

CONSERVATION PROFILES

“(Our) stewardship goals are sustainability, economically and environmentally. Renewable resources are managed for the highest return in balance with sustaining ecosystems. Biodiversity is encouraged whenever possible, allowing for more wildlife. Non-renewable resources are used sparingly.”

Pat Pfeil

For more information:
www.nrcs.usda.gov
www.beef.org



Granddaughter Lili Carlton poses by ranch sign; Inset: Ranch Managers Brady and Patricia Pfeil, Dr. Barbara Carlton, Patrick Carlton and Business Manager Stan Pelham.

Florida

Ranching in a “Sea of Grass”

South Florida is more than beaches and homes. Although, there is a lot of pressure to grow houses on this “sea of grass” there are still agricultural operations that offer productive and sustainable land use alternatives. Carlton 2 x 4 Ranches and Groves is about as ecologically diverse as ranches get. Here you find fresh water marsh, sloughs, creek swamps, hardwood hammocks, planted woodlands of pines and bald cypress along with introduced tame grasses. Since the late 1800s this land has also been home to the Carlton family’s citrus and cattle operation.

The 2 x 4 Ranch was one of the first to restore disturbed rangeland. In the early 1980’s they began work with NRCS to develop 320 acres of slough into a more wildlife-friendly landscape. Pines, cypress and live oak were planted and are managed with grazing, controlled burns and brush management to maintain a diversity of habitat for deer, bob white quail and, recently, Osceola wild turkey. The intensively managed grazing system allows for biodiversity, creating rookeries and habitat for egrets, herons, ibis, cormorant, ducks, and wood storks, among others.

However, in the sub-tropical conditions of the Carlton Ranch, success pivots around one key resource: water. Despite 56 inches of precipitation, the sandy soil can quickly become droughty and could readily drain nutrients and pesticides into the groundwater.

The Carltons installed state-of-the-art water control systems. The ranch works with NRCS and several state agencies to continue ongoing management projects and systems. This has allowed the ranch to keep pastures moist and green more of the year, control pasture pests, save irrigation water, and made it possible to keep wetlands hydrated.

Since 1987 the Florida Department of Agriculture has monitored all surface runoff on the ranch for the nutrients and pesticides used for grove production. This 15-year study has established that Best Management Practices (BMP's) work. The runoff is in excellent condition.

The Carlton 2x4 Ranch offers a superb example of sustainable agriculture, showing how a productive sea of grass can coexist with a sea of houses in a rapidly urbanizing state.

CARLTON CONSERVATION AT A GLANCE

Key Practices:

- Intensive grazing management
- Solar-charged fencing
- Wetland maintenance and construction
- Planted woodlands
- Food plots
- Nutrient management
- Irrigation water management
- Water quality monitoring
- Water control structures

Program Used:

NRCS/SWCD Technical Assistance



Careful water management and monitoring are key parts of the ranch's success.

Rotational grazing, and carefully managed woodlands and wetlands make Carlton 2x4 Ranch a great place to call home for both cattle and wildlife. The Carltons share the ranch with dozens of species of waterfowl and wildlife including American alligators and rare and endangered alligator snapping turtles and burrowing owls.

