Urban Wilderness Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 20, 2026

Parks and Recreation Division Administration Offices
Cypress Conference Room
950 NW 38th Street
Oakland Park, FL 33309

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:07 PM

Roll Call: Roll was called; a quorum was present.

Board Members Present:

Corey Callaghan
Marcey Carabelli
Elizabeth Dutra
Ken Evans
Roberto Fernandez, III
Diana Guidry
Brian Rosen

Staff:
Linda Briggs Thompson, Manager, Environmental Management Group
Michel Therrien, Environmental Project Coordinator, Environmental Management Group
Lisa Totten, Administrative Assistant, Broward County Parks and Recreation

Guest(s): None.

Public Input: None.

Old Business:

Approval of Minutes of the February 18, 2026 Meeting: Marcey Carabelli made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 18, 2026, meeting and Ken Evans seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Status of Sites to Add to Inventory and Designation

Review of Site Visit Assessments Forms.

Linda Briggs Thompson reviewed the Site Assessment Forms that were completed by the Board during their site visits on May 2, 2026, of Covered Bridge Park, 6 Acre Wood Park, Volunteer Park, Sandy Ridge Sanctuary, Sherwood Forest, Cypress Hammock, Oakwood Park, and Three Mountains Natural Area.

Roberto Fernandez, III, noted that none of the sites have a record with the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) program.

Covered Bridge Park in Parkland, Florida, is approximately 6.6 acres, with a mix of vegetation including fiddlewood, sabal palm, cypress, slash pine, marlberry, silver buttonwood, beautyberry, and coontie. Wildlife observed included a marsh rabbit, ibis, blue jays, mockingbirds, zebra longwings, and American redstarts, with listed tillandsia species present. The members' assessment found a heavily invaded understory but also concluded that the site has restoration potential (particularly through invasive removal and mechanical clearing), provides water storage and groundwater recharge, and functions as a plant and wildlife refuge. Based on the on-site group assessment, the Board members present during the visit collectively felt that Covered Bridge Park meets the criteria for Urban Wilderness designation in the biological, aesthetic, and scientific categories, and that it should be added to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Urban Wilderness Park System.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to add Covered Bridge Park to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Liz Dutra seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Six Acre Wood Park in Parkland, Florida, is approximately six acres in size, located off Hillsboro Boulevard and hydrologically connected to Covered Bridge Park via the canal and associated bank/right-of-way. The assessment described the vegetation as pine flatwoods with a mix of native plants including gallberry, wild coffee, ficus, tillandsias, firebush, coco plum, myrsine, staggerbush, butterfly orchids, saw palmetto, ferns, pines, and coontie, and recorded wildlife observations such as zebra longwing butterflies, a skipper, and a fish crow. The group found the site in generally good condition with minimal invasive species, although they noted some Australian pine likely off-site to the south, as well as invasive guinea grass and oyster plant along the connection to Covered Bridge Park. The assessment concluded that the site provides water storage, groundwater recharge, and plant and wildlife refuge functions, with controlled access via sidewalk, and identified the park as having high potential for protecting biodiversity. During discussion, members briefly talked about canal/right-of-way management and the possibility of sending a letter to the appropriate jurisdictional entity (noting that management might not be by South Florida Water Management District and that Parkland may have its own district). Based on the on-site group assessment, the Board members present during the visit collectively felt that Six Acre Wood Park meets the criteria for Urban Wilderness designation in the biological, aesthetic, and scientific categories, and that it should be added to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Urban Wilderness Park System.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to add Six Acre Wood Park to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Diana Guidry seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Volunteer Park in Coral Springs, Florida is approximately 16 acres and characterized primarily as a mesic hammock with an oak canopy and a mix of vegetation including tillandsia, saw palmetto, resurrection fern, live oak, cypress, ficus, royal poinciana, jacaranda, various ferns, slash pine, sabal palm, and gumbo limbo. Wildlife observed included blue-gray gnatcatchers, red-bellied woodpeckers, blue jays, mourning doves, and evidence of coyotes, with listed tillandsia species present, including *Tillandsia utriculata*. The members found degraded portions

of the site and a heavily invaded corner in need of invasive treatment but also concluded that the site has restoration potential (particularly through invasive removal). The site provides water storage and groundwater recharge, and functions as a plant and wildlife refuge. The members noted the park's "horseshoe" configuration of natural area around a more manicured central playground and its proximity to Park Springs Elementary School. Based on the on-site group assessment, the Board members present during the visit collectively felt that Volunteer Park meets the criteria for Urban Wilderness designation in the biological, aesthetic, and scientific categories, and that it should be added to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Urban Wilderness Park System.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to add Volunteer Park to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Ms. Guidry seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The UWAB Members were unable to visit **Sandy Ridge Sanctuary** on May 2, 2026, because access is restricted on that site. Staff have been working with former Mayor Roy Gold, who regularly leads guided walks there, to arrange a special site visit. Mayor Gold conducts public walks on the first Saturday of most months and indicated that he would be flexible in scheduling a visit on either a weekday evening or weekend morning. Board members discussed their individual schedule constraints and agreed to offer Mayor Gold multiple August dates, with August 22, 2026, as a preferred date and suggesting that staff prioritize that option while remaining open to other August weekends if necessary.

No formal motion or vote was taken on Sandy Ridge Sanctuary at this meeting, and the discussion was limited to coordinating logistics for a future group site visit so that the Board can conduct a full site assessment and consider its potential Urban Wilderness designation.

Sherwood Forest, located in Coral Springs, is a 29-acre park configured like a donut with a residential community in the middle and surrounding urban residential uses, including a pavilion, canal on the west side, school on the east side, and a playground within the park. It has no archeological features but noted ecological observations including myrsine, whisk fern, beauty berry, ficus, cabbage palm, wild coffee, firebush, and numerous tillandsias, as well as wildlife such as zebra longwing butterflies, anhinga, and red-bellied woodpecker, with the overall condition characterized as more natural while still needing exotic removal and ongoing management. It was noted that Sherwood Forest provided excellent habitat for butterflies, had controlled access via a cement pathway, and functioned as a site for water storage, groundwater recharge, and plant and wildlife refuge, although members observed a lot of invasives including Surinam cherry. During discussion, Board members noted that the site was accessible and popular with families and referred to it as a fractured donut, reflecting the layout of the residential core surrounded by natural area. The site has biological, aesthetic, and scientific value.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to approve Sherwood Forest for Urban Wilderness designation and add it to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Marcey Carabelli seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Cypress Hammock, also referred to as Orchid Park, in Coral Springs, is a 16-acre, L-shaped cypress hammock adjacent to a regional park with tennis courts and a water park. Ecological observations include a cypress hammock community with sabal palm, myrsine, assorted ferns, lancewood, red bay, oak, cypress, and wild coffee, along with wildlife such as blue jays, dragonflies, anhinga, butterflies including ruddy daggerwing and gulf fritillary, and fish species including largemouth bass and snakehead fish in the adjacent canal. Listed species included tillandsias, it was noted that the overall condition was natural with high restoration and management potential, requiring only minimal mechanical treatment despite the presence of some invasives. Liz Dutra also commented on the elevated boardwalk as a distinctive and attractive feature. The assessment concluded that the site performs water storage and groundwater recharge functions and serves as a plant and wildlife refuge, and recommended it for Urban Wilderness designation based on biological, aesthetic, and scientific values.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to approve Cypress Hammock for Urban Wilderness designation and to add it to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Chair Callaghan seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Oakwood Park in Coral Springs is a 7.2-acre linear wetland adjacent to a heavily used, open mowed play area where many children were playing ball at the time of the visit. The wetland was viewed as a very successful constructed project, with vegetation including saltbush, gumbo limbo, cypress, dahoon holly, sawgrass, coco plum, pond apple, red maple, and leather fern, and wildlife such as blue jays. It was further noted that no invasive species were observed, that the area appeared managed and intact, and that it likely functions as a good wetland recharge area, probably under a conservation easement. The assessment concluded that Oakwood Park provides water storage, groundwater recharge, and plant and wildlife refuge, with comments that some scaevola was present on site, that it is a very urban active park used by families, and that it is probably about a 25-year-old wetland mitigation area. Ms. Guidry noted that it is located adjacent to Terra Vella High School. During discussion, Mr. Fernandez referenced speculation during the site visit that this might be a Goldasich-style mitigation project, typical of the wetland mitigation work completed 25+ years ago. Mr. Evans and others commented on the limited parking and heavy recreational use. The site was recommended for Urban Wilderness designation based on its biological, aesthetic, and scientific values, with a recommendation to add it to both the Urban Wilderness Inventory and the Urban Wilderness Park System.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to add Oakwood Park to the Urban Wilderness Inventory and Ms. Guidry seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Three Mountains Park in Coral Springs, is a 21-acre rectangular park located along the C-14 canal, with surrounding neighborhood residential uses and a large state canal at the south end. No obvious archeological features were noted and the ecological observations were that this is a highly artificial site with vegetation including sea grape, spanish needle, oak, ficus, cabbage palm, and jasmine, and wildlife observations of monarchs and skippers. The overall condition was characterized as heavily impacted, with the three constructed mounds consisting largely of fill material. Ms. Briggs Thompson explained that restoration and management ideas discussed on site by the members included the possibility of developing a wildflower or pollinator meadow and it was noted that the site supported pollinators and insects. The assessment found that the

park did not function as a water storage or groundwater recharge area and provided only limited wildlife refuge relative to more natural sites. Accordingly, the initial recommendation on the Site Assessment Form was that Three Mountains Park not be designated as Urban Wilderness, with biological, aesthetic, and scientific designation values all marked as no and no recommendation to add it to the Urban Wilderness Inventory or Urban Wilderness Park System. During the discussion, Chair Callaghan questioned this recommendation, emphasizing that the site is biologically valuable as one of the few places in Broward County supporting the rare Cuban Crescent butterfly and significant winter habitat for warblers and other birds using large ficus trees and a small cypress hammock; he argued that such biological relevance and protection of green space should weigh more heavily even in a heavily man-made setting. Ms. Carabelli and Ms. Guidry responded that, in their view, the mounded portions of the park felt overwhelmingly artificial and did not resemble classic Florida natural habitats such as scrub, pine flatwoods, or wetlands that the Urban Wilderness program is intended to preserve, with Ms. Carabelli stating that she saw no habitat at the mounds that matched traditional Florida natural systems and that pollinators can readily occur in other urban areas such as medians.

Mr. Fernandez noted that he saw scientific value in the site as an example of succession in a disturbed environment but contrasted Three Mountains with other mitigation-type parks, such as Plantation's Linear Park, where there was a clearer intentional design producing a more naturalistic habitat; he also expressed concern about over-extending the Urban Wilderness program into highly developed green spaces that might weaken future protection efforts. Ms. Dutra and Chair Callaghan raised the concern that delaying or declining designation could leave this green space vulnerable to future development, and Ms. Dutra suggested that demonstrating the presence of species or habitats that are rare elsewhere could strengthen the case for protection. Mr. Fernandez replied that his willingness to support designation would increase if historic aerial photographs showed remnant natural habitat, such as a cypress component, underlying at least part of the site. After further discussion, including Ms. Briggs Thompson's observation that intact native soils are important but not always determinative for successful restoration, and suggestions from several members to verify site history using aerial imagery and additional field review, Mr. Fernandez moved that the Board defer further consideration of Three Mountains Park's Urban Wilderness designation to the next regular meeting and requested that staff research historical aerial photographs to determine whether a remnant natural habitat exists on the site and prepare that information for the Board. Ken Evans seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve the deferral; no vote was taken at this meeting to add Three Mountains Park to the Urban Wilderness Inventory or the Urban Wilderness Park System.

Review of the William J. Kelley Rookery Site Assessment Form

A discussion was had regarding William J. Kelley Rookery in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, explaining that the Board had previously visited the site and voted to add it as an Urban Wilderness area, but that the Site Assessment Form had not been completed at that time and needed to be filled out retroactively for the record. The Board noted the surrounding land use is residential, primarily condos or apartments. Members recalled that the site consists of a substantial open-water lake with natural vegetation, including Australian pine and dense stands of cattails (typha), with additional plantings such as cypress, spatterdock, and other shoreline vegetation. They noted numerous birds using the site, including black-crowned night heron, great

blue heron, American coots, and a red-tailed hawk, and emphasized that the area had historically functioned as a rookery with hundreds of wading birds observed in past decades. Mr. Evans described seeing large numbers of birds there in the 1970s, and Ms. Carabelli and Ms. Guidry discussed the dependence of wading birds on suitable water depth and food supply, as well as how nearby development can disrupt rookery use. The Board acknowledged there had been significant trash accumulation around the lake but that, following staff's communication with the adjoining property, the trash was cleaned up and the conditions had markedly improved. In assessing the site, members agreed the ecological condition was good aside from litter issues, that the site has clear restoration and management potential, and that it functions as a water storage and groundwater recharge area and as a plant and wildlife refuge. The Board also discussed the possibility of habitat restoration to support a rookery again. Based on this review, the Board unanimously agreed to designate William J. Kelley Rookery as having Biological, Aesthetic, and Scientific value and to include it in both the Urban Wilderness Inventory and the Urban Wilderness Park System.

New Business:

Board Membership

Ms. Briggs Thompson reported that the Board is still short two members and stated that staff will reach out to the Intergovernmental Affairs Liaison to ensure that information about the open seats is circulated, noting that John Abbott has already submitted an application that appears to be pending. In response to a question from Ms. Dutra, Ms. Briggs Thompson clarified that any remaining appointees must meet the existing category requirements and must reside in Broward County. Ms. Dutra suggested Fallon Hoke, a park ranger at Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, as a potential candidate, describing her as knowledgeable and well-rounded, and Mr. Evans expressed strong support for this suggestion. Ms. Dutra indicated she or others could speak with Ms. Hoke about applying through the established process.

Section Update

During the Section Update, Michel Therrien reported on natural areas program activities, including education, monitoring, restoration, grants, and partnerships. He reported increased participation in guided walks and virtual field trips, along with outreach at Deerfield Island and Water Matters Day. Educational initiatives include 107 microscopes obtained from Florida Atlantic University by staff member John Pipoly for parks and school partners, ongoing STEAM and geography programs at Franklin and Roosevelt Gardens, and internship and independent study opportunities.

Mr. Therrien highlighted monitoring and research efforts involving heritage trees at Fern Forest, trail cameras and photo monitoring, and gopher tortoise surveys and habitat restoration at Deerfield Island, where tortoises are utilizing restored areas. He also reviewed grants supporting restoration and invasive species control at Easterlin Park, gopher tortoise habitat improvements at Deerfield Island, and hazardous tree removal at Easterlin Park.

Mr. Therrien noted that restoration and invasive species management are underway at numerous natural areas, including Pine Island Ridge, Tradewinds, Deerfield Island, Willow Pond, Long Key, Woodmont, Highland Scrub, Secret Woods, Snake Warrior's Island, Markham Park, and Tree Tops Park. He noted successful air potato control and volunteer snake plant removal at Tree Tops, mangrove trimming and wetland restoration at West Lake, and successful native plantings conducted with partners including 4-H and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. He concluded by highlighting Fairchild's rare plant conservation work and the rediscovery of a single Curtiss' milkweed plant at Deerfield Highlands Nature Preserve, an important species of conservation concern.

Additional New Business:

Mr. Fernandez requested that the Urban Planning Division provide a large-format paper map showing all Florida Master Site File locations and local Areas of Particular Concern within Broward County. He also suggested that staff consider creating a digital atlas of all park maps generated for Broward County facilities and asked whether the recent increase in Broward Schools interactions and virtual field trips was part of a broader goal to bring more students into parks. In response, Ms. Briggs Thompson described the department's long-standing vision of closer school–park integration and explained that naturalists are piloting live, interactive virtual field trips from parks (currently most successfully at Easterlin due to connectivity). Mr. Fernandez then proposed a park "passport" program in which children (and others) could earn stamps or stickers for visiting parks or participating in programs. Ms. Briggs Thompson shared that a similar concept is already in development through the Eco Connections Committee, including a junior naturalist program with activity books and stamps, as well as a park-wide passport/stamp concept that would be open to adults and homeschoolers as well.

Mr. Fernandez thanked staff and the Board for their coordinated response to the BrowardNext issue, noting that although he could not attend the related meeting, he appreciated that the Board's concerns were effectively conveyed, which he felt demonstrated productive synergy between staff and the Board. Finally, he raised a concern regarding the proposed 1301 development project on the Hollywood barrier island. He asked what staff knew about the project and whether any sensitive habitat or protected species were involved. Ms. Briggs Thompson replied that historical records indicate the presence of beach jacquemontia documented there by Fairchild prior to the current contract, and that she believed the developer's documents acknowledge this and state that a portion of the habitat would be preserved, though she had not recently reviewed the design details. Mr. Fernandez expressed interest in the Board sending a formal letter to the City of Hollywood's mayor raising concerns about protecting beach jacquemontia and associated coastal strand habitat. Ms. Dutra volunteered to draft the letter on behalf of the Board, similar to the process followed for the BrowardNext letter. After brief discussion of Sunshine Law constraints, the Board agreed that Ms. Dutra would prepare a draft for staff review rather than circulate it among members, with staff providing input before it is finalized and transmitted under the Board's name.

Mr. Fernandez made a motion to have Board member Liz Dutra draft a letter to the Mayor of the City of Hollywood regarding the endangered beach jacquemontia and the fragile coastal strand habitat and Ms. Guidry seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

During discussion of scheduling the next public hearing, Chair Callaghan recalled that the Board had previously intended to hold a public hearing in October 2026, and noted the need to select a specific date far enough in advance to allow staff to complete the required 30-day notice and other preparations. Ms. Briggs Thompson confirmed that the next UWAB regular meeting is scheduled for September 16, 2026, and the plan to hold a public hearing in October. She emphasized that choosing a date at this meeting was important so staff would have sufficient time to prepare documentation and logistics and October 21, 2026, was selected as the preferred date. Chair Callaghan noted that the Board would meet at the September 16, 2026 regular meeting and review the materials prior public hearing. The Board agreed that the public hearing would be scheduled for Wednesday, October 21st, at 6:00 PM, at Plantation Heritage Park, the same location as the last public hearing.

Chair Callaghan made a motion to hold the next UWAB Public Hearing on October 21st, 2026 at 6:00 PM at Plantation Heritage Park and Marcey Carabelli seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:44 PM.