

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition

Caribbean Conservation Corporation & Sea Turtle Survival League •
Environmental Defense • Natural Resources Defense Council • Reef Relief •
Surfrider Foundation • The Ocean Conservancy

EMAILED — TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT – December 17, 2007

Dear Editor

Though the last heat wave of summer is long gone, the cool air of this December morning provides an interesting look at the drought gripping Florida and the Southeast United States. The dry, crisp air of winter brings with it low humidity and evaporation, further straining the precious resource our region needs – water.

From the disappearance of Lake Jackson to record low water levels in Lake Okeechobee, we are experiencing profound changes in our water supply. It is as if Mother Nature was trying to get our attention, forcing us to come to terms with the imbalance that has evolved between our lifestyles and the limited resources we can draw upon to sustain them.

Nowhere is this more evident than the battle over water in the Apalachicola, Flint and Chattahoochee (ACF) river basins. From Atlanta's thirsty sprawling metropolis and the need for generating power for Alabamans, to the shellfish harvests downstream that support the oystermen of Apalachicola Bay; ways of life are being forced to compete with one another. Meanwhile, a similar unseen battle is being waged. Unable to compete for the precious water they need, habitats of the ACF ecosystem are not only changing, but are on the precipice of ecological collapse.

This raises profound questions in our evolution and adaptability with nature. The words of famed Florida ecologist Arthur R. Marshall come to mind - "Man, who is so rapidly increasing his kind. No one knows all the harm he may be inflicting on himself. But there is ample evidence to believe that we cannot delay revamping our philosophies. We must use all the scientific knowledge available to us, and the reasoned judgment of the affected humans, to assess our actions before we take them."

As Governors Crist, Perdue and Riley gather this week to negotiate the future of the ACF ecosystem, the consequences of our past decisions on this natural system looms large. Are we still wedded to our philosophies of taming Mother Nature, of "getting ours first" as they say? Have we come to understand the delicate balance with nature we must embrace for our own survival?

Surely, we cannot expect that communities in Alabama, Florida and Georgia -which are so dependent upon the ACF - will not continue to grow. They will. It is incumbent upon all of us to embrace new long term agreements and technologies regarding alternative water sources as well as advanced water treatment reuse and conservation for all communities within the Tri-State ACF system.

9 Island Avenue, Suite 501, Miami Beach, FL 33139
(305) 586-1961 • info@flcoastalandocean.org
www.flcoastalandocean.org

Dear Editor Letter
Tallahassee Democrat

December 17, 2007
Page 2 of 2

Without a doubt, recent policy decisions by the Army Corps of Engineers for the ACF have placed a chain of events in motion that is widening our imbalance with nature and increasing competition for a limited resource. While we hope for the easing of this drought, we also expect that reasoned judgment will prevail during the Tri-State Governor's Meeting to assess Corps policy and alter it with sound solutions. This includes adjustment of water flows during the spring spawning season. We call on the Governors to provide leadership to make the hard decisions that lead to better stewardship of ecosystems we depend upon, as well as ensure sustainability of these limited resources for generations yet to come.

The Coalition's steering committee organizations represent millions of citizens across the country and over 200,000 members and activists in Florida who are deeply concerned for Florida's unique coastal and ocean environment. Apalachicola Bay is a prime example of the complexity and importance of Florida's diverse ecosystems and we are pleased to see all three Governors coming to the table to help preserve it.

Sincerely,

T. J. Marshall, Coordinator

Florida Coastal & Ocean Coalition

Footnote: 1. Arthur R. Marshall (1919-1985) was a leading figure in virtually every public issue that had to do with preserving the natural systems of Florida for over 30 years. He played a major role in stopping the Cross Florida Barge Canal, keeping the jetport out of the Big Cypress Swamp, developing a plan for both the dechannelization of the Kissimmee River and the restoration of natural hydrological patterns in the Florida Everglades. He wrote what is referred to as the Marshall Plan, a blueprint for Everglades restoration that is viable today. In the plan he emphasized the need for 'sheet flow', the slow motion of surface water with the minimum of channeling which allows the area surface water to be shared over a much larger wetlands area to the south.

9 Island Avenue, Suite 501, Miami Beach, FL 33139
(305) 586-1961 • info@flcoastalandocean.org
www.flcoastalandocean.org