



# NEWS | Release

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## **Grant to aid County in preserving Lake Apopka land**

**TAVARES** – Thanks to a \$1.95-million grant from the State, one of Lake County's picturesque views from the western shore of Lake Apopka will be preserved for all to witness.

Earlier this month, Lake County Commission Chairman Debbie Stivender, County staff and community supporters journeyed to Tallahassee to lobby for approval of a Florida Communities Trust grant application. The delegation returned to Lake County victorious as the \$1.95-million grant was approved to purchase 192 acres fronting Lake Apopka along County Road 455.

Successful completion of the project will result in the first County access point to Lake Apopka with preliminary plans of a fishing pier, observation tower and picnic facilities. Once a citrus grove, the site is perched about 165-feet above sea level and gives a breath-taking view of the entire lake. Numerous species of wildlife can be seen at the site, including bald eagles and gopher tortoises.

Lake County officials, however, were not the first to recognize the overall beauty of the Lake Apopka land. Native Americans once inhabited the shores and artifacts, such as arrowheads and potsherds, have been unearthed around the lake.

Previously one of the state's most sparkling bodies of water, Lake Apopka had recently fallen on hard times due to run-off of pesticides used in the area. The lake is undergoing an extensive restoration effort by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

The land acquisition project will provide the County a location to construct a passive park with nature trails. Plans for the preserve are to have bicycle and pedestrian trails that will connect to the proposed Lake Apopka Loop Trail and Greenway.

The Lake Apopka land is within the Green Mountain Scenic Byway – one of the most heavily used cycling routes in Florida. Proposed Lake Apopka trails will link to the Byway, which is used each year for internationally recognized triathlons and is an international destination of touring and competitive cyclists.

With the increase of more proposed developments in the area, the Lake County Commission made the grant application a priority with an April 2004 approval to fully explore the grant process. The County will match the Florida Communities Grant with \$650,000 of which the Lake County Water Authority has pledged \$216,000 to the project.