

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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President's Message

On behalf of The Guardians of Martin County's Board of Directors, I hope everyone's summer went well.

Martin County has been very fortunate this year to have such an enlightened Board of County Commissioners, as well as, having Martin County Forever formulating a selection process for the purchase of properties for conservation.

Though not quite as fortunate, all Floridians are experiencing how state preemptions of local regulations can obliterate decades of conscientious growth management.

The Guardians pledge to continue our work to help those who share our responsible growth philosophy and to effectively communicate these needs with our county, state and federal legislators.

We appreciate your support and look forward to rising to the challenges that lie ahead. ■

Guardians Receive Generous Donation and Establish Endowment Fund

Prompted by a generous contribution from J. Gwynne Thorsen and Frances W. Thorsen, The Guardians are pleased to announce the establishment of an Endowment Fund. Prior to his death, Gwynne Thorsen was a highly successful home designer/architect whose work is reflected in many homes in Hobe Sound and Nantucket, MA.

A five-member Endowment Committee, composed of three Board members, one member of the Advisory Board and one at-large member, was established to advise the Board on investment strategies that align with the donor's wishes. "We appreciate the generosity and support for our organization"

Guardians President, Tony Zunino said. "The bequest will give us, and other community non-profit organizations who were also named as beneficiaries, long-term financial stability and predictability".

If you are considering planned-giving options, and want to help the Guardians' efforts to promote responsible growth and protect the quality of life in Martin County, please consider a tax-deductible contribution. ■

READ INSIDE:
Chancey Bay Ranch



State Preemptions

An on-going challenge in recent years has been the Florida Legislature’s continuing and increasing tendency to preempt local governments. Martin County’s voters have consistently elected officials who have allowed the County to ensure that growth proceeds in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner, and we’re disappointed that decisions being made in Tallahassee prevent continuation of this measured approach.

In September, the Martin County Commission considered joining a lawsuit against the Florida Department of Commerce contesting the constitutionality of portions of Senate Bill 180 that prevent local governments from ensuring that growth complies with local Comprehensive Growth Management Plans. The Commission opted for a more diplomatic approach, agreeing instead to work with state legislators to develop a ‘glitch bill’ during the 2026 legislative session to return authority on some development issues to county and local governments.

The Guardians are appreciative of 1000 Friends of Florida’s effort to gather support from counties and municipalities across the state in opposition to what is now becoming apparent as detrimental, and perhaps unintended consequences of SB 180, which was passed during the 2025 Florida Legislative Session. For more information, see <https://1000fof.org/priorities/restorecommunityplanning/#/19/> or Read in Florida Phoenix: https://apple.news/ADRaulvD-RUOv92OqvqO_yw.



Chancey Bay Ranch

Florida’s Right to Farm Act and preemption of County requirements for a proposed meat processing facility in northwestern Martin County.

In January 2025, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) determined that Martin County could not take actions to ensure that the construction and operation of a new proposed meat processing facility would comply with the County’s Comprehensive Growth Management Plan and Land Development Regulations, and that the project could proceed without any public hearings or opportunities for public comment.

With little information about the project publicly-available, The Guardians have sought information about the project, which apparently consists of increased beef production on an ~2,000 acre ranch and construction of a meat processing facility on an adjacent 26-acre parcel, through Freedom of Information Act requests to FDACS and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).



Photo credit: Greg Braun

While The Guardians continue to conduct further research into the proposed facility, our draft position paper on the project can be found at <https://bit.ly/47Vc9zk>. While the Florida Right to Farm Act (Florida Statute 823.14) is intended to protect agricultural operations from frivolous lawsuits, The Guardians have questions about potential further degradation of water quality (the project is situated within the Lake Okeechobee Watershed, which has been designated as “Impaired” due to excess nutrients) and other nuisances.

We appreciate the comments and suggestions from various NGO colleagues of a previous draft of the position paper, which is based on the extent to which issues at the Chancey Bay Ranch project coincide with the contents of the Center for Biological Diversity’s fact sheet on slaughterhouses – see <https://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/chancey-bay-ranch>.

While The Guardians are not necessarily opposed to the proposed facility, we believe that Martin County not only has the authority, but also the responsibility to ensure that if the project moves forward, it does so in compliance with existing County regulations. ■



Photo credit: CBR application to Martin County

Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative

The Guardians, together with our partners at The Conservation Fund and the Treasured Lands Foundation, are pleased that donations from the community are nearing our \$3M target for acquisition and initial management of Acquisition #3 - a parcel located south of Bridge Road which abuts part of Jonathan Dickinson State Park's northern boundary.

"While this former single-family residential property does not have the high-traffic visibility of other parcels acquired by the Loxa-Lucie that front Bridge Road, it adds one more parcel into the jig-saw puzzle of conservation properties situated between Jonathan Dickinson and Atlantic Ridge Preserve state parks", said Greg Braun, chair of the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative.

The Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Steering Committee recently adopted a set of Guidelines for property visitation and are pleased to now be able to provide escorted tours to interested members of the community. To schedule a tour, contact Steering Committee member Jim Howe, at (561)-748-5515 or JamesHHowe@bellsouth.net.

If you are a member of an organization (e.g., Homeowners Association, civic group, non-governmental organization, etc.) and are interested in having a presentation about the Loxa-Lucie, please contact Greg Braun at (561)-758-3417 or execdirector@theguardiansofmartincounty.com.

The Acquisitions Committee is evaluating options for Acquisition #4 in our goal to establish a permanently-protected conservation corridor between the two state parks. For more information, see loxalucieheadwaters.org. Thanks for your support! ■



Loxa-Lucie flatwoods - Photo credit: Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Website

Update from Rivers Coalition



St. Lucie River - Photo credit: The Guardians of Martin County Website

The Guardians are one of more than 100 groups that are members of the Stuart-based Rivers Coalition. Established in 1998, the River's Coalition has met monthly in hopes of achieving their Mission "to stop discharges into the St. Lucie River from Lake Okeechobee and to fight for a safe, healthy and ecologically balanced St. Lucie River Estuary and Indian River Lagoon, and the natural resources that are vital to the economy and quality of life of Martin County and the Treasure Coast."

At the Coalition's monthly meeting in September, an overwhelming majority of Coalition members (including The Guardians) voted to support a Resolution entitled "Stop Harmful Development in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem." The full Resolution can be found at <https://bit.ly/47IJRy0>.

Coalition meetings, which are open to the public (in person or via Zoom), are held at Stuart City Hall on the 4th Thursday of each month (except August and December) from 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM. Each meeting features a presentation highlighting an issue pertinent to the health of the St. Lucie Estuary, Lake Okeechobee and/or the Indian River Lagoon. For more information, or to see recordings of previous meetings, see: <https://riverscoalition.org>.

The Guardians are pleased that the Rivers Coalition are one of the many environmental NGOs who have endorsed the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative. ■

Martin County Forever Update

Following voter approval of the Martin County Forever referendum in November 2024, on January 1, 2025, Martin County began collecting the half-cent sales tax (on most items) that is to be used to acquire conservation lands in Martin County. In late September, Governor DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet agreed to purchase a permanent conservation easement on 1,700 acres of the Bar B Ranch, situated in north-central Martin County. Read the Guardians letter of support here: <https://bit.ly/3jifpM1> and see https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/FLDEP_DSL_OES_FF_2025_BarBRanch.pdf for more information about the Bar B Ranch.

While The Guardians had hoped that the first acquisition under the Martin County Forever program would have been in the Loxa-Lucie watershed, where problems of saltwater intrusion, flooding and water quality are more pressing and development pressure is higher than in central parts of the county, we're pleased that MCF's Environmental Lands Oversight Committee (ELOC) has recently ranked one of the willing-seller properties in the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters project area as its #1 priority.

We're cautiously optimistic that the acquisition of this parcel, which is north of Bridge Rd., will combine with the parcels the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters has acquired south of Bridge Rd, to help create the permanently-protected corridor between the state parks that is a primary goal of the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters project.

The Guardians also congratulate Stacy Ranieri and The Firefly Group, who were recently awarded the Dick Pope All-Florida Golden Image Award for their public relations work on the Martin County Forever Campaign. See: <https://www.fireflyforyou.com/view-eneews.html?id=43> ■

Spotlight on New Board Member – Eric Wesel

The Guardians are pleased to welcome Eric Wesel, owner of Jupiter Island Pools to the Board of Directors. We are pleased to announce that Eric Wesel has accepted a Board of Directors position with The Guardians of Martin County.

Eric, who grew up in Jupiter and attended Palm Beach Junior College, is a longtime resident and business owner in Hobe Sound, having founded Jupiter Island Pools in 1988.

Eric's community service includes having been a past board member of The Pine School, Hobe Sound Early Learning Center, and the Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce. He is currently Vice President of The Hobe Sound Community Chest, board member of the Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce's Community Affairs Committee, was previously an advisor to The Guardians of Martin County and is a member of The Guardian's Endowment Committee.

Eric is married to wife, Laura and has two daughters Bianca and Olivia. ■



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.

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES AT 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) OR FloridaConsumerHelp.com. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY, A NOT-FOR-PROFIT 501(c)3 ENTITY. REGISTRATION# CH30115.

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