

Existing mines will keep rocking along Alico Road New mines would not be allowed along Corkscrew Road

By CHARLIE WHITEHEAD

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The recommendation for the future of southeast Lee County is to keep rock mining restricted to the Alico Road corridor and not allow new mines along Corkscrew Road.

Scenarios created by planners Dover, Kohl and Associates offer a choice of mining only along Alico: a middle-of-the-road plan that allows limited mining along Corkscrew but balances it with flowway restoration and preservation and one that would allow mines all the way out almost to the Collier County line at the east end of Corkscrew.

The scenario Dover, Kohl recommends is the first.

"Wouldn't that be swell," said Kevin Hill, a Corkscrew resident and member of the 15-member committee studying uses in the 83,000-acre Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource area. "That's great."

There are already 3,576 acres of limerock pits approved, the scenario says, and the scenario would allow for as much as an additional 4,048 acres. There are regulatory and other hurdles, it says, and it's unlikely all that land would be mined.

In fact, a needs analysis by Dover, Kohl says that much mining is unnecessary. It projects the rock demand — currently 9 tons annually for every permanent resident — will require a total of 4,397 mined acres, an increase of about 22 percent over what's already approved and well under the 7,624 acres that would be available under the recommended scenario.

The scenario also provides the best opportunity for flowway and environmental restoration and preservation, it says. It also identifies areas for clustered mixed-use development.

"It mostly follows what's in the current (comprehensive growth management) plan," said Mary Gibbs, director of community development for the county. "Dover, Kohl says to keep mining in the area where it's occurring."

The study has cost about \$500,000 so far. Future studies of Corkscrew and Alico traffic and other factors will drive the cost to around \$1 million, with an additional \$400,000 allocated to implement the plans.

Committee Co-chairman Don Eslick of Estero says the recommendation is about what

he expected based on what he heard during the various workshops that took place over the last several months.

"It sounds very much like what they left here with after the workshops," he said. "Hopefully it's what people will coalesce around. Of the three scenarios that's the best."

Kirk Martin is a hydrologist who served on the committee. He said he's unsure the clustered residential use would be compatible with the flowway and environmental restoration the plan envisions.

"That residences and mines are incompatible has been established," he said.

Some existing home sites are located smack in the middle of historic flowways, he said. If the flowways are to be restored the homes are incompatible.

As for not allowing mining along Corkscrew, that prompts questions too, Martin said.

"One of the questions I have for Dover, Kohl is what mechanism do they have to make that happen?" he said. "The DR/GR is the mining district. Clearly there are going to be some folks who bought land out there with the intention of mining."

Yes, there are. There are already mine applications pending along Corkscrew, applications put on hold by the one-year moratorium Lee County commissioners imposed last September, and Gibbs has received letters from other landowners declaring their intentions to seek mine permits as well.

Repeated efforts to reach those landowners or their representatives, or mining representatives who served on the committee, were unsuccessful.

"They're all trying to get their foot in the door and be lined up with whatever comes their way," Hill said, "whether it's a Bert Harris suit or a Conservation 2020 buy."

The county already faces one Bert Harris suit from Schwab Materials, which was denied permission to mine 640 acres the company owns south of Corkscrew. A Harris claim is made when a government regulation or other official act devalues private property.

Conservation 2020 is the county program that buys land for environmental preservation.

Gibbs said she expects the scenarios will be hotly debated, as will the projection of limerock demand.

"I'm quite sure there'll be some discussion on that," she said.

The scenarios will be presented to the DR/GR committee at 1 p.m. Wednesday in a meeting at the Community Development and Public Works Building in downtown Fort

Myers.

County commissioners will meet Aug. 1 to consider a DR/GR plan.

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