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Scenic Watch is a free bi-monthly publication of Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc., dedicated to the preservation, protection and enhancement of Florida's scenic heritage. Individuals, organizations and government agencies are welcome as members. [Join Scenic Florida now](#) to protect our scenic qualities.

Editors comments:

Land use policy and practice meets energy demands. [Interesting article](#) about choices being faced in many sectors.

Where was the first federal highway in Florida and what year was it built? Interested. [See effort](#) to save it for its scenic qualities.

Questions that bother me -

How many of us really make purchasing decisions based on billboard information? Logo signs tell us which interchange services are available.

Do merchants spending thousands of dollars really get their value out of this outmoded form of 'advertising'?

Why are billboards taxed as depreciating property based on their cost, but have to be bought by the state, cities or counties based on their income value?

Why do [tourist destinations](#) that prohibit or restrict sizes on billboards actually succeed - and grow? Maybe your community can join the over 200 cities and counties in Florida that ban or restrict billboards growth.

Billboards

Billboards Hamper Economic Growth

Billboards make a few people a lot of money. Unfortunately, however, they do serious economic harm to communities.

Billboard Blight Stunts Economic Development



Uncontrolled, billboards and signs overwhelm us with competing advertisements. Sign clutter, like a room full of screaming kids, so distracts the consumer that no message gets through clearly. Having smaller and fewer signs enables businesses to do a better job selling their wares at lower cost.

Many cities and states rely on natural beauty and visual quality to attract businesses and tourists. Billboards intrude on the landscape of America and devalue our nation's greatest asset its natural beauty. Four states ban billboards completely: Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, and Vermont. All of these states depend on tourism and have recognized that sign control helps attract tourists' dollars and benefits local economies.

Areas like Boulder, CO, and Fairfax County, VA, which ban billboards, have strong economies and reputations as great places to live. Billboard control also means less chance of billboards going up in sensitive areas -- historic districts, residential neighborhoods, and near parks, churches and schools.

Billboards Lower Property Values



No one wants a billboard in their back yard. Recently, in places as diverse as Scranton, PA, Perth Amboy, NJ, Greene County, VA, and Ft. Lauderdale, FL, homeowners have been outraged by new billboards towering over their homes, blocking their views and lowering their property values.

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Land Use & Smart Growth

State facing serious challenges in future, FWC study says

Growing population and a loss of habitat are chief concerns.

By JIM SUTTON, The Times-Union

It has only taken a couple of decades of exponential growth in Florida to turn an outdoors paradise into an environmental predicament.

In southern Duval and northern St. Johns counties, roads you could barely get to a decade ago have morphed into roads you can barely get on to - or off. A seemingly endless supply of fresh water is now the currency of conflict and massive municipal maneuvering.

Boat ramps are fewer and farther between. They test the nerves of users with their constant overflow. Marinas are privatized. Access is restricted. Farmland has become too valuable to farm.

Land for hunting has dwindled. Wetlands are water hazards for golf courses. Estuaries are storm-water systems for condominiums.

As singer Joni Mitchell predicted 30 years ago, we have paved paradise.

And what's truly scary about Florida's pace of development is that "the good old days" might be now.

Fifty years from now, our children might be vacationing on Florida's coast with children of their own, pointing east from their hotel balconies and saying "When I was growing up, there was a beach right there."

They might tell their children of a time when water came from the backyard rather than from a bottle. They could dazzle young ones with stories about fish dinners caught on hook and line from local waters, rather than long-lines hung halfway across the world.

What will Florida look like 50 years down the road?

That's a question asked by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and answered in a just-released study.

The study starts with the assumption that Florida's population will double between now and 2060, from 18 million to 36 million people. The study represents a series of predictions based on that growth in terms of habitat loss and isolation, coastal challenges, water quality and quantity, wildlife/human interaction and access to land and water resources.

Here are some of the predictions from the study.

Habitat loss

- By 2060, around 7 million additional acres will be converted from rural to urban land - an amount about the size of the state of Vermont.
- More than 1.6 million acres of woodland habitat will be lost.
- Wetland habitat, while not substantially shrinking, will be degraded and isolated. "For the most part, animals and fish that currently live in these habitats will disappear," the study said
- The most affected animals - and plants - will be those known as endemic species, whose range is limited to small geographic areas.
- Habitat loss for selected species includes nearly 2 million acres for bald eagles, 3.3 million acres for Florida black bears, 200,000 acres for Florida burrowing owls, 30,000 acres for Florida panthers, 700,000 acres for the gopher tortoises, 200,000 acres for wood storks and 2.1 million acres for wild turkeys.

Coastal challenges

- 72 percent of Florida's residents live or work in coastal areas.
- The population of coastal areas will increase to 26 million by 2060.
- Developments occurring close to dunes interrupt the natural cycle of erosion and rebuilding.
- More sea turtle species nest in Florida than any place on earth.
- Practices such as coastal armoring and beach renourishment are increasingly endangering nesting patterns. Two of the predicted hardest-hit counties in the state will be St. Johns County, with a 32 percent decrease in nesting, and Flagler County, with 49 percent less activity.

Water loss

- 55 inches of average annual rainfall replenished Florida's aquifers - the source of 92 percent of our drinking water.
- Floridians use nearly 7 billion gallons of water per day in drinking, industrial, lawn-watering and agricultural activities.
- In South Florida, people already are using more water than can be replenished naturally.

Wildlife/human interaction

- We're on a collision course with alligators, black bears, panthers, sandhill cranes and other species.
- Complaints of alligator nuisance have increased from 3,600 in 1980 to more than 17,000 in 2005. By 2060, that number is expected to be 47,800. The increase is a double-edged sword. Black bears have come back from dangerously low levels over the past 20 or 30 years, increasing populations in the state sixfold - to between 2,500 and 3,000.
- Nuisance calls for bears have increased from eight in 1985 to 5,900 in 2005. By 2060, the estimate is 33,800.
- Development that's lacking in rural buffers between homes and wildlife puts animals at risk.
- More than 90 percent of Floridians inhabit urban areas. "... We hear bird songs and frog calls far less than leafblowers and air conditioners," the study said.

Access to land and water

- More than 1 million boats are registered in Florida, the highest number of any state. Trailered boats number about 900,000 today. That number will be 1.8 million by 2060.
- Affordable waterfront land for boat-ramp facilities is becoming scarce as land values rapidly rise.
- Nearly 6 million acres are currently available for hunting and other public access in Florida. By 2060, the state will lose 25 percent of its private hunting lands to development.
- In 1985, the cost of a private hunting lease was \$2 an acre. In 2005, it was \$15 an acre. In 2060, the price is predicted to rise to \$300 an acre.

What all this means

The study was long on predictions but short on solutions. And most of the suggestions rely on government intervention and money (public land acquisition and protection programs, greenways, etc.) in order to move forward. Current budget deficits and government cutbacks don't bode well for taxpayer initiatives in the future.

The one point that's woven tightly throughout the study is that it will take a concerted effort by everyone who enjoys the outdoors to tackle the challenges - from bicyclists to biologists, hikers to hunters and politicians to potato farmers.

To view the complete document, visit MyFWC.com/wildlife2060.

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Florida Finds Destiny in Energy Farm

Developers of a proposed sustainable city in the Sunshine State have planted sorghum for biofuel and also intend to grow jatropha and algae. But will the crops really benefit the environment?

by: Rachel Barron and Jennifer Kho



August 29, 2008

Sorghum



Sorghum plants for making ethanol grows at Destiny Sustainable Energy Farms in Florida.
Destiny

Florida has become the latest state to plant so-called "energy crops" for biofuels.

[Destiny](#), a proposed community that intends to become an eco city, this week announced its plans to grow crops such as sweet sorghum, jatropha and algae to produce biofuels from nonfood materials and showcase sustainable farming practices.

So far, the Destiny Sustainable Energy Farm said it has planted 20 acres of sorghum, a grass that

requires less water than corn, the most common crop used to make ethanol in the United States, and that can grow in less-fertile soil. The farm expects to harvest its first plants later this year.

The farm also plans to experiment with different varieties of sweet sorghum, test the growth in different soil conditions and try different treatments to increase crop yield, according to Destiny.

The University of Florida will measure the yield and estimate the potential ethanol production of the plants to determine the cost of producing fuel from these energy crops. The plan is for the university to assess which variety will produce the most fuel with the least impact to the environment, said Randy Johnson, chief operating officer of the Destiny project.

The Destiny farm joins several other examples of efforts to grow nonfood crops specifically for biofuels.

In August, Ceres told Greentech Media it had begun harvesting switchgrass and sorghum seeds for biofuels (see [Ceres Reaps First Switchgrass, Sorghum Harvests](#)). And in April, the state of Oklahoma said it would plant more than 1,100 acres of switchgrass for ethanol (see [Oklahoma Switches to Switchgrass](#)).

But while the idea of growing nonfood fuel crops could be catching on, it's controversial. Critics are concerned that growing energy crops could use up land that could otherwise be used to grow food.

After all, competition with food is one of the major issues that moving to nonfood crops is intended to solve. Concerns that biofuels could be harming the environment or leading to higher food prices have been a bane to the industry's reputation, and higher prices for current starchy materials, such as corn and soybeans, that are used to make the fuels have cut into biofuel companies' profits.

Advocates of cellulosic ethanol have said the fuel could use waste materials that aren't used for food today, expanding the amount of ethanol that could be made without competing with food. They also claim that cellulosic ethanol can theoretically be made more cheaply than ethanol from starches like corn, but so far, cellulosic ethanol - only produced in demonstration volumes - has remained more expensive.

For one thing, harvesting and gathering far-flung material such as switchgrass has proven difficult and more costly than some companies had expected.

The idea of farming the nonfood materials is alluring because it would make it easier to grow and collect mass quantities of the stuff, meaning it would be cheaper to make into fuel.

Destiny is a proposed city in central Florida that plans to operate with minimal impact on the environment and to attract businesses focused on developing clean technologies.

Fred DeLuca, a co-founder of Subway Restaurants, and Anthony V. Pugliese III, a South Florida land developer, have bought 41,300 acres of land on which to build the green community, which is still in the planning stages. A portion of the purchased land is being used for the farm.

Johnson said the farm wouldn't displace food crops. Instead, the project hopes to evaluate whether it would be more lucrative for farmers that currently grow less eco-friendly products, such as sod, to grow nonfood energy crops instead. Sod requires more water than sorghum, Johnson said.

The farm currently uses a solar irrigation system and no fertilizers, which could end up polluting soil and water, to grow its sorghum, he said.

Still, the farm's efforts might not be enough to ward off criticism of the idea of growing crops specifically for fuel.

In January, Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, said that using farmland for fuel crops will jeopardize the food supply (see [Lester Brown Talks Smack About Ethanol](#)). He has argued that if the price for nonfood crops grow enough to make it worthwhile, farmers will want to switch - and will want to use the best land to maximize profits.

A number of groups have questioned the impact of biofuels from crops like corn, sugarcane and soy.

Oxfam International, a global nonprofit focused on reducing poverty, blames biofuels for contributing

up to a 30 percent increase in global food prices.

Studies published in the journal Science earlier this year concluded that [biofuels may cause more greenhouse-gas emissions](#) than traditional fuels and a Time magazine article in March reported that farmers had cleared trees in the Amazon rain forest to plant biofuel crops.

On the flip side, other researchers have found that biofuels aren't at fault for driving food costs up or wreaking havoc on the environment.

In April, researchers at Texas A&M University published a study concluding that growing corn prices have little to do with biofuels.

And in June, the [Carnegie Institution for Science](#) chimed in with another study that estimated that up to 1.8 million square miles of abandoned farmland is potentially available for growing energy crops globally.

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Scenic Highways & Trails

Campground owner contributes money to improve Bellamy Road

By Mikala Kuchera
For The Herald

HIGH SPRINGS -- Sunlight filtering through the leaves of large oak trees highlights the snaking dirt road known as Old Bellamy, weaving a bumpy path through Florida's history.

And now, the journey may not be quite as rough.

With the help of private funding from High Springs Campground Manager Jason Outler, Alachua County has decided to pursue the surface treatment of a half-mile of Old Bellamy Road, according to a presentation made by County Engineer Dave Cerlanek at the Aug. 12 Alachua County Commission meeting.

The road, which is several miles long and located in Northwest Alachua County, is the first federal highway in the state. It ends in about three miles of hiking trails in O'Leno State Park, intersecting with an area where the Santa Fe River submerges underground, creating a natural land bridge.

After several months of discussion, the Commission voted in favor of negotiating a contract with Outler on the resurfacing of Old Bellamy Road near Interstate 75.

In exchange for the private funding, the project will be moved up from 2011 to 2009, according to the presentation.

In addition to the decision to negotiate with Outler, the commissioners also said they were in favor of the possibility of accepting private funding from residents wishing to resurface roads in the future.

As long as the area to be treated is connected to a paved road, the Commission agreed that private funding, in conjunction with faster project dates from the county, would speed up road resurfacing projects, helping all parties involved.

Old Bellamy Road originally was constructed in 1824 for \$20,000 by John Bellamy, a plantation owner at Monticello, after being commissioned by the Territorial Council. Old Bellamy Road was used as a major highway until the Civil War, creating a pathway from St. Augustine to Pensacola.

The road originally consisted of tree stumps cut to one foot in height in order for wagon wheels to clear, according to The Alachua County Scenic Roads database.

Despite the fear of some residents that resurfacing the road will cause it to lose some of its



Built in 1824 as the first federal highway in Florida, Old Bellamy Road still exists today in parts of North Central Florida, including near High Springs. The dirt road is known for its narrow width and the trees that tower overhead (shown above). The road eventually leads to O'Leno State Park, where the road once led to the only natural landbridge over the Santa Fe River.

historical character, the County will pursue its plans to resurface the road and help Outler create a smoother ride.

land owner near bellamy wrote on Aug 24, 2008 9:39 AM:

" Alachua county should have done this without Mr. Outler's money. They tax heavily enough that the residents in the areas adjacent to the campground should have the benefit of reasonably passable roads. By forcing residents to utilize up to 3 miles of these roads, and offering to improve roads if the residents would finance large portions of the cost, they have attempted coercion on residents for years to avoid full responsibility for these roads. "

MJS wrote on Aug 23, 2008 8:23 PM:

" This is very good news. High Springs Campground is a super place to camp out. The short section of Old Bellamy road really got damaged during Fay. Paving this road will be a real asset to Alachua County and the High Springs community. "

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor