

**LAKE COUNTY PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DESIGN ANALYSIS
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT**

PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD		BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
April 2, 2014		Transmittal: April 22, 2014 Adoption: TBA

LPA#14/4-5T Ecotourism and Agri-tourism Uses Creating Policy I-1.2.9 , entitled “Ecotourism and Agri-tourism Uses”, allowing ecotourism and agri-tourism uses within all Future Land Use Categories.	Case Manager Team: Anita Greiner, Chief Planner Jennifer M. Cotch, Senior Planner Michele Janiszewski, Planner	Agenda Item #3
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- Item -

Applicant:	Staff-initiated Ecotourism and Agri-tourism Uses
Type:	Comprehensive Plan Text Amendment
Creation or Revision:	Revision of Comprehensive Plan text.
Description:	Text Amendment. This request creates Policy I-1.2.9 , entitled <i>Ecotourism and Agri-tourism Uses</i> , which will allow said uses in all Future Land Use Categories, and defines Ecotourism and Agri-tourism.

- Summary of Staff Recommendation -

Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the request text amendment and subsequent definitions.

- Summary -

Analysis:

Lake County wishes to bolster its ecotourism and agri-tourism industry and wishes to permit these uses in all future land use categories to promote and encourage these uses, wherever the underlying zoning district would also permit such uses. While current Policy I-1.2.8, *Agricultural*

and Equestrian Uses, permits agricultural uses in all future land use categories, and while the proposed Policy I-5.2.3, *Conservation Uses within all Future Land Use Categories*, will permit conservation uses in all future land use categories, ecotourism and agri-tourism are not strictly agricultural or conservation uses, they are related activities with an economic component that rely on agricultural and conservation lands to attract visitors. Accordingly, to allow ecotourism and agri-tourism in all future land use categories, a new Policy is required.

The proposed policy would be consistent with **OBJECTIVE IV-3.3, Agriculture, Equine and Tourism Industries**, which requires Lake County to continue to develop and maintain programs in pursuit of cultural, economic, historical and recreational value of agriculture, equine, ecotourism and tourism industries.

The Comprehensive Plan requires Lake County to promote the economic value of agriculture through education and marketing endeavors, as well as supporting and promoting equestrian activities and special events within the County as a means of generating public interest and promoting tourism (**Policy IV-3.3.1, Agriculture**, and **Policy IV-3.3.2, Equine Enterprises**).

Further, **Policy IV-3.3.3, Tourism**, requires that Lake County “actively promote itself as a destination for tourism activities in Central Florida, continue to promote eco-tourism businesses and opportunities, and continue to use the Tourist Development Tax to promote tourism in Lake County.”

Lake County’s untouched charm and natural beauty is a short drive from the theme parks that draw millions of visitors to Central Florida each year. Birders, bicyclists, and nature lovers often are drawn to Lake County to explore Florida’s natural lands. Lake County’s Economic Development and Tourism Department heavily touts the passive parks, access to lakes, and other natural areas that conserve the environment and benefit both local residents and visitors.

Lake County is a popular tourism destination because of what we can offer our visitors that other locations cannot. Our topography and terrain is like nowhere else in Florida. We are in the middle of the state, only an hour from beaches on both coasts and midway between the northern and southern parts of the state. We are a short drive from the Orlando International Airport, as well as all of the Central Florida theme parks and the City of Orlando. Our trails and waterways give outdoorsmen of all types something exciting and interesting to do.

We are home to over 1,400 named Lakes, including the Harris Chain of Lakes, which is a nine (9) lake chain that covers over 76,000 acres of land. The Harris Chain of Lakes has long been known as a hot bed for bass and crappie (speckled perch) fishing. Lake County has hosted many national bass fishing tournaments, including BASS Masters Elite Series, FLW, Oakley and Crappie Masters to name a few. Our Lakes have started to rebound from a few bad years and many anglers who fished here in the 80’s and 90’s are starting to make their way back to the area.

Lake County has been known as the home for triathlon training for over 30 years, taking place primarily in South Lake, where athletes come from all over the country and stay for months at a time to train in our lakes and hills. Many professional and Olympic athletes come to Lake County to train in our year round temperate temperatures.

Sugarloaf Mountain is the second highest point in Florida and the highest point in the peninsular portion of the state measuring 312 feet in height; it has attracted endurance athletes to Lake County for decades as it is one of the most challenging areas in the state to train for running, biking and triathlon competitions.

Lake County is an ideal destination with many agri-tourism opportunities, such as farm stands, u-pick farms, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, corn mazes, and more.

Ecotourism is a growing segment of the tourism industry that is making significant, positive contributions to the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of destinations and local communities around the world. Offering market-linked, long-term solutions, ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity.

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation and communities. Ecotourism activities generally minimize impacts.

Agricultural tourism (“agri-tourism”) is a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment or education of visitors, and that generates supplemental income for the owner. Agri-tourism can include farm stands or shops, u-pick crops or farms, farm stays, farm tours, on-farm classes, fairs, festivals, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, weddings, orchard dinners, youth camps, barn dances, hunting or fishing, guest ranches, and more.

For the reasons stated above, the following policy is being proposed:

Policy I-1.2.9 Ecotourism and Agri-tourism Uses

Ecotourism and Agri-tourism uses, as defined in Chapter X, Comprehensive Plan, shall be recognized as an allowed use within all future land use categories.

Ecotourism support uses are intended to provide minimal public services and facilities necessary, in proximity to natural resources, agricultural, and archeological sites.

Support uses may include:

- *cabins,*
- *parking lots,*
- *restrooms,*
- *picnic areas,*
- *rustic campgrounds,*

- *passive recreation facilities,*
- *special events, and*
- *concession stand/snack bar, limited to 200 square feet.*

Such uses shall be designed in such a manner as to complement the character of the particular destination.

Agri-tourism support uses are intended to provide minimal public services and facilities necessary, in proximity to natural resources and agricultural sites. Support uses may include:

- *cabins,*
- *parking lots,*
- *restrooms,*
- *picnic areas,*
- *rustic campgrounds,*
- *passive recreation facilities;*
- *special events, and*
- *concession stand/snack bar, limited to 200 square feet.*

Such uses shall be designed in such a manner as to complement the character of the particular destination.

Support uses shall not occupy more than twenty percent (20%) of the buildable site with structures, impervious parking, or other developed area. Support uses are intended to serve the needs of visitors to the destination. Support uses shall be located interior to the site and not constructed in a manner as to attract drive-by traffic.

This policy shall be reviewed by the Board within five (5) years of the adoption of the policy to ensure the intent is being met and that the impacts on public facilities are within the acceptable levels of service.

The allowance of ecotourism and agri-tourism uses within all future land use categories will include land uses categories within the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern and the Wekiva River Protection Area. This amendment will promote the preservation of the natural environment and agriculture land uses within the county and will not result in any significant impacts to the natural environment; the goal of the added uses is to promote natural habitats and the preservation of agricultural lands, and not to inhibit or destroy them.

The following definitions will be added to the Comprehensive Plan:

Agri-tourism: *Any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. This shall include a wide range of activities including, but not limited to, picking fruits and vegetables, partaking in hay rides or corn mazes, riding horses, tasting honey, learning about the growing of crops, or shopping in farm gift shops and farm stands for local and regional produce or hand-crafted gifts.*

Ecotourism: *Low-impact form of tourism that involves the visitation of natural areas, agricultural areas, or archeological sites.*

By defining and allowing these eco-friendly land uses as an allowed use in all future land use categories, land owners could have more land use options for their agriculture or environmentally sensitive lands, thus promoting their protection. Expanding ecotourism and agri-tourism land uses will promote a tourism industry that complements and fosters Lake County's rural roots and environmental assets to promote economic development throughout the County.

- Standards for Review -

A. Whether the proposed amendment is consistent with all elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

The amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The amendment will define and allow ecotourism and agri-tourism uses in all future land use categories. **Policy I-1.2.8 Agricultural and Equestrian Uses**, already allows Agricultural uses and equestrian uses in all future land use categories.

The proposed policy would be consistent with **OBJECTIVE IV-3.3, Agriculture, Equine and Tourism Industries**, which requires Lake County to continue to develop and maintain programs in pursuit of cultural, economic, historical and recreational value of agriculture, equine, eco-tourism and tourism industries.

The proposed policy would also be consistent with **Policy IV-3.3.1, Agriculture**, and **Policy IV-3.3.2, Equine Enterprises**, which requires Lake County to promote the economic value of agriculture through education and marketing endeavors, as well as supporting and promoting equestrian activities and special events within the County as a means of generating public interest and promoting tourism.

Further, the proposed policy would be consistent with **Policy IV-3.3.3, Tourism**, which requires Lake County to "actively promote itself as a destination for tourism activities in Central Florida, continue to promote eco-tourism businesses and opportunities, and continue to use the Tourist Development Tax to promote tourism in Lake County."

B. Whether, and the extent to which, the proposed amendment is inconsistent with existing and proposed land uses.

Currently, the Comprehensive Plan (**OBJECTIVE IV-3.3, Agriculture, Equine and Tourism Industries**), requires Lake County to continue to develop and maintain programs in pursuit

of cultural, economic, historical and recreational value of agriculture, equine, **eco-tourism** and tourism industries. **Policy IV-3.3.3, Tourism**, requires Lake County to “actively promote itself as a destination for tourism activities in Central Florida, **continue to promote eco-tourism businesses and opportunities**, and continue to use the Tourist Development Tax to promote tourism in Lake County.”

This amendment will define and clarify that agri-tourism and ecotourism uses are allowed uses within all future land use categories. Allowing ecotourism and agri-tourism uses within all future land use categories is consistent with existing land uses and policies as stated above.

C. Whether there have been changed conditions that justify an amendment.

Lake County’s location, hills, lakes, farms, and existing agricultural and equestrian uses, as well as the proximity to high tourism locations makes it a desirable area to conduct ecotourism and agri-tourism uses while reserving the charm of rural Lake County.

D. Whether, and the extent to which, the proposed amendment would result in demands on public facilities, and whether, or to the extent to which, the proposed amendment would exceed the capacity of such public facilities, infrastructure and services, including, but not limited to police, roads, sewage facilities, water supply, drainage, solid waste, parks and recreation, schools, and fire and emergency medical facilities.

The amendment will not result in additional demands on public facilities that will cause them to exceed their acceptable level of service. The allowance of ecotourism and agri-tourism uses within all future land use categories will be reviewed within five years to ensure the demand on facilities do not exceed the acceptable level of service, and to ensure the intent of the policy is being met.

E. Whether, and the extent to which, the proposed amendment would result in significant impacts on the natural environment.

This amendment will not result in any significant impacts to the natural environment. The goal of the added uses is to promote agricultural and natural habitats, not destroy them.

F. Whether, and the extent to which, the proposed amendment would affect the property values in the area.

There is no indication that there will be any adverse effects on the property values in the county.

G. Whether, and the extent to which, the proposed amendment would result in an orderly and logical development pattern, specifically identifying any negative effects on such pattern.

This amendment will not affect the development pattern; rather it will promote the preservation of the natural environment and agriculture land uses within the county.

H. Whether the proposed amendment would be consistent with or advance the public interest, and is in harmony with the purpose and interest of these regulations.

The amendment is consistent with the interest of the public and these regulations.

– Conclusion –

The proposed policy will allow ecotourism and agri-tourism uses within all future land use categories. A review of the policy will be completed within five (5) years to ensure the intent of the policy is being met and that the impact on public facilities is within an acceptable level of service. Definitions of ecotourism and agri-tourism are included.

– Staff Recommendation –

Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the proposed text amendment to allow ecotourism and agri-tourism uses in all future land use categories, and to provide definitions of both uses.

Planning & Zoning Board Recommendation:

- special events, and
- concession stand/snack bar, limited to 200 square feet.

Such uses shall be designed in such a manner as to complement the character of the particular destination.

Support uses shall not occupy more than twenty percent (20%) of the buildable site with structures, impervious parking, or other developed area. Support uses are intended to serve the needs of visitors to the destination. Support uses shall be located interior to the site and not constructed in a manner as to attract drive-by traffic.

This policy shall be reviewed by the Board within five (5) years of the adoption of the policy to ensure the intent is being met and that the impacts on public facilities are within the acceptable levels of service.

* * *

Section 2. Comprehensive Plan Amendments. The following definitions shall be added to Chapter X, as shown below. Underlined text indicates added text, and * * * indicates that no changes are proposed in the previous or proceeding definitions.

* * *

Agri-tourism: Any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. This shall include a wide range of activities including, but not limited to, picking fruits and vegetables, partaking in hay rides or corn mazes, riding horses, tasting honey, learning about the growing of crops, or shopping in farm gift shops and farm stands for local and regional produce or hand-crafted gifts.

* * *

Ecotourism: Low-impact form of tourism that involves the visitation of natural areas, agricultural areas, or archeological sites.

* * *

Section 3. Advertisement. This Ordinance was advertised pursuant to Chapter 163, Florida Statutes, Section 163.3184(11).

Section 4. Severability. If any section, sentence, clause, or phrase of this Ordinance is held to be invalid or unconstitutional by any court of competent jurisdiction, then said holding shall in no way affect the validity of the remaining portions of this Ordinance.

Section 5. Effective Date. This Ordinance shall become effective as provided for by law.

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ENACTED this ____ day of _____, 2014.

FILED with the Secretary of State _____, 2014.

ATTEST:

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Neil Kelly, Clerk of the
Board of County Commissioners,
Lake County, Florida

Jimmy Conner, Chairman

Approved as to form and legality:

Sanford A. Minkoff
County Attorney

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Exhibit A



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