




MEMORANDUM

June 26, 2025

To: Administrator Byron Brooks -AND- Supervisor Cheryl Gillespie

From: Commissioner Dr. Kelly Martinez Semrad, District 5 

Subject: Commissioner's Request for a BCC Discussion Item
Exploring Protective Designations for Orange County Parks and Forests

Administrator Brooks,

Orange County's parks, conservation lands, and forested corridors are essential to preserving biodiversity, protecting water resources, and sustaining our quality of life. As urban development continues to expand, it is imperative that we explore proactive measures to secure the long-term protection of these natural spaces.

I am requesting that the Board of County Commissioners consider a discussion on potential protective designations under Chapter 68A-19 of the Florida Administrative Code, specifically:

- **Rule 68A-19.004 – Bird Sanctuaries:** This rule authorizes the establishment of official bird sanctuaries to protect nesting, roosting, and migratory habitats from disturbance or destruction. Designating qualifying Orange County parks or forested areas as bird sanctuaries would strengthen protections for native and migratory bird species, promote ecological balance, and enhance the recreational and educational value of our natural areas.
- **Rule 68A-19.006 – Restricted Hunting Areas:** This rule provides a mechanism to establish designated areas where hunting and similar activities are limited or prohibited in order to safeguard public lands and wildlife. Applying for a "Restricted Hunting Area" designation must be approved by the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)**. Implementing this protection within select County parks or forests would help reduce wildlife stress, prevent accidental harm to visitors, and preserve sensitive ecosystems critical to Orange County's environmental health.

COMMISSIONER DR. KELLY MARTINEZ SEMRAD, DISTRICT 5
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These designations would not only advance environmental conservation goals but also generate long-term **economic benefits**. Protecting wildlife corridors from hunting and habitat disruption sustains ecotourism, birdwatching, and outdoor recreation industries that contribute significantly to Florida's economy. Counties that invest in preserving natural habitats often see higher park visitation rates, stronger local tourism, and greater public support for conservation initiatives.

Several Florida counties have already adopted similar protections with notable success. **Alachua County** has established designated bird sanctuary zones to preserve migratory habitats near Paynes Prairie, and **Leon County** has implemented restricted hunting areas to protect forested public lands adjacent to residential and park zones. Orange County has the opportunity to follow these examples by creating a framework that aligns with state conservation standards while reflecting our community's priorities.

Please accept this memorandum as my formal request to place this item on the next available Board agenda under the Commissioner's Report section. The goal of this discussion is to direct staff to:

1. Review the requirements of Rules 68A-19.004 and 68A-19.006;
2. Identify potential Orange County sites eligible for such designations;
3. Prepare recommendations for advancing protective applications through the FWC.

By establishing bird sanctuaries and restricted hunting areas, Orange County can reaffirm its leadership in environmental stewardship and ensure that our parks and forests remain safe, vibrant, and ecologically sound for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Commissioner Dr. Kelly Martinez Semrad, District 5

/s/

Cc: Orange County Attorney's Office