

SITE NAME Everglades Wonder Gardens, 27200 Old 41 Road

A. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The Everglades Wonder Gardens are located on the west side Old 41 Road between Goodwin Street and Wilson Street in Township 47 South, Range 25 East, Section 35 (Bonita Springs USGS Quadrangle 1987) in Bonita Springs, Lee County, Florida. This resource is located on the north side of the Imperial River. The gift shop and museum to the zoo are housed in a wood frame building, located on the east side of the property fronting Old 41 Road, that was constructed circa 1936. This building features board and batten siding and a hipped roof clad in 3-V crimp sheet metal. This building foundation has been raised and presently sits on a continuous concrete block foundation. Several of the original one-over-one double-hung wood sash and three- and eight-light wood casement windows are intact. Some of the original windows have been replaced with metal jalousie windows. Exterior ornamentation includes wood door and window surrounds and wood window sills. A non-historic masonry outhouse is found directly to the southwest of the main building. There is a non-historic porch addition on the east façade, but the building still conveys its historic appearance.

B. DISCUSSION OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Everglades Wonder Gardens is a roadside tourist attraction featuring local and exotic animals. This resource was established as the Bonita Springs Reptile Gardens in 1936. Tourist attractions such as this were common throughout Florida in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the advent of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s, along with the large theme parks of the 1960s, caused a decline in local roadside attractions. The Everglades Wonder Gardens is one of the few remaining historic resources of this type. Most of the original pens, pits, and cages located to the rear (west) of the main building have been substantially altered and no longer retain their historic integrity. Since this resource retains its historic appearance and associations, and it is a rare surviving example of its resource type, it is considered eligible for designation by the Bonita Springs Historic Preservation Board and for listing in the *NRHP* pending further investigation. This resource also contributes to the proposed Old 41 Commercial Historic District.

C. HISTORY AND REFERENCES CITED OF PAST WORK AT SITE

Nutting, E.P.

1986 *The Beginnings of Bonita Springs Florida*. The Friends of the Library, Bonita Springs, Florida.