



## FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

*Affiliated With National Wildlife Federation*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** December 19, 2006

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### **AGREEMENT REACHED TO UPGRADE WASTEWATER FACILITIES, PROTECT WAKULLA SPRINGS**

*-- Multi-million dollar investment to reduce nutrients by 75 percent, improve water quality--*

**TALLAHASSEE** - The City of Tallahassee today joined Wakulla County, the Florida Wildlife Federation, Attorney General Charlie Crist, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Wakulla County resident Joseph Glisson to sign a landmark agreement that will enhance protection for Wakulla Springs and sustain economic growth in the state's capital. Over the next six years, the City will invest more than \$160 million to overhaul its Thomas P. Smith and Lake Bradford Road wastewater facilities, significantly increasing wastewater treatment and improving the quality and availability of reuse water.

"We are very pleased that this important issue has been settled to the benefit of our beloved Wakulla Springs," said Manley Fuller, President of the Florida Wildlife Federation. "We look forward to working with Wakulla County, DEP and the City as we move forward."

"We've said from the beginning that we would use science to help determine if the city's wastewater practices need to be improved and that if we were part of the problem we would be part of the solution," said Tallahassee Mayor John Marks. "Our plan demonstrates continued leadership in protecting our natural resources, related to Wakulla Springs and our region at large. By elevating our system to Advanced Wastewater Treatment, our new system will be among the cleanest in the state."

“On behalf of my fellow Board members and the citizens of Wakulla County, we are pleased the City of Tallahassee and Department of Environmental Protection has stepped forward to clean up Wakulla Springs,” said Wakulla County Commission Chairman Brian Langston. “This agreement will go far to restore and better protect the quality of our water resources, both in the ground and on the surface, that we rely on for drinking, fishing, or just cooling off on a hot summer day.”

Under the plan, the City will increase the treatment of wastewater before reusing it to irrigate vegetation for nitrogen removal at the Southeast sprayfield and landscaping at other locations. The improvements will reduce levels of nitrogen in the treated wastewater by more than 75 percent over six years, with the first reductions occurring within the first six months after a new permit is issued. The agreement will make the City’s wastewater treatment system among the cleanest in the state. The new system, referred to as Advanced Wastewater Treatment, is one of the nation’s best available technologies for treating wastewater.

“Wakulla Springs is one of our state’s most valued natural treasures and we must protect its beauty for future generations,” said Attorney General Charlie Crist. “I am pleased that the city and the county have reached an agreement to safeguard this pristine attraction.”

Other highlights of the agreement include:

- Finding additional ways to beneficially reuse the highly treated wastewater such as golf course and other landscape irrigation.
- Significantly reducing phosphorus and suspended solids concentrations, in addition to the nitrogen reduction.
- Within the next three years, upgrading the City’s biosolids treatment processes, allowing for its use as organic, slow-release fertilizer.
- Develop a new sprayfield management system that focuses on nitrogen removal as opposed to commercial agriculture.
- Establishing a Wakulla Springs Watershed Protection Committee to review annual environmental reports, work on regional solutions to restore water quality at Wakulla Springs and identify opportunities for state and federal funding for improvement projects.

“I am pleased that all parties were able to reach an agreement that will improve the City’s wastewater treatment operations and significantly reduce nitrogen levels,” said DEP Secretary Colleen M. Castille. “I applaud this comprehensive approach to reach a solution that will help protect and improve one of the largest and deepest freshwater springs in the world.”

The settlement agreement comes as a result of mediation after Wakulla County, environmental groups and concerned Wakulla County residents petitioned the renewal of the City of Tallahassee's permit to continue operating the domestic wastewater facility. The Department of Environmental Protection noticed its intent to issue the permit to the City in February. Since then, a State-funded scientific study determined that nutrients from the City's sprayfield were leaching through soils into the groundwater and reaching Wakulla Springs, only nine miles away.

The City's Thomas P. Smith and Lake Bradford wastewater facilities serve more than 200,000 of the county's 275,000 residents. Combined, the facilities can treat up to 32 million gallons of wastewater each day. Within the next few months, financing recommendations for the facility improvements will be considered by the Tallahassee City Commission.

"Both the public and the environment have been well represented throughout this process, and I fully support this settlement agreement that we have all worked long and hard to develop," said Wakulla County resident Joseph Glisson, one of the petitioners in the lawsuit. "I believe this is truly a great day for Wakulla Springs and the citizens of the State of Florida."

One of the largest in the world, Wakulla Springs is a first magnitude springs that flows from an underground river at more than 400,000 gallons per minute. The springs are the centerpiece of the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park, which attracts more than 165,000 visitors annually to Wakulla County. Changes to the springs over the past decade prompted the local community to seek ways to reduce nutrients and restore and protect water quality in the Wakulla River and Springs. To date, Florida has conserved more than 4,000 acres around Wakulla Springs to safeguard the spring recharge area.