



Eco-Fortune

Restoration projects are 'no longer a niche.'



Along the headwaters of the St. Johns, Florida's longest river at 310 miles, engineers have been busy for two decades. They've restored drained marshes, plugged up ditches and canals from the early 1900s and built more than 20,000 acres of reservoirs to collect nutrient-laden water flowing from surrounding citrus groves and cattle ranches. Now that the so-called Upper St. Johns River Basin Project is winding down, engineers will turn their attention to a \$700-million, 10-year project to restore the lower St. Johns.

While Florida's \$10-billion plan to restore the Everglades is the most visible restoration project in the state, hundreds of others, including the St. Johns, also are under way. The public projects, along with increasing restoration on private lands, have led to a boom

in the business of ecological restoration: Turning former wetlands drained for cattle ranches back into wetlands, for example, or moving gopher tortoises to new homes.

Traditionally dominated by boutique firms such as Tampa-based Biological Research Associates, eco-business is now attracting interest from big firms such as Naples-based Wilson-Miller and Orlando's MSEW. "This is no longer a niche," says Alan D. Reynolds, CEO of WilsonMiller. That firm is pioneering Florida's Rural Lands Stewardship program for projects such as Ave Maria in rural Collier County.

The Ave Maria project — encompassing both the university and the town — will protect and restore 17,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land as it makes way for 20,000 residents and 6,000 university students by 2016.

PROTECTION: Everglades restoration is one of hundreds of projects statewide.

Demand for restoration services should grow this year. Florida has about 11.5 million acres being managed for conservation statewide, or about a quarter of the peninsula, says Jo Ann Jolley, associate director of the Florida Center for Environmental Studies at Florida Atlantic University (www.ces.fau.edu), which aims to create a clearinghouse for the highly fragmented restoration industry. Many public lands languish on restoration waiting lists, needing to be rid of ditches or exotic species.

Meanwhile, on privately owned property, "the sites that were easy to develop are all gone," says Reynolds. "Those that are left may have one or a whole bunch of environmental constraints."

Hey, Charlie
Here's what
the environmental
industry wants ...



Continue the Acceler8 program, which uses state money to speed up funding, design and construction to finish eight key Everglades restoration projects by 2011.

Lobby Congress to come up with its promised share of the \$10-billion Everglades project.

Support further funding under Florida Senate Bill 444 for alternative water supplies.

Inspire better coordination between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the state's five water management districts on water-supply planning.



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Environmental Services

3 Key Issues

Florida's ecological restorers are closely monitoring three key issues in 2007, says Darla Miller, vice president for environmental services at Orlando's MSEW:

» Changes in federal wetlands rules that seek to reduce the high number of failed wetlands mitigation projects. New standards will em-

phasize offsite wetlands banks in areas where they are most likely to succeed, rather than postage stamp-sized projects near developments that have proven ineffective.

» Removal of the bald eagle from the U.S. Endangered Species Act. "But make no mistake," says Miller,

"private property owners will still have to have management plans for eagles."

» More protection for the Florida gopher tortoise. The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission is expected to reclassify the burrowing native from "species of special concern" to "threatened."

Company to Watch

WATER RESOURCE ASSOCIATES

Tampa

WRA was founded by Pete Hubbell, former executive director of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and his second-in-command, Mark Farrell, after they left the district in 1997. Ten years later, WRA has grown to \$4.8 million in annual revenue and 15 employees. Steering SWFWMD through the arduous Tampa Bay water wars well-prepared Hubbell and Farrell for their clients' primary demand: Finding water in scarce areas. The company does long-term water supply planning for governments throughout Florida and helps private developers land consumptive-use permits in places where they're hard to get, like southwest Florida's Southern Water Use Caution Area.

Restoring Jobs



WANTED: Everglades restoration work will create 4,000 long-term jobs.

The United States builds one or two major reservoirs every decade. Florida's plan to fast-track eight key elements of the Everglades restoration plan means the state will build three in the next five years. But the areas targeted for the enormous reservoirs — La Belle, Indiantown and the Everglades Agricultural Area 25 miles south of South Bay — don't have the skilled labor to build them. Instead of bringing heavy-equipment operators and construction-craft workers in from elsewhere, the South Florida Water Management District plans to train hundreds of workers in the area, designated by the state as a region of "critical economic concern" because of higher-than-average unemployment. SFWMD is partnering with Palm Beach Community College in Belle Glade and the Education Center of Southwest Florida in La Belle to provide the workforce training. "We're going to create 4,000 job opportunities, and they won't be over once the reservoirs are built," says Alvin Jackson, who is coordinating the training on behalf of the district. "These areas will have to be maintained and managed in perpetuity." ■