

River partnership helps Loxahatchee

Over the years a number of groups and committees have played important roles in planning for, monitoring, performing research on and regulating activities related to the Loxahatchee River.

In May 2000 the need for one more group was identified. The Town of Jupiter recognized the success of a group called the St. Lucie River Issues Team which had been developed to identify, prioritize and arrange funding for projects aimed at improving the condition of the St. Lucie River. The Town and the Loxahatchee River Environmental Control District (ENCON) worked together to establish a group of stakeholders, including municipal water managers, regulatory agency representatives, Jonathan Dickinson State Park managers and concerned citizens to serve a similar purpose for the Loxahatchee River Watershed — the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative.

The objective of the group was clear; obtain funding for the many capital improvement projects needed for the watershed. The group was dedicated to staying focused on this mission. During its first year of existence, the group identified and prioritized approximately \$5 million worth of projects ranging from hydrologic restoration to environmental enhancement.

Proposing a 50 percent local cost match, the group set sights on a legislative line item to fund the suite of projects. With support from local legislators Ken Pruitt, Joe Negron and Jeff Atwater, the Initiative was successful in obtaining, a \$2.5 million line item in the state's budget as of July 2002. The funds were



ROBERT B. TAYLOR JR.

Community Platform

sufficient, with local matches, to fund the following projects:

- Jones Creek Restoration, Phase I
- Loxahatchee Slough Restoration, Phase II
- Jupiter Farms Water Quality Improvements
- Jonathan Dickinson State Park Water Quality Improvements

The Initiative has met at least quarterly since, identifying and prioritizing additional projects. In September 2003, the group was successful in having the South Florida Water Management District appropriate \$1 million in its budget to support the group's projects.

For the upcoming state budget process, the Initiative has identified another \$11.8 million worth of projects, and will be requesting appropriation of \$5.9 million (to be matched by \$5.9 million in local funds) to support 12 additional projects.

For 2004, the Initiative has also put an emphasis on improving public awareness regarding its mission, and broadening of its search for grant and cost-sharing opportunities in support of protecting our river.

If you are interested in further information about the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative, please call Kristen Thomson at 561-741-2363.

Robert B. Taylor Jr. is senior associate with Hazen and Sawyer, P.C., Environmental Engineers and Scientists.