



A patch of flowers adorns the shoulder of County Road 44 in Eustis. Lake County commissioners endorsed the idea of encouraging the conservation of roadside native wildflowers on state and county roadways. (Tom Benitez, Orlando Sentinel / June 8, 2010)

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**Lake County leaders are wild about wildflowers**

**Native bloomers will be nurtured, not mowed**

By Stephen Hudak, Orlando Sentinel

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TAVARES — Lake County commissioners have decided to go wild.

The board voted unanimously to adopt a resolution to conserve and preserve black-eyed Susans, tickseed and other native wildflowers, which proliferate along stretches of several rural roadways.

"This is good not just for the environment, but it's good for the budget," said Commissioner Elaine Renick, a native of Texas, where blooming wildflowers have been credited with luring "eco-tourists" to the Lone Star State.

She suggested the resolution also could save the county money if it trims mowing costs.

Lake joins Volusia in Central Florida and a trio of Panhandle counties to pass the resolution, said Lisa Roberts, executive director of the Florida Wildflower Foundation.

Roberts sought Lake's support in January when she met with the county's "Green Team," a group of employees who have suggested proposals to conserve water, reduce fuel consumption and preserve wildlife.

Amye King, Lake County's growth management director and leader of the Green Team, said some hope that pink phlox and other roadside flora someday will provide tourists with another reason to visit the Sunshine state.

King pointed out that nature lovers who travel to New England to enjoy autumn colors are part of a growing segment of tourists seeking out natural blooms in North Carolina, Texas and other states that market wildflower tourism.

"That's what we're hoping for here, too," she said.

Lake County also boasts several areas cited by the Florida Wildflower Foundation as "prime areas" to view wildflowers, including the Okahumpka Service Plaza on Florida's Turnpike and the Seminole State Forest.

Despite the resolution, Lake County won't park its mowers.

Native wildflowers may have prompted Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon to dub the region "La Florida," or land of flowers, but thick and quick-rising summer grasses along the roadside can pose hazards for motorists.

If unchecked, some grasses will obscure the views of motorists at intersection rights-of-way and others will hold water on roadways in the summer months, Lake County Public Works Director Jim Stivender said.

"It won't work everywhere, but overall it's a very good concept," Stivender said of the resolution.

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