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Fees to protect endangered mouse

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PERDIDO KEY - Land developers and new residents, both blamed for threatening to squeeze the Perdido Key beach mouse out of existence, may instead help save the endangered rodent through impact fees proposed by state and federal wildlife officials.

They released a revised plan Monday to Escambia County commissioners, who are likely to vote on it Sept. 1. Developers had objected to an earlier proposal calling for a one-time \$198,000 per acre fee and annual \$100 per unit assessment.

The new proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission would give developers two options: A one-time fee of \$157,000 per acre plus \$100 per unit annually or a one-time fee of \$100,000 per acre with \$201 per unit annually.

Although cool to any kind of impact fee, some commissioners said they would be willing to accept the proposal just to get development back on track.

Janet Mizzi, U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Panama City-based deputy field manager, said Tuesday that officials are unsure how many mice survived last year when Hurricane Ivan spun in from the Gulf of Mexico and flattened dunes where the rodents live.

Before the storm, an estimated 500 to 800 mice populated Perdido Key, a barrier island bisected by the Florida-Alabama state line, she said. It is the only place where the mice live, mostly on the Florida end.

The new proposal also would prohibit any construction seaward of Florida's coastal construction setback line.

Money mainly from the one-time fee would be used to purchase and restore about 18 acres of mouse habitat. The annual fee would be used for recurring costs such as monitoring the mice.

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