



## BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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February 22, 2022

Major Robert Beaton, Boating and Waterways Division  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
620 South Meridian Street  
Tallahassee, FL, 32399  
[Robert.Beaton@MyFWC.com](mailto:Robert.Beaton@MyFWC.com)

Re: Request to create a prohibited anchoring, mooring, beaching, and grounding zone on locations within the Weeki Wachee River

Dear Major Beaton:

Historically, the Weeki Wachee Springs and River's "exceptionally clear water and natural vegetation and wildlife"<sup>1</sup> have made the river a destination for local residents within Hernando County and "visitors from around the world"<sup>1</sup>. Historically, recreational activities such as, but not limited to, swimming, jumping off of trees, and socializing in the river have been enjoyed by local residents and tourists alike. However, the growing popularity of the river and heightened visitor traffic has led to degradation of the Weeki Wachee River and its surrounding ecosystem, as noted in the "Weeki Wachee Natural System Carrying Capacity Study-Analysis and Reporting, Final Report" by Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions, Inc., Prepared for the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and Hernando County, Florida.<sup>1</sup> The Carrying Capacity Study<sup>1</sup> explicitly noted the links between vessel docking and ecological damage of the river, "denudation appears to be initiated by vessel docking dislodging organic soils and vegetation. This sets up a cascading series of events by facilitating more foot traffic at the impacted areas, expanding the denudation"<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the Carrying Capacity Study<sup>1</sup> highlights the vessel usage has had a detrimental impact on the water quality of the Weeki Wachee River, "the cumulative number of vessels/users and in-water activities such as docking, wading, and swimming contributed significantly to turbidity along the river, which suggests that recreation has negative effects on water quality"<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the Carrying Capacity Study<sup>1</sup>, asserts that to protect the integrity of the river, management options can be taken, such as limiting "access to landing points for docking and exiting vessels to designated areas"<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, in order to protect the ecological environment including natural vegetation and wildlife within the Weeki Wachee River, we (Hernando County Board of County Commissioners) request the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), in accordance with Florida Statue 327.45, titled "Protection zones for springs",<sup>2</sup> create an anchoring, mooring, beaching, and grounding prohibition zone between the defined

location coordinates of upstream boundary at the State Park Corridor located at Latitude 28 31 34.2 Longitude 082 35 55.4 towards the Rogers Park boat ramp canal at Latitude 28 31 54.3 Longitude 082 37 35.1, which are shown on the attached map below<sup>3</sup>. This zone would be in accordance with Chapter 327 Section 45, Florida Statutes (2021)<sup>2</sup>, which directly states that "The commission may establish by rule protection zones that restrict the speed and operation of vessels, or that prohibit the anchoring, mooring, beaching, or grounding of vessels, to protect and prevent harm to first, second, and third magnitude springs and springs groups, including their associated spring runs, as determined by the commission using the most recent Florida Geological Survey springs bulletin. This harm includes negative impacts to water quality, water quantity, hydrology, wetlands, and aquatic and wetland-dependent species"<sup>2</sup>.

Subsequently, we request that any individuals or groups that operate a vessel in violation of the spring protection zone, pursuant to Chapter 327, Section 45, Florida Statutes (2021)<sup>2</sup>, shall be charged on a uniform boating citation as stated in Chapter 327 Section 74, Florida Statutes (2021)<sup>4</sup>, and be subject to the penalties listed in Chapter 327, Section 73, subsection (y) (1-4), Florida Statutes (2021)<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, we further request that the only individuals and/or groups that shall be exempt from the prohibited anchoring and mooring zone be Hernando County, Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), Hernando County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) authorized vessels conducting official business on behalf of their associated agencies. Additionally, we understand that this protection zone shall not apply to property owners along the Weeki Wachee River for the purpose of docking their personal vessels on water adjacent to their property.

Sincerely,



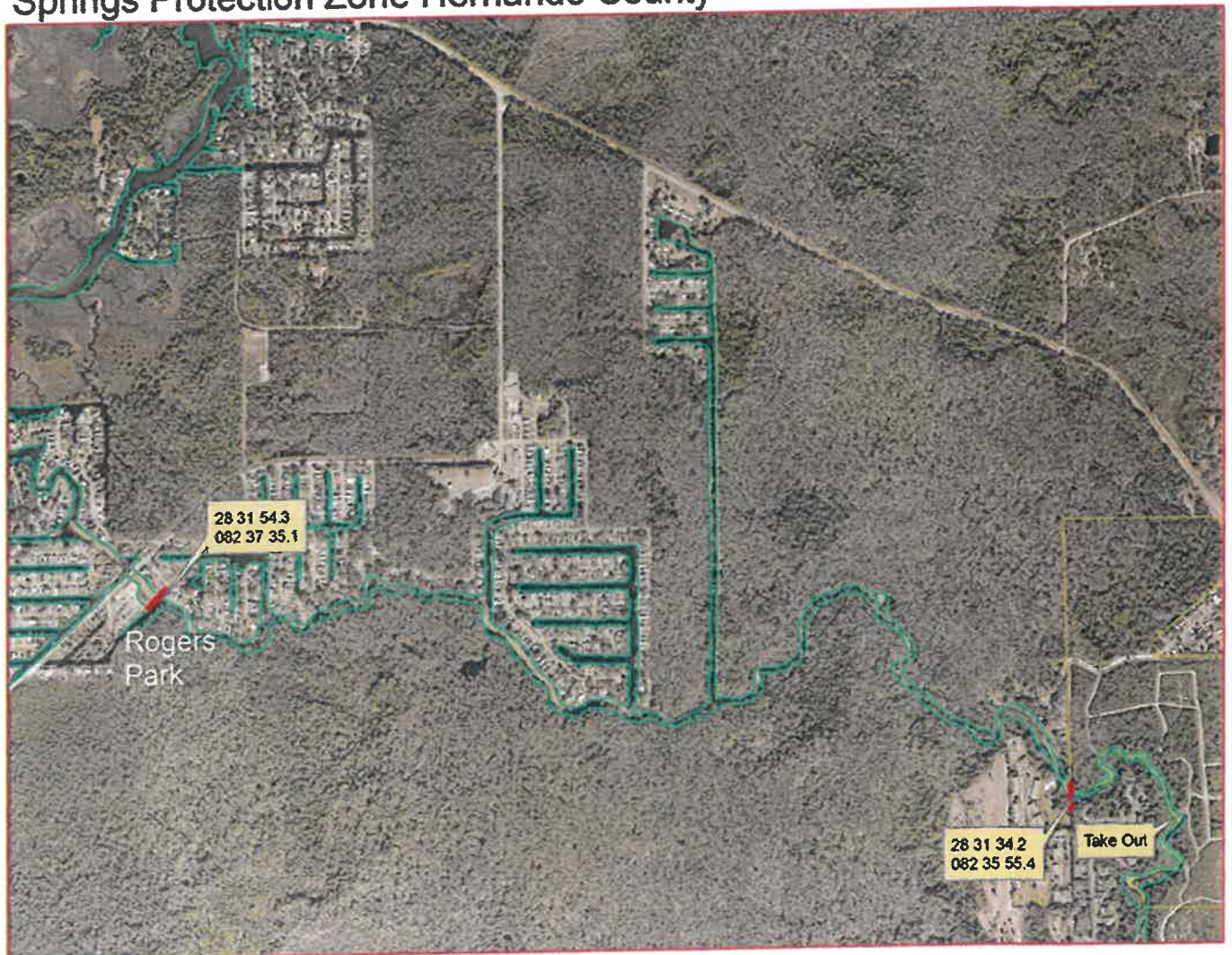
Steve Champion  
Chairman  
Board of County Commissioners  
Hernando County  
15470 Flight Path Drive  
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## References:

1). Wood Environment and Infrastructure Solutions, Inc. (February 2020). Weeki Wachee Natural System Carrying Capacity Study-Analysis and Reporting (WW06). Prepared for the Southwest Florida Water Management District and Hernando County Florida. Pages 1-215. Retrieved from [Complete Final Report-Weeki Wachee Carrying Capacity Analysis 02272020jb.pdf \(state.fl.us\)](#)

2). The 2021 Florida Statutes. Title XXIV. Chapter 327 VESSEL SAFETY. Statute 327.45. "Protection zones for springs. Retrieved from [Chapter 327 Section 45 - 2021 Florida Statutes - The Florida Senate \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

3).  
**Springs Protection Zone Hernando County**



4). The 2021 Florida Statutes. Title XXIV. Chapter 327 VESSEL SAFETY. Statute 327.74. "Uniform boating citations". Retrieved from [Chapter 327 Section 45 - 2021 Florida Statutes - The Florida Senate \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

5). The 2021 Florida Statutes. Title XXIV. Chapter 327 VESSEL SAFETY. Statute 327.73, subsection y (1-4). "Noncriminal infractions". Retrieved from [Chapter 327 Section 73 - 2021 Florida Statutes - The Florida Senate \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

