

Former dairy home to native birds

By Pete Gawda, Okeechobee News

Waste Management, the company that operates the Okeechobee County regional landfill, has made a commitment to protect the environment. Of the 4,300 acres owned by the regional landfill, 2,400 acres are devoted to wetland mitigation.



In 1998 they began a wetland mitigation program. There are two areas of emphasis for this program the Southwest Swamp located east of Berman Road and north of S.R. 70, and the former Posey Dairy, south of S.R. 70.

On Wednesday, Pete Wallace, a biologist with Applied Technology & Management, conducted a photo presentation and a tour of the Waste Management property to show off the company's conservation practices.

Applied Technology & Management supervises Waste Management's environmental programs.

Carolyn McCready of Waste Management stated that currently 325 acres are being used for a landfill. Eventually, 800 acres will be used by the regional landfill.

Mr. Wallace said the 400 acres of Posey Dairy was overgrazed and in "pretty bad shape" when the mitigation program began. But, he added that the renovations of the property have been "immeasurable."

Daily, he said, the 900 cows on the dairy produce waste equivalent to the sewage produced daily by a city of 10,000.

He displayed before and after photographs. Today, a created wetland covers much of the former dairy property and provides nesting grounds for the sandhill crane.

In the Southwest Swamp there are three mitigation areas restoration, enhancement and creation totaling almost 100 acres. Native trees were planted, a flood control structure was erected to control water level and an east-west ditch was filled.

Applied Technology planted 1,600 trees per acre of such common species as black gum, slash pine and cypress. Mr. Wallace said this was over-planting but if 10 percent survived, they would be satisfied. The growth of the plants and trees is monitored.

Two hundred and fifty wells are scattered over the property to measure the level of surface water. Light grazing and mowing are used to keep underbrush down, making a good environment for baby sandhill cranes.

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