



*Working hand in hand for
positive economic development
in Citrus County.*



Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Blvd M.S. 49
Tallahassee, FL 32399

June 25, 2013

Re: Citrus 181-060713 Three Sisters Springs Visitor's Center and Site Development

To Whom It May Concern:

The Citrus County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council join in support of the application of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for RESTORE funds for its Three Sisters Springs Visitor's Center and Site Development project.

The ecologically-important Three Sisters Springs is a refuge for the endangered Florida manatee. The property was purchased for manatee protection in 2010 following concerted efforts and years of fundraising by thousands of citizens, contributions from family foundations, state Florida Forever funds and numerous other monetary sources, including the City of Crystal River, Southwest Florida Water Management, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Under the purchase agreement, management of the property was assigned to USFWS. The agreement also includes a directive to provide public access to the property for educational and limited recreational purposes. The proposed Visitor's Center and Site Development project on U.S. Hwy 19 for which USFWS seeks RESTORE funds will provide a starting point for the visitor's experience while minimizing vehicular impact on the Three Sisters property. The Center will serve to educate the public about manatees and their habitats, Florida's unique aquifer and spring system, and the importance of fresh water to the health of the Gulf.

Citrus County is the only place in the world where people may still legally swim with the endangered Florida manatee. Consequently, ecotourism is a major component of the Citrus County economy. Earlier this year, Duke Energy announced it was decommissioning its nuclear plant in the County, resulting in the loss of 600 jobs in a local economy that was just beginning to see recovery. It now means ecotourism plays an even greater economic role in Citrus County. The development of the Three Sisters Springs project will greatly benefit our economy, the aquatic health of our waters, and support manatee conservation. We request your support of the application of USFWS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Don Taylor".

Don Taylor

Citrus County Economic Development Council
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Josh Wooten".

Josh Wooten

Citrus County Chamber of Commerce
President / CEO

A proud member of the
tampaBAY
partnership