

Expanding the SWOT Analysis

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In [our last article](#) we presented a formal SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis of several efforts intended to improve the quality and quantity of our water resources. This article will present an expanded, but less formal, analysis of some of those efforts.

Acquisition of Conservation Land

Late last month, Gov. DeSantis and the [Florida Cabinet](#) agreed to spend \$79 million on the acquisition of [seven parcels of land](#) by [Florida Forever](#). Three of the larger parcels of land that were included were:

- [Alico/Devil's Garden](#): 10,684 acres in Hendry County
- [Dickerson Bay/Bald Point](#): 17,080 acres in Franklin and Wakulla counties
- Tippen Bay Ranch: 2,883 acres in DeSoto county

The fact that Florida Forever was able to fund these acquisitions is a strength in terms of improving our water resources. These deals provide many specific benefits to the “Ding” Darling Refuge. For example, in a [recent article](#), Noah Valenstein, secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), described how acquiring the Alico/Devil’s Garden parcel will make it much easier for the FDEP to protect the quality of the water that goes into the Caloosahatchee River.

However, [another recent article](#) pointed out that although the Florida Legislature approved a \$93.2 billion budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which includes \$100 million for Florida Forever, the legislature has not yet formally sent the budget to the governor. Unfortunately, the governor is expected to use his line-item veto power to trim the budget due to falling tax revenues that are a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there is a significant threat that the trimming of the budget could result in a reduction in the funding for Florida Forever.

Development of Eden Oak

Eden Oak is a development that is being proposed to be built just off Sanibel and close to Shell Point. The original application was filed in 2016, and it called for the development of 158 acres of mangrove wetland and open water to build 252 multi-family units, 54 single-family units, and a 171-slip marina with a clubhouse and community pool. The current proposal is to dredge and fill 36 acres of mangrove wetlands to build 55 residential homesites with docks, excavate a new canal, and create a boat basin with additional docks.

Due in part to numerous continuances, the process of ruling on the proposal has dragged on for roughly four years. The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has stated in multiple personal appearances, as well as in letters to the Lee County Zoning Commission, that because the Refuge is only separated from the proposed development by roughly 5 miles of San Carlos Bay, we consider the Refuge and the proposed development to be neighbors. We have also stated that we regard this development as a clear threat to our water resources due the degradation of the environment that will result from the proposed development.

June 24, 2020, was the scheduled date for the Lee County Hearing Examiner to hear the final arguments from the Eden Oak applicant and staff. However, the applicant filed another request for a continuance, which was granted. As of this publication, closing statements have been rescheduled for December 11, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Combatting the threat that Eden Oaks could be developed may provide an opportunity for our readers to voice their opinion on the best course of action for this parcel of land. We will make you aware of these opportunities as they occur. Another way to stay up to date on this threat is via [SCCF's Eden Oak Web page](#).

Prevention of Harmful Algal Blooms

Our last article identified the Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Task Force as a strength in the battle to improve our water resources. One of the reason for that is that in January 2020, the Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force established [a set of recommended actions](#) that fit into four categories: Public health, Communications, Management and Response, and Research. At their meeting on April 22nd, the Task Force prioritized their recommendations. Of the recommendations that the task force deemed to be appropriate for the current cycle of funding, the one that received the most enthusiastic support was:

“FWC [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] and DEP [Department of Environmental Protection], working together with DOH [Department of Health], DACS [Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services], and other state partners and stakeholders, should establish a working group representing scientists, resource managers, and communications specialists to 1) review current communication and outreach strategies and tools that address red tides; 2) conduct focus groups and social science studies to identify information needed by the public and the most effective models for messaging and disseminations.”

There is an opportunity for all interested parties to attend the next meeting of the Task Force. That meeting will be held via teleconference on June 24, 2020 at 9:00 am. The dial-in number for the meeting is: 1-408-418-9388. The access code is: 718 434 016. When the agenda for that meeting is established, it is likely to be found [here](#).

Conclusions

Looking at this and the previous article collectively, several conclusions jump out. They are:

- There is a very large number of activities underway at the local, county, state and Federal levels that have a direct impact on our water resources.
- Some of these activities, such as acquiring conservation land, are a strength, while others are a weakness, an opportunity or a threat. Some activities fit into multiple categories.
- Some of the threats, are relatively minor. However, some threats, such as enacting the *Savings Clause* that was described in [our last article](#), would be a huge setback for our water resources.
- The fact that funding for Florida Forever can be agreed to and then potentially reduced or that a critical project such as the Kissimmee River Restoration project, that is close to completion, can be delayed due to a reduction in funding, gives the feeling of taking one step forward and then taking either a half or a full step backwards.
- There are numerous ways for people who want to shape the future of our water resources to participate. This includes:
 - Attend meetings and provide input to the key organizations that are driving water policies. This includes the HAB Task Force meetings, as well as meetings of organizations such as [The Blue Green Algae Task Force](#), the [South Florida Water Management District](#), the [South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force](#) and the [meetings held by the Army Corps of Engineers](#) to develop a new release schedule for Lake Okeechobee.
 - Attend meetings and provide input to the decision makers when an issue, such as the development of Eden Oaks, arises.
 - Respond to calls to action, such as the one [the Society issued on May the 28th](#) about the *Savings Clause*.
 - Implement some of the *Act Locally* actions that were discussed in our last article, such as planting native plants to reduce the need for watering and fertilizer.

- When voting, take into account the candidate's position on water-related issues.
- Stay informed with what is happening and engage your neighbors and friends in conversation and action.

In Case You Missed It: Useful insight into watersheds and what you can do to protect them can be found [here](#).