

## **Charlotte County Weekly Update for 5/1/08 by Roger Baltz**

The County's Veterans Services Division has assisted a Charlotte County veteran with his VA claim, which had been pending since 1999. The claim was granted and the veteran received a back-payment for over \$150,000, plus free healthcare for his dependents. Veterans Services is available to assist all County vets with issues relating to their military service, such as documentation, benefits, health services, VA loans and military burial.

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for four specific County projects has been approved by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The HCP is for the Florida Scrub Jay. The USFWS is now using our plan as an example for other municipalities and consultants to follow. The approval of the HCP was the culmination of just over three years of effort.

The preparations to widen Aquí Esta from Bal Harbor to US 41 in Punta Gorda continue to move forward. The necessary agreements with the Florida Department of Transportation were recently approved by the County Commission.

The most exciting news of the week is the County's purchase of almost 1,800 acres of environmentally sensitive land. The three properties, Thornton Key, Deep Creek parcels, and Ryals Ranch, were preserved through funding provided by Conservation Charlotte. Conservation Charlotte is a voter approved program whereby .2 mills of ad valorem taxes are dedicated to preserve environmentally sensitive land. The properties are prime examples of natural Florida habitat and will provide our residents access to native wildlife, pristine creeks and waterways, and open spaces for passive recreational opportunities.

In recognition of Water Conservation Month the County sponsored a student art contest. Twenty-eight award winning students, grades kindergarten through 12, attended a recent commission meeting with their parents, friends, families and teachers. The students' artwork can be viewed on the County website at [www.CharlotteCountyFL.com](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.com).

The County has begun negotiations with a firm to collect methane gas from the Charlotte County landfill. Landfills naturally produce this gas as part of the decomposition process. Once collected, the gas can be used to produce electricity, a source of revenue for the County that could generate \$1 million a year, or more, over time.

The Commissioners heard a presentation from Tramel Webb a company who offered to act as the development partner to facilitate the disposition of land within Murdock Village Community Redevelopment Area. The County will begin meeting with Tramel Webb representatives to develop an agreement for these services.

The Commissioners have agreed to place the sales tax extension on the August 26 ballot. The current 1% tax expires on Dec. 31. The 21 projects on the 2002 list are either completed or under construction. It has not yet been determined what projects the new extension revenue will be used for; however the County faces a \$200 million shortfall in road construction funding. Recent community surveys indicated that our residents are concerned about roads as well as future water resources. Further discussion on this issue will take place at the May 13 Commission meeting.