

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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Live Responsibly, Protect Our Future

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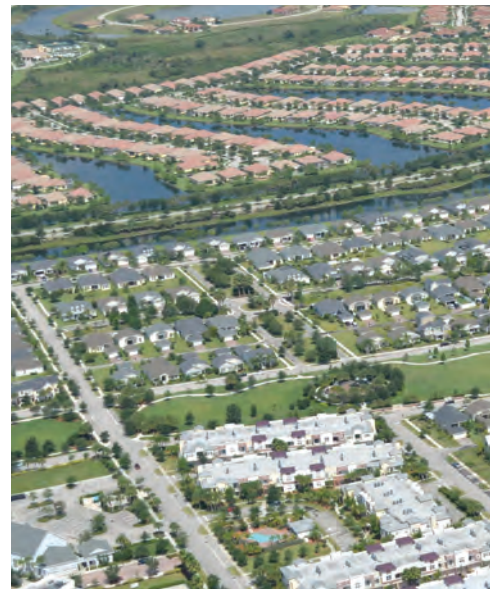
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Above: Hobe Sound
Right: Sprawl in Port St. Lucie's "Tradition" Neighborhood



Harmony Ranch Challenges Responsible Growth

Public input urgently and critically needed!

At its meeting on April 24, 2018, the Board of Martin County Commissioners (the BOCC) will make landmark decisions on applications for Comprehensive Plan Amendments regarding how our urban areas will expand into more than 6,000 acres of existing agricultural lands west of Palm City and Hobe Sound.

Of greatest concern to the Guardians is the Harmony project, which is located outside the County's Urban Services District at all four corners of the intersection of Bridge Road and Pratt-Whitney Road, where

approximately 2,658 acres of existing cattle pastureland and wetlands would be replaced by more than 2,000 units.

Responsible growth is vital to the future of Martin County. But, developments such as the one proposed by Harmony Ranch should be viewed with caution. Creating sizeable residential communities far from existing infrastructure threatens the delicate balance in Martin County between natural and man-made resources.

Following several months of analysis of the proposed Harmony application

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River Kidz Turn Trash into Plastic

What a big success! Close to two dozen "River Kidz" turned out on April 7th, 2018 for the "Trash Art & River Workbook Release Celebration" at Sewall's Point Park. The art is made from discarded trash found on our local beaches. What an incredible learning experience for elementary, middle and high schoolers who are fighting for clean water! The River Kidz motto is, "Stuart is the Sailfish capital of the world not the trash capital!" Learn more about this non-profit and how to get their new workbooks here: <https://www.facebook.com/riverkidzmc/>



Images Courtesy Darrell Brand

NEWS UPDATE

Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir Plan Moves Forward

Our congressional delegation has asked Congress to approve the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) plan for the water storage reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee. The water district has proposed, and sent to the Army Corps of Engineers for review, a 10,100-acre, 23-foot-deep reservoir to hold excess Lake O water and a 6,500-acre man-made marsh to clean the water. While the Guardians agree that is a positive first step, we remain concerned that the District's design will not adequately reduce the wasteful and harmful discharges into our Martin County waters. The position statement adopted by the Guardians' Board clearly identifies the steps that we believe need to be taken so that we don't end up with a plan that at best will reduce the discharges by only half.



The goal for this project was to reduce discharge volumes by at least 80 percent, and we should not be satisfied until the District can demonstrate that this goal can be attained, while simultaneously providing adequate treatment such that discharges to Everglades National Park meet water quality standards.

For more information, go to <http://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/ea-reservoir-optimal-configuration/>



Gail Wotanowicz sent us this sweet photo of a Sandhill Crane family taken in her Martin County backyard which borders a preserve. Gail says, "the adults come to our yard regularly, then one day they came with their baby."

BRIGHTLINE UPDATE

The legal battle against Brightline's dangerous high-speed passenger rail continues.

In February, 2018, Martin and Indian River Counties along with Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida (CARE FL) filed a joint complaint against the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration claiming that federal officials ignored or failed to consider the public safety, environmental impact or traffic problems the project may have on Treasure Coast communities. Brightline trains killed six people and injured at least three others since it began trial runs last year. CARE FL's Brent Hanlon says a ruling on the lawsuit is expected in about four months.

Hearing Granted on Brightline Funding.

Close to 500 email letters have been sent to legislators through our campaign supporting Congressman Brian Mast's demand for an investigation into Brightline's business practices. His request was granted and a hearing scheduled for April 19th in Washington. We'll keep you posted. Brightline is seeking public funding for Phase Two from West Palm Beach to Orlando with no stops planned for the Treasure Coast. By claiming the service is a "highway" rather than a passenger rail train, Brightline seeks to distort and circumvent current statutory regulations



for use of public funds. To Brian Mast, this is an example of Brightline's "ongoing efforts to mislead the public." Express your opinion by sending a letter to Representative Mark Meadows, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Governmental Operations and the subcommittee members. You can send a letter with one click by going to: <https://www.citizensagainststhetrain.com>. ■

Guardians Help Fund Study on Health Risks of Algae

Who could forget the toxic blue-green algae crisis of 2016? The Guardians of Martin County is funding a study on the potential negative health impacts from the algae. The Ocean Research & Conservation Association (ORCA) is conducting the study, which will run through June.

Cyanobacteria play important roles in the structure, maintenance, and biodiversity of microbial and higher organism communities. Unfortunately, these beneficial roles of cyanobacteria are being increasingly overridden by the negative impacts of massive cyanobacteria blooms worldwide. These blooms – commonly referred to as harmful algal blooms – are the direct result of nutrient pollution caused by humans. Martin County has been particularly vulnerable to algae blooms

because of the fresh water canal – including the C44 Canal coming from Lake Okeechobee – that empty into the Indian River Lagoon in Martin County.

Cyanobacteria produce a wide variety of toxins called cyanotoxins, with microcystin being the most common and best known. Acute symptoms of microcystin exposure in humans include abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, sore throat, and hay fever-like symptoms. These symptoms usually subside within 48 hours. More concerning are the potential effects of chronic exposure to microcystins. Microcystin is a hepatotoxin, meaning it is toxic to the liver. A recent report identified an association between high cyanobacterial blooms and high incidence of non-alcoholic liver disease.



Understanding how – and to what degree – humans are being exposed to microcystin is necessary before the exposure can be reduced. ORCA will be collecting fish from the waters of Martin County during the first two weeks of May. Any fishermen or women interested in helping with the collection contact Dr. Beth Falls bfalls@teamorca.org. ■

Harmony Ranch Challenges Responsible Growth

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during late 2017 and early 2018, Martin County's planners recommended denial of the project, citing numerous concerns, including potential urban sprawl, inadequate protection of a nearby wellfield that provides water for existing residents and other significant objections (See www.martin.fl.us/martin-county-services/2017-2018-comprehensive-plan-amendment-staff-reports for staff reports).

The Harmony Comp Plan Amendments (#18-1 and 18-2) come to the County Commission with a recommendation for denial by the

Local Planning Agency (LPA), following several hours of deliberation and public comment on March 14, 2018. Commenters at the LPA meeting passionately voiced concerns on a variety of topics, including even more traffic congestion on major County arteries, inevitable environmental degradation, intensified adverse effects on current over-capacity conditions at South Fork High School, and negative impacts on existing nearby property owners and residents.

Commissioners represent us. The Guardians oppose the Harmony project.

Please plan to attend the meeting in the Commission chambers at 2401 SE Monterey Road on the morning of April 24th. If you cannot attend, please call or email Commissioners and let them know that the Harmony Ranch type of urban sprawl without upland preserves is no substitute for the carefully planned, responsible growth the County needs. Visit <http://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/action-alert-harmony-ranch-challenges-responsible-growth/> to forward opposition to Harmony directly to Commissioners. ■



Our Mission

The Guardians of Martin County is a 501(c)3 organization committed to helping shape a positive future for Martin County, by educating residents about the value of balancing natural and man-made resources to enrich the quality of life in our communities.