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State, Lee to partner on purchase of Boomer property in Estero for \$14.5M

By JAMIE HENLINE, jrhenline@naplesnews.com
March 18, 2005

The state and Lee County know how to spot a deal.

They agreed jointly to spend \$14.5 million to add the Boomer property in Estero to the 10,000-acre Estero Bay Buffer Preserve. The 104 acres south of Broadway and west of U.S. 41 were appraised at nearly \$28 million.

Gov. Jeb Bush and the Florida Cabinet voted Thursday to purchase the land as part of the Florida Forever program.

The Lee County Commission agreed March 8 to pursue the purchase through the county's Conservation 20/20 land preservation initiative.

"Money has not exchanged hands," said Sarah Williams, spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. "An actual agreement has not been drafted."

However, the state and county have agreed to pay \$7.25 million each to close the deal, she said.

The County Commission probably will move to finish the deal within the next 60 to 90 days, said Karen Forsyth, director of the Lee County Land Division. The state also must finalize the deal.

The acreage of the 104-acre property will not be split equally, said Forsyth. The state will receive the title to the property along the Estero River, while the county will get the title to all the frontage along Broadway and most of the frontage along U.S. 41, she said.

"We are going to enter into a management agreement with the state," she said. "Lee County Parks and Recreation will be involved in the negotiations and planning of the management plan, so that the interests of Lee County are very well identified and incorporated within the overall plan."

The Boomer property includes the homestead of Berthaldine Boomer, an original member of the Koreshans. Boomer paid for the sloop that took her, Koreshan founder Cyrus Teed and a handful of members to Southwest Florida in the late 1800s to start their religious, utopian community that died out about 100 years later.

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Nola Boomer, the wife of Berthaldine's great-grandson George, will be allowed to live on 25 acres of the land for the remainder of her life, a request made by the Boomer family when they put the land on the market a little more than a year ago. George Boomer died in 1999 at the age of 77.

The Boomer estate is valued at \$22,550,000 while Nola remains on the property because her life estate, the property she will occupy, is worth \$5,315,000, Forsyth said. After the property is vacated, the entire property will have an appraised value of \$27,865,000, according to the Clearwater firm, Tod Marr & Associates.

"She has been very interested in the preservation of all the property, and she's been a good steward of the land herself. She wants to be very involved in making sure the property is maintained for the future use of Lee County," Forsyth said.

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