
STRATEGIC CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT OF
GULF COAST LANDSCAPES

**CONSERVATION
FOUNDATION
OF THE GULF
COAST
USE CASE STUDY**

December 2021

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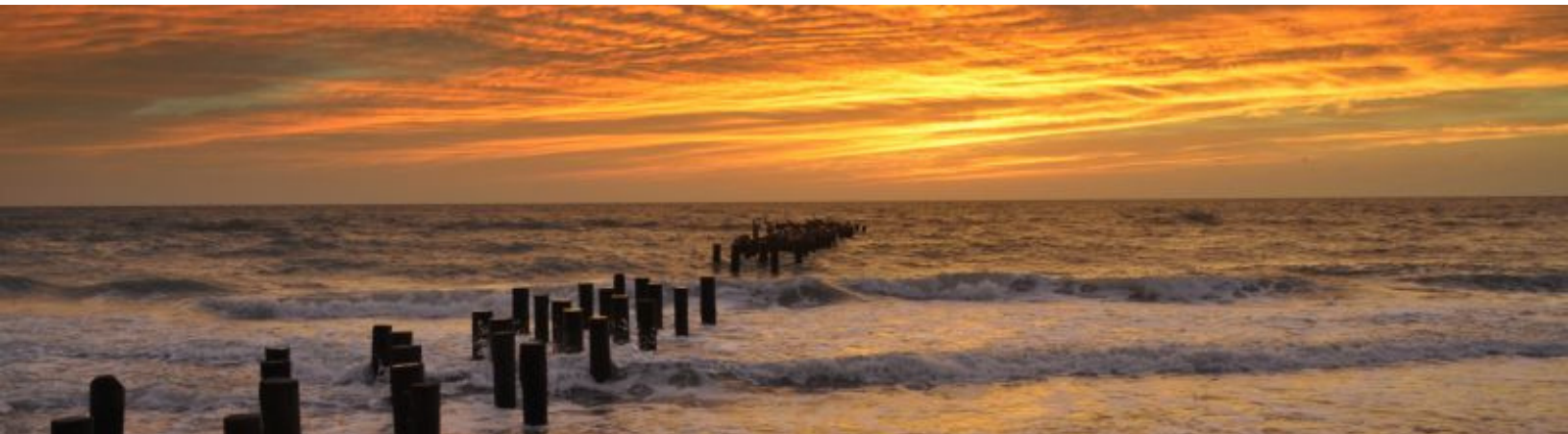
Conservation Geography: Southwest Florida
Primary Stakeholders: Debi Osborne & Lee Amos

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (Conservation Foundation) is a Land Trust accredited organization focused on protecting the land and water in Southwest Florida for the benefit of people and nature. With guidance from their core values, including integrity, community, and inclusivity, Conservation Foundation partners with government, landowners, and businesses to preserve the environmental quality and value of lands and waters. To date, they have protected more than 18,300 acres across 47 properties in several counties in Southwest Florida, helping to preserve the natural lands that affect the quality of life and cultural heritage of those who live there and visit.

Conservation Foundation met several of the Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscape's (SCA's) Use Case Study selection criteria (see below), and was valuable in representing localized land trust efforts in Florida. The primary stakeholders were **Debi Osborne**, the Director of Land Protection, and **Lee Amos**, the Land Stewardship Manager.

Use Case Study Selection Criteria

- ✓ focuses on the acquisition or easement of land (land conservation; not restoration)
- ✓ exhibits a transferable issue that could be experienced by other areas in the region
- ✓ represents an application scale that fits into the hexagonal framework of the SCA project
- ✓ represents a diversity of agency type / mission
- ✓ fits within the existing RESTORE Council goal framework
- ✓ focuses in an area that complements the geographic diversity of the SCA region
- ✓ has planning or funding decisions going to be made within the SCA project timeline



Use Case Study Purpose:

Evaluating and prioritizing lands for conservation priorities within the watersheds of three nationally recognized estuaries.

The SCA Team (hereafter we) launched this Use Case Study with an initial scoping call in November 2020. In addition to the main purpose highlighted above, this Use Case Study was also valuable in that Debi and Lee were **interested in evaluating smaller parcels of land**. The tools currently function using 1km² hexagons for identifying boundaries and running analyses. Although this scale has been useful for the majority of users so far, we recognize that this is a potential limitation of the tool, and it was something we were hoping to test through this collaboration.

Over the course of the Use Case Study, we had a few check in calls and two formal working sessions during which we dug into the tools to explore their functionality and evaluate some of Debi and Lee's areas of interest. The majority of the time was spent using the **Conservation Prioritization Tool**, with Debi and Lee in the driver's seat reviewing their areas of interest and providing detailed feedback regarding the results and associated reporting detail.

Through our working sessions, we captured valuable feedback from Debi and Lee that **highlighted both beneficial use and areas for improvement**. For example, upon reviewing some of their areas of interest, Debi commented that one of the areas where they have been doing a lot of work showed as a high scoring conservation area regarding diversity, so she felt validated in their efforts. Regarding the metrics, Lee indicated that the data measures in the tools were spot on for what they were interested in. However, regarding the initial question of the scale of the data measures, it appears as though fine-scale data is needed to more adequately support their efforts. Lee provided great insights as to how to do this, including incorporating more nuanced detail in the report regarding 303(d) water impairments. He also noted that the funding opportunities they normally pursue are more localized, which is why the **fine-scale data is really necessary for their efforts**.





This Use Case Study was valuable in that it **provided informative ground truthing results and direction for next steps**. The SCA Tool Suite was built to support conservation efforts across the Gulf using the best available data, primarily national datasets with large geographic coverage, that could assist in informing strategic decisions. However, we recognized that the measures included were not as fine-scale as some users may need, and we appreciated the opportunity to test these tools with stakeholders like Debi and Lee to better understand how to support a wider range of users in the future.

For the next steps of the SCA project, we would like to keep **expanding the capacity of these tools by including finer-scale, and perhaps state-specific, data to make the tools more inclusive for those working on parcel-level conservation efforts**.

This Use Case Study is currently considered complete, though we intend to connect with Debi and Lee on occasion in the future as we continue to update the tools.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thank you to Debi Osborne and Lee Amos of Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast for their collaboration and provision of valuable feedback over the last year.

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