

## **SunWest Harbourtowne: A Development that wasn't supposed to happen**

### **Aripeka and the Region**

The fishing village of Aripeka represents the southern extent of the wild lands that are known as Florida's Nature Coast. To the south the coast is intensively developed; to the north is natural Florida. You can still walk along Aripeka Road and gaze out over the gulf across salt marshes- a view unimpeded by coastal development. You can still fish off the bridges and not worry about traffic. There are no strip malls, chain stores, or fast food restaurants. A trip through the region is like traveling back in time to a place that has the aesthetic and natural richness that brought people to Florida in the first place.

In fact there is no place quite like present day Aripeka, gateway to Florida's Nature Coast.

The region's ecological value is undeniable and reflected in the efforts made by state and local organizations to purchase and protect what's known as the Greater Chassahowitzka Ecosystem (GCE), a vast natural area that encompasses about 165,786 acres of land within Pasco, Hernando and Citrus counties. It is home to a variety of protected resources including vast swaths of estuarine and freshwater wetlands, the smallest population Florida black bear in the state, scrub jays, indigo snakes, gopher tortoise, and an array of other game and nongame wildlife. The region's coastline has been described as "nature's nursery" - its vast expanses of seagrasses serve as the breeding grounds for many of our coastal game fish, manatees, and sea turtles. These rich coastal estuaries are essential to Florida's recreational and commercial fishing industries, and the economies and tourism they support.

### **Sunwest Harbourtowne Development of Regional Impact**

The SunWest Harbourtowne project is planned to be a mixed use golf course community on 2,640 acres located in coastal Pasco County, south of Aripeka Road and west of US 19. Preliminary plans show 2,579 multi-family units, 540,000sq. Ft. of commercial/office space, a 250 room hotel with 100 additional condo units, a 138-acre golf course and 850 berths for marina storage. The marina plans are contingent on a partnership with the county to dredge a 2.2 mile channel to provide deep water access to the gulf. As proposed, it will irrevocably alter Aripeka and the region's wildlife – both inland and coastal.

Sunwest Harbourtowne, as proposed is very similar in nature and scope to its bookend project to the north – the Magnolia Bay Development of Regional Impact in Taylor County, Florida. Magnolia Bay's initial requests for permits have been rejected, or faced recommendations for denial, through the state and federal permitting process. Residents, regulators, scientists, and fisherman all realized that the negative impacts to seagrass from this project, the loss of coastal wetlands, and the increased pollution from coastal development all made this a bad project for Florida's Nature Coast.

### **FACTS\*:**

- 1) SunWest Harbourtowne is proposed on a site that was and is still being mined.

2) The county approved mining of the property in 1975 with the contingency that after mining it would be turned over to the County as public land. For regional planning purposes of local and state governments, the property was assumed to be in a public or conservation use status.

3) Through a series of compromises, law suits, and bankruptcies, Pasco County struck a new deal to allow this property to be developed (2006). ***Development on this land was never meant to be.***

4) Development, as proposed, will displace core black bear habitat of the smallest known population of black bear in the state, if not the country. Any loss of habitat could jeopardize the continued existence of this already imperiled population\*.

5) The project would dredge a deep water channel that would displace the protected seagrass beds of the region, imperiling the region's fisheries and degrading water quality, as well as exposing the region to exponential increases in recreational boat traffic\*.

5) The development would essentially isolate protected lands along the coastline in southern Aripeka from thousands of acres of protected land to the north\*. This is not only devastating for the black bear, but dramatically impacts other species of wildlife that currently inhabit the region.

6) The majority of the site is within the "high velocity zone" and coastal high hazard zone. This is an area that is under high risk from hurricanes and coastal flooding.

7) The area is dotted with sink holes – another geological characteristic that is incompatible with heavy development.

*\*For more background information pertaining to these issues, see "Potential Natural Resource Impacts Resulting from the Proposed SunWest Harbortowne" (2007).*

**CALL TO ACTION:** *Express support to protect and preserve Florida's Nature Coast and urge the state/federal government to not allow this project to go forward as currently proposed. Email your thoughts to the following decision makers and agency staff.*

Gov. Charlie Crist: [Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com](mailto:Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com)

David Hobbie, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: [David.S.Hobbie@saj02.usace.army.mil](mailto:David.S.Hobbie@saj02.usace.army.mil)

Ken Haddad, FFWCC: [ken.haddad@myfwc.com](mailto:ken.haddad@myfwc.com)

David Moore, SWFWMD: [David.Moore@watermatters.org](mailto:David.Moore@watermatters.org)

Tom Pellham, Florida DCA: [tom.pelham@dca.state.fl.us](mailto:tom.pelham@dca.state.fl.us)

Ann Hildebrand, Pasco BOCC: [commissioners@pascocountyfl.net](mailto:commissioners@pascocountyfl.net)

State Senator Mike Fasano: [fasano.mike.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:fasano.mike.web@flsenate.gov)








State Rep. John Legg: [john.legg@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:john.legg@myfloridahouse.gov)

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*For more information, contact the Gulf Restoration Network, 352-583-0870, [joe@healthygulf.org](mailto:joe@healthygulf.org). or the Gulf Coast Conservancy, 727-808-4339, [gulfcoastconservancy@verizon.net](mailto:gulfcoastconservancy@verizon.net)*



### Aripeka Corridor

-  SWIFTMUD to SWAP
-  Pasco County Ownership
-  Wildlife Corridor
-  Sun West Mine
-  Aripeka Heights
-  Proposed Exchange
-  SWFWMD Ownership

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