



COUNTY CONNECTION

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IN THIS ISSUE

Section	Page(s)
• Top Story	1
• Newsflash	3-5

Marion County Commissioners
David Moore, District 1
Kathy Bryant, Vice Chair, District 2
Stan McClain, Chairman, District 3
Carl Zalak III, District 4
Earl Arnett, District 5

Acting County Administrator
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MISSION STATEMENT

Marion County provides professional and resourceful public services for our citizens through strategic planning and cost-effective implementation of county initiatives, generating positive results that set the standard for quality local government.

TOP STORY



SANDHILL SUCCESS:

Marion land added to Florida Forever list

By Elaine Delorio McClain

Marion County's springs protection efforts took an important step forward this summer. On June 19, Marion County Parks and Recreation's application to add the Silver Springs Sandhill site to the 2016 Florida Forever project list was unanimously approved by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Acquisition and Restoration Council. Projects on this list are prioritized for state purchase as funding becomes available.

The Sandhill site, **470 acres of land adjacent to Coehadjoe Park and located less than a mile from the headsprings of Silver Springs**, received unanimous support to be added to the Florida Forever list of projects. In a follow-up motion, the council added the Silver Springs Sandhill project into another project: Florida's First Magnitude Springs. This means the acquisition of the site is a priority for funding, as this project is ranked No. 1 within the Partnerships and Regional Incentives Projects group.



Silver Springs Sandhill is listed as "most vulnerable" in the Marion County Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment, and is ideal for producing high quality recharge to the aquifer. Current development rights for this land would allow approximately 1,900 residential units, with a mix of medium and high densities. By adding Silver Springs Sandhill to the list of Florida Forever projects, it becomes eligible for purchase by the state, removing the chance of development. Marion County, along with other state agency partners, would manage the land for springs protection and recreational use.

Florida Forever projects may be acquired directly by the state and then, through an agreement, be maintained by a local government. Marion County Parks and Recreation currently maintains 644 acres of state-owned land. The department has had successful partnerships with state and federal agencies for many years, and cooperates frequently on land management projects.

How does land acquisition help protect the springs? • Turn to page 2

Protecting Marion's water from the ground down

Marion County has world-class springs, beautiful lakes and rivers, and drinking water that's been voted the best-tasting in Florida. Water, without a doubt, is an important natural asset in our community, and many of us are familiar with the water bodies we see at surface level – especially as we cool off in the summer months.

Marion County staff, through their departments' surface-level efforts, are active in protecting the quality of our groundwater – our community's source of drinking water.

These efforts largely fall into these 3 categories:

Marion has **sensitive, sandy soil** and a **porous underground**.

The **source of our water** is the Floridan Aquifer; it flows beneath our feet in an underground system of caves, caverns and holes (like Swiss cheese).

What we do on the surface directly impacts the quality of our groundwater and water bodies.



Stormwater retrofits

As rainwater runs along the ground, it can pick up pollutants such as nitrogen from excess fertilizer. The Office of the County Engineer's **Stormwater Management** section works to protect our water resources by preventing pollutants from infiltrating water bodies or groundwater as part of stormwater runoff.

Example: Using innovative treatment technology, a project on SW 85th Street and SW 40th Avenue in southeast Ocala has removed more than 70 percent of the nitrogen (the key pollutant impacting our springs) that would have otherwise reached the aquifer and discharged at Rainbow Springs. The treatment uses a special soil amendment designed to help remove nitrates as the water infiltrates through the pond bottom and into the aquifer. The result: rainwater that reaches the aquifer is cleaner. Marion County Stormwater manages over 2,400 drainage retention areas (DRAs) and the stormwater system associated with the county's transportation network.

Land acquisition and management

Since water that flows into the ground ends up in our aquifer and eventually our springs, some land in Marion is especially important for spring health. **Marion County Parks and Recreation** works with state agencies to identify areas for purchase and management.



Example: A thick layer of sand between the surface and the aquifer allows the land at Silver Springs Sandhill (*see page 1*), to drain quickly, which is good for maintaining flows from the springs. However, if the quality of water rushing through the sand layer is poor, Silver Springs and surrounding ecology could be negatively impacted. Conserving this land helps protect the quality of water reaching the aquifer, which is why the county worked to have the land placed on the Florida Forever list for state purchase. Marion County Parks and Recreation maintains 644 acres of state-owned land.



Wastewater practices

After wastewater is treated, it's returned to the ground, where it eventually reaches the aquifer.

Example: **Marion County Utilities** has regionalized 11 poorer-performing wastewater plants into five advanced wastewater treatment facilities that discharge cleaner effluent. The department also has a reclaimed distribution system to irrigate two local golf courses, dispersing the treated water over a much larger acreage. The golf course acts as an additional filter, reducing the nitrogen in the treated water before it reaches the aquifer.

NEWSFLASH

Commission votes to amend noise ordinance

By Danielle Damato Doty

The Marion County Commission recently adopted an ordinance that will address concerns related to noise and vibration control.



Following citizen input and workshops held on March 24, 2015, and May 19, 2015, the commission directed staff to schedule and prepare an amendment to Marion County Code Chapter 13, Noise and Vibration Control, typically referred to as the Marion County Noise Ordinance. The board unanimously approved those changes following a public hearing on June 16.

The amendments include adding the use of the “plainly audible” test and providing both code enforcement and law enforcement officers the ability to enforce the ordinance. “Plainly audible” means any sound that can be clearly heard by an officer using his or her normal hearing faculties without enhancement by any device, such as a microphone or hearing aid.

The commission had been receiving an increasing number of concerns from citizens in residential areas regarding noise disturbances, mostly related to loud music. Former sound measurement and enforcement procedures limited county “code” enforcement officers’ ability to provide relief to those residents.

“These are very positive changes for Code Enforcement officers, as well as law enforcement,” said Sam Martsof, Marion County Growth Services Director. “They will now have the tools needed to help citizens who are experiencing disturbances of their peace and quiet in residential areas across Marion County.”

 Click for a short video
**ABOUT CODE
ENFORCEMENT**

Top 5:

Code Enforcement facts

By Danielle Damato Doty

You may have heard about it from a neighbor or perhaps from speaking with an officer, but how much do you know about Marion County’s Code Enforcement Division? Learn more in this month’s Top 5 list:

- 1** The Code Enforcement Division works to promote, protect and improve the health, safety and welfare of citizens. How? Through an effective program based on the Marion County Land Development Code, which guides the orderly development and upkeep of land and property in our county.
- 2** Code Enforcement officers are tasked with upholding county ordinances and working with citizens and businesses to gain and maintain their compliance with county regulations.
- 3** The Code Enforcement Board (CEB) is a quasi-judicial body consisting of seven members. The board receives and evaluates evidence and testimony regarding alleged violations of Marion County codes and ordinances. CEB members are appointed by the County Commission, and CEB hearings are generally held the second Wednesday of each month.
- 4** In 2010, the Board of County Commissioners adopted Ordinance 10-19 regulating the maintenance of abandoned/vacant properties in foreclosure within unincorporated Marion County to avoid declining property values. It requires a mortgagee to register and maintain a property along with paying a registration fee of \$100 per property.
- 5** Code Enforcement staff is available to meet with neighborhood and community groups, businesses and agencies to provide useful program information and answer questions.

Still curious? Visit www.marioncountyfl.org/codeenforcement or contact the Code Enforcement Division at 352-671-8900 to request a staff presentation or site visit.

Did you know?

In 2014, Code Enforcement handled more than 6,500 cases. Each Code Enforcement officer handled nearly 600 cases that same year.

Departments welcome new leaders

By Stacie Causey

Four areas of Marion County government transitioned to new leadership over the summer. A new perspective shines in the Office of Fiscal Review and the departments of Growth Services, Information Technology and Parks and Recreation. Meet our new leaders here.



Chris Kirbas
Fiscal Manager

Chris joined Marion County in May of this year and brings over 24 years of federal and state financial experience at multiple levels to his new role. His governmental and for-profit accounting and budgeting knowledge fuel his excitement "for the opportunity to serve" and his enthusiasm "to help resolve critical issues within the county."



Sam Martsof
Director, Growth Services

Sam, a U.S. Air Force veteran, has served the citizens of Marion County for 23 years, beginning in Code Enforcement. He then held several positions in the Zoning division before being promoted to Planning and Zoning Manager and later to Deputy Director in October 2014. Martsof is honored to serve the community and feels blessed "to have a talented and experienced staff who understand our role in the economic development of our county."



Tom Northey
Information Systems Director, Information Technology

Tom started working with Marion County 911 Emergency Management in 1995, then transferred to the Office of the County Engineer before beginning with Information Technology in 2000. Northey oversees 22 information technology professionals tasked with supporting Marion County governmental and constitutional offices. His excitement and vision for the challenging position is supported by an "amazing department comprised of talented staff."



Jim Couillard, PLA, ASLA
Director/Landscape Architect,
Parks and Recreation

Jim began with Marion County Parks and Recreation in 2006 and will oversee staff members in four divisions: operations, recreation, administrative and design. Jim says he's "honored to serve the community in this position" and is looking forward to further advance outdoor recreation goals by working with the Board of County Commissioners, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, residents and visitors.



KP Hole VIPs: *enjoy the river on your time*

By Stacie Causey

One of Marion County's most visited parks launched a new program this summer in an effort to alleviate morning parking stress on peak attendance days. **KP Hole guests now have the opportunity to reserve parking spaces in advance with the new VIP parking pass.** A \$20 fee will hold reserved parking places until 10 a.m. Passes are available for Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, and must be purchased by the Wednesday prior to the intended visit.

To reserve your "VIP Parking," visit www.MarionCountyFL.org/Parks (click "view and register for park programs" and then type "KP Hole" in the search box) or call 352-671-8560.



Road safety, the Back-to-School edition

By Stacie Causey

Roadways will be a little more crowded beginning Aug. 17, as Marion County public schools open their doors to students for the new school year. The Florida Department of Transportation has proclaimed August as Pedestrian Safety Awareness Month and the Office of the County Engineer provides safety tips to increase roadway safety in and around school zones.

Drivers, be alert.

- Add time back into your commute for the slower speeds in school zones on your route, particularly during the first few weeks of the school year.
- Stop for school buses that are loading or unloading children.
- Look out for children biking or walking, especially as you approach intersections and school crossings.
- Watch for changes in traffic patterns that may have occurred over the summer.

Students, be careful.

- If riding a bike, wear a helmet and walk your bike through crosswalks.
- Obey the instructions of school crossing guards and officers stationed along your route.
- Use sidewalks when possible and stay out of the road completely.
- If you need to cross the road, always look left, right and left again before leaving the sidewalk.

County offers \$3.5 wage proposal to fire union

On July 6, Marion County offered the Fire – Rank & File union a nearly \$3.5 million wage proposal and is currently awaiting a response from the union. The county's offer, if agreed to by the union, will raise the starting pay for paramedics, EMTs and single-certified firefighters, effective Oct. 1. It will also raise the salaries for those currently employed by anywhere from approximately \$3,000-\$6,000. Read the detailed wage proposal and the Interim County Administrator's email to Rank & File with the proposal at www.MarionCountyFL.org/FireFAQs



Q: What is the county proposing in terms of firefighter salaries?

A: The county's offer to the union includes the following increases, effective Oct. 1:

- **All certified paramedics and FF/PMs** (except critical care paramedics) will receive \$2 per hour increase, or **approx. \$6,000 more per year.**
- **All EMTs, FF/EMTs and single-certified firefighters** will receive a \$1 per hour increase, or **approx. \$3,000 more per year.**
- **Min. starting pay would go up:** \$2 for paramedics, \$1 for EMTs and single-certified firefighters.

Total offer: approximately \$3.5 million

Calendar of Events

Find out what events are coming up in Marion County – check the online [calendar of events!](#)