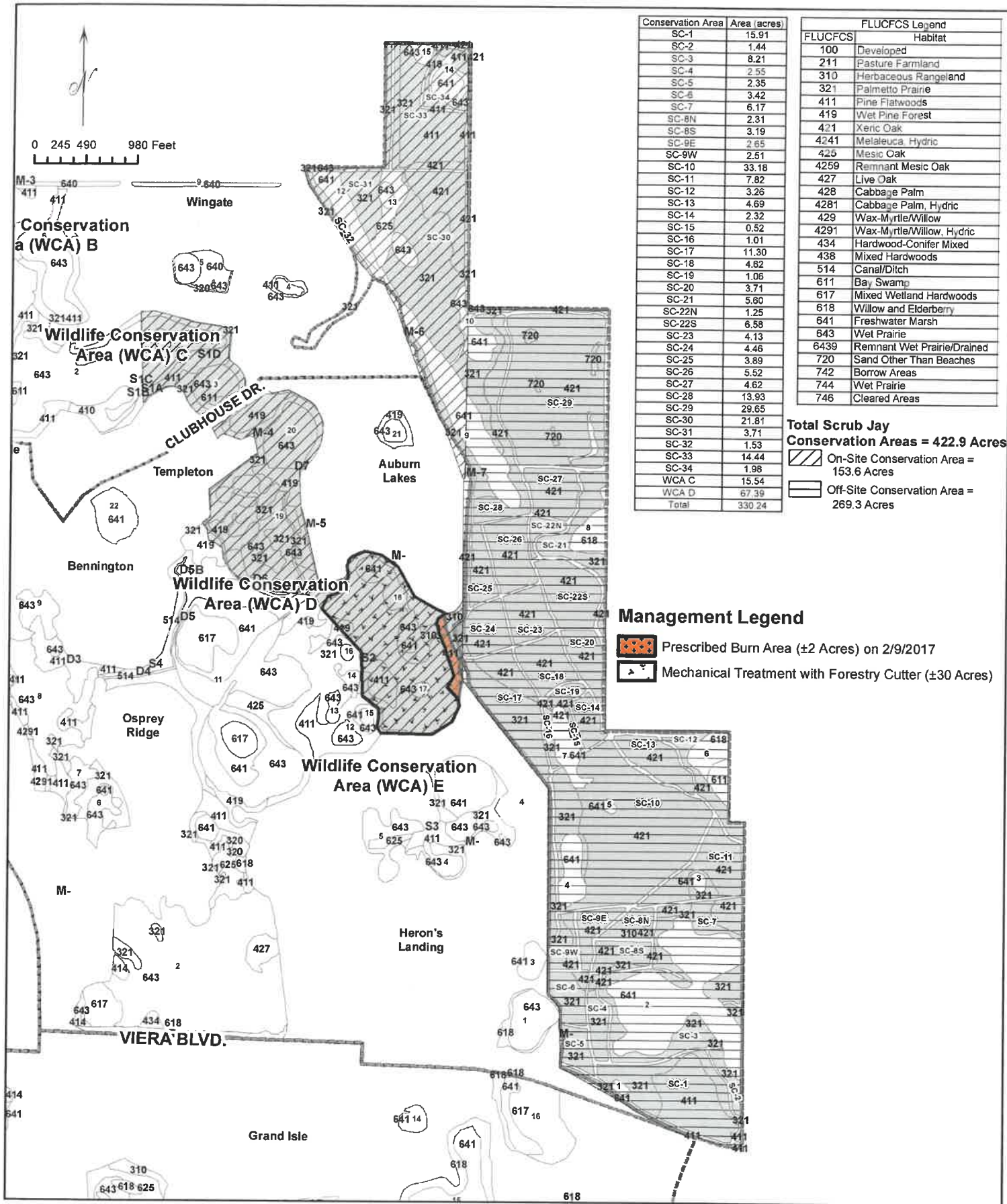


Figure 2: Habitat Management of Conservation Units (2016 - 2017)

Kevin L Erwin Consulting Ecologist, Inc.  
 2077 Bayside Parkway Ft. Myers, Florida 33901 (239) 337-1505  
 Date: 08/16/2010 | File: Habitat Management Map 2017 | PN: CDDSCR112  
 Revision Date: 09/25/2017  
 Drawing Contact: KLECE