

RESTORE ACT Project Proposal

Organization: Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park, Inc.

Project Name: Cherokee Sink Public Use

Project Location: 30°12'45.58"N 84°18'15.47"W

Closed section of Wakulla-Arran Road within Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park and Wakulla Springs Protection Zone.

Project Summary:

Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park, Inc., a 501c(3) non-profit educational organization, seeks funding to develop and operate a recreation area known as Cherokee Sink. This is a tract within the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park. We are seeking funding to open Cherokee Sink, once again, to swimming, and to include uses such as SCUBA diving and public trails. Florida acquired the 1,500-acre parcel in January, 2000.

According to the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park Unit Management Plan (approved December 2007) the 1,500-acres of highly disturbed uplands is an area that presents an opportunity to divert (future) demand for expanded recreational access away from the lodge complex and waterfront and other sensitive resource areas. (UMP, pp 87)

The UMP envisions shelters, a permanent restroom and improved parking to access this recreational and natural feature. The area is well suited for swimming and multi-use recreational trails, the former being consistent with the historic use of this area.

1.2 Does this project have a:

REGIONAL BENEFIT – YES.

According to a recent report on Trends in Outdoor Recreation and Camping,¹ overall outdoor recreation participation across the U.S. remained steady in 2011 compared to 2010. Overall, outdoor recreation participants increased since 2006. Total outdoor outings declined slightly, while Wakulla County's eco-tourism program is at its beginning stages. Certified Green Guides (through the local TCC program) offer a variety of guided experiences, attracting visitors from Leon, Franklin, Gadsden counties and South Georgia.² Guided fishing lures visitors from Atlanta and the Carolinas, while the main Wakulla Springs complex regularly welcomes people from all over the world.³

1.3 Project Description:

This proposal will: Protect natural resources; develop jobs; improve a state park; benefit the economy and ecological resources; add to tourism; and requires Planning Assistance.

Upon our request, the Florida Park Service, Bureau of Park Planning, provided a site plan (attached). The Cherokee Sink parcel at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park is located at 30°12'45.58"N 84°18'15.47"W, Wakulla County.

¹ Outdoor Foundation. *Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2011*. Boulder, CO. www.outdoorfoundation.org

² Palmettoexpeditions.com

Cherokee Sink is a large sinkhole lake located in the southwest portion of the park. The collapse of this sinkhole when formed was sufficiently deep to intercept the water table allowing it to become water filled. Dive exploration has shown the sink to be about 60 feet deep with a silt, sandy bottom. This silt and sand has eroded into the sinkhole at a great rate over the years. It is believed that Cherokee Sink had a much greater depth than 60 feet and was most likely connected to the Wakulla Spring conduit system before the erosion occurred.

The scope of the plan has a high potential of creating an additional tourism destination in an existing but under-served area of the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park. Because of its location away from the main park complex, and historic interest in swimming and other recreational activities, services supporting these activities have the potential to add jobs.

Improvements to the Cherokee Sink parcel within the State Park are a desired feature of the park's approved Unit Management Plan. (UMP, pp 176)

The improvements also call for a Phase 1 Archaeological Survey prior to proceeding, funding for which is included.

The new infrastructure will benefit both the local economy and the park's ecological resources.

Wakulla Springs UMP is concerned that the daily carrying capacity at the main waterfront complex of 1,090 visitors daily (in the summer) is exceeded. Indeed, in the years since the UMP's approval in 2007 the public overwhelms that waterfront by another 1,000 people daily in the summer. One UMP proposal is to offer Cherokee Sink as an alternative to swimmers, which it did for a short time.

Because the Health Department closed the area in 2009 to swimming due to a lack of sewer-connected restrooms, we

seek to broaden the UMP suggested improvements. These improvements will alleviate the carrying capacity pressure on the main spring boil, Wakulla Spring.

The lack of protection to the area, resulting in continued poaching and vandalism, is addressed with the addition of a ranger residence on the parcel. (UMP: "Closure and security of the site at night.") There is no security.

Recreational users will have access to a new bathhouse/concession building with restrooms and showers.

Given the current ecological disturbance at the Cherokee Sink parcel, the appeal and location of any trail system will be evaluated along with an ecological restoration proposal.

The Wakulla County sewer line runs down an abandoned county road (Wakulla-Arran) within the state park. It is in close proximity to Cherokee Sink. Water supply is also close by. Permitting for hook-ups and construction will be included in the scope of work.

Additional concerns about the degradation of underlying karst systems are considered. We realize the sensitivity of above-ground activity to the Woodville Karst cave system that contributes water to Wakulla Spring and to Spring Creek

Current internal circulation on the Cherokee Sink parcel consists of a dirt road with patches of soft sands, wallowed-out area and stretches that allow for the passing of only one vehicle at a time. Our proposal addresses improvements to access and egress, and long-term safety and maintenance needs. The only access to this sinkhole lake is by foot along a 1-mile walking trail.

1.4 Anticipated Project Outcome

Cherokee Sink Recreation Area will be open during regular park operations hours. Entrance fees will be collected at a separate pay station facility. FWSSP will employ one full time person with an anticipated salary of \$25,000 to operate and manage the facility; two part-time OPS personnel to maintain trails and restrooms, anticipated annual salary for two \$24,000.

New facilities, residence and improvements to the land will generate local building industry opportunities.

1.5 Technical and Administrative Feasibility

The Cherokee Sink addition will offer an attractive location, easily accessible from S.R. 61. Hook up to existing sewer and water is within the technical feasibility range since it is only feet away from the main swimming area. The Florida Park Service (FPS), Bureau of Design and Construction has experience in overseeing such projects and FWSSP will partner with FPS to assure qualified contractors are hired.

1.6 Community Resilience

N/A

1.7 Benefits of this project, direct, indirect or both

X Environmental/Restoration/Protection

The addition of restrooms will reduce or eliminate the pollution that closed the area to swimmers. Water quality restoration will open the sinkhole lake to swimmers.. Annual evaluation of water quality. Environmental impact of unsupervised usage of the sinkhole lake will be eliminated, thus keeping the destruction of recently restored sinkhole vegetation to a minimum. Interpretation along hiking trails

will demonstrate the devastation that occurs with habitat loss, and benefits of habitat restoration. The importance of above-ground watershed protection will be highlighted for community interpretation projects.

Human presence in the area will naturally add to the protection from vandalism and poaching.

X Economic Benefits

Opening Cherokee Sink to recreation contributes to the regional and local economy with the addition of jobs and a small store/concession.

X Social Benefits

Wakulla County has no public swimming pool. Closing Cherokee Sink removed a long-standing tradition of swimming in this lake. This deprives our local and regional swimmers and contributes to the overcrowding of Wakulla Spring waterfront during the long, hot summer months. The quality of life and joy of being able to swim at Cherokee Sink is a desirable feature. Additionally, the presence of personnel, and hook-up to available sewer, addresses health and safety issues.

X Other Benefits

In discussions with visitors, local residents and tourism industry representatives, the opening of the Cherokee Sink area will generate publicity throughout the region. It will be a “what’s new in Wakulla” event for promotion purposes.