

# BIOGRAPHIES & Contact Information

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## ROLE OF THE LAKE

### *Thomas E. Lodge, Ph.D., CEP*

Consulting Ecologist

Thomas E. Lodge Ecological Advisors, Inc.

2420 Indian Mound Trail

Coral Gables, FL 33134

Dr. Lodge is a self-employed ecologist with over 35 years of consulting experience. He grew up near Cleveland, Ohio, where he worked part-time from 1959 to 1966 for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History as the curator of fishes and later as an instructor in the museum's science program. He graduated with Departmental Honors in Zoology from Ohio Wesleyan University (1966), and completed his Ph.D. in Biology at the University of Miami (1974) where his dissertation involved the physiological ecology of Everglades' fishes.

Most of Dr. Lodge's work has been with environmental consulting firms. With a background emphasizing ichthyology and limnology, he has become a recognized ecologist specializing in wetlands and their restoration. He has conducted projects pertaining to freshwater and estuarine water quality; terrestrial, wetland, aquatic, and shallow marine environments, including considerations for rare, threatened, and endangered species, mitigation, and conditions such as noise and toxic contaminants. The primary applications of his work have been in federal, state, and local wetland permitting; Florida Developments of Regional Impact; and NEPA documents. He has considerable experience as an expert witness and is a Certified Environmental Professional (CEP) under the National Association of Environmental Professionals.

He is author of *The Everglades Handbook: Understanding the Ecosystem*, now in its second edition (2005), which contains a chapter on Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades headwaters. As was the first edition, the second edition is widely used as a college text and as a guide for lay people to understand the Everglades and its restoration. With a strong interest in wildlife photography, he is a regularly invited speaker on the Everglades.

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STATE OF THE LAKE

***Dr. Susan Gray***

South Florida Water Management District  
PO Box 24680  
West Palm Beach, FL 33416

Dr. Susan Gray is an aquatic biologist with the South Florida Water Management District with over 25 years of professional experience. She is currently the Deputy Director of the Watershed Management Department, and is the Program Manager for the Lake Okeechobee Restoration Program. In this capacity, Dr. Gray oversees the areas that include the Upper Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee and the coastal estuaries. Dr. Gray has been with the SFWMD since 1992, and prior to coming to the District, she worked for an environmental consulting firm and for the Department of Environmental Protection. Dr. Gray received her B.A, and M.A in Biology from San Francisco State University, and her Ph.D. in Biological Science from Florida State University



DISCUSSANTS: Morning Session

***Clif Betts, Jr.***

Okeechobee County Commissioner  
Chairman, County Coalition for the Responsible Management of Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries, and Lake Worth Lagoon (also known as 10-County Coalition)  
5995 NE 120th St.  
Okeechobee, FL 34972

Clif Betts, Jr., a local elected official since 1972, was raised in Okeechobee, and serves as Chair of the Okeechobee Board of County Commission, Chair of the Tourist Development Council, Chair of the 10 County Coalition for Lake Okeechobee and Chair of Work Force Development Executive Board for the Treasure Coast.

He enjoys all water sports, fishing, skiing, etc. He is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and is concerned with, “keeping our lake viable for my grandkids so they can enjoy the quality of life I’ve been afforded.



***Charles H. Bronson***

Florida Agriculture Commissioner  
Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services  
PL 10 The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Charles H. Bronson, a fifth-generation Floridian, serves as Florida’s 10<sup>th</sup> Agriculture Commissioner. Managing the largest state Department of Agriculture in the country with more than 3,700 employees, Bronson’s priorities include overseeing the state’s vast agriculture industry and helping promote its products, safeguarding the state’s food supply, protecting consumers from unfair and deceptive trade practices, and managing about one million acres of state forests.

Initially appointed to the position in May 2001 to fill the unexpired term of the outgoing Commissioner, Bronson was elected to the post in a statewide election in November 2002, and re-elected in November 2006. In addition to heading Florida’s Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bronson serves on the Florida Cabinet - a body that includes Florida’s three statewide elected officials, as well as the Governor, and oversees state land-buying programs, clemency issues and directs the operations of several state agencies. Bronson is a former member of the Governor’s Council on Efficient Government and a past President of the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

Born into a ranching family in Kissimmee in 1949, Bronson comes from a family that traces its long agricultural roots to 1635 as each generation of the family has been in farming since that date. The Commissioner attended Osceola County public schools and received a Bachelor of Science degree in agricultural education, as well as animal and meat sciences, from the University of Georgia in 1972. He worked in the fertilizer, chemical and sod business and ultimately managed the family’s cattle business in Central Florida. A certified law enforcement officer, Bronson served as a reserve deputy in both Miami-Dade and Brevard counties. He was elected to the Florida Senate in 1994, representing a district that encompassed both Brevard and Osceola counties, and reelected in 1998. He served as chairman of both counties’ legislative delegations, and chairman of the Florida Senate’s Agriculture and Consumer Services Committee and its Natural Resources Committee.

He has received numerous honors and awards including an FFA Honorary National Degree for outstanding personal commitment, a Nature Conservancy Legislative Leadership Appreciation Award, a Florida Farm Bureau Legislative Award, and both Florida Sheriff’s and Florida Police Chief Association’s Legislative Awards.

Bronson resides in Tallahassee with his wife, Regina, and daughters Michelle and Melanie.



***Dr. Paul Gray***

Okeechobee Science Coordinator, Audubon of Florida  
Post Office Box 707  
Lorida, FL 33857

Dr. Paul Gray is the Science Coordinator of Audubon of Florida’s Lake Okeechobee Watershed Program. Originally from Missouri, his educational background includes a Bachelors degree from the University of Missouri and a Masters degree from Texas Tech University working on wetland ecology. Paul first came to Florida in 1988 to start his Doctorate from the University of Florida, studying Florida’s Mottled Duck on regional ranches, dairies, and on Okeechobee itself. After completing his degree, he worked three years as supervisor of the Florida Fresh Water Fish and Game Commission’s South Florida Waterfowl Field Station in Okeechobee.

Paul started with Audubon in 1995 managing Audubon’s Kissimmee Prairie, and Lake Okeechobee, Sanctuaries. Prairie work included prescribed burns, exotic plant control, security patrols and various restoration projects. Paul even got an Environmental Resource Permit for the Prairie Sanctuary, which was an education in itself. The Prairie Sanctuary now is part of the State Preserve and Paul focuses on Okeechobee and its sanctuaries, which were established in 1938 and have been maintained by full-time Audubon staff since.

The Audubon Society is more than 100 years old and its mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biological diversity. Paul’s role is to work with agency technical teams on the various restoration efforts around the Lake, and to work with Audubon policy staff to make scientifically-sound and solution oriented recommendations on restoration options for the system. Audubon’s 2007 Lake Okeechobee report is an example of this blend of science and policy that helped lead to a major re-assessment of Okeechobee’s restoration needs.

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***Colonel Paul L. Grosskruger***

District Engineer  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
701 San Marco Blvd.  
Jacksonville, FL 32207-8175

Colonel Paul L. Grosskruger assumed command of the Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District in July 2006. Born and raised in eastern Iowa, COL Grosskruger was commissioned into the Corps of Engineers upon graduation from the United States Military Academy in 1983.

COL Grosskruger is a graduate of the U.S. Army Engineer Basic and Advance Courses, the Combined Arms and Services Staff School, and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering mechanics



From 1993-2002, Ken served as the Director of the FWC Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) in St. Petersburg, Florida. As Director, he was responsible for conducting the applied scientific monitoring and assessment of Florida's marine resources. He also served as the FWC and state's chief scientific liaison to the Florida legislature, other state agencies, and federal government on marine resource scientific issues and marine resource management issues. He also served as the interim director of the FWC Division of Marine Fisheries from August 2000 to June 2001 and acted as the state's fisheries manager directing the planning, coordination, administration of the affairs of the Division of Marine Fisheries



***Mary Ann Martin***

Roland & Mary Ann Martin's Marina  
920 E. Del Monte Ave.  
Clewiston, FL 33440

Mary Ann Martin is owner and operator of Roland Martin's Marina and Resort in Clewiston, specializing in guided Lake Okeechobee Fishing excursions since 1981 for some of the best largemouth bass, blue gill and speck fishing in the world. An avid angler and Clewiston resident for 25 years, Ms. Martin brings a business and recreation perspective to many Lake Okeechobee civic, business and government advisory boards. She is an active board member of the Lake Okeechobee Tourist Development Council and member of the Clewiston Chamber of Commerce. She also serves as a member of the South Florida Water Management District Water Resources Advisory Commission Lake Okeechobee Committee, and serves as a member of International Game and Fish Association Advisory Board.



***Thomas G. Pelham, AICP***

Department of Community Affairs  
2555 Shumard Oak Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100

Tom Pelham was appointed Secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs by Governor Charlie Crist on January 8, 2007. Working with Governor Crist and other state and local leaders, Secretary Pelham leads the Department's efforts to address and manage growth and development issues affecting Florida's cities, counties, and neighborhoods. As the state land planning agency, the Department's mission includes local comprehensive planning, growth management, and community development and revitalization.

Mr. Pelham is serving the people of Florida for the second time as Department of Community Affairs Secretary. Previously, he served as Secretary in the administration of

Governor Bob Martinez from 1987 to 1991. During that time, he played a central role in the initial implementation of the 1985 Growth Management Act. For his service as Secretary, Mr. Pelham received awards and recognitions from numerous organizations, including the Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association and 1000 Friends of Florida, and in 1990 was named the Florida Audubon Society's Conservationist of the Year.

Mr. Pelham is an attorney and certified planner. He has more than thirty years of experience in working with Florida's planning, growth management, and environmental programs in a variety of capacities, including in private practice and as a Tallahassee-Leon County planning commissioner, teacher, and writer. Having worked with many local governments, developers, landowners, and citizen groups, Mr. Pelham brings a balanced perspective to the Department.

A member of the Florida Bar and the American Institute of Certified Planners, Tom Pelham has been a recognized leader in both the legal and planning professions. He is a past chair of the Florida Bar's Environmental and Land Use Law Section and the City, County, and Local Government Law Section, and a past member of the Executive Council of the American Bar Association Section on State and Local Government Law. In 2001, he received the Florida Bar's Bill Sadowski Award for Outstanding Public Service in Environmental and Land Use Law.

Mr. Pelham is also a past President of the Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association (FAPA) and was a member of FAPA's Executive Board for ten years. He is the recipient of the FAPA President's Award for Outstanding Service to the Chapter and the President's Award for Outstanding Service to the Planning Profession.

Tom Pelham received a Bachelor's degree in Government from Florida State University and a Master's degree in Political Science from Duke University. He received his law degree from Florida State University before earning a Master of Law degree from Harvard Law School.



***Dr. Beverly Robinson***

Provost, Belle Glade Campus  
Palm Beach Community College  
1977 College Dr.  
Belle Glade, FL 33430

Beverly J. Robinson is the Provost at the Belle Glade Campus of Palm Beach Community College where she is responsible for the Western Region of Palm Beach County. She has overall responsibility for the daily operation of the Belle Glade Campus which houses a 466 seat performing arts theatre and offers course at West Technical Education Center and several off campus sites. She was formerly the Associate Vice President for Educational Centers and Community Development at Central Florida Community College in Ocala, Florida where she had administrative oversight of the Hampton Community Outreach and Preventive Health Center and the University Center.



From 1994 to 2003, COL Salt was the Executive Director of the Task Force. The Task Force consists of Assistant Secretary level representatives of seven federal departments, five state and local government representatives, and the Chairmen of the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes. COL Salt's primary duties included coordinating Everglades restoration policy among the seven federal departments, synchronizing restoration efforts among federal, state, tribal, and local government programs, advising field agencies on emerging ecosystem management policy, and developing interagency budget documents.

COL Salt graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army in June 1966. He is a graduate of the Army's Airborne and Ranger Schools, the Army Command and General Staff College, and the National War College. He received a Master of Science degree in physics from the University of Colorado in 1972. He retired from the Army on July 1, 1996 and continued as Executive Director of the Task Force and subsequently as Director Everglades Restoration Initiatives as a civil servant with the Department of the Interior.

In his last assignment in the Army, COL Salt served as District Engineer of the Corps of Engineers' Jacksonville District. His Army career included a variety of command and staff assignments in the United States, Germany and Vietnam. He served as deputy commander of the Corps of Engineers' Walla Walla District and as commander of the 87<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. In Washington, D.C., he was assigned to the Pentagon in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans on the Army Staff, and led the strategic planning initiative on Nation Assistance for the Chief of Engineers.

He is married to the former Heather Ann Miller. They have four children; Patrick, John, Charles, and James.

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***Secretary Michael W. Sole***

Department of Environmental Protection  
3900 Commonwealth Blvd.  
M.S. 10  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

On December 21, 2006, Governor Charlie Crist named Michael W. Sole as Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. As Secretary, Mr. Sole oversees Florida's environmental regulatory and law enforcement programs, the acquisition, conservation and management of public lands, including Florida's award-winning state parks, and the development and regulation of Florida's water resources through the State's five water management districts.

Recently, Governor Crist appointed Secretary Sole as Chairman of the 21-member Florida Governor's Action Team on Energy and Climate Change. Under the leadership of Secretary Sole, the Action Team submitted the Phase One report on November 1, 2007. The report includes 35 findings and 30 recommendations regarding Florida's energy policy and incorporating greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies into Florida's energy future.

Secretary Sole has served the Department since 1991, most recently as Deputy Secretary for Regulatory Programs and Energy where he spearheaded the 2006 Florida Energy Act -- the four-year, \$100 million plan to diversify the state's fuel supply and promote energy conservation and efficiency.

Prior to his appointment as deputy secretary, Secretary Sole served as the Department's chief of staff and also as the director of the Division of Waste Management. As Director, Mr. Sole was responsible for implementing state and federal laws relating to solid and hazardous waste management, storage tank regulation and the cleanup of contaminated sites. A long time advocate for Florida's environment, Secretary Sole began his career in environmental protection as a biological scientist for the Florida Department of Natural Resources. During his sixteen years as an environmental manager he has undertaken responsibilities ranging from marine turtle protection and invasive plant management to beach preservation, wetland protection and petroleum cleanup.

Secretary Sole was a Captain in the United States Marine Corps, serving our nation during the Gulf War. He received his Bachelors of Science degree in Marine Biology from the Florida Institute of Technology.

Secretary Sole, wife Jeannie and daughter Samantha are all native Floridians and enjoy scuba diving and visiting any one of Florida's more than 150 state parks during family outings and vacations.



***Malcolm S. "Bubba" Wade, Jr.***

Senior Vice President of Sugar Operations  
U.S. Sugar Corporation  
111 Ponce de Leon Ave.  
Clewiston, FL 33440

Malcolm Wade is Senior Vice President of Sugar Operations for U.S. Sugar Corporation. He was appointed to the Board of the South Florida Water Management District in March 2005, serving to March 2009. He also serves as Co-Chairman of the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) and is a member of the Land Resources Committee at the District.

A graduate of Florida State University, Wade has also served on the Governor's Commission on the Everglades (appointed by Gov. Bush); Governor's Commission on Sustainable South Florida (appointed by Gov. Chiles); Lower East Coast Water Supply Planning Committee, SFWMD; Budget Review Commission, SFWMD; Caloosahatchee

Water Management Advisory Committee; Everglades Technical Mediation Group, Technical Mediated Plan for Everglades Restoration; and as Director of the Everglades Agricultural Area Environmental Protection District.

His professional and business affiliations include: Member, American Institute of Certified Public Accountants; Member, Florida Institute of Certified Public Accountants; Member, Institute of Internal Auditors; Director, Florida Sugar Cane League; Director, United Sugar Corporation; and Director, Olde Cypress Community Bank.



***Carol Ann Wehle***

Executive Director  
South Florida Water Management District  
Post Office Box 24680  
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

Carol Ann Wehle was unanimously named Executive Director by the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board effective June 1, 2005. A frequent keynote speaker and expert panelist on Florida water law and policies, she is the first woman to hold the CEO position at any of the state’s five water management districts. She oversees a staff of 1,771 and a budget of \$1.1 billion. The District mission is to balance and improve water quality, flood control, water supply, and natural systems for a 16-county area – including restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem.

A civil engineer, Ms. Wehle initially joined the SFWMD’s west coast operations in 2001, following nine years of service with the St. Johns River District. Her public service experience also includes four years as a Brevard County Commissioner and five years on the Sebastian Inlet Tax District Commission. Ms. Wehle previously worked at Kennedy Space Center as well as for private-sector firms.

Ms. Wehle is a "Leadership Brevard" graduate, and has served on numerous appointed and elected civic boards. She is active in the American Water Resources Association and other professional organizations. She received her bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



***Frank “Wes” Williamson, III***

Williamson Cattle Company  
P.O. Box 248  
Okeechobee, FL 34973

More than a half century ago, Frank Williamson Sr. founded the Williamson Cattle Company, and today the business is still a family operation. Frank “Sonny” Williamson Jr. and his son, Frank “Wes” Williamson III, run the 9,000-acre ranch and citrus

operation in Okeechobee. Wes is the former president of the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Association and is a frequent guest lecturer at the annual University of Florida Beef Short Course. He also chairs the steering committee responsible for directing rulemaking efforts for the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan.

The Williamsons' business decisions have always been made with an eye toward environmental concerns. On their ranch, cattle have access to more than 9,000 acres, but only about 6,000 of those acres are grazable. Most of the hammocks, pine forests, and swamps on the property have been left in their natural state to assure the aesthetic value of the property and promote the abundance of wildlife. With deer, turkey, and otters viewable in their natural settings, the decision to retain their habitat was an easy one. Furthermore, some improvements made in pasturing and foraging have not only increased the land's capacity for cattle, but its capacity for wildlife as well.

Growing citrus introduces other complexities, such as the large quantities of water needed for irrigation, a need that has been supported for nearly 10 years by an agreement with the Okeechobee Utility Authority that lets the Williamsons use treated water reclaimed from the Okeechobee area. Studied and declared safe by the University of Florida, the water is clear and clean, and its use helps both agriculture and the local urban community.

The beef industry in Okeechobee County has been under intense regulation with respect to the quality of water runoff from the ranches, and the water leaving the Williamson Cattle Company has the least amount of phosphorous per liter of any tributary in the basin. The Williamsons have worked with the University of Florida to change some of the regulations on phosphorous fertilization of pasture grasses, and have actually developed a phosphorous budget that keeps track of all the phosphorous that comes onto the property in feed and fertilizer and all that leaves the property in the form of exports, which is basically beef cattle.

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DISCUSSANTS: Afternoon Session

***J. P. Sasser***

Mayor  
City of Pahokee  
171 North Lake Avenue  
Pahokee, FL 33476

Mayor J.P. Sasser, a life-long resident of Pahokee, has served three two-year terms as Mayor of Pahokee. He is comptroller of Cavinee's Body Shop in Belle Glade.

After graduating from Glades Day School, Mr. Sasser attended Stetson University. Upon leaving he served two years in the U.S. Peace Corps, stationed in Swaziland, now an independent, constitutional monarchy but then an autonomous state within South Africa.

Returning home Mr. Sasser worked in the family business Glades Oil Co. and after it was sold with his sisters in operating a Paul's Parts and Equipment (NAPA).

He is a member of the Pahokee Rotary and was recently appointed by the Palm Beach County League of Cities to represent the Glades-region District 5. He was a participant in the first Water Summit held by the South Florida Water Management District on the management of Lake Okeechobee and discharges made to coastal estuaries.

In its September 2007 article about Lake Okeechobee, Florida Trend magazine wrote: "Pahokee's survival plan hinges on a public-private venture formed to do a \$22 million rebuilding and expansion of the city's lakeside campground, marina and amenities. But the Corps' [of Engineers] initial plan conceived building a berm around the dike at Pahokee, and much of Pahokee's tax base was in the way. Sasser complained. Corps Jacksonville district chief of construction and operations Alan Bugg says a berm will be part of dike rehabilitation elsewhere but innovative designs will spare Pahokee homes and businesses."

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***Maureen Burroughs***

President, Okeechobee Main Street Inc. and  
Owner, Syble's Flowers and Gifts  
119 South Parrott  
Okeechobee, FL 34972

Maureen moved to Okeechobee in 2001 after retiring with 31 years in Product Management from Telcordia Technologies (Formerly the Bell System). Maureen was born and raised in Boston and in the last 15 years worked in Manhattan, New Jersey and Atlanta. Raising a son and traveling internationally did not leave time for any community involvement.

Needless to say, the move to Okeechobee was a culture shock. She assumed her mother-in-law's florist business, which was in a downward spiral but had been a mainstay in the community for 42 years. She created a wedding chapel and the city's largest gift store in conjunction with growing the flower business. In 5 years she has managed to overcome the debts and has tripled the revenues.

She is an active member of Kiwanis, Okeechobee Business Women's Network, Economic Council member, a Big Sister and the President of Okeechobee Main Street, Inc.

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***Ashley T. Tripp***

President, Lake Okeechobee Regional Economic Alliance of Palm Beach County, Inc. (LORE) and  
Owner, Tripp Electric Motors Inc.

1233 NW Avenue L  
Belle Glade, FL 33430

Ashley Tripp is a life-long resident of Belle Glade and civic advocate for the Lake Okeechobee region of Palm Beach County. She served in US Army Reserves and attended Palm Beach Community College and Palm Beach Atlantic University majoring in biology and secondary education. She and her husband, Jimmy Tripp, own and operate Tripp Electric Motors, Inc. She has a passion to see her community prosper and grow by enhancing and optimally using its resources. She has been active in her community by serving in the following capacities:

- President and founding member of the Lake Okeechobee Regional Economic (LORE) Alliance of Palm Beach County, Inc.
- Served on the Quality of Life Committee for PBC 2005 Economic Summit
- Served on the Western County Health Advisory Committee for the Health Care District of PBC
- Glades Historical Society Board Member
- Belle Glade Museum Board Member
- Former Belle Glade Chamber of Commerce Board Member
- Volunteer at PBSO Eagle Academy leading a weekly Bible study
- Local coordinator for Keep Palm Beach County Beautiful's annual Coastal Cleanup of Lake Okeechobee on Torry Island

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### *Lynn Topel*

Executive Director  
Florida's Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative, Inc. (FHREDI)  
& Florida's Freshwater Frontier  
P.O. Box 1196  
Sebring, FL 33871-1196

Lynn Topel is responsible for the continued development of the regional economic development organization to a provider network that encompasses all areas of business and government in its partnerships. She is also responsible for creating a continuous funding stream that enables the organization to fund marketing, educational programs, business outreach, and create strong governmental partnerships.

Lynn's background includes 28 years with a fortune 100 company, spending much of her career in sales and management development. She retired from there to work with a small Entrepreneurial company to restructure the organization to a structured environment, developing and implement training programs for six departments, hire and develop a management team, assisted in the creation of a new division and development of a training academy. She holds a Bachelors degree in Professional Studies and a Masters in Human Resources & Development from Barry University in Miami.

**❖Florida's Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative (FHREDI)**

The mission of Florida's Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative is to enhance regional partnerships to support economic development by creating and supporting regional plans for business expansion and retention, housing, transportation, and education. Since 2003 FHREDI has been instrumental in the creation of a regional housing consortium, supported the development of a regional small business development group to further the development of existing business in the region with the partnership of South Florida Water management District. It worked with four regional workforce boards to bring the state WIRED grant to the region to support the REAL (Rural Entrepreneurial Action Learning) program for post secondary folks, worked with OTTED and Enterprise Florida to create the partnerships for the Catalyst project in the region, and is presently working to create a regional Export consortium to increase the opportunities to regional business for expansion into international markets.

FHREDI continues to meet with regional businesses to create a regional database for the economic development partners and create a way to notify the business partners in a disaster for recovery. FHREDI has also partnered with FDOT, CUTR and Tindale-Oliver in a comprehensive study of the region to create a transportation-mobility plan that will be ready to create a regional mobility organization. They also just completed a regional broadband study that is now being used to create a regional consortium of providers to make high-speed connectivity a reality for the whole region.

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Decision Makers Forum Inc. is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. It was established by Martha Musgrove after her retirement from The Miami Herald, to help keep local government and private sector decision-makers involved and informed about Everglades Restoration and to help integrate local and private decision-making with state and national policy. Six successful forums have been held over the last five years in partnership with a variety of nonprofit organizations and public agencies.

The public forums aim to create and maintain public awareness of environmental restoration. Special efforts are made to invite and engage local government officials and private-sector decision makers who are making most of South Florida's land-use and water-use decisions. Cumulatively their decisions will likely determine the extent and success of restoration efforts implemented by state and federal agencies.

This is the first forum to focus on a single natural resource, and it is being co-sponsored with the Florida Center for Environmental Studies at Florida Atlantic University, the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties, the South Florida Water Management District and the World Wildlife Fund. Additional support has been provided by the Belle Glade Campus of Palm Beach Community College and Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service.

# Projects, Programs, and Issues

The following information is provided to supplement articles, brochures, and other materials found in your Forum packet. It is relevant to many of the topics that will be discussed during the morning sessions. We thank the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and U. S. Sugar Corporation for providing this information.



## ❖ *Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)*

### Okeechobee-Related Programs

#### Agriculture in South Florida

Comprising 40% of the state's total agricultural production, four million acres in South Florida, most within the Northern Everglades watershed, are devoted to agriculture. The area represents 61% of Florida's citrus production and 43% of the state's cattle production and includes some 50 certified aquaculture farms for ornamental fish, food fish and alligator production.

Although silvicultural practices within the southern region of Florida are not as intensive when compared to the north central and northwest regions, timber production on approximately 2 million acres of private and public land contributes significantly to the economic viability of the region.

Annually, south Florida agriculture generates \$3.1 billion in direct cash receipts, with a total economic impact of \$39 billion and provides over 200,000 jobs.

#### Agricultural Economic Development and the Impact of the Drought on Agriculture in the Lake Okeechobee Area

The Department's Division of Marketing and Development is keenly focused on South Florida and its various agricultural sectors. Priorities include constant economic analysis of current drought impacts, market protection and the development of growth markets and alternative agricultural enterprises.

Agriculture has been severely impacted by the ongoing drought in south Florida; 2006 and 2007 were the driest back-to-back calendar years in South Florida since rainfall record-keeping began in 1932. Lake Okeechobee remains more than four feet below its historical average – and nearly a foot below previous historic lows – for this time of year.

Lack of water has significantly decreased planted acreage for several vegetable commodities and sugar is facing continuing declines in direct cash receipts that are expected to total in excess of \$100 million for the last two years.

Overall, the Department estimates that the total economic impact to the south Florida economy because of the effect of the drought on agriculture in the Lake Okeechobee area will be in excess of \$1 billion per year.

### Water Resources Protection

As established by law, the Department, along with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), is one of the Coordinating Agencies in the development and implementation of restoration programs for Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Everglades watershed.

Department staff located in Okeechobee are dedicated full-time to implementing Lake Okeechobee and Northern Everglades restoration activities on agricultural lands. Examples of these restoration activities include:

**Total Maximum Daily Loads:** Implementation to date of individual farm-specific plans and Best Management Practices (BMPs) on 550,000 acres in the Okeechobee watershed, with additional implementation to total 1.3 million acres by 2010; includes the implementation of comprehensive stormwater management systems on all dairies.

**BMP Effectiveness Research:** Joint funding, along with the DEP and the SFWMD, of University of Florida research to evaluate the effectiveness of agricultural BMPs.

**Storage and Treatment of Water on Private Lands:** FDACS is a partner, along with the USDA/NRCS and the SFWMD in the World Wildlife Fund Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project on eight farms to evaluate the economic feasibility of water storage and treatment on private lands in the Okeechobee watershed.

**Alternative Agricultural Water Supply Development:** Incentive cost-share funding, along with SFWMD and agricultural producers, for alternative agricultural water supply projects.

**Regional Water Quality Monitoring:** Cooperative funding, along with the SFWMD, for the United States Geological Survey Lake Okeechobee watershed regional water quality monitoring network.

**Silvicultural BMP Program:** Managed under Florida's silvicultural best management practices program, south Florida's forestlands perform an important role in protecting critical wetlands, waterways, and water recharge areas.

### Farm to Fuel Program

The Lake Okeechobee/Northern Everglades region provides many opportunities for bioenergy production.

First, with no change in agricultural practices, both the sugar industry and the citrus industry have the potential to produce bioenergy and/or biofuels from wastes or residues from their processing plants. For example, sugarcane bagasse is currently burned to produce electricity and is being researched as a potential feedstock for cellulosic ethanol production. Similarly, citrus peel can be converted to ethanol. Currently, both Florida Crystals Corporation and US Sugar Corporation convert their bagasse to energy and

Florida Crystals is working with the University of Florida on developing a cellulosic ethanol demonstration facility.

Second, residues and wastes from existing farming operations have the potential for use in the production of biogas through anaerobic digestion.

In addition to these existing feedstocks, the region has the potential for producing other “energy” crops as well as using woody invasive species in the vicinity of Lake Okeechobee, such as Melaleuca and Brazilian pepper, as energy feedstocks for local electricity generation and/or liquid fuel production.

### Growth Management

The Department, along with the DEP, water management districts, and regional planning councils, cooperates with the Department of Community Affairs to provide assistance in implementing the Rural Lands Stewardship program. This program is designed to provide opportunities for economic development, accommodate growth in an environmentally acceptable manner, protect environmentally sensitive areas, and maintain the economic viability of agriculture and other rural land uses.

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### ❖ *Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)*

- There are two rule changes being proposed for the Lake Okeechobee fishery; one concerning largemouth bass, and another concerning black crappie. We have had two public meetings on these rule change proposals (one in Clewiston and one in Okeechobee) and the public has been supportive of the changes. If accepted by the Commission, they will go into effect July 1, 2008. An important point to emphasize is that implementing the rule changes to protect young-of-the-year LMB and crappie will not, in itself, save this fishery. The key will be habitat improvement in the littoral areas of the lake. The current drought will also help this habitat improvement. The rule changes will help protect the fish until they can move into the fishery.
- There are seven Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) (clickable map attached) <http://myfwc.com/recreation/South.html> totaling more than 850,000 acres that could be impacted by Lake Okeechobee management decisions: Fisheating Creek WMA; Dupuis Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA); Corbett WMA; Holey Land WMA; Rotenberger WMA; Everglades and Francis S. Taylor (EWMA); and Southern Glades WEA.
  - Most of the WMAs/WEAs listed above are downstream of the Lake and are impacted from changes in water quality, quantity, and hydro period.
  - The Fish and Wildlife Commission has also recently developed a policy that explains the history, in particular, for Holey Land and Rotenberger WMAs. The policy was developed to provide other agencies with a clear understanding of our goals and objectives for these two WMAs.

- Snail kites have had a rough go the past several years and discussions have come up as to their numbers being near the same as the Cape Sable sparrow and what to do next. The problem is water levels.
  - Water levels in EWMA have been low for a couple of years resulting in little to no nesting success.
  - The EWMA has been a source area for kite nesting for many years.
  - Questions have come up as to where they will nest this year and in coming years if water levels in the lake are kept as low or lower for restoration.
  - This could be a problem, but other lakes have been used by the kites for nesting recently. Last year, Lake Toho was the hot spot.
  - As long as there is suitable habitat somewhere in the south Florida area, the kite will utilize it: however this is a basic explanation of something a little more complex.
  
- Wading birds may be of interest too, especially woodstorks. Woodstorks have nested for several years within EWMA, but last year, nests initiated were unsuccessful as a result of recession rate reversals during their nesting season. This next year could be particularly bad due to current low water levels and a long dry season yet to endure. Lake Okeechobee rarely experiences woodstork nesting, but last year woodstorks nested near Lake Okeechobee. A dozen nests ended up in a stand of cypress trees within a gator farm north of Harney Pond on HWY 721 (west side of Lake).
  
- In-lake restorations, FWC is partnered with SFWMD to restore sandy bottom and bulrush beds for fish nursery habitat and snail kite nesting habitat
  
- Lake Level Issues:
  - Lake outflows contributing to Red Tide events in Gulf
  
  - Outflows effects on fish nurseries and health of both the Caloosahatchee and St Lucie estuaries
  
  - Outflows carrying organic material that over time have buried oyster beds
  
  - Lake emergent vegetation considered critical habitat for snail kite; best beds destroyed by high lake levels
  
  - Organic material during and after hurricanes was picked up off bottom and hit the whole food web hard; both recreational and commercial fisheries were negatively impacted



## ❖ *United States Army Corps of Engineers*

The projects of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers use an integrated systems-based approach.

- The Regulatory Program is the largest program corps-wide
- Everglades Restoration provides a multi-faceted approach to mission execution with national significance
- Lake Okeechobee - Managing and monitoring this critical resource requires a balance of needs and conservation
  - Public health and safety
  - Lake ecology and outdoor recreation
  - Waterway navigation
  - Water supply
  - Estuary
  - Greater Everglades
- The Herbert Hoover Dike project is an example of USACE actions for change “in action”



## ❖ *U.S. Sugar Corporation*

- Research - The intensive phosphorus reduction BMP program originally developed by U.S. Sugar and the University of Florida and implemented by farmers in the Everglades Agricultural Area is now the model being used throughout the Lake Okeechobee basin to reduce phosphorus inflows into the lake. In addition, U.S. Sugar and other farming interest continue to fund ongoing phosphorus reduction and BMP research projects in conjunction with the SFWMD and UF.
- On Farm Phosphorus Best Management Programs (BMP's) - For more than a decade, U.S. Sugar and other farmers south of Lake Okeechobee have implemented successful BMPs that have reduced phosphorus in farm water by more than 50%. Automatic water quality samplers monitor water quality whenever farm pumps are activated. Water leaving the farms is currently lower in phosphorus than water in Lake Okeechobee and water entering the lake from all other tributaries. Since farms south of the lake account for less than three percent of both water volume and phosphorus load into Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades system to the south is the primary beneficiary of this clean water.
- Everglades Protection District - Farmers in the Everglades Agricultural Area established a special 298 self-taxing district in 1989 that raises \$2.5 million a

year taxing each acre of farmland to fund research on phosphorus reductions and Best Management Practices to find solutions to farm related issues.

- Successful Implementation of Rule 40E-61 - This is the Works of the District rule adopted for protection of Lake Okeechobee. All discharges that end up in the Lake are required to obtain these permits prior to discharge. The Everglades Agricultural Area and the S-4 basin are the only basins that have achieved the loading reduction targets of that program. We were obligated to reduce at least 10 tons and have regularly exceeded reductions of 30 tons.
- Florida Sugar Cane League - The FSCL provides extensive air quality monitoring throughout the farming area. Air quality on the farms meets or exceeds all state and federal air quality requirements, and air quality in the farming area has consistently been better than air quality on either the east or west coast.
- Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS) - Lake levels are critical to agriculture in the entire Lake Okeechobee Service Area which relies on the lake for water during dry times. The sugar industry alone provides more than \$3 billion a year in economic benefit to the state of Florida. U.S. Sugar actively participates in the public process of lake schedule development and works closely with the South Florida Water Management District in dealing with ongoing drought and water allocation issues.
- Renewable Energy - U.S. Sugar has been an industry leader in biomass power generation and fuels the world's largest raw sugar manufacturing and refining facility in Clewiston with clean, renewable energy generated from its residual cane fiber, called bagasse. In addition, water from the cane stalk is used to create steam and recaptured and recycled through the processing plant. Several pilot projects are underway in the agricultural area to produce ethanol from bagasse, citrus and other agricultural biomass.

