



Legislation Text

File #: 20-0405, **Version:** 1

Agenda Item Name:

Support for Alachua Conservation Trust's Federal Grant Applications to Obtain Funds for Land Conservation in Alachua County and the Santa Fe River Basin

Presenter:

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Description:

Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) is applying for two federal grants from the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) that, if awarded, will provide funding for the acquisition of conservation easements to protect non-industrial farm land and wetlands within Alachua County. Staff requests the Board to authorize the County Manager to submit the attached Partner Contribution Forms to ACT for use in ACT's federal grant applications for RCPP and NAWCA.

Recommended Action:

Authorize the County Manager or her designee to sign and submit the attached partner contribution letters for Alachua Conservation Trust's federal grant applications for RCPP and NAWCA.

Prior Board Motions:

None

Fiscal Consideration:

The attached partner commitment submittal under NAWCA would state that in FY 2020/2021, the County will spend at least \$1M for fee-simple and less-than-fee conservation acquisitions in Alachua County.

The attached partner commitment letter submittal under RCPP would state that over a period of four years (2021 - 2024), the County will spend at least \$3M each year for fee-simple and less-than-fee conservation acquisitions in Alachua County.

In these partnerships with Alachua County, federal grants could award:

- NAWCA - \$1M per phase each year
- RCPP - \$12M over four years (5th yr. contribution of \$3M, dependent on Wild Spaces Public Places renewal)

The grants could be used to leverage additional funding sources for the Alachua County Forever program's land conservation acquisitions and save funding resources.

The County's commitment is conditioned on:

- 1) The continued receipt of sufficient revenues through the one-half cent surtax;
- 2) The annual adoption of a County budget appropriating these funds; and
- 3) The participation of willing sellers meeting the goals and requirements of the Alachua County Forever program.

Background:

Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) is applying for two federal grants from the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) that, if awarded, will provide funding for the acquisition of conservation easements to protect non-industrial farm land and wetlands within Alachua County.

One federal grant application is for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) which awards Farm Bill funds through NRCS to protect farmland in a defined region. ACT's RCPP application, entitled Surface to Springs, identifies a proposed region that includes most of Alachua County, the Santa Fe River Basin, and portions of the Suwannee River Watershed.

The second federal grant application is for a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant which awards funds through the USFWS to protect wetland habitat. ACT's NAWCA application includes identified wetland areas in the southeastern corner of Alachua County.

These applications require evidence that ACT is supported by a partner entity that is already committed to conservation of land and water resources within the proposed regions and that the grant awards will complement those existing conservation efforts in the same regions. All of the Alachua County Forever Program's (ACF) current and potential future acquisition projects would satisfy this requirement.

Therefore, ACT would like to recognize its ongoing partnership with Alachua County and specifically identify Alachua County through the ACF program as a partner entity in its RCPP and NAWCA grant applications. If ACT is awarded either grant, those federal grant funds will be able to be used in partnership with the County's land conservation acquisition projects and therefore amplify ACF resources.

In requesting County support of these federal applications, ACT is requesting formal acknowledgement from Alachua County of its own existing commitments to land and water protection through the ACF program by signing the attached "Partner Contribution Forms."

This acknowledgement by the County is not an obligation for any specific purchase or partnership on any parcel of land, rather, it is merely providing evidence in ACT's application that ACT is working with a partner entity that already has a proven commitment and ability to carry out conservation projects within the proposed region for a 5-year grant award period. No County ACF funds are permitted to be used for conservation projects outside of Alachua County.

Request the Board of County Commissioners allow the County Manager (or Director of Office of Land Conservation & Management) to submit the attached Partner Contribution Forms to ACT for use in ACT's federal grant applications for RCPP and NAWCA.

Comp Plan Reference:

Alachua County Comprehensive Plan (2019-2040):

- Future Land Use Element: 6.0 RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL POLICIES; Objective 6, Policy 6.1.1, states:

“The County shall encourage the continuation of productive agricultural uses through an integrated program of strategies, including innovative land use regulations in conjunction with transfer of development rights and support for use of local, State, and Federal incentives including pursuit of funds from state and federal programs for purchase of agricultural conservation easements and purchase of development rights. The County shall initiate a stewardship program utilizing strategies from but not limited to the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act, Section 163.3177 (11) (d) F.S. and Section 570.70, F.S., as appropriate to Alachua County.”

- Conservation and Open Space Element: 6.0 LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM; Objective 6.4 “Other Acquisition Programs,” states:

“Coordinate with other programs for the acquisition and management of natural areas and open space for recreational, open space and conservation purposes.”

Policy 6.4.1 states:

“The County shall seek to maximize the effectiveness of local revenue sources by using them to leverage funds available from federal, state, municipal, private non-profit, and Water Management District programs, such as Florida Forever, Florida Communities Trust (FCT), Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL), and Save-Our-Rivers (SOR).”

Policy 6.4.2 states:

“The County shall provide support, in the form of information, coordination, assistance in obtaining grants, and other support activities to organizations and agencies that acquire and protect natural areas and open space for conservation, open space, and recreational purposes.”