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Loxahatchee River to get \$5 million in state, local money

The money will help pay for projects that stretch from the Gardens to Jupiter.

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For the third year, state money has flowed to the Loxahatchee River to help with efforts to recover from decades of being drained and diverted to feed the thirst of people and crops.

The state has awarded a \$2.5 million grant that will be matched by local governments for \$5 million worth of projects that stretch from the Loxahatchee Slough in western Palm Beach Gardens to Jones Creek in Jupiter.

Sen. Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie, who also is the senate appropriations chairman, helped lead the local delegation's efforts to land the grant.

"This is our third year, our third year, of what will be, I hope, a ded-

icated funding source," Pruitt said.

Pruitt said the credit for convincing the state to continue to spend money on the Loxahatchee River goes to a group that formed three years ago, the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative.

"My job is fairly easy when you have advocates like that; they have just done a phenomenal job with the grass-roots efforts," Pruitt said.

The organization is a coalition of the many governments, agencies and groups with an interest in the river such as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Friends of the Loxahatchee River, Jupiter Inlet District, Loxahatchee River Environmental Control District, Martin County, Palm Beach County, South Florida Water Management District, South Indian River Water Control District, Jupiter and Tequesta.

Initiative Chairman David Brown, who also is Jupiter's water utilities director, said the coalition was formed three years ago out of

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Projects include improving Jupiter Farms' water quality

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frustration.

"I used to go to all the meetings where local projects were talked about and talked about, but very few projects got funded," Brown said.

The group selects and sets priorities among local projects and requires the local entity nominating its project to match 50 percent of the cost. Then, the coalition applies for grants and gets legislative backing.

In the three years since the coalition started, this process has spurred \$12 million worth of work, Brown said.

"Our only purpose is to

provide funding to kick-start local projects," Brown said.

Pruitt said such a coordinated local effort makes it easier to land grants.

"It works much better than the command and control regulatory style we had in the past. They're the best stewards for our tax dollars in getting these projects done," Pruitt said.

The projects have included ongoing restoration of the Loxahatchee Slough, the 15,000-acre head waters of the Loxahatchee River and Jupiter's muck-filled Jones Creek; and improving water quality in Jupiter Farms and Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Martin

County. Several of those multiphase projects will continue with the new grant.

Also, the grant will help pay for work on Martin County's Kitching Creek, a major tributary to the twisting, cypress-canopied northwest fork of the Loxahatchee River, which became the first river in the state to be designated by the federal government as "wild and scenic."

By cleaning up the water and removing ditches in Kitching Creek, "cleaner water and greater quantity of water will make it into the northwest fork," Brown said.

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