

**Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area  
Management Plan Amendment  
March 2023  
Hernando County, Florida**



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**Introduction:** Forming the southern link of a nearly unbroken crescent of public conservation lands stretching 200 miles from Pasco County to the Apalachicola River, the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area (CWMA) conserves one of the largest coastal hardwood swamp forests along the Gulf of Mexico, south of the Suwannee River. Its intact and functioning freshwater, tidal, and spring system communities provide significant watershed and water quality protection, along with important habitat for an array of imperiled and common wildlife and plant species.

Located in Hernando County, Florida, this 28,492-acre conservation area contains diverse natural communities that sustain a large variety of wildlife species. Extensive hardwood swamps in association with uplands creates good habitat conditions for wildlife and allows for seasonal movement of animals in response to fluctuating water levels and food supplies. The CWMA contributes to the conservation of an array of imperiled and other native wildlife including the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*), gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), Florida mouse (*Podomys floridanus*), Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*), and Southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*).

The CWMA is owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund (Board of Trustees) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The FWC has lead management authority for all resources within the established boundary (Figure 1 and 2). The CWMA is managed to conserve and restore natural wildlife habitat, and to provide high-quality opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and other fish and wildlife-based public outdoor recreation opportunities including horseback-riding, cave diving, and hiking.

**Location:** The CWMA consists of 28,492 acres and is within multiple sections in Township 21 South, Ranges 17 and 18 East, and in Township 22 south, Range 17 East. The CWMA is located in northwest Hernando County, approximately 64 miles north of Tampa and 80 miles west of Orlando. It is bordered on the west by the Gulf of Mexico, on the north by the Hernando/Citrus County line, and on the south by Weeki Wachee State Park and Preserve. Approximately two-thirds of the upper eastern boundary is bounded by U.S. Highway 19 (US 19). The CWMA contains several inholdings interspersed throughout the area. Additional disjunct portions of the CWMA are located east of US 19, extending approximately two miles south of the Hernando/Citrus County line. The area is surrounded by residential and urban development and publicly owned forested uplands and wetlands. The CWMA is not located within a designated Area of Critical State Concern.

**Acquisition History:** The original Chassahowitzka Swamp Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) project encompassed lands in both Hernando and Citrus counties, including approximately 7,062 acres purchased from the Lykes Brothers and approximately 8,393 acres of lands purchased from the Turner Corporation. In 1988, 150 acres were added to the CWMA. Since then, several other tracts have been purchased and added to the management area. These tracts of lands were acquired from Dr. James Gills, Royal Palm Beach Colony, 19 West Associates, Glen Lakes Partnership, and Suncoast Family YWCA. Smaller acquired tracts include those of Boyce, Blackwell, Routman, Underwood, and Mizrahi. In 1994, the first tract of the Weeki Wachee First Magnitude Springs conservation project was purchased and added to the CWMA for management, however in 2018 this property was transferred to the DEP-Division of Recreation and Parks for management. Since 1994, several smaller parcels within that project have been acquired and added to the CWMA. The Seville tract, part of the Annutteliga Hammock CARL project, was purchased in 1998 adding approximately 1,585 acres to the CWMA. In 2018 an additional 709 acres were donated to the State by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) as

mitigation for the Suncoast Parkway. In 2020, a 0.52-acre parcel was acquired through the Florida Forever program, and in 2021, 710-acre parcel, another Suncoast Parkway mitigation parcel, was donated by the FDOT. In 2023, another parcel was donated from the FDOT to mitigate the Suncoast Parkway, encompassing 107 acres.

**Management Authority:** The Board of Trustees holds the fee title interest to the majority of the lands within the CWMA, with the FWC holding fee title interest to approximately 150 acres. The FWC is the lead management authority on all lands established within the boundary of the CWMA. Further management authority derives from Article IV, Section 9 of the Florida Constitution as well as the guidance and directives of Chapters 253, 259, 327, 370, 373, 375, 378, 379, 403, 487, 597, and 870 of the F.S. These constitutional provisions and laws provide the FWC the authority to protect, conserve, and manage the State's fish and wildlife resources. As State-owned lands, title to the CWMA is vested in the Board of Trustees and the FWC. On April 12, 1985, the DSL, acting as staff to the Board of Trustees, entered into Lease Agreement 3586; this agreement granted the FWC management authority for the CWMA. To date, Lease Agreement 3586 includes 27 amendments.

**Land Cover and Vegetation:** The FWC uses a comprehensive resource management approach to managing FWC-managed areas. Restoring the form and function of Florida's natural communities is the foundation of this management philosophy. Consistent, long-term monitoring of managed natural communities will quantify changes in habitat conditions, provide information on the cumulative effects of management activities, and measure progress towards meeting management objectives for desired habitat conditions. Measured changes in vegetation condition are intended to be used to inform future land management actions.

Thirty-three natural and altered land cover communities have been identified by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory to date. Native and invasive plant species lists have been compiled for these land cover categories. Fifteen imperiled plant species are known to exist on the CWMA. Britton's beargrass (*Nolina brittoniana*) is designated as Federally Endangered and State Endangered; Austin's dawnflower (*Stylisma abdita*), crested coral-root (*Hexalectris spicata*), Curtiss's milkweed (*Asclepias curtissii*), giant wild-pine (*Tillandsia utriculate*), plume polypody (*Polypodium plumula*), spreading pinweed (*Lechea divaricate*), and swamp plume polypody (*Pecluma pilota* var. *bourgeauana*) are designated as State Endangered; and angle pod (*Matelea gonocarpos*), blue-flowered butterwort (*Pinguicula caerulea*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), catesby lily (*Lilium catesbaei*), garberia (*Garberia heterophylla*), gypsy-spikes (*Platanthera flava*), non-crested eulophia (*Eulophia ecristata*), rose pogonia (*Pogonia ophioglossoides*), scrub pinweed (*Lechea cernua*), shell mound prickly-pear (*Opuntia stricta*), and yellow-flowered butterwort (*Pinguicula lutea*) are designated as State Threatened.

**Fish and Wildlife Resources:** As described above, the CWMA has a variety of natural communities and habitat types that support a wide array of imperiled, rare, and more common wildlife species. The CWMA's upland hardwood forests, hydric hammock, sandhill, and other natural communities provide critical habitat for resident and migratory wildlife. 10 imperiled wildlife species are found on the CWMA. Eastern indigo snake, Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), and wood stork (*Mycteria americana*) are listed as Federally Threatened. Florida pine snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus*), Florida sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis pratensis*), gopher tortoise, little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*), roseate spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Southeastern American kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*), and tricolored heron (*Egretta tricolor*) are listed as State Threatened.

**Management Plan:** The update to the CWMA Management Plan is in the final stages of development, and, if approved, will be in effect from 2023-2033. However, the FWC is submitting this management plan amendment to outline and request facility changes and improvements that the FWC wishes to perform on the area before that time. Below are details for the improvements proposed on the area.

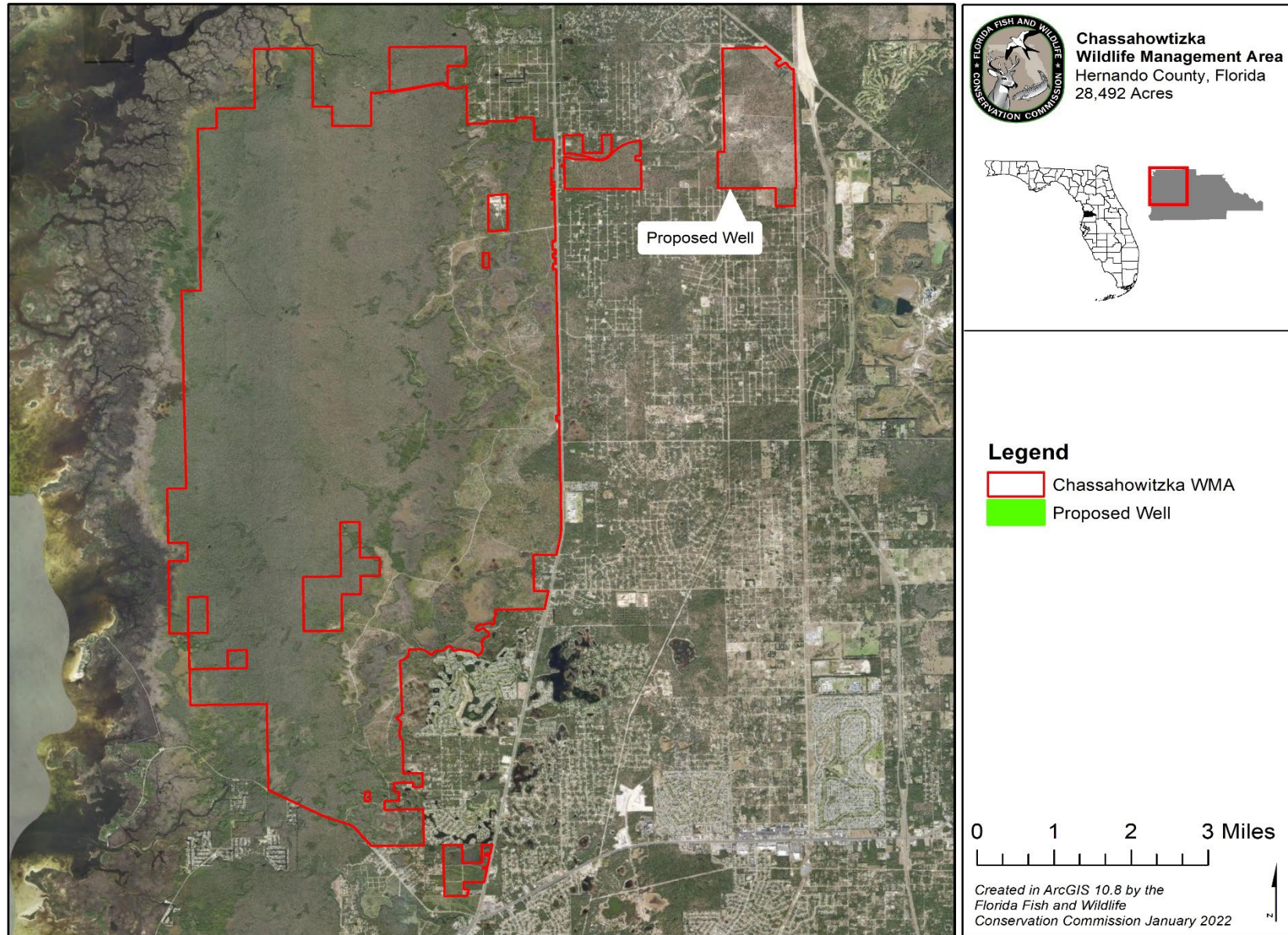
**Management Activities:**

The FWC is proposing the following improvements:

- Installation of a 4 inch well with a 5-horsepower pump and 100 –125-gallon tank to be used as a water source for prescribed burning operations.
- A structure, approximately 10 ft wide by 12 ft long, with a concrete floor and roof to cover and protect the well.
- Power to the well from nearby powerlines (existing power supply is approximately 150 feet from the proposed well location).

The location of these improvements is provided in Figure 1. These improvements will provide the FWC with needed water for prescribed burning on the area. These improvements will have no impacts on wildlife, habitat, or continued management of the CWMA. The FWC will have an individual who has completed Archaeological Resource Management training on site during any ground disturbing activities, and will continue to cooperate with the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources regarding any potential ground disturbing activities.





**Figure 1. Proposed Facility Improvements on the CWMA**



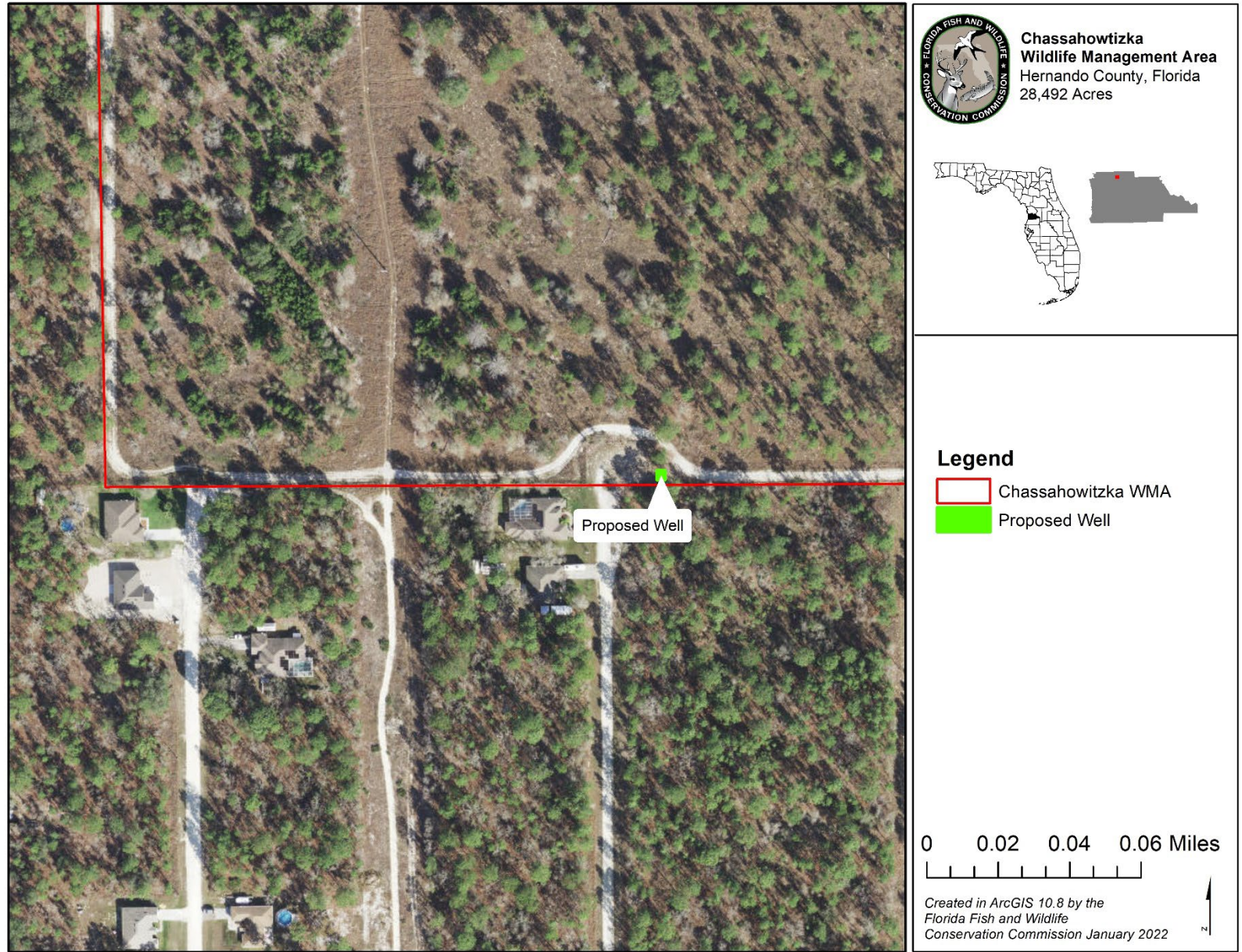


Figure 2. Proposed Well Footprint on the CWMA



## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

**RON DESANTIS**  
Governor

**CORD BYRD**  
Secretary of State

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
620 S. Meridian Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

March 7, 2023

Re: DHR Project File No.: 2022-0657  
Project: Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area Management Plan Amendment

To Whom It May Concen:

Our office reviewed the referenced projects in accordance with Chapter 267, Florida Statutes, and implementing state regulations, for possible effects on historic properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places, or otherwise of historical, architectural or archaeological value.

Based on the information provided, it is the opinion of this agency that ground-disturbing activities for the above project should be monitored by someone who has completed our Archaeological Resource Management (ARM) training program. Once the project is complete, the monitor should submit the appropriate monitoring forms to this agency. In the event that unmarked human remains are encountered during permitted activities, all work shall stop immediately and the proper authorities notified in accordance with Section 872, *Florida Statutes*.

If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Tobias, Historic Sites Specialist, by email at [Jennifer.Tobias@dos.myflorida.com](mailto:Jennifer.Tobias@dos.myflorida.com).

Sincerely,

  
For

Alissa S. Lotane  
Director, Division of Historical Resources and State Historic Preservation Officer

**From:** [Geoffrey Parks](#)  
**To:** [Klein, Hannah](#)  
**Cc:** [Bucheck, Jacqueline](#)  
**Subject:** Review of proposed Chassahowitzka management plan amendment  
**Date:** Friday, February 10, 2023 12:38:09 PM

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**[EXTERNAL SENDER]** Use Caution opening links or attachments

FNAI has reviewed the information regarding the proposed well, well structure, and electricity connection at Chassahowitzka WMA. We are aware of no significant resources that would be negatively impacted by this project. By improving FWC's ability to use prescribed fire, the project should benefit a number of rare and imperiled species that occur elsewhere in this part of the WMA. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,  
Geoffrey Parks, Research Scientist

Geoffrey R. Parks  
Florida Natural Areas Inventory  
1018 Thomasville Rd. 200-C  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
(352) 262-1916 (cell)

**[FNAI – Science for Conservation](#)**

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## Bucheck, Jacqueline

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**Sent:**  
**To:**  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:**

Hannah,

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) has reviewed this request to amend the management plan for the Chassahowitzka WMA for the installation of a 4-inch well, power-drop, and associated 100-to-125-gallon tank to support wildland fire operations on the WMA. The District feels that this request supports land management activities on the WMA and has no opposition with this request. Upon approval from ARC, the successful well contractor will need to submit a permit application with the District. Should you require any assistance I would be happy to direct you to our Water Use section.

I apologize for the delayed response to your request and please feel free to call if you require anything further with this request.

### ***Chris Reed***

*Manager, Land Management  
Land Resources Bureau  
Southwest Florida Water Management District  
2379 Broad Street  
Brooksville, FL 34604  
352-415-0119 office*



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**From:** Klein, Hannah <Hannah.Klein@MyFWC.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 6, 2023 4:42 PM  
**To:** Chris Reed <Chris.Reed@swfwmd.state.fl.us>  
**Cc:** Bucheck, Jacqueline <Jacqueline.Bucheck@MyFWC.com>  
**Subject:** Chassahowitzka WMA Management Plan Amendment

Good Afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well. Attached for review by the SWFWMD is an interim management request/plan amendment for a new well, structure around the well, and power connection to the well on the FWC-managed Chassahowitzka WMA. Please see attached for more details on the project. Once we receive all agency approvals, this



will be going to ARC for final approval, most likely as a negative response item. Please let me know if you need any further information for your review and approval.

I sincerely appreciate your assistance.

Thanks,

**Hannah Klein (she/her)**

Land Conservation Planner

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

620 S. Meridian Street

Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Phone: (850) 487-9767

[Hannah.Klein@myFWC.com](mailto:Hannah.Klein@myFWC.com)