

Purchase of land could help local water environment

BY GEORGE ANDREASSI

george.andreassi@scripps.com

STUART — A land deal involving 2,266 acres near Lake Okeechobee that will eventually help clean up polluted runoff flowing into the St. Lucie River was endorsed Tuesday by the Martin County Commission.

The Lake Point Project will also reduce the amount of fresh water discharged from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie River, county records show.

In addition, the project will send fresh water down the L-8 Canal and could help reduce saltwater intrusion in the Loxahatchee River, county officials said.

The owners will give the 2,266 acres to the South Florida Water Management District in chunks over the next two decades in exchange for the right to conduct a rock mining operation on a 1,000-acre tract for 20 years, county records show.

The owners had previously planned to

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build 44 ranchettes on the 1,000-acre tract. The entire 2,266-acre property had an appraised value of \$53.5 million in December 2006.

The end result will be a complex of reservoirs and stormwater treatment areas that will be able to pump water in and out of Lake Okeechobee as

well as the Okeechobee Waterway, which leads to the St. Lucie River.

“It is a fabulous project,” said Commission Chairwoman Susan Valliere. “It beats 20-acre ranchettes any day in my opinion.”

Commissioner Patrick Hayes, who was active in water management issues prior to his election in 2008, said the project would help longstanding efforts clean up the St. Lucie River.

“This project, compared to planning a bunch of houses out there, is an extraordinary opportunity,” Hayes said.

The stormwater treatment areas are expected to remove 2.6 to 7.7 metric tons of phosphorous from the C-44 Basin, said county Water Quality Chief Gary Roderick.

The property owners will start turning over the stormwater treatment areas to the water management district within three years of receiving the permits for the mining operation, county records show.

The reservoirs created after the completion of the mining operation will be given to the water management district within 20 years.

As part of the deal, the water management district will give Martin County a 150-acre recreation area overlooking the Okeechobee Waterway.

LAKE POINT RESERVOIR AND STORMWATER TREATMENT AREA PLAN

620 acres – Stormwater management reservoir

300 acres: Stormwater management reservoir

225 acres: Stormwater treatment area, Cell 1

240 acres: Stormwater treatment area, Cell 2

135 acres: Stormwater treatment area, Cell 3

150 acres: County recreation area

114 acres: Created wetlands

To be determined: Preserved wetlands