

Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
BOCC Assembly Room
315 Court Street, 5th Floor
Clearwater, FL

Brooker Creek Preserve Issues and Policies
9:30 am to 4:00 pm

Mr. William Davis, Bureau Director
Department of Environmental Management

Introductory Comments

Today, we will continue the discussion on issues that have been debated, discussed and analyzed in the newspapers, posted on blog sites, sent in letters and e-mails, discussed in personal visits to our offices, in Friends meetings, in appearances at the County Commission meetings and at the Environmental Science Forum, and probably over the dinner table or having a beer with friends.

The difference and importance of today, however, is that we will bring all the issues together in a holistic and comprehensive review. We have received the input of many citizens and the Environmental Science Forum. Now we are prepared to give you the information you need so that you, in return, can give us direction in your role as our policy makers.

Brooker Creek Preserve, in all its 8500 acres, is the prize of our highly valued environmental lands. It deserves the tag line, “Our Wildest Place.” In our urbanized county of almost one million people that is nearly built-out, it is incredible that a property this large has been set aside.

So you might ask yourself, if the Preserve is so valued by everyone, why are we here today? Perhaps each person here today has an opinion, but – with 100% confidence – I can tell you that we are not here because there is some covert, diabolical plan to

dismember the Preserve. Also it is not because our County leadership has changed in the last few years – our award winning environmental record speaks for itself. In my opinion, when you boil it down, this workshop we're having today was predestined in the early 1990's when we asked that the properties purchased with Utilities money join with other Brooker Creek properties acquired by the County to become known as Brooker Creek Preserve. In doing so we, of course, benefited by almost doubling the size of the Preserve.

We called it a Preserve and our intentions were honest – perhaps management area or conservation area may have been a better name, but it would not have changed our plans. Our team of professional Environmental Lands staff follows our management plan, and we know the concerns being discussed today have no reflection on them – they are – hands down – the best at what they do.

At the time the Preserve was created, it was relatively unknown whether Utilities would need to use any of the property; but we knew the possibility existed and indeed certain needs have come about.

Over the last 16 years through our progress at the Preserve to give our citizens several opportunities for access, our community has grown very attached and protective. Not all the dialogue has been constructive, but this is an emotional issue for the people who care.

It is understandable that these new facilities and proposals throw a mixed message. So today, because our community has grown and our needs for services have increased whether for drinking water, recreation or the environment, it is time to re-examine these needs. We request you clarify your policies and we, your staff, will appropriately update our management plans.