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## Lee commission: Keep DRGR study limits focused

By CHARLIE WHITEHEAD (Contact)

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Lee County commissioners said Thursday they want to look past the southeastern portion of the county to study all its rural lands.

They won't add to the recently started examination of the 83,000-acre Density Reduction Groundwater Resource area, much to the chagrin of Commissioner Brian Bigelow. What they will do is assess work already done, just like they did for the DRGR, with an eye toward a complete new plan.

Smart Growth director Wayne Daltry said the buildout study that pegged the eventual county population at 1.4 million is not a scenario the county has to let play out.

"That's what happened when we drive off the cliff," Daltry said. "Let's not talk about that date. Let's talk about the date we determined not to drive toward the cliff."

Bigelow said he thought that the date — when the county decided not to drive toward the cliff — had already come. He said he thought all rural lands were to be included in the DRGR study.

"My intention is to include the rural lands in the northern area in the scope of services," he said.

But including all the rural lands in a study geared toward the southeast part of the county would slow that work, other commissioners said.

"Some would argue that's not a narrow scope," Commissioner Frank Mann said. "That's a scope that could choke a horse."

Community Development director Mary Gibbs said that the DRGR work got off to a good start this week with a 2-hour meeting of the 15-member committee appointed by the commissioners. She said the committee has quite enough on its plate without expanding beyond the southeast county DRGR.

"It's a little daunting," she said.

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And the DRGR committee work could yet prove to be moot depending on the Legislature. A state mining task force begins its work next week, and the Legislature came close to assuming all regulatory authority over mining. A bill proposed last session would have given landowners virtual carte blanche to mine anywhere in the DRGR.

"I'd like to see the whole process be home rule rather than part of the process being taken by the state," Commissioner Tammy Hall said.

Commissioners left no doubt they'll support the DRGR work, whatever it takes. Gibbs said consultants that will study mine traffic and do water modelling may be more expensive than originally thought. The planning consultant producing the study and serving the committee has a \$750,000 contract.

"The future of our county is at stake," Bigelow said. "Less than \$1 million is nothing compared to what's at stake."

Bigelow said he supports the DRGR work, but wishes it could do more.

"What we just decided to do is same-old, same-old," he said. "I've failed to convince you what I think should be done. That's get a handle on that part of the county at greatest risk — east of 75."

"Urban sprawl is a disease and all we seem to do is treat the symptoms," Bigelow said. "This is a lost opportunity."

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