

May 27, 2025

Acquisition and Restoration Council
C/o Hank Vinson
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Office of Environmental Services
3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 140
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Via Email only: hank.vinson@floridadep.gov

Dear Acquisition and Restoration Councilmembers:

On behalf of Collaboratory and our shared commitment to building a more resilient and connected Southwest Florida, I am writing to express support for the inclusion of the Bonita Estero Rail Trail (BERT) project onto the Florida Forever Program's Strategic Managed Area Lands List. BERT is an 11.4-mile underutilized rail corridor in Lee and Collier Counties intended to be converted into a public trail as part of the statewide trails and greenway network. The corridor is a designated priority trail segment of the 2024-2028 Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan. Acquisition and management of the corridor as a public trail furthers Florida's statutory and programmatic goals of enhancing the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects. This will contribute towards the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors.

The corridor's acquisition will fill a strategic gap within the Florida Gulf Coast Trail (a Florida designated regional trail system) as a multi-use paved path. Its extraordinary length, considerable width at 130' and location within developed areas of Lee and Collier Counties affords multiple additional public benefits. The rail corridor itself is a wildlife corridor crossing the Estero River, Spring Creek, Imperial River and Oak Creek, all of which flow into the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. This Preserve is an extensive network of wetlands connecting the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed and the Larry Kiker Preserve to Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. The trail will provide a dedicated, safe and affordable transportation route for cyclists and pedestrians. Additionally, the trail's proximity to where



Collaboratory™

2031 Jackson Street, Suite 100
Fort Myers, Florida 33901

Telephone – 239 274 5900
info@collaboratory.org

people live, work and play will facilitate people connecting with the outdoors, all while bolstering local economies.

The project enjoys broad and diverse support from environmental, business and civic organizations. This overwhelming support reflects the multitude of public benefits it will offer. We hope the Acquisition and Restoration Council will look favorably upon this project and include this initiative in the SMALL category of the Florida Forever Program.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dawn Belamarich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "B".

Dawn Belamarich
President and CEO