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Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District
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Water managers question Everglades cleanup standard

07/10/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel - West Palm Beach Bureau
Reid, Andy

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Some water managers question ability to meet phosphorus goal
By Andy Reid | South Florida Sun-Sentinel

In the midst of pushing for a \$1.75 billion land deal to boost Everglades restoration, South Florida water managers on Wednesday suggested lessening the cleanup requirement that guides work to fix the River of Grass.

Trying to clean water by building filter marshes on phosphorus-rich farmland hasn't gotten the water quality to levels set after years of legal wrangling, according to the South Florida Water Management District.

Now, with the district angling to buy out U.S. Sugar and use the company's 187,000 acres of farmland to recreate the connection between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, some of the agency's top officials on Wednesday said the phosphorus cleanup goal is unrealistic.

"That seems to be an unreal, impossible goal to get to," said Patrick Rooney Jr., who represents Palm Beach County on the nine-member board appointed by the governor.

The state already has spent more than \$1 billion trying to meet the phosphorus standard.

Board member Charles Dauray questioned whether water in a baptismal font would be considered clean enough to meet the standard.

"How do we get out of the corner that we are in?" asked Dauray, who represents southwest Florida.

The district should focus on getting better at cleaning water, not easing standards, said Charles Lee, senior vice president of Florida Audubon. Getting the U.S. Sugar land to store and clean water should help, he said.

"Audubon and many others fought for more than a decade to set ... the only scientifically defensible standard," Lee said. "I would vehemently disagree with the premise that the standard can't be met."

To settle lingering environmental lawsuits over the quality of water flowing to the Everglades, a federal and state agreement in 1992 called for cutting phosphorus to 10 parts per billion.

Phosphorus comes from fertilizer as well as the natural decay of soil on hundreds of thousands of acres of agricultural fields from north of Lake Okeechobee to the edge of the Everglades.

Storm water that drains off the land carries phosphorus south,

fueling the growth of cattails that squeeze out sawgrass and other native vegetation vital to the health of the Everglades.

New farming practices helped cut phosphorus flowing to the Everglades. The district also has built about 50,000 acres of filter marshes south of Lake Okeechobee, using plants to absorb phosphorus before it gets to the Everglades.

Water that sometimes comes in with 100 to 200 parts per billion of phosphorus can leave the treatment areas with 15 to 50 parts per billion, according to the district. So far, it hasn't met the 10 parts per billion standard.

"It's never going to happen," said district board member Michael Collins, who lives in the Keys. "Somebody is going to have to get some realism into the discussion."

It can work if the state uses the U.S. Sugar land to enlarge stormwater treatment areas and to store more of water, Lee said. Now, too much water rushes through the filter marshes too fast to meet the cleanup standards, he said. "The U.S. Sugar deal just changes the whole potential," Lee said.

The district board on June 30 authorized moving ahead with negotiations with U.S. Sugar for the buyout. A report on the long-term cleanup plan is due in December.

Using expensive chemical treatments and exploring other biological techniques are among the alternatives if the filter marshes don't work.

"The requirement doesn't go away," said Chip Merriam, the district's deputy executive director.

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@sun-sentinel.com or 561-228-5504. Into the Everglades Take an interactive tour through the Everglades and gain insight into Florida's unique River of Grass. Sun-Sentinel.com/everglades

Clewiston fears a bleak future when Big Sugar goes

07/09/2008

Miami Herald - Online

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Fearing a bitter future when United States Sugar Corp. leaves the town that sugar built, residents rallied around their mayor's call for a role in negotiating the company's controversial exit.

"We should have a seat at the table to help out in the decision-making!" insisted Mayor Mali Chamness a week after the news that U.S. Sugar would sell its holdings to Florida water managers and leave the business in six years as part of an ambitious Everglades restoration project.

Chamness' rallying call drew applause from the 300 farmers, business owners and residents packing the John Boy Auditorium for a July 1 emergency meeting about the area's future.

So intertwined is the economy of this community of 6,500 people with U.S. Sugar that the June 24 announcement of the sale to the South Florida Water Management District was met with shock and disbelief. U.S. Sugar employs 1,700 people, provides 25 percent of Clewiston's tax base and is responsible for more than half of its economy.

The company has been a generous partner too: donating land for libraries and other buildings and providing college scholarships for employees' offspring.

Now Clewiston must wrestle with a future without U.S. Sugar. As part of the \$1.75 billion deal, the company will sell 187,000 acres of agricultural land, its citrus processing plant, its sugar refinery and mill, two railroads and other facilities.

Speaking at the start of the two-hour emergency meeting, Carol Wehle, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District, tried to assure the crowd that agriculture will remain on acreage not needed for pollution-filtering reservoirs and marshes intended to restore the Everglades.

"It is everyone's intention and a commitment to keep the remaining agriculture in a sustainable format," Wehle said, adding that the district plans to sell the sugar refinery and mill on the south side of Clewiston and the citrus processing plant about 15 miles to the west.

"There is a tremendous amount of interest for people to purchase a lot of those facilities," she said. "You are going to receive a lot of attention."

But it is difficult to sugarcoat U.S. Sugar's departure.

Ardis Hammock, a second generation sugar cane farmer along with her husband Alan, at Frierson Farms, said her first thought when she heard about the sale was "you've got to be kidding."

Her second thought was the plan stemmed from Florida Gov. Charlie Crist's vice presidential aspirations. "For Charlie Crist, it's VP, VP, VP."

But by the time of the emergency meeting, Hammock was angry and distrustful of pledges to help with economic development. "It's fine to stand here and say you are going to do it," Hammock said. "But where's the money? Where is the money?"

During the emergency meeting, Hendry County commissioners

and elected officials from Clewiston and Labelle voted to hire an attorney, commission an economic impact analysis and insisted on a state-backed economic transition and support plan to protect the area's future.

There have been efforts to recruit new companies to this town on the shore of Lake Okeechobee and boost eco-tourism. There's also been talk about building an inland port in the nearby town of South Bay.

Still, Miller Couse, chairman and chief executive of First Bank in Clewiston, isn't optimistic. He pointed to the fate of Detroit and other Michigan cities as the steel and automobile industries declined.

"It's nice to say we can go out and reinvent ourselves, but the practicality of it is, I think, zero," Couse said.

For three years, he explained, community officials have been courting companies for a newly developed business park, offering numerous incentives. They will consider themselves lucky if they attract two new enterprises offering 150 jobs.

The uncertainty is already affecting business. "We've seen one commercial deal, about a \$700,000 deal, fall apart in Clewiston simply because of the announcement," Couse said.

The U.S. Sugar sale has been hailed as one of the largest conservation purchases in American history. But for the people of Hendry County, the critical part will be keeping their communities afloat economically while reclaiming the land for the environment.

Clewiston has been a company town for nearly 80 years and no one expected rapid change in this town, which was meticulously designed with wide streets and spacious parks by renowned town planner John Nolen in 1920.

Not only is U.S. Sugar the largest business, but it is also the largest landowner. Community leaders fear the sale will tie up access to U.S. sugar property for years.

"Pahokee has been landlocked by U.S. Sugar for many, many years," said Wayne Whitaker, mayor of Pahokee on the eastern edge of Lake Okeechobee. "We need some of that land so we can grow."

Many local residents said U.S. Sugar had started to withdraw from the community even before the announcement, curtailing perks such as its college scholarship program as it struggled with global competition.

"U.S. Sugar used to do business with me. They do very little business in town anymore," said Mitchell Thomas, owner of Corbin Farm and Ranch Supply in Clewiston. "Most of the executives don't live in Clewiston."

U.S. Sugar also has been pitted against state environmentalists in a long battle over Everglades and Lake Okeechobee pollution.

But some in Clewiston trace the beginning of the end of the company town era to the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, the first of many trade pacts that opened the U.S. sugar market to widening import quotas. At the same time, sugar

prices have remained almost unchanged for 20 years.

To compete, U.S. Sugar slashed its workforce, once totaling more than 3,000, nearly in half. Then in 2005, the company embarked on its "Breakthrough" project -- an effort to consolidate and automate its sugar-making by building a state-of-the-art processing mill on the southern edge of Clewiston, alongside the modern sugar refinery.

"When they started this Breakthrough project they had told us they were going to cut to make us lean and mean," said Butch Wilson, who was laid off by U.S. Sugar last October after almost 32 years and is now director of the Clewiston Museum.

U.S. Sugar Senior Vice President Robert Coker said the community was lucky to have six years to prepare for the change since many industries shut down virtually overnight.

"Agriculture has a future in South Florida," he said. "I just don't know what it's going to look like. I don't think anyone else does either."

That isn't particularly reassuring for local growers.

Robert Hammock, 25, moved back to Clewiston six months ago to work on the family farm with his parents, Ardis and Alan.

"My place is here. It's where I want to be," he said. "Now I don't know if there's going to be a local mill in town where we can sell our cane to make a living."

Land sale will help restore Everglades ecological marvel

07/09/2008

Yakima Herald-Republic

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Yakima Herald-Republic

From sea to shining sea, iconic American images include those purple Rocky Mountains and the spacious sky over the amber waves of grain. Swamps and marshes don't get top billing in patriotic songs, but they are incredible natural resources.

With that in mind, we welcome the recent announcement that U. S. Sugar Corporation is selling its 187,000 acres to the state of Florida when it bows out of the industry in six years.

The Everglades have suffered from human encroachment for more than a century, as settlers arrived and began dredging what they saw not as an incredible natural filtering system, but as useless swamplands.

Now, only about half of the marshy tip of Florida survives in its natural state. Runoff from surrounding agriculture and development has polluted the waters and threatened the water supply. The U.S. Sugar deal means a huge step forward in trying

to heal the natural system.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, part of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, is no short-term solution to the woes of South Florida. The estimate is that it will take 30 years and cost \$7.8 billion. Its intent is to restore the ecosystem, ensure clean and reliable water supplies and provide flood protection.

The sour note in this sweet deal comes for the 1,700 workers who will lose their jobs. But the \$1.75 billion sale includes provisions to help them. The Associated Press reports hourly employees will get a year's pay and salaried workers two years' pay as well as retraining.

Plus, they will get to see an incredible effort to revive the one-of-a-kind ecosystem.

* Members of the Yakima Herald-Republic editorial board are Michael Shepard, Sarah Jenkins, Bill Lee and Karen Troianello.

Water district hears name change idea

07/09/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

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By ELIOT KLEINBERG-Palm Beach Post

Water managers today heard an idea to change their agency's name. The South Florida Water Management District should be renamed the South Florida Water Conservation District, told a monthly workshop. More local news photos and all of today's Post stories. Share This Story "It is time to move in this direction smartly," Marshall, chair of the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation for Everglades Restoration, told the district's governing board. "Can one word make a difference? We think it can." Marshall nephew of the environmental visionary for which the Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge is named said the recently proposed buyout of U.S. Sugar land marks an important moment in the history of the agency, which formed in 1949 as the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District.

Marshall said the word change could reflect the responsibility not just to manage water and move it from place to place, but also to restore, preserve and protect it.

Noting the district currently imposes water restrictions and plans to institute permanent year-round limits, Marshall said, "Would the people of Florida rather be led rather than managed into water conservation?" The board gave no verbal reaction to Marshall's suggestion.

Water managers decry overgrowth of imported plant species

07/09/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online
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Eliot Kleinberg - Palm Beach Post

Members of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board took turns today reminding chair Eric Buermann: melaleuca bad. 'I don't know how melaleucas got here,' Buermann, a lawyer by trade, told a monthly workshop. 'They may be noxious pests here, but in Australia they're worthy trees.' The exchange came during a presentation on how the district requires developers to protect and in some cases add wetlands when they build projects.

The import, called once by a scientist 'the tree from hell,' is one of the 'big four' worst exotic plants in South Florida; the others are the Brazilian pepper, the Australian pine and the Old World climbing fern. They're among nearly 1,000 foreign plants that have taken root, many of them for the bad; state and federal governments have spent millions to try to eradicate them.

Developers imported the water-guzzling melaleuca around 1900 to help drain the Everglades. Since then, it's swarmed more than 400,000 acres, forming impenetrable clumps that crowd out native plants and wildlife habitats.

Researchers found cutting, poisoning and fire made it drop millions of seeds. Biologists eventually introduced an Australian beetle that feeds on its young shoots. In Palm Beach County, a law requires all the big three be removed by 2012.

District governing board member Charles J. Dauray told Buermann he owns 76 acres that are 100 percent infested with melaleuca. 'There was just one little mound of scat,' a scientific term for droppings, Dauray said, suggesting the trees had crowded out all animal life on his tract. 'You can barely walk through the property,' Dauray said. 'It's just so thick that it's a wasteland.' Buermann pointed out acres filled with melaleuca are better than acres of asphalt. Board member Shannon Estenoz agreed, saying, 'bad wetlands are better than no wetlands.'

Rains bringing Lake Okeechobee's water level up, but it still needs 2 more feet

07/09/2008

Jupiter Courier
Monique Mattiace

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Monique Mattiace-Stuart News

Thanks to the recent rains, Lake Okeechobees water level is up and experts hope the trend will continue.

On Wednesday, Lake Okeechobees level was at 10.02 feet, half a foot higher than a month ago. However, the lake is still 2 feet shy of its historical average of 12 feet for this time of the year.

Things are look pretty darn good, said David Unsell, South Florida Water Management District division director for Lake Okeechobee, who wants to see the lake level rise a half a foot monthly.

A slow but steady rise in the lake level would be good for the lakes ecology, said Susan Gray, SFWMD deputy department director of watershed management. If the water comes up too fast, it could hurt plants in the lake. Healthy wildlife depend on healthy plants, she said.

Lake Okeechobee received 8.88 inches of direct rainfall in June, said Susan Sylvestor, SFWMD director of operations for the control department To have 8 inches in one month is very encouraging.

However, it wont be until September or mid-October before experts have a much better feel as to what the next dry season will hold.

This rainy season needs to continue to be overactive to keep the lake over the 12-foot mark and make it through the dry season, Sylvestor said. If it doesnt, the region will face water management challenges in January.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which, regulates Lake Okeechobee, has a new goal to manage the lake at between 12.5 feet and 15.5 feet throughout the year. That range is safe for the Herbert Hoover Dike and meets the needs for all water resource purposes the lake serves, the corps said.

If the lake level exceeds 12.5 feet, the corps said it might discharge water a move conservationists have said has hurt the St. Lucie Estuary in the past.

Meanwhile, businesses around the 750-square-mile lake are also excited about the recent rainfall.

This is a huge bonus. Instead of the water levels going down like they were last year, they are coming up, said boat captain Mike Shellen of Okeechobee, who takes people fishing on the lake.

Shellen said his business is down 35 percent from last year and added some bait and tackle stores have closed because low lake levels have kept away anglers.

The Fourth of July weekend is typically busy, but this holiday brought him no customers, Shellen said.

However, the low levels on the lake have served a purpose.

The SFWMD and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission were able to clean 400 acres of muck that covered the lakes shoreline this year. The removal has allowed proper

vegetation to grow and has helped rid the lake of sediments and phosphorus, Gray said.

The muck has been transferred to an area inside the lake that's up against the dike at an elevation level above 19 feet a level the lake will never reach, Gray said.

Lake levels rising thanks to rain

07/10/2008

Associated Press (AP) - Tallahassee Bureau

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla._Lake Okeechobee's water levels are up thanks to recent rains.

Lake Okeechobee's level was at 10.02 feet Wednesday, half a foot higher than a month ago.

The lake is still 2 feet shy of its average of 12 feet for this time of the year.

Experts say a slow but steady rise in the lake level would be good. If the water comes up too fast, it could hurt the plants.

The low levels haven't been a total loss. State officials cleaned 400 acres of muck that covered the lake's shoreline this year, allowing vegetation to grow and ridding the lake of sediments and phosphorus.

Information from: The Stuart News, <http://www.tcpalm.com>

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LAKE OKEECHOBEE INCHING ABOVE 10 FEET THE FIRST TIME IN ALMOST TWO MONTHS.

07/09/2008

FOX 29 News at 10 PM - WFLX-TV

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FOX 29 News at 10 PM - WFLX-TV

LAKE OKEECHOBEE INCHING ABOVE 10 FEET THE FIRST TIME IN ALMOST TWO MONTHS. IT'S THE MAIN BACKUP WATER SUPPLY FOR MOST OF SOUTH FLORIDA. EVEN THOUGH IT'S ABOVE 10 FEET IT'S STILL MORE THAN 3 1/2 FEET BELOW AVERAGE FOR THIS DATE.

Briefs:Emergency Management Coordinator Is Named

07/10/2008

Washington Post

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Washington Post

Olivia McLean was recently appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to be coordinator of the Office of Emergency Management. She will start the job Aug. 25.

McLean comes from West Palm Beach, Fla., where she was director of emergency and security management for the South Florida Water Management District.

Phosphorous Is Threatening Istokpoga And Arbuckle

07/10/2008

Highlands Today

DOUG CARMAN

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DOUG CARMAN-Highlands Today

SEBRING - As the state is working on the massive Everglades cleanup, a local Audubon Society official warned that one of its tributaries is headed for the same environmental problems plaguing the swamp and Lake Okeechobee.

Paul Gray, a science coordinator with the Audubon Society's Lake Okeechobee Watershed Program, said that the amount of phosphorous in Lake Istokpoga and Arbuckle Creek is rising to the point where it could eventually experience toxic algae blooms if a stronger cleanup program isn't started soon.

The state already dealt with cyanobacteria blooms in Okeechobee, which could be toxic enough to make cattle ill if they drank the infested water. Gray said it was so severe in Martin County a few years ago that signs had to be posted around the water ways warning people not to touch the water.

Cyanobacteria can grow in water that has more than 50 parts per billion (ppb) of phosphorous in it. Even though precise Istokpoga phosphorus content was not available Wednesday, the amount flowing out of the lake and entering canal C-41, the main outflow located east of Lake Placid, rose from an average of 29 ppb from 1990 through 1995 up to 59 ppb through 2000.

'We are heading that direction,' Gray said.

Phosphorous is a naturally appearing nutrient and isn't toxic by itself, but excessive amounts of it seeps into water supplies when lawns or crops are fertilized with phosphate. The extra phosphorous causes algae and some bacteria to bloom.

'Any kind of vegetation grows a lot faster with the higher volumes,' said Bert Galloway, the president of Friends of Istokpoga, a lake watch group that focuses only on Highlands County's largest body of water. They and S.O.S. Florida Lakes have been battling the lake's persistent hydrilla overgrowth problem for years, another problem worsened by the phosphorous runoffs into the lake.

Lake Manager Clell Ford estimated that Arbuckle Creek was getting most of its phosphorous from dairy runoffs around Avon Park until three years ago. He added that those dairies underwent a management program and have cut down on the phosphorous runoffs substantially, but it would take more than 5 years before any improvements could be seen in Istokpoga's water quality.

Istokpoga And Everglades Restoration

The approach Ford described, called 'best management practice' in district lingo, is what the South Florida Water Management District is using toward Istokpoga rather than taking on the more ambitious projects seen on Lake Okeechobee.

The Everglades restoration took national headlines last month when Florida Gov. Charlie Crist announced a planned buyout of more than 300,000 acres of land from U.S. Sugar to preserve the swamp. Though Istokpoga is part of the watershed that covers the Everglades, the district considers the lake relatively healthy compared to Okeechobee and the water downstream, so the focus here is not as intense, Ford said.

The South Florida Water Management District recorded an average of 25.3 tons of phosphorus flowing from Istokpoga to Okeechobee per year, according to a report released in February.

Gary Ritter, the interim director of SFWMD's Okeechobee office which also covers Lake Istokpoga, pointed to data on the SFWMD Web page that stated that the phosphorus concentrations from Istokpoga entering Okeechobee, at 63 parts per billion, is lower than all the other major tributaries and 25.3 c tons the second-lowest contributor in terms of the total phosphorous contributed.

Taylor Creek and Nubbin Slough's watershed, which covers half the area of Istokpoga, dumps 136.4 tons of the mineral as its water has about 537 ppb, the data stated.

Reporter Doug Carman can be reached at 386-5838 or dcarman@highlandstoday.com

Fishing Seagrass proposal bad idea

07/10/2008
News-Press

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Captain Sam O'Briant - News-Press

The Lee County commissioners have a proposal before the group about saving the seagrasses.

It is being pushed by the tree huggers and the anti -boating/ fishing coalitions.

Once again, we can partially thank the Army Corp of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District folks for this. With the water flushes several years ago, they brought much attention to the plight of the lost seagrass. Now this is being used and pushed even harder to cover prop scars and prop ditches.

No, I do not condone tearing up the seagrasses. If you do start to slow down, raise your engine and get out to deeper water. You may even need to get out and push yourself a little. It will not hurt you and will save the grass.

If we let Lee County put in the proposed law for mitigation of dredging some channels, we are opening a massive door that may not be closed until they have closed all navigable waters to powerboating. Do you want to revert to the early 1900s and before? Can you imagine not being able to use a motor to go from Punta Rassa to Cabbage Key?

Are we really trying to revert to the dark ages or are we letting a few rule the majority? This is just what groups like PETA and Save the Manatee want. You see what happened when the manatee zones went into effect.

There are some public hearings coming up. I do not believe they have been scheduled. Watch The News-Press for those dates when they are published.

The fishing business is so slow that I have only been out twice in the last six weeks. The last time was on the Fourth of July. Now that was a trip. We did not wet a line. In fact I did not leave the pickup dock. Yes the party forgot to show up and did not call to cancel. So the two boat trip sat around the dock waiting for two hours that morning before calling it off. The good thing is that I am supposed to get paid for that trip because of the way it was booked.

Where this is leading is that I do not have a firsthand report on fish activity. I hear it is fairly active if you can avoid the storms. They have been rather active in the afternoons. Look for the snook along the outer shorelines and under the mangroves along with redfish. Bigger snapper should be gathering in the passes to head offshore for the remainder of their life. The tarpon are still around if you can find them. They have started their migration offshore to who knows where.

Have a great week on the water and if you see the Tar Heel wave and say hi. Let us get those kids out and have a good time. School starts in about six weeks.

Pole-troll zones can be productive

07/09/2008

News-Press

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By Byron Stout-News-Press

A number of boaters have approached me with concerns about a Lee County plan to mitigate the effects of channel dredging with no-motor zones, in which boats will be propelled only by paddle, push-pole or electric trolling motor.

At first blush that seemed like an apples-and-oranges problem. No-motor zones don't really have anything to do with dredging, so the process seemed arbitrary.

Then again, the 48 public channels to be dredged will provide boater access to all waters of Lee County, many of which are being degraded by prop scarring in seagrass beds. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is charged with protecting those seagrass beds and other marine environments, so the agency can't very well authorize potential destruction (by virtue of more boating access) without offsetting mitigation (preservation of seagrass).

The plan also seemed excessive, according to recent rumors based on a map posted on a Web forum as the Lee County plan. That early working map, which Steve Boutelle of the Lee Division of Natural Resources described as "the universe of possibilities," outlined almost 8,000 acres of potential pole-and-troll zones.

In fact, the final four no-motor zones total 1,245 acres, or about 2 square miles, divided among four existing designated aquatic preserves. All four areas are suffering from prop scarring - damage that should be eliminated with compliance with the zone regulations, which will be clearly marked.

Truth be known, I don't have any problem with pole-and-troll zones if they're well conceived, which these seem to be.

A couple of years ago I visited the two Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Pole/Troll Zones, which total 3,143 acres, or about 5 square miles. The feds brought in the DEP and even the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to work on that plan for the Mosquito Lagoon, which was well served with anglers and fishing guides as stakeholders. The plan wasn't mandated, it was implemented with a grassroots buy-in based on good access channels and the will to preserve some beautiful flats habitat and the great fishing thereon.

I think if I have any real quarrel with how the Lee County plan was implemented, it is with how it was done without real outreach, and without stakeholders who might actually have strengthened it. Because pole-troll zones can be a great thing.

While chasing a school of nice redfish at Merritt Island, Capt. Eric Mannino poled me over a pothole filled with trout that had to average 6 or 7 pounds apiece. You don't find big fish like that

stacked up on a flat being buzzed all day by high-speed skiffs.

Jug Creek Shoal, which straddles the Charlotte Harbor and Pine Island aquatic preserves, might become such a fabled flat. I can't wait to see it after the pole-troll zone goes into effect. That won't be for a while - some still to be determined time in a five-year plan, according to Boutelle. For my part, I'll be waiting with anticipation, rather than aggravation.

Road work flooding neighborhood?

07/10/2008

WINK-TV

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By WINK News

LEE COUNTY, Fla. - People living in one Lee County neighborhood say a new road project is turning their streets into rivers.

Residents in the Glenwood neighborhood say nearby construction is forcing water run-off on the roads in front of their homes. They live near the new Plantation Extension, which will connect Veronica Shoemaker Boulevard and Plantation Road south of Colonial.

Neighbors say it started when a retention pond replaced some woods next to Abbott Street about a month ago. But when work started on the Plantation Extension, they say it started to act like a dam, keeping water from flowing out, and flooding their neighborhood.

"If it doesn't recede anymore and we get more rain tomorrow, we will not be able to get back and forth down our road," said Dan Oppmann, who lives along Abbott Street.

"If we continue to have the kind of rain we're having, right now I'm in a peninsula, I may become an island," said Oppmann's neighbor, Roy Thomas.

Besides access issues, the influx of water has also brought some unusual visitors to the neighborhood..

"We've seen some water moccasins swimming in the areas in the yards right here," Oppmann said., "I've noticed some fish, we've never had fish back here before."

Oppmann says he's been calling the county regularly for a month, trying to get something done...

"They have been helpful when I have talked to them, but we haven't seen any results yet."

Lee County's transportation department says this is a naturally low-lying area. Since Tuesday, they've been putting in diversion ditches and working with water management to find solutions.

Stuart city services shouldn't decrease with new budget

07/10/2008

Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers
Mayfield, Jim

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By Jim Mayfield-Stuart News

STUART — Despite property tax reform and almost \$2 million in cuts, Stuart residents shouldn't expect to see a major decrease in city services, according to the proposed city budget released Wednesday.

The owner of a home with the median value of \$175,640 would pay city taxes of \$652.71 next year, a decrease of about \$125 from the tax bill for the median valued home last year.

The proposed almost \$41 million total budget for 2009 is \$1.36 million more than last year's \$39.6 million budget. But the increase is from departments that must pay for themselves and anticipate increased revenue to match increased spending, such as the city water and sewer department, which is increasing its budget \$3.5 million to build a reclaimed water facility.

The city is actually cutting \$1.9 million from its general fund from \$23.8 million to \$21.9 million.

But those cuts are spread across various departments, so no one group is taking a big hit.

"The service levels essentially haven't changed. It's just a matter of cost containment throughout the budget and every department, and people doing more with less," Financial Services Director Dorothy Zaharako said.

In a letter attached to the budget proposal, City Manager Dan Hudson and Zaharako told commissioners "business as usual is no longer a practical option" in the post tax reform era.

Tax reform and decreased revenues caused by declining real estate values are forcing governments to cut back.

Although Stuart's property tax rate of \$4.3329 per \$1,000 will remain the same under the proposed budget, planners using preliminary numbers estimate more than \$800,000 will be lost in property taxes in 2009 — an 8 percent decrease in total taxable value for the city from 2008.

In terms of personnel, Stuart would add a fire marshal and eliminate a park ranger, two finance/purchasing positions and a harbor master.

The Parks and Recreation Department will reduce recreation programs and services and possibly change the operating hours of the recreation centers.

An additional proposed \$100,000 reserve is planned to cover costs of employee terminations, retirements and disbursements

from employee leave banks.

Taxable value of real estate: \$2.15 billion

Proposed 2008 budget: \$40.96 million total, \$21.9 million general fund

Adopted 2007 budget: \$39.6 million total, \$23.8 million general fund

Increase/Decrease: Increase of \$1.36 million in total budget and decrease of \$1.9 million in general fund

Proposed 2008 property tax rate: \$4.3329 per \$1,000 of assessed value

Adopted 2007 property tax rate: \$4.3329 per \$1,000 of assessed value

TAX BILL FOR A TYPICAL SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE

2008 TAX BILL

Median home value: \$204,000

Homestead exemption: \$25,000

Taxable value: \$179,000

Adopted 2008 property tax rate: \$4.3329 per \$1,000 of assessed value

City tax bill: \$775.59

2009 TAX BILL

Median home value: \$175,640

Homestead exemption: \$25,000

Taxable value: \$150,640

Proposed 2009 property tax rate: \$4.3329 per \$1,000 of assessed value

City tax bill: \$652.71

Note: Figures do not include taxes imposed by other agencies, such as Martin County, the Martin County School Board, the South Florida Water Management District or the Florida Inland Navigational District.

BUDGET WORKSHOPS

City commissioners have three budget workshops scheduled:

Dates: July 14, July 28 and, if necessary, Aug. 11

Where: All workshops will be held at Stuart City Hall, 121 S. W. Flagler Ave., Stuart

When: All begin at 9 a.m.

Polk Commissioners Want Bang For Their Water Buck

07/10/2008

Ledger, The
Palmer, Tom

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By Tom Palmer-THE LEDGER

BARTOW | The search for water to fuel Polk's future growth is costing millions of dollars and Polk County commissioners are increasingly frustrated by the lack of guarantees that the investment will yield anything.

The issue arose today in connection with the plan to spend \$2 million to drill an exploratory well at a private ranch near Lake Walk-in-the-Water to determine whether water in the lower Floridan aquifer is a viable water source.

This follows a \$2 million attempt in Northeast Polk to explore that section of the aquifer because there is very little information on the lower Floridan aquifer — drinking water is typically pulled from the upper Floridan aquifer — as a requirement of the county's water use permit.

Polk and other Central Florida counties are required to come up with an alternative to groundwater by 2013 to reduce the impact of overpumping, which can damage surface waters.

The strategy is to prevent the kind of environmental damage ranging from dried up lakes and wetlands to saltwater intrusion that have resulted from unregulated water withdrawals in the past.

So far water officials have provided funding to help to finance the wells, but have not certified them as alternative water supplies because they concluded it was unclear that the area the county had tapped was not connected to the upper Floridan.

Commissioner Jack Myers was dissatisfied.

He said he wanted a commitment "before we chase our tail like a crazy dog."

Gary Fries, capital projects director for Polk County Utilities, said there's a good chance the rules will change after 2012, which would likely allow the county to use the wells.

Deputy County Manager Jim Freeman said commissioners need to look at the bigger picture, which is that it is appearing increasingly unlikely that Polk will be able to tap the Kissimmee River or other surface waters to provide future water supplies.

In addition, it's important for county officials to plan where they will get additional water after 2013.

"As an inland county, these types of solutions are what we'll have to rely on," he said, referring to the fact that coastal counties could build desalination plants and are farther downstream along

rivers that originate in Polk and other inland counties to tap those rivers.

Nevertheless, Commission Chairman Sam Johnson was frustrated, too.

"It seems like a lot of money for a what if," he said. "I don't like the idea of throwing \$2 million a year away."

County Attorney Michael Craig said the money on the wells does provide some scientific information that can bolster the county's case for using the deep aquifer, but acknowledged the current system is "imperfect."

Johnson said the problem he has is that not only does Polk County have to spend money on such projects, but every other Florida county has to do something similar.

Craig said the alternative is to spend millions of dollars in court, which produces no water.

Polk County Utilities' Fries said despite the cost drilling experimental wells is still cheaper than other alternatives, such as building above-ground reservoirs.

"We think this is our prime candidate," he said.

Ground Water Protection Council Urges Congressional Water Caucus to Adopt National Strat

07/09/2008

Calibre MacroWorld

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WASHINGTON, July 9 /PRNewswire/ -- A group representing state environmental regulators across the country today told a congressional panel that current rates of water use are unsustainable and are already leading to critical shortages in some areas. In their presentation to the Congressional Water Caucus, the Ground Water Protection Council (GWPC) called for greater national emphasis and better funding to study and protect underground sources of water. To view today's report 'Ground Water Report to the Nation: A Call to Action' go to <http://www.gwpc.org/calltoaction> . 'In many places across the nation, we are running our ground water budget at a deficit. Unless we can balance the budget by planning ahead, we are jeopardizing the future health and well-being of our citizens, our economy and our ecological systems,' said Scott Kell, president of the Ground Water Protection Council and deputy chief of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. 'We can't wait until the wells run dry before we start shepherding this finite resource.' The Congressional Water Caucus is studying what members consider to be one of the most important issues facing our nation: ensuring a dependable fresh water supply for all Americans for years to come. Ground water is the drinking water source for nearly half the population. According to GWPC, there are plenty of warning signs that ground

water is in trouble, painting a picture of a growing national problem with significant environmental and economic impacts.

The Ogallala (OH guh la la) Aquifer in the High Plains provides water to eight states from South Dakota to Texas and has been intensely tapped for irrigation since World War II. As a result, the water levels in this 'bread basket of the nation' declined more than 100 feet in some areas.

Los Angeles' only local water supply, the San Fernando Valley aquifer, is contaminated with industrial solvents. The contamination is spreading, and pumping is severely restricted, forcing Los Angeles to import 90% of its water supply from outside sources.

In water-rich Florida, consequences of the overdraft include dried-up wells, reduced surface water levels, degraded water quality, saltwater intrusion in coastal wells and sinkholes.

GWPC is the national association of state ground water protection and underground injection control agencies.

SOURCE Ground Water Protection Council

CONTACT: Lisa Hall for Ground Water Protection Council, 1-850-508-7782, Lisa.Hall@saltermitchell.com

U.S. Faces Era Of Water Scarcity Profligate Use Hurts In Unexpected Places; Quest For New

07/09/2008

CSRwire

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By Keith Schneider-CSRwire

Circle of Blue reports on emerging water crisis

Just as diminishing supplies of oil and natural gas are wrenching the economy and producing changes in lifestyles built on the principle of plenty, states and communities across the country are confronting another significant impediment to the American way of life: increased competition for scarce water.

Scientists and resource specialists say freshwater scarcity, even in unexpected places, threatens farm productivity, limits growth, increases business expenses, and drains local treasuries.

In May, for example, Brockton, Massachusetts, inaugurated a brand-new, \$60 million reverse osmosis desalinization plant to supply a portion of its drinking water. The Atlantic coast city, which receives four feet of rain annually, was nevertheless so short of freshwater that it was converting brackish water into water people actually could drink.

Builders in the Southeast are confronting limits to planting gardens and lawns for new houses as a result of local water

restrictions prompted by a continuing drought. The Ogallala Aquifer, the vast underground reservoir beneath the Great Plains, is steadily being depleted. California experienced the driest spring on record this year.

And scientists at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego forecast that within 13 years Lake Mead and Lake Powell along the Colorado River, the two largest reservoirs in the southwest United States, could become 'dead pool mud puddles.

'The whole picture is not pretty, and I don't think that anyone has looked at the subject with the point of view of what's sustainable,' said Tim Barnett, a research marine geophysicist at Scripps and co-author of the study. 'We don't have anybody thinking long range, at the big picture that would put the clamps on large-scale development.'

Era of Water Scarcity

'I truly believe we're moving into an era of water scarcity throughout the United States,' said Peter Gleick, science advisor to Circle of Blue and president of the Pacific Institute, a think tank specializing in water issues based in Oakland, California. 'That by itself is going to force us to adopt more efficient management techniques.'

The U.S. Drought Monitor, a weekly online report produced by the Department of Agriculture and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, shows that severe drought still grips much of the American Southeast, is spreading east from California across the Rocky Mountains, and has also settled in the Texas Panhandle and parts of Oklahoma and Colorado.

While agriculture in the Colorado Basin faces shortages, farmers to the east in the high plains - tapping the Ogallala Aquifer - have progressively seen their wells dry up. The aquifer is the largest in the United States and sees a depletion rate of some 12 billion cubic meters a year, a quantity equivalent to 18 times the annual flow of the Colorado River. Since pumping started in the 1940s, Ogallala water levels have dropped by more than 100 feet (30 meters) in some areas.

In an interview with Circle of Blue, Kevin Dennehey, program coordinator for the Ground-Water Resources Program at the U.S. Geological Survey, said, 'The problem with the aquifer is that it's a limited resource. There is not an unlimited supply, so the recharge is much less than the withdrawals.'

The prognosis for farmers, whose irrigation accounts for 94 percent of the groundwater use on the high plains, does not look optimistic. In the future, irrigation may not be possible at all as the levels continue to drop past the well intakes of farmers. More likely, before the pumping stops, the cost of drilling and maintaining deeper wells may exceed the value of what can be grown, severely limiting the farmland's value. 'There is no other water available,' said Dennehey.

Receding Water in Great Lakes, Other Regions

Declining water levels affect the Great Lakes, too. In a paper published late last year, scientists projected that over the next three decades or so, water levels in Lake Erie, which supplies

drinking water to more than 11 million people, could fall three to six feet as a result of climate change.

'We'll have more wetland and coastal habitat and shallower water,' said John Hartig, manager of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in Michigan. 'The falling water levels also have huge implications for power plants. Think of power plants designing their water intakes to draw water from a particular depth, at a particular distance offshore. If you water levels drop 1-2 meters 40 years from now, that's going to affect all water intakes.'

In an effort to curb draws on the Great Lakes and further protect the basin's water resources, eight states and two Canadian provinces have passed the Great Lakes compact - an agreement that is intended to prevent the exportation of Great Lakes water to other regions. The compact now needs to be approved by the U. S. Congress before it can become law. (Read an interview about the Compact with James M. Olson, one of America's preeminent attorneys specializing in water-and land-use law.)

The Southeast has been hard hit as well. Authorities in southern Florida issued water restrictions earlier this year. In August of 2007, city officials in Greensboro, North Carolina fined homeowners associations for watering lawns, washing sidewalks, and other violations of emergency restrictions on water use that were prompted by the region's severe drought.

In Atlanta, where a severe drought also persists, authorities pressed residents to reduce water use, successfully. Then leaders of the city's Watershed Management Department, concerned about declining revenue to operate the system, asked permission to raise rates. Officials in Fulton County, where Atlanta is located, did the same thing, praising residents for their efforts at conservation then increasing their rates by 15 percent. If approved by the city council, the average residential water bill in Atlanta would jump from \$84 to \$107 next year.

Causes: Climate Change, Population Growth, Profligate Use

Though there is disagreement in the scientific community about when the southeast drought will end, or how low water levels might get in the Great Lakes, most experts say that American water reserves are changing, and in many cases dwindling.

One reason is global warming, which is altering precipitation patterns producing more droughts in some regions, more flooding in others, and generally making weather patterns unpredictable, thus limiting options for response to extreme conditions. Soil erosion, leaking pipes that are expensive to fix, and an aversion to conservation also are mentioned as causes of scarcity. Another is the country's growing population, expected to reach 450 million by the middle of the century, or roughly 50 percent more people than now.

The results are unmistakable, especially in California. In June, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger declared a statewide water emergency, the first since 1991. Though the winter snow pack in the Sierra Nevada, which produces much of the state's water, was higher than last season, California has had the driest spring on record. Reservoirs are just two-thirds full. Leaders of the state's fast-growing communities have asked residents to

curtail watering lawns and washing cars. In northern California, the air last week was choked by smoke from some 800 forest and grass fires, the highest number on record this early in the fire season.

In 2002, California put into effect a state law that requires developers to prove that new projects have a plan for providing at least 20 years worth of water before local water authorities can approve their projects. For the first time, according to a report in June in the New York Times, several local governments in southern California are actually enforcing the law: They're requiring developers to prove where new homes will secure their water, and in some cases delaying construction permits.

But even in California, where the state's 37 million residents live in a real-life theme ride of natural threats droughts, fires, floods and earthquakes - there is no sense of crisis.

Not Seen as Emergency, Yet

The gravity of the situation hasn't set in for most Americans. In Atlanta, where drought dramatically lowered Lake Lanier, the region's primary reservoir, water scarcity is generally seen as temporary, and not related to how the region has grown.

'As an observer of water in the West, as a journalist and a reader of history, I would venture that water scarcity has rarely, if ever, been a long-term limit to growth,' said Jon Christensen, a researcher at the Bill Lane Center for the Study of the North American West at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. 'Short-term moratoria on building permits have happened in various places around the West in the past, including Las Vegas. They are usually, in my view, shots across the bows of developers and elected officials that stimulate the search for new deals to bring water from other sources at whatever cost is necessary, so that building can continue.'

In 2003, the General Accounting Office, an investigative arm of the U.S. Congress, published a survey that found water managers in 36 states 'anticipate water shortages locally, regionally or statewide within the next ten years.'

The study has proved disturbingly prophetic, and nowhere more so than on the Colorado Plateau and the rest of the American Southwest. The region is in the ninth year of a persistent drought that continues to leave Las Vegas worried.

On June 6, during a congressional briefing, Gregory J. McCabe, a research scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey, presented a study showing that even a 1.5-degree increase in the overall temperature of the Southwest due to climate change will decrease the Colorado Rivers flow. That, he said, increases the likelihood that it will fall short of the amount needed to meet the annual water allocations upon which Nevada, six other states, and 25 million people rely. The Hoover Dam, moreover, will not be able to supply nearly the same level of electric power to Las Vegas as it does today.

'You've got a river now that is stretched totally thin, and all the water is being used,' said Barnett, of the Scripps Institution. 'There is no excess water. You're getting less and less water over the decades, so it's going to be a continuing, festering thing that

will get worse,' he added. 'That's desert. It was never meant to have cities. There are millions of people there, and they all have one water supply, only one: the Colorado.'

As Peter Curtiss, an engineer and head of Curtiss Engineering in Boulder, Colorado, noted, 'People assume these things are going to be available. We've been trained ever since the windmill pumped up water from the farm. Water, electricity and natural gas: When you buy a house, you expect that those services will be there, and the thought of having a house without any one of those seems absurd.'

Managing the Colorado River system and other U.S. water resources in a sustainable way poses great technological, political and social challenges. But, as the Pacific Institute's Gleick said, 'If we continue on our current path, continuing to do things the way we were doing them, we're going to be much worse off in five or ten years, or in the coming decades, because the way we manage water now is inappropriate. It's not sustainable. We over-pump our groundwater. We take water from ecosystems. We don't think about how we grow and where we grow our population.'

Freshwater scarcity is proving to be the new risk to local economies and regional development plans across the country. Just like the rising price of gasoline, the expanding number of home foreclosures, stagnant incomes, and several other stubborn 21st-century trends, water is imposing limits on how America grows.

'So the business-as-usual future is a bad one, Gleick continued. 'We know that in five years we'll be in trouble, but it doesn't have to be that way. If there were more education and awareness about water issues, if we started to really think about the natural limits about where humans and ecosystems have to work together to deal with water, and if we were to start to think about efficient use of water, then we could reduce the severity of the problems enormously. I'm just not sure we're going to.'

By Keith Schneider

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Keith Schneider is a writer in residence at Circle of Blue and a former national correspondent and regular contributor to the New York Times since 1981. Additional reporting for this article was provided by C.T. Pope and Aaron Jaffe, researchers in the Circle of Blue office in Traverse City, Michigan.

At a glance

U.S. moving toward a new period of limited water resources

The Ogallala Aquifer, supplying groundwater to the Great Plains, at record lows in some areas

World's largest freshwater supply the Great Lakes basin threatened by climate change, experts warn

Water shortages hit U.S. cities as restrictions are tightened, rates increased

Global warming and climate change altering precipitation patterns

Population growth stretches water supplies thin, challenges sustainable management

Increasing awareness of pending U.S. water crisis could mitigate long-term damage

Graphics

Map: Extent of state shortages likely over the next decade under average water conditions

[Click here to download a Google Earth module showing water withdrawal rates for the United States. \(2.5MB .kmz\)](#)

[Click here to download the Google Earth application.](#)

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About

Circle of Blue

Founded by leading journalists and scientists and based on the shores of the Great Lakes, Circle of Blue is a nonprofit, nonpartisan independent journalism, science and design project of the Pacific Institute. It was featured recently at the Aspen Ideas Festival, Clinton Global Initiative, World Economic Forum and Aspen Environment Forum. Circle of Blue's reporting is only possible through the generous financial support of individuals, foundations and companies. Circle of Blue adheres to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.

Partners

Circle of Blue partners announced at the Clinton Global Initiative include the international photojournalism agency Contact Press Images; the Environmental Change and Security Program and China Environment Forum at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; exhibit firm Evergreen Exhibitions; acclaimed artist Greg Mort; SustainAbility, the global independent consultancy for corporate responsibility and sustainability; and Sea Studios Foundation, producer of the PBS series, 'Strange Days on Planet Earth.' Also included are and Magnum Photos Foundation, and Globescan, the international public opinion and research firm.

For more information please contact:

Circle of Blue

What Makes A Green Home? Posted By Karrie Rose

07/09/2008

ArticleAddict

Karrie Rose

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By: Karrie Rose-Article Addict

While 'green' has become quite the buzzword when it comes to home building and design, what exactly it means isn't always clear. There are a few standards for eco-friendly homes, but the term 'green' doesn't have a universal definition beyond being a color made by mixing yellow and blue. So how does a consumer know when a home the builder is calling 'green' is actually built with an ecological focus, or at least enough of one to justify its price?

Some of the standards for ecologically minded homes include increased insulation. To be really energy efficient, a home should be insulated beyond the minimum local requirements. This includes floor insulation, which in some cases is built right in to the concrete foundation. In addition to the walls, floors and ceilings, windows should also be insulating. Therefore, double paned and/or vinyl windows are becoming the 'green' standard.

Energy efficiency should be continued throughout the home. Low water use toilets are a must, and those that have different flush options are extra eco-conscious. These options allow you to have a more efficient flush for solid waste, while liquid waste just gets much more conservative flush. Shower heads, washing machines, faucets and dishwashers can also be equipped to limit the water used without compromising function. Air conditioners, refrigerators, heaters and all other appliances within the home should be of the highest standard of energy efficiency. In addition, compact fluorescent lights should be used throughout the home, or replaced by LED lights wherever those are suitable.

Beyond energy efficiency, use of non-toxic, or at least less-toxic, materials is important in 'green' homes. Look for a home with low VOC paints. VOC stands for volatile organic compounds, which are toxins that gas-off from conventional paint. Remember the lighter the pigment, the lower the VOC's, so white or off-white walls are healthier than some of the bolder, trendy colors. This is because it is the paint base that is quality controlled, but it is impossible to take the VOC's out of some pigments.

Another finishing detail that is popular for eco-friendly homes is bamboo or cork flooring. Bamboo is popular because it grows so quickly. It takes about five years to grow bamboo to the right size to make flooring. It is versatile and comes in a variety of styles and colors. Cork is an option because it is sustainable to harvest - removing cork does not damage the cork tree, as it replenishes its cork bark every year anyway. Cork makes a lovely, soft and springy floor surface that is also naturally warmer than many other flooring options.

For our final indoor consideration, eco-friendly homes will use

more natural fabrics such as wool and cotton for carpets and window dressings.

Outside the home leaves plenty of room for 'green' considerations, too. Xeriscaping is a popular means of landscaping utilizing plants native to the area being built in. These plants are naturally drought-resistant because they are acclimatized to the local environment, needing less watering and maintenance than lawns or beds full of foreign flowers.

Another 'green' outdoor trend is utilizing permeable paving stones. These actually absorb water, which then is naturally filtered through the earth and goes back into the ground-water supply. These avoid the toxic run-off that can be caused by water rushing over cement and into drains, carrying oil and exhaust residue straight into the drainage system, which ultimately ends up being a nearby body of water.

If a home you are looking at is being promoted as being 'green', don't hesitate to ask the builder about some of these features. If they don't measure up, don't buy it.

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Florida's Fisheating Creek has plenty to offer

07/09/2008

Miami Herald - Online

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By SUSAN COCKING-Miami Herald

PALMDALE, Fla. -- Listen up, Henry David Thoreau. Walden Pond's got nothing on Fisheating Creek.

This spectacularly scenic stream - which flows, trickles and meanders some 50 miles from Highlands County south and east to Lake Okeechobee - could turn even the most hardened nature-hater into a tree-hugging fool.

After a five-plus-year lapse, I made it up there last week after learning that recent rains had raised water levels enough to be pleasantly paddle-able. My brief, solo trip was intended as a contemplation of nature before the arrival of this weekend's horde of Independence Day revelers from Fort Myers. I was not disappointed.

Unlike the American philosopher, I don't have an ancient family cottage in the woods. But I do have a Honda Element, which, arguably, is just as good. This boxy, utilitarian vehicle is like a mobile college dorm room. It carries a bulky inflatable kayak - plus a paddle, pump, coolers, overnight bag, battery-powered fan, lantern, portable stove, sleeping bag and pad. In short, everything you need for one night in the wild with some degree of comfort.

After a two-hour drive, I arrived at Fisheating Creek Campground on U.S. 27 in Palmdale, where I secured a primitive campsite for my car-dorm and a livery reservation for the next morning for my kayak. A van delivered us to Burnt Bridge - a scenic, woodland put-in about eight miles upstream from the campground. Total cost: \$37.45.

I planned to inflate my kayak and take it for a test paddle, but only got as far as inflating it. A blustery electrical storm in late afternoon took about two hours to vacate the area, so it was nearly dark by the time it subsided. I passed the time reading a detective novel in my car, then decided to take a stroll when the rain slowed to a drizzle.

As I stepped out of the car, I heard the familiar grunt-burp of an alligator, and spied the six-foot animal paddling leisurely down the creek about 100 feet away. To ensure that it knew this was my campsite and not a potential wallow, I waved to it. It stared at me briefly and submerged. OK, just as long as we have our signals straight.

I strolled through the RV section of the campground, down a dirt and gravel road toward a small lake. Adjacent to the lake was a

double-fenced pasture holding several horses and ponies. I watched them graze for a while, then turned back toward camp.

About 50 yards ahead of me on the dirt-gravel road sat a tawny-brown animal about the size of a boxer dog with its back to me. I approached quietly, but it must have felt my foot-falls, because it turned halfway around and stalked into the brush before I got much closer. The only thing I could clearly make out as it disappeared was its long, curved tail.

I caught my breath. Unless I was seriously mistaken, I had just seen a panther - only the second one I've encountered in nearly 30 years in South Florida.

Just then, a marsh rabbit dashed across the road - to the side where the suspected panther had just vanished. Approaching cautiously, I wondered if the bunny would become prey. But I never saw nor heard either of them again.

It was dark when I arrived back at camp. Nearby, gators were grunt-burping from the river, and they were joined by a noisy chorus of insects and frogs. Whoever thinks the woods is quiet after dark probably hasn't been there very often.

Looking around, I realized I was the only camper in the tent section of the grounds. No other humans. Hoping the gators would not decide to take liberties, I sat outside at a picnic table for a while, shining my flashlight around the creek - which occasionally illuminated the reptiles' ruby eyes. In keeping with our telepathic pact, they stayed in the water. But the hopelessly rude mosquitoes and no-see-ums drove me into my car. It rained off and on throughout the night.

The next morning came with a hint of sunlight and no sign of thunderheads as I made my tea on the tiny gas stove. A couple of squirrels scrambled over, hoping for scraps. When they saw I didn't have any, one of them actually grabbed a melting ice cube I had dumped out of the cooler and charged away with it. Those squirrels!

Shortly after 9 a.m., Monty, the livery guy, arrived with his van and trailer at the campground office to take me, my kayak and two canoeists up to Burnt Bridge.

I think the other paddlers, Jim and Sandy Hinchman from Lake Wales, had misgivings about me and my inflatable craft heading solo eight miles down the creek. They insisted on giving me their cell phone number in case I got in trouble. (Interestingly, cell phone coverage on the creek is now 800 percent better than when I last visited; new cell towers have been built nearby.)

The Hinchmans and I said our goodbyes. I launched first, and probably passed five large alligators in the first five minutes after setting out. All of them ducked underwater when I approached, as per our agreement. You wouldn't want to swim in this creek - as cool, beautiful and clean as it looks. For every gator you see, there are probably at least that many lying on the creek bottom or hidden in the marsh grass. I don't think I paddled more than 10 minutes without hearing their baritone indigestion sounds.

With the gators behaving (relatively) politely, I was free to concentrate on the gorgeous scenery - towering bald cypress with

feathery, green leaves and dark, knobby knees that look like a gaggle of trolls lining the shore. Overhead, angel-white ibis and egret crossed the treetops. A pileated woodpecker the size of a chicken bashed a dead tree trunk into submission with his trip-hammer beak. Hawks shrieked; a barred owl hooted. Frogs and insects filled the momentary lapses with croaks and hums.

In my three hours on the river, only one gator hesitated to honor our treaty. The 10-footer floated in the creek, gazing at me as I passed, and failing to submerge on cue.

I looked it in the eye. 'Hello,' I told it, trying to sound assertive.

It sank, cooperatively, underwater.

It's nearly impossible to get lost on Fisheating Creek; arrow signs are posted at regular intervals and the downstream flow will direct you if you come to a T-intersection. Hint: A narrow creek spur choked with water lettuce is usually the wrong direction.

As I rounded a bend past Picnic Lake and spotted the campground office, I felt like my trip had ended too soon. That's OK. Next time, I'll do the overnighter from Ingram's Crossing.

For more information about Fisheating Creek, go tofisheatingcreekresort.com or myfwc.com/recreation or call 863-675-5999.

Town Council approves \$2 million for Reach 8 fight

07/09/2008

Palm Beach Daily News

DAVID ROGERS

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DAVID ROGERS-Palm Beach Daily News

Following a closed-door session Tuesday evening, the Palm Beach Town Council voted unanimously to appropriate \$2 million to defend a permit that will allow the town to rebuild the South End beach area known as Reach 8.

Town Manager Peter Elwell recommended that the first half of the money come from coastal management capital funds and be available immediately, with the second million dollars to come from the 2009 budget.

The Surfrider Foundation, Snook Foundation and three individuals filed a petition in March challenging the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's notice that it planned to grant an environmental permit for the project, which would rebuild eroded beach in an area that roughly spans 2780 S. Ocean Blvd. to 3360 S. Ocean Blvd., not including the Lake Worth Beach.

The \$2 million adds significantly to the \$300,000 Public Works Director Paul Brazil requested and received from the council for the legal battle in early April. At that time, the town had spent

\$1.5 million on environmental and legal costs related to the project.

The \$300,000 was used to fund the current legal defense and pay lobbyists to oppose a federal proposal that would make it more difficult to obtain coastal permits, Elwell said.

The newly appropriated funds will be used to pay the firm representing the town, Greenburg -Taurig and to pay expert witnesses. Administrative law judge R.E. Meale is set to hear the petition starting on Aug. 25.

'Reach 8, particularly in the area south of the Lake Worth Beach, is a severely eroded shoreline and it is imperative that the town prevails in this effort to provide storm protection to the people and properties in that area,' Elwell said Wednesday.

The petitioners opposing the town project are expected to ask the Lake Worth City Commission to join its fight at that commission's July 15 meeting.

Councilman David Rosow said he views the rebuilding of Reach 8 as an important first step in stabilizing the town's beaches.

'Once we get this project completed I expect and hope our new coastal coordinator and coastal protection board will come up with the technologies available that we can use to keep sand on our beaches, and those include groins and breakwaters,' Rosow said.

Survival story- Wood storks thriving in Georgia

07/09/2008

Brunswick News, The (GA)

Ferguson, Anna

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Anna Ferguson - Brunswick News

Jul. 9--Perched in a towering thin tree on Jekyll Island, a colony of tall slender birds sits above the sand.

It is an unusual site, causing passersby to stop and take a second look.

What the spectators are seeing is more than a striking scene. It is proof of nature restoring itself.

When wood storks began nesting on the Georgia coast about 50 years ago, the endangered species was seeking refuge. In the decades since the birds have been nesting in the area, their numbers have steadily increased, although they are still listed on the federal endangered species list.

In recent years, the Coastal Resources Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Interior, as well as other private entities, in an attempt to restore the wood stork

population by monitoring the birds, creating protected wildlife areas and artificial nesting platforms.

It seems these efforts have paid off.

This year, the Coastal Resources Division has declared that the birds are making a strong comeback. When counting nests throughout the region, the CRD tallied an estimated 2,225 nesting wood stork pairs, said Brad Winn, program manager for the DNR Nongame Conservation Section.

More than 500 pairs of nesting birds were found in the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge in McIntosh County, making up about a fourth of the state's entire wood stork population.

Because the refuge can manipulate water levels, it makes nesting and feeding easier for the bird, allowing them to thrive, Winn said.

"Those are impressive numbers," Winn said. "But I wouldn't give us the credit. That belongs to the birds. They are most responsible for their own growth."

Historically, the long, skeletal-looking birds made their home in the Florida Everglades. But development and massive changes to water sources created harsh conditions for the birds, pushing them to find a new home on the Georgia coast.

The recent high count of wood storks is proof that the birds have successfully adapted to their Peach State habitat, Winn said.

How long that will hold remains to be seen. The draining of wetlands along the coast to make room for development is threatening the habitat and nesting areas of the birds.

"Humans are taking water off the marshes and wetlands, and they can't successfully nest," Winn said.

Despite the disturbance of human development to nesting grounds, Winn has hopes the creatures will continue to thrive.

"Wood storks have a long life, about 20 years," he said. "As long as we can maintain a healthy wetland system and as long as they are able to reproduce, we expect the wood stork numbers to increase."

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Old Island Harbor Marina Goes Green as It Pledges to Obtain a Clean Marina/Clean Boatyard Designatio

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Yahoo! News

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KEY WEST, Fla.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Old Island Harbor, a proposed mixed-use development that emphasizes waterfront revitalization at Safe Harbor, has submitted its pledge to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to obtain a Clean Marina/Clean Boatyard designation. The goal of the DEPs Clean Marina program is to promote pollution prevention through voluntary participation.

With approximately 2,000 marinas operating throughout Florida, the DEP feels that pollution prevention measures must be implemented in order to preserve the states coastal environment. Clean water is essential to Florida coastlines and for the well-being of its environment and surrounding communities.

The Florida Clean Marina program is designed to introduce boatyards and marinas to simple, innovative, day-to-day solutions to prevent pollution. The DEPs Marina Environmental Measures details a series of requirements that marinas and boatyards must meet in order to achieve the important designation. These include:

Make available a resource person at the boatyard to provide customers with environmental information, and who can be contacted for inquires about the Clean Marina Program and environmental issues pertinent to the boatyard.

Make available adequate and well-managed trash/garbage containers.

Post for viewing, or otherwise publish, a set of environmental policies used by the boatyard.

The boatyards water and land must be clean and free of oil, sewage or litter.

Docks and grounds must be well maintained for safety and appearance.

All boatyard personnel must be regularly trained on the boatyards environmental policies and procedures.

Old Island Harbor Marina has pledged to meet these requirements and expects to obtain its designation within the near future.

Old Island Harbor Marina wants to go above and beyond the requirements to obtain its Clean Marina/Clean Boatyard certificate. We have the infrastructure in place and we are moving forward and committing to meeting the Florida Department of Environmental Protection requirements in order to obtain our designation, said Alan Dubroff, Boat Yard Manager for Old Island Harbor Marina.

About Old Island Harbor

Old Island Harbor is a proposed mixed-use development that emphasizes waterfront revitalization at Safe Harbor, Stock Island, replacing old derelict buildings, a junk yard and abandoned structures on Shrimp Road. The project will improve the quality of life of local fishermen, tradesmen, artisans and residents of the Lower Keys. As proposed, Old Harbor Island will:

Preserve Safe Harbors working waterfront assuring continued

strength of the Keys commercial fishing industry

Provide public lodging for the seaport at Safe Harbor, which will also serve as a recovery staging center built to withstand a Category 5 hurricane. The center, provided at no cost to the public, would be made available to emergency personnel and other critical service providers during major storms

Preserve commercial and recreational boating by expanding the working waterfront, boatyard facilities, and the port at Safe Harbor

Provide waterside access including a public boardwalk, public lodging, and restaurants directly on the waterfront

Increase tax revenue with a goal to revitalize Stock Island and make Old Island Harbor a significant economic engine, adding approximately \$2 to \$3 million in additional annual tax revenue to Monroe County

Provide affordable housing for local workers

For more information contact Maritza Arceo at 305-347-4321.

Benefits and rules of artificial reefs

07/10/2008

Naples Daily News

BRYAN FLUECH

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BRYAN FLUECH-Naples Daily News

Artificial reefs in Southwest Florida

Florida has one of the most active artificial reef programs in the Gulf and the Atlantic states.

In addition to increasing habitat, artificial reefs improve fishing and diving opportunities, provide socio-economic benefits to local communities, minimize user conflicts and facilitate reef research.

There is an elaborate process involved in the construction of artificial reefs.

As with any issue dealing with the marine environment, there are several rules and regulations in place that dictate where reefs can go and what type of materials can be used. The days of individuals randomly dumping refrigerators, car frames, bath tubs or whatever else they could find to create a reef are long gone. I think most people would agree this is a good thing, but nonetheless the process to construct new reefs can be long and tedious.

Multiple permits are required for artificial reef construction. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is the permitting authority for reefs in federal waters, while both the ACOE and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) assume permitting responsibility in state waters. This rigorous permitting

process can take anywhere from six months to a year to complete. While the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) consults with these agencies during the permitting review process, they do not issue permits for artificial reef sites. They do provide funding for reef programs through construction and research grants.

Although individuals and independent organizations such as fishing clubs were able to submit proposals in the past, FDEP and the ACOE now restrict applicants to local governments and academic institutions because of environmental concerns and liability issues. In some of the panhandle counties, there are still some private entities involved in the permitting process, but even these groups are designated by local governments.

Proper site location is a critical factor in the reef development process. Before permit requests can be submitted to the ACOE and FDEP, a thorough bottom survey of the typical quarter mile by quarter mile square site must be conducted. Surveys are done to ensure bottom substrates are suitable to handle reef materials and that minimal settling and shifting will occur once reef materials are placed there. Ideally, managers look for shallow layers of sand over a limestone substrate that can support the weight of reef materials. Surveys also ensure there is no sensitive habitat such as live hard bottom or submerged aquatic vegetation present that could be impacted by reef materials.

Managers incorporate their survey findings into a management plan that is submitted to authorities for review. Management plans must demonstrate that new reefs will have minimal impact on biological and cultural resources. They also take into account socio-economic factors such as proximity to passes, boat ramps and other access points as well as the likelihood of use by stakeholder groups such as recreational and commercial fisherman, guides, and/or diving operations. Equally important are navigation and safety considerations. Artificial reef are prohibited from being placed in shipping lanes. Current regulations also state that an artificial reefs height cannot exceed one half the total water column depth at mean low water to ensure safe passage of recreational and commercial vessels.

Another essential component of artificial reef development is the type of materials used. Due to environmental and public safety concerns, allowable materials now focus on heavy, stable, durable and non-polluting materials. FDEP will only allow clean concrete or rock, clean steel boat hulls, other clean, heavy gauge steel products with a thickness of a quarter of an inch or greater and prefabricated structures that are a mixture of clean concrete and heavy gauge steel. Whatever materials are used, managers must demonstrate that substantial shifting of the reef materials will not occur.

Management plans must outline how reef materials will be laid out within a site including the types of spaces and crevices that will be created for potential habitat. Typically deployments consist of numerous small piles within a site rather than one large pile depending on the type of fish species targeted. Several research studies suggest that smaller deployments with adequate spacing increase overall production of an artificial reef compared to a single large deployment.

Every pile within a permitted site must be surveyed at least

annually to monitor species diversity and ensure reef materials remain stable. New deployments may only be added to sites that have open permits. Permits from FDEP last for five years and ACOE permits last ten years. After this time period, managers must submit requests to renew permits to both FDEP and ACOE if additional deployments are desired within permitted sites.

In Collier county, artificial reefs are managed by the Coastal Zone Management Department. The countys reef management team only consists of two full-time employees who are also responsible for the management of derelict vessels and county channel markers. Due to limited resources, the management team collaborates with local charter captains and dive shops, the Collier Sea Grant Agent, and other local partners to help manage the program.

Currently the county manages approximately 23 quarter by quarter mile reef sites with over 90 deployments among them. Of these sites, only two have open permits, but the county is working on permitting two new sites and hopes to get a least one open permitted site outside of each of the areas major passes to increase the number of near shore reefs within the county.

Bryan Fluech is the Collier county Sea Grant Extension Agent with the University of Florida Extension Service. He can be reached at Fluech@ufl.edu

