

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board Members

THROUGH: Kenneth G. Ammon, P.E., Deputy Executive Director
Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program

FROM: Ruth P. Clements, Department Director
Land Acquisition and Land Management

DATE: June 14, 2007

SUBJECT: Authorizing Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to Establish and Manage Small Game Hunting on District's Vacant/Undesignated lands.

Recommendation:

Approve a Resolution of the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District (District) authorizing the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to establish vacant undesignated lands comprising 230 acres in the L-31 North Project, Miami-Dade County, and 1100 acres in C23/24 Reservoir Project, St. Lucie County, as small game hunting areas and manage small game hunting on such lands, subject to terms and conditions; providing an effective date.

Background:

As defined by the District's Public Access and Recreational Use Rule (Rule 40E-7.521(30), F.A.C.), "vacant undesignated land" means District lands not designated as a management area, stormwater treatment area, impoundment, or right-of-way which are greater than 10 acres and have legal public access.

Lands within this category have been purchased by the District for various projects (CERP/ACCELER8) that are not scheduled to start immediately and are not subject to a lease or other agreement with farmers/ranchers. In an attempt to utilize such vacant lands for potential recreational uses including hunting, these areas were inventoried and assessed for possible recreational uses. The goal of this inventory was to provide recreational opportunities to the public on the lands that are not presently being used. The primary focus of this inventory/survey was to see if any of these areas could be opened for hunting purposes. There are two sites tentatively available for several years before the projects begin: approximately 230 acres in the L-31 North project area in Miami-Dade County, and another site consisting of three different parcels totaling approximately 1100 acres in the C23/24 project area in St. Lucie County.

The Land Stewardship Division staff inventoried vacant lands for potential recreational uses and consulted with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission ("FWC") staff and members of Everglades Coordinating Council, an umbrella group concerned with hunting in Florida. The outcome was presented to the WRAC Recreation Issue Workshop meeting on April 16, 2007. The user groups have recommended that these areas be made available to provide additional hunting opportunities for the general public.

Additional consultation with FWC staff indicated that FWC would be supportive of administering these hunts and establishing the areas as Public Small Game Hunting as long as the areas were not under construction during the fall hunting season. Once the projects begin, the areas would be de-established and hunting discontinued. The hunts will occur as established and prescribed by the FWC. Approval of these additional areas will increase the amount of hunting activities permitted on District lands.

Both of these areas were established as public small game hunting areas during the 2006-07 hunting season. Although manned check stations were not operated to collect harvest and public use data, reports from law enforcement officers and comments received from the public indicated the hunting program administered on these areas was successful and well appreciated. There were no hunting related issues or problems experienced on either area during the 2006-07 hunting season.

Hence, staff recommends approving the resolution to open these two areas in Miami-Dade and St. Lucie Counties for small game hunting consistent with the District's Public Access and Recreational Use Rule and Recreational Use Policy.

How this helps meet the District's Mission:

This will expand the allowable public uses on District lands without compromising our responsibility to protect the resources as required by legislative mandates and District policy.

This Board item impacts what areas of the District, both resource areas and geography:

This activity will take place in Miami-Dade and St. Lucie Counties and may affect the L-31N and C-23/24 reservoir projects.

What concerns could this Board item raise?

The use of firearms in these areas could be viewed as a potential safety issue. However, these sites are in remote areas and similar hunting programs administered last year by FWC did not result in any concerns or issues expressed by staff and/or users.

Why should the Governing Board approve this item?

This proposal would increase public hunting opportunities on District lands and expand allowable recreational activities consistent with the Everglades Forever Act and District policy. A similar small game hunting program on vacant/undesignated lands within these project areas was approved by the Governing Board in 2006.

RC/bk