

Friends  of Brooker Creek Preserve

**A PLAN TO PRESERVE
THE BROOKER CREEK
PRESERVE**

**PETITION TO THE PINELLAS COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

September 18, 2006

PREFACE

During the 1980's, Pinellas County began a vigorous land acquisition campaign in the northeast sector of the County. Joining with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the State of Florida, Pinellas County set out to save the last remaining wilderness in Pinellas County.

Recently, the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve has become extremely concerned with the direction that our last wild place seems to be heading. Several projects in particular - a therapeutic horse facility, the expansion of the East Lake Youth Sports Association's current recreational fields and the reactivation of a part of the East Lake Road Wellfield - have caused alarm within the Friends and throughout the County.

The Mission of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is to ensure that the Preserve remains a natural wilderness for future generations. We feel the following plan strikes a balance between protecting the natural resources in the Preserve while still allowing for compatible passive recreation and providing for necessary utility needs.

We urge the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners to implement all of the elements contained in this plan and demonstrate that Pinellas County still supports the preservation of the Brooker Creek Preserve.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

The following organizations and individuals have joined with the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve in this petition to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners:

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I. EXISTING CONDITION OF THE PRESERVE

Current Land Use

Public trails- the Friends Trail at the end of Lora Lane is the only hiking trail officially opened to the public. It is about 0.75 miles long. In the near future, several miles of trails will open at the Environmental Education Center. These trails will provide the public a great opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty of the Preserve.

Horse trails- there are over 8 miles of trails north of Keystone Road and there is a one mile loop trail starting at the end of Lora Lane.

Land management- there are several activities that currently occur in the Preserve related to land management. They include prescribed burning, trail maintenance, exotic plant removal and restoration.

Research- some of the research activities in the Preserve include species specific studies, habitat monitoring/studies and ongoing ecological monitoring. Also, the Preserve is home to the Biological Field Research Station.

Environmental education- the Environmental Education Center which opened in 2004 provides an opportunity for residents to learn about the Preserve and the environment. There are many activities and programs that accompany the Center including hikes and various presentations.

Environmental Lands Division Headquarters- the headquarters of the Environmental Lands Division is located in the Preserve on Fletch Haven Drive. Currently this consists of a temporary office building, a pole barn and a covered structure for maintenance vehicles

Division of Forestry Workstation- the Division of Forestry has an approximately 1500 square foot workstation located in the Preserve on Keystone Road. This facility was built in 1999.

Hydrogen-sulfide removal facility- this facility was constructed by the Utilities Department and removes hydrogen-sulfide from the potable water supply. It is located north of Keystone Road.

Alcohol Treatment Facility- this facility was constructed in 1989 before the Preserve was established. It is approximately 15,000 square feet and is located north of Keystone Road.

Interim Chemical Facility- this facility was built in 2002 and is located just east of the Alcohol Treatment Facility. It serves as an interim site to inject chemicals into the potable water supply.

Blending Facility- this facility is currently under construction and is located just off of Trinity Boulevard. It will blend incoming water from Pasco County with water pumped from the Eldridge Wilde Wellfield.

Four Lakes Hammock Campground- this small, primitive campground is located just south of the Pasco County line east of East Lake Road. Only non-profit groups are permitted to use the site under strict guidelines.

Tampa Bay Water Potable Water Wells- there are six parcels in the Preserve which have pump stations for the Eldridge-Wilde Wellfield located onsite. These wells are operated by Tampa Bay Water.

Power lines and pipelines- there are several utility corridors in the Preserve which were constructed before the establishment of the Preserve.

Lora Lane Residence- there is a home located in the Preserve at the end of Lora Lane which was built in 1980. It currently is the home of a Pinellas County Sheriff Deputy who patrols the Preserve.

Radio tower- there is a radio tower located just west of the Alcohol Treatment Facility. This tower was constructed before the creation of the Preserve.

Future Land Use Classification

The vast majority of the Preserve located in unincorporated Pinellas County is designated Preservation-Resource Management (Figure 1) on the Future Land Use Map of Pinellas County (Figure 2a). Most of the lands within the City of Oldsmar are designated Preservation (Figure 3) on their Future Land Use Map (Figure 2b). There are also several small parcels located within the City of Tarpon Springs which have that city's Preservation designation as well. The other classifications in the Preserve include:

- Preservation (Figure 4)
- Residential Rural
- Institutional
- Residential Low
- Commercial General

- Residential/Office/Retail
- Transportation/Utility
- Recreation/Open Space
- Residential Low Medium (City of Oldsmar classification)

Areas with designations other than Preservation or Preservation-Resource Management are either extremely small or have not yet been changed to their appropriate classifications since being added to the Preserve.

Although nearly all of the permitted uses in the Preservation-Resource Management classification seem compatible with the Preserve, the provisions for “wellfield development” and “passive recreation” have been construed to allow for soccer and baseball fields, blending facilities, therapeutic horse facilities and wellfield reactivation for a golf course.

Zoning Classification

Since much of the Preserve was originally intended for development, zoning categories are varied throughout the Preserve (Figure 5a and 5b). They include:

- A-E- Agricultural Estate Residential
- E-1- Estate Residential
- RPD- Residential Planned Development (ranging from 0.5 to 2.5 units per acre)
- AL- Aquatic Lands
- M-1- Light Manufacturing and Industry
- C-2- General Retail Commercial and Limited Services
- R-6- Residential, Mobile Home Parks and Subdivisions
- PRE- Preservation (certain lands within the City of Oldsmar only)
- LC- Land Conservation (certain lands within the City of Tarpon Springs only)

Most of the land in the Preserve has incompatible future land use and zoning classifications which further complicates the situation.

II. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PRESERVE

Future Land Use Classification Changes

We believe that the best way to ensure the protection of the Brooker Creek Preserve is to change the future land use classifications so that all of the Preserve will be designated as Preservation except for the following-

Uses to remain (or be changed to) Preservation-Resource Management:

- Hydrogen-sulfide facility
- Blending facility
- Interim chemical facility
- Environmental Lands Division Headquarters
- Six wellfield parcels operated by Tampa Bay Water
- Division of Forestry Workstation
- Environmental Education Center
- Lora Lane Residence
- Radio tower
- Alcohol treatment facility

Detailed maps and information for each of the exceptions are provided in Figure 6.

Zoning Classification Changes

We propose that along with the above land use changes, the zoning in the Preserve be changed to the following five compatible categories and one existing overlay district:

- P/C- Preservation/Conservation (Figure 7)
- AL- Aquatic Lands (Figure 8)
- P-RM- Preservation-Resource Management (Figure 9)
- PRE- Preservation (lands within the City of Oldsmar only) (Figure 10)
- WPD- Wellhead Protection Overlay (All unincorporated lands east of East Lake Road and north of the Progress Energy ROW)
- LC- Land Conservation (lands within City of Tarpon Springs only) (Figure 11)

All of the Preserve will be designated P/C except for:

- Lands within the City of Oldsmar will remain or be changed to PRE.
- Tidal wetland areas near the Anclote River will be designated AL.
- Facilities/uses which are to remain or be changed to a land use of Preservation-Resource Management will be given the compatible zoning classification of P-RM.
- Lands within the City of Tarpon Springs will remain or be changed to LC.

Designation of the Boundaries of the Preserve

Research which the Friends has conducted shows that the current adopted boundaries of the Preserve described in Resolution 99-250 are not up to date and have numerous errors.

Therefore, we ask that the Commission adopt a new resolution defining the correct boundaries of the Preserve. We believe that the following lands should not be included within the boundaries of the Preserve:

- Hydrogen-sulfide facility
- Blending facility
- Interim chemical facility
- Six wellfield parcels operated by Tampa Bay Water
- Radio tower
- Alcohol Treatment Facility

See Figure 12 which shows the lands that are currently considered part of the Preserve.

III. SUMMARY OF OUR PETITION

- The Future Land Use Classification for all of Brooker Creek Preserve will be changed to (or remain) Preservation except for on the following lands which will be designated Preservation-Resource Management -
 - Hydrogen-sulfide facility
 - Blending facility
 - Interim chemical facility
 - Environmental Lands Division Headquarters
 - Six wellfield parcels operated by Tampa Bay Water
 - Division of Forestry Workstation
 - Environmental Education Center
 - Lora Lane Residence
 - Alcohol treatment facility
 - Radio tower

- The Zoning Classification for all of Brooker Creek Preserve will be changed to Preservation/Conservation, Aquatic Lands, Preservation, Wellfield Protection Overlay or Land Conservation except for the lands listed above which will be changed to Preservation-Resource Management.

- The boundaries of Brooker Creek Preserve will be readopted to include all lands currently considered as part of the Preserve except for the following -
 - Hydrogen-sulfide facility- about 11.83 acres
 - Blending facility- about 98 acres
 - Interim chemical facility- about 2.63 acres
 - Six wellfield parcels operated by Tampa Bay Water- about 5.12 acres
 - Radio tower- about 0.57 acres
 - Alcohol Treatment Facility- about 11.74 acres

- If additional lands were ever needed in the future for an unforeseen necessary utility use which could be located nowhere else but in the Preserve, the county could always request a land use and zoning change to fulfill such a need. This option, which will always be available to the county, will ensure that any additional projects on Preserve lands will be truly necessary and will be openly communicated to the public.

IV. CLOSING

The county's vision of the Brooker Creek Preserve was clearly explained in the Goals and Mission of the County Commission approved Brooker Creek Preserve Management Plan (Figure 13) almost 13 years ago. We believe that these fundamental principles of land preservation, restoration, conservation, environmental education, passive recreation and protection continue to apply today.

We are suggesting the removal of about 130 acres from the Preserve. These lands have been used for projects that do not benefit the Preserve including several utility facilities, the alcohol treatment facility, several potable water wells and the radio tower. The removal of these lands will ensure that there is a clear distinction between what lands are in the Preserve and what types of uses are acceptable in it.

Along with the removal of about 130 acres, if there ever came a time when the county needed additional Preserve lands for a countywide utility need, there is always the option of requesting a land use and zoning change to fulfill such an obligation.

As the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, we urge the Board of County Commissioners to follow our recommendations regarding the future land use, zoning and boundaries of the Brooker Creek Preserve. We hope that the Board realizes what an amazing and priceless asset the Brooker Creek Preserve is and why it is so critical that we do everything we can to protect it.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve