

CONSENT AGENDA



INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA
AGENDA ITEM
Assistant County Administrator /
Department of General Services

Date: November 15, 2016

To: The Honorable Board of County Commissioners

Thru: Jason E. Brown, County Administrator

From: Michael C. Zito, Assistant County Administrator

Subject: Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Gopher Tortoise Habitat Management Funding Assistance

Description and Conditions:

On September 2, 2016, staff applied for Habitat Management Assistance Funding (HMAF) from the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC.) North Sebastian Conservation Area (NSCA) ranked among the top statewide applications received and was chosen to receive \$14,000 to conduct prescribed burning, roller-chopping and exotics treatment, and to install silt fencing to create a holding area for the purposes of receiving Gopher Tortoises from development sites that have Incidental Take Permits.

As part of the funding assistance that provides for silt fence installation, the County agrees to become a Gopher Tortoise Incidental Take Permit (ITP) Recipient Site and to manage the conservation area for gopher tortoises in the foreseeable future. This management is consistent with and furthers the conservation goals of managing the site under the Sebastian Area-Wide Florida Scrub-jay Habitat Conservation Plan (approved March 2000) as well as the management goals and objectives of the County's Approved Management Plan (approved June 2001). It further aids in meeting the management plan objectives agreed upon by the by Florida Communities Trust (a cost-share partner for the purchase of the NSCA).

The funding assistance provided does not require any monetary match.

Analysis:

In the late 1990s, Indian River County purchased several parcels that now make up the NSCA (407 acres) with cost share funding from the Florida Communities Trust (FCT). The conservation area was purchased to preserve and manage native vegetation for rare species. Additionally, the conservation area serves as a key component in the Sebastian Area-Wide Florida Scrub-jay Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) which allows for the Incidental Take of Florida Scrub-jays within the Sebastian Highlands. Management objectives of the conservation area in both the Management Plan and the HCP are compatible with the management for Gopher Tortoises as they share the same habitat and have similar habitat requirements (i.e. low open canopy and well drained soils).

From 1991-2007 developers statewide were able to mitigate for gopher tortoises on-site by receiving an ITP. This permit authorized the "take" of gopher tortoise burrows, gopher tortoises

and all commensal species residing in the burrow through bulldozing or clearing activities. All ITPs that were issued from 1991-2007 are perpetual and transferable, meaning that all tortoises within those permitted areas can legally be entombed rather than relocated. Since 2007, the FWC and local organizations have worked with developers who have ITPs that have not yet conducted clearing activities to ensure that tortoises are safely retrieved and relocated to preserved areas. Statewide there are only two other ITP Recipient Sites, both of which are in northern Florida.

To become an ITP Recipient Site no permit is necessary, only a letter of agreement between the owner of the property and FWC. This letter of agreement does not obligate the owner to any other requirements or commitments for future funding. Any funds received from the HMAF will improve the quality of the habitat for future relocation opportunities and the County will still retain the ability to become a recipient site in the future which may be needed for future County projects.

The funding provided under the HMFA expedites and funds habitat management that would otherwise be paid for by the County through the Conservation budget approved each year. Currently, the Conservation budget provides for \$8,000 in other contractual services which is utilized to fund habitat management activities throughout the County’s conservation areas (over 2,500 acres).

Funding:

The HMFA provided by FWC does not require any monetary match. A budget amendment would be necessary for \$14,000, which would be reimbursed by the FWC purchase order which is issued to the County.

Recomendation:

Staff respectfully recommends the Board to authorize staff to provide FWC a letter of agreement for receiving gopher tortoises from Incidental Take Permitted sites and futher authorize the necessary budget ammendment for reimbursable expenses as provided in the FWC purchase order.

ATTACHMENT

Purchase Order from FWC dated 10/10/16
Example Letter of Authorization

Approved Agenda Item

BY:

Jason E. Brown
County Administrator

FOR:

November 22, 2016

Indian River County	Approved	Date
Administration		
County Attorney		
Budget		
Department		
Risk Management		