

Change likely in sensitive grounds

Further development, mining at water source

BY RYAN HIRAKI

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More mining and development could be coming to an environmentally sensitive southeast Lee County area that provides residents and visitors with drinking water.

A report posted on the county's Web site late Tuesday afternoon means change is likely in this 83,000-acre region, which county commissioners decided to protect 18 years ago to gain state approval of their growth plan.

The area is known as the Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource area.

The report outlines three possible scenarios:

□ The first leans toward preservation, while allowing more mining and development.

□ The second has the same amount of development, but a little more mining.

□ The third favors mining the most, while keeping development the same as in the first two scenarios.

Scenario 1 is recommended, potentially because it manages growth the best.

"Even though the scenarios are a little bit vague, the report is thorough," said Mary Gibbs, the county's community development director.

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CELEBRITY BUZZ

Jolie goes into French hospital to await twins

PARIS — Brangelina's twins aren't here yet, but the big day is drawing closer.

The seafront Lenval hospital in Nice in the south of France said Tuesday that Angelina

Jolie had checked in at its Santa Maria maternity clinic to be kept under doctors' surveillance and rest before she gives birth.

"There's no urgency. It's been planned for a long time," said Nadine Bauer, hospital spokeswoman. "She's very well. Everything is fine."

"She is not on the verge of giving birth, not at all," she said. "It's not for right away."

The actress will almost certainly remain in the hospital until she gives birth, she said. Jolie, 33, has said the babies are due in August.

— The Associated Press

PROPOSALS

Continued from A1

The report will be distributed today at a meeting where committee members could discuss it. The county hired Dover, Kohl & Partners to study the area, part of a project that could cost \$14 million, but also could resolve conflicts among competing interests in the area.

One interest is mining. The area is one of six regions in the state that provide rock needed for roads and construction.

More mining can occur — mining is allowed, but zoning is not yet approved in about a half dozen cases, the report says. But it should be confined to the Alico Road corridor, where most mines are, even if that means destroying an isolated wetland parcel.

"You'd mine that out in exchange for connectivity with other sensitive lands," Gibbs

said, meaning mining companies would have to provide restoration elsewhere.

Developers would face a similar scenario, one in which compromise is essential.

Suggested is a mix of commercial and residential, often condo and apartments built atop businesses, in several areas.

Two are along State Road 82, near Southwest Florida International Airport and the east end of Corkscrew Road.

The other has no access. It's on the Agripartners property, which made headlines during a Coconut Road interchange controversy. About \$10 million was designated for the interchange shortly after Agripartners president Daniel Aronoff, who could have developed the land if the interchange were built, was involved in a 2005 event that raised \$40,000 for U.S. Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska. Young was the chair of the House Transportation Committee, which decides how road money is spent.

SCENARIO 1

Scenario 1 is recommended, potentially because it manages growth the best of three proposals.

From Dover, Kohl & Partners

Scenario 1 strives for the greatest natural resource benefits through two complementary strategies. By keeping limerock mining near the traditional Alico Road industrial corridor, less-impacted portions of the DR/GR to the east and south can be the focus of a long-term restoration strategy to benefit water resources and habitat protection.

In addition to the 3,576 acres of already-approved limerock pits ..., Scenario 1 identifies additional locations as preferred mining areas. ... These locations have various regulatory and ownership hurdles and there may never be sufficient demand for limerock to justify mining this much land. In the unlikely event that all were to become mines, an additional 4,048 acres would be available for aggregate production.

Consolidating future mining has several advantages:

- Truck traffic impacts aren't spread to new areas that would require longer trucking distances for distribution of aggregate.
- Hydrologic impacts of

large mine pits will be less consequential where water levels have already been lowered by drainage features installed for the airport and nearby roads.

Large mine pits create a biologically sterile environment with very little bird life, a desirable condition near airport runways.

Mining would provide an economically valuable use for land that would otherwise be continually affected by aircraft noise.

The best opportunities for flowway restoration and increased water storage are identified in this scenario. Priority 1 lands would begin to link flowways together; Priority 2, 3, and 4 lands would further complete the system over time.

Except for the most critical flowway reconnections, these lands can remain in agriculture. Over time they would be acquired and either converted to agricultural uses that are more consistent with water storage or restored to native habitat.

Several compact mixed-use communities are identified conceptually in Scenario 1 along major roads. Residential development rights would be transferred from more sensitive and remote DR/GR locations. Larger overlay zones could be estab-

IF YOU GO

- What: Committee meeting on 83,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land in southeast Lee County
- When: 1 p.m. today
- Where: Public Works building, 1500 Monroe St., downtown Fort Myers, Conference Room B

Gibbs said this plan could keep homes from springing up through the area, where one home for every 10 acres is allowed.

Pete Quasius, president of Audubon of Southwest Florida, said, "We have to come up with an appropriate balance to protect our environment, not only wildlife and habitat but our water supply."

He said there are times to exchange mining and development in one area for restoration in another. "Then there are times when we absolutely must protect a piece of real estate vital to the ecosystem."

lished in the Lee Plan to allow flexibility in siting these communities.

- Potential advantages
 - Best overall balance between need for limerock products and protection of natural resources
 - Maximum use of the traditional Alico Road industrial corridor for mining
 - Ample (but not excessive) land available for mining
 - Greatest potential for protecting and restoring flowways
 - Least interference with restoring flows to the Estero River
 - Best compliance with planning principles set forth in this report
 - Least interference with restoring flows to the Estero River

- Potential disadvantages
 - Mining pits would be more visible to passengers arriving at airport
 - Land in preferred mining areas may have lower quality rock or a thinner layer of mine-able rock
 - Landowners in preferred mining areas may not be interested in mining
 - Current mining applicants are likely to strongly resist this scenario.