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Inspection finds slough in good working order

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PALM BEACH GARDENS

— The clear water is only a few inches deep as the airboat skims loudly across the surface, leaving a narrow trail in the green saw grass of the Loxahatchee Slough.

"During the rainy season, the water will be about 6 inches higher," shouts Sam Payson, a staff biologist with the Northern Palm Beach Improvement District. Payson expertly handles the craft over the water. In a few spots, he revs the engine to move over muddy ground.

District workers periodically inspect the preserves in the district's 128-square mile area north of Okeechobee Boulevard. The goal is to keep the preserves, such as the

Loxahatchee Slough west of Mirasol, in a natural state and as free of exotic plants as possible.

After an hour of surveying the slough, Payson said everything looked in good working order.

With the summer rainy season and the hurricane season looming, monitoring water levels becomes more important. Before heavy rainfall or hurricanes, gates and pumps are used to prevent flooding.

Bare, whitish cypress trees and an occasional snail kite break the monotony of the flat, brownish-green landscape. Beyond a line of trees surrounding the slough are the barrel-tile roofs of the Mirasol homes. Golfers can be seen on the green fairways.

"It seems like we're in the wilderness, but we are

so close to civilization," Payson said.

The district manages 11 preserves in the 2,300-acre Mirasol development. Water from the 843 acres of preserves in Mirasol flows into the C-18 canal, which is the primary water source for the Loxahatchee Slough. The district monitors three gates, three pump stations and six remote telemetry stations within Mirasol. The largest pump station is in Mirasol.

Flooding contributed to the more than \$10 million in 2004 hurricane damage in northern Palm Beach County. The district's jurisdiction includes unincorporated areas, as well as portions of Riviera Beach, Lake Park, North Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens, Jupiter, Juno Beach and Tequesta.

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