

# TOWN OF LOXAHATCHEE GROVES

155 F Road Loxahatchee Groves, FL 33470



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**TO:** Town Council of Town of Loxahatchee Groves

**FROM:** Francine L. Ramaglia, Town Manager

**DATE:** November 12, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Discussion on Water Control Plan Update / Assessment Methodology

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### Summary:

The Loxahatchee Groves Water Control District (the “District”) operates under Chapter 298, Florida Statutes, and is responsible for drainage and water control within the Town. The Water Control Plan (WCP), the District’s primary operating document, mandates a formal review every five years. The last amendment occurred in 2018, and no review has been conducted since the District merged with the Town. Several issues have since arisen that necessitate evaluation and potential amendments to the WCP.

The timing for updating the WCP is ideal as it allows for not only the incorporation of studies conducted in the early 2000s but also the inclusion of available results from the ongoing Vulnerability Assessment being performed under the Resilient Florida program. Additionally, the District has developed a Comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan and outlined a Local Mitigation Strategy Program, which includes significant drainage system improvements. Finally, the Town has received a Rural Designation from the State of Florida as well as appropriations to move forward with updating culverts, catch basins and other control structures. Updating the WCP will help align these strategic plans with the Town’s long-term water control needs. Vulnerability Assessment being performed under the Resilient Florida program. Additionally, the District has developed a Comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan and outlined a Local Mitigation Strategy Program, which includes significant drainage system improvements. Updating the WCP will help align these strategic plans with the Town’s long-term water control needs.

Key changes include the District boundaries becoming coterminous with the Town’s boundaries. This means the District services areas outside of its previous jurisdictional boundaries, and the nature of those services differs, as access to these properties is not directly onto roads maintained by the District/Town. This shift requires a review of the services provided to these properties and an evaluation of whether the current service levels and assessments remain appropriate.

Additionally, the Duck Puddle property, located on the western edge of the District, presents unique challenges. The Duck Puddle property is different from other areas within the District, not only in size and use but mainly because it withdraws water from the District's system without returning it. The WCP needs to address whether the current service levels and assessment methodology are appropriate for this property.

Another key issue involves maintaining drainage systems in areas with non-conforming lots, which are typically smaller than five acres and often lack a maintenance entity for their drainage systems. These lots, created by unrecorded subdivisions, come in various shapes and sizes. Dealing with drainage solutions and retrofitting neglected or removed drainage conveyances needs to be evaluated, as their impact on the functionality of the entire system is significant. The responsibility for drainage in these areas often falls on individual property owners, leading to impeded water flow and increased flooding during heavy rains. This has been partially addressed through the amendment of Chapter 46 and the allocation of \$150,000 for a matching grant program, but a more comprehensive solution is necessary.

A potential solution is the creation of an enhanced drainage assessment to fund necessary improvements, allowing affected property owners to pay over time. The District plans to adopt a resolution to collect these assessments via the uniform tax bill, targeting implementation for the 2026 tax year. This process involves reviewing the WCP, consulting with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), and holding public hearings to finalize the plan.

### **Key Points:**

1. **WCP Review Needed:** The Water Control Plan (WCP) has not been reviewed since the District merged with the Town, and a review and potential amendment are necessary. The timing is favorable to incorporate both early 2000s studies and the results of the Vulnerability Assessment from the Resilient Florida program, as well as align with the Comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan and Local Mitigation Strategy Program, which includes drainage system improvements.
2. **Changes to District Boundaries:** The District boundaries now align with the Town's boundaries, and the WCP must reflect changes in service levels and assessments for properties outside the original District. The District now services areas outside of its previous jurisdiction, where access to properties is not directly onto roads maintained by the District/Town.
3. **Duck Puddle Property:** The Duck Puddle property on the western edge of the District is different from other areas, as it withdraws water from District waters without returning it. The impact on the drainage system, service levels, and assessment methodology for the Duck Puddle property needs to be evaluated.

4. **Drainage Issues in Non-conforming Lots:** Non-conforming lots created by unrecorded subdivisions come in various shapes and sizes and lack drainage system maintenance, leading to water flow problems and flooding. Dealing with these drainage issues and retrofitting neglected or removed drainage conveyances must be evaluated for their impact on the overall system.
5. **Current Efforts:** The District Board has amended Chapter 46 to address drainage nuisances and allocated \$150,000 for small-scale drainage solutions through a matching grant program.
6. **Enhanced Drainage Assessment:** A comprehensive solution may involve the implementation of an enhanced drainage assessment, allowing affected properties to fund drainage improvements gradually through assessments.
7. **Assessment Process:** The District must adopt a resolution by March 1, 2025, to collect assessments via the uniform tax bill, with public hearings and a cost-benefit analysis guiding the process.
8. **Next Steps:** Staff will secure agreements with the property appraiser and tax collector, review and amend the WCP, and proceed with the public hearing process for adoption by March/April 2025.