

Sundance Trails Ranch

Services Provided:

Environmental Permitting & Mitigation Services

Client: Wantman Group / Rosen Associates
Development / Sound Slinger LLC

Location: Okeechobee County, FL

Duration: 2008 – November 2015



DESCRIPTION OF WORK:

Sundance Trails Ranch is a 768 acre development in eastern Okeechobee County. For 40 years, the site was used as a sod farm. However, the site contains wet prairie, forested wetland and marsh communities in addition to upland pine flatwoods and mixed hardwood forests. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) claimed 254 acres as jurisdictional wetlands.

CECOS was contracted to obtain a USACE permit to develop the property. This project involved complex environmental permitting and agency negotiations to obtain federal permit authorization under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Initial permit activities began in 2007 with permit authorization received in 2008 for a residential development. In 2013, CECOS was requested to modify the permit to reflect a change in use. The site was ultimately developed to host large-scale music festivals. This change required a permit modification, which was authorized in 2015. A goal of the client was to preserve as much of the natural habitats as possible and

work them into the ‘experience’ of the site. Specific activities included evaluating the USACE jurisdictional wetland delineation, evaluating the on-site wetland communities using Uniform Mitigation Assessment Method (UMAM), analyzing wetland impacts and updating impacts based on various project concepts, and developing and modifying a wetland mitigation plan. The original mitigation plan involved on-site creation and restoration of 34 acres and enhancement of 62 acres of wetlands and uplands. After construction of some of the sites, the mitigation plan was revised and a permit modification obtained. Extensive agency negotiation and coordination was necessary to obtain the permit modification due to rule changes associated with mitigation requirements (i.e., use of a Bank instead of onsite mitigation).

Eight habitats were evaluated and mapped. An analysis of wetland connectivity was conducted to determine the federal jurisdiction of wetlands under the ‘Rapanos’ rule, this included field reviews including a helicopter flight, evaluation of historical aerial photographs, analysis of soils, and National Wetland Inventory GIS data. Extensive fieldwork was performed using a sub-meter GPS unit to accurately record vegetation surveys within the delineated wetland habitats. Office based GIS technology was used to process field data and conduct location and landscape analyses. The final mitigation plan included on-site wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement of 90 acres to fully offset the jurisdictional wetland impacts. In addition, a Maintenance and Monitoring Plan was developed. Construction of the first mitigation area was completed in 2010 and CECOS assisted with the bid documents and oversaw the construction. In 2016, the site had its first large scale music event.

