AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION

“Public Works Project of the Year” Award for Disaster Construction less than $5 million

Thomas Creek Restoration Nassau County, Florida

11/24/2010
• **Public Works Project of the Year Nominee:** Thomas Creek Restoration Project

• **Project Category:** Disaster or Emergency Construction/Repair Project less than $5 million

• **Description:**

  Nassau County residents were affected for years with unusual amounts of flooding that had occurred on their Thomas Creek properties, even from small rain events. The creek had not been maintained for decades and when Tropical Storm Fay hit Florida in 2008, excess flooding damaged many homes and properties in the community. The County took action and developed a plan to restore Thomas Creek. The County immersed itself in the funding and logistics of the project and successfully managed to acquire and administer a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to help fund the project. The Engineering Services Department was tasked with heading up the Public Works’ restoration project consisting of three phases.

  The Nassau County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) was able to provide funding for the first phase of the Restoration completed in January 2011. For the second phase, the County successfully acquired and administered the CDBG to provide funds. The second phase was completed in March 2011. The first and second phases included cleaning approximately 6500 feet of a tidally-influenced creek by removing 1100 tons of large woody debris and living riparian vegetation. The County worked tirelessly and partnered with numerous organizations including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Forest Service Division (FDACS), the Florida Department of Economic Opportunities (DEO, formally DCA), the BOCC, Hayward Construction, and the property owners during the course of this important project. Engineering also investigated many safe, acceptable and innovative construction options with the FDEP because the project was in an environmentally sensitive area. The effects to the environment were minimalized by the use of small floats and multiple staging areas. Effects to the natural environment were mitigated by rehabbing access paths and banks with wood chips and log debris.

  The County staff’s exemplary and innovative leadership was key to the successful relationships and trust they built with numerous governmental agencies, Nassau County’s Board, and most importantly, the local residents. Their leadership assured that the first and second project phase was completed on time and within budget.

  Although only two phases are complete, the residents are very happy with the status of the creek and have reported that recent storm events that previously would have flooded their properties, no longer do so. Residents that live closer to the area where Phase Three is under construction have also stated that it floods less and that the water recedes more quickly. For Community relations, Engineering has provided several town hall meetings to present the project to the local residents and take questions/comments. The County also hosted a “Ceremonial Log Pull” for the impacted residents to celebrate their accomplishments. The County has recently been awarded a Disaster Recovery Enhancement Fund (DREF) grant to fund the clearance of 2200 more feet in Phase Three of the restoration and is actively exploring other funding opportunities.

  The County has accomplished in 16 short months what some of us may never get the chance
to do in an entire career. Innovation, diligence and willingness to take a difficult and tedious project head on are what public leadership is all about.

- **Note:** The Thomas Creek Restoration is continuous as funding allows. Although currently there are three phases, more phases will come as funding becomes available.

**Selection Criteria**

- **Construction Management Techniques and Completion of the Project Schedule:**
  The Contractor was given 84 days to substantial completion and was completed on time and within budget in phase 1. In phase 2, the Contractor was given 100 days and completed the work on time and within budget. Hayward Construction used environmentally sensitive construction techniques which included various small floating barges, hand removal of debris, wood chipping, hauling vehicles and pulley systems. Debris was removed by hand without turning soils and creating erosion. Logs were cut and floated down the creek using ropes, pulleys, small boats and heavy equipment. Small debris was chipped and larger debris was cut into manageable sections and hauled off site. Sack cloth materials were used to protect the creek banks where the heavy equipment lifts debris from the water and barges.

- **Safety Performance and Awareness During Construction:**
  The Contract documents required the Contractor to conduct all work in a safe manner. No injuries were reported during phases 1 and 2.

- **Community Relations Between Agency and the Public:**
  Nassau County has involved the public in several interactive public hearings. The feedback from the meetings was overwhelmingly positive and the local news papers have published favorable articles about the project. The County also hosted a “Ceremonial Log Pull” in which local residents affected by Tropical Storm Faye and County staff were honored and the accomplishments from the Thomas Creek Restoration project were celebrated.

- **Environmental Protection:**
  The Thomas Creek Restoration project required absolute regard to the protection of the environment. As options were weighed for the removal process, the County devised innovative techniques to protect the environment from construction related pollution. As opposed to dredging which can have severe effects to the environment, the County used small barges, pulley systems, and removed the debris by hand. The debris was hauled off site and access paths were rehabilitated with woodchips, logs, sack cloth and newly planted trees. Barriers were used to contain any pollution at the surface of the creek. No wildlife was harmed in the entire project. Only trees completely fallen in the creek were removed.

- **Unusual Accomplishments:**
  This type of project has rarely (if ever) been permitted by the FDEP. Also a Community Development Block Grant was acquired and administered completely within the County’s staff. The unique nature of the project presented several complications in the permitting process. The hurdles were overcome and the County was also able to obtain the DREF to fund the new phase 3 of the project.

- **Additional Conditions:**
  The County could not just provide the Contractor with the lowest price because of the importance of working with the FDEP and FDACS. The County awarded the Contractor
who was most qualified while allowing price to be apart of the qualification. This ensured that the Contractor awarded could keep a favorable standing with the permitting agencies while having an honest price. The Request for Qualifications process was consistence with the Florida Consultant Competitive Negotiations Act.

- **Attachments**
  - Tropical Storm Fay Summary.
  - Tropical Storm Fay flooding photos.
  - Local Newspaper publications during Tropical Storm Fay.
  - Thomas Creek Pre-restoration photos.
  - Thomas Creek Restoration process and photos.
  - Thomas Creek Ceremonial Log Pull.
  - Thomas Creek Post Restoration photos.
  - Local newspaper publication after Restoration.