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**NEWS RELEASE**

**Re-Wilding the Quad Parcels Breaks Ground**

**Sarasota, FL (January 23, 2025)** Representatives from Sarasota Audubon Society, Big Waters Land Trust (formerly Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast), and Sarasota County came together to put shovels in the ground on the morning of Thursday, January 23, celebrating their first steps in Re-wilding the Quad Parcels at the Celery Fields. Community investors, stakeholders, staff, and members attended the private program, which was originally planned to take place on the southeastern parcel, but instead held at the Audubon Nature Center due to the weather.

Sarasota County commissioner Dr. Joe Neunder of District 4, Jeanne Dubi of Sarasota Audubon, and Christine P. Johnson of Big Waters spoke to the significance of the historic re-wilding project, which began in 2020 when Sarasota County Commissioners gifted a perpetual conservation easement to Big Waters Land Trust on three of the four parcels.

Sarasota Audubon Society currently manages the land while Big Waters stewards the conservation easement. Together, the two not-for-profit organizations worked with Kimley Horne and Willis A. Smith Construction to create a design, comprehensive plan, and phased approach to rewild these properties. They are actively fundraising to improve this community land for people and nature. This includes new habitat for wildlife and new passive recreation spaces for residents and visitors alike. To date, approximately \$1.5 million has been raised toward the \$5 million overall project budget.

Phase 1 of the Quad Parcels re-wilding project begins with the 11-acre southeastern parcel. Sarasota Audubon and Big Waters note this parcel will have the highest number of trees planted, and when complete, will provide more wooded areas for wildlife to forage and nest, along with a pollinator meadow.

“In contrast to the Celery Fields, which is primarily a wetland, our re-wilding calls for a denser planting of trees on all three parcels to provide for birds and other wildlife that depend on woodlands to thrive,” notes Jeanne Dubi, the former president of Sarasota Audubon and current Director of Special Projects.

“We have carefully selected the trees and plantings based on the needs of our local and migratory birds,” Dubi adds. “Additionally, our design targets five imperiled species of birds and two of bats. And beyond wildlife, our re-wilding provides public access for thousands of annual local, national, and international visitors to enjoy this parcel with ADA footpaths, and a boardwalk to the pond with an overhanging viewing platform.”

According to Dubi, Phase 2 of the re-wilding plan will move to the SW parcel. This is envisioned to be the arrival point for visitors with a parking lot, restrooms, ADA footpaths, children’s natural play area, and open green space.

“This groundbreaking celebrates the work we’ve done thus far: the fundraising, the design, the permitting with the County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and all the coordination to dovetail this project with the County’s road and building plans,” comments Christine P. Johnson, president of Big Waters. “We reached a major milestone in raising the funds necessary to break ground on this parcel today and we are deeply grateful to each and every organization and individual who has donated or supported this re-wilding thus far. This is a big project, with a hefty budget, but the impact will be even more substantial.”

According to Johnson, by rainy season, Big Waters and Sarasota Audubon expect the southeastern parcel to be fully prepped and ready for planting. As additional funding milestones are reached, phased work will begin on the remaining two parcels. The partner organizations expect the re-wilding of the southeastern parcel will take a year to complete.

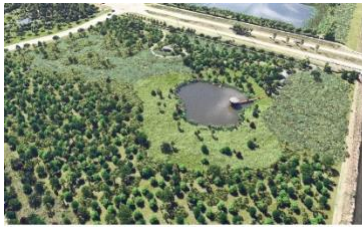
The program concluded with Sarasota Audubon president, Sara Resinger, presenting \$30,000 to the campaign on behalf of recent donations, including a commitment gift from the Sarasota Audubon Board of Directors.

To learn more about the Re-Wilding at the Celery Fields, or to donate, visit [Sarasota Audubon](#) or [Big Waters Land Trust](#).

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Attached are (4) renderings of the Re-Wilding the Quad Parcels concept plans and a map of the location of the Quad Parcels.

Phase 1. The SE Parcel. The 11-acre southeastern parcel design provides support for wildlife dependent on wooded areas for foraging and nesting. The plan design also targets plantings for imperiled species of birds and bats and provides for public access with ADA footpaths and a boardwalk to the pond with an overhanging viewing platform.



Phase 2. The SW Parcel. The southwestern parcel is the arrival point for visitors with the parking lot, restrooms, ADA footpaths, children’s natural play area, and open green space.



Phase 3: The NE Quad Parcel. Re-Wilding the northeastern quad parcel features planting additional trees and shrubs and providing more public access and benches for visitors to enjoy the pond.



Pictured here: An aerial view of the Quad Parcels located at the intersection of Apex Road and Palmer Blvd. The lower right is the SW parcel, the upper right with the small pond is the SE parcel and the upper left with the large pond is the NE parcel.



Pictured here: Map of the Quad Parcels at the Celery Fields



### **About Sarasota Audubon Society**

Sarasota Audubon is the local chapter of the National Audubon Society, dedicated to the protection, conservation, and enjoyment of birds, wildlife and the environment in Sarasota, Florida. Using a combination of science and education, Sarasota Audubon conserves and restores natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. Learn more at [SarasotaAudubon.org](http://SarasotaAudubon.org).

### **About Big Waters Land Trust**

Big Waters protects land and water in Southwest Florida for the benefit of people and nature. Through strategic collaborations with individuals, groups, organizations, and government, they work to ensure all people have access to clean water, fresh air, nutritious food, abundant wildlife, beautiful natural areas to enjoy, and all the other physical and mental benefits nature provides. Their vital work strengthens Southwest Florida's resiliency to storms and floods, enriches lives, and helps safeguard our community for generations to come. Learn more at [BigWatersLandTrust](http://BigWatersLandTrust).