

SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Lands Committee

FROM: Katelyn Potter, Director, Division of Outreach and Operations

THRU: Hugh Thomas, Executive Director

DATE: March 28, 2025

RE: Avalon Woodland Ravines Conservation Easement, Jefferson County

**RECOMMENDATION**

Authorize Executive Director to submit the Springs funding project application for the acquisition of a conservation easement on a 5,495 acre +/- parcel of real property located in Jefferson County to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for an amount not to exceed \$1,240,000.

**BACKGROUND**

In January 2025, the District received an AWS/Springs project application from Tall Timbers Research, Inc to partner with the Florida Forest Service Forest Legacy Program for the purchase of a conservation easement over a 5,495 acre +/- parcel of real property located in Jefferson County. The District will be the conservation easement holder with Tall Timbers Research, Inc conducting all easement monitoring and compliance.

The Florida Forest Service Forest Legacy Program has committed \$3,705,000 or 75% of the project cost. Tall Timbers Research, Inc is requesting Springs funding for the remaining 25% or \$1,240,500. These values are supported by certified appraisal which valued the conservation easement to be \$4,945,500 or \$900 per acre for Phase 1.

The property is in the Aucilla River watershed and contains approximately 3,282 acres of wetlands or 60% of the property. An additional 2,213 acres are maintained in silviculture which contribute to the high recharge rate of 10-15 inches per year in the Floridan aquifer according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The property falls within the Wacissa River and Wacissa Springs Group Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) and the Wacissa Springs Group Priority Focus Area (PFA).

There are over 5.75 miles of stream and tributaries including Dixie Branch, Beasley Creek, and Buggs Creek that flow through the property before reaching the Aucilla River. The property is adjacent to an additional 2,600-acre tract also belonging to the landowners that is intended to be protected in a Phase II stage. The property is also adjacent to over 3,500 acres of land protected with a conservation easement. Less than 1-mile away are connected lands composed of over 10,000 acres of private lands protected with conservation easements; 8,000-acres of land protected through the Florida Forever program; and the Aucilla Wildlife Management Area, a 50,000-acre state-held protected tract.

The property lies within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and has several Florida State Wildlife Action Plan listed species as Species of Greatest Conservation Need that have been documented on the property. A high voltage transmission line runs through the eastern region of the property,