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RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL ACTIVITY UPDATE APRIL 2004

A subgroup of the Rural Lands Stewardship Council decided in December that, instead of scheduling meetings during the spring -- at the height of the legislative session -- (always difficult to do), a group of council members would work on legislation and other initiatives to help improve the way in which the Rural Lands Stewardship Program functions.

Here's an update on what's been accomplished.

1. Legislation has been introduced as part of SB 2188, Sen. Steven Geller's urban infill bill (with a companion bill in the House, HB 1593, introduced by Rep. Mike Davis) The bills will make 10 statutory changes in the Rural Lands Stewardship Program. For an outline of the legislation, see http://privatelands.org/download/RLSP_Refinements_Jan04.pdf

To view the Senate bill, go to Online Sunshine's Florida Senate page, <http://www.flsenate.gov/Welcome/index.cfm>. On the left side of the page, near the top, look for "Jump to Bill." Insert the bill number, 2188, in the space provided, then click "Go." To view the House bill, go to Online Sunshine's Florida House page, <http://www.myfloridahouse.com/>. On the right hand side of the page, look for "Bill Search." Select "Bill Number" from the drop-down menu. Type in 1593, then click "search."

For information on what you can do to support passage of these bills, please contact Chuck Littlejohn -- email: chuck@littlejohnmann.com Phone: 850-222-7535.

2. Letters have gone to the South Florida Water Management District and St. John's River Water Management District asking the water management districts to provide funding to support rural lands stewardship planning in the Treasure Coast region. Both water management districts have budgeted funding for easements and purchases to carry out the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration and Indian River Lagoon projects. If even a small portion of this funding could be made available for rural lands stewardship planning, a large number of the easements and purchases could be carried out through market economy incentives, which would utilize private dollars, rather than public dollars to provide the levels of protection being sought. Initial reactions to the request have been positive.

3. Eglin Air Force Base personnel are looking at the Rural Lands Stewardship Program as a means of using the RLSP's private, market economy drivers as a cost-effective way of preventing encroachments in the 1,000 square-mile flyway that is critical to the base's military operations and weapons testing programs.

4. Agricultural Appropriations requests have been filed in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate to provide funding for RSLP pilots in up to four counties in 13 different states. For details, go to <http://privatelands.org/news/appropriations.htm>

The next meeting of the Rural Lands Stewardship Council will be in early June.

Details on the last meeting, and on the activities of the council and its committees, can be found at <http://privatelands.org/rural/RLSC.htm>