

Lake Jackson ECOPASSAGE

ECO- MESSENGER

SUMMER 2004



LAKE JACKSON ECOPASSAGE:

Building a Safe Route for Both Animals and Drivers

Almost a century ago, US 27 was built to bisect Lake Jackson. Intentions were good, but not much was known about the travel patterns of local wildlife. Since then, unfortunately, motorist safety has been compromised and thousands of species such as turtles, alligators, frogs, muskrats,

and blue herons are killed each year while trying to cross the busy road.

To help solve this problem, the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO and the Florida Department of Transportation initiated a study to assess opportunities within the corridor to supply safe passage for wildlife and the traveling public.

The Lake Jackson Ecopassage Feasibility Study will provide vital data to decision-makers regarding the environment, wildlife and vegetative habitat, land use, public access, and roadway conditions in order to develop an implementation strategy to minimize the effects of the roadway on the ecosystem.

On Wednesday, May 19, 2004, the members of the Advisory Group met with the project team to discuss and set goals and objectives for the study. These goals and objectives will serve as the framework around which the study will be built and set the course for Lake Jackson's Ecopassage.

The goals and objectives featured on the next page will be presented to the public for comment in an upcoming Community Focus Workshop (see *Upcoming Meetings*, back page).



US 27 passes through Lake Jackson and Little Lake Jackson's active eco-systems.



FEASIBILITY STUDY GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

GOALS:

- 1) To minimize effects of the roadway on the ecosystem and re-establish the ecological connection within Lake Jackson for areas bisected by US 27.
- 2) To improve motorist safety and the aesthetic character of the roadway corridor.
- 3) To minimize negative human impacts on the aquatic ecosystems, recommend appropriate facilities for use where possible, and provide access to these facilities.
- 4) Conduct and document the Feasibility Study in a manner that will facilitate the ability to obtain funding from State and/or Federal sources.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Reduce automotive crashes and pedestrian incidents and/or avoid accidents.
- 2) Provide for safe wildlife movement between Lake Jackson and Little Lake Jackson.
- 3) Minimize wildlife roadkill.
- 4) Avoid negative effects to current hydrology.
- 5) Establish a maintenance program for guidewall and passages.
- 6) Establish a vegetation management regime for the ecopassage.
- 7) Establish a management plan and make recommendations for a monitoring plan for the ecopassage system.
- 8) Deter access and use along the roadway corridor to promote safety for humans and wildlife. Divert humans and vehicles to appropriate parking, recreation, and educational areas.
- 9) Deter littering through an active promotion and education program that raises awareness of the ecopassage and its purpose.
- 10) Maximize use of environmentally sensitive materials in the construction of the ecopassage complex, such as low toxicity and/or recycled materials.

DATA COLLECTION UNDERWAY

Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc., (KHA) the engineering company chosen to lead this feasibility study project, and members of its project team, including Ashton & Ashton Associates (AAA) and Biological Research Associates, Inc. (BRA), have already begun collecting data to be analyzed from field studies, existing databases, and from public input. Data collection activities are expected to last through July and will consist of the acquisition and analysis of

existing and historical conditions along the study corridor. KHA is collecting current and historical data and will be assembling the field data gathered into a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database. AAA is heading up the wildlife studies, and BRA will be collecting data for botanical studies along the corridor. Data collected during this period will be used in the analysis and preparation of documentation for the study.

The anticipated schedule for the completion of these documents is as follows:

Project Goals and Objectives Statement	May 2004
Existing Conditions Report	September 2004
Opportunities and Constraints Report	October 2004
Alternatives Considered and Preferred Alternative Report	October 2004
Lake Jackson Ecopassage Feasibility Report (Draft)	Late November 2004
Lake Jackson Ecopassage Feasibility Report (Final)	December 2004



PAYNES PRAIRIE ECOPASSAGE



*Example of a successful ecopassage:
An existing ecopassage located at Paynes Prairie provides protection to the local ecosystem and its inhabitants.*



WHY DO TURTLES CROSS THE ROAD?

The old adage "to get the other side" is correct but does not answer the question as to why or where they are going. According to recent statistics, 8,842 turtles and tortoises attempted to cross US 27 at Lake Jackson between February 22, 2000 and November 1, 2003.

We assume most were crossing to find water and food, but there could be other reasons, such as the search for nesting areas or mates, or changes in food and water supplies. It is important to answer these questions in order to determine the best solution for a passageway. If actions are taken without knowing how and why these turtles are moving, and we build a passageway that is not in harmony with their migratory routes, then the fences, walls, and destruction of habitat will be just as deadly as cars and trucks on the highway.

To find these answers, we are placing small radio transmitters on the turtles to track their movements and locations without interfering with their treks. This data will help us help the turtles, and their friends, safely cross the road—even if all they're looking for is to get to the other side.





Heavy traffic along US 27 (N. Monroe Street) and road-crossing wildlife is a dangerous combination.



UPCOMING MEETINGS:

Specific dates will be provided in future newsletters and on our Web site at: <http://www.state.fl.us/citytlh/planning/tlcpdhp.html>

Advisory Group Meetings

1st meeting held Wednesday, May 19
Future meetings planned for on or about the third Wednesday of each month

Purpose: For professionals in areas related to the project to provide guidance and assistance to the consultant team.

Community Meeting

Tentatively planned for the last week of October

Purpose: To present project alternatives developed over the course of the study and to solicit comments from the public.

Focus Workshop

Tentatively planned for the first week in August

Purpose: To communicate to the public the goals and objectives determined at the May 19 Advisory Group Meeting. The public will have the opportunity to review and comment on existing conditions data gathered to date and to offer opinions and suggestions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This is the first of two newsletters prepared to inform the public about the Lake Jackson Ecopassage Feasibility Study project. For questions about this project, or information on upcoming public meetings, please contact:

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