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Southwest Florida Water Management District

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Executive Director

March 28, 2023

Mr. Jeffrey W. Rogers
County Administrator
Hernando County Board of County Commissioners
20 North Main Street Room 263
Brooksville, Florida 34601

Subject: Weeki Wachee Preserve

Dear Mr. Rogers:

I am responding to your letter that was received by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) on January 20, 2023, containing a Land Acquisition Proposal (Proposal) on behalf of Hernando County (County) pertaining to the Weeki Wachee Preserve (Preserve). The District's responses below in bold will correspond to the numbered proposals set forth in that letter. Any subsequent revisions to the Proposal may lead to modifications of this response.

1. LEASE

The first option for providing Hernando County with access to this property is to obtain a lease over the project area in accordance with the Weeki Wachee Riverine System Agreement dated April 27, 1994, and subsequent Amendment to Agreement dated January 24, 1995. Attached is a draft Management Agreement for consideration by the District.

District Response: The District does not object to consideration of a lease or some other agreement for management of portions of the Preserve by the County; however, some additional conditions and terms would be required and those will be set forth at the end of this letter. Additionally, the draft Management Agreement is not acceptable to the District in its present form.

2. LAND SWAP

To facilitate creation of the recreational area along with promoting conservation of the resources, the County proposes a land acquisition exchange with the District. The County would acquire portions of the property located within the Weeki Wachee Preserve (Preserve), as shown in Figure 1, and would grant ownership to the District of the below listed properties and detailed in the attached spreadsheet. A real estate appraisal of the proposed land acquisition within the Preserve is also attached.

District Response: The properties offered by the County for a land swap have either previously been declined for acquisition or swap by the District or, in the

case of Peck Sink, offer no benefit to the District through ownership since the property is adequately protected in its present ownership. Additionally, the District previously made a substantial investment in Peck Sink in excess of its current estimated value. Therefore, the District is not interested in the proposed land swap since there is no benefit to the District.

3. Update to the Plan for the Use and Management of the Weeki Wachee Preserve

Lastly the County proposes the District move forward with updating the Plan for the Use and Management of the Weeki Wachee Preserve. The District previously stated they are waiting to update the plan due to the County's request to utilize a portion of the Preserve for recreational activities. The update may be finalized with the proposed recreational area removed from the Plan.

District Response: The District has planned the update to the management plan for the Preserve for next fiscal year. Regardless of whether any portion of the Preserve is leased to the County or not, said portion must be included in the management plan.

As has been the District's position during all previous discussions regarding recreation at the Preserve, the District remains open to exploring passive recreation opportunities with cooperators. Even though none of the elements of the Proposal are acceptable to the District as set forth therein, in a spirit of cooperation and in an effort to facilitate a solution that would be acceptable to both the County and the District, the District offers the following counter-proposal for consideration by the County:

The District is willing to discuss details of a lease or management agreement for a smaller portion of the Preserve as set forth in the map attached as Exhibit 1 (Revised Project Area) wherein the County would assume responsibility for recreation subject to and in accordance with the following terms and conditions:

- a. Improve existing amenities and trails within the Revised Project Area;
- b. Utilize the Shoal Line entrance and build out a boardwalk or bridge over the canal to the Preserve for ingress and egress subject to applicable permitting and mitigation requirements;
- c. Expansion of non-motorized boating activities such as a kayak launch;

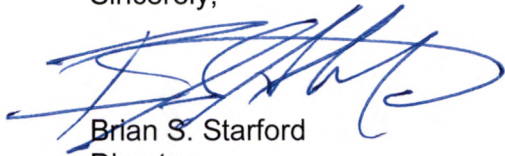
Regarding the creation of a swimming area, the District is not interested in the development of this high intensity recreational use on District-owned lands. However, the District will consider the County pursuing a fee acquisition of the Revised Project Area five years after entering a lease or management agreement. Consideration will be subject to the County meeting the following criteria:

- a. Demonstration that funding exists to support acquisition, development and ongoing maintenance of the Revised Project Area and proposed swimming area;
- b. Demonstration that the proposed swimming area is able to be permitted in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances; and
- c. Demonstration of stakeholder support and buy-in for the project as revised.

Of course, all the foregoing is subject to approval by the District's Governing Board.

The District looks forward to working with the County towards a mutually satisfactory resolution.

Sincerely,



Brian S. Starford
Director
Operations, Lands and Resource Monitoring

EMM
Enclosure as stated

cc: John Allocco, Chairman, Hernando County
Elizabeth Narverud, Vice Chair, Hernando County
Steve Champion, Second Vice Chair, Hernando County
Brian Hawkins, Hernando County
Jerry Campbell, Hernando County
Chris Linsbeck, Hernando County
Carla Burmann, Hernando County
Jon Jouben, Hernando County
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Brian Armstrong, Executive Director, SWFWMD
Christ Tumminia, General Counsel, SWFWMD
Ellen Morrison, Bureau Chief, Land Resources Bureau, SWFWMD
Mike Singer, Section Manager, Real Estate Services Section, SWFWMD
Chris Reed, Section Manager, Land Management Section, SWFWMD
Frank Gargano, Senior Government Affairs Regional Manager, SWFWMD



 Revised Potential County Park Area (March 2023) 350ac 0 750 1,500
 Potential County Park Area (January 2023) 532ac - - + + + + + + + +
US Feet



Southwest Florida
Water Management District