

**PUBLIC HEARING REPORT**  
**FOR THE**  
**BOX-R WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**  
**MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**HELD BY THE**  
**BOX-R MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP**  
**AND THE**  
**FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 FRANKLIN COUNTY, FLORIDA**

The following report documents the public input that was received at the Box- R Wildlife Management Area (BRWMA) Management Advisory Group's (MAG) Public Hearing for the update to the Management Plan for BRWMA that was held at 7:00-9:00 PM, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at the Franklin County Court Room in Apalachicola, Florida.

**BRWMA Management Advisory Group Introduction:**

The meeting was introduced by Ms. Jenna Harper, a BRWMA MAG participant, who represented the BRWMA MAG. Ms. Harper indicated that she was one of twenty stakeholders that attended the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) facilitated BRWMA MAG meeting held on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve Environmental center, in Eastpoint, Florida. Ms. Harper stated that the BRWMA Draft Management Plan was being presented tonight by FWC staff, and that hardcopies of the draft plan and the BRWMA MAG meeting report were available at the front door for the public's review. Ms. Harper thanked everyone for attending and then introduced FWC staff Mr. Gary Cochran, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, FWC, to facilitate and coordinate the presentation of an overview of BRWMA; FWC's planning process, and the draft components of the BRWMA Draft Management Plan.

**Presentation on an Overview of BRWMA and the FWC Planning Process:** Mr.

Gary Cochran welcomed everyone and thanked the public for their attendance. Mr. Cochran then went over an orientation of the material and explained that the purpose of the public hearing was to solicit public input regarding the Draft Management Plan for BRWMA, and not hunting and fishing regulations, indicating there is a separate public input process for FWC's hunting and fishing rules and regulations development. Mr. Cochran then described the materials that were available at the door for public review,

including the BRWMA Draft Management Plan and the MAG Meeting Report and Accomplishment Report. Mr. Cochran then presented the agenda for the Public Hearing and facilitated the introduction of all FWC staff in attendance to the audience. Mr. Cochran then presented an overview and orientation of BRWMA, including a description of the natural communities, data about BRWMA visitors, revenue and economic benefits generated for the state and region by the area, wildlife species, recreational opportunities found on the area, surrounding conservation lands, surrounding Florida Forever Program Land Acquisition Projects, acquisition history, etc. He also explained FWC's planning process for the development of land management plans for the public conservation lands and asked if there were any questions regarding that process.

**Questions, Answers and Discussion on the BRWMA Overview and FWC's**

**Planning Process:** Mr. Gary Cochran facilitated an informal question and answers session where members of the public in attendance, without necessarily identifying themselves, could ask questions of the FWC staff, and discuss the answers. Mr. Cochran again emphasized that the exclusive purpose for the public hearing was to collect public input regarding the Draft Management Plan for BRWMA, and not to discuss area hunting, fishing and use regulations since, as was noted earlier, FWC has a separate process for input on hunting and fishing regulations.

No further question or comments were received at this stage of the BRWMA public hearing meeting.

**Presentation of the BRWMA Draft Management Plan**

At this point, Mr. Jerry Pitts the BRWMA Area Biologist/Manager began the presentation of the BRWMA Draft Management Plan. Mr. Pitts then completed and concluded the presentation of the BRWMA Draft Management Plan.

**Questions and Comments on the BRWMA Draft Management Plan Presentation**

Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, asked if there were any comments or questions from the public regarding the Plan and encouraged everyone to fill out a speaker card for public testimony. He informed them that all comments, questions, and public testimony will be duly considered equally by FWC.

Public Question 1: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions.

*What does FWC consider Fish and Wildlife based recreation?*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist responded.

*Hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, butterfly viewing; anything that is considered public outdoor natural resource oriented (based) recreation.*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response.

*Our philosophy of recreation is a little different from most agencies. We are responsible for what we want people to see, the habitat and wildlife that we have out there in these areas. We invite people to use their preferred mode (authorized by FWC such as hiking, bicycling, horseback riding and on some area vehicles) of transportation to get around to view the habitat and wildlife. For example, we encourage people to come out there on mountain bikes but we don't have trails designed solely as mountain bike trails. We have multiuse trails. The experience we are trying to provide is a picture into the wildlife habitat and wildlife that we are managing as opposed to something that is a sports facility (user oriented non-natural resource based recreation). Is that the question you were asking?*

Public Question 2: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*Mr. Cochran was talking about the mode of transportation (that was one of my other questions.) I kind of got the idea that they don't have trail maps. I have some maps from Box-R. Are those trails available and open to the public all year round? Are they just open during the hunting season and how do the hunters get around?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, responded.

*I will ask Mr. Jerry Pitts, our Area Manager, to answer that question.*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided an additional response.

*Vehicle access is allowed for these hunts the day prior, the day before, day after hunts and during the hunts. Then, at all other times, all other modes of (non-vehicular) transportation are allowed any time of year. You can mountain bike, hike, jog, whatever is authorized anytime of the year.*

Public Question 3: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*This is the main reason I am here tonight: If you want to kayak any of those waters....I think your opening presentation photo was Huckleberry Creek? If you wanted to paddle to wildlife viewing through Huckleberry Creek you would basically have to carry kayaks in there unless it was a hunt or the day before or the day after a hunt. Is that correct?*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*You can launch there. Most the places you can launch from you would have to carry a kayak. We also have giant boat ramp on the big river (Abercrombie Public Boat Ramp on the Jackson River), that is a mile and a half from Huckleberry Creek.*

Public Question 4: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*It is a mile and a half downstream. Kayakers have to launch there and paddle upstream to Huckleberry Creek.*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*We will look into that. That is one of the things we are reviewing. We would like to have a kayak/canoe launch for Huckleberry Creek.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response.

*We will revisit that topic in this presentation. Our main focus is public access that allows the recreational user to be focused on, viewing the wildlife and experiencing nature... that is the reason they are there... so we allow compatible fish and wildlife based recreation whatever modes (which are authorized) that helps them to do that.*

Public Question 5: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*Jerry, how extensive is the Water Hyacinth out there? Because I have seen it really bad in some other creeks.*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*We treat it. We spot spray Water Hyacinth. We spray Huckleberry and Little Huckleberry Creek. We do a foliar application spot treatment. So we have knocked a lot of that out. It's self-replenishing, it washes in those creeks or tidal. We knock it out and then it fills back up. We are hitting it but like I said it is replenishing itself very quickly. That is one of the main exotic plant in this region. The long term plan on this is to keep treating it.*

Public Question 6: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*Could you go back to the previous slide? It says "cooperate with other agencies, counties, stakeholders, and regional landowners to investigate regional recreational opportunities including linking hiking and multiuse trails between adjacent public areas." There's a tremendous amount of opportunities to do that. What stage are you in that? What is the initiative?*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*We are working on that. We are trying to put together some sort of brochures that link us with other area in the vicinity. I have worked with people looking for opportunities to incorporate Box-R onto the paddling trail (FWC's nearby Apalachicola River WEA Paddling Trail).*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response

*A part of this whole picture is to create public interest (in the area). In our section we have folks that sit in the Gulf Economic Development Council, the ready folks, which serves throughout the counties that are economically disadvantaged. We've worked with Dixie and Taylor County on opportunities with Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. Here (at BRWMA), we are looking at the same sort of collaboration with Franklin County. It is also going to be dependent on the interest from Franklin County to get things going. Some of the opportunities that we've talked about is the possibility of the rail line that goes through Box-R and the old bridge, which is no longer suitable for anything on the Apalachicola River. If there was a connection across the river, there is a possibility to take a trail all the way up to the Florida National Scenic Trail.*

Public Question 7: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*I've sat in on meetings regarding that gap (in the Florida National Scenic Trail). There is a gap there. That is one of the unmet gaps there on the Florida Scenic Trail. One of my questions is: What is the status on that railroad? It is a historical or cultural resource?*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*It is listed as a cultural resource.*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response

*There is also interest in keeping the railroad in Port St. Joe for potential economic development. So, there is a lot of moving parts down there. We are working with the U.S. Forest Service who manages the National Forrest System Trails and there are strategic issues involved with that.*

Public Question 8: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*I know that there is interest from the Franklin County. I've talked to people that are involved with the RESTORE Act (Gulf Restoration-Deepwater Horizon), and they are interested.*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided a further response

*I can concur (that they are interested).*

Public Question 9: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions.

*How many acres of pine trees are you growing every year?*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*We shoot for two thousand to twenty-five hundred acres, as much as we can (depending on whether the historic natural community was some type of pin-dominated forest). If you have not been out there in a while, snice we started thinning and replanting, the change in just the last few years is phenomenal. Timber stands that you could not see off the road into, you can now see for one hundred and fifty to two hundred yards into them. It's pretty.*

Public Question 10: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*On that note, Jerry, I have some people that ask me this: What are they going to do with all that land that burned? On either side of US Highway 90.*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*You know, it's awesome, what we have already gone out there done. Some of that stand, was classified as wet prairie, so we have just continued to conduct prescribed burning at the recommended intervals. Everything out there that is classified as wet or mesic flatwoods; we replanted it with longleaf pines a few years ago. That is well along the way to restoration. It looks great out there. The ground cover looks great, we've got trees (establishing) on the ground and a lot of wildflowers which are some of the best ground cover out there.*

Public Question 11: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*I have a question about the budget on page 37. It says "capital improvements new facility construction \$350,000 dollars." What is that mostly for?*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided a response

*One of the facilities that it is for is a public access entrance package close to where the gate is now, near the check station. Another portion of that is a proposal to construct interpretive trails and improvements around Tilton (historic mill town site on the area) which was the home of a company lumber mill town.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response.

*We also have a grant application in for RESTORE funding (Gulf Restoration-Deepwater Horizon), to develop Tilton Town as an interpretive exhibit for the historic timber town that was there. If the grant is approved there could be a lot of activity there and it is a pretty impressive facility of what remains there now.*

Public Question 12: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*What happened to the old mill out there?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response.

*We have a grant application submitted into the RESTORE Act Program which is a part of the Deep Water Horizon Gulf Restoration funding, to develop that site for historic interpretation purposes and we think that there is a good chance that we may get that grant. If that happens we will be, an evaluation to study and determine how much of it could be restored. Certainly, there would be extensive amount of work required to restore it (the old mill and surrounding facilities), to safely open it up for interpretation, to secure it, and restore it.*

Public Question 13: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*Is the roof still on it?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response.

*Yes, it is but it is sagging and it needs a new roof, for sure.*

Public Question 14: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*The roof was sagging twenty years ago when I put a deer stand on top of it.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*When we were out there I didn't want to walk in the old mill facility. Jerry said "You are going to be fine" he trusts that old roof a lot more than I do. Though, we did go in it. It was a pretty substantial building in its heyday.*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response

*Your tree stand isn't why it was sagging was it?*

Public Question 15: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*No. It was sagging before I got there.*

Public Question 16: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*Jerry, could you please go back for just a moment for the Abercrombie (Public Boat Ramp on the Jackson River). So is the arrangement that it's on the WMA but they (Franklin County) manage it? I think they have FWC grant money to construct the boat ramp.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Franklin County did receive FWC grant money to construct the boat ramp through the FWC Boating and Waterways Program. They manage the site through a sublease from FWC.*

Public Question 17: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*So if you have comments about that. Would the appropriate people to contact be the County?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Yes, Franklin County. Of course you can always comment to us as well but the County has the lead management responsibility and authority for the management of the boat ramp.*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response

*The County (Franklin) has and can continue to come to the boating improvements program (FWC Boating and Waterways Program) in FWC for additional assistance. A lot of counties have also dedicated some of their Deep Water Horizon money towards improved boating access.*

Public Question 18: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*About the education part of the plan, the budget lists \$57,000 maxim expected one year and \$500,000 for ten years. Besides a kiosk (which I think we talked about) what else would be under that category?*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided a response

*First off, one of the things we haven't done for Box-R WMA that we are going to do this cycle in conjunction with the Management Plan is to develop a Recreation Master Plan for the area. In that Master Plan there's an interpretive element that is developed for the Wildlife Management Area. Some of the things we develop for the Wildlife Management Areas are bird lists, pollinator lists, and wildflower lists and trail maps. In larger areas, we do a full recreational map and a full recreational brochure. In an area like Box-R, it is likely to be limited to smaller maps. The interpretive element (of the Recreation Master Plan) will identify what we want to do with Tilton (historic Recreation Master Plan), it will talk about the Land Management Activities that Jerry is doing there, it will have the basic maps like parking, "You are here" maps and here are all the things (recreational opportunities) that available on the property.*

Public Question 19: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*Will there be anybody designated on staff to do any education?*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided a response

*That isn't how we typically do things. Usually groups that come in and are willing to do that sort of interpretation are on a volunteer or eco-tourism sort of basis.*

Public Question 20: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*Slow down on advertising and drawing more people in. You know, when more people come the more pollution. Keep that in mind. We have plenty here now.*

Public Question 21: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*If you give more access to paddlers, my experience is that paddlers clean up after themselves and usually clean up after other people too.*

Public Question 22: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*I have to ask about this handout that was given about the military sites (proposed military training sites). I understand this is from the EIS (Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) from the Department of Defense (DOD), United States Air Force (USAF). This is one page and I understand what the emitters (electronic signal emitters) are. Loosely, I know they are a mobile communication radar light, is that fair to say? That are mobile, can be moved around. So, is the Sub-alternative emitter site (described in the referenced hand-out) the only site that would impact the present boundaries of Box-R?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*That is where we stand now, I think with what they (DOD, USAF) have recommended. Again, those are recommended sites that have not been approved, just what has been provided by the Department of Defense (USAF). They are continuing to go through their Environmental Impact Statement process and their National Environmental Policy act requirements under federal law. When that is concluded they will present their final recommendation to us and I think that is forthcoming very soon. When that is done we will evaluate it again to determine if what they are proposing is acceptable, if they need further modification and whether to recommend approval for those (emitter) sites on the area to the Acquisition Restoration Council.*

Public Question 23: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*So is there any mention elsewhere in terms of military use?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Yes, there is in the draft Management Plan of course, in the goals and objectives and elsewhere under the Cooperative Uses element of the Plan. We will describe the military use*

*in the fully fleshed out plan. I would like to inform the public at this stage of presenting the Draft Plan, what we are presenting here is the core, goal oriented action oriented items that we are going to develop and implement on the ground out there on BRWMA. That is why we focus on the goals and objectives. There is a tremendous amount of information that is also included as a part of the final Management Plan which will include a section talking about potential military use on the area. There will be a section on GRASI (Gulf Regional Air Space Initiative) and other potential first responder training as well that will discuss it in further detail. We will also include the Environmental Impact Statement in the appendix of the Management Plan and whatever recommendations we have at that time from the Department of Defense to incorporate in the plan.*

Public Question 24: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*I understand this is just recreation that we are looking at tonight.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Actually, we are looking at resource and operational management as well as planned recreational uses and facilities.*

Public Question 24: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*So that proposed military training use of BRWMA is not something that goes in front of public comment or is it? Is it just not out yet?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Yes, absolutely, the initial recommendation from USAF is out and that is why we are presenting it here at the public hearing tonight. We are presenting it as a proposed use and goal/objective. So, it was presented earlier, and included in the Plan, as one of the cooperative management goals that we looked at earlier is to cooperate with the Department of Defense and implement what is feasible and acceptable, if anything, for their recommendations for military training on that area. Again, those training alternatives or proposals have to be something that we agree is compatible with the conservation of natural resources on the area, and with the public use and access of the area. They (OD-USAF) make*

*recommendations for military, we evaluate them and we provide a fairly comprehensive response. Our initial response is available and we will have that incorporated that the appendix of the Plan. On some of the early recommendations they (DOD-USAF) made we indicated that the impacts that were unacceptable to us. Now, they are coming back with further recommendations.*

*So, yes, you can comment and make recommendations on that proposed use tonight and all the way up to the approval process to provide comment on that proposed use as well. So, it isn't finalized. That is one of my reasons that we are presenting the BRWMA Draft Management Plan tonight with all potential, proposed management activities and uses of the area.*

Public Question 25: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*So limitation of pollution is part of the project. Keep in mind, when you are covering GRASI that noise pollution is horrible here. It might not affect you where you live, you probably live around the city or around an airport. We really love our silence, it is golden. Planes are flying in the middle of the night. That is an indication that things are going to change. We would love to maintain our noise pollution at the level it is now.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*We appreciate that and understand that is an important consideration. Those noises may impact humans and wildlife as well.*

Public Question 25: An unidentified member of the audience provided the following comments and questions

*I have a comment about some notes I made. Is MAG an Advisory group? I am looking at the MAG list, there are a lot of people I know. A lot of them work for agencies, some don't. My question is there is no body representing recreation users like paddlers or bikers. The equestrians are represented.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Yes Ma'am, MAG is a management advisory group. I think that we did invite them. The MAG list that you are looking at represents the people who attended the meeting. We invited approximately- 25 stakeholders which included recreation based organizations.*

Public Question 26: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*I looked at that. They may be there but I don't see them on there. I went through the whole list, including invited but unable to attend. There may be someone here that is associated with recreation but I don't see it.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*We invited the Apalachicola Riverkeepers, which represent paddling interest as well. We normally do invite a member of the paddling community. This could have been an oversight on our part for not inviting someone from this area to represent the paddling community. Rich, (Rich Mospens FWC OPAWS) do you have any comment on that?*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response

*It could be that we just didn't have the names of local people or that Rebecca (Rebecca Shelton FWC Conservation Planner, responsible for lead development of the BRWMA Draft Management Plan) contacted them and that they couldn't attend. We typically do have someone from the paddling community attend.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response

*They are invited normally and The Florida Trail Association or some similar group almost always for every one of our areas if hiking is a recreational opportunity on the area. I can't really explain why they didn't attend. As Rich explained, a lot of it depends on their willingness to participate and to be listed as a MAG member. I'm not sure whop that contact was.*

FWC Response: Mr. Rich Noyes, FWC Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services Section Leader, provided an additional response

*I also see in there was no bicycling stakeholder. But typically we identify people in the area to be likely stakeholders, they are usually contacted if they did accept the invitation and then not show, we would be at a loss. It could be also that we have a limited stakeholder list for this area.*

Public Question 26: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*I'm sure there were good reasons as to why they didn't participate. It has a definite obvious influence on the outcome of your consensus meeting results. For instance, one of the suggestions were for equestrian trails, specifically. I may be wrong but it seems to be that it was suggested because a member from the Equestrian community was present. I understand that you cannot make people come to the table. From my point reviewing this, that was something I noted.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response

*I would like to point out we do emphasize and into take very serious consideration all of the recommendations that are made at the MAG meeting. Just because a particular user group was not represented, that certainly doesn't mean that we won't cover and evaluate that potential use (paddling, hiking, etc.) in that area. As we discussed we will consider a kayak launch.*

Public Comment 27: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*For instance a kayak association. Obviously, the Florida Trail does not go through there.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response

*We always invite them. Again, Rich said what happens is they have to agree to attend. So like every organization they have a limited amount of funds and meetings that they can go to. They are mostly volunteers. I think for this particular area, the Florida Trail at the moment is not anywhere near this area, they elected not able to attend. That point is well taken. We do work very hard to invite 25 stakeholders, virtually all of those include hiking and paddling. If those are uses available at the managed area.*

Stakeholder Response: Ms. Jenna Harper, one of twenty stakeholders that attended the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) facilitated BRWMA MAG meeting, provided an additional response

*I would like to point out that the advisory group ranks highest to provide high quality sustainable recreational opportunities, our number one by far objective.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response

*That is one of the reasons Jerry (Mr. Jerry Pitts, Area Biologist/Manager) pointed out \$500,000 in our recommended cost estimate for that category of the projected budget. That doesn't mean we are going to get the funding or it will be approved for interpretive education. That amount represents the projected funding that is recommended for improving the facilities and access the area. We recognize the need to expand and improve those facilities. Most of our focus during the initial ten years includes: securing the site, securing the existing and managing the remaining natural habitat, wildlife, resource base line inventory work for, the natural communities, and wildlife surveys. All these things are important elements that have to be accomplished to obtain the knowledge about the habitat and resources there before we make decisions about putting in recreational facilities and expanding recreational facilities. As Jerry (Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC Area Biologist/Manager) said, our initial work was primarily focused towards restoring the habitat. Snice, any recreation has to be compatible with the conservation of natural resources on the area. So, there will be an expanded focus on public access during this next 10 year planning and operational cycle. In addition to those are already available to make them more accessible and more widely known.*

Public Questions 28: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*There was one thing mentioned in the results. One of the items that got most support was about cattle grazing. How does that rate? I think one time, maybe historically they had cattle on Box-R or not?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response

*Are you referring to the (BRWMA) Management Advisory Group results?*

Public Questions 29: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*Yes, on page number 4. I just found it. It got no votes. One of the things recommended. As well as logging. Is that for generating revenue?*

FWC Response: Mr. Jerry Pitts, FWC BRWMA Area Biologist, provided a response.

*I think where that came from is someone recommended that we don't do cattle leases there on the management areas. I do not think that is an option.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided an additional response

*That is correct not for this area. In Central and South Florida we do have areas that have historical ranch actives that have been a part of the land for a very long time. We do use cattle grazing as a management tool. At Box-R that will not be considered an option. Historically, there may have been cattle on the property but Box-R does not seem to have the appropriate landscape for cattle at this time.*

Public Questions 30: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*It says additional revenue from farming and renting lands include an apiary lease, is that compatible? Off-site timber sales?*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response.

*Apiary leases are compatible. As to timber sales that is referring to off-site species of pines (pine species that would not have naturally occurred on the area). Many of those pine species that are planted there now were not a part of the historic natural community. So, we are not clear cutting the area. We are trying to maintain that forest structure for wildlife habitat while also restoring the habitat over time. I think they are doing some reseeding of Longleaf pine on some of the areas that have been thinned and burned. That is what we mean by off-site species, that particular species was determined not a part of the natural habitat. It will be replaced over time with longleaf pine.*

Public Questions 31: The same unidentified member of the audience continued this line of comments and questions.

*It also says sales of various permits, recreation users' fees, and ecotourism activities, if such projects could be economically developed. So the door is open at some point to collect user fees.*

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response.

*Any user fees that we implement have to be approved by the Commission and by the Florida Legislators. There is quite an extensive process required for implementing user fees or new user fees.*

End of Public comment and Question Period of the Public Hearing: Mr. Gary Cochran, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, stated.

*Are there any other questions about the BRWMA Draft Management Plan? Again, we will continue to take comments and questions all the way through the entire review and approval process. Seeing that there are no further questions or comments at this point of the meeting, this concludes the presentation of the BRWMA Draft Management Plan that we are going to seek approval for and implement for the 2016-2026 time period.*

**Public Testimony on the BRWMA Draft Management Plan:** One member of the public audience submitted a speaker card indicating their intention to provide formal public testimony. Mr. Gary Cochran again emphasized that the public hearing was for taking input regarding the BRWMA Draft Management Plan, and called the first speaker to the podium.

Public Testimony Question

Public Testimony Question: Robin Rickel Vroegop provided the following comments and questions.

*I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I appreciate the FWC, and all this agency does as well as the other conservation agencies in our area. I feel very blessed to live in this area. My husband and I spent seven days on the Apalachicola River in a kayak. I have a real deep concern and stake in a variety of ways. My name is Robin Vroegop, my relationship with Box-R goes back to ten years. I was a volunteer on St. Vincent Wildlife Refuge, which I still*

am today. Jerry hired me seasonally to work the check station, and I was so grateful for that. It was just getting off the ground. I've done the Christmas bird count, I was out there birding not too long ago. I wear a lot of hats: I am a Florida Master Naturalist, self-educated through the help of courses, also member of the Florida Green Guide association and the member of Florida Society of Ethical Ecotourism. About two and a half years ago I opened a business in Apalachicola, Base Camp Apalach it is right next to the chamber. I feel like I have a good idea about the potential for Box-R in terms of visitor recreation opportunities. I was asked about 8 to 10 months ago to participate in DEP's statewide comprehensive outdoor recreational plan working group. They are in the cycle where they determine how recreational dollars are going to be spent in the future. I am trying to self-educate myself by attending the meetings. If you would like to spread the word, there will be a meeting January 19<sup>th</sup> in Pensacola. (I apologize for the plug.) The comment I wanted to make sure I got on record about (I would have come here regardless of who I represented) there is incredible amount of opportunity on Box-R for paddlers and bikers. The Apalachicola and Jackson River are really wonderful teaching areas. We primarily provide educational tours. Box-R is kind of in our backyard in Apalachicola. I've sent probably 200 to 300 people to the paddling trails that have been developed by FWC. They are wonderful. I have paddled them. I've gone out there and saw people I've told about the paddling trails. I pass out maps (FWC's Paddling Trail Maps), which are outstanding for those paddling trails. I would like to see Huckleberry Creek added to that paddle trail. I understand there may be some private property issues. We need water access. People are not going to carry their kayak through the woods to get to Huckleberry Creek, it is not practical. I want to go on the record of advocating the original purposes of the purchase Box-R. I think I read the original conceptual management plan which talked about canoe and kayak paddling. I wanted to make sure that it was in the new plan. The other item I want to go on record of saying in this meeting is reiterating what Mr. Miller said earlier. The problem with potential military use on a property like Box-R or other private lands in the area is the noise impact to wildlife in the area. Amphibians, birds... It ruins the hunting opportunities too. I wanted to make sure I say that as a representative of the Florida Green Guide Association. I am a former officer of that organization, I know they are opposed to any military activities. In particular on Box-R, I find it kind of hard to figure out why we would allow military access (unless by foot only) on Box-R when we only allow the public (except for hunters) to access Box-R by walking or biking. Again, if we could avoid that it would be beneficial to wildlife and visitors. The noise levels would be harmful. As a paddler, hiker, environmental educator and business owner if we have military activities on any of our public lands it is going to be really a dissuading factor for visitors. If it is allowed at all, I think you would be developing incompatible uses and endangering the public. I strongly urge that we don't allow military activities on this land in the next ten years. Thank you again.

FWC Response: Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, provided a response.

*Thank you for those comments. They will be a part of the public hearing report. As well as the other comments, questions and recommendations we had tonight. Do we have any other individual who would like to provide public testimony?*

**Adjournment:** Mr. Gary Cochran, FWC Land Conservation and Planning Administrator, asked if there were any other members of the public that wished to give public testimony.

*Since there are no other speakers who wish to offer further comments, the meeting is adjourned. Thank you for attending. I would like to remind you that we will continue to take your recommendations and comments all the way through the planning process and to the requisition restoration council meeting, which is also public.*

Mr. Cochran then officially declared the public hearing adjourned.