

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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Environmental Champion Maggy Hurchalla Passes Away at 81

We deeply mourn the passing of our environmental champion and former Martin County Commissioner, Maggy Hurchalla, who died on February 19, 2022.

Maggy's loss is most keenly felt by each of us who knew her well. She served on the Advisory Board of The Guardians of Martin County for many years, offering guidance and counsel during our meetings, including the most recent on February 8, 2022. Maggy stood firm on maintaining the urban services boundary to avoid sprawl in Martin County, and in finding ways to grow responsibly, while preserving our wonderful quality of life, "our Martin County Difference."

The Guardians will be forever grateful for our relationships with Maggy, her commitment to the conservation of our environment, and her contributions to the realization of our mission.

Maggy was one of the initial "architects"

of Martin County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan in 1982. In 2013, we conducted extensive interviews with her to help educate the public on the history of the Comp Plan and to explain why she ardently advocated for restoring some of the goals that had been removed from the Plan over the years. We encourage everyone to view and share the videos of these interviews.

Watch the video series here:

<https://bit.ly/MHCompPlan>

Maggy is survived by her husband Jim, her four children James, Robert, Jane, and George, and four grandchildren. Maggy was the sister of the late former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno.

Her legacy will be carried forward for generations to come, as she will be missed by many. ■

READ INSIDE:
Paddle Out for Maggy



LOSOM & EAA Reservoir Update

by Eve Samples, Executive Director, Friends of the Everglades, and GMC Board Advisor

The following is an excerpt from Eve's presentation shared with The Guardians of Martin County during a December 14, 2021, Board Meeting. The information has been updated at the time of this publication.



Eve Samples

UPDATES ON LOSOM (LAKE OKEECHOBEE SYSTEM OPERATING MANUAL)

Eve shared a "big picture" view on the new LOSOM plan that goes into effect in late 2022, with an emphasis of the pros/cons for the St. Lucie River.

The new LOSOM plan selected by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) will reduce discharges into the St. Lucie (from the Port Mayaca dam) by thirty-seven percent on average, according to ACOE modeling. Eve says this is "decent" but not as good as the plan initially unveiled in the summer of 2021. The first plan would have reduced flows by sixty-five percent, so unfortunately, the ACOE reduced this

amount significantly under the optimization process. Eve said this happened because the Caloosahatchee River was not getting enough relief.

On the plus side, Eve said the St. Lucie River does not need any lake water, but the Caloosahatchee does need some flows of water during the dry season. So, the new plan will give more of the dry season flows to the Caloosahatchee. Another plus is the new lake plan will more than triple the flow of water south to the Everglades.

Eve said the downside of this new plan is it's a gamble during the rainy season. If the rainy season is higher than expected, the rivers (east and west) can get hit with big releases, if the ACOE needs to quickly lower Lake O.

Complicating matters, legislation in Tallahassee, Senate Bill 2508, threatened to preserve overly generous water-supply guarantees for sugarcane farmers in the Everglades Agricultural Area. These protections would apply to the existing Lake Okeechobee plan, the new Lake

Okeechobee plan, and any future plan. As of this writing, Friends of the Everglades is asking Governor DeSantis to veto SB 2508.

EAA RESERVOIR

The reservoir has two components. One is the actual reservoir (10,500 acres) and the other is a Stormwater Treatment Area (a manmade marsh) which will be 6,500 acres. The ACOE is responsible for reservoir construction and the SFWMD for the STA. This was the project that was initially envisioned for 60,000 acres and now it has been unfortunately reduced in size. Construction on the STA began ahead of schedule and is expected to be completed in 2023. The ACOE awarded its first contract for the reservoir component in September 2021.

Eve noted that three sugar cane companies sued the ACOE in August 2021 claiming the EAA Reservoir project cuts into their irrigation rights. Back when CERP was approved in 2000, "the savings clause" promised sugar cane growers that they would never lose water as a result of an Everglades Restoration project. The 3 sugar companies are claiming the EAA Reservoir would do just that. ■

Challenges We Face in 2022

by Ruth C. Mead

Ruth C. Mead serves as a Board Advisor to The Guardians of Martin County. This is an excerpt of a presentation she made to The Guardians on January 11, 2022.



Ruth C. Mead

THE 5 BIGGEST ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS LIKELY TO CONTINUE IN 2022:

1. Piney Point Phosphate Plant:

For 100 years, Florida has allowed the destructive practice of phosphate mining

just to provide the mineral for fertilizers, detergents, etc. In April last year, over 215 million gallons of containment water leaked from containment ponds into a Manatee County tributary that flowed into Tampa Bay. Two months later, a massive red tide bloomed in Tampa Bay. In the last few months, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection filed suit to get back the \$46 million spent on services to mitigate the leak. Plus, over \$1 Million in fines for improper management of the containment facility. Recently a Piney Point

plan was approved to inject the toxic water more than two thousand feet into the ground where many Floridians draw their drinking water from the aquifer.

2. Toxic algae blooms: Years of allowing nutrients to flow downstream into our lakes canals and rivers has coated our waters with toxic cyanobacteria or blue-green algae. Rainfall runoff that flows into Lake O from hundreds of surrounding properties routinely exceeds the limit of allowable pollution. Governor DeSantis has proposed

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BRIGHTLINE UPDATE

BRIGHTLINE RESUMES SERVICE WITH DEADLY RESULTS

Brightline returned to passenger service in November 2021 after a 19-month shutdown due to the pandemic. On the first day, a Brightline train struck a car that was attempting to cross the tracks in Pompano Beach. The woman and her 1-year-old grandson survived the crash. Since then, Brightline trains have been involved with a string of crashes with cars and pedestrians, some deadly.

The number of crashes and fatalities prompted the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to hold a “Rail Safety Town Hall” in Boynton Beach on February 23, 2022. Representatives from Brightline, governments, and other train lines, including Tri-Rail attended. The FRA noted

that Florida logged a five-year average of 2.84 incidents per grade crossing, compared to 1.51 nationally. The FRA encouraged train companies to apply for federal grants to improve rail safety.

The surge in crashes prompted law enforcement agencies in South Florida to increase patrols near the railroad tracks – and hand out hundreds of citations and warnings. This is an effort to get people to stop trying to beat the train.

Train safety advocates would like to see fencing and pedestrian bridges added to help protect the public.

An Associated Press report found that Brightline had the worst per-mile fatality rate in the nation – at least 58 deaths since it began operations in 2017.



BRIGHTLINE WON'T REPLACE THE ST. LUCIE RAILROAD BRIDGE

In February 2022, Brightline announced it would not replace the St. Lucie River railroad bridge, instead the company says it will renovate the 97-year-old structure. Renovations will include replacing all mechanical drive systems, electrical-control systems, and refurbishing key structural components.

Brightline says it will begin passenger service between Miami and Orlando in early 2023. ■

Proposed Rural Lifestyle Amendment Moves Forward

A Martin County Commission majority voted to transmit a controversial land use amendment to Tallahassee on February 22nd, following questions and concerns raised by the public about its impact on Martin County.

A very passionate group of residents pleaded with County Staff and Commissioners to delay the review process of the “rural lifestyle amendment” until public workshops could be held, so the public could fully understand the proposed changes.

The rural lifestyle designation would amend the county's Comprehensive Plan by allowing density to be increased to one unit per 5 acres on lands typically designated for agricultural uses, among other changes.



The Guardians of Martin County submitted a comprehensive list of discussion items, topics for clarification, and suggestions for improvement to the language of the amendment to the County for consideration, prior to the vote.

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY DISCUSSION POINTS

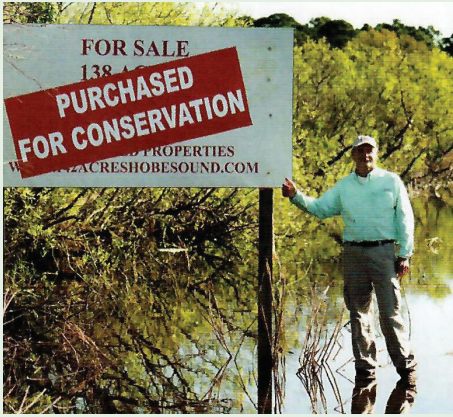
Despite requests from the majority of the meeting attendees to ask for more time to understand the amendment,

Commissioners Ed Ciampi, Doug Smith, and Harold Jenkins voted for transmittal to the state Department of Economic Opportunity, other state agencies and to surrounding municipalities for review. Commissioners Heard and Hetherington dissented.

VIDEO RECORDING OF WORKSHOP

On March 23, 2022, The Guardians facilitated an educational public workshop at Indian River State College. Around 100 people attended in person, with several dozen more attending via Zoom.

View the video of the recordings here: <https://bit.ly/RLifestyle>. Stay up-to-date with the latest on the Amendment at <https://bit.ly/rurallifestyle> ■



LOXA-LUCIE HEADWATERS INITIATIVE UPDATE

Stuart Magazine featured the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative in its March 2022 edition. The article entitled; "Ecological Excellence", shares the hard work and dedication behind the recent purchase of a 138-acre parcel of land on the north side of Bridge Road in Hobe Sound for conservation. As we reported in previous editions of this newsletter, the long-term goal is to put nearly 70,000 acres between Jonathan Dickinson and Atlantic Ridge state parks into conservation.

The story is written by Linda Marx and photographed by Steven Martine. The Guardians of Martin County Executive Director Greg Braun shares the connection between his lifelong work in ecology/conservation and the Loxa-Lucie Initiative in the story.

Read the article here:

<https://bit.ly/LLHIFeature> ■

Challenges We Face in 2022

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changes to improve water quality with penalties for non-compliance, but this has never happened. The DEP has never issued a fine nor filed a lawsuit. Meanwhile, some farmers have sold their land to developers rather than follow the water quality rules.

3. We saw record numbers of manatee deaths in 2021 due to starvation because their primary source of food is seagrass. Seagrass is fast diminishing due to several causes related to poor water quality.

- **4. Florida has 900 natural springs** that pump hundreds of billions of gallons of clean fresh water out of the ground. They contribute to Florida's vast aquifer, the source of our drinking water over the years. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to restore some of the larger springs, yet permits are still given to users who pay pennies instead of dollars to irrigate crops and even to companies that bottled the water.
- **5. Red Tide** is mostly on the west coast but is unhealthy for people and animals. ■

Paddle Out for Maggy

Maggy Hurchalla was known for her love of the water. On March 12, 2022, about 100 family and friends gathered for a ceremonial "paddle out" at Cove Road Park, in Port Salerno. During a speech, Maggy's granddaughter Kym Hurchalla said, "I'm so happy to see so many familiar faces today and I know that's what she would have wanted."

#livelikemaggy



Photo: Max Chesnes



Photo: Rebecca Fatzinger



Photo: Sally Heims

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.