

New wildlife sanctuary going up in Jupiter Farms



An east-facing view of the environmental education center as construction continues Thursday at the new Busch Wildlife Sanctuary in Palm Beach County. PHOTOS BY THOMAS CORDY/THE PALM BEACH POST

Busch facility expected to be open this fall

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JUPITER FARMS — Just six months ago, Busch Wildlife Sanctuary's new property in Jupiter Farms was little more than dirt mounds with concrete foundations. Now, buildings are being finished and sidewalks are being laid. One can almost envision what the new sanctuary will look like to visitors when it opens in the fall.

Two years ago, Busch Wildlife Sanctuary extended its lease for its longtime site on Loxahatchee River District land off Central Boulevard, hoping to move to the plot in Jupiter Farms about three times bigger by the start of 2023.

After the cost of the move jumped to \$18 million, about \$8 million more than the nonprofit had budgeted, the completion date seemed unclear toward the end of 2022.

Amphitheater, windows into animal care among new site's features

In September, the sanctuary's goal was to raise enough money to complete its first phase and have its animals moved to the new property off Indian-town Road by this month. But after receiving another six-month extension from the district, Busch's new goal is to move by the second half of this year.



Beams are cut by a work crew at the education amphitheater during ongoing construction at the new Busch Wildlife Sanctuary.

The sanctuary received a donation in February that brought it \$1.25 million closer to the \$10 million needed to complete the first phase by September.

Only six months ago, Busch's new 19.4-acre property in Jupiter Farms looked like little more than a construction site. The only animals to be found were hiding in the five wetlands on the new property. But what was dirt mounds and bare-bones structures last fall has mushroomed into buildings, sidewalks and fences that will soon hold the sanctuary's rescued animals.

Because of the Fortin Foundation's February donation, one of these build-

ings will be an educational open-air amphitheater named for the late local philanthropist Mary Alice Fortin. The new educational theater will be twice as large as the amphitheater at Busch's current location with the ability to hold up to 160 people at a time.

The amphitheater isn't the only thing that will be bigger at the Jupiter Farms location. The sprawling enclosures and buildings are major expansions from the facilities where the sanctuary sits currently. And learning opportunities are being baked into the flow of the entire

See SANCTUARY, Page 3B

Sanctuary

Continued from Page 1B

facility.

Even the animal hospital will have a viewing window into its examination room, so visitors can watch animals get check-ups before they're taken back into one of the treatment or operating rooms. The new animal hospital is quadruple the size of Busch's current hospital.

All of the facilities at the new Busch Wildlife will be significantly larger and sturdier. Now the staff makes animals meals in a building that looks more like a shack in comparison to the kitchens at the new animal hospital and the educational center. The new sanctuary even has a hurricane-safe large mammal building for the sanctuary's bobcats, otters, bears and panthers.

"It's all (double) poured concrete," Kight said. "If we were to have a hurricane, we don't have to displace these animals. We can bring them inside and



Busch Wildlife Sanctuary Executive Director Amy Kight describes the new chainlink cages for large mammals during a tour of the construction progress of the new Busch Wildlife Sanctuary Thursday in unincorporated Palm Beach County. THOMAS CORDY/THE PALM BEACH POST

keep them safe in here. ... This is probably the safest place in a Cat 5 hurricane."

The new Busch also will have an im-

proved picnic area with a playground that kids can keep an eye on the fox enclosure from as they play.

The new location also has a building that will be able to host "pop-up" events near what will be its eagle enclosure. This building is a small octagonal building with a window to an indoor enclosure on each of its sides. The idea is that a zoo or another sanctuary could let some of their animals visit these enclosures from time to time, gaining visitors for both Busch and the guest animals' home.

Busch still raising money to pay for Jupiter Farms sanctuary

As for the \$18 million cost of the expansion: The sanctuary was able to secure the entire amount. But a large portion of it is loan money that will need to be returned, so Busch is still fundraising and taking donations for its expansion.

Plenty of naming opportunities are available, including the name of the sanctuary itself. Kight says that the name can be changed for whatever do-

nor would put up the \$5 million required to do so.

Although they will be moving the animals to the new enclosures in September, it will take the sanctuary's scaled, feathered and furry residents a few weeks to feel comfortable in their new home and be ready to socialize with guests.

Kight says she hopes the opening will be a grand one.

"I have this grandiose plan that one day when we actually open to the public, it will be like Willy Wonka opening the gates to the chocolate factory," she said with a laugh.

Busch may not be planning to roll out golden tickets, but the sanctuary is aiming to welcome guests into its gates sometime in October, if the animals are settled in by then.

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