

# THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

# IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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## Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative

The efforts by the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters team were recently recognized as a 2022 "Achievement of the Year" by the Marine Resources Council (MRC) of SE Florida. Based



in Melbourne, Florida, the MRC shares the Guardians' concerns about the need to reverse the trend of deteriorating water quality

in the Indian River Lagoon. Acquiring and protecting undeveloped lands in the headwaters of our rivers must be a critical activity, as we simultaneously collaborate to identify the sources of pollution and take appropriate actions to prevent further degradation. The award was accepted by the Guardians' Executive Director, Greg Braun.

In addition to recognizing The Guardians at its Awards Ceremony on November 4, the MRC also honored a number of other Martin County

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## Rural Lifestyle Zoning Update

Having identified early in 2022 the need for more public knowledge and input to the proposal to amend the County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan by adding a new Rural Lifestyle Zoning designation to the County's Code, the Guardians coordinated with Martin County and held a public workshop at which presentations were made about various aspects of the proposal.

After several delays, and in spite of a majority of the public speaking against it, on September 13, the Martin County Commission voted 3-2 (with Commissioners Heard and Ciampi dissenting), to approve the controversial Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. The Guardians' recommendation to reduce

substantially the spatial extent of properties potentially eligible for rural lifestyle had been incorporated in the Commission's resolution, even though it still includes over 10,000 acres outside the County's "Urban Services Districts."

The Guardians remain disappointed, however, that the version that was approved did not include several of the provisions described in the position paper that was adopted by the Guardians

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**READ INSIDE:**  
**In Memoriam**



## Rural Lifestyle Zoning

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Board of Directors in April and transmitted to the Commission. These provisions would have ensured protection of water quality, compliance with Best Management Practices for golf courses, and dedication of a portion of new ad valorem tax revenues for the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands. Simultaneously, the County Commission also approved the Becker/Discovery Land project on approximately 1,500 acres of former agricultural lands on the north side of Bridge Road about one mile east of I-95.

The Guardians, however, remain cautiously optimistic that the economic benefits of these Comp Plan Amendments will be adequate to offset potential adverse impacts on affordable housing, sustainable agriculture, sprawl into agricultural areas and the ability to purchase lands for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), which includes properties within the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters/Atlantic Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project.

Former County Commissioner Donna Melzer, a long-time environmental advocate, has filed a Challenge to the



Vacant lands adjacent to the Urban Services District boundary. Photo: Greg Braun

resolution decided by the majority of County Commissioners. Included in the Challenge is information related to the effect that the new zoning will have on the cost of vacant agricultural land outside the Urban Services District, and the extent to which this increase in value will negatively affect the County's ability to purchase the lands that are included in CERP. So far, no date for the Challenge hearing has been set. Construction at the Becker/Discovery Land project cannot begin

until the Challenge process has been resolved through the courts, the prospect of which, we had hoped, would incentivize the County and the Becker team to try to resolve the remaining areas of disagreement.

To let your Commissioners know how you feel about their decisions, you can reach them at: [hjenkins@martin.fl.us](mailto:hjenkins@martin.fl.us), [shetherington@martin.fl.us](mailto:shetherington@martin.fl.us), [dsmith@martin.fl.us](mailto:dsmith@martin.fl.us), [sheard@martin.fl.us](mailto:sheard@martin.fl.us), [eciampi@martin.fl.us](mailto:eciampi@martin.fl.us) ■

## Water Quality in Martin County

Water quality in Martin County remained reasonably good during the summer, primarily due to the combination of lower than average rainfall and the impact of positive effects, in line with decades of advocacy by the Rivers Coalition (and its member organizations), in coordination with Martin County, the South Florida Water Management District, the City of Stuart and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Fortunately, there has been increasing

pressure and success in managing Lake Okeechobee (Florida's liquid heart) as a resource, rather than as a commodity to be exploited. Keeping the Lake's water level in a range that is low enough to prevent the need for frequent discharges and suitable for "beneficial uses" while providing habitat for emergent vegetation, and nesting indigenous birds has fortuitously benefitted the St. Lucie Estuary, the Indian River Lagoon, and the Caloosahatchee River system.

Managing Lake Okeechobee at a lower level than had been allowed under the previous operating system prevented the need for discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary, even during and following Hurricanes Ian and Nicole.

One resource that the Guardians have found useful in tracking water quality is the Florida Oceanographic Society's weekly, easy-to-understand compilation of water quality data that is pertinent to

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## In Memoriam

*In recent months, the community and the Guardians unexpectedly lost two long-time Board members – George MacLean and Bill Lester*



### GEORGE MACLEAN

George MacLean, long-serving Board Director, Treasurer and Secretary, passed away after an accident in his home on August 26. George and his wife, Joan, moved to Martin County after his service in the military and having had a successful career in the business world. He joined IBM in 1967 and had worldwide experience in sales, marketing and general management in the U.S., Europe and Asia for the next 26 years. Remaining in the telecommunications business, George then served as VP of Nortel Networks Global Accounts, until he retired permanently in 2001, at which time, he and Joan moved from Westport, Connecticut to Willoughby Golf Club.

George served on the Board of Directors of Mary's Shelter, the YMCA of the Treasure Coast and the Stuart Corinthian Yacht Club, and was active in St. Joseph's Catholic Church for many years. A licensed captain from the Chapman School, he and

Joan enjoyed many hours on their boat exploring the area with friends and fishing in our near-shore waters. It was during these adventures that he became aware of our water quality issues that needed attention, which led to his joining The Guardians of Martin County's Board of Directors in 2011 and serving as Secretary and Treasurer. As friend, neighbor, and former Guardians Board member Merrill Synder said, George was passionate about educating the public about Martin County's beauty while still wanting to maintain the small town feel and quality of life that make Stuart, Florida so special.

Additional details about his life, family and decades-long efforts of community service can be found at: <https://www.tcpalm.com/obituaries/tcn029460>



### BILL LESTER

Shortly following his participation in the May Guardians' Board meeting, Advisor Bill Lester passed away after suffering a heart attack. Following his service in the Navy in the 1960's, Bill earned an MBA from the University of Virginia after which he enjoyed a successful career in corporate finance in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Bill's efforts to protect water quality began in Connecticut, where among other commitments, he served as a Director of The Salt Ponds Coalition and The Nopes Island Conservation Association. After retiring to Florida, he served as Commodore of the Yacht Club at Loblolly, and joined the Guardians as an advisor to the Board in 2014.

The Guardians appreciated Bill's thoughtful input over the years, primarily on water quality-related issues, and we relay our condolences to his wife and family. Additional detail about his life, family and decades-long efforts to protect water quality can be found at: [www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/thewesterlysun/name/william-lester-obituary?id=34739618](http://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/thewesterlysun/name/william-lester-obituary?id=34739618) ■

### ODE TO THE INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

O lagoon of life so diverse,  
Unique are you in the universe.  
None like you thousands  
of species supports,  
Oysters, birds, dolphins and big manatee.  
Lovely sea grass up to your knee.  
Be kind to her water,  
Give impacts no quarter,  
Let her be clean and free of pollution,  
Caring for her is the only solution.

- Ted Moorhead

## Water Quality

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Martin and Treasure Coast residents. To see an example, or to watch a video of the sloshing exchange of seawater through the St. Lucie Inlet, see: [www.floridaocean.org/water-conditions](http://www.floridaocean.org/water-conditions)

Our thanks to former Guardians Board member, and current South Florida Management District Governing Board Director, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, for her years-long advocacy for environmentally conscious and sensitive water management. ■

## Transitions

The Guardians Board of Directors welcomes to the Board Jim Snedeker, John Sedwitz, and Mabel Vogel, all of whom were previously on the Advisory Board, and we thank Len Sucsy, who stepped off the Board in October after many years of service.

Additionally we extend our congratulations to the new Indian Riverkeeper Jim Moir, and offer our best wishes to out-going and recently-retired Riverkeeper Mike Conner. Congratulations also to new Martin County Ecosystem Restoration Division water quality liaison Elizabeth Kelly, and best wishes to recently-retired Dianne Hughes, who has been Martin County's point-person for water quality for many years. ■

## Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative

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environmental advocates for their achievements in 2022. These included Eve Samples (Friends of the Everglades), and Gil Smart (Vote Water) in the Category of "Wavemakers" for their outspoken advocacy), Paul Laura and Diane Goldberg (outstanding MRC Volunteers), John Maehl (Government Employee), Merritt Matheson (Elected Official – former City of Stuart Commissioner), and the South Florida Water Management District, for their role in helping to make the C-44 Reservoir and STA become a reality.

The MRC also recognized a new category of IRL advocates – "Legends of the Lagoon." The first 13 Legends included a number of names familiar to most Martin County residents: the Ais Indigenous People, Dr. Duane De Freese, Jonathan Dickinson, Maggy Hurchalla, Dr. Grant Gilmore, Florida Oceanographic Society's Mark Perry and Nathaniel "Nat" Pryor Reed. Congratulations to all!

Following the successful initial privately-funded campaign in 2020-2021 which will permanently conserve a 2-mile long parcel on the north side of Bridge Road en route to I-95, the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Steering Committee has recently announced its

next targeted acquisition - a strategically located 10-acre parcel on the south side of Bridge Road. Fundraising to acquire this new parcel, which adjoins the eastern boundary of a 110-acre parcel owned by Martin County, has begun.

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

Like the initial acquisition, the long-term goals for this additional parcel are to remove the invasive pest plants, restore the wetland conditions that were present before the water table was lowered for agricultural purposes, restore native plant communities, and allow greater flow south into the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River.

A community event where information about this new acquisition will be shared will take place on Wednesday, December 7, at the Hobe Sound Golf Club, featuring nationally-known TV personality and Wildlife advocate Jeff Corwin and local artist/artisan Geoffrey Smith. Both have been inspired by and are eager to assist in our efforts to protect the corridor between Jonathan Dickson and Atlantic Ridge Preserve State Parks. Jeff will debut a short film about the critical urgency to acquire and protect these and other environmentally valuable properties in Martin County. ■

## 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.