

Officials vow aid for Loxahatchee

By Bob Markey II
Staff writer

Northern Palm Beach and southern Martin County government entities will intensify their efforts this fall to ensure legislative funding to restore the Loxahatchee River.

State Sen. Ken Pruitt, R-Dist. 27, on Thursday, criticized Gov. Jeb Bush for vetoing \$1 million in funding the Legislature approved for Loxahatchee River restoration.

"I cannot for the life of me tell you why it was vetoed," he told the Tequesta Village Council.

"We felt we had everything covered, with DEP and South Florida Water Management District backing it," said Cheryl McKee of the DEP, a member of the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative, during a meeting Wednesday of the Loxahatchee River Watershed group. "Right now, everybody's kind of in shock."

The Loxahatchee funding was among \$289 million worth of projects Bush considered regional "turkeys."

The Loxahatchee River Initiative, made up of state and local governments, had originally sought \$1.4 million to fund eight projects geared to improve the condition of water and its flow into the river.

The wish-list included four stormwater treatment projects: at Jones Creek and Cypress Creek Drive in Jupiter; a similar project on the Tequesta peninsula; and the addition of canal storage capacity to promote natural water treatment in Jupiter Farms.

Also planned was the addition of water and sewer and camping facilities at the scout camps within Jonathan Dickenson State Park, as well as the filling of Hell's Canal and recreation of natural water flow: a project to eliminate an old agricultural canal and restore natural water flow to Kitchen Creek in southern Martin County, as well as construction of wildlife corridors under Bridge Road; and a similar project at River Bend Park in Jupiter.

Jupiter Utilities Director David Brown, who spearheaded the effort, is trying to obtain DEP grants to fund the stormwater projects, whose efforts would allow cleaner water to flow into the river.

Specific reasons for the veto remain unclear, but environmental officials on Wednesday conducted a verbal post-mortem on the setback.

McKee said local officials were told by a Bush advisor that the Loxahatchee wasn't on the South Florida Water Man-



ROGER BUCKWALTER/ Staff Photographer

State Sen. Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie, Thursday asked the Tequesta Village Council for support when the Legislature seeks approval from Gov. Jeb Bush for more than \$4 million in funding to restore the Loxahatchee River. Bush vetoed \$1 million appropriation for the river last month.

agement District's priority list — despite its federal "wild and scenic" status.

She and other officials suggested that because various regional water quality improvement plans by do not carry the "Loxahatchee" name, the river is not perceived by Bush advi-

sors as vital, as are better known waterways.

"I keep seeing the (Loxahatchee) River as a sandwich between the St. Lucie, the (Lake Worth) Lagoon and the Everglades," McKee said. "If the (Loxahatchee) name were used, it would get more recognition."