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New group gets basics on resource region

By Ryan Lengerich

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Lee County development staff on Wednesday gave a new committee, assembled to help draft plans for environmentally diverse land in southeast Lee County, a historic look at the area as it prepares to determine how best to use and protect the property.

The 15-member group acts in an advisory role to county commissioners as it shapes the 83,000 acres of Density Reduction Groundwater Resource area. Established in the early 1990s, the area is a crucial contributor to the area's drinking water. Only one home per 10 acres is permitted.

The area, while environmentally sensitive, also is a white-hot mining location, rich with aggregate for building and, in some cases, road construction.

Residents, mining industry representatives, landowners, environmentalists and Smart Growth Committee members comprise the group.

The steering committee will meet the second and fourth Wednesday of each month through June.

"All we ask is for an inordinate amount of your time," Wayne Daltry, Lee County's Smart Growth director, said jokingly.

ON THE COMMITTEE

Commissioner who appointed the member in parenthesis:

- Brenda Brooks, executive director, CREW Land and Water Trust (Ray Judah)
- Steven L. Brown, environmental policy specialist, Conservancy of Southwest Florida (Frank Mann)
- Phil Buchanan, Smart Growth Board (Brian Bigelow)
- Carie Call, PBS&J, Smart Growth Board (Bob Janes)
- Don Eslick, Estero Council of Community Leaders (Janes)
- Richard Friday, Youngquist Mines (Tammy Hall)
- Dennis Gilkey, Gilkey Organization (Janes)
- Cullum Hasty, Sand Castle Realty (Judah)
- Kevin Hill, Corkscrew Rural Community Planning Committee (Mann)
- Jason Lauritsen, Big Cypress science coordinator, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (Bigelow)
- W. Kirk Martin, vice president, CDM (Hall)
- Scott McCaleb, Florida Rock Industries (Mann)
- Peggy Schmidt, resident (Judah)
- Linda Tanner, resident (Bigelow)
- Don Troyer, Troyer Brothers Florida Inc. (Hall)

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The group hopes to make recommendations to the commission at the end of June, and the committee will then dissolve.

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Cullum Hasty, Brenda Brooks and Dennis Gilkey were named co-chairmen.

Commissioners last week set aside up to \$750,000 for a consultant to study the resource area. As that study is conducted, the commission approved a controversial moratorium on growth plan amendments and zoning changes in the area.

The move pleased environmentalists and homeowners within the resource area, but was unpopular with mining industry representatives. Mining companies, many with significant investments already made in studies and application fees, were relegated to the sidelines at least until the September moratorium expires.

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