



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Jay Collins
Lt. Governor

Alexis A. Lambert
Secretary

October 24, 2025

Susan E. Poplin, Administrator of Comprehensive Planning
Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department
300 South Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Tallahassee-Leon County 25-02ESR Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment Expedited Review

The Office of Intergovernmental Programs of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Department) has reviewed the above-referenced amendment in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 163, Florida Statutes (F.S.). The Department's review of the proposed policies focused on important state resources and facilities that would be adversely impacted if the amendment is adopted, specifically: air and water pollution; wetlands and other surface waters of the state; federal and state-owned lands and interest in lands, including state parks, greenways and trails and conservation easements; solid waste; and water and wastewater treatment; and the Everglades ecosystem restoration.

Based on our review of the submitted amendment package, the Department provides the following technical assistance comments in addition to the resubmittal of our original comment letter provided on June 16, 2025, for Tallahassee-Leon County 25-01ESR Proposed:

Department staff have reviewed the proposed revisions to the previously transmitted amendment package (25-01ESR) and acknowledge the text changes to the Lake Protection Future Land Use Category, including the removal of the previously proposed Lake Protection Node (LPN) at the Meridian Road and Orchard Pond Parkway/Bannerman Road intersection. The Department recognizes the efforts of the City and County to protect water quality through local regulations and compliance with state stormwater standards and appreciates the Planning Department's response to agency comments on Tallahassee-Leon County 25-01ESR within this proposed transmittal package. However, due to the uncertainty of the final version of the amendment to be adopted, the Department is including the previously submitted comment letter in our response to the proposed Tallahassee-Leon County 25-02ESR to remain in consideration as the amendment process moves forward.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed comprehensive plan amendment and looks forward to receiving the official response to agency comments in the forthcoming adopted amendment transmittals. Should you have questions or require additional information, please contact me at (850) 717-9037 or Lindsay.Weaver@FloridaDEP.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lindsay Weaver".

Lindsay Weaver, Director
Office of Intergovernmental Programs

Enclosure: Tallahassee-Leon County 25-01ESR Proposed DEP Letter

CC: Donna Harris, Senior Plan Processor
Florida Department of Commerce



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Ron DeSantis
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June 16, 2025

Susan E. Poplin, Administrator of Comprehensive Planning
Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department
300 South Adams Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Tallahassee-Leon County 25-01ESR Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment Expedited Review

The Office of Intergovernmental Programs of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Department) has reviewed the above-referenced amendment in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 163, Florida Statutes (F.S.). The Department's review of the proposed policies focused on important state resources and facilities that would be adversely impacted if the amendment is adopted, specifically: air and water pollution; wetlands and other surface waters of the state; federal and state-owned lands and interest in lands, including state parks, greenways and trails and conservation easements; solid waste; and water and wastewater treatment; and the Everglades ecosystem restoration.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

The proposed amendment replaces the City-County Future Land Use Element and Mobility Element with a new, consolidated Future Land Use and Mobility Element and replaces the existing Future Land Use Map with modifications to future land use categories that generally increase densities and intensities throughout the Urban Service Area (USA). The proposed amendment includes changes to future land use categories, development densities, and the USA boundary. The Department's comments focus on revisions specifically in the Lake Jackson Aquatic Preserve (LJAP) watershed (see Policy 2.8.7, p. 20 and Future Land Use Map). These revisions include 1) Land use categories changing from Rural to Lake Protection (LP) over a substantial acreage within the watershed, 2) Establishment of a new Lake Protection Node (LPN) at Meridian Road and Orchard Pond Parkway/Bannerman Road, and 3) Significant density bonuses for residential and commercial development within future LP and LPN locations.

The proposed Future Land Use Map changes the designation on approximately 1,755 acres adjacent to LJAP from Rural, with a maximum of 1 unit per 10 acres, to LP. The existing LP category limits densities to 1 unit per 2 acres with density bonuses up to 2 units per acre available to conservation subdivisions and identifies intersections where the LPN zoning district would allow bonuses up to 8 units per acre and 12,500 square feet of non-residential uses. The proposed amendments to the LP category would increase the maximum density and intensity bonuses up to 20 units per acre and 20,000 square feet

of non-residential uses per acre. Of particular concern to the amendment area surrounding LJAP, the revisions to the Lake Protection Policy 2.8.7 include the following provision:

Development of areas over 100 acres may be treated as a Planned Development Special District with the allowable densities, intensities, and uses of the Suburban Neighborhood land use category as long as the planned unit development for the development demonstrates adherence to the Lake Protection stormwater standards, meets design standards, and includes measures for protecting the water quality of Lake Jackson from impacts of the development. (Policy 2.8.7, p. 21)

The Department supports the existing LP land use category and use of LPNs as attempts to address documented and historic scientific concerns regarding degradation and pollution of LJAP. However, the proposed LP category allows for much higher densities in these areas, some directly adjacent to the lake edges. These proposed changes have the potential to add tens of thousands of new housing units and millions of square feet of non-residential uses (commercial, office, community services) adjacent to LJAP, leading to potential degradation of upland habitat, isolated wetlands, and the closed basin lakes through nonpoint source pollution.

IMPORTANT STATE RESOURCES

The Lake Jackson Aquatic Preserve was designated in 1973 to preserve its biologic, aesthetic and scientific value of the natural resource for generations to come. The LJAP encompasses Lake Jackson, Carr Lake and Mallard Pond, totaling 5,100 acres in Leon County. It is the only freshwater lake system designated a State Aquatic Preserve and Outstanding Florida Water (OFW). Currently, the north end of Lake Jackson, Carr Lake and Mallard Pond have good water quality. The South end of Lake Jackson generally has poorer water quality due to the impacts of historic development.

While Lake Jackson is not listed as impaired for nutrients or chlorophyll at this time, during the Department's next assessment for the data period of 2012-2024, Lake Jackson will likely be listed as impaired for chlorophyll-a, Total Nitrogen (TN), and Total Phosphorus (TP). In addition to the impacts of development, the lake is nearing a water quality tipping point due to the drought conditions from the "dry down" since 2020. Normally, natural dry downs are not detrimental to water quality. However, during continued low water conditions, nutrients and eutrophication tend to accumulate under lower volume of water, especially from the southern end of the lake.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Although the proposed LP land use would require new development or redevelopment to be on central water and sewer within the USA (where available) and meet the highest of stormwater treatment standards, the Department is concerned that these proposed updates may conflict with the original intent of the LP category and could negatively impact the upland and wetland habitat corridors of the lakes, and ultimately water quality:

- Any dense development within the sub-basins would affect the water quality of LJAP through increases in traffic and expansion of infrastructure necessary to support the increased development.

- Further intensive development in the sub-basins could alter their ability to absorb runoff, resulting in more frequent discharges into the lakes.
- The Lake Protection land use category was established in 1990, and the provisions of Sec. 10-6.616 of the Land Development Code were enacted in 1991 for the protection of Lake Jackson. Removing the low-density components of the Lake Protection category and adding a new LPN in proximity to the LJAP when the lake system is under stress and still recovering from cyclical and natural dry downs for the last 25 years is presumably not prudent.
- The establishment of a new LPN location at the intersection of Orchard Pond Parkway/Bannerman Road and Meridian Road with higher density bonuses does not appear to be compatible with lake protection being in such proximity to Mallard Pond and Carr Lake (part of LJAP) and Special Development Zones A and B.

In addition to concerns regarding potential high-density development in the LP category, the overall changes to the existing future land use categories and Future Land Use Map have the potential to adversely impact water quality within the boundaries of the Upper Wakulla River and Wakulla Springs BMAP, which has been identified as an impaired Outstanding Florida Spring (OFS). The Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act (Sections 373.801-.813, F.S.) identifies and outlines actions the Department must take to address and restore impaired OFS and provides special protection by prohibiting certain activities in their vicinity.

With the proposed increases in density and intensity of existing land uses throughout the amendment area, appropriate measures should be taken to minimize any additional nutrient loading to the springshed. These measures include the proper treatment and disposal of wastewater in accordance with BMAP requirements, implementation of current and future onsite sewage treatment and disposal system (OSTDS) prohibitions, stormwater controls, and the implementation of adequate sediment and erosion control practices to mitigate any groundwater or surface water impacts. The Department also recommends implementing actions for conservation of green space and/or pervious area as much as practicable to assist with stormwater conveyance, groundwater recharge, and water quality integrity.

CONCLUSION

The Department has concerns that proposed changes in land use in the comprehensive plan would lead to adverse impacts on water quality and habitat in Lake Jackson Aquatic Preserve. According to the LJAP Management Plan (2020):

“The north end of the lake is currently minimally developed but is facing pressure from a growing Leon County population. The water quality in this portion of the lake is considered good, but if development increases at the same density seen in the south end of Lake Jackson watershed, water quality is likely to be negatively impacted. Local growth patterns and expected population increase for the county are important factors when developing a comprehensive lake management plan for the aquatic preserve. Cooperation and partnership between residents,

developers, and governmental agencies will help facilitate responsible growth practices that will help restore the environment within the aquatic preserve.” (p. 17).

The Department recommends exploring alternate proposals for the areas of concern, including options such as conserving Rural acreage in the drainage basin, preserving original LP and LPN provisions, and decreasing proximity of new LPNs to the aquatic preserve.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed comprehensive plan and requests that the County address these concerns prior to adoption. Should you have questions or require additional information, please contact me at (850) 717-9037 or Lindsay.Weaver@FloridaDEP.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lindsay Weaver".

Lindsay Weaver, Environmental Specialist II
Office of Intergovernmental Programs

cc: Donna Harris, Florida Department of Commerce