

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative Reaches First Milestone

The Loxa-Lucie Headwaters team set out with a huge challenge two years ago. The goals were to protect nearly 70,000 acres of land that connects the sources of the Loxahatchee River and St. Lucie River to form a conservation preserve for plants and wildlife between Jonathan Dickinson and Atlantic Ridge State Parks. The first milestone of the multi-year project was celebrated in October with the purchase of the first 138-acres of land along Bridge Road.

The Guardians of Martin County is pleased to be one of three non-profit organizations spearheading the effort. The other two organizations The Guardians are working closely with are the Treasured Lands Foundation and The Conservation Fund.

This is an accomplishment that will be enjoyed for generations to come.

The success comes from a combination of support from friends and residents, along with government and non-government organizations. On September 14, 2021, Martin County Commissioner Harold Jenkins pledged \$50,000 in district funds for the acquisition of the 138-acre conservation parcel.

The Conservation Fund's Matt Sexton says the next step is to raise awareness about the project in Tallahassee to garner funding through Florida Forever, a state-wide program to buy land for conservation and recreation. Guardians' Executive Director Greg Braun says the group has been very pleased with the grassroots support from Hobe Sound and throughout Martin County. ■

READ INSIDE:

The Evolution of the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative (LLHI)



The Evolution of the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative (LLHI)

By LLHI Steering Committee Member **JOYCE BULLEN GAY**

Our Loxa-Lucie project was like the arrival of a new baby. It was certainly exciting, but oh so much work.

In the winter season of 2018-2019, GMC Board Director Tony Zunino presented me with a 138-acre piece of land that had been identified by the new Loxa-Lucie Committee for sale. It happened to be owned by a friend of mine and buying it and putting it in conservation seemed like a faraway dream, but very interesting.

Tony and I made the initial presentation to Jennifer Duke, long-time environmental leader and Hobe Sound resident. She liked the idea of the project. We soon made another presentation to a few board members of the Everglades Coalition. Again, it was received positively.

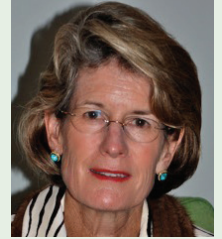
Tony and I sat down and made a list of

people who may be interested in helping contribute to putting this land permanently in conservation. The Conservation Fund's Matt Sexton had helped me put another parcel on the St. Lucie River in conservation, which is now part of the "Nathaniel Reed Fish and Wildlife Preserve".

We formulated a winning team comprised of Tony, with his calm, analytical presentations, Matt's deep knowledge of project management, Pegasus Foundation President Barbara Birdsey's organizational skills, and The Guardians' Executive Director, Greg Braun's vast knowledge of nature, and my interest and knowledge of how to raise funds.

By contacting friends and neighbors about our project and its long-range benefits to the greater Hobe Sound

Community, we started gathering supporters. The generosity and trust they all have has made every step an extraordinary experience.



Joyce Bullen Gay

This 138-acre parcel controls the Headwaters of the Loxahatchee River's Kitching Creek and the South Fork of the St. Lucie River; thus, our project name "Loxa-Lucie". It has also been the key momentum builder to get the interest of Martin County Commissioners, the Governor's office, and the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection.

I believe what we have started has and will change the face of Martin County, and certainly the Hobe Sound area. ■

Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir Project Moves Forward

Promising news to report when it comes to the EAA Reservoir. The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) awarded the very first construction contract for the EAA on September 24, 2021. The EAA is a key component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and will help curb harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.

The nearly 80 million dollar construction contract was awarded to Phillips & Jordan, Inc., a Tennessee company. This portion of the project is scheduled to be completed by

September 2023.

Colonel James Booth, Jacksonville District Commander, said the 10,500-acre reservoir will cover about 16-square miles, an area the same size as the cities of Stuart and Fort Myers combined.

The contract comes about a month after 3 lawsuits were filed in federal court by sugar-farmers Florida Crystals, U.S. Sugar, and the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida. The companies are suing the ACOE alleging the Corps didn't adhere to a promise – dubbed the savings clause – that was made when CERP was approved, guaranteeing that

the companies' water rights would not be reduced.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, a Governing Board member of the South Florida Water Management District, says we must keep moving forward. "The ACOE's first construction contract for the EAA Reservoir is a testament to the determination of Florida's water advocates across the state, especially those in Martin County, who with the leadership of then Senate President Joe Negron, turned the course of history in favor of sending more water south, thus, less to the estuaries. More than any goal, this must be the goal to bring to final completion." ■

BRIGHTLINE UPDATE

PREPARE FOR FAST MOVING TRAINS

Big changes are coming to our communities near the railroad tracks. If you've driven near the tracks along the East Coast Railway, you've seen the construction on a second rail that will allow the higher-speed private passenger train, Brightline, to travel between Miami and Orlando alongside freight trains. You may have also noticed new bright yellow signs warning of trains exceeding 80 miles per hour.

The company says the 168-mile extension from West Palm Beach to



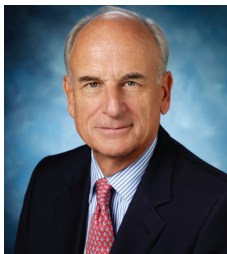
Orlando International Airport will be completed in late 2022 or early 2023. Service from Miami to West Palm will resume before the end of 2021, after being suspended since March 2020, due to the pandemic.

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY SETTLES LAWSUIT

When the trains travel through Indian River County (IRC), the rail corridor will be safer, according to a settlement between IRC and Brightline. County leaders agreed to drop a lawsuit against the rail company in June of 2020 in exchange for \$31.6 million in safety upgrades along more than 30 crossings. As of this writing, IRC Attorney Dylan Reingold tells us they are not aware of any specific rail safety updates other than the importance of everyone staying informed about the continuing construction of the second track. ■

The Guardians on NPR

You may hear a familiar voice while listening to National Public Radio (NPR) on the Treasure Coast. Starting



Peter H. Conze, Jr.

November 1st, The

Guardians of Martin County President Peter H. Conze, Jr., will once again lend his voice to two promos about the work the organization is doing in the community. The two promos are thirty seconds in length; and will air through the end of January 2022 during "Morning Edition" and in the late afternoon, during "All Things Considered". The Guardians have been supporting quality programming on WQCS since 2014. Tune in to 88.9 FM when you're in the car or listen live online at

<https://www.wqcs.org>. ■

New Video: Orca's One Health: Fish Monitoring

Eager to learn about science and want to have a direct impact on the community? Then becoming a "citizen scientist" may be the right match for you.

In our latest video production, we go out on the water and into the lab – for a close-up look at the Ocean Research & Conservation Association's "One Health: Fish Monitoring" program.

Deep-sea explorer Dr. Edie Widder established ORCA in 2005. The non-profit focuses on the use of technology to improve water quality. With that shared end goal, The Guardians continue to support this initiative.

Watch the video at https://bit.ly/GMC_ORCA ■



Improving the St Lucie River: Bluefield Grove Water Farm

A very proud moment occurred in August as state water managers cut the ribbon on a new stormwater storage and treatment project in western St. Lucie County with long-range benefits. Water Champion Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch tells us, "Bluefield Grove Water Farm will reduce nutrient pollution and excess surface water discharges from the C-23 canal being pushed right into the heart of our St. Lucie Estuary. This is a huge win for the St Lucie River."

Once a citrus operation, Bluefield Grove now stores 28,000-acre feet (over

9 billion gallons) of polluted runoff each year on more than 6,000 acres of privately-owned land. The project decreases harmful discharges to the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie Estuary by holding the polluted water.

Bluefield Grove is one of 29 key projects being implemented by an Executive Order signed by Gov. DeSantis in 2019 focusing on Everglades restoration and improving water quality in Florida.

Read more here: <https://bit.ly/SFWMDKeyProjects> ■

The Guardians Weigh in on Future Management of Lake O

You may have heard the term "LOSOM" a lot lately, which stands for "Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual". The LOSOM is important because it will determine when, where, and how much lake water is sent to coastal estuaries and South to the Everglades over the next decade.

The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) began the updating process two years ago, with a request for feedback from the public on several different models. The Guardians joined with other environmental groups in submitting comments supporting "Alternative CC", the option that The Guardians believe will send more clean water south to the Everglades and eliminate harmful discharges.

The ACOE chose "Alternative CC" and continued holding workshops for public input to fine-tune the schedule through September. According to the ACOE website, LOSOM will be implemented at the end of 2022, when the Herbert Hoover Dike Rehabilitation is completed. The Herbert Hoover Dike is a 143-mile dam that surrounds part of Lake Okeechobee and was constructed to reduce the flooding impact from heavy rains which affect the water levels of the lake. ■



Photo: SFWMD, Aug. 18, 2021



Photo: Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch

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.