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## Sarasota County celebrates protections for endangered species

Sarasota County is a nature lover's paradise. Our preserves, natural area parks, beaches and inlets all provide a refuge for plants and animals that are threatened with extinction -- from black bears and sea turtles to rare tropical plants. In other communities, such unique resources are only accessible through National Geographic or the Discovery Channel or by traveling far from home. In Sarasota County, we have unrivaled opportunities to experience them up close, right in our backyard.

On May 21, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, several conservation organizations and Sarasota County observed Endangered Species Day to recognize the conservation programs underway nationwide aimed at protecting America's threatened and endangered species.

While some communities have allowed natural habitats and at-risk species to be severely degraded or lost entirely, the residents of Sarasota County have demonstrated the great value they place on natural places, the creatures that inhabit them and having access to experiences on our lands and waters. They have consistently demonstrated this, such as the 1999 referendum in which they approved a tax dedicated to preserving and managing environmentally sensitive lands and extended that program to include acquiring Neighborhood Parklands in 2005. These programs have protected more than 27,500 acres of environmentally sensitive lands and eight different areas of parklands including beaches, bay fronts, trailheads and more.

"We are so lucky to live in a community that recognizes the value of preserving natural habitats," said Amy Meese, general manager, Sarasota County Natural Resources. "The recognition of Endangered Species Day by Sarasota County is really an acknowledgement of our community. We thank the voters of Sarasota County because while we are responsible for maintaining these beautiful habitats, it's the community that consistently tells us it is a priority to protect them and provide access to them for future generations."

Numerous threatened or endangered animals can be seen in Sarasota County natural area parks or beaches. On any given day, wildlife enthusiasts could witness the threatened loggerhead sea turtle coming ashore on our pristine beaches to lay their eggs. Sarasota County's nature preserves are home to many endangered species, including the rare Florida Panther and the Florida scrub-jay. Summertime visits to scrubby and pine flatwoods rewards visitors with native flora like the endangered Curtiss'

milkweed, the threatened pine lily and giant orchid. Treks along the 'Wild & Scenic' Myakka River may reveal riverine habitat with protected plants like the threatened leather, cinnamon and royal ferns, as well as the epiphytic butterfly orchid.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000.

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