

Three Sisters Springs Community Working Group

The Three Sisters Springs Community Working Group has reached unanimous consensus on these recommendations as the first step toward the development of our community's urban wildlife refuge.

We offer these six priorities as a starting point for the residents, the city, the federal government, the school system and community interest groups to work together to give direction toward the best utilization of the refuge.

Every attempt has been made to look at the restrictive covenants from the Florida Community Trust (FCT) as a guide toward developing these recommendations.

The working group can be called back by the city or USFWS if needed.

All meetings were conducted under the Florida Sunshine laws and were advertised and open to the public.

Executive Summary

A community working group reached consensus on the following six recommendations.

1. A Visitors Center should be built off the property contiguous to, or as close as possible to Three Sisters Springs (TSS).
 - A. This should include parking and interactions such as ticket sales, gift shop, interpretive displays, general TSS facts/history, etc.
2. Visitors from the Visitors Center should either walk or be transported onto the property.
 - A. There should be minimal vehicular traffic and parking on the property, i.e., staff only.
3. An Educational Building should be built on the property.
 - A. The intended audience is all ages - children through seniors.
 - B. A consensus of the details of the building: footprint, square footage, interior arrangement, location, staffing, maintenance, etc. will be determined at further meetings.
 - C. The group recommended USFWS and Friends group conduct further community workshops to define the vision and mission of the Education Building/Center. Citrus Schools may recommend curriculum guidance and expertise. Discussion included possible hands-on field trips/excursions and lesson plans. Refuge could serve as an outdoor laboratory full of opportunities to supplement and support current classroom activities.
4. Improvements to the property should have due consideration to minimize the impact and intrusive nature to the residential neighbors around the TSS Property.
5. Improvements to the property should be flexible and evolve as needed.
 - A. Changes can and should be made as new information is learned. Examples include:
 - B. Visitor Capacity; seasonal maximum and minimums, durations, visitor feedback, etc.
 - C. Educational opportunities and requests.
6. Restore native habitat. The natural plant habitat should be restored on and around current and future trails.

Executive Summary - Continued

In addition, the working group reached consensus on the following principles:

- Visitor to the property should have a robust holistic educational experience.
 - ~All aspects of the experience should be “World Class.”
 - ~Conserve, protect and enhance natural resources.
 - ~Eco-System Eco-friendly and Water/habitat based.
 - ~TSS Property should expand visitor overall knowledge and information of the springs and its function as a manatee sanctuary, the aquifer, Karst system, river, etc. By contrast, Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park has a “Wildlife” theme and TSS should have a “Water/Habitat” theme.
 - ~All ages - Children through Senior.
 - ~Include passive opportunities-
 - More extensive and naturally restored walking paths and trails.
 - Educational signage, passive interpretive signage and or mobile app based.
 - Property and trails should incorporate “The Arts” using art to teach visitors about wildlife and habitat found along path and property - becomes a destination
See: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/willapa/arttrail.html>
 - ~Viewing platforms as per the Management Plan
 - ~Include bike rack at the entrance to connect current Crosstown Trail.

- Use the best environmental and eco-friendly practices, where practical, in the design of programs, infrastructures, transportation, etc.
 - ~Appropriately sited restrooms.
 - ~Attractive and welcoming entrance.

Supporting Information

The TSS Community Working Group was brought together to provide the City of Crystal River Council members and Staff a recommendation on how to move forward with improvements to TSS property. The group met four times from June 22, 2016 to September 21, 2016. The objective of the meetings was, “*To produce a community written guidance document detailing priority actions and timelines for the TSS property.*” A fifth meeting was held on October 13, 2016, to review and finalize this document.

Meeting objectives included:

- Develop trust and community between working group members.
- Develop a shared understanding of the property and project history.
- Develop shared understanding of the covenant requirements which may include common definitions of terms.
- Brainstorm a list of potential priorities for TSS.
- Discuss pros and cons of management activities and categorize based on importance, feasibility, desirability and cost.

The group discussed and reviewed the twenty-one (21) Covenants in the Declaration of Restrictive Covenants Agreement for TSS. The following is a summary of the discussion.

Complete:

1. Zoning changes.
4. A recognition sign.
10. Develop storm water facilities. Completed by SWFWMD with installation of the Wetlands.
13. A significant rotation of the wetlands shall be planted with native vegetation.
11. Storm water facility shall provide recreation open space of wildlife habitat.
18. A safe pedestrian sidewalk connection between the site and existing sidewalk.
21. Ground or surface water shall not be used for commercial purposes.

Partially implemented:

2. Provide at least four recreational facilities. Two of four have been installed: A picnic pavilion and a wildlife platform had been installed.
5. Interpretive signs or kiosks shall be provided. Some signs exist on the boardwalk and two kiosks are being built, but not yet installed.
6. At least 12 regularly scheduled educational classes shall be schedule per year. There was much discussion on this, especially as it pertains to an educational building on the property. Events that meet this covenant include: USFWS open houses, Marine Science Station expeditions to TSS. Friends Education Tours, USFWS interpretive talks, USFWS SUP Tours, i.e., film crews, Media (FAM) tours, etc. Also enhancements to the trails as indicated above in the executive summary contribute to this covenant.
8. Protect and enhance the listed and non-listed native wildlife species and habitat. Partially implemented with improvement to Lake Crystal.
9. Parking will have minimal impact. Temporary parking has minimal impact. Per 1 and 2 above regarding the Visitors Center, this will complete this covenant when implemented.
12. A significant portion of the upland area will be planted with native vegetation.
16. A feral animal program shall be implemented and will be ongoing as needed.
19. A nature trail shall be provided. A trail exists, however significant improvements are recommended by adding interpretive signage, and/or electronic Mobile APPs.
20. The project shall be linked to the land based trail system.

On going and will continue in perpetuity:

7. The project site shall be preserved and managed. This is in progress with the completion of the SWFWMD wetlands project and additional planting on the property.
14. Exotic vegetation shall be removed.
15. An ongoing monitoring and control program for invasive vegetation shall be implemented.
17. Determine the presence of archaeological sites.

Not implemented:

3. Provide access to existing open water shoreline. A clarification from Florida Communities Trust (FCT) as to the intent of this covenant is needed. The city should actively pursue resolving the intent of this covenant with the FCT.

The following recommendations were discussed as part of a “wish list” and are presented here merely to provide whatever input a development firm, architects, etc. may choose to use or not use.

- No trash cans on the property outside the educational building - bring out what you bring in. Example “*Leave No Trace.*”
- Any building improvements to the property should blend in with the natural surroundings.
- Allow pedestrian access.
- Composting toilets, if practical.

A list of potential recreational activities that could meet Covenant Number 2 (passive recreation) was developed:

- Fishing pier on Lake Crystal
- Bike path
- Birding stations
- Tree/Shrub identification
- Manatee fact challenge
- Elevated or raised boardwalk around new wetlands area
- Nature path
- GEO caching
- Diving in Lake Crystal
- Nature photography

Minutes for each meeting are available through the City of Crystal River Deputy Clerk.

Working Group Members

Name	Community Organization
Dee Atkins	Citizen at large
Mike Crouch	Kings Bay Rotary
Chuck Dixon	Citrus County School District
Mike Engiles	META (Manatee Eco-Tourism Association)
Tom Gotterup	Friends of Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge
Jack Huegel	Save Crystal River, Inc.
Janis Huegel	Save Crystal River, Inc.
Joan Luebbe	Crystal River Waterfronts Advisory Board
Bob Mercer	Citizen at large
Mary Morgan-Smith	Friends of Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge
Gerry Mulligan	Crystal River Area Council
Earnie Olsen	Marine Science Station School District
Ardath Prendergast	Citrus County Chamber of Commerce
Pat Rose	Save the Manatee Club
Phillis Rosetti-Mercer	Crystal River Waterfronts Advisory Board
Charlie Slider	META (Manatee Eco-Tourism Association)
Adam Thomas	Citrus County Tourist Development
Katie Tripp	Save the Manatee Club
Lisa Vandebroe	Kings Bay Rotary
Josh Wooten	Citrus County Chamber of Commerce
Joy Hazell	Facilitator
Lisa Morris	City of Crystal River Deputy Clerk