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FLORIDA AND THE ST. JOE COMPANY SIGN PROTECTIVE AGREEMENT
-- Model plan for regional growth saves wetlands, conserves natural land corridors--

PANAMA CITY - The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today reached a highly protective, comprehensive agreement with The St. Joe Company to save wetlands and conserve 20,760 acres along the Florida Panhandle. The Ecosystem Management Agreement requires The St. Joe Company to go above and beyond standard environmental requirements to protect natural areas in a region known for its biological diversity. The agreement will benefit Bay and Walton counties.

"This agreement provides unparalleled wetlands protection," said DEP's Northwest District Director Mary Jean Yon. "By taking a regional approach and working closely with our federal partners, we are able to preserve sensitive natural resources and achieve more protection for Florida's environment."

The plan, known as an Ecosystem Management Agreement, covers more than 31,350 acres of St. Joe owned property stretching from West Bay to Choctawhatchee Bay. Three years ago, DEP and the federal government urged St. Joe to take a comprehensive, regional approach to conservation and development that would provide for predictable community growth while affording greater protection to natural lands along the Emerald Coast.

DEP Secretary David B. Struhs praised the Department staff for convincing St. Joe to enter into the agreement. "Florida's environmental team has secured a commitment that will better protect the resources that matter most. This will avoid traditional piecemeal development that would be insensitive to our desire to protect the entire landscape."

St. Joe has extensive landholdings in Northwest Florida, some of which is earmarked for residential, commercial and recreational development, which requires environmental permits. The agreement provides protective guidelines for activities associated with building roads, homes and community infrastructure and establishes two mitigation areas for environmental enhancement and restoration.

The agreement is a companion to the general permit under consideration by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which covers more than 47,500 acres including property owned by other landowners. Both the management agreement and general permit determine the extent of land conservation, wetland impact and mitigation before any development gets underway.

"This serves as a national example of responsible growth," said newly appointed DEP Secretary Colleen Castille. "Not only does the agreement allow the region's economy to grow, it does so in a way that safeguards important water resources and protects the quality of life of those that live and work in Northwest Florida."

As part of the agreement, St. Joe is setting aside thousands of acres of high quality habitat for preservation. The conservation areas create a two-pronged “Bay to Bay” wildlife corridor linking public land from Choctawhatchee Bay to St. Andrew Bay and preserving the ecological integrity of two of Northwest Florida’s most rapidly developing watersheds.

The public has 14 days to review the agreement before it becomes final. For more information, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/northwest.