

History of Gold Dust Farms

The Gold Dust Farms property has been owned by the Hale/McKethan family for almost 150 years. The aggregation of what became approximately 650 acres began in 1883 when the property now known as Gold Dust Farms, together with other properties, was acquired by John Joseph “J.J.” Hale from the Estate of John F. Baker, whose other Hernando County holdings became Florida Rock Industries. It should be noted that there are high quality rock reserves on the property.

That portion of the Hale properties now known as Gold Dust Farms was cultivated into citrus groves, including tangerines, grapefruit, and oranges. The hard freezes of the late 1890s devastated the groves, along with much of the other citrus industry in Hernando County.

The groves were replanted, but the experience dissuaded the Hale family from cultivating the remainder of their property. They continued to hold the property in its undisturbed condition.

J.J. Hale was married to Dorothy Brooks “Dolly” Ederington, a daughter of Francis Higgins “Frank” Ederington and Precious Ann Nevitt Ederington. Upon their deaths the property devolved to their three children, Clarence, Hugh, and Mary Alice. Eventually, Clarence and Hugh deeded their interest in the property to their sister, who by then had married William M. McKethan.

The McKethan family continued to operate citrus groves on the Gold Dust Farms property, through several freezes and replantings. The remainder of the property was left undisturbed.

Upon the death of Will McKethan, the family made the final decision that the remainder of the Hale/McKethan family holdings would not be cultivated into citrus groves, or otherwise developed. In order to preserve the pristine nature of the property, Alice Hale McKethan, in 1936, conveyed the approximately 350 undeveloped acres to the United States Department of Agriculture, which later conveyed it to the State of Florida. That property included the lake now known as McKethan Lake, on the west side of US-41.

The approximately 300 cultivated acres known as Gold Dust Farms was continued in citrus production until the hard freezes of the early 1980s. Those freezes essentially killed the Hernando County citrus industry, including the Gold Dust Farms groves.

After the freezes of the early 1980s, Gold Dust Farms was planted in pine trees, which have been periodically harvested. The last harvest occurred in 2023, with replanting beginning in 2024.

Gold Dust Farms partnership is now owned by second and third generation descendants of Alice Hale McKethan, as its partners. The family has continued the tradition of being responsible stewards of the property, using it for timber management and recreational hunting, in a manner that does not adversely affect the area in which it is located, much less the surrounding properties.

Over the years, the family has had ample opportunity to sell the property for development into small rural lots, or to do so itself, but has resisted that temptation. However, in recent years, the partnership has grown to twenty-one (21) partners, and continues to grow with each passing generation. As a result, the family recently has considered either selling, or itself developing, the property for conversion to small rural lot single-family residences.

Fortunately, in 2024 the family was approached by Justin Wilson with a proposal to purchase the property for use as a high-end limited membership national golf club, without any single-family residential development. After considering that proposal, it was the family’s belief that a golf course, with only limited private lodging overnight accommodations, for members only, is a much better alternative for the property than would be the development of 50 to 100 single-family residential lots, and the offer was accepted.