CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE Online

A watery report card: Legacy — F

Dan Hilliard, guest column, 06/03/12

By Special to the Chronicle
Sunday, June 3, 2012 at 12:00 am *(Updated: June 3, 12:01 am)*

Kudos to the Citrus County Chronicle Editorial Board! The board's consistent and positive position regarding water resource management as illustrated in the May 25 editorial is a fresh breeze for the Nature Coast! The message is being echoed by a growing number of residents and organizations throughout the state, and a very simple message it is: We have a water crisis on our hands and we expect the state Legislature and regulatory agencies to find remedies before we pass the point of no return.

DAN HILLIARD/Special to the Chronicle
The muddy area below the walkway at Big King Spring in Levy County is the stream bed of Spring Run Creek. The King Springs complex is not flowing.

Water is critically important to our lives in so many ways, yet we take it for granted. It is more than a facilitator of clean dishes, cars and wetted lawns. It is the fundamental foundation of our lives, our economy, our food supply and recreation.

According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, water contributed more than $600 billion to the state's gross product in 2008. It generates tens of millions of dollars to the Citrus County economy annually by virtue of tourism and recreational activity. It is the goose that laid the golden egg!

There are certain paradigms about water that are inescapable. Regardless of the supply of water in Florida, it is a finite resource. There are two metrics that sharply influence the benefit of this resource to the people via the many ways it supports us. One is quantity and the other is quality.

Florida relies on water from regional aquifers for approximately 90 percent of its water supply. We pump more than 7 billion gallons per day from the ground and anticipate an increase of that figure to more than 9 billion gallons per day by 2025. In doing so, the level of the aquifer is reduced incrementally.

Recharge is wholly dependent on rainfall. As aquifer levels fall, springs throughout the state flow with less vigor. Given circumstances such as high volumes of groundwater pumping and prolonged drought, they may cease to flow altogether. Neither circumstance is desirable.

As the aquifer levels decline, lakes and rivers dry up, and this is also undesirable because the degraded resource results in diminished economic productivity. These things happen not because the gross supply of groundwater is greatly diminished, but because we are using and losing supply from the top of the water mountain that is our aquifer. This is the part of the aquifer so critically important. Inefficient use and drought can combine to create the perfect storm of conflicted interests.

Concurrent with water quantity is the issue of water quality. While science examines these aspects separately, they are intrinsically linked. A trite turn of phrase has it that "the solution to pollution is dilution." Lacking quantity, there is no dilution. Lacking dilution, we are left with increased concentrations of pollutants, which imply degradation of biological productivity and risks to human health.
The message that follows is not pretty. It is the federal report card that evaluates how well our laws and resulting management practices work. It is the telling of how effectively the people of Florida are represented by the Florida Legislature and water management agencies. It is the tale of what we have done to ourselves.

WATER QUALITY IN FLORIDA

General water quality findings for Florida as a percentage of assessed miles/acres that are impaired waters:

Type of Waters / Percent Impaired / Percent Assessed

- Rivers and streams / 80% — 8,418.1 of 10,476 miles / 20%
- Lakes, reservoirs and ponds / 90% — 1,013,666.6 of 1,124,398.8 acres/ 54%
- Bays and estuaries / 97% — 5,176.4 of 5,316.9 square miles / 100%
- Coastal shoreline / 97% — 5,824.5 of 6,034.2 miles / unavailable

The source is the "Watershed Assessment, Tracking & Environmental Results" for 2010 as published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in administration of the Clean Water Act.

Folks, we are at a crossroads. It is clearly demonstrated that past practices have failed the people of the state badly. We cannot continue on this course without severe consequences to our health and economic prosperity. We have the power, but not the right, to

pass these problems on to the next generation. The cost of recovering degraded water quality and destroyed ecosystems is staggering. The cost of depending on reclaimed or highly treated water for beneficial supply is daunting, and in some cases may rise to 1,000 percent of groundwater costs for treatment and distribution.

Our persistence in abuse of groundwater supply is fraught with hazards and promises great expense if we do not find a better way to protect the resource and more efficient ways to use it. There is no other choice.

“You can avoid reality, but you cannot avoid the consequences of avoiding reality.” — Ayn Rand (1905-1982).

Dan Hilliard is director of Withacoochee Area Residents Inc. (WAR), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. WAR’s website is www.warinconline.com.

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This photo of a photo shows the interior of Gator Joe's, a restaurant on Lake Weir. The image depicts the early days after it was constructed, circa the 1920s. Note the water under the building.

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Gator Joe's, shown in a recent photo from a slightly different angle, shows the shoreline has retreated 100 yards or more.

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