

CITY OF SANIBEL

RESOLUTION NO. 98 - 89

A RESOLUTION DECLARING SANIBEL A CROCODILE REFUGE AND ENDORSING EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A BREEDING POPULATION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, Sanibel's Vision Statement states that "Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary, one in which a diverse population lives in harmony with the island's wildlife and natural habitats," that "The Sanibel community must be vigilant in the protection and enhancement of its sanctuary characteristics," that "The City of Sanibel cherishes its cultural, social, ecological, and economic diversity, and will endeavor to maintain it," and that "the dominant principle is Sanibel's sanctuary quality"; and

WHEREAS, American crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*) have historically ventured as far north as Charlotte Harbor; and individual crocodiles have over the past two decades been observed on Sanibel; and additional crocodiles have been reported in nearby Estero Bay; and

WHEREAS, the 11-foot female American crocodile now in the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, has thrived in this area, and resisted efforts to relocate her elsewhere. Shortly after being moved from Pine Island to Collier-Seminole State Park south of Naples in May 1986, she swam back up the Gulf of Mexico, and was back on Pine Island by November. She was first observed in the Refuge in 1990. Since at least 1995, she has built a nest every year. None of the egg clutches have proven fertile, presumably due to old age or lack of a mate; and

WHEREAS, the American crocodile is a federally-listed endangered species, and the eastern part of its range in Florida has been truncated by habitat destruction, and the breeding population in Florida Bay is under stress because of the diversion of fresh water away from the Everglades, and the marginal breeding population in Estero Bay (where one adult male was accidentally killed by an alligator trapper last year) is threatened by loss of habitat from development; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission occasionally seeks to relocate crocodiles that are at risk; and occasionally seeks to relocate egg clutches that are vulnerable to mortality or failure; and

WHEREAS, the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge has expressed interest in accepting such relocations, in a spirit of cooperation for the restoration of the American crocodile; and

WHEREAS, Sanibel is in many ways ideally suited for such efforts. It has the three elements most closely associated with reproductive success for the American crocodile: the right habitat, a suitable climate (lacking hard freezes), and access to fresh water (provided by the island's unusual freshwater lens). Just as important, there is perhaps no community in the United States more strongly identified with an ethic of ecological preservation and restoration. From the enthusiastic response of residents and visitors alike to the presence of the existing crocodile, it is clear that a crocodile restoration effort would draw support from

the community. The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge also offers unparalleled opportunities for public education about crocodilians; and

WHEREAS, contrary to a widely-held misconception, field researchers have found that American crocodiles are significantly less aggressive than American alligators, which are common on Sanibel. Though all crocodilians must be treated with respect (as must any large animal), American crocodiles pose no greater challenge to cohabitation with humans than the alligators to which we are already accustomed; and

WHEREAS, a breeding population of American crocodiles would, like our manatees, serve as a potent and popular symbol of Florida's unique and priceless legacy of wildlife, highlighting the need for coastal habitat preservation and far-sighted ecological planning as Lee, Collier and Charlotte Counties experience some of the fastest rates of urban growth in the country;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Sanibel, Lee County, Florida:

Section 1. The Sanibel City Council reaffirms the City of Sanibel's commitment to sanctuary and biological diversity, declares Sanibel a refuge for the American crocodile, and welcomes any efforts by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, and the staff of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge to introduce additional crocodiles to Sanibel, whether by relocating wild

American crocodiles that are at risk in their present locations, or by relocating egg clutches that are vulnerable to mortality or failure.

Section 2. Effective date.

This resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

DULY PASSED AND ENACTED by the Council of the City of Sanibel, Lee County, Florida, this 21st day of April, 1998.

AUTHENTICATION:

Wallace M. Kain Ray A. Price
Mayor City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Ralph D. Price
City Attorney

4/20/98
Date

Vote of Council members:

Davison	<u>AYE</u>
Janes	<u>AYE</u>
Kain	<u>AYE</u>
Madison	<u>AYE</u>
Reding	<u>AYE</u>

Date filed with City Clerk: APR 22 1998

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