



An Equal Opportunity Employer

Southwest Florida Water Management District

2379 Broad Street, Brooksville, Florida 34604-6899
(352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476 (FL only)
WaterMatters.org

Bartow Office
170 Century Boulevard
Bartow, Florida 33830-7700
(863) 534-1448 or
1-800-492-7862 (FL only)

Sarasota Office
78 Sarasota Center Boulevard
Sarasota, Florida 34240-9770
(941) 377-3722 or
1-800-320-3503 (FL only)

Tampa Office
7601 U.S. 301 North
Tampa, Florida 33637-6759
(813) 985-7481 or
1-800-836-0797 (FL only)

August 17, 2023

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Executive Director

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:

Thank you for your July 21, 2023, letter pertaining to the Weeki Wachee Preserve (Preserve). Your letter requested the District prepare a lease for the "use of the revised project area to include the Mermaid Lakes masterplan within the Preserve." The Hernando County (County) request follows its January 20, 2023, proposal for development of a public park and the District's response dated March 28, 2023.

You are correct that the District "did not object" to consideration of a lease or some other agreement for management of portions of the Preserve by the County. As discussed in our March 29, 2023, meeting at the District, the District's letter dated March 28, 2023, identified a potential "path forward" that would allow the County to obtain a five-year lease or management agreement (agreement) of a portion of the Preserve within which the County would assume responsibility for certain recreation-related items. Those items included:

- a. Improving existing amenities and trails within the Revised Project Area.
- b. Utilizing 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.

During our meeting on March 29, 2023, we also discussed two additional items that could be considered in an agreement:

- d. The addition of a bathroom.
- e. Expansion of trails and the addition of some covered picnic areas.

Please note that at this time, the District will consider an agreement that would allow enhancement or expansion of the passive recreation that presently exists at the Preserve, with the addition of a bathroom and kayak launch. Recreational activities authorized in an agreement must be consistent with the purpose for which the land was acquired. As such, any agreement will be referred to as Weeki Wachee Preserve, not Mermaid Lakes Park.

While the District's March 28, 2023, letter identified a potential path forward for the District to consider the County pursuing fee acquisition of the Revised Project Area five years after the District and County enter into an agreement, at this time the District will not consider a request beyond what was agreed to for a potential agreement. The District is not interested in the development of high intensity recreational use on District-owned lands.

In order for the District to prepare a draft agreement, the draft must be able to reference exhibits/plans that only include those items outlined in a. through e. above. To move forward, the County must revise its July 21, 2023, request to only include those items outlined in a. through e. above for District review. Narrative and plans that include a boardwalk adjacent to the canal, swimming area and associated amenities, references to the County's Masterplan and Mermaid Lakes Park must be removed from the submittal.

Once the County and District agree to appropriate exhibits and terms as set forth above, the District will begin drafting an agreement for the County's consideration. Of course, any agreement is subject to approval by the District's Governing Board.

To further clarify, what the District is requiring is to prepare a proposed agreement that supports items a. through e. above. Please ensure any revised submittal addresses the following (using terms defined in previous correspondence):

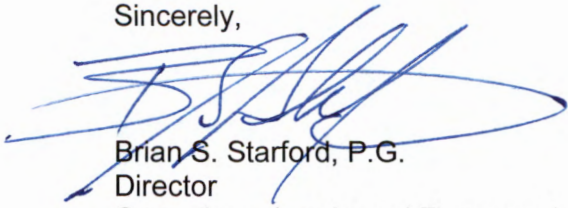
1. Provision of a plan to improve the existing amenities, covered picnic table pavilions, and trails within the Revised Project Area with specifics such as location of improvements, maps of proposed trail expansions, types of improvements being proposed, trail materials proposed to be used, etc.
2. Any plans for new trails, covered picnic table pavilions, or extensions of existing trails beyond what presently exists, indicated in a different color for differentiation between existing and new trails.
3. Plans to 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, including specifics such as location of the bridge or boardwalk over the canal, size of the bridge, materials proposed to be used, etc.
4. Plans regarding the expansion of non-motorized boating activities such as a kayak launch, including location of the kayak launch, materials to be used for any build out, dimensions, etc.
5. Plans regarding the addition of the bathroom, including location of water lines, sewer lines, utilities, dimensions, and any other pertinent information regarding the bathroom; and
6. Removal of any reference to the construction of a boardwalk adjacent to the canal and creation of a swimming area and associated amenities, since the District has only indicated a willingness to consider the County pursuing a fee acquisition of the Revised Project Area subject to the County meeting the following criteria five years after entering a lease or management agreement:
 - i. Demonstration that funding exists to support acquisition, development and ongoing maintenance of the Revised Project Area and proposed swimming area.
 - ii. 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
 - iii. Demonstration of stakeholder support and buy-in for the project as revised.

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Please provide the District with the previously requested information so that we can evaluate and respond to the request and then draft a proposed agreement if the terms and conditions proposed are acceptable.

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

Sincerely,



Brian S. Starford, P.G.
Director
Operations, Lands and Resource Monitoring

EMM/brm
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
Brian J. Armstrong, Executive Director, SWFWMD
Mandi Rice, Assistant Executive Director, SWFWMD
Ellen Morrison, Bureau Chief, Land Resources Bureau, SWFWMD
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Chris Reed, Section Manager, Land Management Section, SWFWMD
Frank Gargano, Senior Government Affairs Regional Manager, SWFWMD