

**November 14, 2017**

Mayor Theresa Jacobs  
Orange County  
201 S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner Betsy Vanderley  
Orange County Board of County  
Commissioners  
201S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner Bryan Nelson  
Orange County Board of County  
Commissioners  
201S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner Jennifer Thompson  
Orange County Board of County  
Commissioners  
201S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner Pete Clarke  
Orange County Board of County  
Commissioners  
201S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner Emily Bonilla  
Orange County Board of County  
Commissioners  
201S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Commissioner Victoria P. Siplin  
Orange County Board of County  
Commissioners  
201S. Rosalind Ave., 5th Floor  
Orlando, FL 32801

Re: Friends of the Wekiva River comments on an additional interchange to the Wekiva Parkway

Dear Mayor Jacobs and Commissioners;

In the late 1980's, I was the lead ecologist on the consulting team that defined the alignment for the Wekiva Parkway. In general, the alignment that we selected is very close to the path that Parkway follows today. At that time, the approach to the design of the Parkway was conventional and the Friends of the Wekiva River, among many others, wanted something much better than conventional. So, the approval process for the Parkway was halted. In fact, for more than a decade, there was a general assumption that this would forever be the missing link to the beltway system around Orlando.

But in the late 1990's, it became clear that a well-designed, limited access Parkway might be a better solution than 6-laning SR 46 and the piecemeal development of all the land around it. But the approach to the Parkway needed to be exemplary. A distinctive strategy required careful thought by dozens of experts from various disciplines. The comprehensive effort that followed over the next 15 years was substantial:

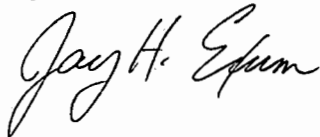
- The Wekiva River Protection Act required local governments to enact changes to Comprehensive Plans to protect water quality and quantity, and to establish land uses compatible with resource protection in the basin,

- The state promulgated the Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act and the Wekiva River Basin Coordinating Commission defined the details for a multifaceted strategy for environmental protection,
- The US Congress designated the Wekiva River and several of its tributaries as a National Wild and Scenic River,
- The state prioritized land acquisition to protect unique areas for aquifer recharge, distinctive habitats and ecological linkages,
- Water quality improvement projects were implemented and minimum flows were established for the springs and surface waters in the Basin,
- Biological research was conducted that better informed the final design of the Parkway; for example, the roadway was elevated through specifically-identified wildlife corridors between Wekiwa Springs State Park and the Ocala National Forest and, finally,
- The Parkway's limited access standards were sustained through the identification of three interchanges.

That process, and all those actions at the local, state, and even federal level have, over the last 30 years created a particularly unique design for a high speed, limited access roadway. The Friends of the Wekiva River (FOWR) have been involved throughout the process, and I have had the privilege of serving on the FOWR Board for the last 20 years of these discussions. The Wekiva Parkway, as designed, sustains a wildlife corridor of state-wide importance, protects areas of high aquifer recharge important to Wekiwa and Rock Springs and sustains the values of the Wild and Scenic Wekiva River.

Please don't consider proposals that would begin to dismantle the legacy of the Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act and the efforts to protect natural resources in the Wekiva Basin.

Jay H. Exum, Ph.D.



Friends of the Wekiva River Board Member