

# Marion County Commissioners Reject Ocala Ranch Comprehensive Plan Changes

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Suwannee St. Johns Sierra Club Group

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## **Marion County Commissioners Reject Ocala Ranch Comprehensive Plan Changes**

Ocala, FL: In the 3rd and final hearing on changes to the comprehensive plan for a 3000 acre Development of Regional Impact (DRI) AZ Ocala Ranch, the Marion County Commissioners were left with more questions than answers to this massive sprawling development on the southwest corner of Marion County.

Though the project attorney referred to the plan as a “rural” neighborhood, it would have been a sprawling urban development with 4, 6 and 8 housing units on each acre along with shopping centers, professional offices, 2 golf courses and several community pools within one mile from Gum Slough and the Withlacoochee River. Commissioners patiently listened to over 20 speakers, mostly residents, and then voted with their constituents. No speakers from the audience spoke in favor of this project. The Commissioners did not accept the AZ Ocala Ranch agents’ arguments of why they needed to develop this land in the manner they had represented to the Commission.

The environment and the citizens who protect it can breathe a sigh of relief and celebrate that Marion County Commissioners heard their pleas and concerns ranging from intense development, water usage of 3 million gallons a day, depleted wells, fertilizer usage, chemicals on landscapes and shade trees,

changes to wildlife corridors, agriculture lands used for urban intensive, concerns on roadway concurrency, emergency and safety services in a remote area of the county. Concerns were also raised about the Sabal Trail gas pipeline on the property and a compressor station across the street.

Ocala Ranch planners told Commissioners that they would give the county a fire department, hook up to a re-use water center and reduce fertilizer use. Plans about a mitigation bank on the most vulnerable of their wetlands within the property boundaries were unclear. The Marion County commissioners listened to their constituents, citing public interests, incompatibility with existing neighborhood and safety & emergency services.

When asked what now? Alisha Lewis, a Florida Highland community organizer stated, "We realize AZ Ocala Ranch may have a chance to appeal this decision, however our community will grow in strength and numbers to continue opposing a development of this size threatening to impact our rural way of life."

Whitey Markle, Chair of Suwannee St. Johns Sierra Club had this to say after the meeting, "The Commissioners acted in the best interests of their residents and listened to us; asking relevant questions based on our concerns and in the end voted to protect the environment."

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About The Sierra Club

**The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 2.4 million members and supporters. In addition to helping**

people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org).

The Suwannee St. Johns Sierra Club Group represents 15 Counties, Alachua, Baker, Bradford, SW Clay, Citrus, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Putnam, Suwannee, and Union in north central Florida and includes over 2000 members.