

THE LOXAHATCHEE RIVER MANAGEMENT PLAN

Background

The Jupiter Inlet District (JID) considers the Loxahatchee River, Florida's only federally designated Wild and Scenic River, an important natural resource, not only for the communities adjacent to the river, but also for the State of Florida. As a result of the relatively pristine condition of the river, the increasing urbanization, drainage basin and river modifications, and changes to freshwater inflow, the JID has implemented a management plan for the Loxahatchee River. The management plan is intended to enhance public recreational uses while striving to preserve and enhance the natural resources and multiple, beneficial uses of the Loxahatchee River over which the JID has authority.

The management plan addresses that portion of the Loxahatchee River, west of the FECRR trestle. This portion of the Loxahatchee River includes the Central Embayment, North Fork, Northwest Fork, Southwest Fork, C-18 Canal, and minor tributaries.

Purpose

The purpose of the Loxahatchee River management plan is to describe a series of management options, and provide an implementation plan and schedule. The management options to be implemented are based on an established general priority of importance based primarily on scores resulting from a decision matrix process and recommendations from the JID.

Approach

The approach used by the JID to develop the management plan included two important supporting tasks. First, a technical assessment was conducted that included a search of available information relating to the Loxahatchee River, as well as environmental, recreation, and engineering studies. The technical assessment was a one year study that included field studies, data evaluation and computer modeling.

The technical assessment included the following:

- Review of available and pertinent literature;
- Evaluation of submerged aquatic vegetation, oyster communities, shoreline habitats, fine sediment distribution, and salinity/freshwater concerns;
- Manatee distribution and management
- Review of recreational usage, boat usage and dock construction; and
- Evaluation of present and future channel requirements, past and present water quality conditions, salinity modeling and management, siltation assessment, and present and future needs for aids to navigation.

This technical information was gathered to provide a better understanding of the Loxahatchee River and obtain the required up to date and relevant facts needed to develop a workable and successful management plan. This information was compiled into two technical support documents.

The second task was the development of a decision matrix. The JID used the decision matrix to evaluate management options in relationship to their potential for meeting the goals of the management plan. The decision matrix originally included 57 management options. The management options were evaluated, given numerical scores and ranked based on the magnitude of the numerical scores.

Based on the numerical ranking, the JID selected those management options with a score of zero or greater for further consideration. Based on local public input (public meetings and questionnaires), technical studies conducted as part of this project and staff and fiscal considerations, a total of 30 management options were selected and included in the management plan. The management options not included as part of the report may be reconsidered at a later date.

Report Organization

The management plan is organized and discussed under the following major topics:

- Role of the JID;
- Education and public awareness;
- Environmental enhancement, restoration, habitat management and monitoring;
- Manatee management and protection;
- Recreation;
- Engineering; and
- Management Plan Implementation

The role of the JID establishes a framework for the JID to become a clearinghouse for activities relating to the river. The education and public awareness section discusses the management options for enlisting public support and educating the public. The environmental, recreation and engineering sections discuss associated selected management options. Manatee protection details the selected management options for enhancing the protection of the manatee. The management plan implementation section discusses guidelines for implementing the management plan, a proposed schedule for the management options, potential funding sources, and estimated unit/rate costs for selected management activities.