United States Department of the Interior

U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

7915 BAYMEADOWS WAY, SUITE 200
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32256-7517

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS Log No. 41910-2006-F-0330

January 24, 2012

Colonel Alfred A. Pantano, Jr., District Engineer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
10117 Princess Palm Avenue, Suite 120
Tampa, Florida 33610
(Attn: Tracy Hurst)

Dear Colonel Pantano:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife (Service) has reviewed your Public Notice dated 28 November 2011 and other information associated with the permit application SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH) for the proposed Ridge Road Extension, Pasco County, Florida. Our comments are submitted in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (87 Stat 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661 *et seq.*).

In our 29 April 2009 letter to the Corps, the Service recommended measures to resolve outstanding issues regarding the ARNI designation. To date, the Service has not received a revised or approved wetland mitigation plan. Pending the incorporation of previous recommendations provided by the Service into the construction plan set along with an approved mitigation plan, the Service will not object to issuance of the Department of the Army permit. These recommendations include twin 120-foot wildlife underpass bridges at Station 214+00, eliminate Pond No. 10 and the single box culvert at Station 203+00, provide a 50-foot minimum buffer between the Pithlachascotee River wetland jurisdictional limits and Pond No. 5A, provide a 50-foot minimum buffer between the Pithlachascotee River wetland jurisdictional limits and Pond No. 6, install a 10-foot high fence with ¼-inch metal mesh (3-feet above ground and 1-foot buried) along the entire Serenova Preserve, and incorporate grating to allow light in all single box culverts.

In regards to wetland mitigation and potential effects on wood storks, the Service will review the mitigation proposal after the plan has been deemed acceptable by the Corps and the Environmental Protection Agency and determine if the mitigation minimizes the risk of take to an insignificant or discountable level.
In regards to potential effects on the Florida scrub-jay, the previous surveys have expired and new surveys will be required. In addition, we have established an Indigo Snake

Survey Protocol that is to be implemented in the event that the proposed project is keyed to a "May Affect" using the Indigo Snake Effects Determination Key (Snake Key). Because the Snake Key uses the number of gopher tortoise burrows at the site as part of the effects determination, gopher tortoise surveys also need to be updated. All survey results and effects determinations must be submitted to the Service for review in order for us to complete the consultation.

If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact Dr. Heath Rauschenberger at (904) 731-3203.

Sincerely,

Heath Ra

for David L. Hankla
Field Supervisor

Cc:

David Pritchett, US EPA
David Rydene, NOAA-Fisheries
Terry Gilbert, FWCC