MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board

FROM: Ben Glass, Community Affairs Manager

THRU: Steve Minnis, Deputy Executive Director, Business and Community Services

DATE: August 30, 2019

RE: Approval to Negotiate and Enter into Sustainable Suwannee Program Agreements

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Governing Board approve the Executive Director to negotiate and enter into individual contracts with three agricultural producers to implement low input rotations.

BACKGROUND

At the September 13, 2016, Governing Board Meeting, the Board approved the District to enter into a contract with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to receive $5,000,000 in springs funding for the Sustainable Suwannee Program. Under this program, agriculture producers were invited to submit proposals to implement lower input rotations in their operations that will cost effectively reduce nutrients (nitrogen) in groundwater that contributes to spring flow. Lower input rotations include converting to silviculture, Bahia grass, or a sod-based rotation using Bahia grass.

The District has received 25 applications for this program, of which 15 met the eligibility requirments. These requirments include, but are not limited to, active farming occurring, the applicant is the active producer, the length of the agreement, and minimum and maximum acreage. Based on the evaluation criteria, three applicants are being recommended for the Executive Director to negotiate and enter into contract for incentive funding. These three producers were evaluated using the Sustainable Suwannee Evalution Tool presented to the Board in a workshop on July 9, 2019. This tool gives each producer a 1-5 score based on their location, 1 being the most desirable locations, 5 being the lease. That location score is then multiplied by the cost/benefit ratio as calculated by the the Land Conversion Analysis Spreadsheet to yield the ranking score. These three projects ranked highest out of all qualified applications. It is estimated that 222,650 pounds of nitrogen loading to the groundwater will be reduced across 505 acres at an estimated average cost of $4.42 / pound of N over 10 years.

The total maximum cost of the 3 projects for a 10-year agreement shall not exceed $984,750. The FDEP Springs Funding will contribute 100% of the project costs. See Exhibit A for a detail project cost and environmental benefit breakdown.

Wayne Moseley is converting 200 acres of his row crop operation located in the Ichetucknee Springshed to Bahia grass pasture. It is estimated that 122,000 pounds of nitrogen loading to