

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



In this Issue

- EYE IN THE SKY: Water Champion Documents Waterways..... 1
- Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative Update 2
- Brightline/Virgin Trains Update..... 3
- 2020 Legislative Wrap-up 3
- Harnessing The Sun's Energy: Solar Power Expansion..... 4



EMAIL

info@theguardiansofmartincounty.com

VISIT ONLINE

theguardiansofmartincounty.com

WRITE

The Guardians of Martin County
P.O. Box 1489
Hobe Sound, FL 33475

CALL

772-546-7480



Lake Okeechobee, June 21, 2020



EYE IN THE SKY

Water Champion Documents Waterways

From her view 10,000 feet up, River Warrior Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch gives us something to cheer about when we need it most; hope for the future of the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon (IRL).

Jacqui and her husband Ed, from their small plane, have been documenting our waterways, Lake Okeechobee, and the many algae blooms in these areas since the summer of 2013.

As Jacqui has observed, "Seeing something from the air is often more dramatic than seeing it from the shoreline. A picture speaks a thousand words."

Over 136 billion gallons of tainted freshwater from Lake Okeechobee was

released into the St. Lucie and IRL during the so-called "Lost Summer of 2013", which spawned toxic algae blooms and spurred Jacqui, her husband, and countless other river advocates into action. Then came the summer of 2016, among the most dangerous and long-lasting on record in terms of algae outbreaks.

Jacqui decided she needed a home for her photos where everyone could view them, leading her to develop an online blog. The blog has eyes on it from citizens, to state agencies, to elected officials. View the blog here: <https://jacquithurlowlippisch.com>

"I get feedback from the blog as people

continued on next page



Eye in the Sky

continued from page 1

can ask questions and comment. I write about many different topics, but they all have to do with the St Lucie River/Indian River Lagoon. I know my blog is received by some local governments, the Army Corps of Engineers, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and other state and federal agencies. They watch for the aerial photos of the condition of the river and to see if blue-green algae is blowing up in Lake Okeechobee. Often news agencies call for clarification or ask me if they can use a photo. I am happy to share and also post on Facebook."

Jacqui says she gets inspiration from her mom, Sandra Thurlow, a self-appointed local historian.

"My mom does inspire me. First, she and my father taught me a love of wildlife and nature. Later in life, my mother

encouraged me to find and write about what was most meaningful to me. I knew this was the river and was able to elevate this concern when I ran for Sewall's Point commissioner in 2008. As I advocated for the health of our waters, my mother was great at opening up her history files and sharing what seemed like endless historic information about the St Lucie River. Of course, the original name of Stuart was not "Stuart," but "Stuart on the St Lucie!" My blog posts have often become a family effort with my husband as pilot allowing me to take aerials, mom's history, and my brother's technology (<https://jacquithurlowlippisch.com/>)



Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch

[todd-thurlows-time-capsule-flights/](#).

Everything written stems from my love of this beautiful place. We must protect our home."

Keeping Lake Okeechobee levels

continued on last page

THANK YOU, JACQUI & ED LIPPISCH FOR ALL YOU DO!!!

In addition to being a respected environmentalist, Jacqui is a former Commissioner and Mayor of Sewall's Point. She is currently a Governing Board member of the South Florida Water Management District (appointed by Governor DeSantis) and a Board member of The Guardians of Martin County.

Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative Update

NAME THAT PLANT

What is green and white, lives only in peninsular Florida and was recently observed blooming in the wetlands along Bridge Road in Hobe Sound?

If you guessed the Alligatorlily, you are correct!



The Alligatorlily – *Hymenocallis palmeri*

While performing ecological surveys in the area, in addition to the endemic alligatorlily, members of the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters team also encountered snail kites and limpkins, two notable wetland-dependent bird species.

The team continues researching possible private acquisition of tracts along Bridge Road between Hobe Sound and I-95.

As first reported in the last issue of In Balance, Phase 1 of this regional watershed project involves acquiring a 138-acre tract that extends approximately two miles in length on the

north side of Bridge Road. This acquisition would be the first in what is hoped to be the catalyst for hydrologic restoration and permanent protection of properties in the ecological corridor between Jonathan Dickinson and Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Parks.

If you'd like to contribute or help with this initiative, please contact a member of the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters team: Tony Zunino (fazunino3@gmail.com), Barbara Birdsey (BBirdsey@comcast.net), Joyce Bullen Gay (Joycebullengay@me.com), Matt Sexton (msexton@conservationfund.org), or Greg Braun (DGregBraun@aol.com). ■

BRIGHTLINE/VIRGIN TRAINS UPDATE



NEW PROPOSED RAIL SAFETY LEGISLATION

In July 2020, Congressmen Bill Posey and Brian Mast introduced the Pedestrian Safety Study Act to help protect the safety of pedestrians, motorists, and residents along the higher-speed rail corridor being constructed on Florida's East Coast. Virgin Trains, USA, also known as Brightline, was running the passenger train from Miami to West Palm Beach when the service was shut down in mid-March due to the Coronavirus. 250 workers lost their jobs, including rail workers and management.

The proposed legislation would provide federal funding to study the safety of the railway, particularly in areas where

schools are within a one-mile radius of the railroad.

"These trains will travel at fast speeds through existing town centers and residential areas with little separating the tracks from the surrounding communities," said Rep. Posey. "The introduction of high-speed rail will undoubtedly present safety challenges for many, including our schools, and that needs to be properly addressed."

Last year, the Associated Press reported the FEC railroad corridor had the worst per mile death rate of any of the 821 railroads in this Country.

"The deaths our communities have already witnessed along this corridor

clearly indicate there are safety issues, and Brightline has a long history of straight-up lying to the people of Florida, so at this point I don't believe they've earned the trust to decide for themselves whether their trains are safe. This study is much needed to expose these issues before more lives are lost," said Rep. Mast.

COURT CASE AGAINST VIRGIN TRAINS ARRIVES AT NATION'S TOP COURT

In May, Indian River County (IRC) filed a Petition with the U.S. Supreme Court (Writ of Certiorari) seeking the Court's discretionary review of the lower courts' approval of the issuance of \$2.7 billion

continued on last page

2020 Legislative Wrap-up

THE IMPORTANCE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

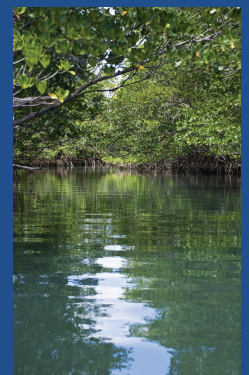
We thank the more than 13,000 people who called, wrote emails and signed a petition urging the Governor to veto Senate Bill 410. This damaging legislation would have undermined local comprehensive planning in Martin County and all across Florida. We want to express our deep appreciation not only to the Governor, but also to everyone who took the time to advocate for the veto of Senate Bill 410, reasserting Florida's hallmark of home rule.

ENVIRONMENT WINS IN 2020-2021 BUDGET

The Governor's budget, signed on June 29, 2020, includes \$690 million for Everglades restoration and water quality projects. This includes \$50 million for Indian River Lagoon projects and \$20.8 million to research and combat harmful algal blooms.

We were pleased to see \$100 million set aside for Florida Forever in the budget. The land conservation program helps to ensure the preservation of our natural resources for future generations. Jane West,

the Planning and Policy Director for 1000 Friends of Florida tells us, "It is a significant amount. While the environmental community was pushing for more, given the current budget constraints due to the pandemic, we are moving in the right direction." She adds the recent legislative session was good for those concerned about conservation. Ms. West is a Board Advisor to The Guardians. ■



Harnessing The Sun's Energy: Solar Power Expansion

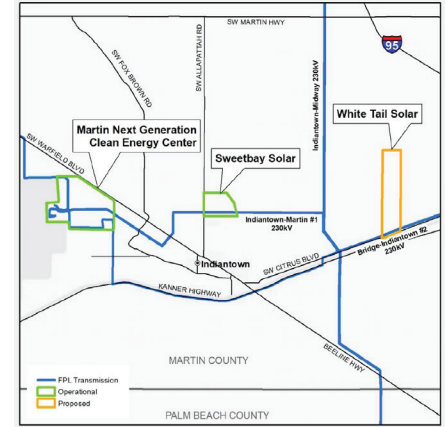
Florida Power & Light (FPL) continues moving forward with its goal to install more than 30 million solar panels around the state by 2030, with another proposed solar site in our area.

In June, The Guardians of Martin County sent a letter supporting the proposed White Tail Solar Energy Center to Martin County Commissioners. Read Letter: <https://bit.ly/FPLLetter>

The White Tail site is located on the North side of Citrus Boulevard about 3 miles east of Indiantown. The Guardians believe the 600-acre site will provide environmental and economic benefits.

The solar energy centers have zero emissions, they are quiet, do not require water for operation and reduce air pollution.

The property has been actively farmed for several decades and contains no natural wetlands or upland native habitat. Commissioners will consider the final site approval at their regular meeting on August 25, 2020. Martin County staff is recommending approval noting it is in compliance with the Martin County Comprehensive Plan. FPL says it would like to become the world leader in solar-energy production. ■



BRIGHTLINE/VIRGIN TRAINS UPDATE

continued from page 3

in tax-exempt private activity bonds by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and issued by the Florida Development Finance Corporation.

The essential issue of the petition relates to the separation of powers between federal agencies and the courts, questioning whether an agency like the USDOT has the right to interpret a standing law of the land in a manner significantly different from its original purpose, language and meaning. IRC Attorney Dylan Reingold tells us the USDOT was granted a

30-day extension to August 21, 2020 to file its brief. The Supreme Court conference date is September 29, 2020.

ACTION DRIVEN BY RESIDENTS

The legal appeal cost \$200,000 and was paid for by private donations to Indian River County from IRC and Martin County citizens.

Two Amicus Briefs (Friend of the Court) were filed in support of the appeal by Americans for Prosperity Foundation and the Indian River Neighborhood Association. ■

Eye in the Sky

continued from page 2

lower is helping to prevent major discharges over the last few summers. Still, Jacqui and Ed have been following a large algae bloom over the lake that began in early May 2020. Since July, it has been lessening in size and intensity, but remains significant.

"I am encouraged so far this summer. The powers that be are very aware of the algae in Lake Okeechobee and they do not want to discharge it. Hopefully Mother Nature feels the same way!" ■

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.