

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board Members

FROM: Tommy Strowd, Director,
Operations, Maintenance and Construction Division

DATE: July 1, 2011

SUBJECT: **Authorize the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to establish approximately 3873 acres of vacant, undesignated lands in the L-31 North Project Area in Miami-Dade County as the Rocky Glades Public Small Game Hunting Area and manage small game, non-native invasive reptiles and hog hunting on the property during the 2011-12 hunting season.**

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 which are greater than 10 acres, have legal and practical public access, and are not designated as a management area, a stormwater treatment area, an impoundment, or right-of-way.

Lands within this category have been purchased by the District for various water resource projects. In some cases, projects are not scheduled for immediate construction and the properties within the project area are not subject to leases or other restrictions that would preclude them from being open for recreational use on an interim basis. In an attempt to utilize such vacant lands for public recreation, including hunting, these properties were first inventoried and assessed for possible recreational use in 2006. The primary focus of this assessment was to evaluate if any of these areas could be opened for small game hunting. The assessment identified the Rocky Glades site as an area that was available for hunting related recreation as project construction would not occur for several years.

The original Rocky Glades Public Small Game Hunting Area was established as a 230 acre site in 2006. In 2010, construction activities were initiated on the original site and the small game hunting area was relocated to an adjacent 1900 acre site where construction had recently been completed. Based on the success of past hunting programs offered on the property and the availability of additional property, staff recommends re-establishing the Rocky Glades Public Small Game Hunting Area for the purpose of hunting small game, non-native invasive reptiles and hogs during the 2011-12 hunting season and expanding the area by 1973 acres. Stakeholders are supportive of this proposed action and the recommendation to expand the size of the area available for hunting.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has agreed to establish the Rocky Glades site, with its revised boundaries, as a Public Small Game Hunting Area and administer small game, non-native invasive reptiles and hog hunting opportunities on the property during the 2011-12 hunting season in accordance with State and Federal regulations with approval from the District. Although check stations have not been operated in the past to collect harvest or public use data, reports from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissions Wildlife Officers and comments received by District staff indicate hunting activities provided on this area in the past have been successful and well received by the public.

How this helps meet the District's Mission:

This will expand the allowable public uses on District property consistent with the District's Recreational Use Policy without compromising resource protection responsibilities 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 County in the L-31N project area and will affect the Operations, Maintenance, and Construction Division.

How this helps meet the District's 10-Year Strategic Plan:

This project is an integral component of the District's 10-year Strategic Plan to provide public use opportunities and recreational access to District lands.

What concerns could this Board item raise?

The use of firearms in this area could be viewed as a potential safety issue, however, this site is located in a remote area and similar hunting activities have been administered in this area in the past without incident.

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 District policy. The Governing Board has annually authorized the Rocky Glades site to be established as a Public Small Game Hunting Area for the past five (5) years.

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