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## Flood protection may be possibility

Lots near Sunshine may offer watershed for Lehigh

By DON RUANE, [druane@news-press.com](mailto:druane@news-press.com)

Published by [news-press.com](http://news-press.com) on August 21, 2003

A watershed offering flood protection could be established in Lehigh Acres with land now saddled with unpaid property taxes.

Property records show there are tax certificates issued for more than 650 parcels in the area around Sunshine Boulevard.

Many were abandoned by people who have no intention of using them, according to Karen Forsyth, lands director for the county.

Because flooding has been a problem in the past along the Orange River, the land in Lehigh Acres could be used to store runoff from heavy rains before it is released from Harn's Marsh into the river.

In addition to that, spreading the water over a larger area would mean less flooding.

"There's certainly the ability to reduce flooding from Lehigh Acres," said Lee County Commissioner John Albion, whose district includes Lehigh Acres. "This will do some of that."

The county first has to knit together enough of the tax-delinquent land and nondelinquent property to create storage areas and flow ways.

To do this, the county might be able to acquire nondelinquent property by trading a delinquent parcel somewhere else in Lehigh Acres for the property it needs for water retention.

Jim Fleming, vice chairman of the East County Water Control District, believes building the retention areas could make surrounding land more attractive as lakefront property.

The delinquent land could be sold and the proceeds used to assemble more blocks of land from single-family lots for other public uses.

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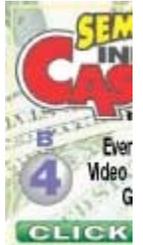
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