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Doris Pellegrini  
Little Club resident

UCF



MATTHEW RATAJCZAK staff photographer

Loxahatchee River advocate Patrick Hayes speaks Thursday night to a group of concerned residents in Tequesta about the fate of the river. Residents and activists gathered to form a coalition to protect, save and restore the ecosystem of the first federally designated Wild and Scenic River.

# River friends unite

## Coalition members discuss campaign for Loxahatchee

By Suzanne Wentley  
staff writer

### TEQUESTA

Nearly a hundred Martin and Palm Beach county residents passed postcards, petitions and pictures Thursday evening with one goal in mind:

"To save the river," said Doric Wereszak, a Little Club resident who said she was interested in protecting the Loxahatchee River from saltwater intrusion.

Like Wereszak, many of the people attending the first meeting of the Loxahatchee River Coalition at County Line Park were not well versed in technical phrases such as "minimum flow levels" and "cubic feet per second."

But it didn't take long before the residents were organized and ready to lobby the South

Florida Water Management District and other agencies to take better care of the first federally designated Wild and Scenic River.

"I'm not sure of all this scientific business, but we have all seen the river disintegrate," said Doris Pellegrini, also of Little Club in South Martin County. "We know the river is going to die."

With colorful maps hung in the front of the room, environmental activists and members of the Jupiter Farms Environmental Council, who organized the meeting, explained the problems associated with the health of the Loxahatchee.

The first battle is to fight a plan by water managers to create a minimum freshwater flow level of 35 cubic feet per second — or 262 gallons per second — into the river, the group agreed.

Joanne Davis, a planner with 1,000 Friends of Florida, said that amount of water is not enough to restore the cypress trees, which have been replaced by saltwater-friendly mangroves along the banks of the Loxahatchee River.

"We can find ways to get our drinking water without hurting this river," she said. "The river needs good, reliable, clean, fresh water so it can restore itself."

Wearing a "Got Water?" pin, Mary King, a Hobe Sound resident, said she has seen firsthand the river dying.

"I'm an avid kayaker, and we need water," she said.

Many attending the meeting vowed to attend the water district's 2 p.m. Wednesday workshop to discuss the need to allocate more water to environmental purposes instead of urban uses.

Dick Roberts, a biologist with Jonathan Dickinson State Park, said now is the time to lobby while water managers are discussing the flow levels.

"I've worked on this river for 32 years," he said. "This is our golden time to catch the water management district. This is the time to grab the water management district by the throat."

Along with talk of a minimum guaranteed flow of fresh water, the residents Thursday also considered creating more opportunities to use reclaimed water to irrigate golf courses and the possible need for a spillway on the river to hold back salt water, which seeps in from the inlet.

But the main goal is to influence public policy with a new grass-roots effort, said Kathy Fehey of the environmental council.

"We live here, and we need to watch this river," she said.