



NEWS RELEASE

Ruby Street Stormwater Project Brings Conservation Easement to Dora Canal

March 6, 2017, For Immediate Release, Tavares, FL: Habitat restoration is a critical issue in areas subject to intensive suburban development that affect local lakes. There are various strategies employed for restoring different types of natural habitats disrupted by human activity.

The Tavares Stormwater Project is turning into an environmental case study by addressing problems related to water quality, quantity, and flow around approximately 131 acres of ecologically sensitive lands consisting of 115 acres of wetlands and surface waters and 15 acres of uplands located on the west side of the Dora Canal between Lake Dora and Lake Eustis, near Dead River Road.

The project engineering will provide critical habitat for wildlife and help improve water quality by removing potentially harmful nutrients by enhancing healthy plant growth, supporting our bee population, provide more nesting sites for birds and nurseries for fish, as well as collection areas between 'knees' for sediments that help build land. Dead and decomposing tree parts furnish colonization sites for bacteria, periphyton (*freshwater organisms attached to or clinging to plants and other objects projecting above the bottom sediments*) and algae that are used as food by animals on the lower end of the food web.

The benefits of these preservation areas include:

- *Preserving pristine and ancient cypress forests and other valuable forested communities.* Forests are being destroyed and degraded at alarming rates. Forests are so much more than a collection of trees. These ecosystems are complex webs of organisms that include plants, animals, fungi and bacteria. Florida's Cypress trees have been around for thousands of years. They typically live for hundreds of years. They stand out among the trees of the planet for their size, longevity, beauty and resistance to water rot. Many specimens reach 100 feet in height, growing 24 inches in a single year, and have trunks with 20-foot diameters. Cypress trees have few insect or diseases problems and are tolerant of high winds and ice storms.

- *Providing an integral habitat for a wide variety of native and protected plants and animals.* These protect our watersheds (an area or ridge of land that separates waters flowing to different rivers, or basins). Plants provide wonder and supply oxygen we need to survive and soak up carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that contribute to ongoing changes in climate patterns. Fewer natural wildlife habitat areas remain each year. Moreover, the habitat that remains has often been degraded to bear little resemblance to the wild areas which existed in the past. Habitat loss—due to destruction, fragmentation and degradation of habitat—is the primary threat to the survival of wildlife in the United States.
- *Protecting and buffering the Dora Canal which houses a nesting rookery for a number of wading bird species and raptors.* There are 196 species of breeding birds in Florida. Nesting species and others (such as White Ibises and Little Blue Herons) flock in great numbers to our Florida lakes. In case you didn't know, Alligators patrol the lakes, keeping mammalian predators from preying on the island's birds. The wading birds that nest in our area include the herons, egrets, ibises, roseate spoonbills, American avocets, American oystercatchers and black-necked stilts. Suitable nesting habitat is limited and in many areas raccoons and coyotes make successful nesting impossible. Nesting birds are extremely sensitive to disturbance by man. Simply intruding too close to a nesting area could possibly result in a nest being abandoned and the birds may or may not attempt to nest a second time.
- *Acting as a fish and wildlife corridor and greenway in between Lake Dora and Lake Eustis.* These corridors protect environmentally sensitive areas by providing linkages in the landscape and potential buffers between natural and/or human communities and are complex ecosystems that provide an avenue for wildlife movement, protection of natural resources, and green space buffers for humans. These “lifelines for living” help support human, wildlife, and natural habitats.
- *Improving the water quality of the Oklawaha Watershed and Chain of Lake.* With decades of residential and agricultural growth, the levels of nutrients and other trace pollutants making their way into these natural areas began to rise. As a result, native ecosystems as well as the plants and animals that are part of those systems began to change. The Tavares Storm Water Project is working to remove excess nutrients and other pollutants, or prevent them from entering natural systems our local lakes. Our planned constructed wetlands can effectively achieve this effort.
- *Enhancing the recreational value to boaters using the Dora Canal.* The Dora Canal offers up some of the most beautiful parts of old Florida's natural beauty that you will ever see. Birds and alligators find their home here as people come to her shores to bask in the beauty that surrounds her and the fun derived from her presence. To enjoy Lake Dora is to enjoy her offerings, from playing on her surface to taking in the birds and gators, to fishing from her bounty to basking in the subtle joy of her beautiful sunset panorama.

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