

## Wetlands Permitting

“Pasco County’s rapid growth drastically increased our emergency evacuation demands, as well as our mobility and transportation needs. After 14 years working to secure federal approval for a Ridge Road extension, Pasco enlisted Dawson & Associates. Their expertise facilitated complete federal approval, and today, the Ridge Road extension is open — providing people in Pasco improved connectivity and expanded emergency evacuation options.”

– Panos Kontses, PE  
Interim County Engineer, Pasco County, FL

### CLIENT

Pasco County, FL.

### BACKGROUND

With substantial population growth and concerns over emergency evacuation, Pasco County applied for a federal environmental permit in 1998 to extend the four-lane Ridge Road highway nearly 10 miles across Florida’s Serenova Preserve. County officials saw this project as crucial for residents’ safety during emergencies. But legal and regulatory hurdles involving wetlands mitigation and other environmental issues delayed federal approval.

After 14 years of negotiations and with no approval in sight, Pasco officials retained Dawson & Associates to improve relationships with Corps officials and secure project approval.

### RESPONSE

The Dawson & Associates team was comprised of former officials who served at the highest levels of Corps leadership including a former civilian chief of engineering and construction, a former leader of the regulatory program nationwide and a former Commander of the South Atlantic Division.

Given the certainty that federal approval would be challenged in court, the Dawson team worked with county and state officials and outside counsel to draft a new proposal that directly addressed the Corps’ complex concerns about Ridge Road’s impact. This new proposal substantially increased the number of bridges to reduce wetlands disturbance and established an improved analytic foundation for judging environmental impact.

More important, the Dawson team helped improve relations between Corps officials and project negotiators by establishing improved communications to address potential problems at an early stage.

As a result, the Corps granted environmental approval for the full Ridge Road project and the road opened in 2022. Shortly after, a federal judge upheld the Corps’ approval.