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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner
The Capitol • Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800

Please Respond to:

Division of Forestry
1600 NE 23rd Ave
Gainesville, FL 32609

January 19, 2006

Dear County Commissioners:

I'm writing to you about an issue that might be coming to you for a decision soon. The Alachua County Land Conversation Board (LCB) is considering purchasing 200 acres of land that the City of Gainesville owns near Wacahoota Road on SR121. Some of the board members feel that this tract is important as a wildlife corridor between Kanapaha Prairie and Paynes Prairie. Although there is some merit to this claim, it is not the primary hydrologic and wildlife connector between these properties. This better quality wildlife crossing connection lies farther South through the Whitehurst property. In addition, SR 121 runs along the Eastern Boundary of the City property and has heavy vehicle use which prevents safe wildlife migration. This fragmented property already has lots with houses on its South and West edge and development is moving in from the North.

I have been talking with the City of Gainesville about exchanging our current office site and Smokey Bear Park for part of the Wacahoota property since 1994. We had an agreement worked out and were close to signing it twice previously but Governor Bush vetoed the funding to build our new District Office. This year we were authorized to spend 1.91 million dollars building a new office and we began working with the City for an exchange. Appraisals have been done, surveys done, we have hired a local architect and a management agreement has been drafted between the City and the Division of Forestry. The agreement calls for us to build our office on 10 acres and set aside 40 acres for conservation, a hiking trail and resource education.

If the County decides to purchase this tract we will be in jeopardy of losing our funding because of time constraints on the money. I feel like the DOF would be a benefit to this parcel because we have agreed to help the City write a management plan on the 150 acres they would retain. DOF would integrate the 40 acres we set aside into the City's plan. We would also provide manpower and technical expertise to implement this joint plan and the City Commission would have approval and enforcement rights on what we do in this plan. The construction on the 10 acre parcel would go through the normal review process with Alachua County. It should be noted that our Biologist and Alachua County's biologist helped site this 10 acre parcel to be least



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intrusive to wildlife and vegetation. A short list of some of the benefits to the County, DOF and the City are as follows:

- The Alachua County Land Conservation Board would not have to spend \$1,796,000.00 on land that would be managed and funded for conservation by the City of Gainesville and DOF.
- The value of the 40 acre parcel that DOF would pay for is \$359,200.00, which would allow the conservation board to spend that amount of money on other parcels in the area or elsewhere in the County.
- The Wacahoota tract would be under a management plan for the first time since the City bought it in 1966.
- The Division of Forestry would keep its District office in Alachua County rather than relocating to an adjoining County. This keeps more jobs and Fire Equipment in Alachua County.
- The City of Gainesville would utilize our current facilities for their Parks and Recreation Department, reducing their impact on Morningside Nature Center.
- Smoky Bear Park on the East side of the City would not have to be closed.
- The Division of Forestry would have its office in the geographic center of the District and would have a training room that could be used to teach fire classes to Alachua County Firemen.
- The Wildlife habitat on the property would be enhanced through the use of fire which has been excluded for decades. County and staff found high quality sand hills in the western part of this property that will really improve with prescribed fire.
- Nature trails will be established and will give citizens and school children a place to learn about ecosystem management.

I would have rather waited until the Land Conservation board meets on Thursday before I bothered you with this issue but I'm being sent to Texas on Friday morning to help in the wildfire situation. I will be gone for two weeks and wanted to let you know that I do not think it is appropriate for the County to buy this tract given the limited amount of land money you have and the many tracts that need to be purchased. The City and DOF would save you 1.8 million dollars that can be used for purchasing other lands. If you decide that you absolutely have to have this parcel I would recommend that you only purchase the 150 acre portion and allow us to enter into a management agreement with the County on both parcels.

If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact Duane Durgee at (352) 955-2100 or dugeed@doacs.state.fl.us. If he is not in please contact our biologist Charlie Pedersen at (352) 955-2353. He will be the Division of Forestry representative while I am in Texas. He would be happy to make a presentation before the Board if needed. I will return by February 3 and would be available for individual or Commission meetings to answer questions.

Sincerely Yours,

Don West
Forestry Center Manager



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