

# LITTLE PINE ISLAND MAKING COMEBACK

Developers helping restore land to its more natural condition

By PAMELA SMITH HAYFORD, [phayford@news-press.com](mailto:phayford@news-press.com)

Published by [www.news-press.com](http://www.news-press.com) on January 29, 2004

Little Pine Island hit the halfway mark in acres restored to nature this past year.

"It's just been incredible how both the plants and the animals have come back," said Dick Anderson, director of sales and customer service for Little Pine Island Wetland Restoration and Mitigation Bank, run by Mariner Properties Development Inc.

A mitigation bank basically works like this: When a developer or government agency builds anything that impacts the environment, such as new roads, they must make up for the damage by restoring other land. If they can't do it on their property, they can pay a mitigation bank. The bank is a group or company that restores a large piece of land, like Little Pine Island.

Before the mitigation bank was set up on Little Pine Island in 1996, the invasive exotic tree melaleuca covered about 1,600 acres of the 4,700-acre island. The rest was mangroves.

Now more than 800 acres have been restored, Anderson said.

The new nature has attracted more than 100 species of animals that weren't documented there in '96, such as white pelicans and peregrine falcons.

In return for restoring the land, Mariner can charge companies needing mitigation. Ten percent of each sale goes into a trust fund for ongoing maintenance; 7 percent goes to the state.

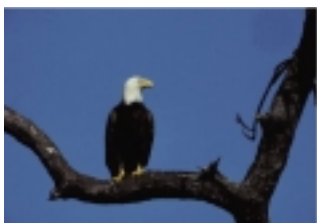
"We've sold more than 200 credits," Anderson said.

Restoration is getting trickier as the mosquito ditches are filled in. They're what drained the land and allowed melaleuca to thrive in the first place.

With the ditches filled in, the island will be wet for much longer periods of time, which limits herbicide spraying.

The Lee County Mosquito Control District said it has consulted with Mariner to prevent the ditch fill-ins from increasing mosquitoes out there.

"We're also watching out for the bald eagles nesting on Little Pine Island," Anderson said.



The one nesting pair there keeps moving their nest to newly restored areas. But that stops work on other nearby land within at least a 750-foot radius.

While the logistics are getting more difficult, Anderson said it's nice to know the apex predator likes the restoration.

