

**Hernando County Comprehensive Plan
2040 PLAN**

Section A. Chapter 10.

CONSERVATION ELEMENT

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GOAL 10.01 – Protect Wildlife and Habitat

Hernando County’s Growth Strategy protects the functional integrity of remaining wildlands and wildlife habitat in support of the County’s rich ecological, recreational and agrarian heritage. Protection is accomplished through conservation of wildlife and natural resources of importance in Hernando County. [F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)]

**Habitat Conservation
[F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.e.]**

Objective 10.01A: **Hernando County shall consider during the review of development permits the importance of wildlife corridor connections from the Green Swamp to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in accordance with recommendations from professionally accepted sources used for State planning purposes in order to protect the functional integrity of large habitat areas in public ownership and the movement of native and protected wildlife. Mechanisms to be utilized will be considered on a site specific basis including the provision of open space, the mitigation of habitat loss, and the provision of conservation easements.**

Strategy 10.01A(1): Mitigation shall be considered for significant loss or fragmentation of environmental and wildlife corridors identified during the review of a proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment. Mitigation shall compensate for disruptions that have the potential to significantly degrade wildlife movement within and adjacent to Hernando County.

Strategy 10.01A(2): The Hernando County Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) Program shall provide public education on the benefits of natural areas protection and the conservation of locally significant resources.

Strategy 10.01A(3): Encourage appropriate agencies and private organizations to assist the County in conserving and preserving natural area linkages which may function as wildlife corridors and/or recreation areas. Mechanisms to be coordinated may include conservation of agricultural lands, preservation of rural development patterns, land acquisitions, conservation easements, the transfer or purchase of development rights, development incentives, and landowner agreements.

Objective 10.01B: **Hernando County shall implement measures to protect the functional integrity of habitat required to protect native species and the habitat of state and federal-listed plant and animal species.**

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- Strategy 10.01B(1):** Identify locations and extent of prime habitat for listed and rare species using state and regional habitat coverage and site occurrence information, especially as updated by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) and other professionally accepted sources. Habitat identification shall include species listed as endangered, threatened, species of special concern, imperiled or rare.
- Strategy 10.01B(2):** Implement a development review system that provides for coordination with regional, state and federal agencies to ensure agency rules are implemented and followed, especially regarding habitat protection and listed species.
- Strategy 10.01B(3):** Ensure that land development regulations allow for development layout that promotes clustering and open space protection for significant habitat areas.
- Strategy 10.01B(4):** Review of development orders and amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map shall include a review of potential habitat and Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs) as mapped by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Project approvals should include design or mitigation conditions that prevent loss of significant habitat.

Significant Natural Communities

[F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.f., (6)(d)2.g., (6)(d)2.h., and (6)(g) 9.]

Objective 10.01C: Identify and preserve environmentally sensitive lands, archaeological resources, imperiled communities and natural areas important to Hernando County.

Strategy 10.01C(1): The Hernando County Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) Program shall identify and carry out habitat protection and conservation projects and the continued maintenance/conservation of properties included in the ESL program pursuant to the ESL policy guidance adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC).

Strategy 10.01C(2): Provide and support innovative public education to inform citizens of the existence and significance of wildlife habitats and unique natural communities.

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- Strategy 10.01C(3):** Coordinate with state and federal agencies, adjacent counties and municipalities regarding the management, protection and use of natural communities and resources partially or wholly under their purview including the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, the Withlacoochee State Forest, and the estuaries, bays and coastal rivers of Aripeka and Weeki Wachee.
- Strategy 10.01C(4):** Support the retention of habitat of the Florida Black Bear population, especially in the Coastal Zone as defined in the Coastal Management Element of this Plan as a primary means of maintaining ecologically functional wildlife habitat in Hernando County.
- Strategy 10.01C(5):** Review of developments and amendments to the Comprehensive Plan shall include a review of the impact to remaining habitat in the historic coverage of hammock woodlands habitat, as maintained in the County's Geographical Information System (GIS) database (Hammocks of the Government Land Survey 1843-1845: Hernando County, Florida). Development within these areas shall provide for conservation of habitat, rare species, topographical features, remnant ecological assemblages and archaeological resources. Habitat conservation measures may include requirements for open space, development layout, conservation easements and/or mitigation.

Invasive and Noxious Species

Objective 10.01D: Protect plant and animal communities from the spread of invasive and noxious exotic species.

- Strategy 10.01D(1):** Identify problem areas where invasive exotic vegetation may threaten the functional integrity of upland, wetland and aquatic ecosystems. Plant species included on the State of Florida's Noxious Weed List and on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council list for the central Florida region should be included in the inventory.
- Strategy 10.01D(2):** The County should consider prohibiting the planting of invasive exotic vegetation on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's Category I list of invasive species for the central Florida region or its equivalent, and shall discourage plant nurseries from selling these species.

- Strategy 10.01D(3):** The County will utilize a Noxious Plant Control Ordinance to address control and eradication of those noxious and invasive plants specified by the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners as having the most egregious impacts on its resources and lands. The ordinance may address control of noxious plants on public and private lands.
- Strategy 10.01D(4):** Develop and implement programs for removal of invasive exotic and noxious species from County-owned lands with emphasis on preserve lands and passive parks. The County may also participate with other agencies to assist in cooperative exotics removal projects that enhance both state and county lands.
- Strategy 10.01D(5):** Implement a public education program on the eradication of exotic or noxious species, and increase public awareness of the need to prevent and eliminate these species.
- Strategy 10.01D(6):** Implement Florida Friendly Landscaping techniques as a means of increasing vegetation community resiliency and resistance to the recruitment and spread of exotic and noxious plants.

GOAL 10.02 – Natural Groundwater Aquifer Protection

Hernando County places a high priority on protection of aquifer recharge structural and functional integrity and high-quality groundwater resources.

[F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.b. and (6)(c)2.]

Aquifer Recharge Integrity

Objective 10.02A: The County shall strive to protect the groundwater aquifer recharge system.

Strategy 10.02A(1): Coordinate with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to identify and protect the features that enhance optimum recharge function including geological, hydrological and biological features, in areas of high recharge and those that are vulnerable to impacts from alteration or pollution.

Strategy 10.02A(2): Develop low-impact stormwater design standards for prime aquifer recharge areas. The standards should maximize recharge function as part of development design in order to replicate pre-existing hydrologic site conditions.

Strategy 10.02A(3): Develop a public education program coordinated with appropriate agencies regarding the function of the aquifer recharge complex and identify steps that can limit the amount of contaminants reaching the aquifer.

Special Features Protection

Objective 10.02B: Hernando County shall strive to provide the highest level of protection consistent with best management practices to the most vulnerable features of the aquifer recharge complex including natural karst features, caves, and alterations such as mining that expose the aquifer directly to surface influences.

Strategy 10.02B(1): Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPAs) shall be designated for all community public water supplies.

Strategy 10.02B(2): The County shall require that all abandoned wells be sealed in accordance with applicable regulations to prevent contamination of groundwater resources.

Strategy 10.02B(3): Special Protection Areas (SPAs) shall be designated around vulnerable features which have the potential to discharge directly to the aquifer.

Strategy 10.02B(4): Special Protection Areas (SPAs) includes areas with land use approval processes for mining whether or not actual excavation has taken place.

Strategy 10.02B(5): Land development regulations will include specific prohibited uses, setbacks, design standards (such as low-impact stormwater design), use restrictions, and buffer provisions for Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPAs).

Strategy 10.02B(6): Land development processes will include a requirement for the review and inclusion of measures to protect vulnerable karst features.

Caves

Strategy 10.02B(7): Land development processes in areas above cave systems will include requirements for a subsurface geologic assessment of the project and a floral/faunal survey to identify the presence of protected species, by qualified professionals, with recommendations regarding the need for mitigation and protection measures.

Strategy 10.02B(8): In areas above cave systems, development approvals will not be issued until scientific information is provided to assure that the subsurface karst geologic features and floral/faunal species will not be adversely impacted. A naturally vegetated surface setback shall be formulated to conserve the karst system underlying the property. Subsurface geologic features and their karst connections shall be studied and reviewed by appropriate state agencies with their recommendations and findings used to develop and manage the property. Protection shall be afforded new species.

Groundwater Protection

Objective 10.02C: **The County shall protect the water quantity and water quality of the groundwater aquifer via a coordinated strategy of aquifer protection and overlying natural resources protection.**

Strategy 10.02C(1): Planning for provision of adequate water supplies to serve the needs of urban, agricultural and industrial land uses is predicated upon maintenance of aquifer levels and withdrawals that ensure the protection of Hernando County's natural systems including, but not limited to springs and rivers.

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- Strategy 10.02C(2):** Hernando County will coordinate with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to establish minimum flows and levels (MFLs) for springs, surface water features and aquifer levels in accordance with state and federal regulations.
- Strategy 10.02C(3):** The County will plan the location and design of stormwater, sewage treatment and solid waste disposal facilities to prevent the contamination of groundwater resources as outlined in the Utilities Element of the Plan.
- Strategy 10.02C(4):** The County shall require all new golf courses to be designed and maintained using the best management practices developed by the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) or an equivalent program.
- Strategy 10.02C(5):** The County shall manage turf and landscaping at County-owned facilities utilizing Florida-Friendly Landscaping principles in order to reduce nutrient pollution, conserve water, and provide public education on best management practices.
- Strategy 10.02C(6):** The County will utilize the Extension Service to provide public education with emphasis on residential areas regarding the maintenance of aquifer quality through implementation of Florida Friendly Landscaping design and maintenance techniques, including proper fertilizer application and its importance to protection of the County's surface water systems.
- Strategy 10.02C(7):** The County should require detailed analysis and carefully review any future proposals that use fracking for extraction of raw energy resource materials regarding impacts to the groundwater aquifer and sensitive karst features.

Water Supply Planning

[F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.b. and (6)(c)3.]

Objective 10.02D: **The water supply needs of existing and new development, agriculture, industry, and natural systems shall be met through potable water supply planning, as outlined in the Utilities Element of this Plan and through coordination with state and regional agencies.**

Strategy 10.02D(1): The County's water supply planning framework includes the following:

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- a. consistency with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Regional Water Supply Plan and coordination with SWFWMD in water supply modeling;
- b. preparation of ten-year water supply facilities needs based on water supply modeling and the Future Land Use Map;
- c. inclusion of needed facilities within the 5 year Capital Improvements Program and annual capital budget;
- d. utilization of the adopted Water Supply Work Plan pursuant to the Utilities Element of this Plan to outline local government responsibilities in providing for water supply facilities serving new and existing development;
- e. utilization of the adopted work plan to manage or influence the timing and location of development.

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GOAL 10.03 – Surface Waters and Wetlands

Protect, maintain, enhance and restore, where possible, Hernando County’s submerged saltwater and freshwater habitat, springs, estuaries, littoral zones (shoreline shelf areas) and wetlands. [F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.k.]

Surface Water Bodies and Habitats

Objective 10.03A: Protect the water quantity and water quality of water bodies and submerged habitats through best management practices, buffering, regulatory control and coordination with the applicable regulatory agencies.

Strategy 10.03A(1): Hernando County will maintain a Riverine Protection Ordinance that regulates and manages land use activities located within one (1) mile of the Weeki Wachee River, the Mud River, the Withlacoochee River and the Little Withlacoochee River to address:

- a. setbacks and buffers in order to provide for natural floodways and minimize flood damage;
- b. the preservation of natural vegetation to supply naturally functional stormwater treatment and scenic beauty;
- c. the preservation of native flora and fauna in order to preserve healthy fish and wildlife populations;
- d. the design of drainage systems to prevent the flow of inadequately treated stormwater runoff into the applicable river;
- e. riverine access design standards that minimize vegetative alteration and shoreline degradation.

Strategy 10.03A(2): Vertical seawalls should be discouraged along the shorelines of natural water bodies such as rivers, lakes, springs, bays and the Gulf of Mexico. Sloping revetment structures with cantilevered or pile-supported docks or walkways should be encouraged as the accepted method to protect surface waters. Where vertical seawalls are determined to be the best alternative for shoreline stabilization, at least one row of riprap boulders shall be installed along the seawall.

Strategy 10.03A(3): Coordinate with the applicable regulatory agencies to monitor and establish, as needed, boating regulations and no-wake zones aimed at protecting native wildlife, shorelines and submerged aquatic vegetation.

Strategy 10.03A(4): Implement erosion control standards in its land development regulations and facility design guidelines that address:

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- a. control of erosion and sedimentation from construction activities adjacent to any open water body or stormwater conveyance, to include silt screens and turbidity control measures appropriate to the site;
- b. retention of natural sloping topography and vegetated setbacks from open water bodies both during and after construction;
- c. establishment of rooted vegetation immediately after site construction to minimize erosion and loss of top soil to sedimentation;
- d. discouragement of seawalls and encouragement of sloping revetment structures overlaying appropriate filter fabric along shorelines.

Strategy 10.03A(5): Ensure protection of the quality and quantity of waters flowing overland into lakes, springs, rivers, bays, estuaries, marine waters and other water bodies through:

- a. ensuring appropriate design of stormwater controls, erosion and sedimentation controls, and sewage treatment discharges;
- b. limiting the use of septic systems in flood prone areas;
- c. limiting the use of structures which constrict the natural flow of surface waters and release of floodwaters;
- d. prohibiting point source pollutant discharge into waterbodies;
- e. requiring proper management of dredging activities so as to minimize impacts on waterbodies.

Strategy 10.03A(6): Assist the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) in identifying and implementing projects and standards designed to protect the world-class Weeki Wachee Spring and Weeki Wachee River through the Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) process to lower the total daily maximum load (TMDL) of nutrients to the springshed. Coordinate with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the FDEP on protection measures for other springsheds located in Hernando County.

Wetlands

Objective 10.03B: **Hernando County wetlands are important to the maintenance of groundwater, freshwater and marine ecosystems and shall be protected to the greatest extent possible consistent with state and federal regulations to avoid compromising wetland functions.**

Strategy 10.03B(1): The County shall require the identification and delineation of wetlands on plans for development pursuant to the standards of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Florida

Department of Environmental Protection, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Strategy 10.03B(2): Hernando County shall prohibit the alteration of Class I Wetlands consistent with the requirements of state and federal regulatory agencies. Alteration includes but is not limited to filling, draining, excavating or interruption of flow into or out of the wetland. Class I Wetlands meet at least one of the following criteria:

- a. Wetlands contiguous to or hydrologically connected with any natural surface water body including, but not limited to rivers, creeks, lakes and tidal waters;
- b. Any wetland having a hydrological connection to the Floridan aquifer;
- c. Any wetland within or hydrologically connected to a lake littoral zone;
- d. Any contiguous extent of wetlands of forty (40) acres or more;
- e. Wetlands that serve as known nesting, resting or feeding areas of federal or state listed species.

Strategy 10.03B(3): Projects having an overriding public benefit may encroach into Class I wetlands where there is no viable alternative provided that projects are designed to minimize disruption, provide continued wetland viability, and provide appropriate mitigation. Projects having an overriding public benefit include public roadways needed to serve the larger community and public utilities projects needed to serve the larger community or that are necessary to the health and safety of the community.

Strategy 10.03B(4): Hernando County will discourage the alteration of Class II Wetlands as defined below. If feasible alternatives are not viable, alteration should be limited to 25% of the wetland area and be designed in a manner that maintains the cross-sectional volume and primary hydrologic flow of the wetland. Class II Wetlands meet at least one of the following criteria:

- a. Isolated wetlands or formerly isolated wetlands that have been artificially connected to surface waters hydrologically, and that are five acres in size or greater;
- b. Isolated ephemeral wetlands of 1/8 acre or larger, excluding ephemeral wetlands on land zoned agriculture and mining.

Strategy 10.03B(5): Class III wetlands may be incorporated into development sites where existing wetland topography and drainage receiving capacity is present. Alteration must conform to state and local regulations. Class III wetlands are defined as isolated wetlands that

are less than five acres in size and that do not qualify as Class I or Class II Wetlands.

Strategy 10.03B(6): When encroachment, alteration or removal of a wetland is permitted, habitat compensation or mitigation as a condition of development approval shall be required in accordance with the regulatory standards of applicable state and federal agencies. On-site mitigation is preferred where feasible.

Strategy 10.03B(7): The County may allow restoration or preservation projects to occur on land that is currently or would become County-owned if deemed appropriate and provided the permittee monitors and manages the restoration pursuant to an agreement with the County.

Strategy 10.03B(8): A vegetated buffer averaging a minimum of twenty-five (25) feet in width and no narrower than fifteen (15) feet in width shall be maintained by development adjacent to Class I and/or Class II wetlands. No development is allowed in the buffer except for walkways or boardwalks used for access or recreation.

Strategy 10.03B(9): The potential impact of comprehensive plan amendments and other development orders on wetlands shall be evaluated and minimized.

Strategy 10.03B(10): The County encourages the establishment or use of conservation easements as a mitigation tool for important wetland habitats including:

- a. upland hammock islands such as occurs in the Weeki Wachee Swamp and Chassahowitzka Swamp;
- b. important floodways adjacent to rivers, and other floodwater storage areas;
- c. adjacent to important wildlife habitat connections and/or existing conservation areas.

GOAL 10.04 – Minerals, Soils and Trees

The County shall require conservation, protection and sustainable use of mineral resources, soils, and trees as important natural resources. [F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.d.]

Objective 10.04A: Hernando County shall protect high quality mineral resources, soils and existing tree cover as important economic, cultural and scenic resources.

Limerock Minerals

Strategy 10.04A(1): Any Future Land Use Map amendment proposals to the Mining Category must demonstrate the presence of hard or soft limerock deposits that benefit the local economy and have potential for feasible extraction without negative impacts to sensitive habitat.

Soil Conservation

Strategy 10.04A(2): Identify prime and suitable agricultural soils. Suitable agricultural soils are most appropriately located in the Rural Future Land Use Category which provide support for agricultural preservation strategies.

Strategy 10.04A(3): The Hernando County Extension Services should work with agricultural operations and community farms and gardens to encourage the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) that maintain soil quality and prevent soil erosion and loss. BMPs may include contour planting, no-till planting, crop rotation and stabilization of irrigation systems and waterways.

Tree and Forest Cover

Strategy 10.04A(4): Protect Hernando County's forest, rural and urban tree cover through the following programs:

- a. encourage the retention and restoration of native forest cover as important habitat, especially long-leaf pine forest and upland hardwood forest;
- b. maintain specimen tree standards for retention of large native trees on development sites including providing for flexibility in site layout to retain trees and forest stands;
- c. encourage the retention of multiple tree generations in locations on a development site where they can reasonably provide open space;
- d. adopt landscaping practices for public roadways that provide for native street trees in order to promote high-quality public spaces;

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- e. maintain a Canopy Road Ordinance that protects canopy trees along scenic canopy road corridors.

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GOAL 10.05 – Cultural Resources

Hernando County recognizes its rich archeological, historical and cultural history and shall identify and protect these resources to the greatest extent possible.

[F.S. 163.3177(6)(a)3.f. and (6)(g)9.]

Archaeological Resource Protection

Objective 10.05A: The County shall protect archaeological sites and resources through monitoring and regulation of activities that might adversely affect such resources.

Strategy 10.05A(1): Coordinate with the State of Florida, through the use of the most recent Florida Master Site File data to map and catalog archaeological sites and to identify the potential for archaeological resources on proposed development sites early in the review process.

Strategy 10.05A(2): A Cultural Resource Assessment Survey (CRAS I) performed by a qualified professional in accordance with the guidelines published by the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research should be performed for all proposed development sites on land with characteristics for a high probability of occurrence or where resources are indicated on the Florida Master Site File or other acceptable data source. High probability of occurrence includes property located within 1,200 feet of a river, freshwater swamp, permanent freshwater pond or lake, or within 200 feet of a sinkhole. Review and acceptance of the survey by the Florida Department of State is required prior to proceeding with development.

Strategy 10.05A(3): The County should allow flexible site development and land use standards for the purpose of protecting significant cultural resources. If resources cannot be avoided or preserved on site as part of the development plan, the County and the applicant shall consult with the Florida Department of State regarding acceptable alternative protection methods.

Strategy 10.05A(4): The County shall prohibit disturbance of significant archaeological sites, whether or not the site was previously identified, and require that if any accidental disturbance occurs, construction must be suspended and the information reported immediately in accordance with the requirements of Florida Statutes.

Historic Resource Protection

Objective 10.05B: **Hernando County shall protect historic sites and structures and shall consider culturally-important architectural features in development review.**

Strategy 10.05B(1): The County should coordinate with local preservation groups and the Florida Department of State to develop and implement standards for local historic designations and consider local buildings that may qualify for such a designation.

Strategy 10.05B(2): The County should promote and provide flexibility in building standards for the retention of historic structures and features.

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GOAL 10.06 – Environmental Health Hazards

The County shall properly control and regulate necessary activities that may present an environmental or health hazard.

[F.S. 163.3177(6)(d)2.da. and (6)(d)2.i.]

Air Quality

Objective 10.06A: The County shall protect its air quality through review and mitigation of potential air pollution sources.

Strategy 10.06A(1): The County shall review the impact of development proposals and land use activities with the potential for chronic or temporary degradation of air quality including exhaust stacks and similar emissions sources, uses emanating noxious or toxic odors, and open burning activities.

Wildfire Hazard Mitigation

Objective 10.06B: The County recognizes that much of its extensive forest cover, whether publicly or privately owned is subject to periodic wildfire and managed burning. The County shall review development proposals to include the evaluation of potential wildfire risks and best management practices consistent with “Wildfire Risk Reduction in Florida” and other professionally acceptable publications.

Strategy 10.06B(1): Maintain the Hernando County Community Wildfire Protection Plan in partnership with the Florida Forest Service and other state and local land management agencies, including designation of high-hazard areas and activities, coordination of wildfire response, and implementing methods for reducing hazards.

Strategy 10.06B(2): Identify incompatible land uses when they are proposed near lands with potential for wildfire and lands managed with periodic controlled burning. Incompatible land uses may include but are not limited to hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, schools, day care facilities, adult congregate care facilities and large or dense residential developments. The review of incompatible land uses should include a wildfire risk assessment, and may include conditions for mitigation through design where it is found that the land use has the potential to be impacted by the threat of wildfire.

- Strategy 10.06B(3):** Mitigation of wildfire risk for those developments deemed to have potential to be impacted by the threat of wildfire may include but shall not be limited to:
- a. recommended development layouts that locate open space or recreational uses, such as golf courses, adjacent to the wildfire risk to act as an additional buffer to structures;
 - b. required notifications of likely smoke episodes to be delivered to individual parties who may be potentially affected;
 - c. required notification via plat notations and deed restrictions for property sales that raise awareness for potential buyers of wildfire risks and maintenance burning activities;
 - d. vegetation management for new communities or uses that prevents hazardous fuel build-up;
 - e. incorporation of firewise community design standards such as residential defensive space, setbacks, common area design and construction material selection recommendations.
 - f. public education and/or designation as a firewise community

Hazardous Materials Management

Objective 10.06C: **Hernando County shall monitor the use, storage and disposal of hazardous materials.**

Strategy 10.06C(1): The County shall develop and maintain regulations that govern the storage, transportation and disposal of hazardous materials.