

SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board

FROM: Stephen Schroeder, Chief, Office of Administration

THRU: Tim Alexander, Deputy Executive Director, Business and Community Services

DATE: March 26, 2021

RE: Warner-Harrell Conservation Easement Amendment, Suwannee County

RECOMMENDATION

Approval of an amendment to the conservation easement on the Warner-Harrell Tract in Suwannee County for a limited time and limited purposes.

BACKGROUND

In October 1999, the District acquired a conservation easement (CE) on 912 acres +/- identified as the Warner-Harrell Tract in northwest Suwannee County. The CE was subsequently amended to permit construction of cabins and removal of other structures on the parcel. In October 2020, the District received an inquiry from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection seeking guidance regarding a request to construct steps into "Burnice Sink" located on the property.

The District determined that the CE, as amended, would not permit such construction. After several follow-up communications with the owner's representatives, a request was made to amend the CE to permit construction of steps into the sink. The representative explained that divers are currently exploring the cave system that connects to Burnice Sink and they want to construct steps into the sink to protect the side of the sink from further erosion and damage.

After reviewing the request, staff determined that it is in the best interest of the District to grant an amendment limited in both time and scope of use in order to protect the existing natural resource while also furthering scientific and geological knowledge. Staff is recommending that the CE be amended for a period not to exceed 10 years, that the steps be constructed in a manner that maximizes protection of the sides of the sink while also minimizing the direct impact on the sides. Additionally, use will be restricted to scientific/exploration use only; recreational and other private uses will be prohibited. The owner has agreed to absorb all costs associated with the amendment and has agreed to the stated terms. The owner will be required to obtain all required permits at its own expense. The District's Land Management staff will include monitoring compliance with the amendment as part of its CE monitoring plan.

At the March 9, 2021 meeting, the Lands Committee unanimously approved the staff recommendation. A copy of the e-mail chain with the owner's representative, triage maps, and summary maps of the parcel are attached.

SCS/tm
Attachments
File #98-013