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Althea P. Jefferson, AICP
Senior Policy & Planning Analyst
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

via email to ajeffers@sfwmd.gov

Re: Response to South Florida Water Management Comments - Martin County Comprehensive Growth Management Plan Amendment (DOC #23-5ESR) and Future Land Use Map Amendment (DOC #23-6ESR)

Dear Ms. Jefferson:

The below serves as JWA Ranch, LLC's ("Applicant") response to comments submitted by the South Florida Water Management District ("District") to Martin County ("County") regarding the District's review of the proposed text amendment change to the Martin County Comprehensive Growth Management Plan (DOC #23-5ESR) and the proposed amendment to the Future Land Use Map (DOC #23-6ESR) for the project known as "The Ranch."

The District has no comments or objections to DOC #23-5ESR.

The District's primary comment relating to DOC #23-6ESR is that the proposed future land use map change from Agricultural to Rural Lifestyle appears to be inconsistent with the federally authorized Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan ("CERP") and the Indian River Lagoon - South ("IRL-South") project component. As the proposed land use change does not establish any development rights this comment does not appear applicable to the proposed future land use change.

It should also be noted that the subject property is under private ownership and not subject to any easements or other development restrictions that would require "use of the entire 3,902 acres as water storage and upland/wetland restoration" or allow for the "public use" on the property as stated in the District's comments. A recommendation of denial of the proposed land use change

based on either or both of these statements would be a deprivation of the Applicant’s constitutional and statutory property rights.

Under the existing land use designation, the Applicant has the right to develop the property as contemplated, with the exception of the following that would be allowed or required under the Rural Lifestyle future land use designation: (i) the provision of sewer service (instead of being required to provide up to 195 individual onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems (“OSTDS” or “septic systems”) over the 3,902 acres), (ii) the allowance for a smaller residential lot footprint (Applicant is proposing approximately 200 acres of land for residential purposes, instead of potentially 3,902 acres for residential development as required under the existing Agricultural land use), (iii) the requirement that all wetlands and wetland buffers be located outside of any residential lot (residential lots established under the Agricultural future land use designation may include wetlands and buffers within the residential lot) and (iv) the requirement to develop the property under a planned unit development agreement (the Agricultural future land use designation would allow the development of residential lots, golf courses and related amenities by-right under straight zoning regulations) which requires review and approval by the Board of County Commissioners and the Applicant providing offsetting public benefits. The proposed land use change from Agricultural to Rural Lifestyle does not increase the density, nor intensity of any potential development already permitted on the subject property.

Development of the subject property under the Agricultural future land use designation, which requires 20 acre minimum lot sizes, includes the potential for up to 195 individual septic systems spread across the 3,902 acres, allows wetlands to be included as part of, and within, said lots, and site plan approval accomplished under straight zoning regulations, when compared with the requirements of the Rural Lifestyle future land use designation would have a substantially worse potential impact on the objectives and goals that were originally described for the Palmar Natural Storage and Water Quality Treatment Area. Development under the Agricultural future land use designation would do nothing to improve, enhance or restore water quality, water storage capabilities or existing wetlands on site.

The Applicant is very much aware of the IRL-South project and its Pal-Mar Natural Storage and Water Quality Area component and strongly believes the proposed amendment to change the future land use designation for the subject property from Agricultural to Rural Lifestyle will not negatively impact implementation of the CERP or the IRL-South component, and to the contrary will serve to increase the ability to address some of the goals of the Palmar Natural Storage and Water Quality Treatment Area and will provide the opportunity to ensure the improvement, enhancement and restoration of water quality, water storage capabilities or existing wetlands on site.

As background, the previous property owner worked closely with the District and County over a decade ago on a plan that would have provided increased water storage on portions of the subject property located south of State Road 76 in exchange for increasing the development potential on the site to allow for up to 600 residential units on the approximately 1,450 acres located around

State Road 76. That plan, however, never materialized due to a lack of State funding and a change in priority of State acquisition plans.

It is also noteworthy to discuss District actions with regard to CERP and the IRL-South component from a land acquisition perspective. Since the acquisition of a portion of the “Harmony” parcel in late 2014, the District has not targeted, nor included, any lands located within the “Pal-Mar Natural Storage and Water Quality Area” in its land acquisition plan. As of the writing of this response, neither the subject property, nor any other property located in the “Pal-Mar Natural Storage and Water Quality Area,” is targeted by the District for acquisition.

The Ranch property is comprised of approximately 3,902 acres, which includes approximately 442 acres north of State Road 76 and the balance south of State Road 76 and Bridge Road. The project proposes two (2) golf courses on the south parcel, with associated support facilities, 175 residential lots between one (1) and two (2) acres in size, over 1,400 acres of agricultural uses and the preservation of approximately 650 acres of wetlands. Only a very small portion of the development will include buildings and paved areas for access and parking. This is substantially less than the 1,450 acres previously approved by the District and the County in 2010 with the previous owner’s development plans, with the vast majority of the land under the proposed plan being “pervious” in nature and not requiring considerable stormwater management. A detailed engineering plan is underway as part of the development application detailing the stormwater management for the impervious areas, as well as water quality treatment for the golf course areas and balance of the development.

The stormwater management system of The Ranch will be designed to accomplish two additional requirements of the District and exceed minimum standards. The project is being designed with Best Management Practices (“BMPs”) to provide an additional fifty percent (50%) of the required water quality treatment volume as necessary since the project is within a stormwater basin that contributes to Waters Not Attaining Standards (“WNAS”). In addition, the stormwater management system will be designed with BMPs to provide a net improvement for the nutrient loading of both Nitrogen and Phosphorous, of which the St. Lucie Canal (“C-44 Canal”) is considered impaired. The project will also provide significantly more on-site storage within the proposed interconnected lake system, in addition to existing on-site ditches and canals, which will provide for more storage of stormwater and a reduced discharge rate to the C-44 Canal from the on-site development.

The Ranch development is currently authorized by a Consumptive Use Permit (“CUP”) issued by the District (Permit Number 43-00074-W). The permit is for irrigation and authorizes withdrawals from both the C-44 Canal and groundwater (via wells). The permit is for twenty years and expires in 2029. The permit authorizes 2,975 MG/Year which is sufficient to irrigate the golf courses, common areas and other portions of The Ranch development. A modification request will be submitted to the District concurrent with the application for Environmental Resource Permit (for construction of the phases of proposed development). Representatives of The Ranch are presently in negotiations with Martin County Utilities for potable water and sewer to serve the project,

however, irrigation will be primarily by way of the withdrawals authorized by the above-mentioned District CUP. The Applicant and the County are in the process of verifying capacity to serve The Ranch development, including the potential to add a raw water site to The Ranch property, if needed or required by the County.

Representatives from The Ranch have had numerous meetings with staff from both the County and the District regarding the proposed development plan. A pre-application meeting was held between the representatives from The Ranch and the District on October 18, 2022 to discuss this development project and the permitting required to authorize construction as presented. None of the issues noted in the District's comments were brought up at that time or since. All required regulatory criteria will be met or exceeded as part of the project design and has been incorporated into the application(s) submitted to the District for Environmental Resource Permit(s). It should be noted that the south parcel is currently isolated from surrounding lands by a canal/ditch/berm system which provides both its water supply and drainage. The canal/ditch/berm system provides irrigation water via pumps located at the C-44 Canal, as well as provides drainage during the wet season. Accordingly, the south parcel has no connection to the Harmony parcel located to the east, Pal Mar lands located to the south or Sunlight Ranch located to the west. At the time of this application, reclaimed water is not available to the site and the Applicant is not aware of planned extensions of reclaimed water service to the project area

In addition, The Ranch property has been actively engaged in agriculture for over fifty (50) years. As with most agricultural lands located in South Florida, an extensive network of ditches currently exists on the property. This extensive ditch network system bisects/interconnects practically all on-site wetlands for purposes of providing drainage of pasture areas in the wet season. While a large portion of the project will remain in agriculture, it is anticipated that many of the interior ditches will be eliminated as part of the development, thus restoring a more natural hydroperiod to many, if not all, wetlands located on-site. These enhancements and restoration activities will greatly improve the hydrology and water quality of the property, and ability to store and treat water on-site, a primary goal of CERP.

The Ranch project site contains numerous wetlands on both the north and south parcels. All on-site wetlands have been delineated at the time of this response and wetland determinations have been ongoing with District staff, of which approval is anticipated to be provided shortly. All delineated wetlands have been field reviewed/inspected by District staff and acreage of each surveyed. Buffers are required by both the County and the District with the County's requirement exceeding that of the District. Accordingly, that acreage has been quantified for each delineated wetland. As part of the development, the wetlands are being restored to improve environmental conditions and water quality on the property.

Even though the District's comments are not applicable to a proposed future land use amendment, the proposed Ranch development will accomplish many of the objectives and goals that were originally described for the Palmar Natural Storage and Water Quality Treatment Area. All on-site wetlands will be hydrologically enhanced and maintained in perpetuity. In addition, all

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development areas will meet or exceed current regulatory requirements and have a positive impact with regard to water quality treatment and water quantity storage within The Ranch stormwater management system.

Neither amending the future land use map for the subject property from Agricultural to Rural Lifestyle, nor the proposed development of The Ranch, will negatively impact implementation of the CERP or the Indian River Lagoon South component. To the contrary, the restoration and enhancements proposed as part of the project will drastically improve the hydrology and water quality for the property, and surrounding areas, all of which will serve to further the purposes of CERP and the IRL-South component.

In addition to the above, and as requested in the District's comments to DOC #23-6ESR, please find enclosed preliminary master stormwater management calculations analysis that has been submitted to the County in support of DOC #23-6ESR and The Ranch project.

Cc: Martin County Board of County Commissioners (*via email*)
Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (*via email*)
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (*via email*)
Florida Department of Environmental Protection (*via email*)