

Group may form environmental committee

ABC hopes to perform water sampling, halt construction of Air Force subdivision

By MLADEN RUDMAN Daily News Staff Writer

A local environmental group opposed to construction of an Air Force subdivision on Garnier Bayou is looking to expand its reach.

The growing Association for Bayou Conservation Inc. hopes to get involved with collecting water samples from local bayous and Choctawhatchee Bay as part of a state-sponsored water quality monitoring program.

ABC also has applied for a federally-matched Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission grant that would establish a broad-based environmental committee for the area.

The Partnership for Choctawhatchee Bay and Bayou Conservation imagines local politicians, the Air Force, concerned citizens and others sitting on the committee.

Its goal, among others, would be to address the impact of development on waterways.

"Right now everything is done ad hoc," said ABC president John Jannazo, about managing environmental issues locally. The partnership "would be a formal, standing planning committee."

He added the partnership also might include working groups of people looking at the health of animals and plants in the bay, erosion and sedimentation and pollution, among other categories.

"ABC is willing to take the lead on it," Jannazo added. "We've got a lot of folks that are interested."

While it will take several months before ABC hears if its grant proposal has been approved, it hopes to have a more immediate impact by taking part in water sample collecting.

There was a fish kill in Garnier Bayou as recently as last week. Mullet, pinfish and even an occasional spotted seatrout were victims.

"With fishes floating in the water, people are worried about what caused it," Jannazo said. Water sampling "is part and parcel with what we've been doing."

Water samples are collected by volunteers, picked up by the conservation commission and then analyzed for contaminants such as bacteria or red tide.