

THE ROLE OF DISPERSED WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE NORTHERN EVERGLADES – A RANCHER PERSPECTIVE

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The cattle industry and ranches are sustainable and best suited to assist with the State's environmental initiatives (storage, recharge, water quality, habitat, carbon sequestration). Ranchers are generationally environmental stewards and have the most noble purpose: to feed the world. Cattle ranching is the oldest ag land use in Florida, and it remains the most natural (in balance with the landscape) celebrating 500 years of cattle. Cattle production is generally a net total phosphorus exporter (more exported than imported) with relatively low nutrient concentrations, just large acreages of land. Most of the wildlife corridor is on ranchlands and approximately 40% of endangered species are only found on private land. The University of FL Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has estimated over \$4 billion in annual value of non-marketed ecosystem services are provided by Florida pastures and rangelands for wildlife habitat, biodiversity, water storage and treatment, carbon capture and outdoor recreation. There is an immediate need for support of programs and incentives (easements, payment for environmental services) that assist landowners in continuing to provide and expand these services as a productive business venture. Land in Florida is being lost on a daily basis to development – more concrete means less habitat and food production. There needs to be a concerted effort to sustain family ranches to protect wildlife and water. Programs need to have a more simplified entry processes which will result in increased interest and participation with landowner's extensive knowledge of the landscape driving the project design. Agriculture in general needs to be able to produce and market food without excessive regulation and burden. Viable agriculture is the best assurance of a safe, secure, abundant and reasonably priced food supply.

PRESENTER BIO: Matt Pearce is President of Pearce Cattle Company (Okeechobee), Chairman of Conservation Florida and Past-President of the Florida Cattlemen's Association. Matt is a 7th-generation Florida cattle rancher who is passionate about protecting ranching and wildlife habitat. His goal is to successfully pass down the ranching lifestyle to the next generation.