

# 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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## Doing What's Right for Martin County



Tricolored Heron



Hobe Sound Festival of the Arts

### Protecting This Bird's Water Lifeline

The Guardians are pleased to be among many non-profits in support of an initiative to preserve land in Hobe Sound that is home to wading birds, bobcats, endangered plants and more. The ecological corridor is the headwaters of the Loxahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers, east of I-95 and west of Hobe Sound on both sides of Bridge Road.

The wildlife and plants depend on this natural flow of water for daily existence. Without it, they may not survive.

A vital land parcel adjacent to Bridge Road is now for sale. Purchasing this land will

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### Reaching Out in Hobe Sound

We were thrilled to meet so many of you at this year's "Hobe Sound Festival of the Arts". On February 1st and 2nd, we joined more than 200 artists, along with other non-profit organizations, to take part in the 19th annual event. The festival booths lined Dixie Highway from Bridge Road to Venus Street. Artists showcased their sculptures, paintings, jewelry and more.

While Saturday was cut short due to rain, the weather cooperated on Sunday and thousands of people packed the festival. From our shared booth with the "Hobe

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## Protecting This Bird's Water Lifeline

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help protect the headwaters' flow and the wildlife it supports. The land is subject to residential and or commercial development if not conserved. Help us ensure life goes on for thousands of living creatures and miles of natural beauty by joining this effort.

Learn more about this evolving project by viewing our web page:

<https://bit.ly/Loxa-Lucie>

If you have questions, please direct them to:

### *Donations and applicable tax deductibility*

Matt Sexton, Sr. Vice President, The Conservation Fund

[msexton@conservationfund.org](mailto:msexton@conservationfund.org)

### *Ecological issues*

Greg Braun, Executive Director, The Guardians of Martin County

[dgregbraun@aol.com](mailto:dgregbraun@aol.com)

### *Property management, recreation, hydrologic reconnection opportunities*

Chuck Barrowclough, Executive Director, Treasured Lands Foundation

[cbarrowclough@treasuredlands.org](mailto:cbarrowclough@treasuredlands.org)

## Reaching Out in Hobe Sound

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Sound Concerned Citizen's Coalition", we handed out dozens of our water bottles, brochures and newsletters.

After learning about our educational work to help keep Martin County a desirable place to live and work, dozens of people signed up for our email distribution list. We hope this will lead to more participation and support in the future. We thank everyone who stopped by to learn more about The Guardians of Martin County and our Martin County Difference. ■



*Hobe Sound Festival of the Arts*

# 2019 Year-End Report

On December 10, 2019, Guardians' President Peter Conze welcomed our Board, Board Advisors, and the public to our last meeting of the year. We shared updates on the Guardians' progress in 2019, the latest on our campaign for higher-speed train safety, a new initiative to conserve land earmarked as having high environmental value (The "Loxa-Lucie Headwaters" Initiative) and our featured speaker this year was Chauncey Goss, Governing Board Chairman of the South Florida Water Management District. Mr. Goss gave a presentation on the District's efforts related to Lake Okeechobee's water levels. Prior to the meeting, he took a helicopter tour of Martin County with Executive Director Greg Braun. As the District has invested significant resources in water management in Martin County, it was helpful for Mr. Goss to see the open land from the air, as it is a vital part of our Martin County Difference. ■



*2019 Year-End Meeting*



*Loxa-Lucie Aerial*

## VIRGIN TRAINS / BRIGHTLINE UPDATE

### INDIAN RIVER COUNTY CONTINUES FIGHT IN COURT

On February 18, the Indian River County (IRC) Commission reversed an earlier decision and voted to appeal the verdict of the U.S. Court of Appeals, permitting Virgin Trains/Brightline to issue \$2.7 Billion in tax-exempt Private Activity Bonds to finance the next stages of its proposed Orlando-Miami higher-speed train connection. To accompany this vote, private citizens contributed the first \$200,000 necessary to file the appeal, while the balance of \$400,000 in legal fees will be paid by IRC if the case is accepted by the U.S. Supreme Court.

On March 11, high profile counsel retained to file the appeal was granted a 60-day extension to prepare the brief. IRC Attorney Dylan Reingold has reported the brief now will be due May 18, 2020.

### VIRGIN TRAINS IS DEADLIEST RAILROAD IN NATION

The Associated Press (AP) reported in December 2019 that Virgin Trains/Brightline had the deadliest railroad per mile in the nation. Close to 50 people have been killed since the trains began running from Miami to West Palm Beach in January 2019. Florida Senator Debbie Mayfield and Representative Tyler Sirois filed the "Florida High-Speed Passenger Rail Safety Act", Senate Bill 676 and House Bill 465 during this legislative session, designed to promote and enhance the safe operation of higher-speed passenger rail systems in Florida. While train safety efforts will continue, unfortunately, this legislation did not pass.

### TRAIN MISSES PASSENGER AND REVENUE PROJECTIONS

In January, the Palm Beach Post reported that the train transported fewer than 1

million passengers during 2019, less than half the number that had been forecasted for the year. Revenue for 2019 was only \$22 Million, less than one-fifth of the gross income that the railroad had projected



in its report to potential bond holders in late 2017, in which Brightline claimed 2019 ridership in South Florida would exceed 2.3 million, while revenue would eclipse \$112 Million. In an effort to boost passenger counts, the company plans

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## Why is 'Suicide By Train' Worse on Virgin tracks?

The following "Letter to the Editor" was written by Merrill Snyder, a Board Advisor to The Guardians of Martin County. It was published on December 17, 2019 in the Treasure Coast Newspapers.

A Dec. 5 article, citing the Associated Press, said Virgin Trains USA operates the deadliest trains among the nation's 821 railroads. Virgin Trains, formerly Brightline, has averaged more than one death a month since operations began. Some track record.

How has Virgin Trains responded? By claiming 75 percent of the deaths are from suicide. Suddenly in the last 24 months Florida residents have decided to jump in front of bright new trains in record numbers. Maybe there's something in the water here. Or

maybe it's a matter of prestige — like the suicide jumpers in San Francisco choosing the Golden Gate over the Bay Bridge as a way out.

Clearly, other railroads have operated far longer with far fewer deaths per mile. If suicide by train is so

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## \$250 Million in Federal Budget for Everglades Restoration

Florida Governor DeSantis applauded the President's budget of \$250 Million, a \$50 Million dollar increase over the \$200 Million for Everglades restoration projects approved in December 2019. The Governor said, "This investment in Everglades restoration will build on our efforts at the state level for critical projects like the EAA Reservoir, the Caloosahatchee Reservoir and the C-44 Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area. I look forward to continuing to work with the President and our local, state, and federal partners on preserving and restoring Florida's environment."

The Governor said the monies should be enough to maintain the pace of completing water quality projects, including the reservoir South of Lake Okeechobee to reduce harmful discharges into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers. ■



## Virgin Trains / Brightline Update TRAIN MISSES PASSENGER AND REVENUE PROJECTIONS

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to build three new stations in South Florida: at Port Miami, in Aventura and in downtown Boca Raton. The three new stations will cost \$120 Million, Brightline says, with \$90 Million of that amount coming from "grants and government contributions", still to be fully disclosed. ■

### IN CASE YOU MISSED IT,

here's a link to our video on train safety, produced in November 2019:

<http://bit.ly/SafeTrains>

## Why is 'Suicide By Train' Worse on Virgin tracks?

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attractive, why haven't other lines seen a similar pattern of suicides? Maybe Virgin Trains' crossings are simply less safe.

Management admits, "We need to look to do more." No kidding. It's not good enough to lament the fatalities and worry that these incidents are "devastating for crews" on the trains.

Stop promising wonderfulness and blaming everybody but yourselves for the

disaster you've created. Stop trying to make citizens responsible for the safety features that you should pay for. And, given the performance of the other 820 railroads, stop implying that Florida residents are at fault because they're uniquely eager to jump in front of trains.

Recently, an Amtrak train killed a grandmother and her two grandsons on a nearby track. Florida is launching

an investigation into safety features at railroad crossings. Florida, please be sure to investigate Virgin Trains, the deadliest rail line per mile in the United States. Nothing matters more than citizen safety.

As for Virgin, eliminate all the angst and death by simply scrapping your expansion plans.

*- Merrill Snyder, Palm City*

## 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.