

NEWS

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Kitson Shares Plans for Babcock Ranch ***Proposal would permanently preserve significant portion of the property***

Ft. Myers, Florida – Syd Kitson, chairman and CEO of Kitson & Partners, today announced plans to permanently protect one of Florida’s largest remaining environmental treasures, while providing for sustainable development and creation of “a new lifestyle community, connecting people and nature in an unprecedented way.”

Mr. Kitson is working on a proposal for the state to purchase approximately 74,000 acres of Babcock Ranch for preservation. Kitson & Partners’ proposed community, contained within a 17,000 acre tract at the southwest corner of Babcock Ranch, would include additional preservation areas.

“We have the opportunity to create something uniquely Florida,” Kitson said. “I believe people want ways to connect with nature. I also know Florida’s growing population is in desperate need of sustainable communities.”

Under a proposed agreement being negotiated with the state, approximately 81 percent of the 143 square mile property, including the most environmentally significant portions of the ranch, would be purchased by the state. These areas, equivalent in size to the city of Tampa, would be set aside for preservation and recreational use.

Babcock Ranch is an environmental treasure and is home to a number of listed species including gopher tortoises, red-cockaded woodpeckers and large mammals such as Florida panthers and black bears. Comprised of cypress domes, mesic flatwoods and wet prairies that straddle Telegraph Swamp, the ranch is part of an environmental corridor linking Lake Okeechobee to the Charlotte Harbor Estuary.

Once all terms of the proposal are finalized, the agreement must go before the Florida Cabinet for consideration and approval. The agreement for state purchase will be contingent on the Charlotte and Lee County commissions approving creation of a sustainable community.

Since July, when Kitson & Partners announced it had executed a contract to purchase the Babcock Florida Company, Syd Kitson has met with Charlotte and Lee County planning and policy officials, environmental organizations and state agencies. His goal has been to work toward an

agreement that allows Kitson & Partners, the state and the counties to preserve a significant portion of the property and conserve one of Florida's most vital natural resources.

"After literally hundreds of hours of discussions, we are working toward achieving consensus on a shared and ambitious vision for Babcock Ranch, and a plan for realizing that vision," said Kitson. "We still have a long way to go, but I believe if we stay focused on our shared goals we can create a legacy for our children that will make all of us proud."

Kitson cautioned for any agreement to be realized, both the preservation and the sustainable community must work together and be approved by state and local leaders.

Kitson & Partners provided briefing packages Thursday for the county commissions outlining a proposal for an innovative, sustainable community with 19,500 residential units divided between Charlotte and Lee counties. The community would include a range of housing for all income levels as well as schools, shops and workplace facilities that could help recruit environmental science companies and other compatible economic activity to the community.

"I want residents to be able to walk out their door and go for a 3-mile hike in the woods," Kitson said. "It will be a place where they can truly get away without leaving their neighborhood."

Kitson & Partners intends to create a residential area that will integrate greenways with a self-sustainable community, an approach that Kitson hopes will become a model for Florida.

In a move that will foster the link between the development and preservation, Kitson has asked Babcock Preservation Partnership to develop plans for the property's stewardship that includes natural and recreational areas within the development.

"We understand that the Babcock Preservation Group will continue to be watchdogs for this project, but I believe this is the best chance we have to achieve their goals and we look forward to their input." said Syd Kitson.

Another innovative part of the proposal is the use of the Rural Land Stewardship Program to reduce the costs of public acquisition. Audubon of Florida's Eric Draper called the stewardship plan a creative new conservation tool.

"This plan to harness development to help pay for conservation is a true win for the environment," Draper said.

Kitson & Partners will make a presentation to the Lee County Commission on September 12th, and will go before the Charlotte County Commission on September 13th. The proposed agreement with the state is expected to go before the Cabinet for approval on October 4, 2005.

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