

Eve Samples: Federal government, Martin County both need to protect waters

By Eve Samples

Saturday, August 29, 2009

Dear Federal Government,

May I call you Fed? After all these years of spatting over aviation grants and Lake Okeechobee discharges, I feel like we've gotten plenty intimate.

It's me, Martin County. You can call me Martin. I don't mind.

I'm writing because I'm a little worried that I'm sending mixed signals. I hate to come across as fickle, even if we have had our ups and downs.

On the one hand, I'm suing you. To be more precise, a group of my residents is suing you.

The Rivers Coalition's lawsuit to stop the Army Corps of Engineers' discharges from Lake O is finally headed to court this year — three years after it was filed.

I really hope we win.

Sure, my St. Lucie Estuary looks better than it did in 2005, when toxic algae blooms clung to its surface like slime. Remember? It was because of your incessant fresh-water discharges from Lake O.

No, it's not that bad now. But anyone who's spent time on the South Fork of the St. Lucie River knows what the water looks like up close: It's still chocolate brown.

You can't see deeper than six inches below the surface. Thick, suffocating muck remains at the bottom.

Just try catching a fish. It's not easy. Ask the travel writers who were here during last week's fishing event. Snook season could be a big disappointment this year, too.

Get to the point, you say.

I know, I can be a little long-winded. Have you ever watched one of my county commission meetings?

Well, I'm worried that you might think I'm wishy-washy because, at the same time this lawsuit is coming to a head, my commissioners are thinking about letting people build closer to my waterways.

Instead of requiring buildings to be 20 feet away from my shores, Commissioner Doug Smith has proposed reducing that setback so restaurants and marinas on certain properties with sea walls and bulkheads can sit closer to the water.

If the changes are approved at Tuesday's commission meeting, buildings could go up within 10 feet of the shore in redevelopment areas.

Only 28 properties would be affected by this rule change — but it doesn't send a great message about protecting my waterways, does it?

I can hear your booming voice in my mind now: "Building closer to the shore poses more risk in hurricanes."

Fed, I don't want to ask you for more emergency money than I have to after the next storm knocks me around. But I'm warning you now that I might have to if this rule change is approved.

If I seem fickle, maybe it's only fair.

You're a little fickle, too, Fed.

Even though you've been dumping about 144 billion gallons of freshwater into my estuary every year, you're also giving me money to clean up it up.

This summer, you awarded me a \$4 million grant to build oyster bed reefs in the St. Lucie River.

I guess I'm a little confused. A tad hurt. That's probably why I act so erratically sometimes.

Here's an idea: Why don't we both stop being fickle?

I'll get serious about protecting my estuary by getting the commissioners to drop the idea of building closer to my waterways.

And you can get serious by stopping the Lake O discharges. That's really what I want out of the Rivers Coalition lawsuit.

What do you think, Fed? Can we give it a go?

With lots of love (and a little hate, too),

Martin

Eve Samples is a columnist for Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers. This column reflects her opinion. Contact her at (772) 221-4217 or eve.samples@scripps.com.

Posted by **Alretired** on August 29, 2009 at 2:36 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Don't forget to include our beach environment, which is being ruined by misguided "renurishment".

Posted by **rnelson** on August 29, 2009 at 2:57 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Thank you Eve. And for the idiots who voted for Smith. You deserve the increased taxes you are going to get, and the decrease in your property values.

Posted by **jackiet** on August 29, 2009 at 4:03 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Thank you Ms. Samples for such an insightful column...may I remind your readers that it is Commissioner Smith who is "pushing" hard for the change in the setbacks on the river and who refused to even vote to support the Rivers Coalition law suit.....he, whose campaign literature always showed him standing in front of his "beloved" river. The word "hypocrite" comes to mind. Also, there are many, many, many other changes to our Comp Plan which will be voted on Tuesday, many of which were suggested by the Future Group, which are going to compromise the river, and our quality of life in general, our water, our open spaces, our residential neighborhoods and more. I hope the "little people" will show up and express their displeasure with the changes. At 9AM on Tuesday, you have the opportunity to stand up and be heard for 3 minutes....or you can arrive and, to quote Nancy Reagan "JUST SAY NO".

Posted by **flasun** on August 29, 2009 at 5:41 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

I won't gush and genuflect, or post the parcel #s of riverfront properties, etc...

Just a sincere, heartfelt THANK YOU and a 'here's hoping' this piece is read by as many as possible, Eve, thank you.

I will ask that all reading, plz contact the members of MCBOCC, especially Douglas (email address below) before Tuesday's vote, send them this column, make it pristinely clear..

dsmith@martin.fl.us

Posted by **LDouglas** on August 29, 2009 at 5:48 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

What a great perspective, and very nicely done Mrs. Samples. I couldn't even comment when I read the letter to the editor about the travel writer's poor to no, catches.

It's really sad to hear what happened to a river that I spent a lot of vacation time along (and lived along for a year) and have a lot of fond memories of. (One of which was a neighbor who ate fish out of there almost every morning for breakfast. He was still living independently and driving right up til his death in his late 90's.)

I hope the River Coalition prevails in this too long battle.

Posted by **Gimpy** on August 29, 2009 at 7:27 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Who are the 28 properties that the Commissioner seems to think takes priority? Who stands to benefit from this? Those that vote for this change are probably seeking some type of gain from this change, be it a barter of some kind, be it material, financial or power. I believe we have several commissioners with their own agenda, definitely not there for the majority. Just look at our neighboring Commissioners in Palm Beach. I believe ours are just as corrupt.

Posted by **dauidmarset** on August 30, 2009 at 11:21 a.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Nice article Eve, Stuart News was lucky to get a writer of your abilities.

Posted by **m0mwhocares** on August 30, 2009 at 1:33 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

If commissioners care so much about our environment then why did they deliberately destroy the bathtub reef beach by removing lifeguards and parks department staff? This beach has now been nick named "the toilet"

Posted by **behappy** on August 30, 2009 at 1:59 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

An article in this paper a day or two ago a spokesman for the Corps was quoted as saying they only make releases when they absolutely have to in order to protect the integrity of the dike. I in the past they have made a lot of statements that claimed they were going to repair the dike. Why don't they shut up and just fix the damn dam?

Posted by **JensenBeachMom** on August 30, 2009 at 4:08 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

This was a very well written article-Thank you Eve! Hopefully it will get the attention of many Martin County residents, the MCBOCC, Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Govt. I have lived in Martin County for 26 years and have seen many changes-some good and some bad. The fresh water releases must go away-along with anyone who supports them!

Posted by **arkhlraiser** on August 30, 2009 at 5:15 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

In the words of Deep throat..."follow the money."
Who, EXACTLY, stands to benefit from the changes Mr. Smith proposes?

Posted by **flasun** on August 30, 2009 at 5:20 p.m. ([Suggest removal](#))

Posted by behappy on August 30, 2009 at 1:59 p.m.
"Why don't they shut up and just fix the damn dam?"... busy building a bridge..