



Greater Pine Island Civic Association

Protecting Pine Island Since 1957

P.O. Box 3044
Pineland, FL 33945
GPICA.org

March 1, 2022

Jesse Lavender
Director, Lee County Parks and Recreation
Terry Park
3410 Palm Beach Blvd.
Fort Myers, FL 33916

Dear Mr. Lavender,

For 65 years, the Greater Pine Island Civic Association (GPICA) has worked collaboratively with Lee County government to ensure a good quality of life and a healthy environment for local citizens. On Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2021, members of the GPICA attended the meeting of the Conservation Land Acquisition and Stewardship Advisory Committee (CLASAC) to provide input related to saw palmetto berry harvesting that had taken place in 2021 at the Pine Island Flatwoods Preserve.

We expressed concerns on behalf of our membership and Board about the harvesting. Most importantly we noted that:

1. The harvesting was not aligned with ecologically sound management of county preserve lands;
2. It was undertaken without adequate information on the possible short- and long- term impacts to Island wildlife;
3. There was no pre-harvest data available by which to measure the vendor compliance restricting the amount of berries to be removed;
4. It is doubtful commercial harvesting would deter illegal harvesting and
5. Citizens of the island were not given an advance opportunity to comment on this significant change to the management practices of an important land parcel.

During the meeting, you stated that “good government is going to look at every option that we have available to us in the future and evaluate and study it and bring it back for more discussion.”

We could not agree more. That is why we are respectfully requesting the results of the evaluation conducted following the harvest, in support of further discussion on allowing commercial harvesting on Pine Island and other Lee County preserve lands in the future.

Board of Directors

Helen Fox, President | Nadine Slimak, Vice President | Michael Sweeney, Treasurer |
Deborah Swisher-Hicks | Cindy Bear | Connie D'Alessio | Tim Heitz | Shari Perkins

In addition to data gathered about the specifics, we would also like to know:

- How any funds garnered from the harvest have been allocated and how they are being utilized;
- What actions might be taken in the future.

Last, in order to facilitate trust — a tenet of good government — we request that the GPICA be updated, on a routine basis, about management considerations for Pine Island parcels so that we can assist the County in gaining input from our broader community and assist the county in meeting the preservation goals established through the Conservation 2020 land acquisition program.

We thank you in advance for responding to these requests.

We value the ideal that good government is representational and builds on partnerships for strength, and we look forward to continuing to have a productive partnership with you and the wider Lee County Parks and Recreation Department.

Sincerely,

Helen Fox
President, GPICA
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Cynthia Bear
Board Member, GPICA
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info@GPICA.org; Lee County Commissioners Kevin Ruane, Cecil Pendergrass, Ray Sandelli, Brian Hamman, Frank Mann; Executive Assistant Pamela Smith; Richard Wesch, Lee County Attorney; Roger Desjarlais, Lee County Manager