

## **Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges**

### **Special Board Meeting- Vista Visioning: Mark Gluckman's Master Plan Concept**

Meeting date: March 28, 2023. Written by Debbie Meeks on August 20, 2023. A video recording is also available.

Present on Zoom: Scott Wright, Debbie Meeks, Paul Ramey, John McPherson, Peg Hall, Jeri Treat, Ron Kamzelski, Linda Kimball, Boyd Kimball, Pete Tirell, Ginessa Mahar,  
Representing the Refuge: Andrew Gude  
Meeting called to order at 10:00 am

#### **Presentation**

Mark Gluckman introduced himself and gave an overview of his long-held interest in the Vista project. The project vision is to tell the story of the refuge, lumbering, and the role of the refuge in protecting the trees and river. We do that by preserving some of the historical structures.

Mark showed an aerial photograph of the site with a tracing paper overlay showing where the buildings are located. Then he showed a topography map showing the land elevation also with an overlay of the buildings which are all located on high ground. The highest sections of land are a little over 11 feet and the low are just under 2 feet. The main house was built close to the river but on high ground and has a river orientation.

In the concept plan, Vista Road passes through an entrance gate, past the cook's house which will be repurposed as a visitor center, a host pavilion for camper volunteers, and continues to the river for Friends paddling initiative. A Historical protection zone is established within the road with rigid rules about protecting the existing historical ambiance. A brick walkway around the perimeter of the house gives a sense of organization, the main house museum and maybe includes a little seating area. Outside the historic preservation zone, there is a future education center, which might have interactive exhibits and perhaps a library, and meeting room. There is also a walkway leading from the Vista central plaza, past the old boat landing and connecting to the River Trail boardwalk.

The river is declining, springs got failing grades in Florida Springs Institute's year-long study so it is important to embrace and establish the river connection and do what we can for protection. Connecting to the River Trail walkway is also important.

The site could tell the story of lumbering, the story of sustainability, the story of the refuge and also protecting the river. It's a bit of a conundrum how to create an exciting and compelling story that attracts visitors and funding while at the same time protecting the site. But it can be done with a historical protecting zone where changes are restricted.

#### **Discussion**

Scott: Will boaters be allowed to access the site? Mark: Don't see why not, hard to see how not to allow access.

Scott: might talk to Manatee Springs, they wish people didn't access the run in their motor boats. It might be problematic to allow access. Mark: Can look at it two ways, it's a good way to get there and it works well but I wouldn't like to see too many boats.

Scott: Many times boaters are looking for a restroom. Is there going to be a restroom open to the public?

Ginessa: We should talk about staffing before we talk about access. Are there safety concerns without staff being present?

Peg: We should focus on what the big picture is and make a list of other concerns so we don't get derailed.

Ron: How is the Refuge involved, do they have buy-in? Andrew: Yes.

John: An issue that is going to come up right away is the auxiliary buildings around the house, they are falling down and Andrew has talked about getting rid of them. Mark: I would hope we can keep them. Stabilize them but keep them because they add value and contribute to historical character. John: There are funding issues with that and it would take our focus off the cook's and main houses. Scott: If it is impossible to keep them then install interpretive signs so there is at least something marking the site and painting a picture for visitors.

John: We will have to address them fairly quickly. Andrew: The refuge's facilities guy told me to take them down but we can rope them off and let nature take them down slowly. We're in no hurry to knock things down.

Peg: We could indicate on the plan that it is aspirational to keep them, we might not be able to save everything.

Linda: The Vista Road goes in front of the cook's house so it isn't within the historical protection zone but we are getting a grant to preserve it. Is it considered one of the protected buildings? Mark: Yes, it is protected. I placed the road as close to the existing drive as possible and wanted to keep it off the low lying land. The cook's house just happens to be on the other side of the road.

Linda: Is the paddling initiative part of this vision? Mark: I hope so. Friends started the initiative many years ago and Paddle with a Purpose is a good way to access the refuge. Paddlers are environmentalists and fit well with our goals. I see paddling as part of the vision, but not see an outfitter with boats stored on the property.

GiNESSA: Would this be a publicly accessible put-in? Are there tie-in locations for paddlers nearby? Mark: Yes, it would be publicly accessible but there is an outfitter at the Gilchrist ramp at SR 47 and it looks pretty horrible so I wouldn't want that here. But paddling is a good way to orient to the river, I would limit it to paddle craft only. There could be an outdoor classroom where small groups come to learn about sustainability and paddle Sandfly creek.

GiNESSA: What about visitation access, is it 24/7? Mark: probably along the lines of when the Refuge is open.

Debbie: It would have to be open on weekends. Mark: Right but probably during daylight hours and a caretaker would be there. Access presents a staffing problem and it should be controlled somehow. Andrew: We have to see what the demand is, there are logistical things we can't address at this point. The concept plan can be pie-in-the-sky at this point.

Mark: I see the road paving ending at the host camper's pad, the turnaround at the river is not a parking area. Parking has to be worked out, possibly it is at the River Trail. For the ramp, I visualize something like the district put in at the Luken's tract, you can't back your trailer into the water but it provides secure footing. Don't see the necessity of a boat ramp for motor craft. Ron: Fowler's Bluff is just up the river for larger boats. Peg: I think the paddling initiative is an add-on, it would add value but a bigger priority is the museum and visitor center. Paddlers are so passionate that if we pay attention to that we will lose the bigger priorities. We need our story laid out before we try to attract boaters.

GiNESSA: Will there be a picnic spot for people? Mark: I don't know. It could be done in a way that wouldn't be intrusive. Debbie: In our first meeting we talked about possibly taking half the boat house and converting it to a platform where people could sit and picnic.

Scott: I agree with Peg that the primary purpose is preservation of structures and education, don't even talk about water access at this point. It takes very careful planning to have good kayak access. Does the plan fit the Refuge and Friends goals and main mission?

Peg: Is there any divergence from the goals of the State with this plan since they are our main funding source?  
John: They approve adaptive reuse of historic buildings all the time so there shouldn't be a problem. Peg: Is their interest just in the buildings or do they have an interest in the Refuge story? John: I don't see anything in this that the State would be concerned about from a historic perspective.

Linda: Where is the federal government in the development of master plans? Andrew: This is a non-committal process since the Refuge isn't funding it, as a vision there's no reason to run it up the food-chain. It's meant for future planning purposes, the facilities people know what we're interested in doing and as parts become a reality then they will have to be approved.

**Vote:** Debbie made a motion to accept the master plan as drawn with no changes. John M: seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

Adjourned at 10:55am







HOUSEBOAT (CIRCA 1989)

BOATHOUSE  
CIRCA 1925

HOUSEBOAT  
CIRCA 1919

SURATNEE RIVER  
GRAND CANYON  
PEOPLE SCENIC ENCLOSURES

VISTA PLAZA  
MAIN HOUSE

HOST PAVILION  
CHICKEN'S TOWER

FRIENDS OUTPOST  
CIRCA 1910-1915



BOAT HOUSE (CIRCA 1910)

VISTA GATEWAY TO INCLUDE  
SIGNAGE & HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

SCALE 1" = 50'



\* HISTORIC STRUCTURES MARKED  
SURVEY AND ARE APPROXIMATE  
ROADWAY ALIGNMENT, SIZE  
DETERMINED BY BUILDING

# VISTA

LOWER SURATNEE RIVER  
DADE COUNTY, GA

MARE GLUCKMAN, GA  
MARCH 2025



MAIN HOUSE (CIRCA 1956-1979)

