

## SR 80 DESIGN FROM INDIAN HILLS DRIVE TO CR 833

**Project Description**

This project involves the widening of roadway from 2 to 4 lanes and new pond sites along an approximate 6.4-mile segment of SR 80 east of LaBelle. Species issues include the Audubon's crested caracara, and a 4-month U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-approved survey was conducted to identify active nests in the project area. One nest was identified, but the proposed project was outside of the primary protection zone and therefore mitigation for species impact was not required. Other issues included the Florida panther as the project is located within the Focus Area; a Panther Biological Assessment was prepared for the project, to serve as a baseline for the USFWS Biological Opinion. The USFWS issued the Biological Opinion with an agreement that the FDOT would purchase Panther Habitat Units to offset impacts.

Environmental Resource Permitting with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) was conducted, and an Individual Permit was obtained. Permitting for roadway projects is typically through the Water Management Districts, but since the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) was in the process of purchasing property along the existing FDOT-owned right-of-way, it was deemed to be a conflict of interest if the SFWMD permitting the project on behalf of the state. A Standard Section 404 Permit was also obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Permitting with the USACE was very challenging as they require that wetland mitigation occur within the same watershed as the proposed impacts. Due to a lack of both state and federally permitted wetland mitigation banks, and FDOT's difficulty in conducting their own "on-site" wetland creation/mitigation, it was eventually negotiated with USACE to purchase credits from a mitigation bank outside of the watershed.

