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County to decide funding option for recreation

By BILL ROGERS

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A decision on what Highlands County will do concerning the distribution of recreation funds to the three municipalities will likely not come until later this fall.

June Fisher, the director of the county's community services division, said Monday the staff needs to "so some additional research." Fisher added that she, Vicki Pontius, director of parks and recreation, and Development Services Director Mark Hill will be visiting with the three municipalities within the next few weeks.

The county's Office of Management and Budget will also get involved, according to Fisher.

The county has allocated \$560,640 to be distributed among Avon Park, Lake Placid and Sebring in the 2010-11 budget.

Two options are being considered as funding formulas. One is based on transportation impact fee benefit districts and the other is based on the number of recreational facilities in each municipality.

The Lake Placid Town Council has been waiting to see what the county will do because the amount had to be factored in as a final budget was being adopted last week. Some members of the council have been concerned for some time about the town not receiving an equitable amount for recreation.

John Komasa, the town's parks and recreation director, said both options are fair and the money Lake Placid would receive under each option is similar.

Debra Worley, who serves on the town council, said the town put \$163,500 in the 2010-11 recreation budget for its allocation from the county. If the amount turns out to be less than that, Lake Placid might have to make some budget cuts.

Worley said a long-term solution needs to be figured out. The solution could be setting up a user fee or a nonadvalorem tax.

The decision will ultimately be made by the Highlands County Commission. Fisher doesn't know when the commission will receive the recommendation from staff.

"We want to make it the fairest we can," Fisher said. "Hopefully we can work something out."