

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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Land Conservation Successes

Thank you, Martin County Voters!

The benefits of voter's support of the November 2024 Martin County Forever land conservation referendum are beginning to become more apparent, as the County Commission has approved numerous projects that had been given favorable review by the Environmental Lands Oversight Committee. Dozens of projects ranging in size from small oceanfront tracts on Hutchinson Island to thousands of acres in more remote areas, are moving forward, with permanent protection being assured through either fee-simple acquisition or permanent conservation easements where development rights have been removed.

Income from the voter-approved referendum began being collected in January 2025, and thus far more than 2,000 acres have been preserved and the County is negotiating on numerous tracts that total more than 8,600 additional acres. *(continued on page 2)*



READ INSIDE:
Chancey Bay Ranch Update

Scrub Preservation

The Guardians also appreciate the efforts by County Staff and Commissioner Blake Capps to preserve scrub parcels in Hobe Sound. A generous contribution by Martin County resident Louise C. Yeiser allowed a parcel of scrub land adjacent to the Hobe Sound Scrub Preserve to be preserved rather than cleared for construction of more townhomes.

Although not visually appealing to some, sand pine scrub is an environmentally valuable vegetative community that provides habitat for a variety of state-listed and federally-listed Endangered and Threatened species. More than 95% of the former scrub in Martin County has been converted to other uses, so The Guardians and our conservation colleagues rightfully celebrate whenever any amount of scrub can be preserved.

To learn more about scrub, scrubby flatwoods, and other natural vegetative communities in Florida, see the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, including https://www.fnai.org/PDFs/NC/Scrub_Final_2010.pdf and https://www.fnai.org/PDFs/NC/Scrubby_Flatwoods_Final_2010.pdf. ■



Land Conservation Successes - continued from page 1

With properties within the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters being one of Martin County Forever's four project areas, The Guardians are optimistic that private donations can now be used in conjunction with county-generated funds to match state programs to preserve large tracts that exceed the Headwaters Initiative's ability to protect.

The County's website for this program is frequently updated as progress is made. See <https://www.martincountyforever.com/lands/#land-acquisition> to learn which properties have been acquired, which are under negotiation, and how you can nominate a property that you think should be considered.

The Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative, which consists of The Guardians, the Treasured Lands Foundation and The Conservation Fund continue with outreach and fundraising activities. The Initiative was pleased to recently be endorsed by the local chapter (the Loxahatchee Group) of the Sierra Club (see <https://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Sierra-Club-Loxa-Lucie-Headwaters-letter-of-support-032526.pdf>).

A complete list of Loxa-Lucie Headwaters endorsements can be found here: <https://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/loxalucieendorsements/>).

The Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group's monthly meeting where Executive Director Greg Braun presented the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhnppKiSEa4>.

The Initiative was also pleased with the great and enthusiastic turnout to a Loxa-Lucie celebration event recently held at Harry and the Natives. Artwork by local artist/artisan Geoffrey Smith, a foursome of golf at Hobe Sound Golf Club and a vintage 21' Lyman boat (Thank you Barbara and Dave Birdsey!) were auctioned off, and attendees heard presentations from Jim Snedeker about Martin County Forever, Jessica Namath about "Floridians for Public Lands" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404018999364993/>) and an update from The Conservation Fund's Charles Donaldson about ongoing progress on acquisitions and habitat restoration activities on properties acquired through tax-deductible contributions to The Conservation Fund (<https://www.conservationfund.org/our-impact/projects/conserving-the-loxa-lucie-headwaters-a-mosaic-of-floridas-critical-wetlands/>).

The Guardians and the Loxa-Lucie Headwaters Initiative appreciate Harry McArthur, Harry and the Natives, Pat Martin and 'The Garage Band' for supporting the community outreach event and providing entertainment! ■



Waters and Recreation – Get outside and see for yourself what is being done to address water quality deficiencies.

In the interest of promoting the public's knowledge about natural resource treasures throughout Martin County, The Guardians have developed two companion pieces featuring recreational opportunities on publicly-owned lands.

Initially prompted by a desire to identify trails and hiking opportunities on various governmentally-owned and privately-owned parklands, (see <https://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/trail-guide/>), the project expanded to include lands that are open to the public where the primary use of the land is for water quality improvements (<https://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/recreational-stormwater-treatment-projects/>).

Public land and public money have been used to build and manage these facilities, also known as 'stormwater retrofit' projects, where the state, Water Management District or a local governmental entity has creatively undertaken projects to clean surface waters before they flow into our various estuaries. Because these facilities are often in residential areas, the birds and other wildlife are now accustomed to human activity, which makes them great sites for nature watching as well as getting outside for some exercise and fresh air.

We encourage you to check our maps, click on the websites, and get outside to enjoy some of these little-known treasures. ■

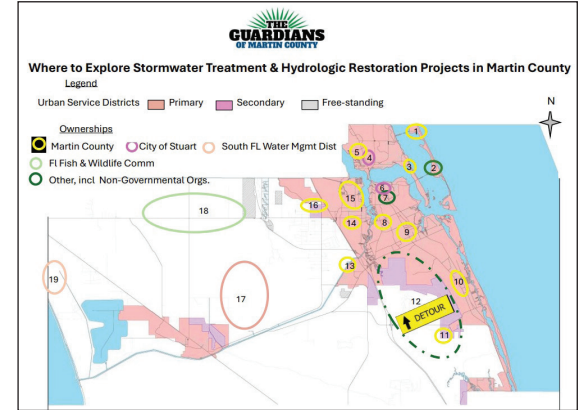


Photo credit: Greg Braun

Chancey Bay Ranch Update

At a February 2026 meeting of the Martin County Commission, Commissioners included public discussion about the proposed meat processing facility that is being considered on the 2,000+-acre ranch in northwestern Martin County. The Guardians appreciate the dozens of our conservation colleagues, citizens and animal rights advocates who attended, spoke and/or emailed the Commissioners stating their interest in preventing the facility from becoming a new source of pollution, traffic and social and environmental impacts.

While there continue to be differences of opinion regarding the preemption of Martin County being able to ensure that the project meets the County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan and Land Development Regulations, the County did agree to reach out to the property owner to discuss various areas of concern.

The Guardians believe that the Florida Right to Farm Act is for farmers, not slaughterhouse factories. If the alleged preemption holds, we hope the owners will be willing to enter into a voluntary agreement through which county residents could be assured that construction and operation of the facility will not exacerbate water quality deficiencies in the Lake Okeechobee watershed, adversely affect groundwater resources and protect bald eagles, caracaras and other natural resources. ■

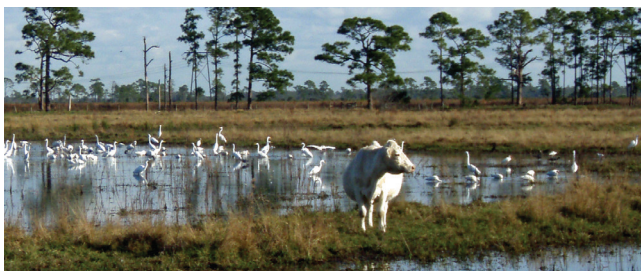


Photo credit: Greg Braun



Photo credit: CBR application to Martin County

Legislative Session Wrap-up

The Guardians also appreciate the tireless efforts by our colleagues at 1000 Friends of Florida (<https://1000fof.org/past-webinars/2026-florida-legislative-wrapup/>), the Florida Wildlife Federation (<https://floridawildlifefederation.org/engage/session/>), Vote Water (<https://votewater.org/news/>), Audubon Florida (<https://audubon.emailmachine.co/web-view/362>) and other conservation groups to keep Florida residents up-to-date with the often environmentally-depressing news from the Florida Legislature. Thanks to everyone who has responded to the all-too-frequent, last-minute requests to “Let your elected officials know ...”. We can’t expect our politicians to support causes we favor, and reject proposals we oppose, unless we let them know how we feel. ■



Board Transitions

Following the untimely passing of former Guardians Board member Eric Wesel last November, there have been various additions and changes on The Guardian’s Board of Directors.

Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, a long-time water quality advocate and former member of the South Florida Water Management District’s Governing Board, moved up from The Guardians Advisory Board to the Board of Directors in January. Welcome Jacqui (below right)! You may recognize Jacqui’s voice as she advocates for water-wise living on one of The Guardians’ Public Service Announcements on WQCS, the Treasure Coast’s local National Public Radio station – listen at <https://youtube.com/shorts/bbcMAXP0mYg>.

Following many years of exemplary service as Secretary, man-about-town John Sedwitz has turned that responsibility over to Board member Emilie Pryor (below left). John will stay on the Board and continue to be The Guardians’ liaison with the Hobe Sound Chamber of Commerce <https://www.hobesound.org/> and the Hobe Sound Concerned Citizens Coalition <https://business.hobesound.org/directory/Details/hobe-sound-concerned-citizen-s-coalition-inc-2954714>.

Emilie, who joined The Guardians Board in November 2023, will now orchestrate the activities of The Guardians’ all-volunteer Board of Directors and serve as liaison between the Board and staff. Thank you for enthusiastically stepping up, Emilie! ■



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.

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