

**CHASSAHO WITZKA
WILDERNESS
STUDY**

FLORIDA



CITRUS AND HERNANDO COUNTIES



The Refuge System is a National network of lands and waters managed and safeguarded for preservation and enhancement of the human benefits associated with wildlife and their environments. It presently consists of over 320 units, embracing nearly 30 million acres in 46 states. About 90 refuges containing 25 million acres in over 30 States qualify for study under the Wilderness Act.

OCTOBER - 1971

PREFACE

The Wilderness Act of September 3, 1964 (Public Law 88-577), requires that the Secretary of the Interior review every roadless area of 5,000 contiguous acres or more and every roadless island, regardless of size, within the National Refuge System within ten years after the effective date of the Act, and report to the President of the United States his recommendations as to the suitability or non-suitability of each such area or island for preservation as wilderness. A recommendation of the President for designation as wilderness does not become effective unless provided by an Act of Congress.

In defining wilderness, the Act also included areas of less than 5,000 acres that are of sufficient size to make preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.

Sections 4(a) and (b) of the Wilderness Act provide that: (1) The Act is to be within and supplemental to the purposes for which National Wildlife Refuges are established; and (2) Wilderness areas shall be administered so as to preserve their wilderness character and shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use insofar as primary refuge objectives permit. Wilderness does not remove or alter an area's status as a National Wildlife Refuge.

This brochure concerns a national wildlife refuge that has been studied by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife at the direction of the Secretary of the Interior. Its purpose is to summarize the wilderness study in sufficient detail to enable the reader to form an opinion regarding study conclusions concerning the suitability and desirability of including all or part of the refuge within the National Wilderness Preservation System.



INTRODUCTION

The 30,514-acre Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1943, is located in Citrus and Hernando Counties approximately 70 miles north of Tampa and St. Petersburg and 4 miles south of Homosassa Springs. The entire refuge was included in the study that was undertaken to determine wilderness possibilities.

Fresh, brackish, and salt marsh and water are the primary habitat types that sustain large waterfowl, wading bird, shore bird, and predaceous bird populations as well as significant numbers of alligators, manatees, raccoons, mink, and other mammals.

The refuge has, since its establishment, been managed in as near a natural condition as possible. Wildlife response has been excellent. Refuge objectives relate directly to the needs of threatened wildlife species, the wintering waterfowl population, and the maintenance of all indigenous wildlife species and general habitat types.



CHASSAHOWITZKA MARSH

HISTORY

Past and present inhabitants of the general area in which Chassahowitzka Refuge is located have always depended on the abundant natural resources available on the land and in the waters.

Algonquin Indians were among the earliest inhabitants. From before 300 B.C. until the early 1400's, these highly cultured and intelligent Indians permanently resided in the general locale depending almost entirely on the rich flora and fauna. The invasion of the Iroquois Indians in the early 1400's ended the reign of the peaceful Algonquins, and Spanish exploration in the 1500's brought death, disease, and famine resulting in the removal of most Indians from Florida by 1710.

The Seminole group of Indians, primarily Creek and Hitchiti Indians, moved into Florida in the 1700's and hunted and fished the lands and waters that now make up the refuge. Many of Florida's landmarks, including Chassahowitzka Refuge, were given names taken from the Seminole language.

White settlers became a part of the scene after 1842 and were given land as a reward for fighting the Indians. As the 1800's ended, timber companies were attracted to the area; and by 1930, the once plentiful forest products were nearly gone. People turned to commercial fishing and cattle raising as sources of income. These activities and others tied closely to the abundant natural resources of the area continue to support many of the people living near the refuge.



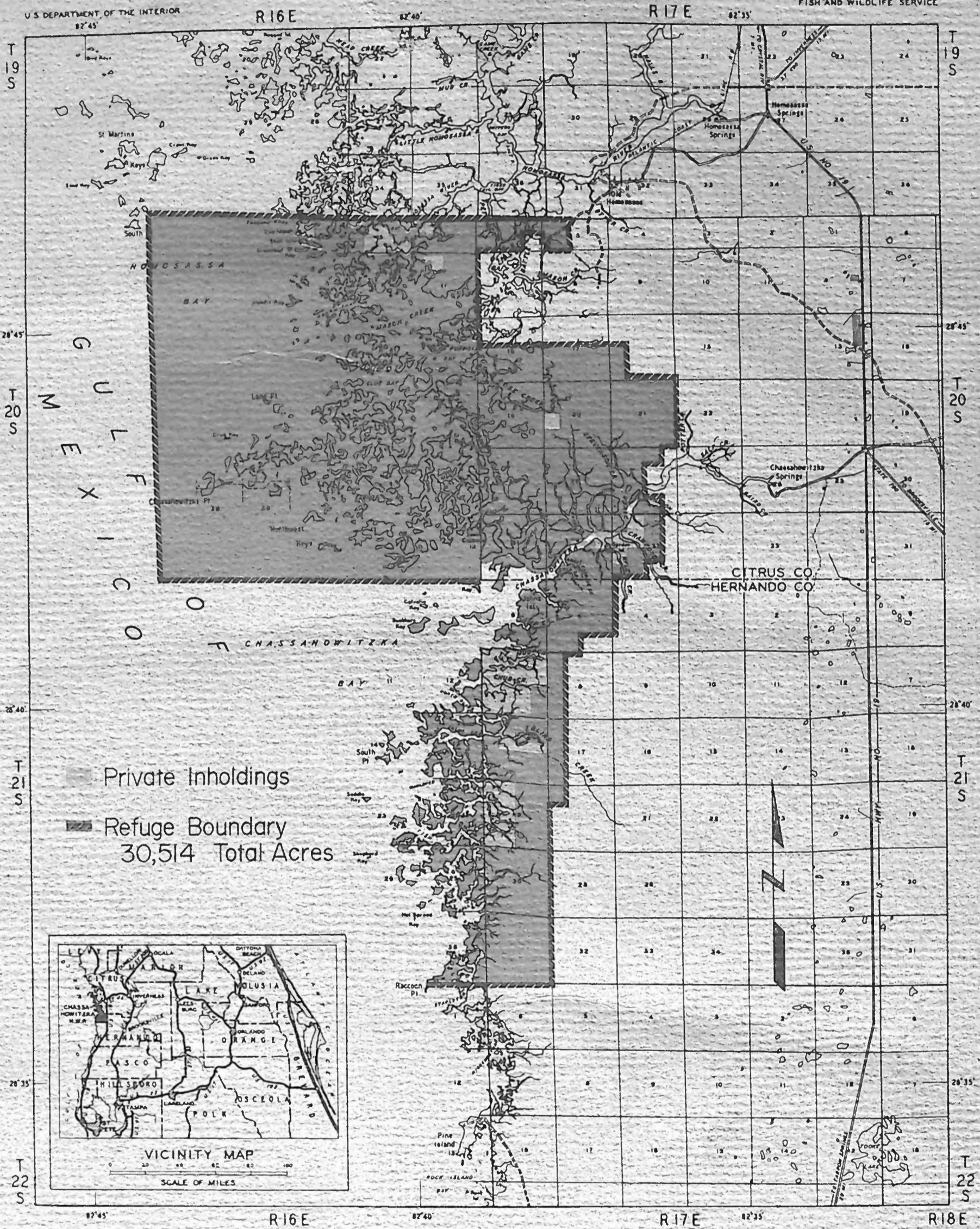
CHASSAHOWITZKA WILDERNESS STUDY

CHASSAHOWITZKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

CITRUS AND HERNANDO COUNTIES, FLORIDA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



October-1971

Preliminary - Subject to Change

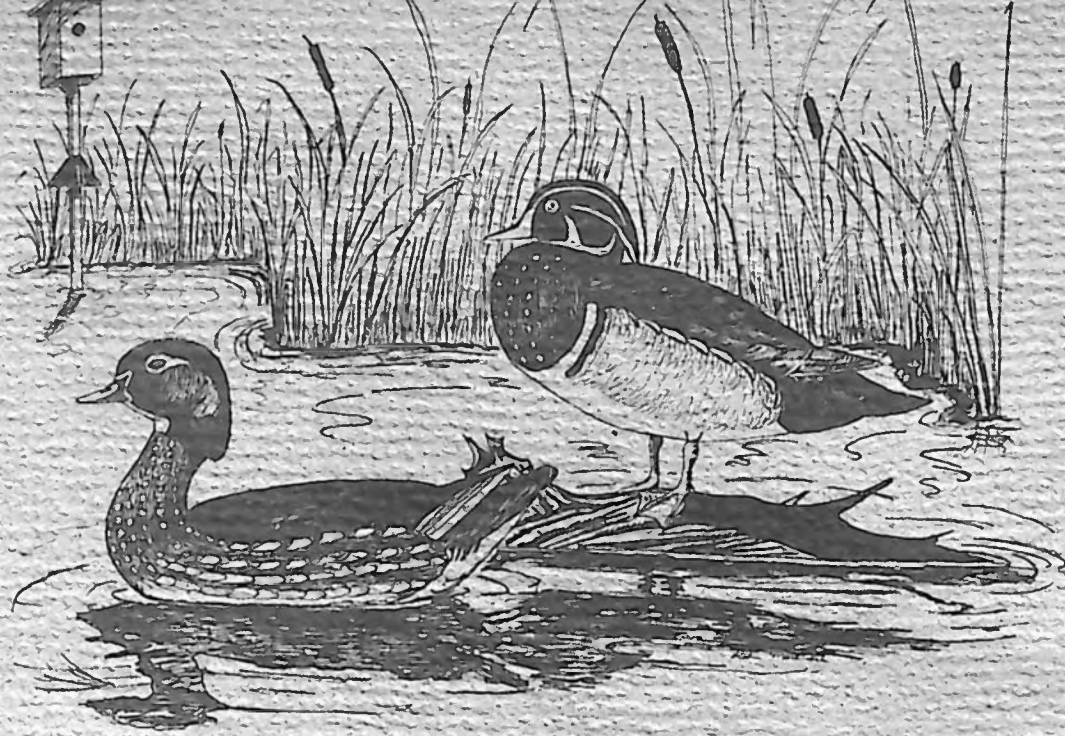
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

A product of the shallow salt waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the gleaming fresh waters of the rivers and springs that flow into the area, Chassahowitzka Refuge is truly a place of scenic beauty. Nearly 21,000 acres of the refuge are vegetated with a dense needle-rush-sawgrass marsh interspersed with cabbage palm-red cedar tree islands. With approximately 8,000 acres of salt water bays, streams, and ponds, and 1,500 acres of cut-over swampland, the refuge is truly a paradise for wildlife and people. The shallow waters are abundantly vegetated with extensive beds of submerged aquatics which attract thousands of waterfowl, other water birds, and many marine species.

Temperatures in the refuge locale are Chamber of Commerce mild with extremes ranging from 12 to 98 degrees. The colder temperatures are fairly uncommon. Average annual rainfall approaches 54 inches.

In Citrus County the refuge boundary includes the water bottoms acquired in fee title by the Federal Government; in Hernando County the boundary extends only to mean high tide, omitting the navigable waters which are state-owned.

HOMOSASSA BAY
CHASSAHOWITZKA REFUGE



RESOURCES

More than 20,000 ducks, primarily mallards, pintails, and widgeon, and 30,000 coots winter on Chassahowitzka Refuge each year. Wood ducks nest on the refuge in artificial nesting structures, and a gadwall and Florida, or mottled duck, propagation program is underway.

Several rare, endangered or otherwise threatened bird species, including brown pelicans, wood ibis, bald eagles, and ospreys, are documented in the refuge bird list which contains 248 species. As many as 500 white pelicans have wintered on Chassahowitzka Refuge. Song birds, herons, egrets, ibis, rails, gallinules, shore birds, and other birds nest in large numbers.

The refuge mammalian population is represented by a few white-tailed deer, black bears, manatees, and more numerous bobcats, raccoons, otters, and mink. Upland habitat on Chassahowitzka Refuge is limited, and the number of upland mammals is accordingly small.

Alligators, snakes, turtles, and a wide variety of salt and fresh water fish are found on the refuge. The shallow river and bay waters of the refuge provide outstanding nursery sites for the numerous marine species inhabiting the refuge.

Vegetative types found on the refuge are varied with the needlerush-sawgrass marsh complex comprising the largest acreage. Cabbage palm-red cedar free islands are scattered throughout the marsh which also includes mixed stands of saltgrass, saltmarsh cordgrass, saltmarsh bulrush, and sand sedge. Burgrass or muskgrass is abundant and the most important waterfowl food, although shoalgrass and widgeon-grass are also utilized. The small mangrove keys provide nursery sites for marine organisms and also are very attractive to nesting and resting water birds.

The waters of Chassahowitzka Refuge are extremely clean and productive. The crystal clear waters of the Homosassa and Chassahowitzka Rivers and the numerous other limestone springs flowing into the Gulf of Mexico join together to produce an ideal aquatic situation for animal and vegetation growth and development.

Approximately 2,000 acres of the refuge's needlerush marsh are grazed by permittees' cattle under a special use permit. Commercial fishing within the navigable waters of Chassahowitzka Refuge is also an important, established financial venture. Commercial sport fishing guides also take advantage of the outstanding fishing opportunities on the refuge.

WATERFOWL
MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION



PUBLIC USE

Current annual public use on Chassahowitzka Refuge approaches 30,000 visitors. Ninety percent of the visitors come to fish while five percent are waterfowl hunters and the remaining five percent account for all other uses.

Public use facilities are not available on the refuge at this time. Future facilities will be related primarily to providing an interpretive or educational experience. Approximately 2,500 acres in Citrus County are open to waterfowl hunting. Established airboat routes are maintained through a portion of the marsh and the navigable waters and are heavily utilized by waterfowl hunters.

Commercial fishing and wildlife-oriented boating within the navigable waters of the refuge are established practices. These and other public use activities, including sport fishing, sightseeing, waterfowl hunting, and nature study, will be continued unchanged so long as they do not conflict with the primary wildlife objectives of the refuge.

FISHING AND OYSTERING



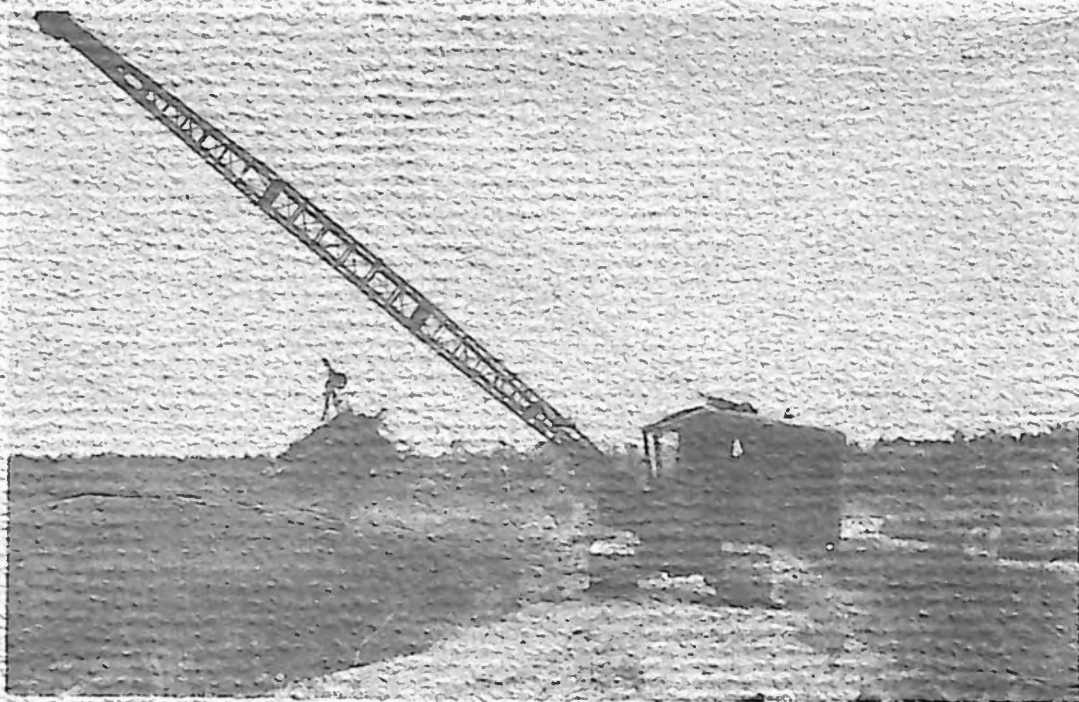


GADWALL
PROPAGATION PEN

DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

There are tentative plans to provide wildlife-oriented interpretive, educational, and recreational facilities on Chassahowitzka Refuge. Nesting boxes for wood ducks have been erected, and additional boxes are planned. Propagation pens for gadwalls and mottled ducks are maintained in an attempt to establish local nesting populations of these two species. Artificial nesting structures for American ospreys are also planned. Prescribed burning is accomplished in the marshes in order to improve the make-up of natural food plants for waterfowl. The construction of low profile dikes and the installation of water control structures are partially completed with the objective being the manipulation of water levels and salinities to provide maximum wildlife benefits. Most development is directed towards creating an area on Chassahowitzka Refuge where people can see, study, and enjoy wildlife with a minimum amount of disturbance to the overall refuge habitat.

LOW PROFILE DIKE
CONSTRUCTION



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

The social and economic well-being of the people living around Chassahowitzka Refuge, in the State of Florida, and throughout the United States depends, to a great extent, on the maintenance of coastal marshes in a natural condition. There is, of course, also a need to carefully manage portions of these marshes for the maximum production and protection of wildlife resources.

At Chassahowitzka Refuge, management of the existing ecological systems has proven to be of maximum benefit to wildlife and people. The clean, unpolluted marshes and waters of the refuge attract and produce large numbers and varied species of many wildlife forms. Water birds, threatened species, mammals, marine species, and reptiles thrive in this outstanding estuarine environment.

Outdoor recreation and commercial harvesting of marine resources tied to the marshes and estuary are extremely important; and since Chassahowitzka Refuge is such an attractive portion of this natural, wild, productive environment, those who administer and use the area have a major responsibility to maintain its unspoiled character.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the management and development programs on Chassahowitzka Refuge have not significantly changed most of the refuge environment, some of the existing activities are not considered to be compatible with provisions of the Wilderness Act.

Most wildlife and habitat management occurs within a 5,000-acre area bounded by Seven Cabbage Cutoff, the Chassahowitzka River, and the interior boundary of the refuge from Porpoise Bay to the Chassahowitzka River. The 2,500-acre waterfowl hunting area is situated in Citrus County and includes marsh and navigable waters.

Power boats are operated extensively throughout the navigable waters of the refuge. These waters dissect the marsh and other higher land areas creating numerous islands of varying sizes. Airboats are operated over established routes throughout a portion of the marsh and the navigable waters. Commercial fishing and sport fishing guiding are long-established activities on which many local individuals depend for a livelihood.

Access to the refuge is entirely limited to power boaters and to those who are willing and able to use muscle-powered crafts. Among the many problems associated with any plan to eliminate power boats from all or a part of the refuge is the danger of rapidly appearing storms. Severe weather conditions often arise unexpectedly, and safety problems can be anticipated when individuals are unable to return rapidly to the safety of land.

Public use activities, including waterfowl hunting, commercial and sport fishing, boating, nature study, and nature enjoyment are existing activities that are important to the many people using the refuge. These will be continued so long as they are in keeping with primary wildlife objectives.

The use of power boats is of central importance to the using public on Chassahowitzka Refuge. Under present conditions, access and enjoyment of the entire refuge is very impractical, if not impossible, unless power boating is permitted to continue. Commercial fishing and sport fishing guiding are permitted throughout the refuge. These three activities, power boating, commercial fishing, and sport fishing guiding, are inconsistent with a true wilderness situation; but since these are long-established, important commercial and recreational opportunities occurring primarily over the navigable waters of the refuge, their possible elimination, resulting from wilderness designation, is not recommended. For this reason, it is concluded that Chassahowitzka Refuge is nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

ANYONE CONCERNED WITH THIS STUDY IS URGED TO PERSONALLY INSPECT THE CHASSAHOWITZKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE CHASSAHOWITZKA WILDERNESS STUDY MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE REFUGE MANAGER, CHASSAHOWITZKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, RT. 1, BOX 153, HOMOSASSA, FLORIDA 32646 OR THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE, PEACHTREE-SEVENTH BUILDING, ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30323



AS THE NATION'S PRINCIPAL CONSERVATION AGENCY, THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HAS BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES FOR WATER, FISH, WILDLIFE, MINERAL, LAND, PARK, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES. INDIAN AND TERRITORIAL AFFAIRS ARE OTHER MAJOR CONCERNS OF AMERICA'S "DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES."

THE DEPARTMENT WORKS TO ASSURE THE WISEST CHOICE IN MANAGING ALL OUR RESOURCES SO EACH WILL MAKE ITS FULL CONTRIBUTION TO A BETTER UNITED STATES—NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

CEDAR KEYS

WILDERNESS STUDY AREA



SEAHORSE KEY

CEDAR KEYS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

FLORIDA



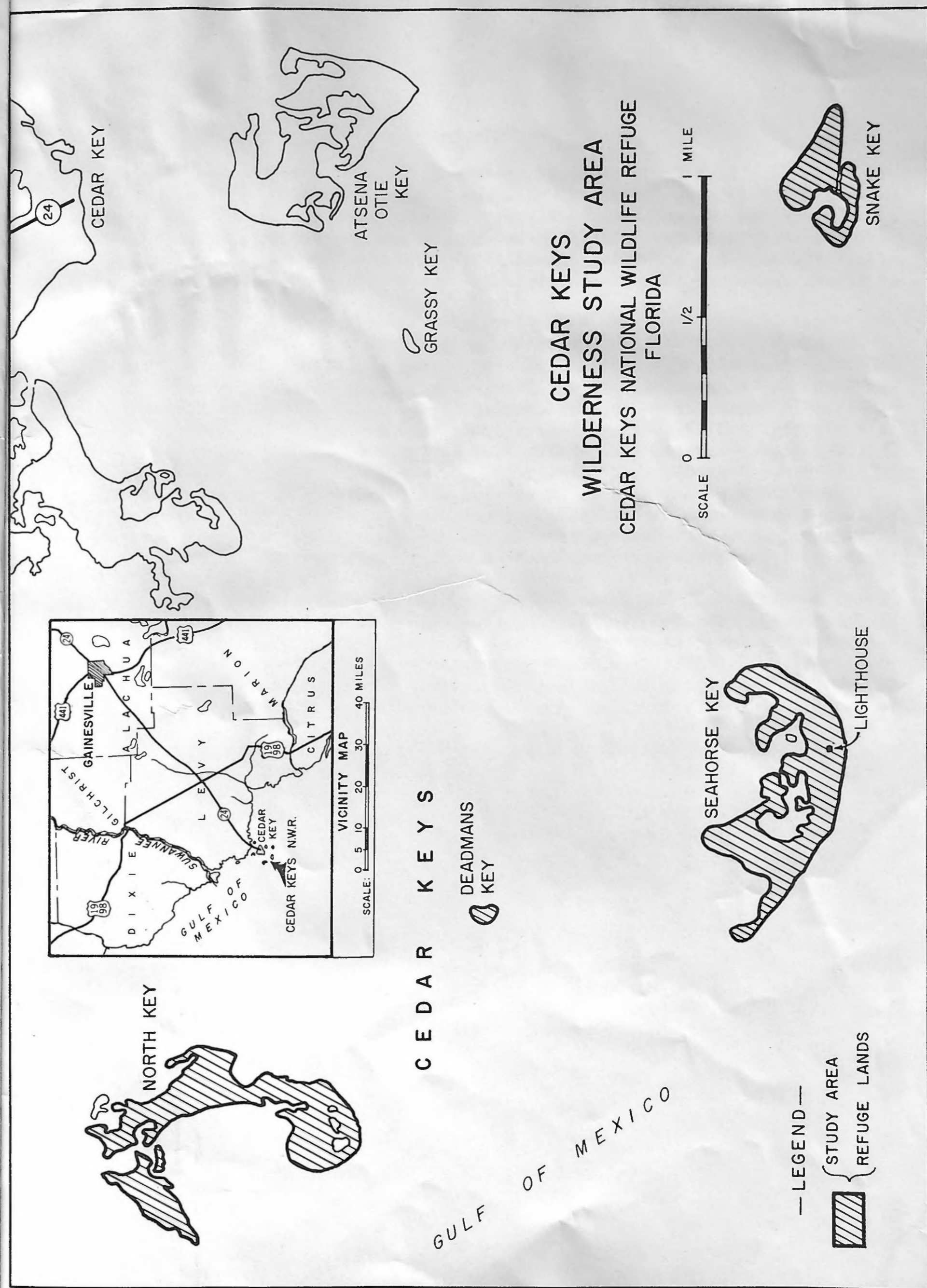
PREFACE

The Wilderness Act of September 3, 1964 (Public Law 88-577) provided the authority and indicated the procedure by which National Wildlife Refuges, meeting the necessary requirements, are to be considered for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This law directed the review of every roadless area of 5,000 contiguous acres or more and every roadless island within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge qualifies as a wilderness study area. The four islands comprising the refuge are located two to three miles off the coast of Levy County. Ranging in size from 10 to 165 acres, the refuge islands total 378 acres. Narrow beaches of fine white sand alternate with mangrove swamps and salt marshes around the shores while a hammock forest of live and laurel oaks, cabbage palm, and red bay dominate the uplands. Despite a long history of intermittent use, the islands now show little evidence of man's encroachment. An old lighthouse and a small marine laboratory operated by the University of Florida are the only obvious marks of civilization on Seahorse Key.

Sections 4(a) and 4(b) of the Wilderness Act provide that: (1) the Act is to be within and supplemental to the purposes for which National Wildlife Refuges are established; (2) wilderness areas shall be administered so as to preserve their wilderness character and shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historical use, insofar as primary refuge objectives permit.

Lighthouse on Seahorse Key



Location

The Cedar Keys are a group of five major and numerous smaller islands located in Levy County on the west coast of Florida some 90 miles north of Tampa. The four outer islands, Seahorse, Snake, Bird and North Keys, comprise the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge islands are two to three miles offshore from the town of Cedar Keys which is located on Way Key, another island separated from the mainland by several miles of salt marsh.

History

The Cedar Keys have had a rich and interesting association with man, dating back many hundreds of years before the coming of Spanish explorers to Florida. A number of Indian middens, now evidenced by shells and potsherds strewn along eroding beaches, have revealed use of the islands by four separate Indian cultures ranging from 450 to 1,800 years ago.

Seahorse Key was the site of several military installations during the Florida Indian War and the Civil War; one minor naval skirmish took place there during the early days of the latter war. A small cemetery dating back to the post-Civil War period is located near the lighthouse on Seahorse Key.

The entire group of keys was reserved for Federal military purposes by Executive Order in 1840, and Seahorse Key was reserved for lighthouse purposes in 1851. The existing lighthouse, constructed in 1855, remained in active operation until 1915. In 1880, a quarantine station was established on Snake Key for use during the yellow fever epidemic. During the late 1800's and early 1900's several families lived on Seahorse and North Keys.

The Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge was established as a colonial bird sanctuary by Executive Order 5158, dated July 16, 1929, and signed by President Hoover. Included under this Order were Snake, Bird, and North Keys. Seahorse Key was later added to the refuge by President Roosevelt's Executive Order 7484, dated November 6, 1936.

In 1952, the Bureau issued a 20-year permit to the University of Florida to establish a marine laboratory on Seahorse Key.

There is today little visible evidence of man's activities on these islands with the exception of the lighthouse and marine laboratory which occupy several acres on Seahorse Key. The Indian middens, the military installations and dwelling sites of the 1800's, the scars of past fires and other uses have been effectively screened by time and now blend unnoticed into the natural landscape.

Description

The Cedar Keys are strikingly different in many respects from the sea-formed islands on other sections of Florida's west coast. Seahorse Key, the outermost refuge island, was formed as a huge sand dune many thousands of years ago. This dune is now evident as a prominent central ridge which slopes abruptly to an elevation of 52 feet. The central ridges of Snake and North Keys are less obvious, extending only 5 to 10 feet above sea level.

The narrow, white sand beaches are one of the most attractive features of these islands. The beach on Seahorse Key extends along the entire south shore of the island. Snake and North Keys have smaller beaches which alternate along the shorelines with salt marshes and mangrove swamps. In many areas, the sand beaches have been stranded by shoreline accretion and are separated from the water by a zone of salt marsh and mud flats. All the islands are surrounded by shallow sand and mud flats which make them relatively inaccessible, even by outboards. At low tide few sites along the shores can be reached by boats.

The elevated ridges are dominated by an upland forest of cabbage palm, red bay, live oak and laurel oak. Characteristic understory plants include cherry laurel, saw palmetto, youpon, wild olive, prickly pear, cedar, and Spanish bayonet. The lower elevations of the islands, comprising almost 40 percent of the total refuge acreage, are subject to frequent tidal flooding, and are dominated by mangrove swamps and patches of salt marsh. All the islands possess shallow bays and lagoons partly encircled by mangrove swamps. Submerged stands of marine grasses and algae are common in these interior bays and the waters surrounding the islands.



Seahorse Key Beach

Wildlife

Although the Cedar Keys might be expected to support animal life similar to that of the nearby mainland, they more nearly resemble oceanic islands in that they possess a very limited terrestrial fauna. The lack of permanent fresh water has been a major factor in limiting populations of resident vertebrates and in preventing the establishment of species which have landed on the keys in the past.

Cedar Keys historically has been of tremendous value as a nesting area for colonial birds. During the period 1960-65, the total annual production of colonial birds ranged from about 4,000 to over 54,000 with an average of 20,600. The more abundant nesting species include the white ibis, common egret, double-crested cormorant, snowy egret, Louisiana heron and great blue heron. Many species of gulls, terns, and shore birds use the refuge beaches and mud flats for feeding and loafing throughout the year. Passerine birds are most abundant during periods of migration.



Common Egrets

The refuge provides nesting and year-round habitat for several "threatened" species. One active bald eagle nest is present on North Key. Thirty-two osprey nests were present on the refuge in 1966; 25 of these were on Seahorse Key, making it an extremely important nesting area for this species.

Some ten species of reptiles have been recorded on the refuge. Unusually dense populations of cottonmouths are present on Seahorse and Snake Keys. Mammals are relatively scarce on the refuge. Exceptions are the gray squirrel and the black rat on Seahorse Key. Raccoons visit all four keys regularly, while otter and mink are considered rare visitors.

Management

Because of its small size and importance to wildlife, Cedar Keys Refuge obviously can support only limited public use if it is to meet the objectives for which it was established and if its wilderness character is to be preserved as required by the Wilderness Act. The open season for public use will extend from mid-July through October. Visitor use at other times of the year must be prohibited to avoid disturbance to colonial bird rookeries and osprey and eagle nesting activities.

Access will be by boat only. Shell collecting, picnicking, beachcombing, birdwatching, and photography will be permitted during daylight hours. Hunting, camping, and fires will not be permitted.

Operation of the University of Florida Marine Laboratory will be continued under permit from the Bureau.

There are no plans for further developments on Cedar Keys Refuge. The development of improved public access to the islands or visitor use facilities on the islands would be completely incompatible with refuge and wilderness objectives and, therefore, will not be considered. Provisions can be made, however, for offshore observation platforms to enable visitors to enjoy and photograph colonial bird nesting without disturbance to the birds.



Snake Key



North Key

Relationship to Surrounding Area

Cedar Keys Refuge lies in the center of a section of Florida's west coast that is just now beginning to display the rapid development for real estate, commercial and recreational purposes that has characterized other coastal areas in Florida. The Intracoastal Waterway along Florida's west coast and the Cross-Florida Barge Canal, already under construction, will intersect each other near the mouth of the Withlacoochee River, 20 miles southeast of Cedar Keys. These major waterways are expected to result in an expansion of industry, tourism, commercial shipping, and water-oriented recreational uses.

State and Federal agencies administer a number of areas providing important outdoor recreational opportunities within a 50-mile radius of Cedar Keys. These include the Gulf Hammock Wildlife Management Area and Manatee Springs State Park in Levy County, the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Citrus and Hernando Counties, and the Citrus Wildlife Management Area in Citrus County. Anclote State Park, located on Anclote Key 65 miles south of Cedar Keys, is the closest beach recreation area. The nearest wilderness study area is the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, 115 miles to the northeast, which offers an entirely different type of wilderness environment.

The rich marine environment surrounding Cedar Keys supports productive oyster and sponge beds as well as leading crab, mullet, bait shrimp and sport fishing industries. The refuge islands are an integral part of this environment, contributing a tremendous amount of nutrients to the surrounding waters.

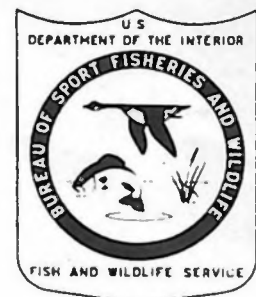
The University of Florida Marine Laboratory, located on Seahorse Key under permit from the Bureau, serves as a base for scientific research on these important marine resources and for education and training in the marine sciences.

Inspection

Anyone concerned about this study is urged to personally inspect the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. Arrangements should be made in advance with the refuge manager, Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE



5 CC 9-25-10

Can't keep him down

Diagnosis doesn't keep pastor away from pulpit

NANCY KENNEDY
Chronicle

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience"
— James 1:2-3.

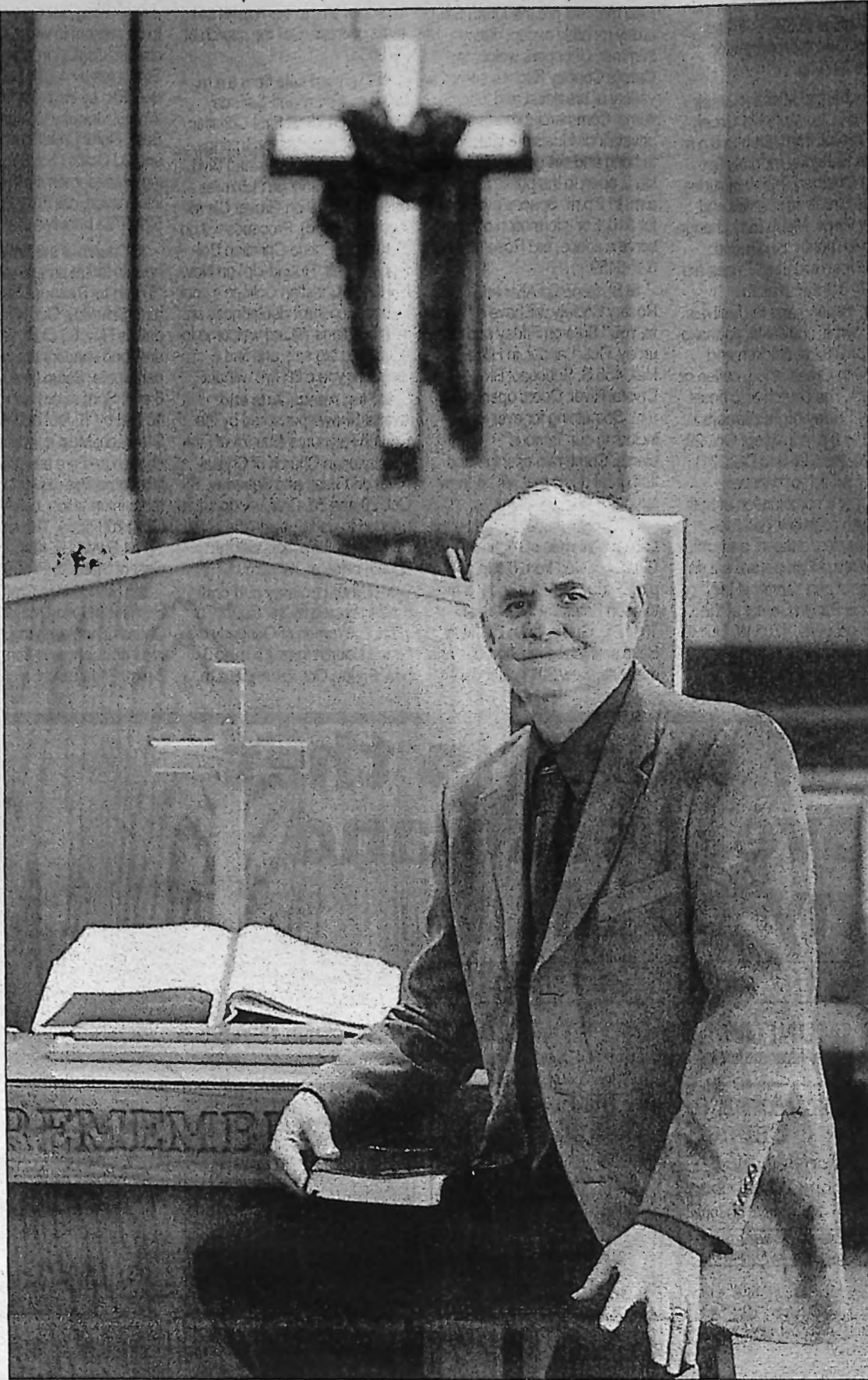
Twenty-five years ago, a man drinking coffee in a Kentucky restaurant needed a kidney, so the Rev. John Mattingly gave him his. "I had a kidney; he needed one," he said. "I knew God wanted me to do it."

Up until that time he had called himself a Christian, he said, but wasn't fully devoted. Ever since, however, he has lived with one thought: to serve the Lord with all his might — and with great joy, no matter what.

See PASTOR/Page C4

REVIVAL

First Baptist Church of Chassahowitzka will host a revival at 6 p.m. nightly, Sept. 26 to 29 at the church, 10002 S. Riviera Point, Chassahowitzka. Guest speaker will be the Rev. Bob Clark from New Port Richey. Call the church office at 382-3585.



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

The Rev. John Mattingly is still in the pulpit preaching, despite a cancer diagnosis that gives him 12 to 18 months to live.

PASTOR

Continued from Page C1

Seven months ago, Mattingly and his wife, Peggy, came to serve at First Baptist Church of Chassahowitzka.

Having spent 36 years in construction, this is Mattingly's first church as pastor.

"I prayed for this church for years," he said. "I didn't know it was this church, but a church like it, filled with sweet people."

Shortly after he and his wife, Peggy, moved from Pasco County to Spring Hill and began work at the church in Chassahowitzka, Mattingly, 66, woke up with a strange pimple on his tongue.

A visit to the doctor confirmed that it was cancer. He was given three to four weeks to live.

He takes chemotherapy treatment every Thursday and preaches every Sunday. In seven months, he's lost 100 pounds. He can't eat solid food, and only drinks juice.

Mattingly also has cancer in the right side of his jaw. The doctor wanted to do surgery on Mattingly's tongue and jaw, fashioning a jawbone from another bone in his body, but it would leave him unable to talk—and there would only be a 50-50 chance he would survive.

"I told him no," Mattingly said. "I came here to preach, and that's what I'm going to do."

As it stands, the doctor has given him 12 to 18 months to live. He said he's prepared and ready to go or stay, that his life belongs to the Lord.

"How long do you have to live?" Mattingly asked the doctor. "We trust the Lord and know that nothing is

impossible with God. He does the healing, and he's going to take me home when he says it's time, not when the doctor says."

"Everyone's going to die," he said. "People know that, but they don't live it."

Mattingly said this cancer has given him a greater urgency in his preaching. He sees how fleeting life is and knows the permanence of eternity, and believes in the reality of both heaven and hell, and that many people don't.

"I remember leading a man to Christ one day and the next day he was gone," he said.

He also said his cancer has caused him to know God differently, deeper.

"This has brought me to a deeper level of prayer," he said. "I see his mercy and goodness in this, and his grace."

He said it has also given him a calmness that he hasn't known. Things don't bother him like they used to.

"This is the best church and the best congregation," he said. "I praise God for that. These are sweet people and I know I'm doing, as well as I am because of these people praying."

Church secretary and treasurer Mary Pelt said Mattingly "woke our church up."

They've received 13 new members since April and will be accepting membership for four more in October.

"That's pretty good for a church this small," she said. "We needed a leader. He wants us to be active, to work in the church and get out and witness to people—do what we're supposed to be doing, only more so."

"We're all excited to have him here," she said. "We're motivated. You can come here any day and see people here working."

Wild whooping crane chicks hatch in Mich.

Special to the Chronicle

The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP) is celebrating another success in its efforts to reintroduce a wild migratory whooping crane population in eastern North America. Two whooping crane chicks hatched Monday at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Wisconsin. This is only the third time in over a century that naturally produced whooping cranes have hatched in the wild in the Midwest.

The chicks, #W1-10 and #W2-10 (W = wild hatched), are the offspring of whooping crane pair #9-03 and #3-04 from the ultralight-led crane Classes of 2003 and 2004.

"This is an exciting moment for the many dedicated people contributing to this project and another sign of success for WCEP," said Necedah NWR manager Doug Staller.

The chicks are the result of re-nesting. Earlier this spring, nine breeding pairs of whooping cranes built nests and laid eggs. All nine nests failed. Four pairs re-nested, including #9-03 and #3-04. Two additional pairs of cranes are incubating nests. All five pairs currently remain on their nests.

The nest abandonments earlier this spring are similar to what has been observed in previous years. WCEP is investigating the cause of the abandonments through analysis of data collected throughout the nesting period on crane behavior, temperature, and black fly abundance and distribution.

In 2001, WCEP project partner Operation Migration's pilots led the first whooping crane chicks, conditioned to follow their ultralight aircraft surrogates, south from Necedah NWR to Chassahowitzka NWR in southwest Citrus County. Each subsequent year, WCEP biologists and pilots have conditioned and guided additional groups of juvenile cranes to Florida. Having been shown the way once, the young birds initiate their return migration in the spring, and in subsequent years, continue to migrate on their own. In 2008, St. Marks NWR along Florida's Gulf Coast was added as an additional wintering site for the juvenile cranes.

In addition to the ultralight-led birds, biologists from the International Crane Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rear whooping crane chicks at Necedah NWR and release them in the company of older cranes from whom the young birds learn the migration route. This is the sixth year WCEP has used this Direct Autumn Release method.

Whooping cranes that

take part in the ultralight and Direct Autumn Release reintroductions are hatched at the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., and at the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wis. Chicks are raised under a strict isolation protocol and to ensure the birds remain wild, handlers adhere to a no-talking rule and wear costumes designed to mask the human form.

In the spring and fall, project staff from the International Crane Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service track and monitor the released cranes in an effort to learn as much as possible about their unassisted journeys and the habitat choices they make both along the way and on their summering and wintering grounds.

Most graduated classes of whooping cranes spend the summer in central Wisconsin, where they use areas on or near Necedah NWR, as well as other public and private lands.

Whooping cranes were on the verge of extinction in the 1940s. Today, there are only about 550 birds in existence, approximately 400 of them in the wild.

Aside from the 102 WCEP birds, the only other migrating population of whooping cranes nests at Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories of Canada and winters at Aransas NWR on the Texas Gulf Coast. A non-migrating flock of approximately 30 birds lives year-round in the central Florida/Kissimmee region.

Whooping cranes, named for their loud and penetrating unison calls, live and breed in wetland areas, where they feed on crabs, clams, frogs and aquatic plants. They are distinctive animals, standing 5 feet tall, with white bodies, black wing tips and red crowns on their heads.

WCEP asks anyone who encounters a whooping crane in the wild to please give them the respect and distance they need. Do not approach birds on foot within 200 yards; remain in your vehicle; do not approach in a vehicle within 100 yards.

Also, please remain concealed and do not speak loudly enough that the birds can hear you. Finally, do not trespass on private property in an attempt to view or photograph whooping cranes.

6-6-2010

The hope is that, when the weather chills late this fall, the wild chicks will become the first migratory cranes in the eastern United States to learn the migration route naturally — without the use of ultralights, crane costumes or humans.

Eventually the two birds, dubbed “Wild 601” and “Wild 602,” will be banded.

Officials are still discussing details of that and whether they will be fitted with radio transmitters such as those worn by their parents.

Condie said that with so much out of human hands with the “first family,” she expects that much of the human attention will be directed to crane No. 602, only without the designation “wild” as part of its name.

Not-so-wild 602 was one of two chicks hatched at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, the same place where other cranes that follow the ultralights hatch each year.

Those eggs came from the abandoned nest of another pair of cranes

from previous ultralight-led migrations.

Not-so-wild 602’s twin hatched but had to be put to sleep because of a medical problem with its leg. That leaves not-so-wild 602 as the first crane in the second generation of the program because its wild cousins hatched several weeks later.

Condie said that the crane program supporters are getting plenty of questions about “little 602.”

That bird and 17 others are in flight training in preparation for the early October departure for Florida.

While the system of training the cranes to follow the aircraft gets tweaked a bit each year, Condie said, she expected to see no big changes this fall because it has worked. Still, the pressure will be there to see how the second generation fares.

“It’s a first. It’s a landmark. It’s a milestone,” she said.

For more information, check out www.operationmigration.org.

Barbara Behrendt can be reached at 564-3621 or behrendt@sptimes.com.



Special to the Chronicle

Members of University of Florida Woodwind Quintet front row, from left, are: Patrick Sikes, clarinet; Maho Azuma, flute; and Samantha Pensis, oboe. Back row, from left, are: Valery Neiberger, bassoon; and Jonathan Moore, horn.

Wind & Water for park projects

Special to the Chronicle

The Friends of Chassahowitzka presents its ninth annual Wood, Winds and Water fundraiser on Sunday, March 14, at Sugarmill Woods Country Club.

The evening will begin at 5 p.m. with a silent auction, hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar, followed by dinner at 6 and music at 7.

Tickets sell quickly, especially if a group wishes to be seated together. The cost is \$60 per person.

Pianist Martin Bachthaler will entertain during the cocktail hour. Bachthaler recently retired after 13 years as the piano accompanist for the Sugarmill Chorale.

Born into a family of musicians, Bachthaler played part time in bands from 1955 to 1985. Before retiring, he recorded "My Musical Memories," produced by the Heartbeat Recording Studio in Crystal River.

The University of Florida Woodwind Quintet, consisting of clarinet, flute, oboe, horn and bassoon, will be performing during the dinner hour.

For ticket purchases and more information, contact Shirley Knudsen at 382-0525, Ardath Prendergast at 382-7158 or Lace Blue-McLean at 201-0149.

has been playing since age 12, is currently a junior majoring in bassoon performance. She studies with Dr. Arnold Irehai and has performed under his direction numerous times both across the country and internationally.

■ Jonathan Moore is in

his last year at the University of Florida pursuing a double major in music and political science. He is fourth horn in the Ocala Symphony Orchestra, second horn in the Gainesville Chamber Orchestra, and co-principle in both the UF Symphony Orchestra and

The University of Florida Woodwind Quintet is:

■ Patrick Sikes is a sophomore clarinet performance major. Sikes performs with the University Wind Symphony, Symphony Orchestra and Clarinet Ensemble, as well as chamber groups throughout the school.

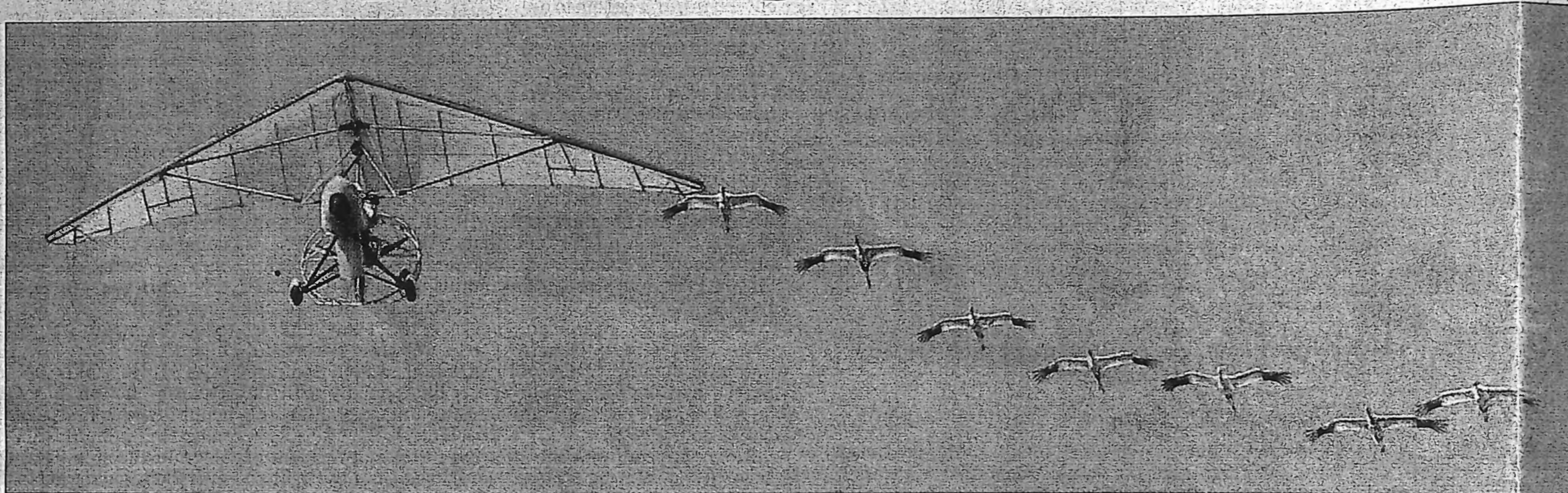
■ Maho Azuma was a member of the Broward All County Band for five years and is currently the principle flautist in the University of Florida Symphony Orchestra. She has participated in the Festival of Winds Wind Ensemble for 2 years.

■ Samantha Pensis is a third-year oboe performance major. She is principal oboist of the University of Florida Symphony Orchestra as well as the Wind Symphony.

■ Valery Neiberger, who

2-26-2010

Whoopers fly over Citrus



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

Seven endangered whooping cranes are led Thursday by an ultra-light aircraft as the group passes over the Marion County Airport on the birds' final leg of their migration to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Citrus County. The pilots, crew and birds left Wisconsin Oct. 17 on a journey that totaled more than 1,200 miles.

Endangered cranes pass Dunnellon airport Thursday on their way to Chassahowitzka refuge

SHEMIR WILES
swiles@chronicleonline.com
Chronicle

It may have been in the low 20s, but chilly temperatures didn't keep whooping crane enthusiasts from watching the majestic birds fly over Dunnellon/Marion County

airport Thursday morning. On Migration Day 87, the remaining seven birds of the 2008 Operation Migration migrating flock flew to their final stopover at the Halpata-Tastanaki Preserve in Marion County. If weather permits, the cranes will fly today and end their 1,285-mile journey at the Chassahowitzka National

Wildlife Refuge in Citrus County. Starting as early as 7:30 a.m., the modest crowd of whooper watchers began to grow on the aircraft field of the airport. Some came bundled in heavy coats, chunky scarves and armed with cups of warm coffee as they awaited the arrival of the cranes.

Mary Coleman, of Beverly Hills, said it was her first year watching the flyover. "I'm kind of excited about it," she said. For the past three years, Coleman said she's tried to be present at the flyover event, but something always prevented her

See CRANES/Page A4

CRANES

Continued from Page A1

from attending.

"I was really watching this year to see if I could make it," she said.

Coleman said she has tracked the cranes' progress online and in the newspaper. This year, she said she knew the flyover was an event she couldn't let pass without viewing.

John Gill said it was also his first year watching the cranes fly over the airport. Armed with a camera and tripod, Gill was banking on taking great shots of the whoopers as they passed the crowd.

Gill said he wanted to attend the event last year, but his father fell ill and he had to miss it.

"I didn't want to miss it this year," Gill said.

Gill said he's been following the migration online on the Operation Migration Web site. He said he's always been a bird fan and loves photographing them. Gill currently is in the process of moving to Dunnellon from Kalamazoo, Mich. Up there, he said they have sandhill cranes, which are close relatives of the

For those who want to see the cranes one last time before they settle in at their winter home in Chassahowitzka, Ivan Vincente with the refuge said people will be able to view them around 8 a.m. today flying over the Wal-Mart on U.S. 19 in Homosassa, depending on the weather.

whooping cranes. However, Gill said he's impressed by the whooping crane's size and distinctive call.

If he's able, Gill said he will definitely be back for next year's flyover.

"That's the plan," Gill said.

Charlene Nelson, of Floral City, said it was her second year watching the cranes and this year's flight was particularly special because she donated a mile of the trip to her grandmother.

"She taught me how to bird," Nelson said.

Her grandmother's interest in birds rubbed off on her at a young age, she said, and ever since then, she's been an devoted bird admirer. Nelson said she's been following the crane migration in the newspaper and on the Operation Migration Web site. Because

of being an avid watcher of the whooping cranes, Nelson said she's grown to really love them. At last year's flyover, she said she cried because it was so touching.

"They're magical animals, I think," she said.

Her hope is that the migration will help continue to restore the whooping crane population in America.

Liz Condi, with Operation Migration, said this year's migration has been relatively normal, but extremely slow. After being downed 11 days in Wisconsin and almost a month in Alabama, Condi said hopes for a prompt arrival in Florida were dashed.

"Every day on the ground, no matter where it is, is tough," she said.

Rain and wind proved to be tough obstacles for the 14

cranes and crew of 12, Condi said, but they are still a few days earlier than last year.

Whether the new westerly path was a success won't be determined until the trip is finished, Condi said. However, pilots have already said the new path was safer for landings because there was more open, flat terrain.

Through bad weather and all, Condi said the cranes have been good flyers.

"Overall, they've been very well behaved," she said.

When the group reaches Chassahowitzka, Condi said there would definitely be a sense of triumph.

"Once the cranes are down in Chassahowitzka, we'll all take a great deep breath — a sigh of relief," she said.

For those who want to see the cranes one last time before they settle in at their winter home in Chassahowitzka, Ivan Vincente with the refuge said people will be able to view them around 8 a.m. today flying over the Wal-Mart on U.S. 19 in Homosassa, depending on the weather.

People are encouraged to call the Chassahowitzka NWR Complex headquarters at 563-2088 anytime to listen to a daily whooping crane updates.

1-23-2009

SPRAYS WEATHER

Atlanta Constitutional Journal January 22, 1910

INNOCENT ATLANTA YOUTH OBSERVED STRANGE THINGS ON CHESSAHOWITZKIE TRIP

The following interesting account of a trip taken by Atlanta fishermen to the beautiful waters of Florida's far-famed Chessahowitzkie was written by John I. Hopkins, Jr., an Atlanta school boy, son of Charles T. Hopkins, the well known attorney.

We were scheduled to leave Atlanta on December 16 for the greatest hunting and fishing place in the world and naturally, my entire time for the preceding six months was used in getting my shells, guns, hunting boots, flannel shirts, etc. in order, and in dreaming of the pleasures that were to come. I don't know that these dreams improved my standing at Peacock's school any, but, of course, nobody cared about this but Dad.

At last the anxiously expected hour arrived, and we go to the train with Mr. L.Z. Rosser, Mr. Forrest Adair, Mr. Frank Adair, Mr. Robert Gregg and that bloodthirsty creature, Mr. Henry Porter. Dr. John Gaines, a surgeon from Nashville, with an uncontrollable desire to cut, is also present. We expect to ride in a sleeper and the next day in a common coach, but, to our joy and surprise, we find a model, up to date private car, in possession of Colonel P. H. Brewster, Mr. Neese and Mr. Hunnicutt. The equipments are up to date, splendid cook, waiters and a couple of French maids who do up one's hair when he retires for the night.

A Singular Performance

Immediately after leaving the Terminal station, a somewhat singular performance began which I never fully understood, being only a student at Peacock's. A square table was placed in the center of the car, and upon this was put a long rather blackish looking bottle with a pitcher of ice water. The bottle accelerated the conversation. Two small packages of what I subsequently learned were cards, were placed on the table and a number of small, thin round looking objects, variously colored, some blue some red and some white. A crowd immediately gathered around the table occupying all of the available seats and soon some very peculiar language was heard. So far as I could tell, one card was dealt to each man until each had five. Then some of the small round things were thrown in the middle of the table and apparently some members of the game became dissatisfied with their hands and threw a greater or lesser amount of cards into the center of the table. Then they got more cards. Pretty soon I heard Mr. Adair say "two pairs" Mr. Rosser said "threes" and Mr. Adair said "oh H-" and threw down his cards. Mr. Rosser immediately began pulling the variously colored small round things with a loud noise being tired with the preparation and expectancy of the trip. I soon passed into a half somnolent condition and yet it seemed to me in this part sleep that I again frequently heard the exclamation of Mr. Adair "oh H-" and the sarcastic laughter of Mr. Rosser accompanied by the rattling of these small different colored round objects as he drew them toward him. He treated them like they were a substitute for central real estate.

The trip is new and I enjoy it. The time slips by and the following night we are at the place which has held by thoughts and hopes for a solid year —Homosassa, Florida. We go to Captain Richardson's who shows us to our rooms, gets us a bite to eat, largely consisting of broiled venison, baked ducks and fried fish with some oysters on the side. For the first time since I left Atlanta silence prevails for a half hour, and then an adjournment is taken in the sitting room where Captain Richardson regales us with a few exaggerations and wondrous tales intended to discount Teddy's return from Africa. But bye and bye, even those fail as sleep lays a heavy hand upon us and we retire in our rooms, the French maids having everything in order.

The Land of the Unknown

Four o'clock comes immediately, and a banging at the door by the Florida "coon" signifies it is time to be up and away. A little hurried dressing in which soap and water and a hair brush play a very secondary part, some coffee and the trunks and grips are in the tug and we are off to the land of the unknown, where fish walk on the water, deer bite if interfered with around the camp, and ducks light on the boat.

At 1 o'clock P.M. we turn the last bend of the great and wondrous Chessahowitzkie, and are in sight of the "Viola Mayfield" the faithful, virgin, old houseboat.

Trunks are unpacked, mosquito nets put up, guns and rods taken out, and we proceed to eat a slight repast which has been prepared by the half Chinese cook, consisting of ~~broiled and barbecued venison, baked and roasted ducks, banked and fried fish, ham, side meat, onions, tomatoes, rice, corn and two or three things to which our ability never reached.~~ *baked*

Dinner is soon over, and each, with his guide, proceeds to the happy hunting grounds. By the time it is 3 o'clock and there are but two hours of daylight, but in the meantime the hunters get two bears, several deer, and the three or four fisherman a couple of thousand pounds of fish, then we quit because the weariness of the trip is still upon us, come arrangements are yet to be made at the constant "Viola" and the sun is fast sinking behind the marsh of sawgrass.

"Early to bed" is the rule, for tomorrow the serious work begins, and the camp speedily divides into two classes — the hunters and the fishermen. The fishermen desire to know with many sarcastic and personal remarks why the fellow who goes hunting is such an idiot as to waste good time at that foolish pastime, The hunter, in return, reviles, as best he can, the fisherman

To both there comes good sport. The ducks are tame and anxious to be killed. It is evidently a prearranged race suicide for all that is necessary is to make a duck call and they come in flocks and right for the privilege of roosting on the end of the gun waiting to be shot.

The deer are bloodthirsty, aggressive and annoying. They have a bad reputation for biting one's shins from which blood poison frequently results. From the forest in the distance to the river, there crawl, snakelike creeks at the head of, which under the dense waving external parameters are dark pools where the great black bass lie savage and abundant. At the head of Crawford's creek one day, I had rather a trying experience, I was quietly fishing attending to my own business and engaged in semireligious subconscious reflections, hauling in bass weighing from fifteen to twenty pounds each when an abominable deer interested with my sport. She came up investigated John the

guide and myself with a curiosity evidently mixed some animosity. After a while she got bolder and tried to get into the boat. I was engaged at the time in pulling a twenty-one pound bass and did not want to be disturbed. I held the bass firmly with one hand and struck at her with a light with the other. This irritated her and she then got into the boat and..... Realizing I had to protect my self, but if the bass obtained a slack line I would lose him. I was forced to shoot the misguided creature

Annoyed by the Deer

The deer annoyed us quite a lot around the camp. Nothing was safe from them. Mr. Rosser hung some of his lingerie on the tent to dry and peaceably eating a grapefruit before breakfast. His intention was finally attracted to an enormous buck that was nibbling at his drying clothes. Being naturally of an impetuous disposition, he grabbed a beer bottle and hit the poor thing just back of the ears, which resulted in its instant death. I felt somewhat aggrieved at this because the buck had become something of a pal and I don't think Mr. Rosser should have dried his linen on the tent anyhow. He seemed to regret it afterwards.

The bears are not so tame or inquisitive as the deer. They rarely attempted to eat at the same table with us, nor did they come and sit on their haunches around the campfire and smoke pipes and listen to the evidently truthful stories of the guides. They are more formal, punct... and distant than the deer. We never kill more than four or five a season as the meat at that time is a bit tough and does not barbecue very well.

The fishing is quite good and the four or five already fishermen were moderate in their desires and usually caught three or four thousand pounds of fish in the aggregate, each day. I witnessed a somewhat peculiar event which might be worth mentioning. In the party was a fly fisherman, who, late one afternoon found an enormous school of sea trout who were striking on the surface of the water. He used one fly and in an hour and twenty minutes caught one hundred and forty five fish. He would make a cast, and , as the fly reached the water, two or three trout would come up and stand on the water on their tails and grasp the fly before it reached the water. After catching the one hundred and sixty fifth fish he examined the fly and found it was perfectly dry. It had never touched the water.

To one like myself who is young and innocent and who desires to preserve his completion in its best possible shape, and therefore regards the "Beauty Sleep" as being imperative it is very annoying to be awakened by the call of the wild turkeys in the morning. The "put" "put" "put" of these as they cluster about the immolated "Viola" is quite annoying. One finds that he is on the Boulevard with a chicken menagerie on every side, that has no other object in life but to awaken and irritate, It is a pity that one tired from the professional servitude of Peacock's Private School should be so annoyed at the only season of the year when his ardent inborn have entitled him to a perfect rest. Of course, the only recourse is to get some friendly guide to run the things away by throwing rocks at them.

The entire trip passed pleasantly and agreeably, the only drawback being Mr. Henry Porter, who had on the previous year carried down a very dangerous weapon in the shape of an air gun shooting BB shot. The weapon itself could have been reasonably guarded against by the members of the party, but Mr. Porter is of a naturally wild and reckless disposition, and in his hands it was constant menace.

We were exceedingly in hopes that on this trip Mr. Porter would abate his recklessness (as he was a year older), but were mistaken, and he discarded the air rifle for a single shot Remington 22 caliber gun, and we, in consequence, lived in constant terror. Fortunately, no evil results followed, though several of us were repeatedly forced to seek shelter behind the house boat and in the water, If we can but persuade Mr. Porter to abandon his vicious and bloodthirsty tendencies in this direction, we will have peace and harmony on our next trip.

TODAY & Thursday morning
HIGH 71 Partly cloudy, S.E. winds.
LOW 55 20 percent chance of
rain tonight, patchy fog.
PAGE A4

JANUARY 20, 2010

Florida's Best Community

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Good migrations

Hundreds greet cranes at flyover

AMANDA MIMS
Chronicle

DUNNELLON — Despite heavy fog Tuesday morning, hundreds of spectators eventually sighted what they'd been waiting for since this year's Operation Migration mission began in Wisconsin. With bated breath and cameras and binoculars in hand, they watched as 10 endangered whooping cranes following an ultralight aircraft

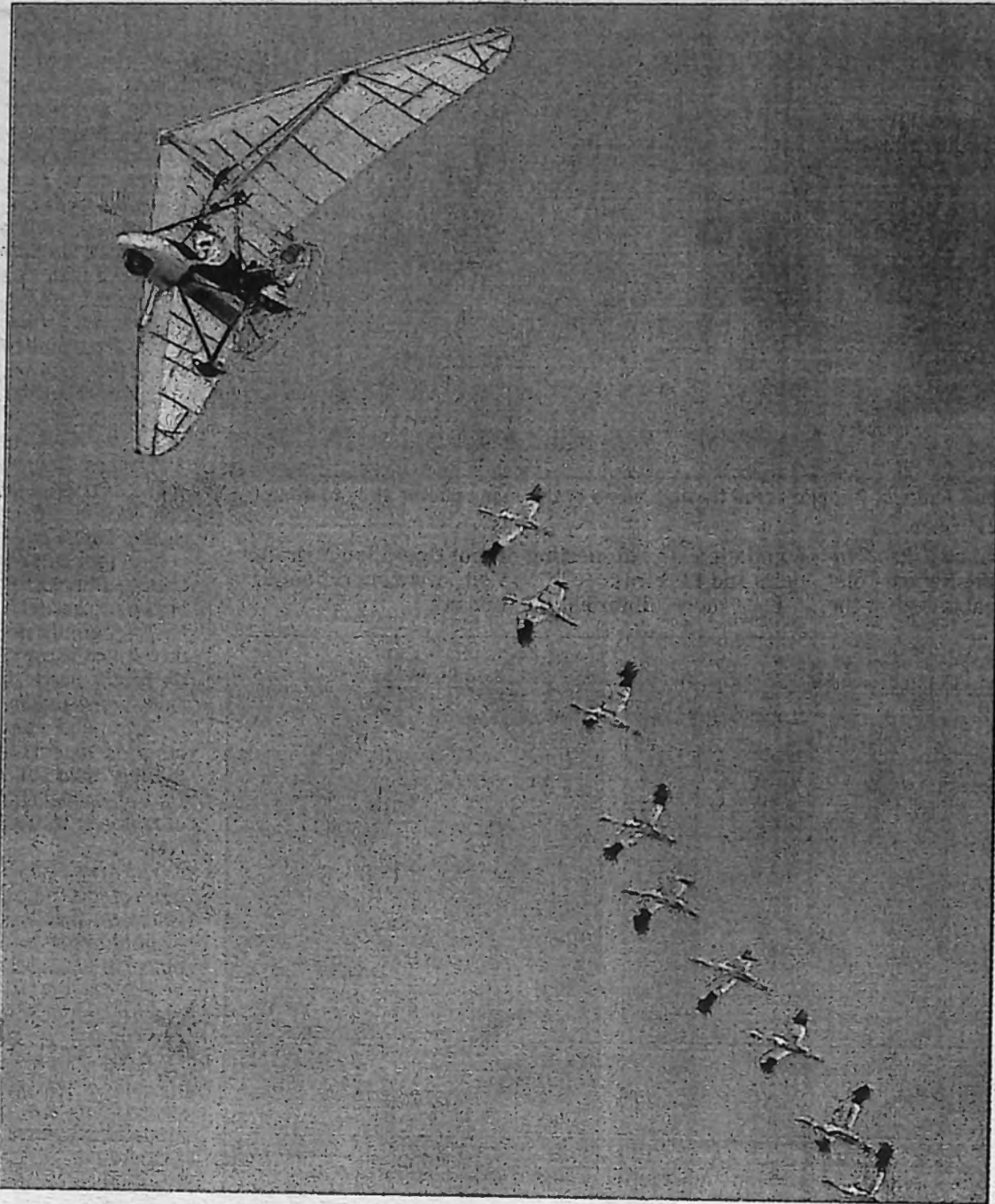
“It's the longest it's taken for the flyover.”

”

Ivan Vicente, visitor services specialist for wildlife refuge.

up. For a while, the foggy conditions jeopardized the

flyover occurred several hours after organizers had planned because of thick fog that lasted for hours after the sun came



conditions jeopardized the flyover, but the planes and cranes were able to take off by about 9 a.m.

The birds and ultralight aircraft left their Marion County location roughly 60 miles from the airport and arrived at the airport by about 10:30.

“It's the longest it's taken for the flyover,” said Ivan Vicente, visitor services specialist for Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge.

But the longer wait meant more time for visitors to arrive.

“We had a great crowd, a lot of supporters,” Vicente said.

Volunteers counted more than 700 spectators as they walked through the gates starting before 7:30 a.m., the suggested arrival time to watch the flyover.

“The excitement builds as we get closer and closer,” said Lace Blue-McLean, president of Friends of Chassahowitzka, as the “Craniacs” watched and waited for the birds' arrival. The crane fans often wait outside for hours in frigid temperatures just to welcome them home for the winter.

“It's so worth it when you see those birds fly over. It's wonderful.”

Blue-McLean said she sees many of the same people at the flyovers each year. Others, like Fred Brookshier, watched for the first time.

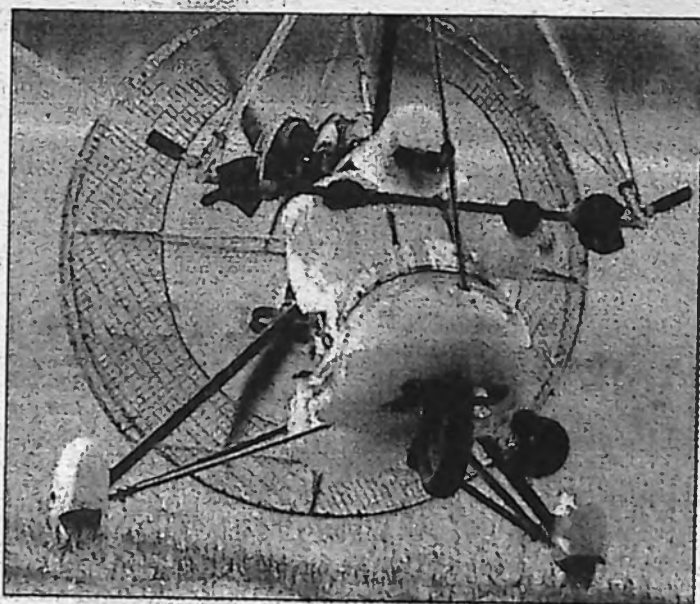
“It's a fantastic sight,” said Brookshier, of Rainbow Springs. “It kind of gives you chills.”

This week marks the end of this year's migration for these whooping



ABOVE: Lead pilot Richard van Heuvelen files Tuesday over a large contingent of birding enthusiasts at the Dunnellon Airport in Marion County. Ten of the original 20 whooping cranes that left the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin in October 2009 have made it almost all the way to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge on Citrus County's western coastline. LEFT: Chris Gullikson gently touches down his trike after leading the birds to their pen. BELOW: Brittany Harrod receives a hug Tuesday morning from her grandmother Elaine Springer as the flyover is under way.

MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle



Makeover: Miss Citrus pageant on hiatus

Miss Teen Citrus also postponed

MIKE WRIGHT
Chronicle

Here she comes ... actually, no she isn't.

Tradition takes a furlough this year as lack of participation has forced cancellation of the annual Miss Citrus County Scholarship Pageant.

The teen version of the pageant also is cancelled, meaning girls and young women will not benefit from thousands of dollars in scholarship money from the Citrus County Fair Association.

Fair officials blame a continuing poor economy and girls not able to commit to the time it takes to prepare them for the pageant that was scheduled for March 29, first day of the weeklong Citrus County Fair.

“It's very unfortunate,” fair manager Hal Porter said. “It's been a great program for the children for many years.”

The fair board has sponsored the pageant for 30 years and Porter said he believes it existed for years before that.

Contestants, though, especially for the Miss Citrus pageant, have begun dwindling in recent years.

Longtime fair board member Nell Mayberry, a veteran in planning the annual pageant, said she thinks the economy has forced

ning the annual pageant, said she thinks the economy has forced many potential contestants to think twice.

The county began combining
See PAGEANT/Page A2

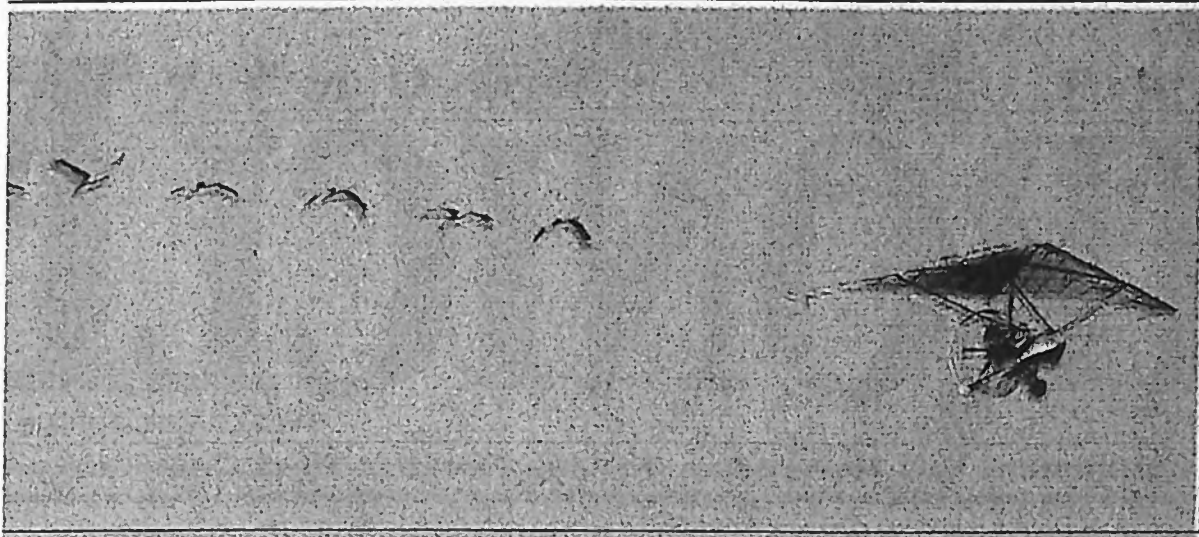
Boards reply to auditor's findings

Groups finished response Dec. 18

CHRIS VAN ORMER
Chronicle

Citrus Memorial Health System's two boards have each replied to the Auditor General of the State of Florida with written explanations of the auditor's preliminary and tentative findings and recommendations released Dec. 18. The recommendations came as a result of a request in February from state Sen. Charles Dean, R-Inverness, who had received a petition signed by about 100 members of the Citrus County Medical Society, which expressed physicians' concerns about the hospital's business practices.

The auditor general's release outlines 11 findings and requests that both boards — the Citrus County Hospital Board of Trustees and the Citrus Memorial Health Foundation Board of Directors — explain their actual or proposed corrective actions in each of the findings.



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

Leads 10 endangered whooping cranes toward the Dunnellon Airport.



Donna Jenks of Apopka scroll through some of the many photos they took during r.

ssahowitzka Na- population to 25 nesting about Operation Migration, dlife Refuge Com- pairs and 125 birds. visit www.operationmigra goal is to grow the For more information tion.org.



BOARDS

Continued from Page A1

Foundation: The foundation has been governed by the lease and the agreement for hospital care since 1990.

"In terms of oversight, these agreements are compliant with Florida law and promote good governance if the parties cooperate to achieve good governance, as they did for nearly 20 years before the recent dispute arose," said Ryan Beaty, CMHS chief executive officer, who signed the formal written response.

The foundation lists a number of existing controls, such as the trustees being able to sit on the foundation board of directors, the trustees levying a lower tax than requested and the trustees receiving certain monthly and annual reports from the foundation.

"While the foundation is always open to mutually agreeable improvements in the arrangement between the parties, the status quo is compliant with Florida law and presents an excellent framework to efficiently operate Citrus Memorial hospital if the parties cooperate in good faith to do so, as they previously did for nearly 20 years," the foundation said.

Trustees: Members of the board of trustees maintain they lack meaningful oversight of the foundation.

"... the current Citrus County Hospital Board, as bound by the 1990 contract, has essentially no right of oversight: the corporate not-for-profit need only provide/furnish public financial reports and unspecified other documents from time to time," said D.V. Upender Rao, chairman of the board of trustees, who signed the response.

The trustees raised the issue of sovereign immunity status, the privilege given to a public entity to a favorable outcome in the case of legal action. The hospital's sovereign immunity status should cap liability for doctors at \$200,000. The trustees said the status was at risk be-

taken place, and "should the mediated agreement come to pass and be implemented, then governance issues will be resolved."

■ The second finding was that the foundation should maintain separate accountability for expenditures of its ad valorem tax receipts.

Foundation: While asserting it was unaware that accounting was required or needed, the foundation replied: "In the interest of cooperation and transparency, the foundation has already begun accounting for the use of the ad valorem tax proceeds in the manner suggested."

Trustees: The trustees acknowledged that the foundation was addressing the issue and said it would not provide the foundation with tax dollars until its policy for separate accountability was approved and implemented.

■ In the third finding, the auditor general noted the absence of separate accountability for expenditures of funds from the Low Income Pool Program, which the hospital receives from the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration.

Foundation: The foundation requested that this finding be stricken because the burden for record-keeping would lie with the AHCA, and the documentation for the funds would be in the possession of AHCA.

"AHCA has never taken the position that LIP funds are restricted for use only for the benefit of Medicaid patients," the foundation responded. "Such a finding would be completely unworkable in the hospital context, as there is no way for hospital to increase services in a way that only impacts Medicaid patients."

The foundation also disagreed with the auditor general about how much LIP funding it received.

Trustees: "The Citrus County Hospital Board will require that the Citrus Memorial Health Foundation follow all applicable state and federal laws, all regulatory agency mandates and all administrative rules and requirements," the trustees

as they walked through the gates starting before 7:30 a.m., the suggested arrival time to watch the flyover.

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"It's a fantastic sight," said Brookshier, of Rainbow Springs. "It kind of gives you chills."

This week marks the end of this year's migration for these whooping cranes. Vicente said this year's 1,200-mile migration was the third longest in

See GOOD/Page A2



a hug Tuesday morning from her grandmother Elaine Springer as the flyover is under way.

MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle



response Dec. 18

CHRIS VAN ORMER
Chronicle

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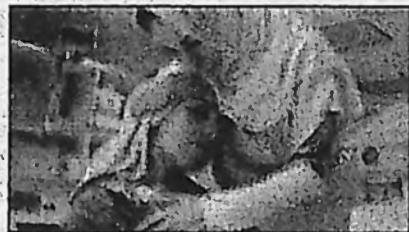
The auditor general's release outlines 11 findings and requests that both boards — the Citrus County Hospital Board of Trustees and the Citrus Memorial Health Foundation Board of Directors — explain their actual or proposed corrective actions in each of the findings.

■ In the first finding, the auditor general wanted additional accountability of public funds, the money raised through levying taxes.

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Kangaroo care

Preemie practice helps moms nurture nature./Page C1

Late-night drama

Former "Tonight" host expects to be back in old role./Page B6

Scuffle Man accused of assaulting off-duty deputy./Page A3

Stellar support School employees honored./Page C1

Award Big Brothers Big Sisters honors a member./Page C5



On the rise

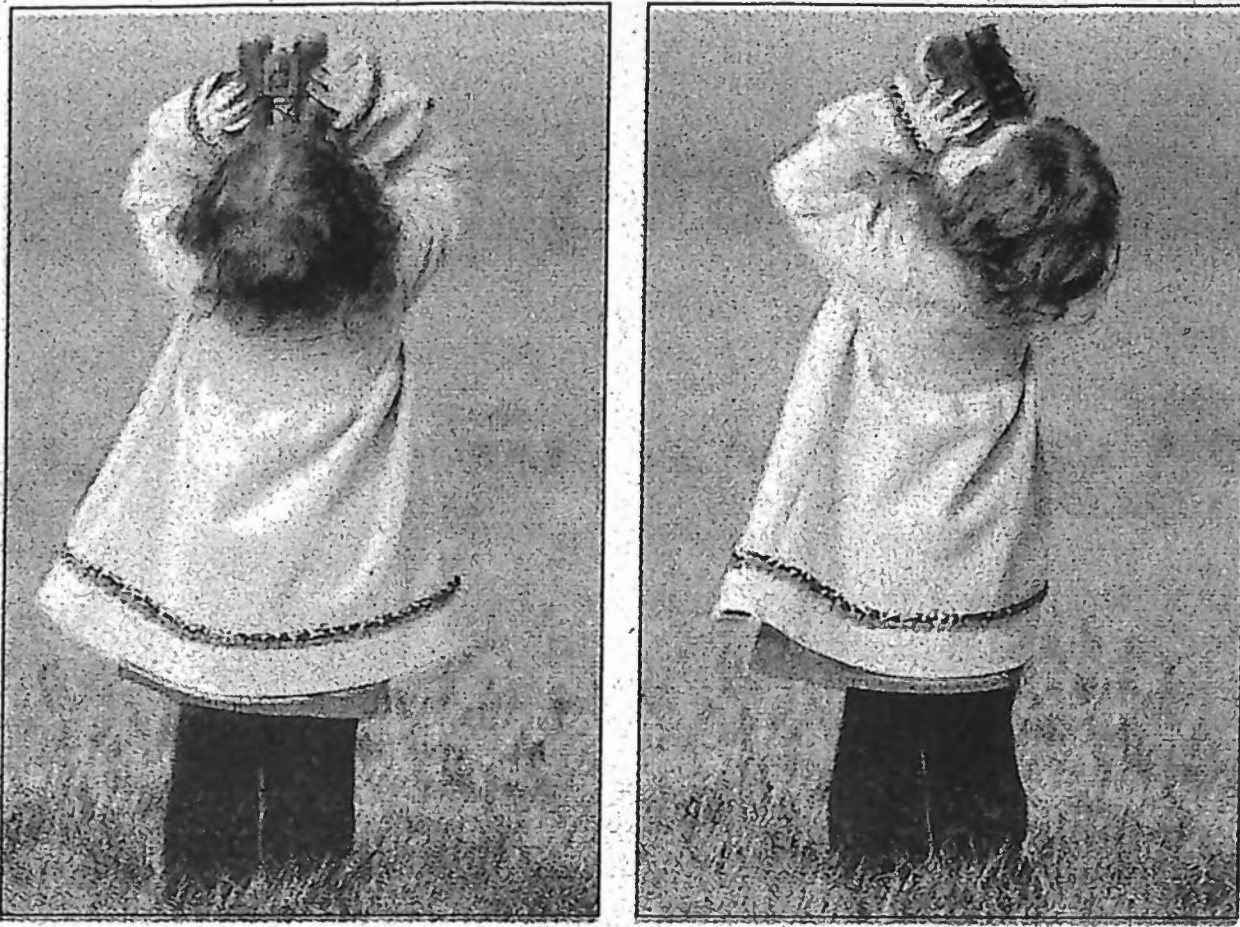
\$ Massachusetts election lifts medical stocks, which gives boost to Wall Street./Page A6



1-20-2010

Donna Jenks of Apopka scroll through some of the many photos they took during er.

assahowitzka Na- population to 25 nesting about Operation Migration, ildlife Refuge Com- pairs and 125 birds. visit www.operationmigra- goal is to grow the For more information tion.org.



he sky as she tracks the whooping cranes during the Operation Migration flyover ne of the more than 700 spectators counted by officials as they walked through suggested arrival time to watch the flyover.

1-20-2010

view, evening gown t.

e are incredibly y," Porter said. "It's ll fun. There's work too."

Porter and Mayberry the break in tradi- say the real disap- t is not being able to larship prizes to de- ung women.

geant typically di- o \$8,300 in scholar- ey among the top with the queen re- ,500 to cover school- penses.

given out a lot of ip money," May- l. "The economy is more people than ough it would."

and Mayberry said ssociation will look oring the pageant t year.

r the pageant coor- ind Citrus County et together and see s a way to make it nd easier," Porter ne part of our mes- t getting out there benefits. I'm sure rethinking it and ng. This is some- feel very strongly



DAVE SIGLER/Chronicle file photo

Brittany Sanow takes the crown during the 2009 Miss Citrus County Scholarship Pageant last March. Lack of interest has cancelled this year's pageant, officials said.

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Trustees: Members of the board of trustees maintain they lack meaningful oversight of the foundation.

"... the current Citrus County Hospital Board, as bound by the 1990 contract, has essentially no right of oversight: the corporate not-for-profit need only provide/furnish public financial reports and unspecified other documents from time to time," said D.V. Upender Rao, chairman of the board of trustees, who signed the response.

The trustees raised the issue of sovereign immunity status, the privilege given to a public entity to a favorable outcome in the case of legal action. The hospital's sovereign immunity status should cap liability for doctors at \$200,000. The trustees said the status was at risk because they do not have "structural control" over the foundation.

Although the foundation stated that no additional accountability for public funds would be needed, the trustees proposed a number of practices and policies.

The board of trustees "will require accountability for public funds" it provides; furthermore, it will require greater public input by the foundation and greater transparency."

The trustees will require the foundation to amend all of its governance documents to stop the unlimited terms of its directors.

The trustees agreed they have a responsibility to ensure proper accountability measures are in place.

The trustees also mentioned that mediation between the two boards had

the funds would be in the possession of AHCA.

"AHCA has never taken the position that LIP funds are restricted for use only for the benefit of Medicaid patients," the foundation responded. "Such a finding would be completely unworkable in the hospital context, as there is no way for hospital to increase services in a way that only impacts Medicaid patients."

The foundation also disagreed with the auditor general about how much LIP funding it received.

Trustees: "The Citrus County Hospital Board will require that the Citrus Memorial Health Foundation follow all applicable state and federal laws, all regulatory agency mandates and all administrative rules and requirements," the trustees responded.

In the fourth finding, the auditor general said formal policies and procedures regarding long-term debt was lacking. It recommended policies and procedures to include guidance on restrictions and limitations for debt capacity, reserves, ratios and measurements, reporting, benchmarks, selection and use of professional service providers, and criteria for determining the sales method.

Foundation: The foundation said it was amenable to developing policies and procedures with the trustees. But it took issue with the auditor general's conclusions about debt capacity.

Trustees: The trustees asserted they were taking corrective action to formulate and adopt debt management

See BOARDS/Page A4

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Chassahowitzka¹⁰⁻⁵⁻⁰⁸ contract stays home

Campground management bid questioned

MIKE WRIGHT
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Chronicle

When Citrus County officials went searching for a park manager at the Chassahowitzka River Campground in 2003, they didn't have to look far.

Only one person applied: David Strickland, a Chassahowitzka native and owner of the Chassahowitzka Hotel on Miss Maggie Drive.

The county agreed to a one-year contract in early 2004 with Strickland that paid him \$25,000. A year later, they ditched the contract in favor of full-time employment at roughly the same salary.

Earlier this year, the county commission decided it wanted to privatize the campground, which struggles to break even. The thinking was a private operator could streamline costs, increase rates, and then return

enough money to the county for needed capital improvements.

The county prepared a request for qualifications, or RFQ. Similar to a bid, but not quite: Interested companies would offer general plans for the park, along with their experiences in similar fields of operation. The proposals do not include contract amounts; those details are later negotiated with the top-ranked proposal.

The county received two offers. One was from a company owned by a Lake City couple, whose experience centered on former concession contracts with two state parks. Citrus officials, who later scored the proposals, agreed that company didn't have the experience to operate the Chassahowitzka Campground.



Anthony Schembri
says county wasn't biased.

They instead chose Arcas Enterprises Inc., a Homosassa company in existence since 2001 and owned by Strickland.

Officials say nothing prohibits a county employee from bidding on a county contract, as long as he resigns his job before the contract is signed.

Jim Free, vice president of Nature Quest Inc. — the company not offered the contract — believes a conflict of interests exists. He is protesting the bid because, in part, he claims that Strickland showed up at a pre-bid conference wearing a county uniform and was given favorable treatment.

County Administrator Anthony Schembri and top county officials involved in the bid say that isn't so. They said Strickland was off duty and wearing a shirt bearing the name of

See CONTRACT/Page A7



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

Erik Smith from Pine Ridge prepares a kayak recently at the Chassahowitzka River Campground. Smith was kayaking on the river with his wife and daughter.

the county. The county vendor would share in capital improvements, such as replacing the dock, building a new store and adding a playground.

Strickland — who declined to comment for this story, saying he needed permission from his supervisor to speak to the press — also is reportedly planning to install cable and Internet access for campers.

When commissioners said they wanted to privatize the campground, county Parks and Recreation Director Rafael Del Valle said he asked Strickland his opinion. He said Strickland thought it was a great idea.

Del Valle said he didn't know whether Strickland planned to bid on the contract or not.

"The only thing David did was recommend that we privatize," Del Valle said.

Del Valle said he developed the RFQ himself, including all the financial and

Thorpe said the county hasn't yet started negotiating a contract with Strickland because of recent media interest in the issue.

couldn't recall exactly what was said.

Bamer's written notes from the meeting included Free asking this question: "Is there a conflict of interest with a full time employee responding to this RFQ?"

Two days later, Free formally protested Strickland's bid in a letter to county officials.

Assistant County Attorney Peter Aare researched state law and concluded Strickland is qualified to bid because he didn't participate in formulating the bid specifications and would resign prior to the contract being awarded.

Free's bid protest is being reviewed by Cathy Taylor, director of the Department of Management and Budget. Free also sent e-mails to county commissioners seeking their help; he is planning to address the board as well.

margin higher than Nature Quest; in part, reviewers said Nature Quest had no experience operating a campground.

Schembri considers bidding rule

Thorpe said the county hasn't yet started negotiating a contract with Strickland because of recent media interest in the issue. He said he isn't sure Strickland will even want to continue in light of the publicity.

The county states the campground budget is about \$300,000, though revenues have fallen below

Schembri, ~~mean~~ said he is considering a rule that would bar county employees from bidding on county contracts unless they resign before offering the bid.

He said he plans to check with other counties to see what they've done in similar situations.

As for Strickland and the Chassahowitzka River Campground, Schembri said perceptions are deceiving.

"He's got rights too," Schembri said. "Under the rules, David Strickland did nothing wrong."

CONTRACT

Continued from Page A1

the Chassahowitzka Hotel. They also said Strickland signed in under his company name, Arcas Enterprises.

Still, Schembri acknowledges the issue raises a question of fairness.

"If you were looking at this from the outside, it certainly gives the inference of impropriety," Schembri said. "But from the inside, there's nothing wrong."

Officials: Strickland had no role in bid

The 40-acre Chassahowitzka River Campground is owned by the Southwest Florida Water Management District. In 1991 Swiftmud, as the water district is known, entered into a 20-year interlocal agreement with Citrus County to operate the campground.

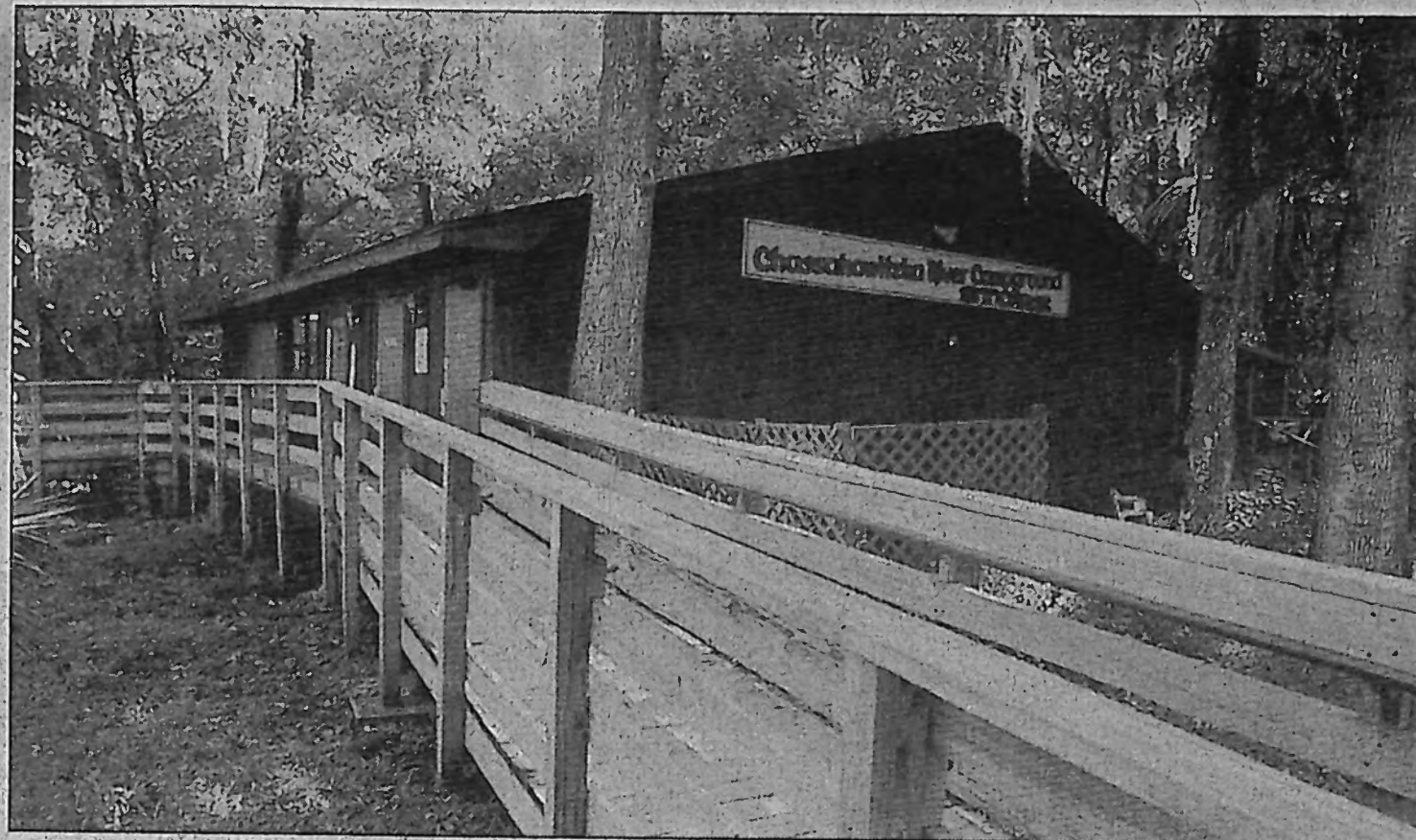
It hasn't been a cash cow.

Records show in the last five years the campground barely broke even; in 2007, it lost money. Most revenue comes from the 78 campsites, but the annual occupancy is generally less than 30 percent.

Because it operates as an enterprise fund, no tax dollars are used. What revenue the campground earns goes to pay the salaries of the five-person staff as well as upkeep. The county hasn't generated enough money to make the improvements it says are needed.

Strickland, as the park manager, asked county commissioners to raise the camping rates, Community Services Director Brad Thorpe said. The board refused. As part of his proposal, Strickland said he would raise the rates from \$20 a day to \$30 a day, or \$120 a week to \$200 a week, for full campsite hookup.

The county's vision is to hand over control of the park to a private vendor



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

The campground struggles to break even. Most revenue comes from campsites and the camp store.

background information about the campground. He said Strickland was not involved.

Thorpe said Del Valle didn't need Strickland's help in preparing the RFQ.

"He knows that park better than David does," Thorpe said.

The county posted the RFQ in July by advertising it in the newspaper and online at demandstar.com, a Web site that commonly connects businesses with governments seeking bids.

The posting included a mandatory pre-bid meeting Aug. 13 at the Chassahowitzka River Campground store to discuss the proposal and ask questions. Strickland and Jim Free, the co-owner at Nature Quest, showed up, along with Del Valle and Ron Bamer, the county's purchasing and contracts manager.

Free contends that Strickland arrived in a county uniform and harassed him about bidding on the campground contract. Del Valle said Strickland was off duty and wearing a Chassahowitzka Hotel shirt.

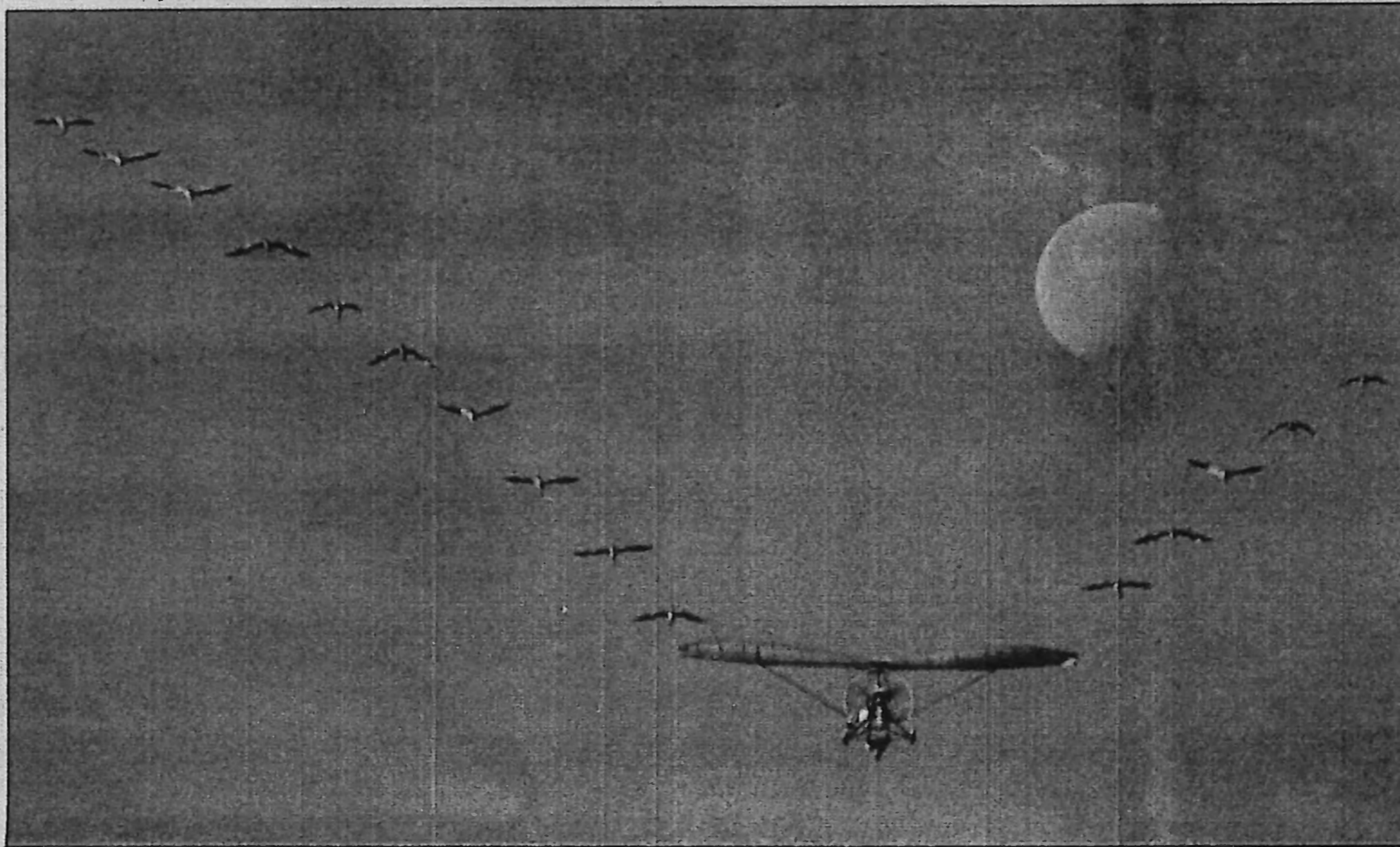
Del Valle said Strickland did become angry when



A boater heads toward the county campground on the Chassahowitzka River.

1-29-08

Home sweet home



DEAN HESTER/Special to the Chronicle

The flock of whooping cranes that arrived in the area from Wisconsin on Sunday make their way to their winter home in the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge on Monday morning. With the moon as a backdrop, the flock was photographed while passing over the Wal-Mart in Homosassa.

1-25-08

“ I’ve never seen him so enthusiastic about anything. ”

Loranie Carter, about her son’s, Logan, effort to learn more about whooping cranes.

Crane lovers flock to arrival

Birds land in Dunnellon

CRISTY LOFTIS
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Chronicle

DUNNELLON — His favorite bird is number 706.

That’s who Miami third-grader Logan Carter was scanning the Sunday morning skies for as a group of endangered birds made their way into Marion County.

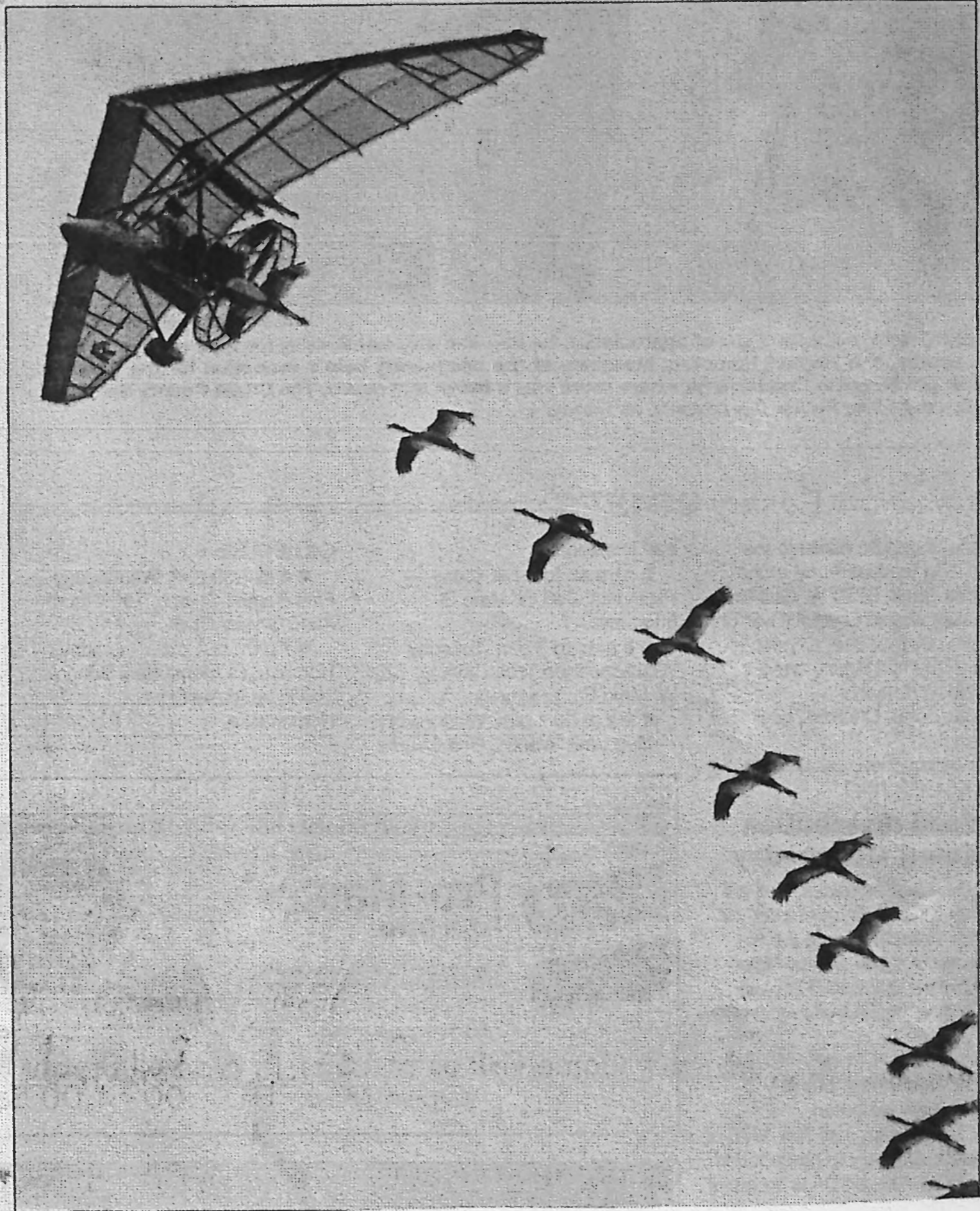
Logan and his family were just a few in a crowd of hundreds that gathered at the Marion County/Dunnellon Airport to watch Operation Migration’s newest flock of whooping cranes learn the migration path to their winter home.

Operation Migration, which began in 1994, is an organization dedicated to restoring whooping crane populations. Each year, they teach juvenile whooping cranes their migratory path by having them follow four ultra-light air craft from Wisconsin to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge.

Details of each year’s migration is available online, where people can track the cranes progress and learn about the birds.

That’s how Logan’s journey into becoming a “craniac” began.

His class began learning about Operation Migration’s project and the children used the Web site to learn how this year’s migration was going.



1-28-2008

That's where Logan learned about crane 706 and his own passion for the endangered species.

Crane 706 is described as having an appetite that is so voracious that it almost bit the beak off the puppet on its first feeding.

As the cranes flew over the airport to a field a few miles south, where the cranes would be safe from the noise and people Logan was worried 706 had been hurt. After all, there were only 16 cranes in the sky when there were supposed to be 17.

A quick question to Operation Migration spokeswoman Liz Condi found that 706 was flying well Sunday morning. It was actually crane 703 who had a run in with some of his winged peers who was being driven to the landing site so that he could recover from minor scratches.

Logan was relieved.

He and his family came from Miami to watch the fly-over after Logan became enthralled with the project.

"I've never seen him so enthusiastic about anything," his mother, Loraine Carter, said.

Old and young alike

Please see CRANE/Page 4A

DAVE SIGLER/Chronicle

ABOVE: The main flock of migrating whooping cranes follows one of four ultralight planes Sunday to the Dunnellon airport. The ultralight planes guided the cranes more than 1,100 miles from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin to the Marion County facility. Depending on the weather today, the flock will make its final trip, migrating to its winter spot at the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Park Refuge. BELOW: Ultralight pilots Richard VanHeuvelen and Chris Gullickson are greeted with hugs after they returned to the Dunnellon Airport after dropping off the cranes at the Halpata Reserve.





DAVE SIGLER/Chronicle

More than 500 observers braved the cold and damp morning to watch the long-awaited arrival of the 2007 class of whooping cranes arrive Sunday at the Dunnellon airport.

1-28-2008

CRANE

Continued from Page 1A

peered at a cloudy sky watching for the cranes.

"I'm kind of a crane enthusiast," Denise Simmons of Inverness said.

She came out with her husband, Greg, and 8-year-old son, Derek.

"Oh boy, oh boy!" Derek yelled as the first ultralight appeared with one crane gliding with ease in the plane's air draft.

While the cranes always begin each day together, they don't always stay that way, pilot Richard Vanheuvelen said.

"They tend to split up in the air a lot," Vanheuvelen said.

That's why Operation Migration uses four aircraft to herd the cranes and follow those that stray away.

This year's guided migration was the organization's longest to date with 96 days

spent far on the 1,250-mile journey.

Depending on the weather, the cranes will make the final leg of their journey today from Marion County, across Citrus County and to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Park Refuge where the birds will stay until about April when they are expected to migrate home on their own.

This may be the last year the whooping cranes are bought to Chassahowitzka after the entire 2006 migrating class died last year.

The birds were penned in a marshy area and during severe storms drowned in the water surge.

To ensure this year's class is safe, a special gate has been installed that can sense when the water is too high.

"The gate will open and give the birds an escape route," said Sarah Zimorski, who is

a part of the International Crane Foundation's tracking team.

This week, the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership will have its annual meeting.

Members will decide whether Chassahowitzka is still the best destination for the cranes. One alternative site being considered is the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge near Tallahassee.

There are only about 500 whooping cranes living in the wild and captivity in North America, Zimorski said.

According to Operation Migration's Web site, about 60 birds have been successfully taught the migration route in the program's first five years. That's four times the number of whooping cranes that existed in the early 1940s.

To learn more about Operation Migration, go to www.operationmigration.org.

“They tend to split up in the air a lot.”

Richard Vanheuvelen
ultralight aircraft pilot.

Cranes grounded for record-setting 11th straight day

Flock stuck in Tennessee

Chronicle

High winds and a low ceiling Monday forced Operation Migration to cancel their flight for a record-setting 11th consecutive day.

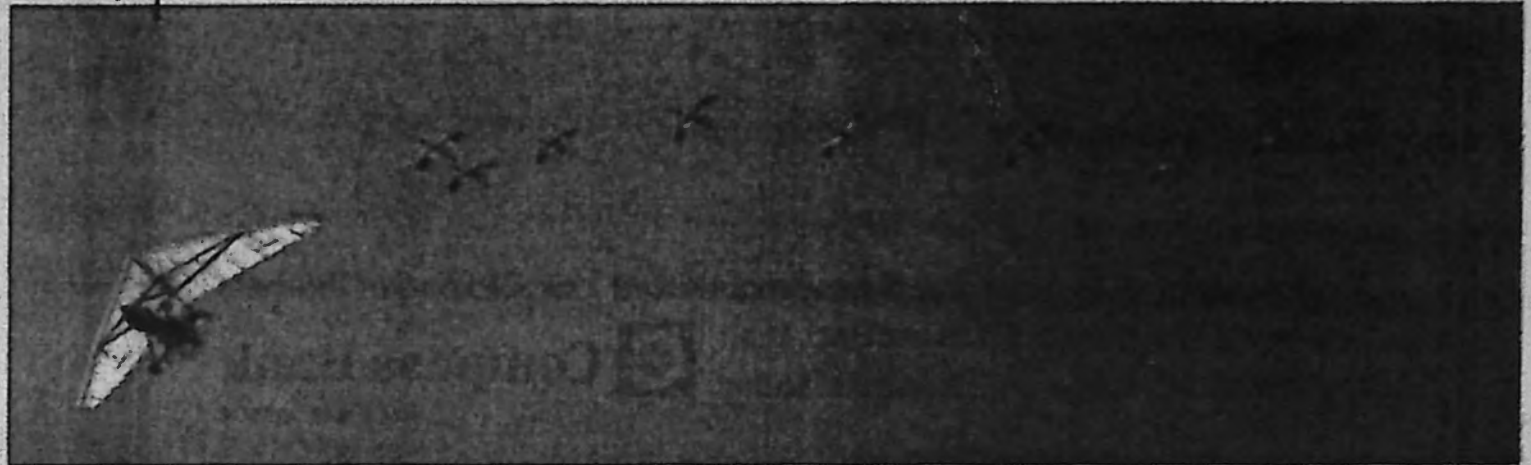
Since finding whooping crane 733 on Nov. 28 in a farmer's field in Big Spring,

12-18-07
Ky., after the chick had been missing five days, the cranes have traveled 124 miles.

Monday was day 66 of the trip, which has covered 680 miles so far. Winds aloft were blowing at 35 mph and the ceiling was between 900 and 1,000 feet, below the top of the Cumberland Ridge.

Operation Migration officials did attempt to fly, but when they couldn't get over the Cumberland Ridge they flew

Please see CRANES/Page 4A



Chronicle file

The annual migration of whooping cranes has been delayed 11 straight days due to inclement weather. Officials with Operation Migration hope to be airborne again soon and en route to Florida.

12-18-2007

CRANES

Continued from Page 1A

the whooping cranes from one temporary pen location to another, providing some lucky Tennesseans a chance to view a flyover. The change in pen location is also healthier for the cranes as fecal matter can build up in the enclosures, plus the birds needed the exercise and had to be reminded they were migrating.

The birds left Necedah Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin on Oct. 13, and will arrive in January at the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge.

The entire trip to Florida is about 1,250 miles. the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership.

Operation Migration teaches whooping cranes to migrate from Wisconsin to Florida each year. In the first five years of the program, about 60 birds have been taught a migration route between Wisconsin and Florida. This is four times the number that existed in the early 1940s.

Operation Migration Inc. works in partnership with nine private and government agencies known collectively as

**Operation
Migration teaches
whooping cranes
to migrate from
Wisconsin to
Florida each year.**

the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership. This year's whooping crane flyover event will be at the Dunnellon Park Commerce Airport and the public is invited to attend. The airport is at 15070 S.W. 111th St., off Marion County Road 484. For day-to-day information about the cranes progress, visit www.operationmigration.org and click on "In The Field."

For directions to the flyover event at the Dunnellon Airport, call the Crystal River Refuge at 563-2088.

7-31-07

County: Chassahowitzka utility moving along

No word on assessment cost

TERRY WITT
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Chronicle

Construction of a \$13.1 million centralized water and wastewater system in Chassahowitzka is moving along well, but the cost to property owners remains unknown for now, according to a July 30 memo from county Public Works Director Glenn McCracken.

The memo, an update for property owners in the coastal community, said the water portion of the project is nearly complete and the sewer portion is 40 percent complete.

The county will focus now on building the remainder of the sewer. McCracken said the project should be finished next year by spring or summer.

The county has received \$7.75 million in grants — all but \$1 million for the sewer portion — but plans to ask for additional state funding this fall when State Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, brings the legislative delegation to Citrus County for the annual legislative hearing.

Citrus County commissioners plan to impose a special property assessment on landowners to pay the portion of the project not funded by state and federal grants, but county officials won't know the size of the assessment until they know if additional grant money is certain.

Commissioners voted last Aug. 8, to delay collection of the water and wastewater assessment until 2007, but McCracken said the process has been reviewed and staff has concluded the assessment won't have to be collected until after construction is complete, as required by Florida law.

Fasano has worked in the Legislature to secure grants for the water quality project in hopes of lowering costs for property owners. Chassahowitzka is not a wealthy community. County Commissioner Gary Bartell has also lobbied the Legislature for grant money to buy down project costs.

U.S. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite, R-Brooksville, has earmarked \$1.1 million of State Tribal Assistance Grant (STAG)

money for the project. The county is filing the necessary application to qualify for the money, according to spokeswoman Jessica Lambert.

McCracken said the county is still allowing the owners of multiple lots in Chassahowitzka to give up development rights to one or more parcels to lower their costs. The process, known as Permanent Reassignment of Development Rights, allows owners of multiple lots to pay a reduced number of assessments. McCracken said the deadline for taking advantage of the option would be established soon.

He said the first public hearing on water and sewer assessments will take place in the fall of this year. The date has not been set.

17 cranes casualties of storm²⁻⁴⁻⁰⁷

*Almost all class of 2006
whoopers confirmed dead*

CRISTY LOFTIS
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Chronicle

At least 17 endangered whooping cranes guided from Wisconsin to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge died as a result of powerful storms earlier in the week.

Refuge manager Jim Kraus said the young birds were found dead Friday after the previous night's storm, which was filled with high winds, lightning, heavy rain and an unusually high tide.

Eighteen cranes came to the area in January after following ultralight planes. The project is coordinated by Operation Migration and the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership — the idea is to teach the endangered birds the winter migration path.

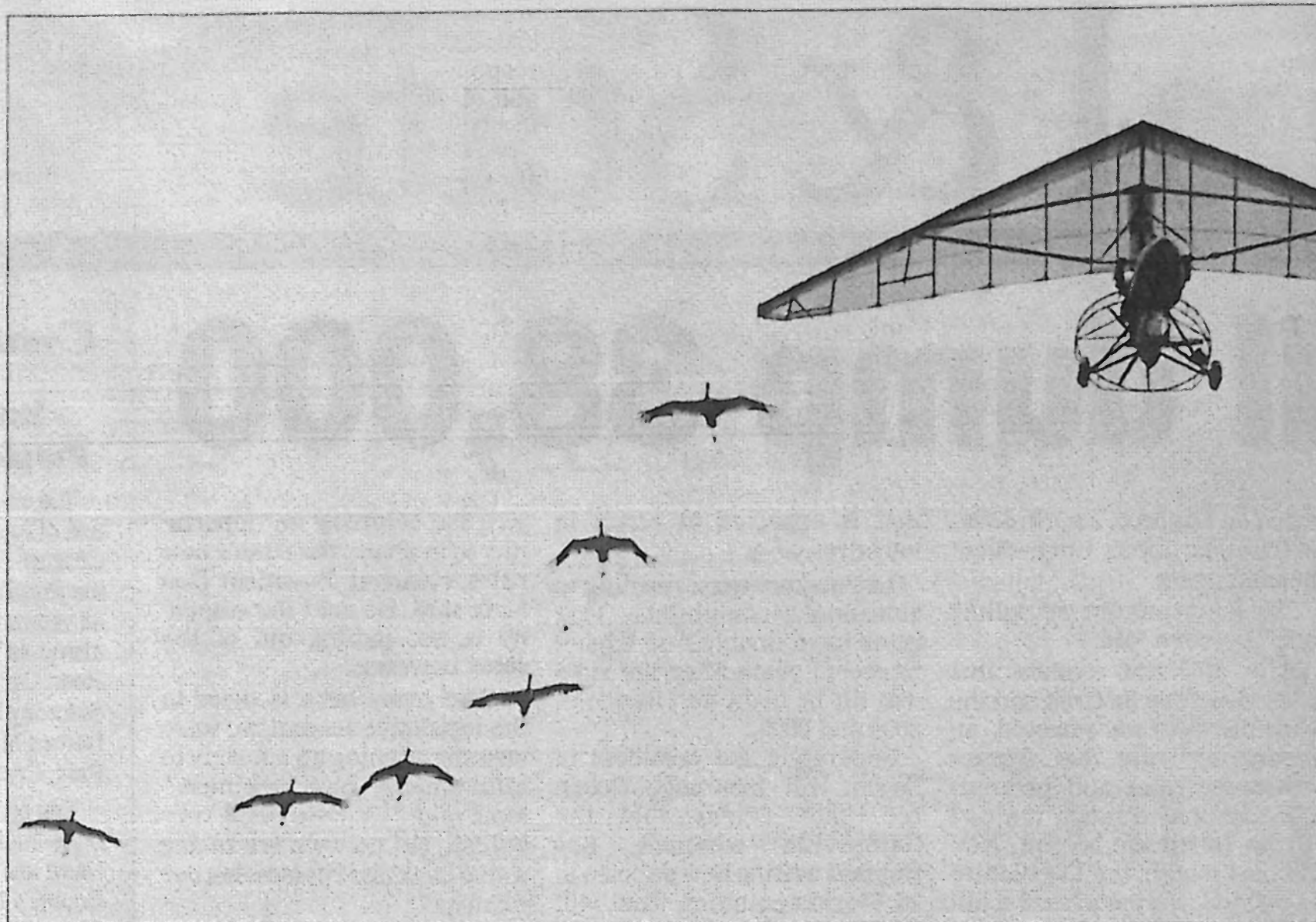
The 18th bird is still unaccounted for, Kraus said.

Please see **CRANES/Page 4A**

Whooping cranes follow an ultralight aircraft during training Sept. 29, 2006, at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Necedah, Wis.

At least 17 young whooping cranes led south from Wisconsin by ultralight aircraft were killed in storms that hit Florida, dealing a devastating blow to a project to create a second migratory flock of the endangered birds in North America.

Associated Press



CRANES

Continued from Page 1A

"That's kind of a mystery we're trying to unravel," Kraus said.

The electronic tracker on the crane is still submitting a nearby signal. There's a chance and some hope that the bird may be alive, but he reminded bobcats and other predators are also in the refuge. Bobcats have killed whooping cranes associated with the project in the past.

The reintroduction project to increase crane populations is now in its sixth year, with 85 cranes trained to fly from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin to Florida.

Whooping cranes are an endangered species, with numbers that had dwindled to only 15 in 1940. Currently, there are fewer than 500 whoopers in North America.

The 2006 class was delayed several times during its migration this year because of heavy wind and cold weather; however, when the birds arrived in January, it was the first year the entire flock survived the 1,200-mile trip, Kraus said.

"Overall, the project has been a great success in spite of what happened," Kraus said.

When the cranes are first hatched, the birds will follow the first object they see — a behavior known as imprinting. Researchers act as the birds' surrogate parents and slowly train them to fly and follow

ultralight airplanes.

Because the goal is to keep the cranes completely wild, researchers wear nondescript clothing and do not talk around the birds, so they do not get accustomed to being around humans. Researchers also feed the birds using crane puppets and have the pilots fly in costumes.

The Chassahowitzka site is penned in to protect the cranes from predators; however, the birds may come and go as they choose. The location is on a small salt marsh island with a stilted shed for researchers to unobtrusively study the animals.

Kraus said teams are in the beginning stages of determining the actual cause of death for the 17 birds.

The birds were last checked on Thursday evening. Because of the magnitude of the storm and the remote location of the pen, personnel were unable to check on the cranes until Friday afternoon.

"My heart is aching both for the young birds we lost and for the dedicated people who devote so much of themselves to this project, only to see the cranes' lives end in this manner," co-chair of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership John Christian wrote in a news release. "These birds were the start of a new generation of life for the species, but we will recover and continue our work. Our thoughts also go out to those in central Florida who suffered personal losses as a result of these storms."

RV resort popping up ¹⁰⁻²⁴⁻⁰⁶ near Chassahowitzka

Construction under way, first phase has 39 sites

MIKE WRIGHT
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Chronicle

Jim Eyster has another RV development on his radar:

The man who brought Gary Burghoff of M*A*S*H fame to his Nature Coast Lands RV Resort in northwest Citrus County is developing a second similar resort south of Chassahowitzka.

Construction began this month on Chassa Oaks RV Resort on U.S. 19 south of Chassahowitzka. When completed, it will

support 130 concrete RV pads with prices beginning at \$49,900, plus a clubhouse, laundry, swimming pool and tennis court.

The first phase is for 39 sites and already half are spoken for, said Barbara McCorkhill. She and her husband, Joe, are sales associates with developer Jim Eyster.

Phase I construction is targeted for occupancy by the end of this year, Mrs. McCorkhill said.

The idea of RV resorts is catching on nationwide as recreational vehicle owners seek high-class areas to park their RVs and to live.

"They're becoming very popular," Mrs. McCorkhill said. "Folks who like to camp in Florida are having more and more trouble finding nice campgrounds, especially in a nice location."

The McCorkhills know. In May 2001, they left careers in technology to spend life on the road. On occasion, they would "work camp" at resorts by doing various jobs and getting a break on the cost.

Last year, they settled on Nature Coast Landings, Eyster's RV resort off U.S. 19 near the Cross Florida Barge Canal. That's the same place where Burghoff, best known as Radar in M*A*S*H, is the celebrity spokesman.

Chassa Oaks will be a bit different.

Owners of RV pads may live there full-time or rent them out on their own; at Nature Coast Landings, a management company handles rentals similar to a time-share.

The McCorkhills began working as sales associates for Eyster at Nature Coast Landings and now are selling Chassa Oaks.

"We're the whole staff," she said. "We're the sales staff, we're the maintenance, the advertising folks."

Mrs. McCorkhill said she believes RV resorts like Chassa Oaks will grow in popularity.

"A lot of these folks like the sense of community they get," she said. "It's like buying a condo."

Chassahowitzka effluent tests ⁹⁻²⁶⁻⁰⁶ prove inconclusive

JIM HUNTER

jhunter@chronicleonline.com
Chronicle

Tests to detect effluent from septic tanks on the upper Chassahowitzka River this spring have proven inconclusive.

That's according to an August report by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on two tests done in March and May using traditional and experimental techniques.

"Overall, the results from this work do not provide a definite indicator of direct septic tank inputs, their quantified loads or direct evidence of human health concerns," the report read.

State Sen. Nancy Argenziano, R-Dunnellon, had requested the tests in an effort to get definitive results once and for all about whether septic systems in

Chassahowitzka were posing a health threat, something that has been alleged for years and that has resulted in an effort to take a county sewer line to the southwest Citrus community.

Argenziano said the report was "ambiguous" at best and seemed to show no evidence of a health threat.

Though it has been suspected for some time, definitive data showing pollution by septic tank pollution has not been evident in tests.

For effluent bacteriological indicators, the recent tests used *E. Coli*, *Enterococci* and *Clostridium perfringens*, which are all found in the waste of both humans and warm-blooded animals. The experimental part of the tests measured what's called optical brightener dyes in the water. The dyes are in most

laundry detergents and typically go into septic tanks and so can be an indicator of septic tank effluent.

The water is checked for brightener and correlated to the bacteriological samples. If both are high, that's an indicator effluent is present.

The first samples were done at low tide March 15 and 16 and May 9 and 10. Bacteriological samples were taken at 10 stations. The second test was done with more sensitive equipment available in May. The report stated the May bacteriological counts were much higher than those in March because of rain less than 24 hours before.

While there were differences in the brightener across the canals system in the upper river, the indicator was greater in the three eastern canals, compared

with the 10 southern canals, suggesting there is a greater input of human effluent along the eastern canals, the report said.

The highest brightener presence was found near and just downstream of the Chassahowitzka Main Spring (site 5), Chassahowitzka No. 1 spring (site 6) and the mouth of Crab Spring Run.

That was unexpected, the report read, attributing it to either the cumulative impact of upstream waters, submarine groundwater discharge or interference from non-human sources. Sites 5 and 6 also reported the highest counts of *Enterococci*, suggesting, the report read, that the higher presence of brightener at those sampling stations came from human sources.

Despite that correlation, how-

ever, the report stated that the brightener indicators did not correlate well with any of the traditional bacteriological indicators.

The report concluded: "Traditional bacteriological indicators continue to demonstrate little utility in isolating point sources of human effluent from leaking onsite sewage treatment disposal systems." It read there are other more specific testing methods that could be used, but they are costly and time-consuming.

The report stated optical brightener tests did provide results that suggest certain areas within the Chassahowitzka springs and canal system may be receiving the effluent, presumably from septic tanks.

But "any definitive conclusions must be treated with caution," the report stated.

8-17-06

Fingers crossed for future of cranes

■ Operation Migration hopes two chicks will be able to find their way to Florida on their own when winter comes.

By BARBARA BEHRENDT
Times Staff Writer

CRYSTAL RIVER — Ever since the first batch of rare whooping crane chicks ascended into the cool Wisconsin sky behind ultralights to learn a migration route to Florida, the reintroduction project has been a nail-biter.

Organizers worried about the long flight south, how the chicks would fare in their winter home in Chassahowitzka and whether they would make it back to Wisconsin on their own the next year.

Not since that maiden voyage in late 2001 and early 2002 have there been more reasons for the crane project partners to be more nervous.

This year's cause for concern boils down to three little whooping cranes, the most precious to date.

They are the first members of the second generation.

All eyes rest on these three to determine the final success of the countless hours of

work to reintroduce a migratory whooping crane population to the eastern United States.

That flock has grown to 63 individuals, 61 adults and two of the three second-generation chicks.

The third second-generation chick was hatched in captivity and is in flight training behind ultralights at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin.

The other two are completely outside the control of the staff of Operation Migration.

Hatched June 22, these two birds are the first whooping cranes born in the wild in the

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8-7-2006

Cranes from Page 1

Midwest in a century. Their parents, two cranes that learned the migration route behind ultralights in 2002, lost their first eggs of the season but nested again and those eggs hatched.

The father and mother cranes are so far doing a good job raising their first offspring, according to Liz Condie, chief operating officer for Operation Migration, who spends a good deal of her time with her fingers crossed.

It is hard for crane project partners to keep track of the wild "first family," as they are called. They make every effort to keep the birds wild and that means they try to stay hundreds of yards away from them at all times, using binoculars and long camera lenses to make their daily checks.

Watching and hoping is all they can do.

"We've not gotten off the edge of our chair. Nobody has any fingernails

left and our stomachs are in knots every day" hoping that the gangly crane chicks are okay, Condie said.

The vast expanse of the Necedah refuge is a dangerous place. Just a week ago another older crane was found dead, possibly killed by a predator.

Every day the young birds get closer to fledging, when they discover their wings can take them into the air and away from the clutches of most predators.

The two wild chicks, which stand about 2 ½ feet tall, half the height they will reach as adults, should be ready to take to the air in the next couple of weeks.

"Every day is one more day," Condie said.

While much of the Necedah refuge has been experiencing drought-like conditions, the territory where the "first family" has staked its claim still has plenty of water, Condie said.

Whooping cranes frequently have two chicks at a time but both don't always survive. They tend to be



Special to the

The first whooping cranes born in the wild from a migratory flock in Florida are being raised in Wisconsin while being monitored.

aggressive to each other in the early days, possibly out of their survival instinct.

But if the two eggs hatch together and the parents split, two can thrive, Condie said.

Water system costs could break residents

Homeowners say assessment will be a financial burden

TERRY WITT
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Chronicle

The Chassahowitzka water and sewer project nearly died last year when county commissioners first looked at the \$11.1 million price tag, and even

though the project survived, cost continues to be an issue for some residents.

A group of Chassahowitzka property owners has organized a community meeting at 7 p.m. today at the fire station to discuss forming a property owners association that could potentially address the cost issue and possibly hire an attorney.

Michael Hartley, a visually impaired plumbing contractor who went door-to-door Monday handing out fliers advertising

MEETING ON TAP

■ County commissioners will meet at 1 p.m. today on the first floor of the Citrus County Courthouse in Inverness. At 2:15 p.m., commissioners will host a public hearing for adoption of the Chassahowitzka property assessment for water.

the meeting, said an attorney has been contacted to answer questions at the meeting, but

6-27-06
he is not from Citrus County. Local lawyers declined to take the case.

Hartley is aware that county commissioners are scheduled to consider approval today of a \$6,361.88 special property tax assessment to pay for the water portion of the project. He said he plans to ask the commission to delay the vote until his group has more time to research how to reduce costs for Chassahowitzka residents.

The property assessment for water could be paid as a lump

sum or financed over 10 years, but the finance charges would total \$4,897.64. The county would assess a 6 percent interest rate on the loan and the property appraiser, tax collector and assessment coordinator each would each collect 2 percent interest for handling the paperwork in the respective offices.

Matt and Hope Corona, who helped distribute the fliers with Hartley, question whether

Please see **BREAK/Page 4A**

Group files water 17-15-06 suit

Chassahowitzka residents cry foul

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Chassahowitzka property owners filed a class action lawsuit Friday alleging the Citrus County Commission has imposed a special water tax that is neither fair nor equal.

The lawsuit targets the \$6,361.88 special property assessment the Citrus County Commission approved on June 27 to build a central water line into the community.

The assessment is being levied against residential and commercial property owners in Chassahowitzka, but the suit says homeowners are getting hit hardest.

Matthew Corona, one of the four property owners filing the suit, said the litigation is not aimed at overturning the property assessment, but rather to distribute the tax burden more fairly.

"We want everyone who benefits to pay their fair share," Corona said. "We don't want to put an unfair burden on the residents of Chassahowitzka."

The lawsuit, filed by members of the recently formed Chassahowitzka Property Owners Association, alleges commercial properties are being given a break on the water assessment.

Corona said the county plans to assess one piece of commercial property at the corner of U.S. 19 and Miss Maggie Drive for its current use rather than its highest and best use.

7-15-2006

WATER

Continued from Page 1A

He said the property owner plans to build a gas station on the property, but the county will assess it as vacant commercial.

Corona said residential property is being assessed for its highest and best use, creating an inequity.

The lawsuit also takes issue with the county's decision not to impose the water assessment tax on property owners

“ It's another mini-mortgage payment attached to their property. ”

Matthew Corona
property owner.

along the 7,000 feet of water line from Sugarmill Woods to Miss Maggie Drive.

With those property owners receiving a free ride, the lawsuit contends residents in Chassahowitzka will unfairly shoulder more of the tax burden. They alone will have to

pay for the 7,000 feet of line.

Corona is one of four names listed in the lawsuit. The others are Michael D. Hartley, Clay Steinman and PSC Holding LLC.

But the lawsuit said they are members of a class of 523 homeowners in Chassahow-

tizka. Corona said all the residents of Chassahowitzka are represented in the lawsuit.

Community residents received a July 11 letter from the county indicating they have the option of paying the \$6,361.88 assessment as a lump sum by Aug. 14, or they could spread the payments over 20 years, paying \$582.39 annually.

Corona said the \$582.39 would be added to their property tax bill.

“It's another mini-mortgage payment attached to their property,” he said.

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... Thursday and will end later

The board questioned whether Danella should be allowed to proceed with the Chassahowitzka water project when it had not completed the Halls River Road sewer lines.

But the Chassahowitzka contract was preserved when Danella Operations Manager Nick Fidducia said the company had run into unique soil and rock conditions on Halls River Road that it had found nowhere else in the state. He said those conditions delayed the project, along with wet weather.

He convinced Commission Chairman Gary Bartell and Commissioners Jim Fowler and Dennis Damato the company had done all it could to complete the Halls River Road sewer project on time. A motion to commence work on the Chassahowitzka project passed 3-2, with Bartell, Fowler and Damato supporting the motion and Commissioners Vicki Phillips and Joyce Valentino opposed.

Fidducia said Danella has installed all but 80 feet of sewer line on Halls River Road. When the remaining line is in the ground, he said the company would begin work on Chassahowitzka. He thinks the Halls River Road sewer lines would be finished by September.

He said the entire project area along Halls River Road consists of fractured limestone. When the company dug deep trenches for the sewer lines, he said water would flow

Please see **HOT SEAT/Page 5A**

Contractor finds self on hot seat

7-12-06
Commission:
Start project now

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The Chassahowitzka central water project barely escaped a nearly fatal political blow at Tuesday's county commission meeting that could have ended the project or caused more delays.

Commissioners at one point appeared poised to cancel the Chassahowitzka contract with Danella Companies Inc. or impose heavy financial penalties for failing to complete an unrelated sewer project on Halls River Road. The contractor is at least three months behind on installation of sewer lines along the road.

7-12-2008

HOT SEAT

Continued from Page 1A

through fractures in the limestone sidewalls and fill the trenches, making it difficult to dewater the trenches. He said the company has never run into this type of fractured limestone in any other coastal area of the state.

The water lines are part of a larger Chassahowitzka water and sewer line project that nearly died when the only bid for the water and sewer lines last year was \$11.1 million, about \$6 million more than anticipated.

Commissioners then separated the water and sewer portions of the project and re-bid the water portion. Danella, which had been the low bidder for the combined project, was once again the successful bidder on the water portion, and there were no savings realized by re-bidding the contract. The cost remained at more than \$11 million.

The water project is being funded almost entirely with a special property assessment on the residents of Chassahowitzka. The county also has received a \$600,000 community development block grant to lower the cost of connecting water lines to low-income Chassahowitzka residents. The grant might have been lost if the Danella contract

The water project is being funded almost entirely with a special property assessment on the residents of Chassahowitzka.

had been cancelled, according to Acting County Administrator Tom Dick.

In other business:

■ Commissioners agreed to send a letter to the Florida Department of Transportation's Aviation Division and the Federal Aviation Administration advising them of concerns by Inverness residents about security fencing around the Inverness Airport.

Inverness resident Robert Masters and his wife appeared at Tuesday's meeting. They said the fencing, which is 6 feet tall and has three barbed wire strands at the top, is offensive and doesn't belong in a residential neighborhood.

Staff also was instructed to look at the possibility of screening the fence with foliage or setting it back away from residential property lines.

C-27-2006

BREAK

Continued from Page 1A

the community really needs a central water system when people like themselves already have good wells.

Matt Corona said he has had his well tested at least four times and contaminants were never found.

He said the second problem is that many Chassahowitzka residents won't have enough income to pay for the water and sewer assessments.

"As I walk through this com-

munity I can see more than half can't afford to pay the cost," he said. "It's just a sad thing. You are passing by a lot of fixed income people who won't be able to pay it."

The county has not determined the size of the sewer assessment.

Glenn McCracken, county public works director, said the staff is internally studying how much to assess vacant commercial properties along U.S. 19 between Homosassa and Miss

Maggie Drive, the entrance road to Chassahowitzka.

When those calculations have been made, McCracken said the county will be in a position to determine the size of the sewer assessment.

He said the reason for the high water assessment was the lack of state grant funding. He said the county received a \$600,000 community development block grant for the water portion of the project, but millions for the sewer portion.

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