

Savannah Rude

RTV3305

03/06/2026

Hernando County is no stranger to growth, with its population growing 16.35% since 2020, according to the [World Population Review](#). However, with this high population growth comes development.

Sandal Key, formally known as Lake Hideaway, is one large development that commenced in November 2023. Located in Weeki Wachee, the development is a “lagoon community” undertaken by Metro Development Group.

While plans for the development were approved by the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners in 2021, some residents in the adjacent Woodland Waters neighborhood have faced their share of problems since construction began.

Tim Collins, 61, has lived in Woodland Waters for five years. He moved to the area to enjoy the sprawling 800 acres of forest that sat in his backyard, he said.

“There are enormous amounts of wildlife and majestic trees, and I thought ‘Boy, it’ll be tough for somebody to really screw this up,’ and so I bought this, and we moved up here,” Collins said. “I just loved it and loved the neighborhood, love the neighbors.”

This all changed for Collins and his neighbor, Jeannie Galbo, when construction started in their backyards.

While developers for Sandal Key were supposed to leave a 100-foot buffer of forest between Woodland Waters and the development site, Galbo said that rule was not followed.

“They came in with oversized equipment, and when they took the trees down, they took everything down,” Galbo said. “There was no rhyme or reason. Nobody came through tagging any trees or even making an attempt to relocate any of the wildlife.”

Collins recalled Galbo calling him and asking if they were having an earthquake because the vibrations from the heavy equipment were so intense.

“Being a pilot, I went and pulled an instrument out of my airplane, it’s similar to a seismometer, and I set it on my desk so I could, out of curiosity, see what we’re up against here,” Collins said. “The equivalent was right around 2.8 to just 3.9, 4.0 earthquake all day long, every day for months.”

Being a robotics engineer, Collins’ first worry wasn’t the noise or sensations, but the damage these vibrations would cause to his home, he said.

“All of a sudden, pool drains out. That was one of the first things that happened,” Collins said. “Cracks in the structure that’s connected to that vibrating ground, and so the cracks were first, plumbing leaks were next.”

The biggest concern about the vibration for Galbo was her home being a repaired sinkhole home, she said.

“Since this construction has started, I noticed a sinkhole opened up, and now you can see it as clear as day,” Galbo said. “The whole ground caves in.”

Besides just a sinkhole, Galbo’s pool equipment failed due to the amount of sand and dirt blowing onto her property, she said.

When developers removed all the trees, they also created a large pile of sand, twice the size of Galbo’s house, about 100 feet away from her fence, Galbo said.

“Once they took all the trees down, there was no buffer there, so whenever the wind picked up all of that sand, it was like being at the beach,” Galbo said. “You know when you’re at the beach and the wind blows and you’re trying to have a sandwich, and you have all that sand in your face? That’s what I experienced in my backyard and in my lanai.”

Since construction started, Collins has estimated over \$200,000 in damage to his home, he said.

“It just kept going, and so we started immediately reaching out to the project managers at Metro, and we got a hold of different people, tried to set up meetings,” Collins said. “My initial meeting with Metro, when I did get their first project manager, his response to me was, ‘Too bad. Sue us. We got a lot of money. We’re a big developer.’”

Some residents of Woodland Waters have taken the matter into their own hands, Galbo said.

“After years of getting nowhere with them, we reached out to an attorney,” Galbo said. “A couple of us neighbors have collectively gotten together, and we are under the counsel of an attorney.”

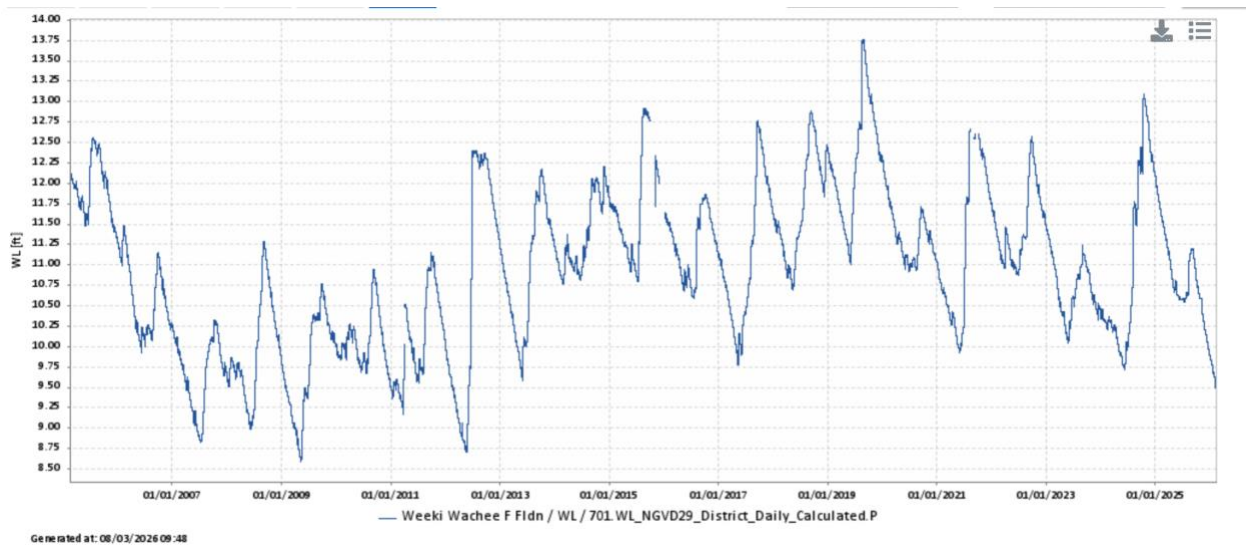
Besides the hit that Woodland Waters residents like Collins and Galbo took to their homes, Collins said he was very concerned about water usage.

Collins calculated that the proposed lagoon alone, not including the over 3,000 proposed houses, would have an evaporation rate of about 230,000 gallons a day, which is more than what all of Woodland Water uses in a day, he said.

“Now they’re drilling wells, and all these houses are going to take water,” Collins said. “But just the construction alone, my water table has gone from 16 feet from the surface to 34 feet, so that’s an 18-foot drop in the water table.”

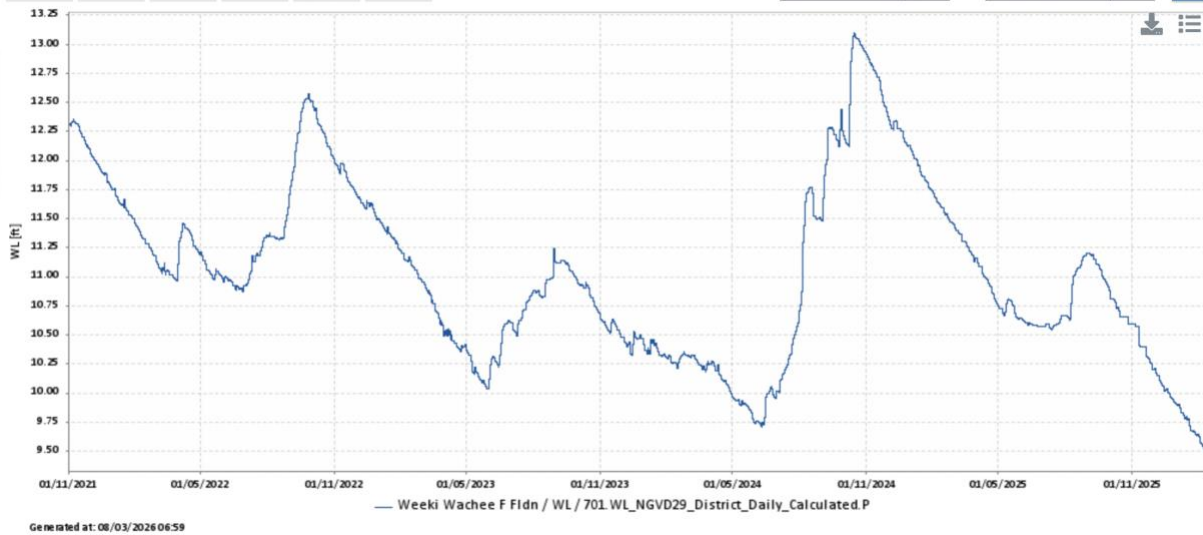
Collins is not alone. Hernando County has recently been experiencing a drop in groundwater elevation.

According to data from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the last recorded maximum water elevation was 9.50 feet on Feb. 9, the lowest since 2012. This is a measurement taken from a groundwater well in Weeki Wachee, 6.3 miles away from Collins' house and 5.5 miles away from the entrance of Woodland Waters.



Courtesy of Southwest Florida Water Management District

Maximum water elevation experienced a decrease at the beginning of 2023 and then again in 2024, before increasing. Levels then decreased again in 2025.



Courtesy of Southwest Florida Water Management District

Abby Suarez, a sustainability consulting associate for ERM, explained how runoff is also a concern.

“In a non-developed area, after it rains, there is a standard level of water that is recharged to the aquifer,” Suarez said. “But as development increases, the percentage of impervious land cover increases, meaning less water infiltrates into the earth, and more water becomes runoff, which is bad because it can overwhelm natural streams.”

Natural land cover filters out pollutants, so an increase in developed area can also lead to degraded water quality, Suarez said.

“We’re sitting on the best water that God made, and now it’s dropped,” Collins said. “It’s just nothing good is coming of this, and our property values are down, 30 to 40%, and there’s just no end in sight. This will be years before this thing builds out.”

Residents in Hernando County have also raised concerns about water table levels. One resident, Carolyn Turner, is worried about a large apartment complex being built in the backyard of her 55-year-old-and-up community, Forest Glenn.

Turner, 83, went through a similar experience to Collins and Galbo. She said that she moved to Florida from Indiana to be surrounded by woods and wildlife.

“Old Florida is being all built up, you’re not going to have any old Florida,” Turner said. “We were surrounded by woods, and now out my back door is a three-story apartment building being built.”

In Turner’s neighborhood, residents are only permitted to use their hoses once a week, she said. With 135-140 apartment homes being built right behind her neighborhood, Turner said she is concerned about water usage.

“All those people are going to take water. All those people are going to have to have sewers. All those people are going to have to have electricity,” Turner said. “If they don’t have enough for us now, why are they building more apartments?”

Turner explained that these concerns over development have driven a historic number of residents to put their houses on the market.

“Several are thinking about selling, but once it started, you either had to sell before it started or now you’ve got to wait until it’s over and see what you can do to make it better,” Turner said. “We have 8 or 10 houses in here for sale, that’s the most we’ve ever had.”

Galbo, who plans on moving, said there are more houses for sale in Woodland Waters than she has ever seen since moving there.

“Growth is inevitable. It’s going to happen, I understand that,” Galbo said. “But there’s no care for the wildlife, and I know that there are laws in place, but they’re just not enforced, and what they did coming through here is criminal, in my opinion.”

Collins said he wasn’t expecting to run into any of these problems when he moved to Florida with his family.

“Nowhere in my wildest dreams did I think that a couple of years after I got settled in would I be watching the corners of my house split apart and the floors crack open,” Collins said.

“Seeing my neighbors and people I’ve come to love and care about go through this.”

Metro Development Group did not respond when reached out to for comment.

Sources:

Tim Collins

612-619-4036

Jean (Jeannie) Galbo

352-585-1029

Abby Suarez

813-440-7914

Carolyn Turner

317-696-6440