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Letter To The Editor  
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**Don't close gate on Cone Ranch venture**

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Your opinion would be well taken if the issue was about another County Park. But it's not!

All the whoopla is about the preservation of publicly owned Cone Ranch, and the natural resources contained within.

For your further edification, Cone Ranch was not purchased by Water Utilities "Enterprise" fund nor do the ratepayers have one dime invested in this publicly owned property. It was acquired by inter-local agreement from the Board Of County Commissioners to be used to develop a public water supply for the citizens of Hillsborough County. The general obligation bonds used for that purchase have been re-financed twice over the years and are still owed by the citizens of Hillsborough County and no public water supply has been developed for the citizens of Hillsborough County after twenty One (21) years.

Continuing.....The County's Environmental Lands Acquisitions and Protection Program is not charged with acquiring or developing County Parks. They are charged with acquiring and preserving environmentally sensitive lands which protect wildlife habitat, natural areas, drinking water sources, and the water quality of rivers, lakes and bays for future generations in perpetuity. The Cone Ranch has received the highest priority rating of any property currently on the ELAPP list for acquisition.

Oh! By the way, all properties currently held for preservation in the ELAPP are open to the public between the hours of sunup to sundown for hiking and wildlife watching. Some even have hiking trails, off road bicycling and horse riding trails that are maintained by citizen groups rather than public employees. No restrooms or picnic shelters are available unless some group purchased and placed them on site.

Make no mistake about it.....selling Cone Ranch will not benefit the public who want their property to remain under public ownership and continue to be preserved in perpetuity through ELAPP. It will not provide one cent of relief to the current County Budget situation. It will only benefit the money brokers, politicians and bureaucrats willing to breach the public trust for personal gain.

Alligator Bob Young, Florida Master Naturalist.