

Hello newsletter editors,

My thanks to Phyllis Hall, Seminole Audubon Society, for summarizing our call on Sunday and writing an article for her chapter's newsletter. She graciously shared that article with me, which I am forwarding on to you for use in your chapter newsletters. Thanks to all of you for keeping your individual memberships up-to-date on RCC actions.

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The January 12 RCC meeting was held via conference call. The RCC is composed of representatives from Audubon Chapters in Central Florida: Orange, Ridge, West Volusia, Southeast Volusia, Highlands, Halifax River, Kissimmee Valley, Lake Region, Oklawaha. The RCC meets three times per year to share information and provide updates on our regional conservation priorities for 2020 which are 1) promote Lake Apopka restoration, visitor access and a new Audubon Nature Center, and 2) Monitor and act on local and state government land use decisions impacting wildlife habitat in our geographic area.

At the January 12 meeting, the new Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) Coordinator, Kristen Sims, was introduced. Kristen will coordinate CLI graduates throughout the state connecting them with each other and with their local Audubon chapter activities. Kristen is based at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. The president of the new UCF Audubon chapter, Lauren Puleo, was also introduced.

Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy for the FL Audubon Central Florida Policy Office, gave updates on legislative issues.

A decision was made on December 12 on the Osceola Parkway extension through a portion of Split Oak Forest, a wilderness conservation lands east of Orlando in Osceola County. This was a

compromise solution to the original proposal. It will add ten new acres of mitigation land to every one acre affected by the project. The RCC recommends chapters continue to pressure local officials to provide adequate funding for this.

There is concern about the request by CEMEX to expand their mining in the Green Swamp Wilderness area. 322,000 acres of the Green Swamp region was designated as an Area of Critical State Concern in 1974. It is located west of Highway 27 and east of Interstate 75 in Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando and Pasco Counties. The headwaters of the Peace River, Withlacoochee River, Oklawaha River, and Hillsborough River are located here. It's 560,000 acres of wetlands, flatlands and low ridges are bounded by prominent sandy ridgelines. Rainwater drains across the surface to create headwaters of four major rivers: the Withlocoochee, the Oklawaha, the Hillsborough and the Peace. Rainwater also trickles down through the soil to replenish the Floridan aquifer system, the primary source of drinking water for most Floridians. The RCC chapters in that region were urged to contact the Lake County Commissioners to oppose the CEMEX request for exemption. The Lake County Commission cannot approve this project on their own. It will also need to be approved by the Department of Economic Opportunity Division of Community Planning.

Another issue of concern discussed was legislation related to biosolid disposal. There is a company which wants to dump biosolids from treatment facilities on land in the Kissimmee basin which would increase nitrogen affecting water resources. There is proposed legislation to tighten regulations and eliminate an exemption that currently allows this dumping. There is new technology that was started and had success in the City of Sanford some years ago to convert the biosolids to energy. That was abandoned during the Governor Scott era. RCC members were encouraged to advocate at the local level to encourage innovation to deal with biosolids from treatment facilities rather than dumping them on land.