

Restoration Project Begins in Williford Springs

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WASHINGTON COUNTY A panhandle staple will soon see some changes. A restoration project is currently underway in Williford Springs. Repairing this spring should benefit the local economy.

Unfortunately for visitors, the Williford Springs has been closed the past two months. However, it's for good reason.

"One of the things we're gonna do is remove about ten tons of excess sediment that has over the years wound up in the springs," said Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel Vinyard. "Primary because of human activity in the area."

Thursday morning, officials with the Northwest Florida Water Management District held their groundbreaking ceremony for the springs restoration project.

Plans are to make the spring more accessible to visitors.

"At the end of the day when it's completed, people will be able to come here to the park. They'll be able to walk around the trail down here, there'll be a landing down there for the canoe and kayaks to park, explained Washington County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Ted Everette.

One of the big points of this restoration project is tourism. Everette says that once the project is completed in about a year, it will bring an economic boost to the area.

"What we do know about tourism is that when people come into a place such as this, they're going to stop, buy gas, buy our food," he explained. "They're going to rent kayaks. They're gonna rent canoes. All this is economic development."

Guest speakers at Thursday's groundbreaking ceremony included state representatives Marti Coley and Jimmy Patronis.

Construction on the project has already started. It's expected to cost around \$1.5 million. Unfortunately, the spring won't open again until 2015.

"We should be here next year with our swimming suit on, swimming in this spring."

Combined resources from the Northwest Florida Water Management District, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will fund the project.