

# Plan aims to help the Everglades

## Water from Lake Okeechobee would be sent to the south

BY GEORGE ANDREASSI  
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A proposal to build a 25-mile-long, 10-mile-wide "flow-way" from Lake Okeechobee south to the Everglades — which would provide an alternative to releasing lake water into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers — is gaining political traction.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers relieves high water levels in the lake by releasing billions of gallons of water into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers, damaging the water quality of the estuaries as well as local fishing, boating, tourism and real estate industries.

The lake water contains fertilizer, sediment and pesticides that run off farms and lawns into the waterways leading to the lake. Also, too much fresh water in the St. Lucie River has been linked to fish lesions and toxic algae blooms in 2005.

"The corps has been urged to re-evaluate this concept of a flow-way and the momentum on both the east coast and the west coast has been building," said Paul Millar, Martin County's water resource manager.

The flow-way would send the lake water south to replenish the Everglades and underground drinking water supply, environmental activists said. Plants and soil would filter out

nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen.

Supporters of the flow-way said they were encouraged that U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., mentioned the proposal during an April 3 visit to the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution in Fort Pierce.

"I can't say that we put a rubber stamp of support on it," said Bryan Gulley, Nelson's spokesman. "But being a strong supporter of the Everglades, as Nelson is, he's interested in looking into any proposals that might further restore the Everglades, including this one."

The corps and the Martin County Office of Water Quality are set to make

a presentation about the flow-way proposal to the Martin County Commission on Tuesday. The Rivers Coalition, a group of local advocates for the St. Lucie River, is also expected to get an update.

Constructing the flow-way could be an alternative to an expensive rehabilitation of the Herbert Hoover Dike surrounding the lake, said Alan Bugg, the corps' chief of construction and operations.

Government reports show that if the lake's water level exceeds 18 feet, water can seep under the 35-foot earthen dike and compromise it. That could cause flooding in western Palm Beach County, according to the Army Corps.

"If this option were selected, then water would just be able to flow out the spillway and it would never rise up on

the dike," Bugg said.

There is no cost estimate for the flow-way proposal, but the dike rehabilitation is expected to cost \$846 million, Bugg said.

In addition to calculating the price tag of the flow-way, the corps must determine whether it fits with the projects in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, Bugg said. The plan was formulated by the state and federal governments in an attempt to restore the environment and natural flow of water into the Everglades.

A decision on the dike options is expected in late summer or early fall. Congress has the final say, Bugg said.

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## Tri-Rail postpones schedule changes

### Work on track delays effort to add trains

BY MICHAEL TURNBELL  
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Tri-Rail's plans to put more rush-hour trains into service on Monday have hit a snag.

The South Florida Regional Transportation Authority is postponing its new schedule for two weeks because a job to replace 88,000 railroad ties on the Tri-Rail tracks has taken much longer than expected.

"We had to do much of the work at night to be able to accommodate all of the commuter trains and other traffic during the day," said Gary Sease, spokesman for Jacksonville-based CSX Transportation, the company that maintains the tracks for Tri-Rail.

"We also had some issues with the mechanical conditions of the machines doing the tie replacement. Mostly it's the size of the job and that fact we were restricted to certain hours."

Tri-Rail trains must run slower until the new ties are in place. Tri-Rail spokeswoman Bonnie Arnold said it didn't make sense to put additional trains into service if they can't operate normally.

Under normal conditions, commuter rains can operate as fast as 79 mph. But they're restricted in construction areas to 25 mph, Arnold said.

The tie work, which was supposed to be finished on April 6, is now expected to be complete next week, Sease said.

Tri-Rail now expects to launch its new schedule on May 14. Service will increase from 40 to 50 trains a day weekdays with trains every 20 minutes at rush hour.

The new schedule is available at [www.tri-rail.com](http://www.tri-rail.com).

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## Training for the reel thing



**FISHING FAN:** Adam Lewis, 9, watches 8-year-old Tamara Sullivan's technique on a simulated fishing machine as Kayes Catches and Giselle Sarver, both 9, egg her on Thursday. Boynton Beach Fishing Academy sponsored a fishing program for students in the aftercare program at Poinciana Elementary School. **Staff photo/Carey Wagner**

## House passes tax break for Marlins' home

BY LINDA KLEINDIENST  
TALLAHASSEE BUREAU  
CHIEF

TALLAHASSEE • The Florida Marlins scored a crucial run in the Legislature on Thursday as the state House overwhelmingly endorsed a \$60 million tax break to help build a new home for the team.

In an 86-24 vote, lawmakers approved the last critical piece of funding needed to finance a new stadium in Miami.

The money would come from sales tax revenues generated by the team inside the venue that would be kept to help pay for the ballpark instead of going to the state.

The measure now heads to the state Senate, where it is expected to be a tougher sell.

"There still is about half the chamber against this issue," Senate Majority Leader Dan Webster, R-Winter Garden, said. "It's an uphill battle, no matter what."

Miami-Dade County and Miami officials, who have worked out a \$490 million financing scheme with the team and Major League Baseball, estimate the new stadium could generate up to \$9 million a year in sales tax revenues. The plan approved by the House would allow \$2 million of the money to remain in Miami each year for the next 30 years to help finance stadium construction and maintenance.

This is the sixth time in eight years the Legislature has been asked to help fund a stadium for the two-time World Series winners.

This year's proposal is similar to a measure that passed the Senate last year only to die in the House on the final day of the legislative session.

While the Marlins declined to comment on Thursday's vote, Miami-

Dade Mayor Carlos Alvarez said he is more optimistic than ever.

"Obviously this will come down to the wire again," he said in a telephone interview. "[But] I believe this is the year that if anything happens, it will."

Proponents of the plan, which has the support of House Speaker Marco Rubio, R-West Miami and key members of his leadership team from Miami-Dade, say it will encourage economic development, and that will mean new tax revenues.

Opponents objected to setting aside public funds for a baseball stadium when the state is cutting services during a tight budget year.

"We just can't afford it," said Rep. Mary Brandenburg, D-West Palm Beach. "We have so many unmet needs in the state. We know we need more funding for our state universities and our Highway Patrol troopers need a raise."

Gov. Charlie Crist, who once served as general counsel for Minor League Baseball, supports the Marlins' plan and an even more ambitious proposal to help all nine of the state's professional sports teams, including the Marlins, the Miami Dolphins, the Miami Heat and the Florida Panthers.

No location for the new Miami ballpark has yet been determined.

The Marlins, who are bound by leases to play at Dolphin Stadium through the 2010 season, hope to open a 37,000-seat retractable roof ballpark by 2011.

Staff Writer Sarah Talalay contributed to this report.

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### DIGEST Staff reports

#### PALM BEACH COUNTY

##### Schools superintendent signs one-year contract extension

Art Johnson says he plans to remain as Palm Beach County schools superintendent for another five years.

The Palm Beach County School Board on Wednesday awarded Johnson a one-year contract extension on top of his existing deal, thereby keeping him in office through the end of June 2012. The board agreed to consider future extensions for the popular education boss on a year-by-year basis.

Johnson, 62, will continue to receive \$300,000 plus benefits for his annual services; \$50,000 of that is deferred pay invested and available upon his retirement.

Appointed superintendent in March 2001, Johnson appears to be the 10th-highest paid schools chief in the United States, according to a report compiled by his office. He told the board he wishes to remain with the district.

#### WEST PALM BEACH

##### Elementary school worker gets honor, surprise visit

Tammy Ditmars seems to do it all at Meadow Park Elementary in West Palm Beach.

She's worked on the campus for 18 years and serves as its director of School Age Child Care. She's active in the PTA. She organizes annual luncheons and various community fundraisers that help students.

Ditmars' achievements earned her a surprise visit Thursday from Superintendent Art Johnson and a new title: Non-Instructional Employee of the Year.

As child care director, Ditmars, of Royal Palm Beach, established a lending library and helped the after-school program earn a high level of distinction from the state Department of Children and Families, spokeswoman Vickie Middlebrooks said.

#### BOYNTON BEACH

##### Teen charged with attempted murder, armed robbery

Police charged a 17-year-old with two counts of attempted murder and one count of strong armed robbery Thursday in the shooting April 16 of two men outside a strip club in the 1100 block of North Federal Highway.

Michael Demarie, 50, of Boca Raton, told investigators that when he came out of the Platinum Showgirls club and got into his BMW, the teenager sat down in the passenger's seat, pulled out a gun and demanded his possessions. Demarie ran from the car and the teen shot several times, hitting him in the back, police said. The second victim, John Jackson, 51, of West Palm Beach, was in his Mercedes. When he went to help his friend, he was also shot in the back. The wounds were not life-threatening, police said.

The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* is not naming the suspect because he is a juvenile.

#### WEST PALM BEACH

##### Police charge suspect, 41, in sex assault of teenage girl

A 41-year-old man was arrested Wednesday after he was accused of assaulting a 15-year-old girl.

Blaine K. Pealy, of West Palm Beach, was charged with lewd and lascivious behavior and was being held without bail at the Palm Beach County Jail.

The girl told police that Pealy abused her once within the last two months after he ordered her into a bathroom and told her to remove her pants and underwear.

Police say Pealy admitted abusing the girl.

Pealy also told police officers that he was teaching the girl about boys because she had asked about sex several times.

#### I-95 UPDATE

The Florida Department of Transportation reports the following on Interstate 95:

**The northbound entrance ramp** from Sixth Avenue South is closed until late August.

**The inside lanes** of the northbound and southbound exit ramps at Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard will be closed 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. through Saturday morning.

**For around-the-clock**, real-time traffic information, travelers can call 511.

**For I-95 traffic reports**, just say, "I-95" or "Interstate 95." Information is also available online at [www.511southflorida.com](http://www.511southflorida.com).

**To see real-time video**, go to [www.palmbeachcotraffic.org](http://www.palmbeachcotraffic.org).

**For updated lane closure** information, visit [www.pbfdot.com](http://www.pbfdot.com).