

State moves to protect river

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TALLAHASSEE — Anyone who has canoed on the serene Loxahatchee River, which slowly winds its way out to sea north of Jupiter, knows the cypress-canopied river is wild and scenic.

Now Florida's government is acknowledging the Loxahatchee's beauty as Gov. Bob Graham and the Cabinet voted Tuesday to seek federal "wild and scenic river" designation for 7.5 miles of the river's northwest fork.

Nominating the Loxahatchee for

such a federal designation doesn't guarantee the river's protection, but it sets in motion a plan aimed at managing its use.

The river plan is controversial. Included in the plan approved Tuesday is a statement that it will neither prohibit, nor approve the addition of highway interchanges outside the designated river corridor. Florida Audubon Society Vice President Charles Lee says that's an exemption for a local developer who plans new roads.

The governor and Cabinet maintained that language over Lee's

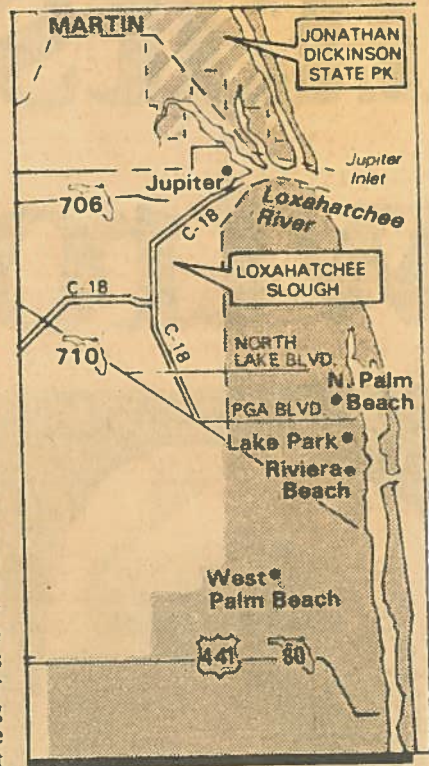
objections. Graham said: "It's a statement of the obvious that nothing herein shall prohibit interchanges."

The plan to manage the Loxahatchee is part of a broader goal of securing a buffer between the river's wild banks and South Florida's rapid development. The federal government has the authority to protect wild and scenic rivers by acquiring surrounding land.

The Cabinet's action means the governor can ask the U.S. interior secretary to designate a 7.5-mile stretch of the Loxahatchee's northwest fork as part of the national wild and scenic river system. It also means the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will oversee the plan for managing the river and adjoining land prepared by the DNR and the South Florida Water Management District.

The plan calls for cooperation between governments and private business to prevent damage to the stream and its basin. It also controls public access to the river.

The Loxahatchee would become the first officially "wild and scenic river" in Florida. The designation was sought — but never obtained — for the Suwannee River in



North Florida.

Few of the nation's waterways have this kind of protection.

With or without help from the federal government, the South Florida Water Management District, drawing on funds in the state's Save Our Rivers program, is buying 1,250 acres along the Loxahatchee and its tributaries.