

November 12, 2009

Via Electronic Mail Only

Edith M. Stewart
Public Affairs Administrator
Office of Public Affairs
Hillsborough County
County Center, 26th Floor
601 East Kennedy Blvd
Tampa, FL 33602

RE: Cone Ranch Proposal

Dear Ms. Stewart:

I am writing to you ahead of the upcoming Cone Ranch Advisory Panel ("Panel") meeting on Monday November 16, 2009 to bring you current on the status of Florida Conservation & Environmental Group's ("FCEG") proposal to preserve and restore Cone Ranch.

During the most recent Hillsborough County Commission meeting, the County discussed undertaking a fairly broad and complex evaluation of a possible consolidation of all of the public water systems in Hillsborough County. It is our understanding of these discussions that this consolidation would necessarily include the enterprise fund of Water Resource Services ("Water Department"), which claims ownership of Cone Ranch. As part of this potential consolidation, it is our further understanding that a valuation of all of the County's water system assets, including Cone Ranch, would need to be completed.

As you know, an integral part of FCEG's proposal would require that the Water Department divest its ownership of Cone Ranch so that it can be permanently preserved. As the Water Department has stated publicly on many occasions, they have no interest whatsoever in preserving or restoring Cone Ranch, but rather they are interested solely in maximizing its monetary value as an asset on their balance sheet. This sentiment is obviously at odds with the ethic of environmental preservation.

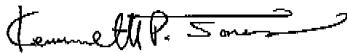
With respect to timing, it has been indicated by various County staff that the appraisal and evaluation processes could take a year or more; and the ultimate consolidation process could take even longer. Additionally, there are still many items that still must be completed in order to assess both the viability of the proposed consolidation as well as the permanent preservation of Cone Ranch including; i) land and asset appraisals; ii) environmental assessments; iii) wildlife assessments; iv) water rights evaluations and connected inter-local agreements and many others. Since none of these items has been undertaken, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to settle on an appropriate course of action.

Lastly, regardless of whether the Panel chooses to make any recommendations at all to preserve Cone Ranch -- choosing perhaps one of the options delineated in the County's Disposition Alternatives Analysis matrix or some hybrid thereof or simply chooses to defer to the Water Department and do nothing -- it appears that little can be done at the present time until the broader question of the water utility system consolidation is evaluated.

As you know, FCEG began its discussions with the county regarding Cone Ranch in mid-2008 and we continue to believe strongly in the possibilities of public/private partnerships and in the preservation of environmentally sensitive land. However, and disappointingly, FCEG is notifying you and the Panel that while it will continue monitoring matters related to the preservation of Cone Ranch (and remains highly interested and available to participate in its preservation and restoration) it will be difficult to properly engage in any course of action until Hillsborough County has completed its evaluation of the potential water system consolidation.

Once these items and the evaluative process is completed by the County (or Water Department as appropriate), FCEG will determine whether or not it can continue to participate further in the process and in what capacity. Of course, in the interim, we remain available to provide information and advice as needed.

Sincerely yours,



Ken Jones
Partner and General Counsel
Florida Conservation & Environmental Group

cc: Heidi McCree, Chair, Cone Ranch Advisory Panel
Mike Merrill, Assistant County Administrator, Finance