



Pinellas County

Staff Report

File #: 19-1420A, **Version:** 1

Subject:

Ordinance amending the Pinellas County Code by adding Division 4-Equine Riding and Seagrass Damage to Article X-Aquatic Preserves of Chapter 58-Environment; providing for the prohibition of equine riding within aquatic preserves; and providing for the prohibition of unpermitted seagrass damage within aquatic preserves.

Recommended Action:

Following the public hearing, adopt the proposed ordinance amending the Pinellas County Code by adding Division 4-Equine Riding and Seagrass Damage to Article-X Aquatic Preserves of Chapter 58-Environment; providing for the prohibition of equine riding within aquatic preserves; and providing for the prohibition of unpermitted seagrass damage within aquatic preserves.

- The ordinance is for the purpose of preventing further damage to seagrass in the Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve system.
- The ordinance supports the efforts of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tampa Bay Regional Planning County, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, and the City of St. Petersburg.
- Authority to advertise a public hearing was approved by the Board of County Commissioners (Board) on October 8, 2019.

Strategic Plan:

Ensure Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

2.1 Providing planning, coordination, prevention, and protective services to ensure a safe and secure community

Practice Superior Environmental Stewardship

3.3 Protect and improve the quality of our water, air, and other natural resources

Summary:

On October 8, 2019, the Board authorized a public hearing to consider amending Division 4 Equine Riding and Seagrass Damage of Chapter 58 Article X of the Pinellas County Code in order to protect public health, water quality, and seagrasses from impacts resulting from horseback riding and other human activities that may damage or scar seagrass in the PCAP system. Horseback riding has recently become popular within nearshore areas of the PCAP where seagrass is prevalent. Aerial photographs show that horseback riding is causing extensive damage to seagrass. Horseback riding also presents water quality and public health impacts arising from horse defecation. Banning horseback riding and other unpermitted activities that cause seagrass damage in the PCAP is consistent with state best management practices, Florida Statute (F.S.) 258, Part II (Aquatic Preserves), and Florida Administrative Code Chapter 18-20 (Aquatic Preserves).

Background Information:

Pinellas County is home to two (2) aquatic preserves; the Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve and the Boca Ciega Bay Aquatic Preserve (together, the PCAP). The state of Florida has 41 aquatic preserves defined by F.S. 258.37 as exceptional areas of submerged lands and associated waters set aside for being maintained in their natural or existing condition. It is estimated there are 33,774 acres of seagrass in the PCAP. Seagrass improves water quality by filtering nutrients and trapping sediments, which enhances fisheries habitats and recreational opportunities which benefits the economy and tourism.

This ordinance supports the efforts of the TBRPC and FDEP. Exhibit A to the Resolution is a letter of concern from the TBRPC to the FDEP urging an end to horseback riding activity considered to be degrading to the seagrass beds and water quality in the PCAP. The letter also requests that the FDEP incorporate language into the Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve Management Plan prohibiting horseback riding and other uses detrimental to the aquatic preserves. The City of St. Petersburg and the TBEP have expressed support for a countywide ordinance that bans horseback riding and other activities harmful to seagrass in the PCAP. Further, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has expressed support and will assist the county with the installation of signage. Lastly, the ordinance was sent to all Pinellas County cities for their consideration. No objections were received.

Fiscal Impact:

N/A

Staff Member Responsible:

Addie Javed, Director, Public Works

Partners:

FDEP
TBRPC
FDOT
TBEP
City of St. Petersburg

Attachments:

Proposed Ordinance
Exhibit A
Project Location Map