

RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

TELECONFERENCE

December 15, 2004

MEETING REPORT

Participants:

Council Members:

Chuck Aller	Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
Ernest Cox	Gunster, Yoakley & Stewart, P.A., West Palm Beach
Eric Draper	Florida Audubon, Tallahassee
Craig Evans	Stewardship America, Inc., Boca Raton
William Kerr	BKI, Inc., Consulting Ecologists, Indialantic
Charles B. Littlejohn	Florida Land Council, Tallahassee
Peter Madsen	CH2M HILL, Inc., Atlanta
Pete Spyke	Arapaho Citrus, Ft. Pierce

Guests:

Walker Banning	Florida Department of Community Affairs, Tallahassee
Doug Bournique	Indian River Citrus League, Vero Beach
Butch Calhoun	Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, Tallahassee
Jim Handley	Florida Cattlemen's Association, Kissimmee
Richard Hilsenbeck	The Nature Conservancy, Tallahassee
Debbie Keller	The Nature Conservancy, Tallahassee
Billy Kempfer	Kempfer Cattle Company, Melbourne
Patricia Williamson	CH2M HILL, Inc., Navarre

Meeting chaired by: Charles B. Littlejohn

Minutes prepared by: Craig Evans

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Teleconference Report:

1. Agenda Item A: INTRODUCTIONS/WELCOME: Chuck Littlejohn

Participants introduced themselves (see list above)

2. Agenda Item B: UPDATE ON START UP OF POTENTIAL PROJECTS:
RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (RLSP)

Rural Lands Committee, Indian River Citrus League: *Pete Spyke, chair*

The Indian River Citrus League established a Rural Lands Committee last year to work with and represent the interests of its citrus grower members and other rural landowners throughout the Indian River Citrus growing region (Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin and Okeechobee counties) on issues related to rural land planning, rural land valuation, and growth and development in rural areas.

Two efforts are now underway.

First, Sen. Ken Pruitt established a Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast (St. Lucie, Indian River, Martin counties) last spring. The Committee has been meeting since May 2004 and will issue a final report in September 2005. The report will go to Sen. Pruitt and will be used by the Florida Legislature and local governments in the Treasure Coast region to fashion plans to guide future growth.

At the last meeting of the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast (CSTC), the Indian River Citrus League's Rural Lands Committee was asked to form a subcommittee specifically to look at rural land issues, and to determine where agriculture will end up in the final landscape. The subcommittee will be meeting along with CSTC to draft the part of the report that will deal with rural lands.

Second, in February 2004, St. Lucie County held a planning charrette for a 28-square-mile area in the northern part of county where developers have come in with DRI (Development of Regional Impact) applications. The county wants to look at different types of settlement patterns for the area. The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council has been hired by the County to put together a team of consultants to see if a rural land type of methodology can be used to produce a different development footprint. This effort also has a deadline of September 2005.

These two projects will fully occupy the Rural Lands Committee for a good part of 2005.

Chuck Littlejohn asked: Does this involve rural land planning in general, with possibilities for applying some of the principals in Rural Lands Stewardship Program law?

Pete Spyke responded: It's a little different since lands in northern St. Lucie County already have been vested with one unit per acre, so agricultural uses will not be a part of the final plan. The effort will focus on how those involved in the planning effort want the landscape to end up. Have to come up with a plan, including how open space will be handled, so that is Rural Land-ish.

North St. Lucie County Planning Effort: *Pete Spyke*

See second effort described above.

Eglin Air Force Base Flyway/Northwest Florida Greenway Initiative: *Patricia Williamson*

Two meetings were held in December to explore the use of the Rural Lands Stewardship Program as a tool to help establish a 1,000-square-mile flyway/greenway across five counties in the Florida Panhandle to provide unhindered ingress and egress to Eglin Air Force Base and the Navy's Whiting Field to ensure the bases are able to continue their flight training and weapons testing missions.

Both meetings included presentations by Patricia Williamson from CH2M Hill's Navarre office in the Florida Panhandle, who has been working with Craig Evans on additional ways in which the Rural Lands Stewardship Program can be implemented, including new approaches for introducing stakeholders to the program's concepts. Patricia also is the contact person for CH2M Hill's work with Eglin Air Force Base.

The first meeting was held December 7 at the 1000 Friends of Florida office in Tallahassee in which a group of 14 people participated in person or by telephone. Participants included Charles Pattison, Dan Pennington and Janet Bowman of 1000 Friends of Florida; Debbie Keller and Richard Hilsenbeck of The Nature Conservancy; Tom Beck, Anita Jenkins, Ann Redmond and Tim Durham of WilsonMiller; and Patricia Williamson, as well as Walker Banning of the Department of Community Affairs, Chuck Littlejohn and Craig Evans.

The second meeting was held on December 8 at Jackson Guard in Niceville and included Jesse Borthwick, Gary Pelham and Kenneth W. Bristol of the Eglin Air Force Base Command; Pat Blackshear, Planning Director of Okaloosa County; Vernon Compton of The Nature Conservancy; and Patricia Williamson, with Debbie Keller and Craig Evans participating by telephone.

Eglin Air Force Base, the nation's largest air base and the leading test facility for the development of "smart weapons," is concerned that future housing and commercial development might make it impossible for the base to continue using airspace over surrounding civilian areas for missions such as low-level training flights and weapons testing.

The Northwest Florida Greenway project was launched in 2003 as a partnership between the Eglin Air Force Base, the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and The Nature Conservancy to address this issue.

The Northwest Florida Greenway project is intended to protect and sustain existing military lands and airspace, promote continued target industry growth, preserve the environmental quality and biodiversity of the region, maintain the economic viability of timber lands, and create additional recreational activities by protecting a corridor of undeveloped land between the Eglin Air Force Base Range and the Apalachicola National Forest.

The proposed footprint for the flyway/greenway is 10 miles wide and 100 miles long. It crosses five counties – Walton, Washington, Bay, Calhoun and Gulf. It would impact five major landowners – MC Davis, Bear Creek, Northern Trust Company, Deltona and Georgia Pacific – as well as many smaller landowners.

It has become apparent that there is not enough money or enough opportunities for negotiating conservation easements to establish the proposed flyway/greenway.

Property rights and land values are major issues.

As a result, the Rural Lands Stewardship Program is now being investigated as a tool that will use market economy forces to pay for protecting the air space, while maintaining private property rights and allowing land values to appreciate.

Chuck Littlejohn: What are the next steps? Is there a forum for making decisions?

Patricia Williamson: This is still in its infancy stages. Federal facilities are constrained in what they can do. The military command in Washington DC still is trying to decide how to deal with encroachment issues.

But everyone realizes they have to move quickly because of what's going on with property values, which are escalating rapidly.

It appears the Rural Lands Stewardship Program would help address many of the issues that have been raised – cost of land purchases, concern from private landowners about accepting easements, land valuation, future appreciation, not interfering with economic growth and development.

The next step is in deciding how to best involve the affected landowners.

Private Landowner/Private Developer Efforts: *Ernie Cox*

Two privately initiated projects are in the early stages of planning. The basic concept is that private owners are looking at creating Rural Land Stewardship Areas on areas of 20,000 to 40,000 acres. The concepts have been very well received by policy makers. This has been made possible by the new flexibility built into the legislation through SB 2188 that allows smaller project sizes and allows private landowners to initiate projects. These projects will show how the program can be tailored to meet a particular community's needs. Will be able to provide more details in next 45 days.

Craig Evans: This is very encouraging news. I commend Ernie for his work in this area. As a result of these efforts, developers are starting to work directly with private landowners to suggest the use of the RLSP as a way of accomplishing their development goals. This is exciting. It adds new opportunities for RLSP. And it adds new market forces to move it forward.

Eric Draper: I'm working on one of these projects with Ernie. Have had meetings with county commission, who are very receptive to the proposal. It would remove development rights off one property to protect natural resources and move credits to another property. This has a very good chance of going forward.

Bill Kerr: I've been watching his project as well. The environmental consultant has been selected, the landowner has been selected, and the developer is moving forward. It will be a very nice project and involves some very important, environmentally significant lands.

3. Agenda Items C &D: UPDATE ON OTHER RLSP RELATED ACTIVITIES – WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICTS

Craig Evans: The water management districts have responded positively to the language included in SB 2188 requiring that they provide assistance and support, where possible, to promote rural land stewardship planning.

There was a joint meeting on June 1 between representatives of South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and St. John's River Water Management District (SJRWMD) that was organized by Stewardship America and held at the Indian River Citrus League offices in Vero Beach. Both water management districts agreed at that meeting to work with IRCL's Rural Lands Committee to assist with its rural land planning efforts.

I also had meetings with senior staff at the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) and North West Florida Water Management District (NFWMD). Both also

indicated a willingness to work with groups as necessary and as opportunities came up to provide technical support, help with fund raising, and help with creating the geographic information systems land cover database and aerial photogrammetry needed to prepare for a rural land stewardship area. Some modest financial assistance also may be possible.

SJRWMD has become involved with the IRCL Rural Lands Committee in providing GIS maps and assistance with data gathering. Dave Fisk has told me that quite a few landowners in other counties have been approaching SJRWMD showing interest in the RLSP. He said he's collecting addresses and will be passing those on shortly.

SFWMD also has been very supportive of the RLSP and has created a staff position to help promote the concept. It also has committed resources to providing assistance to two rural counties – Glades and Hendry counties – to find ways of using the RLSP to protect land and water resources without taking any additional land areas off local tax roles. Pam Mac'Kie has spearheaded all of these efforts and is to be commended for the steps she has taken.

In my meetings with the water management districts, I have found them very supportive and willing to find ways to work together. They have only very limited financial resources at this point which can be devoted to RLSP efforts, but they are willing to do as much as they can within the resources they have.

Doug Bournique: Craig's assessment is just right. We have found the districts to be willing to lend as much help as they can, especially with mapping resources.

4. Agenda Item E: PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE AGENDA:

Chuck Littlejohn: Please see enclosed outline, passed out in advance of teleconference.

Is there a way we can get seed money down to local governments as an incentive to get them to pursue RLSP applications?

Have an estimated cost of \$500,000 to establish a Rural Lands Stewardship Area, which may be conservative. That's a lot for local government to swallow.

Any comments?

Silence.

Walker Banning: The new Secretary of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Thaddeus Cohen, has directed staff to look at Chapter 163, the Growth Management Act, and Chapter 380, the Development of Regional Impact Act. He is asking staff to suggest revisions to make the Acts more responsive to the concerns people have. We've been dealing with these laws for 25 years, and Secretary Cohen feels it is time to throw new ideas out on table. The intention is for DCA to be in a position of working with the Governor's Office to come up with legislation for the next session of the Legislature.

Staff will be working over the next few weeks with people on the outside to get feedback on ideas, drafting statutory language, getting the Secretary to review and getting language in legislative process.

This is a priority for the Governor, which he announced even prior to Thaddeus Cohen's appointment.

So there will be some type of Growth Management legislation this year, which will provide a good opportunity for addressing additional thoughts about the Rural Lands Stewardship Program.

Ernie Cox: Sen. Paula Dockery will be trying to get money again this year for the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act (R&FLPA). A package with Paula might make sense – put some money into R&FLPA and some money for RLSP to get a broad base of people to support

The initial reaction of most people and legislators is that funding tight. The reality is, we need to look at programs that can do a better job of spending the money that's available.

Eric Draper: We are hitting resistance at Governor's Office on the R&FLPA; they are actively discouraging it. Dockery will carry it. Looking for sponsor in House.

Ernie Cox: Is there a need for an education effort?

Eric Draper: The belief in the Governor's Office is that the R&FLPA is all about temporary easements. The Farm Bureau insisted on including that provision, but now it has become a red flag for [DEP Secretary] Colleen Castille and others. We may be able to get Secretary Cohen engaged, and have him help us emphasize that temporary easements are only about 5% of the program.

It may not be advisable to tie the programs too close. Wouldn't want the R&FLPA to drag down the RLSP. It may be better to run then separately.

Craig Evans: Run then separately, but educate people that they are supportive of each other and complimentary.

One thing really needs to be stressed about the RLSP – which makes it unlike any other program – and that is its capacity once it is up and running, to use private sector and development money to pay for easements to greatly leverage public investment.

The key here is that local communities only need a little bit of seed money to get this started. As a result, a small investment can have very large returns. In Collier County, for example, for every \$1 dollar invested there is a potential pay off of \$350 in value for the lands that will be protected.

If the Legislature will provide \$500,000 in seed money for one county, that county then has the potential of using that initial investment to get \$17 or \$18 million worth of protection.

Chuck Littlejohn: How about some of the other changes that are included in the legislative proposal? Allowing the use of a small amount of land acquisition management money to facilitate formation of RLSA. Is that dead on arrival, or is it something that can be talked about?

Eric Draper: It would be possible to take this from the source of money that land management money comes from, the documentary stamp taxes, but would get resistance to going into land management funds themselves. Agencies feel they don't get enough money as it.

Chuck Littlejohn: I figured that would be difficult.

Craig Evans: All counties are required to update comp plans. One way of getting the RLSP into broader use, might be to require that counties look at the RLSP while they are doing their updates and spending money on consultants. If the RLSP is a required component, it would be part of the process, instead of being something that is additive and separate.

Walker Banning: The Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) offers an opportunity here. The EAR offers a way to push for an honest assessment of what's going on in rural areas, for an examination of the comp plan, then for suggestions on improving it.

It offers an opportunity for a county to ask the questions: How well does the comp plan protect rural areas? Does it have proper planning for this area built in?

As DCA works with individual counties on their EAR, we should be sure counties ask questions that get at an assessment about how well they have been doing in protecting rural resources. If the answer is not very good, or if development in these areas is going off in the wrong direction, then the EAR should be used for recommending corrections in the comprehensive plan, which is where the RLSP concept comes in as a rural land use planning tool.

Ernie Cox: Is there a way to see which counties are coming up for review, as part of a DCA reminder or whatever you send out? If the county has rural lands, let them know about the resources that are available; don't wait to get the EAR, but be proactive.

Walker Banning: DCA has not done that as systematically as we should. That's a good idea, will do in future.

The E&A report focuses on the major community planning issues within a county. We try to work with local government in helping identify major issues. This where I can work with local governments to be sure major issues include rural land use issues.

Chuck Littlejohn: SB 2188 states that the RLSP is a land use for DCA to encourage. Is it possible to amend Chapter 163 under the EAR review and put in a provision that this is something counties should specifically look at and comment on?

Walker Banning: Good idea. That section in statute now includes three or four special topics that local governments have to look at, as part of the EAR, such things as assessments about how well land planning is being coordinated with school boards and water management districts, as well as a special requirement dealing with coastal high hazard areas.

It might be possible to craft another paragraph in this section with an explicit requirement that counties must assess the status of their rural lands and rural resources to see if what's been happening is consistent with what the county wants to happen. If not, then require that the county suggest appropriate changes in its comp plan to do a better job of protecting rural resources.

Chuck Littlejohn: If you don't mind, I'm going to recruit Ernie to draft up something for you to take a look at.

Agreed by all.

Pete Spyke: One thing to remember, with a few rare and precious exceptions, is most rural landowners do not want to be "preserved." What they want is to be able to capitalize on the fact that land for development is worth many more times than what is worth for agriculture.

Landowners are not campaigning to be preserved. The incentive to preserve rural lands is coming from urban citizens. So if you are looking for support for getting funding for these programs, you should look to the average citizen.

Landowners will gladly go along with this so long as they don't lose any value they currently have.

Ernie Cox: Pete raises an interesting point that we all need to take into consideration. The Rural Lands Stewardship Program is a concept that is incentive based, that recognizes the growth realities of the state, and through a real incentive program, gives operators and owners a chance to make real money and to potentially make more money by keeping some of their land in agriculture rather if they simply sold the whole thing.

This economic incentive is one of the real hallmarks of this program. If it's done right, it does not require public money on the implementation side.

Pete Spyke: I often refer this as rural land development program. That's because you must think about creating developments in such a way that you can retain some rural land in the landscape.

Craig Evans: That's a good point. It also can be thought of as a land utilization plan. In some places you develop, in some places you may maintain agriculture, and in some places you have natural resources.

It looks at utilizing land in more efficient ways and cash flowing that. The key to this is it's not an either or situation. It uses the market economy, the ability to develop and the growth of state as a positive to help cash flow agriculture. If agriculture is not viable, then maintaining natural resources and putting green technologies in place that can be used on the land, might be.

These are ideas that you first suggested, Pete. And now it is beginning to happen.

Ave Maria is a good example. Some real creative approaches are being considered for ways in which the wastes that are generated by any human settlement can be handled to reduce their environmental impacts. By starting with a blank palette, where there is an opportunity to build a town in an area that is not already built up, you can consider the use of green technologies, such as phytoremediation, as an alternative to more traditional water, sewer and land fill/incinerator facilities.

Hence, the RLSP not only allows for new settlement patterns, but allows for new ways for mitigate the environmental impacts of a settlement right on site at the time and place they occur, and to generate a cash flow for surrounding ag lands at same time. These are some of opportunities that we haven't fully explored yet.

Chuck Littlejohn: What is the possibility of eliminating the requirement for DRIs in established RLSAs? Is this something that DCA discussed this recently? This was included in the legislation we started with last year and we took it out.

Walker Banning: This discussion has not come up internally at DCA, at least not at the staff level. We had some discussions last year, then dropped it. There were quite a few questions, although I don't recall right now what they were. Is there time to resurrect that discussion and get consensus among people in terms of what a good response to those questions? I don't know.

Chuck Littlejohn: Ok. We'll raise it in the next forum.

Craig Evans: I recall someone at DCA, Walker, telling me that "you only have to do good planning once."

Walker Banning: Yes, that's a good philosophical point.

Craig Evans: It would seem to me that, if the RLSP is used properly to do planning on a large, regional basis, then you do not have to come back and do it again on smaller parcels, or for individual developments.

If the RLSP is used to answer questions, address issues, and deal with concerns which the DRI was designed to do, then it would be necessary to only have to do a DRI once, on a regional basis. That may end up being more efficient, would provide an incentive for pursuing the RLSP, and would end up with an equally good if not better planning result.

Pete Spyke: I'm not sure doing away with DRI requirement is battle that will be in our best interest to fight right now. Once you start talking about a large tract of land, 10,000 acres or more, you would not have one single town, but more than likely would have a number of rural hamlets and villages, each of which would be developed by a different developer.

The DRI process allows you to focus on the actual mechanics of building a city as opposed to the general philosophical approach to the Rural Land Stewardship Area where you are trying to establish your values and density credits. The RLSP does not really go into where schools are going to be located and so forth.

So, if you are picking your battles, doing away with DRI at this point in time probably is not a battle that is worth our time to fight.

Craig Evans: That's a good point. That's the decision that was made last year with SB 2188. That's also the reason for this teleconference, to discuss possibilities then determine the best course of action.

Pete Spyke: Better to use our chips in other places.

Craig Evans: Use the RLSP to provide concept and structure, and use the DRI to provide more detail; maybe that's not a bad thing.

Doug Bournique: Something we need to communicate: RLSP keeps the value in the local community. It does not export value to developers in other areas. It gives locals money and cash flow and a reason to stay in agriculture.

Chuck Littlejohn: That's a good point.

Craig Evans: It's apparent that there are a lot of positives here, and many exciting opportunities ahead.

The questions are: How can we communicate these opportunities and possibilities? And how can we put them in a package so we can move this forward and start implementing them? I guess that's the challenge.

What can we do to bring forward the opportunities and possibilities we've discussed and actually do something on the ground for the benefit of the state and all its citizens?

Ernie Cox: I might make one suggestion, particularly if we are not well received by the Legislature in trying to get seed funding for several different places. Maybe there are a few "tweaks" that will make the program a little more user friendly and certain. Let's focus on those. And then, let's see how it goes for a bit. The changes made last year have resulted in a lot more interest in the program, based on the things I'm doing and the phone calls I'm getting.

We might be able to make a few small changes, then let the market work for awhile.

Doug Bournique: In our area, we don't have the luxury of a lot more time. There are some huge tracts of land that have come up for sale that you would have thought would have lasted 20 more years. Huge chunks of the Treasure Coast and the central East Coast of Florida are transitioning very quickly.

We've got to speed through this process as quickly as we can and come up with the best options for our rural lands area.

Chuck Littlejohn: There is one last legislative issue that was sent in by Michael Busha. He has suggested making better use of the Regional Planning Councils as a means of promoting rural land stewardship principles. I don't know if any one has a reaction on that one way or the other. Mike has been very supportive of this from the Treasure Coast. I just don't know if any other the other Regional Planning Councils have really looked at this issue very seriously yet.

5. Agenda Item F: DISCUSSION ABOUT ROLE OF RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL RE: SPECIFIC PROJECTS

Craig Evans: I'd like to use this call to talk a little about the path forward for the Rural Lands Stewardship Council. I've served as the council initiator, and as meeting organizer, communicator, and fund raiser for three years now. Frankly, I did not do as good of a job as I would have liked in 2004.

A subgroup of council members was organized in December 2003 to work on SB 2188, which was extremely successful.

There also was a subgroup working on a Congressional earmark, in an effort to get federal funding. But the subgroup decided at the last moment to not pursue that.

With the exception of this teleconference, and the June 1 meeting at the Indian River Citrus League to discuss water management district involvement in rural land planning efforts in the Treasure Coast, which involved another subgroup of Council members, there has not been a formal meeting of the Council all year. This occurred in part because there did not seem to be any pressing issue, outside of the legislation that was being pursued, that was worth taking busy people from their busy schedules just to have a meeting.

Now it appears that there are some projects starting up where it might make sense to re-engage the Council. That's what I'd like to discuss. Plus I'd like to discuss how the Council should be operated from this point forward.

The RLSC developed statements of purpose and mission in 2003 (see <http://privatelands.org/rural/RLSC.htm>), which establish the Council as a neutral forum for discussion. The Council includes people from agencies and organizations representing a variety of interests and stakeholders in the state (again, see <http://privatelands.org/rural/RLSC.htm>)

I've just learned that Secretary Cohen has accepted an invitation to serve personally on the Council. He will be the third DCA secretary to do so, following Colleen Castille and Steven Seibert.

The Council offers a unique opportunity to discuss issues and cooperate across various lines of interest. The council also can help support projects as they get started and go forward, since it provides a forum to talk about issues that come up and to find ways to resolve them.

By using the council as a forum for discussion, there is an opportunity to develop strategies to move the Rural Lands Stewardship Program concepts forward that will have broad acceptance. There's the opportunity to provide input to various agencies and levels of government that will help these agencies put the Rural Lands Stewardship Program concepts into practice, and tailor implementation steps to the specific needs and opportunities of local areas throughout the state.

There is a need for local groups like the Rural Lands Committee of the Indian River Citrus League because everything is local. But if there is an opportunity to have a forum at a larger level, to involve a wide range of affected interests, plus water management districts, and different levels of government, that can be a valuable help and assistance in moving projects forward.

Pete Spyke: Isn't Rural Lands Stewardship Council a subsidiary of another organization?

Craig Evans: No, it's not a subsidiary of any organization; it has, however, been run out of another organization, which has acted as a "host" for the council.

The genesis of the council goes back to 2001, shortly after Gov. Bush signed the Rural Lands Stewardship Act (chapter 163.3177(11)(d), Florida Statutes) into law. Several people who were involved in developing the concepts that led to the legislation, including myself, Chuck Littlejohn and Al Reynolds, met to discuss ways to help promote the program and move it forward.

We felt there was a need to organize some effort or group that could support the legislation, build momentum for the program, find out how to adapt it to the needs of various local communities and help in implementing it.

Our first thought was to bring together an informal group to discuss these issues. We came up with a list of people who we thought could make valuable contributions and began asking them about their interest in serving on a council.

At the same time, I approached the Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation to see if there was a possibility of obtaining a grant to fund this effort. There was, and I prepared a proposal that was submitted in September 2001 and approved by the Dunn Foundation in December 2001.

It was necessary to use a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in order to submit this proposal and obtain funding. Since I operate a 501(c)(3) organization, Stewardship America, I used this organization as the “host” for this proposal. There was some discussion about using other structures, and I know you’ve brought this up for discussion at other Council meetings, Pete, but no one else has come forward to take the lead, so it has remain structured this way.

The Dunn Foundation grant made it possible to launch the Rural Lands Stewardship Council and fund its operations during 2002, which included the cost of organizing the council and holding its first few meetings, preparing educational materials describing the Rural Lands Stewardship Program, posting these materials on the Internet where they could be easily accessed, and funding the cost of travel to meet with local property owners, ag groups and county officials to introduce them to the program.

A grant proposal was submitted to the Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation in September 2002 to renew this funding for 2003, but the Dunn Foundation felt that the organizations and agencies represented on the council had the necessary resources to continue the council’s work on their own.

So this is the approach that was taken for funding the council’s operations for 2003. Seven of the council member organizations came forward and provided the funding necessary to organize and hold meetings, establish a committee structure, continue refining educational materials to explain the program, and bring together county commissioners, planners, private landowners and other groups to discuss the issues facing different communities and how the RLSP might be used to address some of these issues.

This input was very valuable in drafting several of the changes in the Rural Lands Stewardship Program that were made through SB 2188 in the 2004 Legislative session.

Once again, a grant proposal was submitted in September 2003 to the Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation for continued funding and, again in December 2003, was turned down.

Since the focus at the time was on drafting SB 2188 and getting it passed, it seemed logical to make that the priority issue, and to put other Council activities and committee work on the back burner.

Up to this point, I have been performing in the traditional role of a nonprofit – taking an idea, getting funding to pursue the idea, and launching the idea.

But, as with happens with any nonprofit endeavor, when funding for an initiative or program is not renewed then momentum can be lost.

Now may be time to take the next step and make the council a more formal entity.

One thing that might be considered in legislation is establishing the council as a formal entity, say as part of the Department of Community Affairs.

At this point this is an informal volunteer group where people come together in meetings or on telephone calls to discuss the Rural Lands Stewardship Program.

It is a very open structure at this point and can be changed in any way that the people who are participating wish to change it.

That's why this item is on the agenda – to decide what is the best path forward, what the role should be, and how it should go forward.

Pete Spyke: When people write a check to fund the Rural Lands Stewardship Council who do they write the check to?

Craig Evans: At this point, checks would go to Stewardship America. Although, frankly, I haven't received any checks for that purpose for over a year and a half.

There has been no funding for the Rural Lands Stewardship Council for some time, and there are no funds available that are earmarked for that purpose now.

Pete Spyke: Who is Stewardship America?

Craig Evans: Stewardship America is a 501(c)(3), tax exempt nonprofit educational organization incorporated in Florida in 1995 as Florida Stewardship Foundation. You can find all the details you want on the organization's web site, <http://privatelands.org>, which has information and updates going back to January 1997, when the website was launched.

Its mission is to “advance initiatives that will engender a thriving rural economy with an economically robust agriculture, a healthy natural environment, viable rural communities and safe, abundant supplies of food and fiber.”

Its mission is completely consistent with the vision that was established for the Rural Lands Stewardship Program by the Governor's Growth Management Study Commission, which is one reason it was logical for Stewardship America to undertake efforts to promote the RLSP.

Pete Spyke: So if we are volunteering on the Rural Lands Stewardship Council are we somehow affiliated with Stewardship America?

Craig Evans: Not at all. The relationship is the same as when you attend a meeting that is organized by DEP, one of the water management districts, or an organization such as 1000 Friends of Florida or The Nature Conservancy.

Your participation in the meeting constitutes no affiliation whatsoever with the sponsoring organization. The role of the organizing agency or organization is dedicated solely to making the meeting possible, and it is your choice whether you find the meeting valuable and whether you wish to participate.

So there is no association whatsoever, except there is a Rural Lands Stewardship Council in name that provides a mailing list and a phone list of people who are interested in these issues.

So a structure is in place, and it can be re-formed in any way that the group who currently make up the Council wish to do so at this point.

Chuck Littlejohn: Do any of you see any advantages in creating a committee within the Department of Community Affairs to hold public meetings once in awhile?

Ernie Cox: My initial thinking is that there is a benefit to an ad hoc group of people from lots of perspectives being able to have a forum to meet. We each bring our own perspectives to the table and are able to discuss these things. I think it is better to be separate from an agency, whether we want to set up a totally separate entity or whether we want to continue to do it informally, I think is a matter for further discussion as some point in the future.

I would prefer to be able to get a broad based group of people involved rather than to have it in a particular agency

Pete Spyke: I would agree with you Ernie. At this point, I'm not really sure who I'm part of, and I think it would be better to make the Council independent, not a part of DCA, but truly independent, where we don't have to worry about having to raise funds to run the organization. Have it be an ad hoc group. We could still call it something, but let it be detached.

Craig Evans: At this point, that's its status. Obviously, whoever is the chair is going to use his or her organization or agency as a resource for getting out information and that organization's name is going to be associated with that person's efforts.

But I agree. I think it is time for a new format, for discussion about who the new chair should be, and about what direction the council should take in organizing meetings and involving people who have an interest in these issues in the meetings.

Today, Chuck Littlejohn is acting as chair. Certainly the people who are a part of this ad hoc group can make that decision and select who that chair should be.

Here's a suggested format for you, Pete: Many small groups use the organization with whom the chairperson is affiliated as the support organization during the period that person serves as chair.

That way, the group is given organizational support, in terms of resources and staff, to help it get things done. This support role rotates around among different organizations over time, as individuals from different organizations serve as chair. So that may be one strategy to consider.

Another approach would be to set up the Rural Lands Stewardship Council as its own 501(c)(3), but if you don't like to do fund raising now, then you won't want to take that approach since there are a lot of administrative details and requirements involved in running a nonprofit organization.

I would propose that a meeting or teleconference call be set up to specifically discuss this issue the next time this ad hoc Rural Lands Stewardship Council group gets together.

Chuck Littlejohn: Pete, why don't you and Ernie and I and anyone who would like to join us set a time to have a conversation about that.

6. Agenda Items G & H:

It was decided that input on legislation would be handled by email, and that the date and time for the next teleconference/meeting also would be set by email.

The teleconference was adjourned at 4:27 p.m.