



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Jacksonville District

News Release

Release No. 06-23
For Release: May 1, 2006
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issues permit for Freedom Commerce Centre

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced today that it has issued a permit, based on a revised application to fill wetlands, to construct a multi-use development known as the Freedom Commerce Centre. The original application had requested a permit to fill 167 acres of wetlands. The revised application requested a permit to fill 35.55 acres.

In May 2005, the Corps denied a permit for this project. The site is an undeveloped 604-acre tract of land with 560 acres of wetlands and 44 acres of uplands, bordered by Baymeadows Road, I-95 and Philips Highway in Duval County. The site contains the headwaters of both Pottsburg and Julington creeks, which flow into the St. Johns River (an American Heritage River). The original application included impacts to higher quality forested wetlands, consisting of mature hardwood forests, bay swamps and cypress stands. After receiving the Corps' denial, the applicant, Freedom Commerce Centre Partners, L.P., LTD, modified its site plan and resubmitted to the Corps in December 2005. The Corps has now concluded that the applicant has chosen the least damaging practicable alternative. A permit has been provided to Freedom Commerce Centre Partners, L.P., LTD. The permit includes requirements for mitigation and identifies areas where no future development may occur.

The Corps' permit denial continues to apply to the remainder of the property, including approximately 80 acres at the south tip and a 7-acre strip along Philips Highway, since the issued permit represents the applicant's total plan of development and the entire property has already been evaluated by the Corps and other federal resource agencies. If the applicant or any other owner should apply to develop the area, the permit stipulates that the areas have been evaluated and are included in the Corps' denial.

The proposed impacts were reduced from 167 acres of fill into waters of the United

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States to 35.55 acres of fill, which includes 1.7 acres of ditches. Impacts are mainly to medium quality wetlands as opposed to the high quality wetland systems that would have been impacted by the previously proposed project. The denied project was based on 90% of the impacts to high quality wetland systems on site and the revision is based on 11% of the impacts to high quality systems.

“Freedom Commerce Centre Partners, L.P., LTD made dramatic changes to its development proposal. The project is now scaled back so construction is only on developable uplands and already existing roads, said Col. Robert Carpenter, Jacksonville District commander. Our permit allows wetlands to be filled only for the purpose of allowing access to the developable areas. The Corps has worked closely with the applicant to balance protection of pristine wetlands with the rights of the property owner to use developable parcels.”

This project was begun in the 1980s and resulted in the Corps’ permitting of minor amounts of fill in connection with the construction of commercial and residential development along Baymeadows Road. In 2000, Freedom Commerce Centre Partners, L.P., LTD applied for a permit to fill 265 acres of wetlands to construct a large multi-use project. This project was later minimized to affect 167 acres of wetlands, and the Corps denied this application in May 2005.

The decision to issue the permit was made in accordance with the wetland regulations promulgated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

For more information, please contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Corporate Communication Office at [904-232-2236](tel:904-232-2236) or visit our website at www.saj.usace.army.mil and click on “Hot Topics.”

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