

PETITION

PUT THE “PROTECTION” BACK IN LAKE COUNTY’S RURAL PROTECTION AREAS

WHEREAS rural areas provide environmental services and are essential to the health, safety, and well-being of Lake County residents. Rural lands are vital for agriculture, forestry, wildlife preservation, open space, recreation, aquifer recharge, flood control, carbon sequestration, and water purification; and

WHEREAS the value of rural areas is codified in numerous Florida Statutes including the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act, the Rural Family Lands Act, the Wekiva River Protection Act, and the Community Planning Act; and

WHEREAS a 2023 legislative finding stated, “*A thriving rural economy with a strong agricultural base, healthy natural environment, and viable rural communities is an essential part of Florida...*” and ... “*the agricultural, rural, natural resource, and commodity values of rural lands are vital to the state’s economy, productivity, rural heritage, and quality of life.*” (Chapter 570.70(1) and (3) Florida Statutes); and

WHEREAS Florida’s Community Planning Act requires that every local government create a comprehensive land use plan so that it can, among other things, “protect natural resources within their jurisdictions.” (Chapter 163.3161 (4) Florida Statutes); and

WHEREAS Florida’s Community Planning Act specifies that future land use plans should discourage “urban sprawl” (Chapter 163.3177 (6) 2h, Florida Statutes), which the Act defines as “*a development pattern characterized by low density, automobile-dependent development*” that fails “*to provide a clear separation between urban and rural uses*” (163.3178 (52), Florida Statutes); and

WHEREAS Lake County’s 2030 Horizon Comprehensive Land Use Plan, adopted in 2010, recognizes the preservation of core areas, designated as Rural Protection Areas, as a fundamental component of its growth management plan. The Comprehensive Plan states that “*Lake County shall exercise extraordinary care to uphold the long-term integrity of Rural Protection Areas and shall recognize their primacy in future land use decisions.*” The Rural Protection Areas (RPA) are identified on the Future Land Use map as Wekiva-Ocala RPA, Emerald Marsh RPA, and Yalaha-Lake Apopka RPA; and

WHEREAS through the Interlocal Service Boundary Agreement process Lake County municipalities are annexing lands within the Rural Protection Areas at an alarming rate. Annexations are transforming rural lands into urban zoning categories and densities, which fail to provide a clear separation between urban and rural uses; and

WHEREAS the Comprehensive Planning process requires extensive public input related to growth management while Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements do not require any public input and are typically created with a lack of transparency; and

WHEREAS, numerous recent municipal annexations of land located within Rural Protection Areas have preempted and circumvented Lake County Comprehensive Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies, resulted in urban sprawl, incompatible land uses adjacent to existing rural parcels, loss of Lake County's rural heritage, and diminished health, safety, well-being and quality of life for Lake County residents.

NOW THEREFORE, I (we) hereby petition:

1. Lake County government to use all its available power and legal authority to stop municipalities from annexing and urbanizing lands within Rural Protection Areas, including modifying Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements and Joint Planning Agreements.

2. Lake County municipalities to change their Comprehensive Plans and Land Development Regulations such that they recognize, respect, and adopt Lake County designated Rural Protection Areas and their associated Land Use Series, Open Space requirements, density categories and development strategies, and address preservation of county designated Rural Protection Areas in Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements and Joint Planning Agreements.

NAME (print and sign)

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DATE

Please mail the completed Petition to the Lake County Conservation Council, P.O. Box 759, Eustis, FL 32727-0759 or email to: hepting.jane@gmail.com

We will be collecting signatures to submit, in bulk, to the commissioners in the near future.