

SRWMD governing board reconsiders proposed tax increase

Staff

The Suwannee River Water Management District does not expect to raise taxes this year to fund its minimum flows and levels (MFLs) program, Governing Board Chairman Donald Quincey said Monday.

"The Governor's Office has helped us identify additional funding sources to help pay for our MFLs program, and we've also been able to reduce our operating budget slightly, so we don't anticipate having to raise taxes this year after all," Quincey said during a governing board teleconference.

At its July meeting, the board had proposed increasing the millage rate to raise additional revenue to pay for the MFLs program, which helps determine how much water is available for issuing water use permits.

However, because there no longer is a need to generate additional revenue through ad valorem taxes to pay for

MFLs this year, the board likely will adopt a millage rate that will generate only as much revenue as the District collected last year, to meet its operating budget.

The first public hearing on the Fiscal Year 2010-11 proposed \$61.6 million budget will be held on Tuesday, Sept. 14 at 5:30 p.m. The hearing will immediately follow the governing board's regular monthly meeting, which will be held at a special time, beginning at 3 p.m.

A final public hearing will be held Tuesday, Sept. 28 at 5:30 p.m. to adopt the final budget and millage rate. A governing board workshop on the District's draft Water Supply Assessment will precede the final budget hearing, beginning at 3 p.m.

Both budget hearings will take place at the District's Headquarters at the corner of US 90 and CR 49 in Live Oak. The public is invited and encouraged to attend. For more information call 800-226-1066 (Florida only) or 386-362-1001.

Downpours cause flooding in Levy

Officials, residents say they haven't seen such flooding since 2004

By MARK SCOHIER

Michelle McCain said she and her husband, Albert, once planned to build a 3,000-square-foot home on the one-acre lot they own near Rosewood, a community outside of Cedar Key.

They bought the property, complete with a mobile home, in 2002. Two years and several hurricanes later, as the couple watched their mobile home become surrounded by floodwater, the McCains realized their property was more suited for a houseboat.

"What's the point in putting a house out here," McCain said Saturday, pointing out of her living room window to the waist-high water covering what had been her back yard just a week prior.

McCain said the water started flow-

ing around and under her home on Aug. 21. A week later, it had reached levels she hadn't seen since the hurricanes of 2004.

"I've already been through this once," she said. "I know what's fixin' to happen. It's about to get real bad. It's just crazy."

McCain said it took months for the water from the 2004 hurricanes to dissipate, and she said she's worried it will take even longer this time.

"It's just scary. I've got two kids: a 12-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl. My little girl told me she wants to go swimming."

McCain said she's seen water moccasins, alligators and floating balls of biting ants clustered together on the surface of the water in places where her children

See Flood on page 6

Rosewood resident and business owner living down the street from the McCains, said he's all too familiar with sheet flooding. Saturday, he was busy trying to pump the water out of the pond his yard had become.

"It got up to one step of our house, and I got really, really nervous."

The problem with pumping, he explained, is that there's nowhere for the water to go. Rosewood naturally has a low elevation, he said, but the matter was complicated after the 2004 hurricanes when road crews piled crushed limestone on top of existing dirt roads in an effort to keep them from washing out. The elevated roadways prevent sheets of floodwater from moving freely over the land. On a nearby road built of crushed

stone, Robinson pointed out several backed up areas along the sides that he said needed culverts.

"They need to do something with the drainage around here."

In addition to elevated roads, Robinson said newer homes in the area have been built high on mounds of fill, further impeding the natural flow of water.

He said he was worried that the water could cause the foundation of his home to settle or cause problems with septic tanks in the area.

According to Barbara Locke, administrator for the Levy County Health Department, septic tanks are definitely an area of concern during flood events, especially when there's a possibility of cross contamination between septic systems and

wells.

"People probably shouldn't be using their septic or well if it is under water," she said. "They should be using bottled water."

Locke added that it's a good idea for people with flooded wells or septic tanks to have their water tested at the health department.

According to a report by the Environmental Protection Agency, wells that are more than 10 years old or less than 50 feet deep stand a good chance of becoming contaminated if flooded. Microorganisms from contaminated water can cause a number of health problems, including gastrointestinal illnesses and Legionnaire's disease. Toxic chemicals such as pesticides washed into a well can cause problems

usually play. The ductwork in the floor of her home has started to collapse.

"We can't really afford to just pack up and move somewhere." But if the rain continues, McCain said, her family would be forced to get out.

The McCain's property was not the only one to be flooded over the last week, according to Levy County Emergency Management Director Mark Johnson.

Inglis, Gulf Hammock, western portions of Bronson and Camp Azalea, a community just west of Chiefland, all reported some type of flood activity, Johnson said in a phone interview Monday afternoon.

"Over the last five to seven days, the county took anywhere between 16 and 17

inches of rain, depending upon where you live."

Johnson, surveying the scene in Rosewood during the phone interview, said county road crews on Monday were digging out blocked culverts in the area and cutting ditches along portions of S.R. 24. in an effort to get the water moving.

Johnson said Rosewood is one of a couple of areas that act like drains for the county. During heavy, fast downpours, the areas sometimes experience what Johnson called sheet flooding, where water flows in a broad swath across the land out toward the Gulf of Mexico. Sheet flooding is what is happening at Rosewood, he said.

Carl Robinson, a

with internal organs.

Johnson said, as of Monday, the area had not been declared an emergency zone.

"This is just something we need to deal with at this (county) level."

He said Rosewood Baptist Church, Otter Creek Church and the Inglis Community Center are on standby as emergency shelters in case people need to leave their homes.

People dealing with flooded properties and homes can call the Levy County Sheriff Office's non-emergency number at 352-486-5111. For information about having your well water tested, call the Levy County Health Department at 352-486-5300.

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Agency questions need for new water standards

The state DEP debates what measurements should be used in rules.

By **STEVE PATTERSON**
The Times-Union

Despite a federal court order to set new clean-water standards for Florida's rivers, a state agency is debating whether rules for the St. Johns River in Jacksonville are good enough already.

An administrator in Florida's Department of Environmental Protection says he doubts the federal government would accept that, and it's only one of several options being considered.

But that should never be a possibility, said St. Johns River-

keeper Neil Armingeon.

"To me, DEP has in effect told the federal judge 'go to hell; we don't care what you said,'" said Armingeon, who broached the subject Tuesday in a state workshop on standards in Bunnell.

The standards are meant to control algae-feeding nitrogen and phosphorus in relatively salty coastal parts of rivers.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed last year to set new standards to settle a federal lawsuit by several activist groups, including the Riverkeeper organization. A federal judge approved the settlement over objections of business and agricultural groups worried new rules would carry unreasonable costs for them.

State officials want to submit

their own proposal for algae nutrients to EPA and to a federal peer review panel overseeing how new standards are set.

EPA has until 2012 to set final standards for coastal areas. It proposed standards for freshwater areas of the St. Johns and many other rivers this year, and will set final rules soon.

Daryll Joyner, a state environmental administrator, said his office is considering whether coastal standards should be based on concentrations of nutrients — the amount of algae food per gallon of water — or the total weight of nutrients entering the river. Or maybe both.

The nutrient weight, what scientists call the river's "loading," is the basis for a St. Johns cleanup plan that local gov-

ernments, utilities and some businesses agreed to in 2008. That plan committed them to various projects, such as sewage treatment plants upgrades, that would together cost more than \$600 million.

Some parties to that agreement, such as JEA, have argued to EPA that work should be enough to restore the river's health. JEA has said that new EPA rules could saddle the utility with huge costs for new equipment and processes to handle wastewater.

Joyner said his agency would use the research it already has on the St. Johns loading to set any concentrations it proposes — if it does any. He said other rivers where the state has less information already on hand

would have standards set a different way that relies on statistics and sampling from a limited number of testing spots.

Joyner said he expects EPA to want concentration-based standards, because those are easily compared against water samples and are normally used in EPA rules.

Joyner also said his office disagrees with an EPA plan to create separate standards controlling how water coming from upstream sources adds to the nutrient load in a river's lower sections. He said EPA asked the state to suggest some benchmarks for that, but his agency thinks that's too complicated.

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RIVER FLOWS

Officials: No tax increase needed to support water-levels program



JASON MATTHEW WALKER/Lake City Reporter

Megan Wetherington, a water resource engineer with the Suwannee River Water Management District, readies a Price velocity meter, which measures the speed of the river's current and calculates the river's flow rate.

By ANTONIA ROBINSON
arobinson@lakecityreporter.com

The Suwannee River Water Management District does not expect to raise taxes this year to fund its Minimum Flows and Levels program, according to Governing Board Chairman Donald Quincey.

"The governor's office has helped us identify additional funding sources to help pay for our MFLs program, and we've also been able to reduce our operating budget slightly, so we don't anticipate having to raise taxes this year after all," he said during a governing board teleconference.

The MFLs program helps determine how much water is available for issuing water-use permits.

The board had pro-



JASON MATTHEW WALKER/Lake City Reporter

Ruby Sprengle, 23, splashes Brock Ketterling, 21, both of Portland, Ore., while taking a dip in the Suwannee River on Wednesday. 'It's so calm and still,' Ketterling said. 'It's unlike any other river.'

posed increasing the millage rate to raise additional revenue to pay for the program at its July meeting.

The current millage rate is 0.4399, which generated more than \$6 million for the 2009-2010 fiscal year, according to Charlie Houder, SWRMD assistant executive direc-

tor. One mill equals \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of taxable value.

The Suwannee River Water Management District will likely adopt a millage rate that will not exceed the amount in revenue collected for 2009-2010, according to

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Suwannee projects will affect Columbia

Several projects funded during fiscal year 2011 by the Suwannee River Water Management District will affect Columbia County.

The largest and most significant effort will be in the Minimum Flows and Levels program, according to Melanie Roberts, director of mission support.

The district has budgeted approximately \$750,000 which will predominantly be spent on MFL development on the Lower Santa Fe River and its springs and the Ichetucknee River and its springs.

This is an increase of \$100,000 above last year's budget for MFLs.

■ Staff reports

Flows: Raising taxes not necessary

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Melanie Roberts director of mission support.

"There no longer is a need to raise taxes to fund Minimum Flows and Levels this year because the district has identified additional funding sources to help pay for the MFLs program," she said.

The SWRMD has not yet settled on a specific rate, but the board will likely adopt a millage rate

that will generate only as much revenue as the district collected last year to meet its operating budget. The fiscal year 2009-10 budget was \$56 million.

The governing board is still working on a final budget. The actual millage rate could vary slightly from last year, but the ad valorem revenue will not exceed last year's amount.

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ing on the Fiscal Year 2010-11 proposed \$61.6 million budget is 5:30 p.m. Tuesday at the district's headquarters located at the corner of U.S. Highway 90 and CR 49 in Live Oak.

The hearing will immediately follow the governing board's 3 p.m. regular monthly meeting. Call (386) 362-1001 for more information.

Group sees film documenting Florida's hidden rivers

Story and photo by Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

Most people never get a chance to see the freshwater rivers flowing beneath Florida. Beneath the farms, homes, factories and cities, fresh water flows through limestone channels and caves. When residential, commercial or agricultural wells are drilled, they tap into these hidden rivers.

Cave divers like Annette Long are among the few who have dived into these caves to see the breathtaking views. She was among the divers that filmed "Water's Journey – Hidden Rivers of Florida," a look at the underground caverns and channels of the Floridan Aquifer in this area of Florida.

A half-hour version of the film, produced by famed underwater cave diver and photographer, the late Wes Skiles, was shown to the Fanning and Manatee Springs Working Group last week. The group is a forum for the discussion of how to protect springs.

Long, who lives in Chiefland, said one of the most interesting parts of the film was shot under a very deep sinkhole next door to the Sonny's Barbeque in the city of Alachua. Skiles and Brian Pease are shown in the film walking through the restaurant carrying a tracking device that allowed them to follow the divers swimming unseen below the restaurant in the aquifer.

Pease invented a device that picked up signals emitted by a transmitter being towed by divers Jill Heinerth and Tom Morris in the film. The divers, who were filmed by other cave diving cameramen and women, were the stars of the documentary, along with Skiles and Pease walking on the surface above them.

The documentary took place at several

locations in Florida, but a big part of it was filmed beneath Gilchrist County at Little Hart Springs, according to Long. The divers would enter the caves through the spring cave entrances and use scuba gear and lights to maneuver through the caverns and channels filled with fresh water.

The idea behind the documentary, paid for by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, a public television station in St. Augustine and Progress Energy, was to educate Floridians about the hidden rivers of fresh water that lie beneath Florida.

"The DEP felt it was worth the effort to show that what you do on the land affects the water we drink," Long said. "One scientist at the working group said, 'Our drinking water bears the signature of what we do on the land.' I thought he summed it up very well."

Long has dived under much of Florida. She said the size of the channels and large caverns in the aquifer varies. Some of the largest she has seen are under Weeki Wachee where caverns are 300 feet deep and some of the limestone rocks lying on the bottom are the size of houses.

She has swum past many well casings sunk into the aquifer.

One of the largest openings in the aquifer in Levy County can be seen at Manatee Springs State Park when the water is crystal clear. Water flows from a large cave opening at the east end of the spring and out to the Suwannee River. Swimmers can dive into the spring run and see the large cave opening wearing a diver's mask.

The documentary "Water's Journey" is available to groups that want to see it in a one-hour version, a half-hour version or a six-minute version. Long can be contacted at Long5892@bellsouth.net if you or your group would like to see the documentary.



A large sinkhole opened up on the grounds of the Chiefland Golf and Country Club last week. The course is less than three miles from Manatee Springs State Park, and perhaps one of the largest openings of the Florida Aquifer.

Regional water authority may not drill well on site north of Chiefland

By Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

Nature Coast Regional Water Authority Chairman Randy Durden said last week he doesn't know at this point whether the authority will drill a regional well field on a 122-acre tract owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District near the north Chiefland city limits.

Durden confirmed the property has been identified in a draft feasibility study as a future regional well field site for the Nature Coast Regional Water Authority. The study shows water from the tract would be piped to Fanning Springs and possibly across the Suwannee River to Old Town.

Durden, speaking to the Fanning and Manatee Springs Working Group, said SRWMD owns the land and will decide how the property can be used. He said the draft feasibility study is not final and some of the projects may never happen.

The property was part of a 155-acre tract purchased by SRWMD with Florida Forever money and \$160,000 of Chiefland city funds for a Chiefland Wellhead Protection Area, but the water district no longer calls the remaining 122 acres a protection area

for Chiefland's water. It is considered district lands.

The city purchased 33 acres of the 155-acre tract for its new well site but is concerned that a large regional well field next door could impact the city's water supplies in the future. The city says that is the reason it wanted the full 155 acres protected as a Chiefland wellhead area.

However, the city commission failed to obtain partial title to the property when it gave SRWMD the \$160,000 to buy the property. The district now has title to the 122 acres and has rejected city requests to lease the land or buy it from the district.

The 122 acres adjoins Chiefland's 33-acre well site and is about a block north of the Chiefland city limits.

Durden, a Gilchrist County commissioner and a banker, said he would not be in favor of anything that would "harm anyone's water" and he was not sure what projects would be included in the final draft of the feasibility study.

"There's a lot of things in the feasibility study that won't take place," he said.

Durden said the final draft of the feasibility study

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will be released this month. Until then, many questions will remain unanswered.

Chiefland recently attempted to convince SRWMD to give the city a long-term lease on the 122 acres of disputed land with an option to buy the property, but the water district has not responded to the city's proposal.

The city says it gave SRWMD \$160,000 for the express purpose of preserving the entire 155-acre well site for a Chiefland Wellhead Protection Area. The city has documents confirming the land was purchased for that reason.

The Nature Coast Regional Water Authority was created to provide quality drinking water, wastewater services and reuse water to member cities and counties. Bell, Trenton, Gilchrist County and Fanning Springs are currently members. Cross City and Dixie County pulled out, but Durden said the two governments may rejoin the organization.

Biomass policy reversed, to relief of local officials

North Central Florida Regional Planning Council changes course on timber proposal

By **Stephenie Livingston**

stephenie.livingston@gafnews.com

A recently proposed policy on biomass by the Regional Comprehensive Planning Committee of the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council has been dismissed after local counties and timber growers objected through letters and resolu-

tions, and after comments from the public during a committee meeting last week.

Last month, Hamilton County commissioners passed a resolution against the proposed amendment stating that the policy was not "in keeping with the desires and plans" of the board after the committee proposed limiting the harvesting of

woody biomass from "natural resources of regional significance."

The discarded policy had proposed to "[l]imit the harvesting of biomass from Natural Resources of Regional Significance to levels which will not significantly and adversely impact the functions of the Natural Resource of Regional Significance from which the biomass is harvest-

ed."

Commissioners were concerned that timber growers in the county would be faced with limitation of sales, resulting in the loss of funds from the sale of forest products. Commission said they did not want to see timber growers suffer a loss of

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Biomass policy reversed, to relief of local officials

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income due to limitations imposed by a government entity.

Letters were sent by the board to neighboring counties requesting that they support Hamilton County's resolution by opposing the proposed policy.

A representative said the committee received several letters requesting the proposed policy be deleted as well as at least one letter requesting it be retained.

Local voices were, indeed, heard. The policy was deleted by the committee a few days after last Thursday's committee meeting attended by Hamilton County authorities and local timber growers.

"To see the kind of support we received from our sister counties, and from the timber industry, was very humbling," said Hamilton County

BOCC Chairman Ronny Morgan. "We are very thankful. I think this will not only be good for our county, but for the whole state."

Lafayette County Clerk of Court Ricky Lyons said Lafayette County Commissioners sent a letter to the committee strongly objecting to the policy.

"The board was afraid such a policy would eventually hurt timber growers in Lafayette County," said Lyons.

Suwannee County BOCC Chairman Wesley Wainwright agreed, "I can't help but think biomass would improve the timber market in the area."

Still, biomass is an issue that is currently being debated, with proponents of such plants agreeing that biomass is a chief renewable energy source, while others question factors such as pollution and the sustainability of Florida's forests.

Newberry gives initial OK to 300-home development

By Alex Chachkevitch
For *The Herald*

NEWBERRY — The master plan of the 105-acre Newberry's Town Square, which could have as many as 300 homes, was given initial approval by the Newberry City Commission Monday, Aug. 23.

The approval rezoned the square's site and changed the land use of the area from agricultural to planned development.

This is the first of a many-step process

Gerry Dedenbach, the director of Planning for Causseaux, Hewett and Walpole, presented the 20-year construction plan for the town square, which is located on the east side of U.S. 27, between Southwest 15th Avenue and Southwest 30th Avenue.

Ed Norfleet III is the developer.

The area will include 300 residential homes and 250,000 square feet for commercial use, which can include restaurants, retail businesses and a hotel.

Also, there will be a 2-acre park at the town square center, which will be located in the northwest part of the land.

Dedenbach said the project's cost is difficult to determine at this point.

"I think this is terrific," City Commissioner Joe Hoffman said. "This is what we want for Newberry."

Comments about this story can

be left under the online version of it at *The Herald's* Website.

Stories are generally placed online each week by Thursday evening at:

www.NorthFloridaHerald.com

Toward purchase of former Ideal Marina

Foley pledges \$200,000 to county

By MARK VIOLA
Staff writer

Foley Timber and Land announced Tuesday it will contribute \$200,000 to Taylor County to assist with the purchase of the former Ideal Marina property in Steinhatchee.

Senior Vice President for Planning Bo Taff made the

announcement during the county commission's workshop session held Tuesday afternoon.

According to County Administrator Jack Brown, the county has signed a contract with Capital City Bank to purchase the property, which has been appraised at about \$2.5 million.

The county has also placed a \$75,000 option on the property and has until Nov. 15 to close on the property.

"We appreciate the fact that the county is in desperate need of a boat ramp," Taff said Thursday.

"We've been following their ongoing efforts.

"Jack Brown approached us

and said the county was pulling together every available resource," he said. "He said the county felt this was the best long-term option.

"Foley agreed we would be willing to contribute to the effort and agreed to the importance of obtaining a boat ramp to the long-term viability of the county.

"We hope this contribution will assist the county's effort to support local industry. We are a coastal community and our economy is largely based on the coast," Taff said.

"Foley is pleased to be able to help in this effort. Our coast is a wonderful resource."

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FOLEY

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Last month commissioners unanimously approved moving forward with the purchase of the property, on which the county hopes to build a boat ramp to help with the lack of public access to the Steinhatchee River.

Brown said he is working to secure the funding necessary to purchase the site, with commissioners already agreeing to use funds previously set aside for the final phase of the Taylor County Sports Complex.

The Ideal Marina property consists of 5.2 acres. A number of boat slips have already been constructed at the site, which includes a length of riverfront property as well as land on the other side of Riverside Drive.

SRWMD expects to hold the line on taxes

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At its July meeting, the board had proposed increasing the millage rate to raise additional revenue to pay for the MFLs program, which helps determine how much water is available for issuing water use permits.

However, because there no longer is a need to generate additional revenue through ad valorem taxes to pay for MFLs this year, Quincey said that the board likely will adopt a millage rate that will generate only as much revenue as the district collected last year, to meet its operating budget.

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take place at the district's headquarters at the corner of U.S. 90 and C.R. 49 in Live Oak. The public is invited and

encouraged to attend. For more information call (800) 226-1066 (Florida only) or (386) 362-1001.

Alachua city reviews Walmart plans

Supercenter includes a garden center and a drive-through pharmacy.

By Anthony Clark
Business editor

City of Alachua planning staff are reviewing Walmart's plans to build a 154,000-square-foot supercenter and retail outparcel on a 37-acre pasture at the

southeast corner of I-75 and U.S. 441.

After more than five years of site planning and engineering, and with approvals from the Suwannee River Water Management District and the Florida Department of Transportation, Walmart submitted plans to the city in June.

Kathy Winburn, city planning and community development director, said they are reviewing

the plans to see if they are consistent with land development regulations before scheduling a public hearing with the Planning and Zoning Board. That would be followed by a hearing before the City Commission.

The city's process includes a study to determine the project's economic impact to local businesses.

Mayor Gib Coerper said

Walmart has already eliminated earlier plans for a gas station and cut the store's size down from 183,000 square feet in response to community and business concerns.

"We don't want to have a shop so big it's going to smother everybody else," he said.

Coerper said the feeling of a past City Commission was to have a store that serves the area

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WALMART: Store could generate 300 jobs

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but not a large region. The store likely will draw shoppers from High Springs who now go to Gainesville, he said.

Walmart's submission includes an economic impact review of California cities with new supercenters from 2003-07 conducted by Navigant Consulting Inc.

The studies showed that taxable retail sales in those cities increased 15 percent in the first year after a supercenter opened, including an average of \$34.4 million in populations under 25,000. The increased traffic also increased sales at other retailers by 11 percent, the report says.

The supercenter plan includes a garden center and drive-through pharmacy.

The project also includes a 13,500-square-foot outparcel for lease to other retailers, a park-and-ride lot and a covered bus stop.

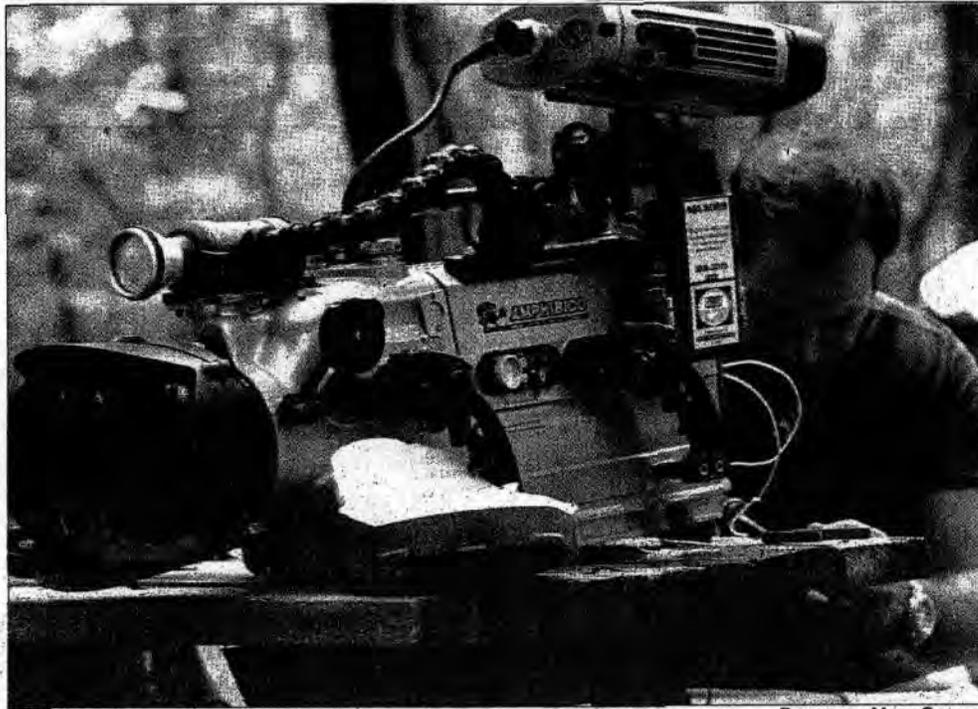
Walmart spokesman Daniel Morales said the stores typically generate 200 to 300 jobs.

A report by CPH Engineers Inc. of Sanford shows the project would have a daily impact of 11,400 gallons of water, 4,680 gallons of wastewater and 6,196 new vehicle trips, all within existing capacity, and it would create 144 tons of solid waste per year served by New River Solid Waste Facility, which has capacity

for 50 years.

Walmart is seeking a variance to Alachua's requirement for a "primary drive aisle" in front of the store that appears as an extension of public streets with sidewalks, parallel parking and a canopy of trees, saying it creates unsafe pedestrian and vehicle conflicts and that the trees would cause maneuvering hazards.

Asked what he is hearing in the community, Coerper said, "You're always going to get a group of folks that don't like Walmart, but as a general rule I think people are excited about the fact that we're going to get some retail shopping here."



PHOTOS BY MARK SCOHIER

Anthony Lenzo, camera tech for the dive crew at last week's filming at Hart Springs, makes some adjustments to an underwater camera Wednesday.

Hart Springs goes Hollywood

By MARK SCOHIER
news2@chieflandcitizen.com

Hart Springs will be featured in a segment of a new TV series on geology put together by the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Discovery Channel.

Filming for the project at Hart Springs, which focused on part of the spring's cave system, started Wednesday and ended on Friday.

Lucy Van Beek, a BBC producer at the springs Wednesday, said the TV series, called "Naked Earth", will be hosted by the BBC's Richard Hammond and will air some time in 2011.

"We chose Hart Springs because it's such a beautiful location," Van Beek said. "It's absolutely stunning."

Mark Long, a cave diver from Chiefland, was part of the five-person dive crew that entered the cave system. Long said the crew entered at Little Hart with a camera and tracking system and swam through about 1,700 feet of cave system.

"It went great," he said Monday. "I think we got everything they needed. Everything worked, which is kind of amazing when you put that much technology together."

Long said one of the divers was outfitted with a communication system that allowed host Richard Hammond to speak with the crew, which spent a total of about 5 hours

within the cave system. They were also tracked, in real time, by Brian Pease, an inventor and electrical engineer who developed the tracking and communications system.

Mitchell Gentry, park manager for Hart Springs, said Wednesday that the dive crew's journey would also be permanently marked by a trail that would let visitors know where that section of the aquifer runs.

"The underground part is just as much or more than the part you see," Gentry said. "This will help people realize what they do on the surface affects what happens underground."



Engineer Brian Pease makes adjustments to tracking equipment.

Bronson continues to fight federal agency claims that business district would flood

By Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

The town of Bronson continues to fight a federal plan to designate part of the town's business district as being flood prone. It considers the designation unjust because the town has never flooded.

City Council members were told Tuesday that an updated federal flood risk map has been adjusted to exclude most of the town's business district from being designated as flood prone, but council members were still upset with a proposed federal map showing flood waters creeping up close to the back of businesses in 100-year storm and invading part of the business district.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is working with the Suwannee River Water Management District to develop Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps

(D-firms) showing what areas of the county would flood in a storm that dumps 10 inches of rain in a single day, or four inches in an hour -- a 100-year storm.

SRWMD hired URS Corporation to conduct the digital flood map study. The first proposed maps to come out of the study showed the Bronson business district under water in a 100-year storm. The town was upset because there is no record of the business district ever flooding along U.S. 27A.

The water district asked FEMA for a finding that the flood study was inaccurate. The town gave SRWMD officials and URS engineers tours of a flood ditch behind the business district built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps to carry water away from Bronson to nearby Chunky Pond. But FEMA refused to comply with SRWMD's request.

URS representative Robert Johnson said the town will be notified later this

week of the company's findings and given copies of the flood risk maps. He said the town will have 120 days to appeal. Town officials are frustrated because URS used sophisticated computer modeling to draw its conclusions. The town has no access to software that could be used to challenge the company's assertions.

The company used existing federal flood elevation data to feed into the computer models. The town considers the computer modeling inaccurate because it apparently does not take into account the ability of surrounding swamps to absorb the water from heavy rains or the capacity of the drainage ditch to carry water away from town.

Councilman Berlon Weeks, who has fought to overturn the flood zone designation, said the town recently received 20 inches of rain in four days and there was no flooding in Bronson. He said the drainage ditch worked as

designed, carrying the storm water away from the town.

"Nothing changed at all. The flooding's just not here," he said.

The flood zone designation will require businesses that fall into the 100-year zone to carry federal flood insurance. Councilwoman Beatrice Mongo said the designation would discourage businesses from locating in Bronson.

Johnson said URS has no data showing Bronson has ever been hit by a 100-year storm. When told that 24 inches fell on Levy County during Hurricane Elena in 1986, he said URS has no rain gauge data to confirm that 24 inches of rain fell or how much fell in the Bronson area.

He said the revised D-firm maps from his company have lowered projected flood levels in a 100-year storm and most of the Bronson business district is now out of the high risk flooding category.

North Florida Focus

September 8 & 9, 2010

www.nflonline.com

Serving Hamilton, Lafayette and Suwannee Counties

UF researchers seek to understand and protect Florida's springs

By Joseph Kays

Renowned University of Florida naturalist Archie Carr called them "little ecologic jewels" and "the singular blessing of the Florida landscape."

Environmentalist Marjorie Stoneman Douglas called them "bowls of liquid light," and 18th-century explorer William Bartram called them "enchanted and amazing crystal fountains."

Geologically, Florida's 700 springs are windows into the Floridan Aquifer — 100,000 square miles of permeable limestone saturated with water like a giant sponge that underlies all of Florida and parts of Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama.

For eons, rainwater has trickled from the surface down to the aquifer, only to reappear days, months or years later from the springs, to form rivers like the Ichetucknee and the Silver, evaporate and fall again as rain in a never-ending cycle.

For much of history, human impact on the springs and the aquifer has been minimal. Although archaeological evidence indicates humans have lived around the springs and along the rivers they feed for thousands of years, it is only in the last century, as Florida's population has mushroomed, that humans have begun to negatively impact the state's fresh water supply.

Beginning in the 1880s, Jacksonville, Fla. and Brunswick, Ga. became the first municipalities to punch wells into the Floridan Aquifer to provide drinking water for their growing populations. Today, Floridians use more than 7 billion gallons of water a day, more than 60 percent of it groundwater.

At the same time that more water is being withdrawn from the aquifer, nitrates and other pollutants from septic tanks, treatment plants and stormwater and agricultural runoff are contaminating the surface water that replaces it.

The springs are suffering "death by a thousands wounds," says Jim Stevenson of the state's Springs Task Force and the Ichetucknee Springs Basin Working Group.

"Between 1950 and 1990, Florida's human population more than quadrupled, and our population continues to increase," a November 2000 report from the task force said.

"Since the 1970s, scientists have documented a decline in water quality in most Florida springs, particularly in regard to nutrients such as nitrate."

Over the past 30 years, typical nitrate levels in Florida springs have risen from 0.02 milligrams per liter to 1.0 milligrams per liter, according to the report.

During a recent day-long tour of the Ichetucknee Springs basin, Stevenson illustrated the many ways development is impacting, and being impacted by, the springs.

He starts in Lake City at Alligator Lake, which regularly flushes its water into a sinkhole that ultimately leads 12 miles south to Ichetucknee Springs. Lake City used to pump its treated sewage into the lake. Now, the city sprays the effluent over some 350 acres of hay field just a stone's throw from the Ichetucknee Trace, the historic path of the Ichetucknee River, now mostly underground.

As the tour follows the current and historic path of the river south, Stevenson points out gas stations almost on top of sinkholes feeding the springs, and mobile homes being swallowed by sinkholes in an area that was once the riverbed. Canoeing down the Ichetucknee River from the headwaters, Stevenson then points out the ecological implications of the pollution. Mats of algae float past the canoes, algae covers the eelgrass that grows along the river bottom and water lettuce threatens to clog

some of the seven springs that feed the river.

For Richard Hamann, an environmental law expert in the UF College of Law's Center for Governmental Responsibility (CGR), it was a tour like this that opened his eyes to the extent of the springs pollution problem.

"It wasn't until I saw the sprayfields and the sinkholes that I realized how comprehensive any springs protection legislation would have to be," says Hamann. "I was most impressed by how far from the headwaters you could have pollution impacting the springs."

Last year, Hamann advised a team of students from CGR's Conservation Clinic in the development of springs protection legislation and tools to help local governments implement it.

The model springs protection legislation that law students Matthew Brewer, Matt Clark and Christine Francesciani, and interdisci-

SEE UF, PAGE 3

UF researchers seek to understand and protect Florida's springs

Continued From Page 1

plinary ecology doctoral student Jason Evans drafted at the behest of the Silver Springs Basin Working Group required the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in cooperation with the Florida Geological Survey to delineate springsheds and primary and secondary protection zones for all first- and second-magnitude springs. Flow from first-magnitude springs, the largest, exceeds 64 million gallons a day.

Once this was completed, the law required local governments to review their comprehensive plans to ensure that they addressed any springs in their jurisdiction. The law also required DEP to establish total maximum daily loads of nutrients for all impaired first- and second-magnitude springs and adopt new criteria for determining impairment.

The model legislation ultimately evolved into the "Florida Springs Protection Act" introduced during the 2005 legislative session by then state Sen. Nancy Argenziano of Dunnellon and former state Rep. Dwight Stansel of Wellborn. The act was stripped of most of its requirements and then stalled as the session expired, but Hamann says its introduction was an important first step.

"We weren't looking to propose something that was politically possible; we were looking to do something that was needed," Hamann says of the legisla-

tion. "This kind of legislation doesn't happen overnight, but the fact that we set in motion serious consideration of the problem and potential solutions is an achievement."

"Getting sponsors and getting it introduced was a big first step," adds Fay Baird, coordinator of the Silver Springs Basin Working Group. "I was very impressed with the quality of the legislation we received from Richard Hamann and the students."

Margaret Carr, a UF landscape architecture associate professor, says "this legislation is part of the building momentum to tie land use to groundwater protection. What initially seems like a radical idea eventually becomes possible."

Four years ago, Carr led a group of 17 urban and regional planning and architecture students who developed a land-use plan to protect the water quality, water quantity and native habitats of the Ichetucknee springshed.

The final plan the team presented to Columbia County elected officials and administrators sought to balance population growth around Lake City, with the desire to preserve the area's agrarian heritage and protect the Ichetucknee springshed.

One of the keys to effective legislation and land-use planning to protect springs is understanding exactly how water moves through the karst system. That's what UF geological sciences Associate Professor Jon Martin is

studying at one of the most unique areas in Florida's springs system.

Unlike the karst geology of the central continent that has produced places like Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, most of Florida's caves are under water.

So Martin is focusing his research on a stretch of the Santa Fe River that goes underground for more than six miles through O'Leno State Park in High Springs.

"O'Leno is a great natural laboratory because it has been extensively mapped by cave divers," says Martin, who is a member of the Springs Task Force. "We can track water as it enters the system and as it comes out."

Martin and his colleagues, including geological sciences doctoral student P. J. Moore, are using a variety of mechanical and chemical techniques to track water in the Santa Fe River from when it disappears beneath the surface at a point called the river "sink" until it reemerges six miles later at the river "rise."

"We monitor the chemical composition of the water along the flow path," Martin says. "We also monitor the temperature and measure the chemistry to see how it changes. We're basically developing a natural chemical fingerprint for the water."

Specifically, Martin's team is trying to understand how water moves between large conduits like sinkholes and springs and the

saturated limestone "matrix" that surrounds them.

"Water flows rapidly through the big conduits, but much more slowly through the matrix," Martin says. "We're trying to understand how these two types of flows interact."

Interaction between the matrix and the conduits has important implications for human and ecological health, Martin says.

"The water we drink comes from the matrix porosity. If a contaminant gets in the matrix, it could reside there for a very long time and cleanup would be very difficult," he says. "It will also slowly seep into the conduits and get out into the springs, changing the ecology."

In addition to monitoring the water going through the conduits, Martin's team has drilled eight 100-foot-deep wells to get samples of the matrix water near the conduit.

"Using all of these techniques, we can plot what portion of the water is from the matrix and what portion is from the conduit," Martin says. "A lot of attention has been focused on sinkholes and other large pathways for contaminants to enter aquifers. What is less commonly appreciated is that the porous matrix provides an additional, significant route for contaminants from the ground surface. Consequently, results from this work could provide the basis for a more realistic conceptual model of water flow in the Floridan Aquifer."

From: LAKECITYJOURNAL.COM

9/15/2010 10:47:00 PM

Ichetucknee Springs Basin Working Group envisions three-year project for restoration plan

By Karl Burkhardt

Restoration planning is the focus of the new coordinator of the Ichetucknee Springs Basin Working Group (ISBWG).

“We will working toward a vision stakeholders create for what the springs should look like, what the biology and water quality should be and the ultimate health of the springs,” said Ondine Wells, newly appointed coordinator of the group.

She was speaking at a joint meeting with The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP), enlisting their support and explaining how the two groups could work together without duplicating efforts.

TIP emphasizes education and programs that “Achieve results through voluntary programs to satisfy regulatory objectives.”

Wells succeeds Jim Stevenson who retired earlier this year as the leader of the working group. She is a communication specialist at Pandion Systems, an environmental science, ecology and communications company in Gainesville.

Wells said the first step is to outline ecological, hydrological and biological issues. Ichetucknee Springs and other natural waterways are suffering from low levels and increasing amounts of nitrogen compounds.



Ondine Wells, coordinator of the Ichetucknee Springs Basin Working Group, presents a proposal to create a three-year restoration plan. (LakeCityJournal.com photo)



Joel Foreman, Chair of The Ichetucknee Partnership, discusses coordinating efforts with Ondine Wells (left) and Cindy Johnson of the Suwannee River Water Management District. (LakeCityJournal.com photo)

With stakeholders, including concerned residents, government officials, farmers and business owners, Wells intends to create a vision of what the springs should become.

Setting benchmarks for reducing impairments and identifying restoration actions will lead to a restoration plan.

Wells envisions a series of restoration actions, guided by monitoring and evaluation of the progress.

ISBWG meets quarterly, but Wells proposed additional meetings:

- A visioning workshop on Wednesday, November 3, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Impairments and Benchmarks Workshop, Wednesday, January 26, 2011.
- Goals, Objectives and Strategies Workshop, Wednesday, April 27, 2011.

Part of the challenge for ISBWG will be finding funding and partners for restoration projects.

“We want to ensure we are building on past accomplishments and not duplicate, but assist one another in moving forward,” she said.

“The Working Group itself will not be implementing the restoration actions,” Wells said. “Our goal is to help initiate and help stakeholders initiate restoration.”

SRWMD approves budget

The Suwannee River Water Management District Governing Board adopted its tentative budget of \$56.5 million and proposed millage rate of 0.4399 at its first budget hearing Tuesday.

The tentative budget reflects no change in the tax rate from the current fiscal year.

Due to decreases in property values, however, projected revenues for the district are down about \$300,000.

The final budget and millage rate are scheduled for adoption at a public hearing Tuesday, Sept. 28, at 5:30 p.m. at the district's headquarters at the corner of US 90 and CR 49 in Live Oak.

A governing board workshop will precede the budget hearing, beginning at 3 p.m.



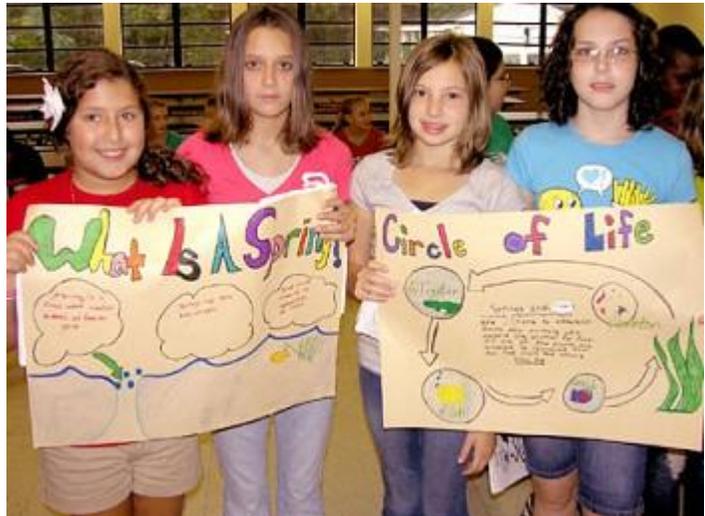
9/19/2010 8:05:00 PM

The Ichetucknee Partnership providing equipment, teacher training for schools for LIFE and PARKnership programs

By Karl Burkhardt

The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP) is expanding its projects to protect the aquifer by supporting a program to monitor water quality and educating residents about how their actions affect water quality.

TIP dedicated \$14,000 to continue and expand the Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) program for students in grades 6 through 8 in the SAIL program at Richardson Middle School this school year.



Students display posters they created to illustrate lessons from the Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) program. (TIP photo)

LIFE and PARKnership programs at Fort White Middle and High schools will receive \$4,000.

Cindy Johnson, TIP Coordinator said \$3,800 will go to Richardson for teacher training and professional development, substitute teachers on field experience days, and supplies and equipment. The money also will fund bus transportation for student field experiences to Ichetucknee State Park, Stephen Foster State Park, and Alligator Lake. During these field experiences, students will perform water sampling, collect data.

In addition, the Suwannee Water Management District (SRWMD) will furnish the school with seven new Vernier Labquest data loggers to use in the field and classroom, at a total cost of \$2,300.

Also, \$10,220 is dedicated to the Florida Department of Environmental Education to oversee development of curriculum, labs and field experiences, provide teacher training

The LIFE and PARKnership programs at Fort White Middle and High schools will receive:

- \$2,000 for the purchase of 12 rain barrels – 10 to be installed at the schools to teach, promote and implement water conservation; one to be painted by the art classes and presented to SRWMD for installation at its headquarters; and one to be painted and presented to TIP.
- \$1,500 for purchase and installation of a water-efficient irrigation system at the middle school's newly-constructed greenhouse. The greenhouse will be used as a teaching tool both for LIFE students and Future Farmers of America (FFA) members. Springs-friendly best management practices (BMPs) will be taught to students and implemented at the greenhouse. The BMPs include proper fertilizer use, efficient water use, and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles.
- \$500 for World Water Monitoring Day test kits (10 kits at \$50 each).

Johnson announced that the SRWMD and DEP will continue funding to monitor flows and levels at several Ichetucknee sites, including Blue Hole, Dampier's Landing and the 27 Bridge. DEP had announced earlier this year that due to budget constraints it was discontinuing a number of springs monitoring sites statewide, including ones at Ichetucknee.

The TIP executive committee asked DEP to reconsider and as a result, DEP and SRWMD each agreed to provide cost-share funds to continue the sites, which are maintained by the U.S. Geological Survey. Estimated annual cost to continue monitoring each spring: \$20,000.

From: LAKE CITY JOURNAL (online)

9/19/2010 8:19:00 PM

'Springs and Farms Activity Book' brings environmental understanding to elementary schools

By Cindy Johnson
TIP Coordinator

Kindergarten students throughout Columbia County's public schools were presented copies of the *Springs and Farms Activity Book* produced cooperatively by [The Ichetucknee Partnership](#) (TIP), [Suwannee River Water Management District](#) (SRWMD) and the Santa Fe Soil and Water Conservation District. This is the second year the activity book has been distributed to elementary schools.

Activities in the book are designed to increase children's understanding of and appreciation for farms, forests, rivers and springs – all of which are among Columbia County's most valuable economic and environmental assets.

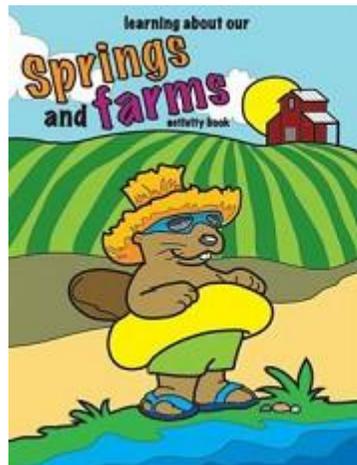
In addition to learning what it means to be good stewards of natural resources, students are introduced to age and grade appropriate learning skills such as counting, matching, printing/tracing letters of the alphabet, and matching letters to their sounds.

Bellamy Beaver, TIP's friendly mascot, guides children to the springs, where they learn what a spring is, what plants and animals live there, and how people have fun at springs.

Bellamy then slips into a pair of overalls to transport the readers down to a farm where they learn the concepts of seed-to-harvest and farm-to-market. Agricultural best management practices (BMPs) are introduced at a very basic level ("just enough fertilizer and water"). Students also



Students from Fort White Middle and Elementary schools took part in a "buddy-up" day in which the 6th and 7th-grade students taught the kindergarteners about farms and springs, using the activity book. The middle-school students presented skits, readings and posters based on the activity book, then guided the kindergarteners through the lessons and activities in the coloring book. (TIP photo)



Bellamy Beaver, shown on the cover of the workbook, was enthusiastically portrayed by sixth-grader Ryan Warrick. (TIP photo)

learn that commodities we use daily actually come from farms.

The book contains a poem, fun facts about the aquifer and the Ichetucknee springs, activities about water conservation and recycling, and a colorful map in which Bellamy must find his way from Alligator Lake to Ichetucknee Springs. The books will supplement other classroom lessons and teaching materials.

“We are so excited about this book,” says Dorothy Spradley, school district volunteer/marketing education coordinator. “We’ve never had anything like this for our kindergarteners before.”

The *Springs and Farms Activity Book* was so well received in Columbia County that it is now being adapted by the Levy and Gilchrist soil and water conservation districts for use in elementary schools within their counties.

SRWMD Adopts Tentative Budget And Tax Rate

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) Governing Board adopted a tentative budget of \$56.5 million and proposed millage rate of 0.4399 at its first budget hearing Sept. 14.

The tentative budget reflects no change in the tax rate from the current

fiscal year. However, due to decreases in property values, by maintaining the same rate the District has actually lowered taxes by about \$300,000.

Taxes paid to the District fund numerous services to the public, including protection of rivers and springs, water monitoring programs, water resource development and water supply planning.

The final budget and millage rate are scheduled for adoption at a public hearing Sept. 28 at 5:30 p.m. at the District's headquarters at the corner of US 90 and CR 49 in

Live Oak. A governing board workshop will precede the budget hearing, beginning at 3 p.m.

For more information contact the District at 800-226-1066 (FL only) or 386-362-1001.

SRWMD adopts tentative budget and tax rate

Submitted

LIVE OAK, FL, September 15, 2010 – The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) Governing Board adopted a tentative budget of \$56.5 million and proposed millage rate of 0.4399 at its first budget hearing Sept. 14.

The tentative budget reflects no change in the tax rate from the current fiscal year. However, due to decreases in property values, by maintaining the same rate the District has actually lowered taxes by about \$300,000.

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Springs, from Page 1A

among all the springs in the state. Greenhalgh said the level of nitrates varies in the spring but it remains one of the most polluted springs in the state from nitrates.

Nitrates promote the growth of exotic plants on the spring floor and the growth of algae. Algal blooms are common in the spring. The green slime on the floor of the spring is an algae caused by nitrate contamination. Nitrates are a fertilizer, Greenhalgh said.

Nitrates flowing downstream in the Suwannee River are causing algal blooms in the estuary at the mouth of the river.

"I've got pictures that show it looks like a spinach patch," he said.

Greenhalgh is one of the state scientists that regularly attends the Fanning and Manatee Springs Working Group meetings every quarter and contributes his knowledge of the springs to the discussion. The working group is a forum aimed at elevating the public's knowledge about the importance of the springs and finding ways to protect them.

Not everyone agrees with Greenhalgh's conclusions, however.

Hugh Thomas, coordinator for the Suwannee River Partnership in the Santa Fe and Lower Suwannee River basins, said he is not an expert on nitrate

contamination, but he knows the nitrate levels fluctuate in the spring depending on the flow of the river and other factors.

"Has agriculture caused an impact. Yes. That's the primary land use. I don't think it's strictly agriculture, however."

Thomas said agricultural practices have improved over the years and the scientific application of fertilizers to farm crops through best management practices has reduced the amount of fertilizer used by farmer. The era of applying 500 pounds per acre is in the past.

"Farmers are implementing these best management practices. They can fertilize their corn in small doses and split the application," Thomas said.

Thomas said an isotopic study would be needed to determine the specific source of the nitrates flowing from Fanning Springs. Isotopes would reveal the chemical signature of the nitrates flowing from the spring and reveal their source, whether it was agriculture, septic tanks or wild animals.

Greenhalgh and Thomas say an isotopic study of the water flowing from Fanning Springs has never been attempted, but they are not sure why.

Thomas noted that the Florida Department of Health studied Manatee Springs and found that

nitrate contamination from the park's campgrounds was causing some of the nitrate pollution in the spring. Nitrate levels in Manatee Springs are also elevated, measuring higher than 95 percent of Florida streams. The nitrate levels at Manatee are 1.9 milligrams per liter, much lower than Fanning Springs.

Manatee Springs has also seen algal blooms. The green slime on the bottom of the spring is also attributed to nitrate contamination.

But Shired Island in Dixie County was at one time described as one of the dirtiest beaches in Florida due to high bacteria counts, Thomas said. However, Dixie County commissioned a scientific study that revealed the bacteria came from wild animals rather than human beings.

Thomas said agriculture shouldn't be identified as the sole source of nitrate contamination in Fanning Springs.

"I do believe agriculture is responsible for some of it; exactly how much I don't know," he said.

Levy County Interim Agricultural Extension Agent Anthony Barbaglia echoed Thomas's conclusion that agriculture is probably the source of some of the nitrates flowing from the spring, but he said it's difficult to say how much.

"I don't think it is all agriculture," he

said.

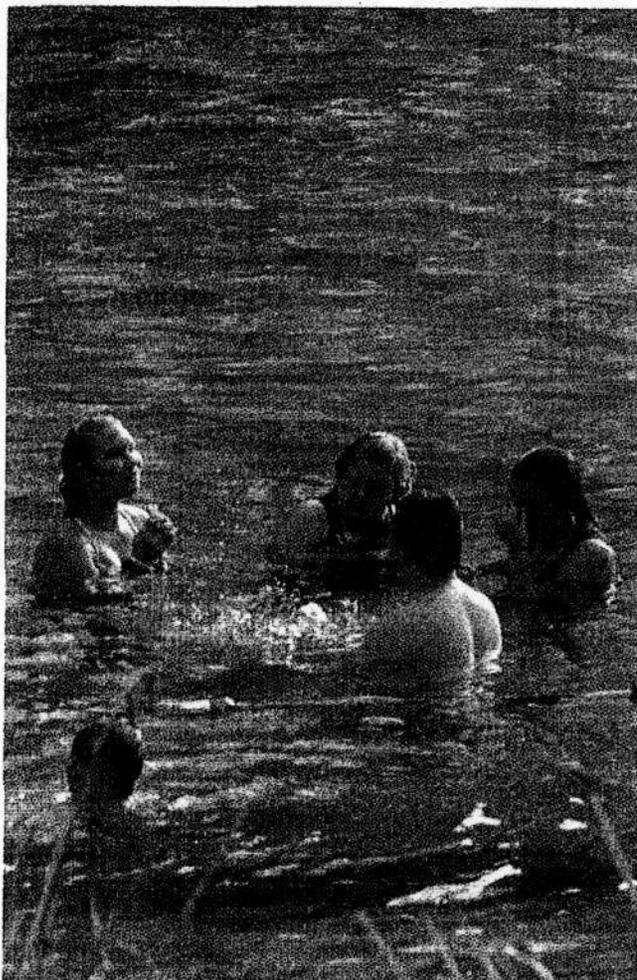
He said the extension service tests for crop response to nitrogen. There are guidelines that say only so much nitrogen should be applied per acre for best results.

Barbaglia doubts agriculture is causing the elevated nitrate levels in Fanning Springs.

"You can't really say where the nitrates are coming from. It could be anything. You can't pinpoint agriculture or dairyman," Barbaglia said.

Greenhalgh said it is possible the estimated 500 septic tanks in Fanning Springs are contributing to elevated nitrate contamination in Fanning Springs, but he also noted Fanning Springs has a population of just 737 people.

"A dairy cow produces the equivalent amount of nitrogen (N) as 23.33 humans on a daily basis," he said an e-mail. "Fanning Spring's population's potential N loading is equal to 32 dairy cows. You can contact the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Dairy Division for total dairy cow numbers in the Fanning Springs spring shed if you wish. As I related to you at the workgroup meeting, nitrate loading in the ground water (using WAM computer model) indicated that fertilizer use in row crop agriculture was the largest single loader within the Fanning spring shed."



Kids enjoy a recent day in the cool water of Fanning Springs. A state geologist says a ton of dissolved nitrate flows from the spring into the Suwannee River.

State geologist: Row crop ag causing high nitrate levels in Fanning Springs

By Terry Witt
Staff Writer

A state scientist says a ton of dissolved nitrates flows daily from Fanning Springs into the Suwannee River, and fertilizer use in row crop agriculture is the primary source of the pollution.

State geologist Tom Greenhalgh of the Florida Geological Survey has been tempted to back a flatbed tractor-trailer loaded with bags of farm fertilizer up to the Fanning Springs spring run to demonstrate the amount of nitrates spewing from the spring.

"This is how much fertilizer flows daily from that spring," Greenhalgh said.

Nitrates are a form of nitrogen used in farm and lawn fertilizers. Greenhalgh says farming is the dominant land use in the spring shed that surrounds Fanning Springs and farmers use nitrogen to fertilize crops. The spring shed is the land area contributing water to the spring.

The spring run at Fanning Springs is an opening in the Florida Aquifer. Water flows through underground limestone caverns, tunnels and cracks toward the spring. An estimated 70 million gallons of water bubbles and flows from the spring daily. Nitrates are dissolved in the water and are invisible to the naked eye.

Water samples taken by state scientists show the nitrate level in Fanning Springs in October of 2009 was 5.4 milligrams per liter, fourth highest

See ***Springs***, Page 2A

Hunting season on horizon on SRWMD lands

LIVE OAK, FL, Aug. 2, 2010 – Hunting will soon begin on nearly 100,000 acres of Suwannee River Water Management District-owned lands. Deer, hog, turkey and small game hunting is available on limited days

from September-March. Hunting on these lands is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

The following is a list of areas available for hunting:

- Big Shoals, eastern

Hamilton County

- Cypress Creek, eastern Hamilton County

- Holton Creek, southern Hamilton County

- Little River, southern Suwannee County

- Troy Springs, northern Lafayette County

- Twin Rivers, eastern Madison County

Mallory Swamp, southern Lafayette County

- Steinhatchee Springs, southern Lafayette, northern Dixie and eastern Taylor counties

- Lower Econfina, western Taylor County

- Middle Aucilla River, eastern Jefferson, western Madison and Taylor counties

- Aucilla, eastern Jefferson and western Taylor counties

- Log Landing, eastern Dixie County

- Devil's Hammock, southern Levy County

- Santa Fe Swamp, eastern Bradford County

Holton Creek is a mobility impaired hunting area. It is closed to the public during hunt dates, except to persons hiking the Florida Trail.

Persons using WMAs are required to have appropriate licenses, permits and stamps.

Additionally, new regulations apply to some areas beginning this season.

For more information contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 386-758-0525 or visit www.myfwc.com. Hunting regulations and maps of WMAs are available at http://www.myfwc.com/RECREATION/Hunt_WMABrochs.htm#ne.

Thursday, Sept. 23, 2010 • Union County Times

SRWMD to adopt 2010-11 budget Sept. 28

The Suwannee River Water Management District's governing board adopted a tentative budget of \$56.5 million and proposed millage rate of 0.4399 at its first budget hearing Sept. 14.

The tentative budget reflects no change in the tax rate from the current fiscal year. This, along with the decreases in property values has actually lowered overall taxes in the district by \$300,000.

Taxes paid to SRWMD go toward funding numerous services

to the public, including protection of rivers and springs, water monitoring programs, water resource development and water supply planning.

The adoption of the final budget and millage rate will take place on Tuesday, Sept. 28, at 5:30 p.m. The public hearing will take place at the district's headquarters located at the corner of U.S. 90 and C.R. 49 in Live Oak.

A governing board workshop will precede the budget hearing at 3 p.m. For more information, call 386-362-1001.

Rainfall Varies Across District

LAZARO ALEMAN
Jefferson Journal
 Senior Staff Writer

It was a mixed bag for the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) in terms of the rainfall that it received during August, with coastal areas getting significant

amounts of rain while inland regions saw below normal precipitation.

All told, according to the district's latest hydrologic conditions report, released on Sept. 8, rainfall across the district in August averaged 9.51 inches, or 127 percent of the dis-

trict's long-term average of 7.49 inches for the month.

But given the range of totals seen across the region during the month, "this statistic may be a poor indicator of rainfall conditions in August," the report notes.

For example, coastal

areas of Dixie and Levy counties had more than 25 inches of surplus, while the upper Santa Fe River Basin showed a deficit of more than 10 inches since September 2009, and the upper Suwannee River

Please See *Rainfall* Page 4A

Rainfall

Cont. From Page 1

Basin was near or below the long-term average, according to the report.

Meanwhile, the 12-month rainfall total was 60.90 inches, giving the district a surplus of 6.22 inches, up 2.7 inches from the 3.52-inch surplus recorded the previous month. The surplus is the difference between the 60.90 inches of rainfall in August and the 12-month historical average of 54.68 inches.

The report shows that Jefferson County received 7.00 inches of rainfall in August, compared with 6.54 inches in August 2009 and its historical August average of 6.46 inches. Jefferson County has received 66.93 inches of rain during the last 12 months.

Madison County, meanwhile, received 7.66 inches of rainfall in August, compared with 8.20 inches last August and its historical August average of 6.13 inches. Madison County has

received 61.99 inches of rain during the last 12 months.

The report indicates that river flows were generally above normal for the month, with the exception of the Suwannee River, which was below normal near Wilcox. Lake levels, meanwhile, remained relatively stable when compared with the previous month's levels, as exemplified by Sneads Smokehouse Lake in Jefferson County. And groundwater levels declined overall.

States the report: "(Groundwater) levels in 74 percent of monitored wells dropped in August, with an average decline of nearly six inches. Wells in coastal areas that received heavy rainfall continued to rise. The highest level in 34 years of record was observed in a Floridan Aquifer well near Gulf Hammock in Levy County. Overall, conditions across the dis-

trict fell slightly below the 50th percentile, based on records beginning in 1978."

The district continues to advise homeowners to limit landscape irrigation to two days per week, based on a year-round water-conservation rule that applies to residential landscaping, public or commercial recreation areas, and public and commercial businesses not regulated by district-issued permits.

The SRWMD compiles the hydrologic conditions report using water resource data collected from radar-derived rainfall estimates, groundwater and surface water levels, and river flows, among other variables.

The SRWMD encompasses all or parts of 15 counties in north-central Florida, including Madison County and the eastern half of Jefferson County.

Lake City Reporter



Tuesday, September 28, 2010

www.lakecityreporter.com

Vol. 136, No. 215 ■ 75 cent

County to receive funds for property taken off tax rolls

\$20K could flow in from Suwannee River's program.

By TONY BRITT
tbritt@lakecityreporter.com

LIVE OAK — Columbia County could receive more than \$20,000 from the Suwannee River Water Management District as part of Payment in Lieu of Taxes program.

The PILT program is where the Water Management District pays a sum of money for lands that have been taken off the tax rolls because they were purchased by the Water Management District.

This year, the Water Management District is set to give 11 counties a total of \$326,314 back for lands owned by the district that have been taken off local tax rolls.

According to Water

"The check is going to be presented to the County Commission on Oct. 7."

Terry Demott
SRWMD Senior land resource coordinator

Management District reports, the PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when District-owned lands are taken off the tax rolls. Since land owned by the District is tax-exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

COUNTY continued on 3A

COUNTY: PILT payment

Continued From Page 1A

Columbia County could receive \$23,183 for this year's PILT payment.

"The check is going to be presented to the County Commission on Oct. 7," said Terry Demott, SRWMD Senior land resource coordinator, explaining why the amount is tentative. "We're not making full payment this time because there is some information we have not received from the tax collectors office yet. I'm waiting on Ronnie Brannon's office to get that to me and we will act accordingly."

Demott said the \$23,183 amount Columbia is set to get is based on the taxes for the three years before the Water Management District bought them and the amount is averaged to determine how much each county will get.

"Each year the Water

Management District and the county calculates the amount of payment in lieu of taxes that are due and then we are required to get that reviewed by the Department of Revenue," Demott said. "With approval from the Department of Revenue, the Water Management District Governing Board approves the payment in lieu of taxes."

The Water Management District has worked with Columbia County on PILT for about 10 years, Demott said.

PILT required the Water Management District to pay taxes on public lands for a 10-year period, but with the recent passage of legislation, counties will now receive PILT funds until their populations reach 150,000 people.

Don Quincey, Jr.: Why we're selling land

By Don Quincey, Jr.
Special to The Sun

Published: Wednesday, September 29, 2010 at 6:01 a.m.

Your Sept 26 editorial, "Those Surplus Lands" concluded with the statement: "The (Suwannee River Water Management) District isn't in the real estate business, it's in the water protection business."

We couldn't agree more.

The SRWMD owns 160,000 acres of fee simple lands and 125,000 acres in conservation easements, all acquired over a span of several decades. Our land acquisition program began with a purchase here, a purchase there, almost always riverfront property.

What started out as a piecemeal approach gradually assumed the form of a real plan: Our Florida Forever Work Plan. It was a giant puzzle, with one governing board after another filling in the important pieces.

Over time, and with increased funding assistance from the state, the district developed one of the premier land acquisition/public lands programs in Florida and perhaps the nation.

We were instrumental in creating the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail and restoring Mallory Swamp. Our land acquisition projects have helped many rural towns and cities alleviate their stormwater and wastewater problems. We've acquired springs in order to protect them. We've opened up our lands for an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities.

But the cost of managing existing public lands has become prohibitive and state funding for acquisition and management has dried up. Therefore, we've identified and propose to sell roughly 1,000 acres, or less than one percent of our fee-simple acres, as surplus lands.

All proceeds from the sale of these lands will be used to purchase property of greater environmental value. Our surplus lands committee meetings where such matters are discussed are open to the public and the press.

For the most part, these surplus properties are of little or no significant water-resource value (uplands, for example). They are parcels that previous governing boards agreed to "bundle" into purchases of other, more resource-valuable tracts when owners were unwilling to divide properties offered for sale.

By divesting the district of lands that no longer provide significant floodplain management or protection for surface waters, wetlands, springs and aquifer recharge, we believe we are engaging in responsible stewardship not only of our precious land and water resources, but also of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

We are, after all, in the business of protecting water resources - not managing real estate holdings with minimal water-resource value.

Don Quincey, Jr. is chair of the Suwannee River Water Management District governing board.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2010

Suwannee to get \$30K from Water Management District

Most counties within the boundaries of the Suwannee River Water Management District will receive a bigger check this year from the District for payment in lieu of taxes (PILT), say district officials.

The PILT program

was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when District-owned lands are taken off the tax rolls. Since land owned by the District is tax-exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when

the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

Suwannee will receive \$30,429.59, more than double last year's pay-

SEE SUWANNEE, PAGE 13A

Suwannee to get \$30K from SRWMD

Continued From Page 1A

ment of \$15,208.

PILT required the District to pay taxes on public lands for a 10-year period. But with the recent passage of legislation counties will now receive PILT funds until their populations reach 150,000.

"This means the majority of our counties will see an increase in PILT revenue this year because taxes will be reinstated for property that had previously fallen off the tax rolls due to the 10-year cap," said District Assistant Executive Director Charlie Houder. "This will result in more revenue to support our small counties."

Collectively, 11 counties within the District will receive a total of \$326,314 in

PILT funding this year in comparison to the \$177,012 they received last year.

The following are totals for each county:

- Bradford: \$15,093.45
- Columbia: \$23,183.09 (tentative)
- Dixie: \$24,196.21
- Gilchrist: \$43,990.32
- Hamilton: \$38,351.28
- Jefferson: \$9,223.41
- Lafayette: \$77,306.21
- Levy: \$25,108.88
- Madison: \$20,464.85
- Suwannee: \$30,429.59
- Taylor: \$18,967.43

District officials will distribute PILT payments to the county commissions from now through the end of October.

SRWMD payment to Taylor County increases 7-fold

The Suwannee River Water Management District presented Taylor County commissioners with its annual payment in lieu of taxes, and thanks to legislation passed this year, the amount increased seven fold compared to last year.

The payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when district-owned lands are taken off the tax rolls. Since land owned by the district is tax-exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the district

purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

PILT required the district to pay taxes on public lands for a 10-year period, but with the recent legislation counties will now receive PILT funds until their populations reach 150,000.

For Taylor County, this meant an increase this year from approximately \$2,600 to \$18,967.

District Governmental

→ Please see page 2

Dixie County to receive \$24,196 from SRWMD

SRWMD

Continued from page 1

Affairs Director Steve Minnis presented the check to commissioners during their meeting held Tuesday, Sept. 21.

"[The new legislation] means the majority of our counties will see an increase in PILT revenue this year because taxes will be reinstated for property that had previously fallen off the tax rolls due to the 10-year cap," said District Assistant Executive Director Charlie Houder.

"This will result in more revenue to support our small counties."

Collectively, 11 counties within the district will receive a total of \$326,314 in PILT funding this year in comparison to the \$177,012 they received last year.

In addition to Taylor's allotment, county totals were: Bradford, \$15,093; Dixie, \$24,196; Gilchrist, \$43,990; Hamilton, \$38,351; Jefferson, \$9,223; Lafayette, \$77,306; Levy, \$25,108; Madison, \$20,464; and Suwannee, \$30,429.

SRWMD Adopts \$56.5 Million

Budget

The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) Governing Board on Sept. 28 adopted a final budget of \$56.5 million and 0.4399 millage rate for the 2010-11 fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

The budget reflects no change in the tax rate from the current fiscal year. Due to decreased property values, the District has actually lowered taxes by about \$300,000 District-wide by maintaining the same millage rate.

Under a 0.4399 rate, property owners with a taxable value of \$100,000 would pay \$43.99 in property taxes to the District.

"The District has worked hard to develop a budget and work plan that addresses current water resource issues within existing available funding levels," said District Executive Director David Still. "We will continue to seek ways to be conservative without affecting

the commitment to meet the needs of the District's resources and people."

Property taxes paid to the District fund numerous services to the public. This year's budget and work plan include the following:

The completion of a water supply assessment that will assess water availability in order to develop a water supply plan for the Upper Santa Fe River Basin.

The establishment and implementation of minimum flows and levels (MFLs) on our rivers and spring systems to help protect our water resources.

The Suwannee River Partnership to provide cost-share funding to local farmers for implementing best management practices to help protect water resources.

The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP) to promote protection of rivers, springs and groundwater in the Ichetucknee Springshed through education and outreach, research and monitoring, and best management practices.

The Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps and Risk MAP programs to evaluate flood risks, update digital flood maps, and establish flood elevations. The information will provide the public better access and data to view which properties are located in a flood zone.

Land acquisition and

management program, which allows the District to purchase property for the purpose of flood control, water quality protection, and natural resource conservation. Lands are also open to the public for recreational use.

Hydrologic, groundwater, and surface water monitoring network to monitor water levels and quality and to track rainfall and flooding conditions. The figures are available to the public through the District's website.

Efforts to improve, update, and enhance the District's commitment to Information Technology in the form of computing facilities, software and data management tools, Geographic Information System, and Internet services to the public.

SRWMD To Distribute PILT Checks To Counties

Most counties within the boundaries of the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) will receive a bigger check this year from the District for payment in lieu of taxes (PILT).

The PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when District-owned lands are taken off the tax rolls. Since land owned by the District is tax-exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

PILT required the District to pay taxes on public lands for a 10-year period. But with the recent passage of legislation counties will now receive PILT funds until their populations reach 150,000.

"This means the majority of our counties will see an increase in PILT revenue this year because taxes will be reinstated for property that had previously fallen off the tax rolls due to the 10-year cap," said District Assistant Executive Director Charlie Houder. "This will result in more revenue to support our small counties."

Collectively, 11 counties within the District will receive a total of \$326,314 in PILT funding this year in comparison to the \$177,012 they received last year.

The following are totals for each county: Bradford: \$15,093.45, Columbia: \$23,183.09 (tentative), Dixie: \$24,196.21, Gilchrist: \$43,990.32, Hamilton: \$38,351.28, Jefferson: \$9,223.41, Lafayette: \$77,306.21, Levy: \$25,108.88, Madison: \$20,464.85, Suwannee: \$30,429.59 and Taylor: \$18,967.43.

District officials will distribute PILT payments to the county commissions from now through the end of October.

Hamilton to get \$38K from Water Management District

Continued From Page 1A

Most counties within the boundaries of the Suwannee River Water Management District will receive a bigger check this year from the District for payment in lieu of taxes (PILT), say district officials.

The PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when District-owned lands are taken off the tax rolls. Since land owned by the District is tax exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

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- Suwannee: \$30,429.59
- Taylor: \$18,967.43

District officials will distribute PILT payments to the county commissions from now through the end of October.

SEE HAMILTON, PAGE 2A

SRWMD adopts \$56.5 million budget

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) Governing Board on Sept. 28 adopted a final budget of \$56.5 million and 0.4399 millage rate for the 2010-11 fiscal year that begins Friday.

The budget reflects no change in the tax rate from the current fiscal year. Due to decreased property values, the District has actually lowered taxes by about \$300,000 District-wide by maintaining the same millage rate.

Under a 0.4399 rate, property owners with a taxable value of \$100,000 would pay \$43.99 in property taxes to the District.

"The District has worked hard to develop a budget and work plan that addresses current water resource issues within existing available funding levels," said District Executive Director David Still. "We will continue to seek ways to be conservative without affecting the commitment to meet the needs

SEE SRWMD, PAGE 2A

Continued From Page 1A

of the District's resources and people."

Property taxes paid to the District fund numerous services to the public. This year's budget and work plan include the following:

- The completion of a water supply assessment that will assess water availability in order to develop a water supply plan for the Upper Santa Fe River Basin.

- The establishment and implementation of minimum flows and levels (MFLs) on our rivers and spring systems to help protect our water resources.

- The Suwannee River Partnership to provide cost-share funding to local farmers for implementing best management practices to help protect water resources.

- The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP) to promote protection of rivers, springs and groundwater in the Ichetucknee Springshed through education and outreach, research and monitoring, and best management practices.

- The Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps and Risk MAP programs to evaluate flood risks, update digital flood maps, and establish flood elevations. The information will provide the public better access and data to view which properties are located in a flood zone.

- Land acquisition and management program, which allows the District to purchase property for the purpose of flood control, water quality protection, and natural resource conservation. Lands are also open to the public for recreational use.

- Hydrologic, groundwater, and surface water monitoring network to monitor water levels and quality and to track rainfall and flooding conditions. The figures are available to the public through the District's website.

- Efforts to improve, update, and enhance the District's commitment to Information Technology in the form of computing facilities, software and data management tools, Geographic Information System, and Internet services to the public.

Lake City Reporter



Thursday, September 30, 2010

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SRWMD sets budget at \$56.5 million

District adopts millage for fiscal year 2010-2011.

By LEANNE TYO
ltyo@lakecityreporter.com

The Suwannee River Water Management District has sealed a budget of \$56.5 million and an unchanged millage rate for the upcoming

fiscal year.

The district's governing board adopted the budget and a millage rate of 0.4399 mills Tuesday for the 2010 to 2011 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

Because of decreased property values, the district has lowered taxes about \$300,000 districtwide by keeping the same millage rate.

"Due to the hard economic times ... the district has chosen not to place extra burden on the taxpayer."

Melanie Robert
Director of mission support
SRWMD

Property owners with a taxable value of \$100,000 would pay \$43.99 in prop-

erty taxes to the district under the adopted millage.
Melanie Robert,

SRWMD director of mission support, said that the tax rate has remained the same since fiscal year 2008. There is no change in the millage from the current fiscal year.

"Due to the hard economic times and the fact that many of the district's constituents are receiving tax increases in other areas, the district has chosen not

to place extra burden on the taxpayer," she said.

The upcoming fiscal year's budget will fund numerous services to the public, such as completing a water supply assessment to develop a plan for the Upper Santa Fe River Basin and promoting protection of natural resources with the

SRWMD continued on 3A

SRWMD: Evaluating water supply

Continued From Page 1A

Ichetucknee Partnership.

Robert said that, among the services with budget allotments, the most important is evaluating the district's water supply and establishing the Minimum Flows and Levels to protect area water resources.

Florida statutes mandate the district to establish and implement MFLs on area

rivers, springs and lakes, Robert said.

"This actually sets a level of flow that our water bodies cannot fall under without experiencing harm," she said.

Although the district is receiving less in ad valorem taxes and state funding has been withdrawn, it will provide the same public

services on less funding, Robert said.

"The district will continue to evaluate our efforts and projects in order to be as efficient as possible with taxpayer dollars," she said, "as well as provide the public with natural resources and protection of those natural resources for the future."

R.O. Ranch to hold trail riding events on Pioneer Day

In conjunction with Pioneer Day in Mayo, the R. O. Ranch Equestrian Park will host numerous trail riding events, along with camping, live music, and great food.

The activities will kick off with the Ranch's Boot to Saddle Trail Ride that begins Friday, Oct. 8 at 8 a.m. Participants will begin their journey at the ranch, located on CR 357 in Cooks Hammock, and travel down an 18 mile trail to the town of Mayo. Riders will stop at the halfway point for lunch (you provide). Water will be supplied for horses.

Trailers will be provided for those who wish to

be taken back to the ranch at the halfway point.

A poker run will take place during the trail ride for an entry fee of \$5. Cash prizes will be awarded at the ranch that evening.

The ranch will host several trail riding events on Saturday, Oct. 9. Entry fees apply to some events. Live music will begin at 6 p.m. on Oct. 8-9. A food vendor will be on site.

On Oct. 10 participants may join the ranch in dedicating an old-style chapel building at 3 p.m. An ice cream social will follow.

Primitive camping (no stalls) will be available at the ranch from Thursday, Oct. 7-Sunday Oct. 10.

For more information contact Pennie Flickinger at 386-362-1001.

Lafayette to get \$77K from Water Management District

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ated by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when District-owned lands are taken off the tax rolls. Since land owned by the District is tax-exempt, PILT

SEE LAFAYETTE, PAGE 10A

Lafayette to get \$77K

Continued From Page 1A

funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

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"This means the majority of our counties will see an increase in PILT revenue this year because taxes will be reinstated for property that had previously fallen off the tax rolls due to the 10-year cap," said District Assistant Executive Director Charlie Houser. "This will result in more revenue to support our small counties."

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