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Leon County Board of County Commissioners Agenda Item#12

March 18, 2025

To:	Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board
From:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Title:	Authorization to Proceed with Drafting an Ordinance to Amend Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act Pertaining to Land Management Activities and Approval to Schedule the First and Only Public Hearing for June 10, 2025

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department/Division Review and Approval:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator Nawfal Ezzagaghi, Assistant County Administrator Scott Brockmeier, Director, Development Support & Environmental Management
Lead Staff/Project Team:	Deji Ajose-Adeogun, Director, Environmental Services Division

Statement of Issue:

This item seeks Board authorization to proceed with drafting an ordinance to amend Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act and approval to schedule the first and only Public Hearing for June 10, 2025. Proposed amendments to Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental

Management Act pertain to the silviculture and forest management application requirements to expand environmental permitting exemption criteria to include accredited land conservancy management groups.

Fiscal Impact:

This item has no fiscal impact.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Authorize staff to proceed with drafting an ordinance to amend Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act pertaining to the silviculture and forest management application requirements to expand environmental permitting exemption criteria to include accredited land conservancy management groups.

Option #2: Schedule the first and only public hearing to consider an ordinance amending Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act pertaining to the silviculture and forest management application requirements to expand environmental permitting exemption criteria to include accredited land conservancy management groups for June 10, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

Report and Discussion

Background:

During its regular meeting on February 11, 2025, the Board ratified actions taken at the annual Board Retreat which included a Strategic Initiative to exempt land conservancy groups, such as Tall Timbers, from environmental permitting requirements for activities that support and further their mission of fostering exemplary land stewardship. These activities would include establishing native successional forests via the selective removal of trees and other vegetation management practices. This item seeks Board authorization to proceed with drafting an ordinance to amend the silviculture and forest management application requirements section of the Environmental Management Act (EMA) and approval to schedule the first and only Public Hearing for June 10, 2025.

This initiative advances the following FY 2022 – FY 2026 Strategic Initiative:

- *Exempt land conservancy groups, such as Tall Timbers, from environmental permitting requirements for activities that support and further their mission of fostering exemplary land stewardship such as tree removal and other vegetation management. (2025-92)*

This particular Strategic Initiative aligns with the Board's Environment Strategic Priority:

- *(EN2) Conserve and protect environmentally sensitive lands and our natural ecosystems.*

The Land Development Code (LDC) and Environmental Management Act (EMA) establish environmental protection standards for land management in Leon County. Section 10-4.207 of the LDC outlines application requirements for silviculture and forest management and provides

exemptions from LDC regulations for properties designated as “agricultural” by the Property Appraiser’s Office.

Currently, properties without agricultural exemption status must submit a vegetative management plan for any silvicultural activities. However, the existing code does not explicitly address properties under a perpetual conservation easement for land conservancy management that lack agricultural exemption status. Consequently, organizations such as Tall Timbers Research Station, a not-for-profit, accredited land trust and research organization, are ineligible for agricultural exemptions because their research and land management activities do not qualify as agricultural use.

Analysis:

Following the adoption of the Strategic Initiative, staff reviewed the Environmental Management Act (EMA) to identify necessary amendments that would allow accredited land trusts, such as Tall Timbers, to be exempt from environmental permitting. Currently, under the EMA, land conservancy management groups must obtain an environmental permit for any land management activities, including tree removal. The proposed amendment to Section 10-4.207 of the EMA would exempt accredited land trusts from obtaining an environmental permit for any land management activities.

Accreditation is determined by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent, national accreditation program of the Land Trust Alliance governed by a diverse board of 18 volunteer commissioners with expertise in land protection, stewardship and nonprofit management. Land trust accreditation recognizes organizations that meet national quality standards. These accredited trusts have more staff and volunteers and invest eight times more resources into the stewardship and protection of their conservation lands compared to similar-sized non-accredited organizations. Additionally, accredited land trusts conserve three times more land than their non-accredited counterparts.

The proposed amendment would establish specific criteria within the EMA to allow accredited land trusts, such as Tall Timbers, to be exempt from environmental permitting for activities related to land management. The amendment would further support the mission of accredited land conservancy management organizations like Tall Timbers with their exemplary land stewardship and public outreach and conservancy education efforts.

A component of the ordinance drafting process will include garnering feedback from the Leon County Advisory Committee for Quality Growth (ACQG) and a consistency hearing by the Planning Commission (PC). Comments and recommendations from the ACQG and PC will be provided in the Board’s June 10, 2025, public hearing agenda item. Once scheduled, the Board’s public hearing will be publicly noticed in accordance with Section 336.10, Florida Statutes.

Options:

- 1. Authorize staff to proceed with drafting an ordinance to amend Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act pertaining to the silviculture and forest management application requirements to expand environmental permitting exemption criteria to include accredited land conservancy management groups.**

2. **Schedule the first and only public hearing to consider an ordinance amending Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act pertaining to the silviculture and forest management application requirements to expand environmental permitting exemption criteria to include accredited land conservancy management groups for June 10, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.**
3. **Do not authorize staff to proceed with drafting an ordinance to amend Section 10-4.207 of the Environmental Management Act and do not schedule the first and only public hearing for June 10, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.**
4. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Options #1 & #2

Attachment:

1. [Silviculture and Forest Management Application Requirements Section 10-4.207 of the EMA](#)

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