

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board Members

FROM: Kenneth G. Ammon, P.E., Deputy Executive Director,
Everglades Restoration Resource Area

Through: Ruth Clements, Department Director
Land Acquisition and Land Management Department

DATE: June 12, 2008

SUBJECT: Authorize the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to establish Public Small Game Hunting Areas and manage small game hunting on District vacant undesignated lands.

Recommendation:

Approve a Resolution of the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District to re-authorize the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to establish vacant undesignated lands consisting of approximately 230 acres in the L-31 North Project, Miami-Dade County, and approximately 1100 acres in the C23/24 Reservoir Project, St. Lucie County, as Public Small Game Hunting Areas for the 2008-09 hunting season 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 water resource projects. In some cases, the projects are not scheduled to immediately go to construction and the properties within the project area do not have leases or other restrictions that would preclude using them on an interim basis for recreational purposes. In an attempt to utilize such vacant lands for public recreation, including hunting, these areas were inventoried and assessed for possible recreational uses. The primary focus of this assessment was to evaluate if any of these areas could be opened for small game hunting. The assessment identified two sites that would be available for hunting related recreation as project construction will not occur for several years: approximately 230 acres in the L-31 North project area in Miami-Dade County and a second site consisting of three different parcels totaling approximately 1100 acres in the C23/24 project area in St. Lucie County.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has agreed and is supportive of re-establishing these areas as Public Small Game Hunting Areas for the 2008-09 hunting season. Additionally, the possibility of opening these areas up for small game hunting was presented and supported at the April 14, 2008 Water Resources Advisory Commission Recreation Issues Workshop and at the May 8, 2008 Water Resource Advisory Commission meeting.

Both of these areas were previously established as Public Small Game Hunting Areas by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 hunting seasons. Although check stations were not operated to collect harvest and public use data, reports from Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission Wildlife Officers and comments received by District staff indicate the hunting program administered on these properties was 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 and St. Lucie Counties in the L-31N and C-23/24 project areas.

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 have been successfully administered on both properties in the past.

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. Both of these areas were authorized by the Governing Board to be opened as Public Small Game Hunting Areas in 2006 and 2007.

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