

Environmental & Land Use Law Center, Inc.

Shepard Broad Law Center · Nova Southeastern University
3305 College Avenue · Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33314
Phone (954) 262-6140 · Fax (954) 262-3992

Treasure Coast Office
224 Datura Street, Suite 201
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401
Phone: (561) 653-0040
Fax: (561) 653-0041

Martin County Office
2336 SE Ocean Blvd. PMP 110
Stuart, Florida 34996
Phone: (561) 463-9598
Fax: (561) 288-2261

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SCRIPPS INSTITUTE BRIEFING PAPER

This paper analyzes possible impacts that may be associated with the Scripps Institute locating at Mecca Farms in northwestern Palm Beach County. For questions or comments, please contact the ELULC at the above, Treasure Coast Office, letterhead address.

THE DEAL

The Scripps deal requires the State to pay \$310 million over seven years for employee salaries and equipment. The money will come from a one-time economic stimulus package from the federal government. Palm Beach County has additionally committed \$200 million to acquire a site and build 320,000 square feet of lab space and 41,000 square feet of administrative space for the institute. The bonds it will use are backed by county income and do not require voter approval. Palm Beach County will also provide a 42,000-square-foot temporary building by 2004, which may be on the Pratt & Whitney property in northern part of the county. Under the deal, Scripps is required to stay in Florida and refrain from expanding outside of Florida or California for twelve years.

THE JOBS

Employment estimates vary – possibly up to 50,000 jobs, 500 companies. Scripps projects 545 jobs in its first seven years here.

The Governor's estimates, prepared by the Washington Economic Group, said Scripps would attract about 500 companies in 15 years and create an additional 44,000 jobs. However, Rep. Dan Gelber, (D-Miami Beach) commissioned a study which found that that Bush's economic impact study substantially overstated the benefits - it's more likely that 16,000 jobs would be created in 15 years.

THE LOCATION

Scripps' tentative site is Mecca Farms in northwestern Palm Beach County. The County is acquiring the property about \$60 million -- \$30,000 an acre. Scripps would occupy about 100 acres of the site. The County plans to recoup some of its investment by selling parts of the property to biotech companies interested in moving near the research institute.

Mecca Farms is a 1920 acre citrus grove, and has few, if any onsite wetlands or other natural areas to protect. However it is bordered on three sides by environmentally sensitive lands - the state-owned J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area (to the west), a county-owned mitigation area (Unit 11) and the C-18 canal (to the north), and the county-owned Loxahatchee Slough (to the east).

THE IMPACTS

Loxahatchee River

Mecca Farms has long been thought of as an ideal site for a water storage reservoir to help restore the Loxahatchee River. Unfortunately, the Everglades restoration plan for northern Palm Beach County is still in its early, formative stages, and the modeling has only just been initiated to determine whether such a reservoir will in fact be needed, and where it will need to be located. However it is expected that there will be a need for some additional water storage in this area, and Mecca Farms would be an ideal site due to its location on the C-18 canal. Siting a major research park on the site could easily hinder its ability to be used for regional water storage.

Siting a Scripps on Mecca raises additional concerns about protections for the Loxahatchee River. Mecca drains into the C-18 canal, which feeds the Loxahatchee River, and there is already a significant lack of water storage in this basin. This project also creates the potential for increased drainage, runoff, and pollution from the land where Scripps would be built, in addition to impacts caused by developing surrounding land for other businesses and homes.

Roads

The project will require millions of dollars in new and improved roads and utilities. Seminole Pratt Whitney Road must be extended from Northlake Boulevard to the Beeline Highway along the western edge of Mecca and the extension is not yet on the County's five year road plan.

The Seminole Pratt extension will cost between \$20 million and \$25 million and will run along the edge of sensitive natural areas Corbett and Unit 11 mitigation area. Seminole Pratt will likely connect in Martin County with the Western Corridor and the proposed Indian Street Bridge into St. Lucie County. Construction of the Western Corridor through south western Martin County will likely increase development pressure in the area, which is outside of the County's urban services district.

The Scripps project could also increase pressure on the County to extend the controversial "Acreage Reliever Road" (State Road 7) from Okeechobee Blvd. through to Northlake Blvd. The Acreage Reliever Road as currently proposed ends at Persimmon Boulevard in the Acreage. The road will be constructed through county-owned environmentally sensitive lands which were purchased with tax payer dollars for permanent preservation. The extension of the road through to Northlake will further impact high quality wetlands and uplands known as Section One and could ultimately route traffic directly adjacent to pristine habitat in the City of West Palm Beach Water Catchment Area (Grassy Waters Preserve).

The location of Scripps at Mecca Farms also raises concerns about the ultimate northern end point for State Road 7. The Department of Transportation owns road right of way for SR-7 as far north as the Beeline, bisecting Loxahatchee Slough. The extension of SR-7 through the Slough would cause enormous environmental impacts.

Other yet-to-be-determined roads may also need to be constructed or widened in order to accommodate the enormous amount of development expected to be associated with Scripps.

Water & Sewer

It is unclear how water and sewer will be provided to the Scripps site. County rules currently do not allow the County to extend water and sewer into the rural tier, where the site is located. Several options have been mentioned, including building a new utility to serve Scripps, expanding an existing county-owned plant, or the county buying the existing Seminole water utility located at the Callery-Judge citrus groves.

It is also possible that Palm Beach Gardens whose western boundary borders the Mecca site would annex the land and allow Seacoast, the city utility, to extend its water and sewer lines to serve the site.

A major issue is whether the water and sewer lines would serve only Scripps or whether they would be extended to serve surrounding areas. Extending water and sewer into a wider area beyond the Scripps site would inappropriately urbanize a largely rural and environmentally sensitive area.

Sprawl

Approximately 350 spin-off businesses are located within three miles of the Scripps facility in California. If Palm Beach County experiences the same level of growth, significant natural resources would be impacted. The quality of life in northern Palm Beach County could be seriously diminished due to the effects of sprawl -- increased traffic, roads, development, pollution, and taxes to support the additional growth.

The selected site for the Scripps project, Mecca Farms, unfortunately encourages urban sprawl. The site is located in a remote, rural area which requires the development of extensive infrastructure in order to accommodate the Scripps facility. Siting an intense use, such as Scripps, in such a remote area fails to maximize existing public facilities and disproportionately increases the cost of providing public facilities such as roads, water, sewer, police, fire, and emergency response. If the supporting infrastructure is not carefully planned and limited, it could promote additional urban development in rural areas adjacent to the Scripps site which could significantly impact neighboring rural residential communities and environmentally sensitive lands.

The location of Scripps in rural western Palm Beach County will certainly bring intense development pressure to adjacent lands. Palm Beach County has long sought to acquire approximately 1700 acres of the nearby 4700 acre Vavrus Ranch for preservation as environmentally sensitive lands. The site has also been mentioned as a potential site for a CERP storage reservoir to enhance dry seasons flows to the Loxahatchee River. The new development potential of this site, and others nearby, may ultimately price the property above the range of local government for either preservation or restoration purposes. It is reasonable to expect to see development proposals for high density residential or commercial uses on this and other nearby sites, resulting in the significant loss of open space and contributing to the negative effects of sprawl on the area.

Environmentally Sensitive Land

Palm Beach County has acquired nearly 30,000 acres of environmentally sensitive lands for preservation purposes, many of which are in the northern part of the county in the general vicinity of the Scripps site. Recently however, the county has demonstrated a willingness to use some of these lands for purposes other than preservation, like roads. Because many of these county-owned natural areas are not encumbered with legal mechanisms (like conservation easements) to ensure their permanent preservation, there is a great deal of public concern that the increased development pressure from the Scripps project will encourage the conversion of more preservation lands for development purposes. These concerns will not subside until the county ensures the permanent

protection of all preservation lands through conservation easements, a charter amendment, or other means.

Public Records Exemptions

In approving the Scripps deal, the legislature also carved out broad exemptions for Scripps from the state's public records act. The exemptions include scientific research related to methods of manufacture or production, trade secrets, proprietary information, patentable information, agreements or proposals to receive funding, agreements by the Scripps Florida Funding Corporation to release funds to The Scripps Research Institute, materials that relate to the recruitment of scientists and researchers, the identity of donors or potential donors, information related to participants in clinical trials or experiments, and any information received by Scripps from a person, another state, or nation, or the federal government which is confidential or exempt pursuant to that state's or nation's laws or pursuant to federal law.

Expedited Permitting

Approving the Scripps project at the Mecca Farms site and its necessary infrastructure will require numerous federal, state, and local government permits as well as major changes to the County's growth management plan and zoning code. The state and county have indicated an intent to seek expedited permitting for the project through Section [403.973](#), Florida Statutes – the Job Siting Act. The Job Siting Act shortens the time to acquire environmental permits and comprehensive plan amendments by the creation of "regional permit action teams" to expedite the necessary review. The regional teams are established via a memorandum of agreement and include members from the relevant state and local government agencies and other local governments and federal agencies as circumstances warrant.

Local governments must hold a noticed public workshop to review and explain the expedited permitting process, the terms and conditions of the memorandum of agreement to the public, and to execute the memorandum of agreement. The agreement can provide for permit proceedings among the various agencies to be held jointly and at one location. It also can authorize modifications to local government and state agency procedures and time limits to allow for decisions on the project within 90 days but cannot alter nonprocedural standards unless expressly authorized by law. Challenges to state agency action or local government approval for projects approved through the expedited permitting process are subject to the summary hearing provisions of s. [120.574](#) which generally requires final hearings to be held within 30 days.

CONCLUSION

While many positive things have been said about the impact the Scripps Institute might have on our local economy, it is clear that the site chosen for the facility is very poor from a land use and environmental perspective. Because of its location in a remote rural area and its significant lack of infrastructure, the proposal is in many ways inconsistent with the vision of the Palm Beach County Comprehensive Plan and with many basic growth management considerations. It is not at all clear that the additional costs to the public in terms of building the infrastructure to serve this facility have been sufficiently analyzed or considered in the debate over the policy decision to subsidize this uncertain venture. The potential for negative impacts from this project are great – without sufficient planning and forethought they will be a certainty. We strongly urge decision-makers to consider alternate sites for the Scripps facility to reduce public costs of providing infrastructure, sprawl, and impacts on the local environment. Other potential locations in northern Palm Beach County, such as Abacoa in Jupiter, or other urban locations which have infrastructure already in place, should be fully analyzed in terms of their ability to accommodate Scripps before final commitments are made.