

In Audubon vs. Osceola, a good environmental deal

SCOTT MAXWELL Orlando Sentinel

4:38 p.m. EDT, August 20, 2014

A few months ago, Osceola County made a remarkably bad decision – something with the potential to foul the Everglades ecosystem and waste gobs of taxpayer dollars.

But this week, the county did something even more remarkable ... it fixed things.

It actually took a bad vote and reversed it.

Yes, in an age where politicians often do bone-headed things – and then dig their heels in and double-down on dumb – Osceola commissioners admitted they made a mistake and fixed it.

Good for them.

I detailed the county's vote to remove key environmental protections from its land-use plan a few months ago here ("In Osceola, a bad environmental move could cost us all.")

Basically, the county was preparing to (literally) paved the way for development in environmentally sensitive places, putting at risk the Kissimmee River and parts of the entire Everglades Ecosystem – a region taxpayers are already spending \$9 billion to restore.

So the Florida Audubon Society sued, saying the county had no right to allow such pollution.

A battle was expected. But this week, Osceola essentially said: "OK." (County statement here.)

The county agreed to reinstate many of the protections. And they did so joyfully with Commissioner Fred Hawkins Jr. declaring: "This was a really good day for all and for future generations to come."

Now, one can argue commissioners should've better researched their decisions before they took the first vote. (I would.) But the most important thing is that they did what's right now, saving taxpayers money on a lawsuit in the short-run – and in cleanup costs many times over in the long-run.

So, good for Osceola. Good for Audubon. Good for future generations.