

*Elegant solution to trashy problem*

**Nonprofits teaming up for beautification project at Oyster Lake on County Road 30A**

**Jim Thompson** Northwest Florida Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK

SANTA ROSA BEACH – Three local nonprofit organizations are teaming up with the Walton County Tourist Development Council (TDC) for a double-edged beautification project at Oyster Lake on County Road 30A. The beautification efforts involves planting trees and other vegetation along the north side of 30A in a narrow strip of land between the road and the ecologically rare dune lake. In addition to adding to the natural beauty of the area, the plantings are designed to capture any windblown trash and keep it out of Oyster Lake.



**People walk along the bike path next to Oyster Lake in Dune Allen Beach. Three nonprofit groups are working with the Walton County Tourist Development Council to clean and improve the ecologically rare dune lake. PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SNYDER/DAILY NEWS**

**“We are excited about this project and feel it will be a wonderful improvement to this area and will be highly visible to residents and tourists alike.”**

**Leigh Moore**

Scenic Walton president



**Trash is washed into the sea grasses.**



**Construction debris on the shoreline at Oyster Lake.**

Scenic Walton, formed 13 years ago and affiliated with the nationwide Scenic America nonprofit organization battling visual pollution, is working with the Green Thumb Garden Club and Trees on the Coast to keep trash out of the lake, one of the coastal dune lakes found in just a few places on Earth.

The Green Thumb Garden Club in Santa Rosa Beach was formed in the 1950s and affiliated with National Garden Clubs Inc. Trees on the Coast is a Destin-based nonprofit that works to improve the tree canopy in Okaloosa and Walton counties

cross over their banks and flow into the Gulf of Mexico as a means of natural flood control.

The beautification effort proposed by the three nonprofit groups got a big boost recently when the Walton County Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved a \$10,000 outlay from the TDC to support the effort.

The money will come from proceeds of the 5% “bed tax” charged to visitors staying in accommodations in South Walton, where beaches and other

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through the Green Thumb Garden Club, will help fund the effort.

“We are excited about this project and feel it will be a wonderful improvement to this area and will be highly visible to residents and tourists alike,” Scenic Walton President Leigh Moore said in a letter presented to the commission seeking TDC support.

In the letter, Moore also called the initiative “... a great opportunity for a

and to enhance the area's natural beauty through planting, conservation and education.

In addition to the 15 coastal dune lakes found along and near Walton County Road 30A, they also are found in New Zealand, Australia and Madagascar. Defined as being shallow, irregularly shaped and located within two miles of a seashore, the coastal dune lakes in South Walton are even more rare than others because they share an intermittent connection with the Gulf of Mexico. Those connections, known as "outfalls" occur as the lakes, fed by streams, groundwater, rain and storm surge, fill up,

attractions like the dune lakes bring in large numbers of visitors annually.

The County Commission must approve expenditures of TDC dollars.

Commissioners were prompted to approved the \$10,000 outlay after learning that the three nonprofits will help fund the initiative. Trees on the Coast is making a \$1,500 in-kind donation in the form of 10 live oaks to be planted between CR 30A and Oyster Lake, while Scenic Walton has allocated \$750 and the Green Thumb Garden Club is contributing \$500. Beyond those contributions, a \$500 grant from the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, arranged

public-private partnership to improve our community."

Plans for the 24,000-square-foot project call for the live oaks to be planted at each end of the interface between Oyster Lake and CR 30A, with the area between to be planted with clumps of Muhly grass, which grows 3 to 4 feet tall, dwarf Fakahatchee grass, which can extend 2 to 3 feet tall, sea oats and 250 beach sunflower plants.

According to Brian Kellenberger, the TDC's director of beach operations, once the plantings are in place, the TDC will have primary responsibility for maintaining the area with help from Scenic Walton.