



COTI ENDORSES "YES" VOTE ON CONSERVATION 20/20 REFERENDUM [Return to News \(/news.cfm\)](#)

October 24, 2016

To: Our COTI Members and Friends:

COTI has endorsed a "yes" vote on the Lee County non-binding referendum ballot question titled as "Conservation 20/20." COTI believes that this program has been successful in acquiring land for conservation and water management purposes and strongly supports its continuation.

Please vote YES on Conservation 20/20 Non-Binding Referendum.

See the commentary below, which will be appearing in Island papers this week. -----

Conservation 20/20 Program Needs Voter Support

by Mike Miller COTI President

In 1996, Lee County Commissioners enacted a program of using County General Fund revenue to acquire and retain undeveloped property for conservation purposes. The program, called "Conservation 20/20," has been very successful with 24,930 acres having been purchased at a total cost of about \$89 million.

The November election ballot this year will include a non-binding referendum asking Lee County citizens whether they approve of the program.

The non-binding nature of the referendum means that the Lee County Board of County Commissioners will not be legally bound by the outcome. But a negative

vote, or maybe even a less than overwhelming positive vote, could influence the Commissioners to reduce or even eliminate the program.

The Committee of the Islands - COTI - strongly endorses Conservation 20/20 and urges all citizens to support the program by voting "yes" on the referendum.

The benefits of the programs are many:

- Much of the acquired land supports regional water quality goals by providing water storage during the wet season and helping with vegetative filtering of excess nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. This natural removal of nutrients helps to clean waters that ultimately flow into the Caloosahatchee and the Gulf or that recharge our drinking water aquifers through ground absorption.

- The land purchases provide an offset to development. A recent study by the University of Florida on behalf of the non-profit "1000 Friends of Florida" projects that future development will cause Florida's population to swell to 33 million from 20 million presently, and that, by 2070, over a third of the state's area will be covered with buildings, roads and concrete.
- The land acquisitions support passive recreation in providing residents with places to hike, walk or just enjoy nature.
- The program is efficiently-managed and not financially burdensome. Ongoing costs, including both acquisition and management, have been running between \$4 million and \$6 million a year. This represents less than two percent of the County's annual property tax collections. So even if the program were entirely eliminated and County taxes were reduced as a result, the potential savings relating to the average Sanibel home would be less than \$45 a year.

Lee County Conservation 20/20 is an effective government program that needs to be continued for the benefit of us all.

COTI invites your input on this and other issues affecting our island. Send an email to coti@coti.org. To read our past commentaries on Island issues, visit our website at www.coti.org. Or visit Committee of the Islands on Facebook.

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