



# Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

March 15, 2009

Mr. Calvin Harris, Chairman  
Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners  
315 Court Street  
Clearwater, FL 33756



Dear Chairman Harris:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc. and the Friends of Weedon Island, Inc. in regard to the Pinellas County budget discussions. Our organizations work to ensure that Brooker Creek Preserve and Weedon Island Preserve continue to excel as the ecological and historic gems of Pinellas County.

The Preserves are the rare yet accessible treasures of Pinellas County. They offer walkers, hikers, and paddlers an escape from the sights, sounds, and pressures of the everyday world. Glimpses of yesterday's Pinellas are just around the bend of the mangrove canoe trail and through the shadows of old growth trees. These treasures need to be protected by vigilant and knowledgeable staff, particularly in these times of drought and uncertainty. The lessons of history need to be taught to today's children, in hopes they will continue the legacy of Pinellas County's stewardship of these special places. The Preserves are visited by visitors from around the globe, showcasing our historic and wildest places.

The two world-class Education Centers, funded by "Penny for Pinellas", provide unique windows into the ecological and cultural history of the County. The Education Centers provide programs and events that not only offer free entertainment for families in very challenging economic times, but help children understand what science is and its value, perhaps encouraging them to pursue science as a career. While science in a classroom alone can be quite dry, the Education Centers offer science in action. The Education Centers are where the taxpayers can see their tax dollars in action too, from well equipped classrooms to interactive exhibits. These capital improvements, already paid for by our taxpayers, allow programs to be provided for all age groups and interests, ranging from preschool book time to teacher training.

Many of the Education Center programs are funded by the Friends groups, so their actual cost is not put on the taxpayer. However we require the venues and the staff to continue this work. The Centers' staff members are professional environmental educators, holding degrees and certifications that enable them to work with a broad audience on a multitude of topics. Any shuttering of these Centers will negate the progress and partnerships made by staff to date.

The behind-the-scenes efforts of the Environmental Lands Division ensure that the Preserves are provided sound stewardship. Uplands, wetlands, and waterways are maintained for their ecological health; boardwalks and trails are maintained for public access; and fire breaks are maintained for the health and safety of the Preserves and neighboring communities. Likewise, public safety and protection of environmental lands from adverse activities (arson, trespassing, motorized vehicle use, etc.) are provided by the Sheriff's Environmental Lands Unit (LIMA).

We urge you to view Brooker Creek, Weedon Island, and the County's other environmental lands as significant pieces of green infrastructure, needing your continued funding, care, and preservation. The voters approved a charter amendment for protection of these lands just last November. Please ensure that the budget process will underscore that vote with continued funding for ecological services, educational opportunities, and LIMA staffing at the County's Preserves.

Sincerely,

*Allyn Childress*

Chair, Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc.

*Robert "Bob" Kerstein*

President, Friends of Weedon Island, Inc.

Cc by email: Commissioner Nancy Bostock, Commissioner Neil Brickfield, Commissioner Susan Latvala, Commissioner John Morroni, Commissioner Karen Seel, Commissioner Kenneth Welch, Mr. Robert LaSala, Dr. Bruce Rinker, Ms. Theresa Blackwell, Ms. Diane Steinle, Mr. Howard Troxler

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