Florida Specifier

Practical Information For Environmental Professionals

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A note to readers

2021 will be my last year of publishing the Florida Specifier*. It's been an honor to have been involved with the paper since arriving in Florida during the fall of 1989. Many thanks to you for reading, and to the hundreds of companies that have chosen to spend their marketing dollars with us to help support our editorial effort of providing "practical information for environmental professionals."*

Mike Eastman

Got a story lead?

Got an idea for a story? Like to submit a column for consideration? Let us know. And don't forget to fill us in on your organization's new people and programs, projects and technologies—anything of interest to environmental professionals in Florida. Send to P.O. Box 2175, Goldenrod, FL 32733. Call us at (407) 671-7777; fax us at (321) 972-8937, or email mreast@enviro-net.com.

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Research provides insight into nutrient sources in Lake O

By ROY LAUGHLIN

A new study from researchers at Florida Gulf Coast University concluded that ammonia from chemical fertilizer is the primary driver of algae blooms in Lake Okeechobee.

Nitrogen and phosphorus derived from animal manure and atmospheric nitrate deposition appear to be a far less significant source of nutrients that spark and support harmful algae blooms in the lake.

The research provided credible new insight into the influence that ammonia has in sparking and prolonging Microcystin algae blooms.

The year-long study involved nutrient analysis in water samples from 14 stations in Lake Okeechobee and adjacent tributaries, from the basin canals just outside Lake Okeechobee's levee, and from agricultural canals that convey water to and from the lake.

The researchers used EPA methods for nutrient determination that included the different chemical forms of nitrogen, phosphorus and other constituents that influence water quality and eutrophication.

The research on nitrogen looked at cycling between different chemical forms of nitrogen: ammonia, nitrate,

HABs
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Photo courtesy of Advanced Environmental Technologies LLC

Field technicians with Advanced Environmental Technologies LLC mix an electron acceptor blend into a barrel of PetroFix to be sprayed in a tank pit excavation. Cleanup work on petroleum sites has slowed significantly during the recent pause in funding for the state Petroleum Restoration Program. See related story on Page 11.

DEP assumes Section 404 authority for most dredge and fill permitting

By ROY LAUGHLIN

In late December, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published a notice in the *Federal Register* finalizing its decision to transfer authority for Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The move finalized the transfer process that began in the fall of 2018 under then-Gov. Rick Scott.

As of mid-January, DEP had posted a webpage to assist applicants in identifying and downloading joint application forms for Section 404 dredge and fill permits and state environmental resource permits.

The single application will be separately reviewed for compliance with both Clean Water Act Section 404 provisions and Florida's permitting requirements.

Applicants will have to meet requirements for the two separate permits. One federal and one state permit will continue to be issued—at least in the near term. But prospects for a combined permit in the future look good.

Section 404 permits are granted for five-year intervals. Those currently in effect remain valid for the duration.

The corps will transfer its pending applications to DEP. Applicants do not need to reapply. The final decision on any pending permit application submitted to the corps will be made by DEP.

DEP's assumption does not cover all Section 404 permitting under the Clean Water Act. The corps remains the permit reviewer for three categories of "retained waters."

Notably, they will retain jurisdiction over listed navigable waters. These include harbors and waters with channels to major ports, and shipping facilities.

The corps also retains responsibility for water subject to the ebb and flow of tides along with a 300-foot administrative landward boundary adjacent to tidal waters. Generally, that includes estuaries, beaches and river mouths.

The third class of retained waters is those in Indian Country. This may apply to Seminole Indian and Miccosukee Indian reservations in Florida.

Under the memorandum of understanding governing the permit authority transfer, if DEP determines that a permit application is for the above-mentioned retained waters, then it will refer the applicant to the corps and take

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Biden administration names new environmental leadership

Staff report

President Joe Biden and his team have assembled a group of agency heads, advisers and cabinet secretaries to advance the environmental agenda in the U.S.—an agenda held hostage for the past four years by the prior administration.

Michael Regan, nominated as administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, was one of the incoming administration's first nominees.

He currently heads the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, a post he's held for the past four years.

The Sierra Club, in awarding Regan its 2020 Distinguished Achievement Award, noted that Regan assumed management of a department that had suffered budget and staff cuts under the previous administration.

His reputation for turning around that department will help the EPA attract bona fide scientists to join or rejoin the agency's critically important Science Advisory Boards.

In his four years at DEQ, Regan oversaw one of the nation's largest coal ash excavations, rejected a controversial gas pipeline, endorsed and promoted clean energy projects, and established a board on environmental justice.

He brings the Biden administration

LEADERSHIP
Continued on Page 15

EPA finalizes rule restricting future use of some key scientific studies

Staff report

On Jan. 5, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalized a rule that placed future restrictions and stipulations on the use of scientific data used to make regulatory decisions.

The rule, Strengthening Transparency in Pivotal Science Underlying Significant Regulatory Actions and Influential Scientific Information, had been under consideration for more than three years.

The primary purpose of the rule, introduced by former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, was to give the agency greater latitude in weighing data from scientific studies used in regulatory decisions.

The rule required that "pivotal science" studies that present dose-response data must contain sufficient detail in the data for independent validation.

The final rule will affect only future EPA regulations. The rule did not invalidate existing regulations based on studies that will no longer be eligible for consideration going forward.

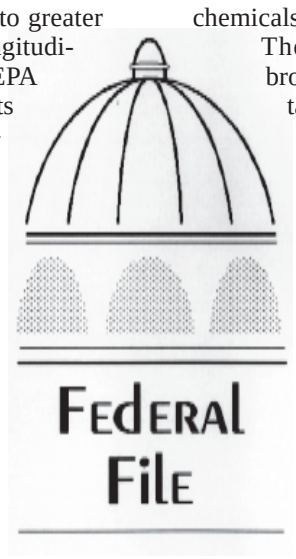
This was the most controversial aspect of the rule when it was proposed because it was aimed squarely at the most influential air quality study ever performed, Harvard's "Six Cities Study."

Regulated industry representatives criticized the use of the Six Cities Study because the data used was anonymized to comply with the legal requirements that protect patient identity and confidentiality, and could not be independently validated.

The new rule creates a Catch-22 that can be exploited by regulated industries and could expose the public to greater air contamination levels. Longitudinal studies cannot now meet EPA data transparency requirements while protecting subject privacy.

The new rule went into effect on Jan. 7 and is likely subject to the Congressional Review Act that allows Congress a say in rules passed during the final 60 legislative days of any administration.

Now that Democrats control both houses of Congress, it's likely that this new rule will be rescinded.



Everglades restoration report. In early January, the Jacksonville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released its updated five-year progress report describing Everglades restoration projects and progress implementing them.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan is the largest single component of the work reviewed. Smaller projects covered in the report include multiple non-CERP projects such as stormwater retention areas, Lake Okeechobee levy work and operating manuals for water releases and water management.

The report, the fourth issued since CERP's inception in 2000, highlighted significant progress in the rate of work as both the federal government and the state of Florida appropriated significantly increased funding during the most recent five-year period.

According to the report, during the past five years, $1.3 billion from federal and state sources was spent on CERP and prospective CERP projects.

Since CERP's inception, $3.25 billion has been spent.

Forty percent of all CERP funding has occurred in the past five years. With an expected total cost of $23.158 billion, just 14 percent of the spending on approved projects has occurred.

The Everglades restoration project remains one of the largest and most prominent ecosystem restoration projects in the world.

EPA restricts use of five chemicals. In December, the EPA announced restrictions on the manufacture, importation and use of five chemicals categorized as "persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals," after a Toxic Substances Control Act review.

Rather than characterizing the action as a ban, the agency said the decisions on each will "reduce exposure" to the five chemicals.

The chemicals include decabromodiphenyl ether, a flame retardant in plastic enclosures for electronics such as TVs and computers; phenol, a flame retardant, antiwear additive and anti-compressibility additive in hydraulic fluids, lubricating oils, industrial coatings, adhesives, sealants and plastics; 2,4,6-tris(tert-butyl) phenol (2,4,6-TTBP), primarily a contaminant resulting from intermediate synthesis and processing of organic chemicals; hexachlorobutadiene, a byproduct of chlorinated hydrocarbon manufacture; and pentachlorothiophenol, used to make industrial rubber formulations more pliable.

Each of these compounds is subject to a separate TSCA rule—distinctly separate in the details of exceptions and schedules for phasing out use.

For example, DecaBDE, will be phased out over up to 36 months except in automobiles. Replacement components in autos may contain DecaBDE until 2036, whereas any product that contains PCTP, at a level of less than one percent, faces no restrictions.

The new TSCA restrictions for these compounds are lenient on disposal and recycling of products that contained the now-restricted substances.

Whether this will turn out to be a loophole exploited by recyclers, or a practical approach to removing them from the human environment remains to be seen.

Following the announcement of these five now restricted PBT substances, EPA announced the receipt of a manufacturer-requested risk evaluation for two other chemicals within the octahydro-tetramethyl-naphthalenyl-ethanone chemical category.

These chemicals may be subject to a full TSCA risk assessment, scrutiny that some of the chemicals in the list of five avoided.

Aldicarb's future. Aldicarb, sold under the trade name Temik 15G, is a highly persistent and toxic chemical that was once applied to citrus but is currently banned.

Its sole manufacturer, AgLogic, petitioned the EPA to loosen its decade-old ban on application to citrus. That petition is now under review.

When aldicarb first reached the market in 1965, the potent acetylcholinesterase inhibitor was described as a "systemic pesticide," and praised as a revolutionary new way to control insect pests.

It was put onto the soil, taken up by plants through their roots, and carried to the leaves through the plant's vascular system, and was extremely effective because of its toxicity, persistence and bioaccumulation behavior.

However, it also leached into groundwater in areas with shallow aquifers, first reported to the public in 1983, posing a risk of human exposure. Numerous rural drinking water wells in Florida were contaminated.

Orange juice from treated trees also contains substantial aldicarb residues that posed specific risks to infants and children.

By 2010, an agreement was reached with EPA to withdraw aldicarb sales in the U.S. by 2017.

Since then, AgLogic twice requested Florida Department of Agriculture ap-

FEDFILE

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DEP continues to deny permit to ag waste recycler

Staff report

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection recently issued an order upholding a judicial ruling denying the 2019 renewal of MW Horticulture Recycling Facility Inc.'s registration with DEP for agricultural waste management and recycling.

The firm operates two waste management facilities near the city of Fort Myers in Lee County.

DEP found the applicant to be irresponsible and incapable of running a compliant operation. MW Horticulture's owners have already begun the appeal process.

The firm has had legal issues with both the state and county. While their state registration continues to be denied, a DEP injunction to cease accepting materials for recycling was overturned in October.

According to MW Horticulture officials, they make compost organically from yard waste, and operate complimentary landscape supply and garden depots.

Several fires have broken out in stacks of agricultural debris stored at their facilities, including an event that required the closure of Interstate 75 in May, 2020, due to the resulting smoke.

MW attributed the fires to spontaneous combustion.

Lot J development on hold. Jacksonville Jaguars owner Shad Kahn's plan to develop his Lot J site to include entertainment, office, residential and hotel uses is now facing a delay.

Jacksonville city officials estimated that predevelopment cleanup of the property may take up to three years before construction on the former fuel farm site can begin.

Although the city undertook measures to prevent the contamination of groundwater, notable contamination remains under what is now parking for TIAA Bank Field, home of the Jags.

The city will cover some of the costs of establishing the mixed-use development. In addition, over $200 million in taxpayer subsidies are being considered to support the proposed development.

Due to the level of contamination present, development of Lot J has been limited to industrial uses. Residential and similar uses with the potential for human exposure are prohibited.

The site must be cleaned up to appropriate state standards prior to construction of the proposed multi-use development.

Duke solar program approved. Duke Energy's Clean Energy Connection program has been approved by the Florida Public Service Commission.

The program established $1 billion in new solar power plants across the state. Facilities are anticipated to go on-line between 2022 and 2024.

The PSC noted the plan's development of renewable energy, the lessening of reliance on fossil fuels and decreased carbon emissions as advantages.

The program includes construction of 10 new solar energy generation plants that will provide 750 megawatts of combined energy.

Duke plans to open residential and small business enrollment for the program this year. Enrolled customers are expected to enjoy a seven-year full payback.

Jacksonville news. The Jacksonville City Council approved and funded the creation of a new resiliency officer management position.

The new job will be stationed within the city planning department, which currently oversees the city's resiliency efforts. The resiliency officer will operate at the division chief level.

Jacksonville created a Special Committee on Resiliency in January, 2020, to assess the resilience and health of the beaches, coastline and St. Johns River system including tributaries, wetlands and riparian land.

The adequacy of the city's flood management plans within the already flood-prone St. Johns basin has been questioned by environmental advocacy groups including the St. Johns Riverkeeper.

In other news, the city is considering ways to improve its recycling program, which already ranks in the top quarter of programs in Florida.

The city currently offers curbside recycling for a variety of materials. As with many municipal programs, the once profitable endeavor is now running at a loss.

City council members are considering ways to better educate residents about the program, hoping to reduce the number of unrecyclable items disposed of in bins.

By reducing the volume of unacceptable materials collected, the city can reduce its cost of operation.

Florida Notes

Resilient Brevard launched. The Brevard County Natural Resources Management Department launched Resilient Brevard to increase its resiliency to the impacts of climate change.

The effort is intended to identify measures to minimize the impacts from flooding, storm surge and sea level rise.

The project, announced cooperatively between the county and the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, has five focus areas.

Strategies, policies and a plan will be developed to address economic resilience, public services and safety, resilient development, public health and equity, and resilient nature-based practices.

The department is conducting a survey to gather public input to assist in guiding the program.

The survey and additional details about Resilient Brevard and similar programs in Volusia and Brevard counties are available on the Peril of Flood website, Florida's Coastal Resiliency Portal, at www.perilofflood.net.

Hillsborough receives green building award. Hillsborough County received the LEED Platinum Certification for Cities and Communities from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Hillsborough is the first county government in Florida to achieve the Platinum level, the highest available award for green building leadership.

The Cities and Communities certification requires implementation of several sustainability measures.

Criteria used by the county included both economic and environmental considerations. Wide ranging areas were measured including energy, cultural resources, land use and conservation, recreation and social services, among others.

Highlights of the county's achievements include operating a waste-to-energy plant, converting to LED lighting, installing solar panels and reducing chiller energy costs.

Hillsborough also set aside 65,000 acres for water and ecology management to assist in flood mitigation, address sea level rise, improve water quality, provide habitat and offer recreation opportunities.

In addition, the county's utilities department maintains superior wastewater treatment quality, and produces and distributes reclaimed water.

People news. Dr. Charles Kibert, professor and director of the Powell Center for Construction and Environment at the University of Florida, was elected chair of the Green Building Initiative's board of directors.

NOTES

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Sarasota County embarks on major wastewater system improvement plan

Staff report

In late December, Sarasota County officials released details of a countywide wastewater infrastructure improvement and expansion plan.

The plan was driven by population growth and the need to bring many parts of the wastewater collection and treatment system up to current standards.

A consent agreement signed last September with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection played a significant role in the development of the plan.

The Bee Ridge Water Reclamation Facility, the county's largest wastewater treatment plant serving customers primarily east of Interstate 75, will be upgraded to meet advanced wastewater treatment standards.

This plant has a storage pond for reclaimed water, one that overflowed during heavy rains last year. To prevent a recurrence of overflow, the county contracted for the construction of two deep disposal wells.

Contractors completed one 1,700-foot-deep disposal well and will construct a second.

The county has three other wastewater treatment plants that are included in the upgrade plans. They too need to meet advanced wastewater treatment standards under the consent order with DEP.

The county's wastewater collection system is aging, and needs repairs and upgrades to support expansion. Also, county commissioners expect to approve policy changes that require conversion from septic systems to sewer, and establish and enforce stricter standards for small private wastewater systems such as those in trailer parks and recreational vehicle campgrounds.

In addition, county and Utilities Department officials will update their water and sewer infrastructure extension policies. The ones currently in force were established in 1992.

The new policies are needed not only to meet capacity increases but also to endorse improvements in technology and operating procedures that have evolved over the past 30 years and are now standard for contemporary wastewater treatment and collection systems.

The cost of updating Sarasota County's wastewater collection and treatment system as well as their reuse system is not cheap. County officials in initial public outreach efforts have advised that more than $500 million will be spent on improving potable water, wastewater and reclaimed water systems throughout the county.

To balance the budget for operations and expansion, customers of the Bee Ridge Water Treatment Facility saw their fees increased by a one dollar per month per dwelling unit as a "water quality fee."

Over the next five years, these customers will see their fees increase by five percent per year.

The fee increases will help fund the $175 million in treatment plant upgrades and capacity increases to be completed in 2025.

The county is also likely to increase stormwater management fees. Those fees have not increased in Sarasota County since 2008.

The county's potable water system is also part of the utility improvement planning and budgeting, although its share may not be as large as the wastewater components.

In August, Sarasota County increased potable water rates by 1.5 percent. The T. Mabry Carlton Water Treatment Facility has potable water treatment units that are nearing the end of their useful lives.

That plant is currently installing new equipment that will meet current standards and increase plant capacity from 12 million gallons per day to 15 mgd. The county doesn't have a permit for the expanded capacity, but will likely need one within the current planning interval.

As reported in previous issues of the *Specifier*, the Peace River Regional Water Supply Authority, a water supplier to local utilities, is extending a water supply pipeline into Manatee County.

This is particularly important for the city of Sarasota, which buys water for its municipal potable supply from Manatee County. The current agreement ends in five years and both parties must prepare to negotiate on supply and price for a successor agreement.

Some of the changes discussed here have already been made or are now in progress. Others will be the subject of public discussion and require approval by local elected officials during the next few months.

Lake Apopka phosphorus removal project. At its December meeting, the governing board of the St. Johns River Water Management District approved a $2.19 million contract to help reduce phosphorus loading in Lake Apopka.

The project, dubbed the Lake Apopka Duda Property Water Storage Improvement Project, will divide the property into four hydraulic cells. A levy around all cells will allow storage of an additional half foot of water.

The four hydraulic cells to be constructed can be independently managed to retain water while phosphorus is sequestered from it before its release to the lake.

Project engineers expect a total phosphorus load reduction to Lake Apopka of 390 pounds per year.

Westwind Contracting Inc. was awarded the contract. Work is expected to be completed in the summer of 2021.

Florida Keys coral restoration. One of Florida's seven iconic reefs, Eastern Dry Rocks, received $5 million in funding to begin reef restoration activities.

The money will be spent according to plans outlined in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 2019 Mission: Iconic Reefs restoration program.

According to the announcement, "this project is the first of its kind in the Florida Keys to comprehensively address the restoration needs at one site and it will represent the largest coral restoration project in the region."

Eastern Dry Rocks reef is about seven miles southeast of Key West. Some of the reef's structure is as shallow as one foot below surface.

This bank reef is notable for crevices and coral canyons between the reef ribs that are deeper than those typically found at bank reefs in the Keys. This promotes a very diverse fish fauna.

According to Mission: Iconic Reefs, reef restoration efforts will focus intensively on culturing hard coral both in situ and by transplantation from onshore culture tanks to restore coral cover loss over the last decades.

The project is a cooperative venture between the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium, the Coral Restoration Foundation and NOAA.

The funding came from the NMSF and NOAA's National Coastal Resilience Fund.

DEP releases statewide assessment notification. The 2021 strategic monitoring plans are now available from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

WATCH
Continued on Page 5

From Page 4

According to DEP, "these plans represent the water quality and biological monitoring needs identified in preparation for basin assessments as part of the watershed management approach."

The purpose of the program is to prioritize monitoring resources where more data is needed from sampling Florida's surface waters to advise biological assessments and evaluation of water quality.

The sampling will be overseen by seven regional operation centers located in the six DEP district offices and Tallahassee headquarters.

The department is beginning a more extensive monitoring effort than has occurred in the past with the intent of better controlling harmful algal blooms and restoring impaired surface water habitats.

In addition to identifying ecosystems threatened by impairment, it will also focus on those already verified as impaired.

In both cases, the data will be used to develop total maximum daily loads as the basis of their basin management action plans.

The public face of this effort is an online Water Quality Surface Water Monitoring Events Map. It shows the locations where DEP's Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration is conducting water quality and biological monitoring.

It is available at https://floridadep.gov/dear/water-quality-assessment/content/water-quality-monitoring-events.

Apalachicola Bay oyster harvesting suspended. In mid-December, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission took an action long avoided but increasingly necessary because of habitat degradation and overfishing in Apalachicola Bay. It shut down oyster harvesting in the bay through the end of 2025.

This will reduce Florida's oyster harvest by 90 percent, and the U.S. harvest by 10 percent. The four-year hiatus follows an emergency shutdown announced in July.

FWC will monitor oyster populations closely and may reopen the fishery sooner than January, 2026, if recovery warrants.

In addition, FWC will plant oyster shells and other hard material to promote spat settlement, a process called "clutching." It has budged $17 million obtained from a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation for the clutching project.

Leesburg wastewater treatment upgrade. Late last year, city of Leesburg officials launched an effort to upgrade their Turnpike Wastewater Treatment Facility.

The treatment capacity of the renovated plant will increase by 50 percent from the current three million gallons per day to 4.5 mgd.

Expansion of the plant, first proposed more than 15 years ago, will meet increased demand from growth in The Villages and other residential developments in Lake County.

Advanced wastewater treatment capability will be added to the facility. The effluent nutrient reduction will primarily protect Lake Harris and Little Lake Harris.

It will reduce nutrient loading to both lakes by more than 13,000 pounds annually, about 33 percent. The plant will also augment the supply of Leesburg's reuse water system.

The cost of the project is $21.6 million. Lakeland-based Hydro Solutions Consulting LLC is partnering with Carollo Engineers to design the plant. Wharton-Smith Inc.'s construction group will build the plant.

The work is expected to be completed by late summer, 2021.

Red tide reported in southeast Gulf. On Jan. 6, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reported that red tide dinoflagellates, Karenia brevis, were present in southeast Gulf of Mexico water samples collected during the previous week.

Water samples from Collier, Charlotte and Lee counties contained the red tide organism.

Lee County samples contained background to high concentrations. In Collier County, medium to high concentrations were present. And in Charlotte County, samples ranged from background to very low concentrations.

In Lee and Collier counties, fish kills suspected to be related to the presence of red tide organisms were reported.

The FWC's Red Tide Status Map for Jan. 8 showed red tide was present in nearshore waters and in the lagoons around Sanibel Island. Red tide had also spread to Monroe County along the Gulf of Mexico.

The FWC site predicted on Jan. 8 that net southern transport of surface and subsurface waters would occur in most areas over the next four days.

Usually, red tides in Florida occur during the late summer and fall. By December, they typically die off. So, this bloom in early January is unusual.

Conservation Florida announces partnership with U.S. Air Force

Staff report

Conservation Florida and the Avon Park Air Force Range joined forces to protect natural and agricultural lands in the range's Sentinel Landscape region of the Everglades headwaters.

The cooperative agreement authorizes CF to negotiate the purchase and terms of conservation easements in partnership with the U.S. Air Force for properties in the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape.

The landscape covers almost 1.7 million acres of land known for its rich biodiversity and abundance of private ranches. It is anchored by the Air Force's largest primary air-to-ground training range east of the Mississippi River, which is used by every branch of the armed forces.

Portions of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area also lie within the boundary of the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape.

Beyond the boundary, CF and its partners recently introduced the H2O: Headwaters to Okeechobee watershed protection initiative, extending protection efforts of the regional partnership from Orlando to Lake Okeechobee.

"The Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape offers willing landowners expanded opportunities for protecting their land," said Chad Allison, program manager with the Central Florida Regional Planning Council. "Conservation Florida's critical role delivers additional support from federal, state and local programs to help the U.S. Air Force meet landowners' specific needs.

"The result is a much greater capacity for land protection and conservation benefitting the citizens of Florida by protecting water, open space, biodiversity, military training, and agriculture."

In addition to being a geographic region, the Sentinel Landscape is also a partnership to conserve land within its boundaries. CF is a partner in this collaborative effort to protect land of high conservation value that also enhances military readiness.

Avon Park Air Force Range will administer funding in support of the purchase of the conservation easements via the U.S. Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program.

This project represents a growing trend to protect land that serves many purposes for humans and wildlife.

Florida Specifier

2021 Drillers Directory

If your organization provides environmental or geotechnical drilling or direct push services, you're invited to complete and return the form below. Our annual Drillers Directory will appear in the April/May 2021 issue. **There is a fee of $150 to list your firm** (fee waived for current *Florida Specifier* advertisers). Please type or LEGIBLY print the information requested below and return as soon as possible to Mike Eastman at mreast@enviro-net.com or mail to P.O. Box 2175, Goldenrod, FL 32733. **If you were included in last year's directory, there is no need to complete this form—we will be in touch.**

The deadline for submitting listings is **Friday, March 5, 2021.**

Company name: _____

Primary Florida address: _____

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Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____ Web: _____

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Wellington WWTP renovations slated for spring completion

By ROY LAUGHLIN

Work on the village of Wellington's wastewater treatment plant in Palm Beach County is finally nearing completion. The first in a series of plant upgrades began in 2018. The second, which commenced in May, 2020, is entering its final stages.

Improvements to the plant will expand its peak treatment capacity to more than 6.5 million gallons per day. By the time all of the planned renovations are complete, almost the entire physical plant will have been renovated.

Several large residential developments—started or announced over the last year—are the primary motivators for the capacity expansion.

The expansion will help meet the demands of population growth not only in the village but also in a service area outside the village that includes adjacent parts of the village of Royal Palm Beach and unincorporated Palm Beach County.

With the increased wastewater flow input, effluent output handling is the primary focus of the current plant improvement efforts.

The plant produces reuse water for irrigation that is used in parks and along roadways. Some of the treated wastewater is sent to an artificial marsh, Peaceful Waters Sanctuary. Most of the remaining wastewater unusable for irrigation or marsh renourishment is disposed of through a deep disposal well.

Wellington's wastewater treatment plant now features a solid waste byproduct dryer. Also to be completed in the current phase will be rehabilitation of the headworks that distributes wastewater to treatment cells as it enters the plant.

In addition, new emergency generators have been installed and a new odor control system is being added.

A new operations building, renovation of the old operations building, new blowers for wastewater aeration, a new reuse water control building, and replacement of guardrails, catwalks and other safety improvements are also part of the rehab effort.

The cost of the project, $18.6 million, is slightly less than the original estimate of $19 million. The contractors are Weiss Construction Group LLC and Wharton-Smith Inc.

Next to receive attention will be lighting and lightning protection at the plant.

When construction is finished, an upgraded supervisory control and data acquisition system will be installed.

The SCADA cybernetics will include flow and water level sensors, timers, automated valve controllers and other components that allow computers to monitor and control wastewater processes in the collection system and at the wastewater treatment plant.

Outside the treatment plant, wastewater collection pipes will be rerouted from the north end of the village so that they no longer cross the Palm Beach Polo and Country Club property.

All the remaining projects at the plant should be completed by May, according to local newspaper reports.

In 2018, as the village kicked off its wastewater treatment plant improvements, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection awarded its Domestic Wastewater Plant Operations Excellence Award to Wellington's water reclamation facility.

This award is given annually to one wastewater treatment plant in each of DEP's six regions.

Wellington's wastewater utility operators are not resting on their laurels. The new plant will be another step in the right direction for the village's residents, public health and the environment.

National Groundwater Awareness Week set

Staff report

The National Ground Water Association and The Groundwater Foundation announced that National Groundwater Awareness Week will take place this year March 7-13.

The event was established in 1999 to highlight the responsible development, management and use of groundwater, and as a platform to encourage yearly water well testing and maintenance, and the promotion of policies impacting groundwater quality and supply.

This year, NGWA and its partners will focus their advocacy on highlighting the need for heightened awareness of local, regional and national policies that protect and increase access to groundwater.

NGWA will also be offering free materials such as state-by-state groundwater fact sheets, groundwater frequently asked questions and tools to get students involved in groundwater education.

The observance also serves as an annual reminder for water well owners to test, tend and treat their private water systems.

RNG facility to be built in North Florida to produce transportation fuels

By ROY LAUGHLIN

Renewable natural gas, or RNG, production scored another big success in December when an investment fund announced its partnership with the New River Solid Waste Association to extract and refine methane from landfill gas at NRSWA's solid waste facility in Raiford.

Fortistar LLC, a privately-held investment fund, will sell the RNG as vehicle transportation fuel.

"Creating fuel for transportation is a solution available today to significantly decrease human-related greenhouse gas emissions," said Mark Comora, president of Fortistar. "NRSWA maintains an excellent reputation in waste management in Florida and we're looking forward to working with them to capture greenhouse gases, displace diesel trucks and produce cleaner fuel for a more sustainable future."

NRSWA's New River Regional Landfill is a publicly owned solid waste landfill that serves Baker, Bradford and Union counties in North Florida. The landfill is located in Union County.

NRSWA also has contracts with Alachua, Gilchrist and Levy counties for disposal of some of their municipal solid waste on a contract basis.

The facility receives about 800 tons a day of municipal solid waste produced by approximately 330,000 Florida residents.

The landfill, which began operation in 1992, has the distinction of being the first in Florida to serve more than one county. The renewable natural gas facility will add another first.

"This will be the first project to convert gas from a municipal solid waste landfill to RNG in Florida," said Perry Kent, executive director of NRSWA.

Landfill gas is about 50 percent methane and 50 percent carbon dioxide.

Fortistar's planned Raiford facility will remove the carbon dioxide, compress the methane and load it into pressurized tanks.

The production goal from the landfill will be approximately 1,900 dekatherms per day of RNG. According to Fortistar, that's equal to 5.1 million gas gallon equivalents of RNG annually.

The gas will be purified using Air Liquide's proprietary gas filtration membranes. A state-of-the-art Vilter Single Screw Gas Compressor will compress the gas. In tandem, the filtration and gas compressor will deliver pipeline-quality methane.

The use of methane recovered from landfill gas has been a green energy technology for more than three decades.

Its use as a transportation fuel has been increasingly common for at least a dozen years, predominantly using natural gas from fracking sold as compressed natural gas.

Founded in 1993, Fortistar invests in projects that "address global environmental challenges." It has seven portfolio companies that own 100 facilities including biodiesel producers, biogas facilities and now RNG for transportation.

In mid-2018, Fortistar established a portfolio to acquire RNG facilities. It plans to construct and operate a dozen RNG facilities. The New River Waste Regional Landfill facility is the fifth of the planned dozen.

In a press release, the company characterized the RNG produced at the facility as equivalent to the fuel requirements of 7,500 passenger cars.

In fact, the use of methane including RNG by long-haul semi-trailer freight haulers is a rapidly maturing industry.

Fortistar's prospects for success with RNG appear to be bright for several reasons.

First, cost savings for natural gas fuel use is 30-40 percent for truckers. Second, methane's market as a transportation fuel is well-established, although still modest. Finally, tax credits are generous for RNG producers and sellers.

Most of the alternative energy fuel tax credits ended with 2017's federal tax overhaul. Lawmakers determined that alternative fuels didn't need further special tax treatment once they lowered the standard tax rates on business profits from 35 percent to 21 percent.

But that changed on Dec. 19, 2020. The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 included special provisions for biomass fuel, including investment tax credits, and alternative fuels were among the biggest winners.

Fortistar plans to spend big on RNG facilities. To construct its 12 new RNG extraction/refinery plants, they plan to invest nearly $500 million in new capital investment over the next year.

When completed, these facilities will help produce 120 million gallons of gasoline equivalents of RNG and reduce U.S. transportation emissions by 2 million metric tons of CO2 annually.

State, Miami-Dade County announce major investment in Biscayne Bay

By BLANCHE HARDY, PG

In late December, Gov. Ron DeSantis announced a $20 million investment in the protection and preservation of Biscayne Bay. The effort is a joint funding initiative between the state of Florida and Miami-Dade County.

The governor described Biscayne Bay as "a treasured resource for Florida, for Miami Dade and really for the entire country."

DeSantis was joined by Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Noah Valenstein to make the announcement.

The $20 million in funding will be used to update infrastructure and implement new technologies to help predict and prevent sanitary sewer overflows into the bay.

The state and county will each invest $10 million and work collaboratively to identify and pursue potential restoration projects. Miami-Dade has already identified six projects costing $5 million, $2.5 million of which the state will cover.

In August last year, a grand jury warned that Biscayne Bay is at a tipping point.

In addition, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration noted in a 2019 study that levels of chlorophyll and phosphorus entering the bay were increasingly affecting its water quality and could lead to lasting damage.

Late last year, Miami Waterkeeper Rachel Silverstein, PhD, noted to the Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners that there are over 100,000 septic tanks in the county of which 50,000+ are already compromised, according to county's own report in 2018.

Silverstein said the situation is both "an environmental and public health crisis," and recommended the commission act to stop sewage leaks, eliminate septic tanks, enact a fertilizer ordinance currently under consideration, and capture and treat stormwater runoff.

Levine Cava issued an action plan report calling for the conversion of septic tanks to central sewers in the county. But according to estimates, wholesale septic-to-sewer conversion could cost more than $4 billion.

The Plan of Action Report, presented to the commission by the mayor in early December, was prepared as a joint effort between the Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department and the county's Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources.

The report's primary objective is to "inform policymakers of the most effective practices and investments that should be implemented in the near-term to reduce the environmental impact and public health risks of septic tank systems in vulnerable areas."

The plan proposed a methodical and phased approach that prioritizes resolving potential impacts from the systems that pose the highest risk while yielding the greatest benefits in the least amount of time.

Miami-Dade also needs to address sea level rise resiliency at ground level. Because many of the county's septic systems are in proximity to the bay and its tributaries, they are vulnerable to rising sea and groundwater levels.

Septic systems in low-lying areas with drain fields near groundwater elevation are particularly troublesome.

Drain fields must remain above the groundwater table to function properly. Once groundwater rises to the level of waste in the drain field, the system becomes a public health threat and environmental contamination risk.

Reports and data presented to the county indicate that areas within Miami-Dade will experience groundwater levels within half a foot of the surface for more than a quarter of the year by 2040, predicting large numbers of septic system failures.

The mayor's plan includes reference to a 2019 report identifying roughly 9,000 septic tanks that could fail by 2020, and 13,500 additional systems that could fail by 2040.

Levine Cava prioritized septic-to-sewer conversions where existing tanks are most vulnerable to failure due to sea-level rise, including those in flood-prone areas.

Coalition receives grant to encourage climate change dialogue

Staff report

The Florida Media Coalition received a one-year, $50,000 grant to engage business leaders in discussions about the potential impacts of climate change.

The grant from the Environmental Defense Fund will support The Invading Sea, a collaboration of 26 news organizations from across Florida to address the threat of sea-level rise.

The Invading Seas includes 25 daily newspapers and WLRN Public Media, South Florida's public radio station. The group's goal is to raise awareness, amplify its voice in the region and create a call to action that cannot be ignored.

"In 2020, Environmental Defense Fund opened its Florida office with the goal of addressing climate change with practical solutions," said Dawn Shirreffs, the Florida director of the Environmental Defense Fund. "We know that to make progress we will need robust engagement from the private sector."

The coalition plans to establish a variety of opportunities that will allow members of the business community to discuss climate change issues, including a weekly feature and hosted webinars.

The Invading Sea was founded by the editorial boards of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel, Miami Herald, Palm Beach Post,* and WLRN Public Media.

Editorials are posted and shared between coalition members and the group publishes opinion pieces from a variety of sources including public officials, business leaders, scientists and activists.

Proposed titanium mine near Okefenokee Swamp may soon begin operations

By ROY LAUGHLIN

Twin Pines Minerals LLC of Birmingham, AL, owns 12,000 acres of sandy ridge land east of the Okefenokee Swamp that it proposes to mine for titanium and zirconium.

In 1989, the U.S. Department of the Interior described the region's lands as the most valuable source of titanium minerals in the country.

In 1992, the federal government denied permits to DuPont de Nemours Inc. to mine the area for titanium, although they had been mining the lands for some time. Mining efforts ebbed until 2019.

North of the border

In 2019, Twin Pines applied for both Clean Water Act Section 404 permits and Georgia state environmental permits for wetland drainage.

Titanium mining involves a process similar to that of Florida's phosphate mining. The company wants to eventually remove roughly 50 feet of sand over the mineral deposits on part of more than 3,000 acres of the 12,000 the company owns.

The Georgia Conservancy, the state's foremost advocacy organization, mounted a full-scale opposition campaign, focusing on opposing federal Section 404 wetlands permits.

Their primary concern was that the 50-foot excavation depth for mining is below the Okefenokee Swamp's basin depth. The group was concerned that lowering water levels to drain the mine would also drain the Okefenokee and influence water flow to both the St. Mary's and Suwannee rivers.

The fierce opposition in 2019 led Twin Pines to withdraw its request for a permit. The company returned in July, 2020, with a modified proposal for a demonstration mine on 800 acres.

In addition to a smaller footprint than the initial proposed mining operation, Twin Pines said that it would relocate gopher turtles as well as endangered plant species on the site.

The company maintained its premise of safe, new mining practices to protect water resources. But the Georgia Conservancy again opposed the mining plan.

The group said that the revised permit application was a classic example of permit "segmentation," where an applicant reduces the size of its impact to lessen regulatory review requirements.

In this case, the permit applicant was hoping to circumvent the requirement to produce an environmental impact statement, said the advocacy group.

"The development and issuing of an EIS require several thorough studies of the proposed mine's potential impacts," they said. "Additionally, the EIS would provide the public with new opportunities to issue comment letters."

An opinion letter, submitted in 2019 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said that FWS could not definitively say that the mining proposal would significantly affect the environment.

However, they had concerns that the proposed project could pose substantial risks for adverse impacts to the Okefenokee refuge and the surrounding environment that could be irreversible—even with mitigation provisions in place.

The FWS statement, although noncommittal in usual times, seems as concerted an assessment of harm as was possible during the Trump administration for any environmental project proposed.

This project has received two unexpected boosts from the federal government since the permit applications were submitted in July, 2020.

In October, 2020, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers applied the administration's revised Waters of the U.S. rule. The corps determined it no longer had jurisdiction over any of the wetlands to be affected by the smaller project, so a Section 404 wetlands permit was not required.

The second boost resulted from a notice of request for public comment by the U.S. Department of Commerce on Dec. 10, in the Notice of Request for Public Comments by the Titanium Sponge Working Group.

The summary of this request includes the following:

"In February of 2020, the president issued a memorandum concurring with the secretary's findings that titanium sponge imports threatened to impair U.S. national security. The president's concurrence also agreed that actions to adjust imports under Section 232, such as tariffs, should not be taken at this time and established an interagency working group. The work of the Titanium Sponge Working Group has proceeded in exploring measures to ensure access to titanium sponge in the United States for use for national defense and in critical industries during an emergency, and at this time the Bureau of Industry and Security is seeking public comments to better inform the deliberations of the working group."

There can be little doubt that the national security aspect, unexplained in the request, bears directly on a $100 billion U.S. Department of Defense program to develop hypersonic weapons begun under the Trump administration.

Titanium is the only metal the U.S. has ever successfully used in aircraft capable of extreme hypersonic flight.

But a recent article in the *New York Times* in January, 2021, cast doubt that hypersonic weapons have any chance of useful implementation.

While the Biden administration is undoing many of the Trump administration's executive action during its first days, breaking the link between titanium mining and national security is not likely to be high on the administration's list of action items.

However, a recent Associated Press report noted that protection of the Okefenokee Swamp against this mining proposal was part of the successful Senate campaigns of both Rafael Warnock and John Ossoff. Congress may work with the White House to stop the mining project.

The prospects for the company also had some setbacks in January.

In addition to the election of the two Democrat candidates to the U.S. Senate, prospects for the Twin Pines further paled when an article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* about the mining project noted that the company has a record of environmental violation citations.

Twin Pine's president, Steve Ingle, is also vice president of engineering for Green Fuels Energy and its subsidiary, Georgia Renewable Power. Georgia Renewable Power operates two biomass facilities in the state that have been cited by state regulators.

Recent legislation was passed in Georgia, *AJC* noted, to end incineration of toxic rail ties by Georgia Renewable Power. If Georgia regulators expect a positive record on permit compliance from permit seekers, the blemishes on the records of Ingle's firms may detract from its chances of permit approval.

Although located in Georgia, the mining project is hardly remote from Florida. Florida surrounds the location of the mine on three sides at a distance of fewer than 20 miles.

Mining operations could influence water levels in the Floridan Aquifer in Florida and potentially affect as many habitats in Florida as are likely to be affected in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp.

The 2021 Florida legislative session: A look back and a leap forward

By WILLIAM D. PRESTON

Fresh out of FSU law school, my first legislative session was as a staff analyst for the Senate Natural Resources and Conservation Committee in 1976. It proved to be a crash course in Florida lawmaking, and rough and tumble politics among members.

Democrats ruled the roost, primarily the "Pork Chop Gang" from numerous small counties in North Florida. Republicans were the distinct minority sitting way in the back of both chambers.

The tensions and power plays usually broke out among the Democrats from the north and south factions with collateral impacts that sometimes affected staff, often unintentionally. And you never knew for sure exactly when or how the knife might come flying out of the dark.

So I voluntarily left as staff director of that Senate committee after four sessions, preferring to depart on my own two feet rather than being unceremoniously carted out on my shield.

I walked across Monroe Street and hired on at a new, very small law firm, Hopping Boyd Green & Sams. Wade Hopping, the primary Florida lobbyist, would turn out to be my primary mentor for the next 20+ years.

Of course, there were no "mobile devices" and no Internet. You got relevant information by talking, listening, telephoning and meeting with members, staff, agency personnel and other lobbyists (plus, your clients) and by reading from papers that you held in your hands.

Someone once asked Wade how he became so successful in his trade. It was simple, he said. He read each and every Senate and House bill dealing with environmental matters and pretty much knew more on the issues than anyone else.

That training and experience provided me with a solid foundation for my environmental law practice and career over the next 40+ years. I owe (and miss) Wade a lot.

What's new for this session?

First of all, the COVID-19 protocols put in place will result in major changes to the legislative process and public involvement. If you plan on coming to town before or during the 60-day session commencing on March 2, you should check ahead. Members of the public will likely not be allowed to attend committee meetings unless invited by the committee.

Remote viewing and testimony rooms have already been established at the Leon County Civic Center to view meetings and participate virtually. An online registration system will likely be utilized for those wishing to provide testimony, and seating—if available at all—will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Masking and social distancing in committee meetings will be enforced. Senate and House gallery viewing is still undetermined.

As has been the norm in recent years, whether you are in Tallahassee or not, you can follow specific legislation and access bills, amendments, staff analysis reports and a host of other documents and information from the comfort of your new home office by using the following House and Senate links: https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/ and https://www.flsenate.gov/ .

The budget

Of course, the pandemic created a huge adverse impact on Florida's economy over the past 11 months, which continues to the present. To address Florida needs, relevant monetary and fiscal policies, directives, funding sources and Appropriations Committees' budgetary deliberations will be a heavy focus during the 2021 session.

To fulfill his role in these efforts, Gov. Ron DeSantis recently released his "Florida Leads" budget that proposed ongoing funding for Florida's environment. The Legislature is supposed to measure its own budget-building efforts (separately in the House and Senate) against this opening line in the shifting Florida budgetary sands.

DeSantis' proposal continues the increased funding levels for environmental protection implemented by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection during his initial two years in office.

For the Legislature's consideration, the governor's 2021 budget includes ongoing funding of more than $626 million for water quality improvements, springs restoration, alternative water supply development and Everglades restoration projects.

The proposed budget also addresses the challenges of sea level rise, intensified storm events and localized flooding by establishing the Resilient Florida program. The intent would be to provide $1 billion over four years for grants to state and local government entities to fund projects that address impacts in each of these areas.

Other budget highlights earmarked for DEP program implementation, if approved by the Florida Legislature, would include the following:

• More than $469 million for Everglades Restoration

• $145 million for Targeted Water Quality Improvements including $100 million for cost-share grant funds for water quality improvements, such as septic conversions and upgrades, other wastewater improvements, and rural and urban stormwater system upgrades; and $45 million to accelerate projects to meet scientific nutrient reduction goals (called total maximum daily loads), which may include green infrastructure investments or land conservation to protect our water resources

• $180 million for the new Resilient Florida program ($1 billion over four years), including $165.7 million to fund projects to adapt regionally significant assets to address the impacts of sea level rise, intensified storms and localized flooding; $12.1 million to provide grants to local governments in order to close the gap for statewide sea level rise/vulnerability assessments; and $1.7 million and 15 positions (FTE) for program operations

• $50 million for Springs Restoration

PRESTON
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Petroleum cleanup coalition upbeat about future prospects for PRP

By GLENN MacGRAW, PG

The results are in from the *Specifier* survey of Agency Term Contractors working in the Florida Department of Environmental Professional's Petroleum Restoration Program. The compilation of replies from ATCs provided a clear picture of how the recent PRP "pause" has impacted ATCs, their staffs and the environment.

I helped create the initial rules and policies for the State Underground Petroleum Environmental Response Act in 1986 and was involved in the original rollout of the Early Detective Incentive Program, which has evolved into today's PRP program. I've been affiliated with and working within the state's petroleum cleanup program since its inception.

Although I'm well aware of everything that's going on with the most recent PRP pause, reviewing the survey responses gave rise to my own personal pause.

I've always looked for the best workable solution for cleaning up each contaminated site. But during these urgent times for ATCs, a mechanism for broader workable solutions was conceived and developed: The Informal Coalition of Environmental Associations, or ICEA.

The phrase "when the going gets tough, the tough get going" has never had a better fit than with this new coalition, assembled about three months ago to address the fiscal stoppage of work and an extremely low budget request for fiscal year 2021-2022.

In my 34 years of working in this industry, I have never seen anything as cohesive and focused as this group and I'm glad to be a part of it.

It's great to see competitors come together during times like these to focus on a single end-goal: a program that is sufficiently funded on a continual basis to effectively address Florida's groundwater contamination. It is truly refreshing!

The education of legislators is in full swing and the coalition's work products have been well received, complete with a GIS presentation of the PRP issues in each legislator's district.

The primary associations in the ICEA are the Florida Ground Water Association, Environmental Professionals of Florida, Florida Association of Professional Geologists, Florida Engineering Society and Florida Brownfields Association.

We have been led by Steve Hilfiker, who is also the chair of the Environmental Committee of FGWA.

The coalition will continue the momentum it has built and will stay engaged in what we hope is a much better outcome that works for all parties. Anyone that is a member of any of the above-mentioned associations is welcome to participate.

Survey results

I reviewed all survey replies and summed up the most common responses from the recent survey, as follows.

Business questions

1. Are you an agency term contractor, driller, laboratory, vendor or other business that works on Petroleum Restoration Program projects? 21 of 22 respondents are now working in the PRP Program.

2. How many people in your company, including outsourced staff, work a majority of their time on program projects? An average of 11 employees per company are involved in 22 responses.

3. If the PRP portion of your revenue is halved, how many employees would you need to lay off? The average number of layoff would be four people per company in 20 responses.

4. What other damages or effects to your company would stem from a 50% reduction in the program? Replies included a total loss of institutional knowledge and trained and experienced staff and loss of capital and employee investment. A high percentage of these professionals will either leave the state or seek positions outside the PRP program.

5. Would your business be able to shift to other sources of work, or is there a chance your business may not survive this slowdown? The replies indicated that the pause is causing a major disruption of the entire supply chain for the program and, although some companies can find other work to perform, a large portion of the contractors are dedicated to this program. They were told by DEP to staff up and make sure they can perform to meet DEP's performance metrics. Anyone can understand that it is tough to run a consulting business without the ability to forecast revenue and run a fiscally responsible company in times like these.

Site/Client questions:

6. How is the slowdown affecting your site owners and tenant clients? Site owners are not able to perform site upgrades in conjunction with the program due to the work stoppage. This had caused major scheduling and bank loan problems. Site owners are extremely frustrated to have cleanups at their site lasting 20 years or more. Redevelopment and the highest and best use of properties is not happening on program sites.

7. How is the slowdown affecting your client's lenders, and other related professionals working on projects that are dependent on cleanup program funds? Adverse reactions are occurring throughout the service sector. Lenders are nervous and asking a lot of questions as all lending institutions are accustomed to relying on the backstop of PRP eligibility and the program performing cleanups to a known endpoint. This is the very premise that over 75 percent of all banks made the loan in the first place. Redevelopment on many PRP sites is severely curtailed or on hold.

8. How many developer clients, including site owners that desire or are planning renovations or redevelopment, do you have that are or will be impacted by a pause in funding and projected deficit in revenues next year? The number of redevelopment projects held up per contractor was eight, or approximately 80 total projects.

9. Will contamination migrate off-site impacting other properties as a result of the current DEP "pause" or reduced funding next year? Virtually all groundwater plumes will expand, contaminate additional media, drive up overall costs, cause additional money to be spent to update site conditions when projects resume, and lengthen the already long duration of site cleanups.

10. How many paused sites do you manage that already have off-site contaminant migration? The number of paused sites averaged 13 sites per contractor (130 total) where the sites have off-site contamination.

11. How many discharge files/sites have you closed including LSSI (% and total)? Include comments on progress made cleaning up the groundwater and any challenges that have hindered further progress in obtaining site closures. Closures are being obtained, but closures are hard to achieve with Florida's soil and groundwater standards. Many closures are held up for some reason or another by DEP project managers. Innovative technologies are not being pursued as much over the last four years. Benzo(a)pyrene has frequently been the main constituent that has been an obstacle to site closures. There seems to be too many administrative, technical and financial slowdowns to obtain site closures.

12. Florida's aquifers have been restored at over 11,000 sites in the program. Comment on how you, your company and your peers have contributed to this suc-

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Michael R. Eastman
Publisher/Editor

The *Florida Specifier* welcomes columns, articles and letters to the editor on any subject or issue pertinent to the environmental, regulatory and technical areas the newspaper covers. We reserve the right to edit all submissions for newspaper style and publish submissions on a space-available basis only. The opinions expressed on this page are those of the authors.

DEP, Florida Recycling Partnership name 2020 Recycling Award Winners

By BLANCHE HARDY, PG

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Recycling Partnership recognized their 2020 Recycling Award Winners during Florida Recycles Week in late 2020.

DEP Secretary Noah Valenstein presented Walt Disney World Resort Disney's Animals, Science and Environment's Animal Nutrition Center with the department's Recycling Recognition Award.

Florida Recycling Partnership Chair Dawn McCormick honored the 2020 Recycling Champion Award Winners including Anheuser-Bush, DAR PRO Solutions, Florida State University, Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful and Sarasota County Solid Waste.

Anheuser-Busch's Jacksonville brewery is the first of the company's North American breweries to achieve a 100 percent recycling rate. The Jacksonville facility recycled more than 124,000 tons of materials in 2019.

DAR PRO Solutions, a brand of Darling Ingredients, takes production by-products from large manufacturers and commercial food establishments and—using an in-house rendering process—transforms the waste material into new resources.

The Florida State University award was two-fold. First, it honored Willie Wiggins, an FSU facility specialist and assistant director for waste management, for his commitment to recycling and for starting the recycling program on the FSU campus.

In addition, it recognized the work being done on campus including the "Chuck it for Charity" program, the office supply reuse room and surplus property, which supports the reuse of items on campus.

FSU recycled 1,322 tons of materials, composted 405 tons of materials, and donated or re-sold 1,465 tons of recycled materials.

"The long-standing success of our recycling program is a testament to Willie Wiggins' commitment to making FSU the best it can be," said Elizabeth Swiman, director of the school's Sustainable Campus program.

"Willie is the backbone of this operation," she said. "His decades of work have allowed us to build success upon success so that we can serve our campus and sustainability goals simultaneously."

FSU's recycling program was completely created and is maintained by FSU staff to address the university's specific needs and goals. The recycling team can process all waste materials except for household waste. More than 2,500 tons of material are diverted from the landfill and recycled annually.

"Many universities and businesses talk sustainability and have recycling programs, but Florida State doesn't just talk about it or claim to have programs," said Dave Irvin, associate vice president for facilities. "We've developed and implemented practical results-based actions that make a real difference."

Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful features a variety of recycling initiatives aimed at creating interest, awareness and motivation to reuse, recycle and even upcycle all kinds of materials.

The group's Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program, undertaken in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, protects local wildlife from becoming entangled in used monofilament.

Sarasota County Solid Waste modified its recycling collection program, demonstrating its understanding of the challenges of developing and growing a recycling campaign.

The county developed education and outreach messages to launch throughout each stage of transition and employed post-transition customer satisfaction surveys to measure transition progress.

HABs

From Page 1

dissolved organic nitrogen and total nitrogen.

The researchers extended the chemical analysis by using mass spectroscopy to determine the relative abundance of nitrogen and oxygen isotopes in the different chemical forms of nitrogen that cycle between inorganic forms and nitrogen assimilated by plants and animals.

Isotope analysis is a way to distinguish the influence of biological and chemical reactions in biogeochemical processes because lighter isotopes are more abundant in chemicals that are formed or modified by metabolic reactions.

This method, isotope ratio analysis, allowed the researchers to distinguish between nitrogen that came from ammonia fertilizer used on pastureland, nitrate produced by microbes, nitrate produced by atmospheric chemistry and deposited into the lake by precipitation, and organic reduced nitrogen that had been produced by bacteria and primary producers then transferred through food chains.

The wet chemistry findings by the researchers are consistent with the generally accepted scenario for sources of nitrogen and phosphorus in Lake Okeechobee.

The isotope chemistry, however, provided significant new insight into the transformations of nitrogen in the lake, and how primary producers respond to different chemical forms of nitrogen.

The conclusion is that ammonia has the primary role in promoting cyanobacteria blooms in Lake O.

During the wet season, runoff leaches synthetic ammonia from pasture and farmlands where it was applied as fertilizer. Drainage carries the ammonia to the lake and is the primary driver for algae blooms.

The study also indicated that runoff accounts for only a portion of the nitrate in Lake O. The authors could not identify a source for about 25 percent of the lake's nitrogen budget present as nitrate. They suggested that groundwater, found to be a source of nitrate in other regions, could be Lake Okeechobee's hidden nitrate source.

The observation of ammonia-nitrogen's role as an HAB driver in Lake Okeechobee is consistent with other HAB research over the past two decades.

Most perplexing was the finding that, in the past decade, cyanobacteria such as Anabaena, which are nitrogen-fixers and cause blooms, have been displaced in Lake Okeechobee's HABs by genera that are not nitrogen fixers, notably Microcystis.

Microcystis blooms have also been the major and most noxious ones in the past decade in Lake Okeechobee's drainage to tidewaters.

This new research by Pei Ma, PhD, and her colleagues at Florida Gulf Coast University does not create a new paradigm to understand cyanobacteria blooms in Florida but it does explain a paradox about the dynamics of cyanobacteria HABs.

When the bloom species does not fix nitrogen, exogenous nitrogen, ammonia, in particular, drives its blooms. In Lake Okeechobee, the most concerted nutrient driver is inorganic ammonia from agricultural fertilizers—not phosphorus from manure or sewage.

Now that scientists understand the role of nitrogen as a source for cyanobacteria HAB species that do not fix atmospheric nitrogen, making a distinction between the different sources of ammonia that fuel Florida's HABs will surely get more scrutiny with this research as a model.

This insight, if implemented in basin management action plans, may finally help reduce eutrophication in Florida, shifting the focus from phosphorus reduction alone with the addition of fertilizer ammonia to the reduction effort.

The study, Investigating Sources and Transformations of Nitrogen Using Dual Stable Isotopes for Lake Okeechobee Restoration in Florida, was published in *Ecological Engineering* and is available online.

MRC report card: Another year of no improvement in IRL ecological health

By ROY LAUGHLIN

The Marine Resources Council's 2020 Indian River Lagoon Report Card described another year with no significant improvement to IRL's ecological health.

No significant recovery of seagrass beds in the lagoon's northern segments is evident. Nitrogen and phosphorus in the water column—the nutrients responsible for eutrophication and prolonged, annually-recurring algae bloom—have shown no significant decline.

MRC began publishing this report card three years ago to inform the public about the progress of environmental stewardship and restoration in the lagoon.

Rather than a scientific report, it is an evaluation of key parameters of water quality and ecosystem health presented in a format readily accessible to the public.

The report interprets the lagoon's environmental health in terms of five key parameters including the environmental health of seagrass: the levels of total nitrogen and total phosphorus in the water; total dissolved solids, an index of water clarity; and chlorophyll a, an indicator of phytoplankton in the water.

The data was collected by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the St. Johns River and South Florida water management districts.

The report presents straightforward, well-labeled graphs and color-coded tables that effectively show the time series of changes and reporting stations, a representative surrogate for sub-areas of the lagoon.

The report covers the Indian River Lagoon from Stuart-St. Lucie River Estuary to Mosquito Lagoon.

Leesa Souto, PhD, executive director of the Marine Resources Council, said that the data were the same used by DEP to develop total maximum daily loads to support their basin action management plans.

She noted, however, that MRC is independently vetting the data—analyzing, interpreting and presenting it.

This latest report card is based on data from calendar years 1996-2019.

Along a geographical gradient, the report card shows that conditions go from generally "good" in the southern part of the lagoon in St. Lucie and Martin counties and parts of Indian River County, to bad conditions with no improvement in ecological health in the northern Indian River.

The Banana River is the northern segments' loss leader with the poorest indices of ecological health.

Souto noted that over the 15 years of data collection, the trend line for water quality has remained essentially the same, although with some short-term excursions above and below the trend line.

She noted that, during former Gov. Rick Scott's administration, funding for tributary monitoring was massively reduced to the point where critical data that would be helpful now for accurate TMDL determinations is insufficient or simply not available.

A synopsis of the report card is available online. MRC staff are now in the final stages of preparing the report for printing. Copies are expected to be available by March.

PRESTON

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• $40 million for Alternative Water Supply

• $20.8 million for Innovative Technologies that address harmful algal blooms, increased water quality monitoring, and support for the Blue-Green Algae Task Force and the Office of Environmental Accountability and Transparency

• $82 million for Florida Forever and Florida State Parks ($50M for Florida Forever and $32M for Parks)

• $50 million for Beach Restoration.

If you have any interest or involvement in any of these specific subject areas or topics, you would be well-advised to plug remotely into the House and Senate Appropriation Committee and subcommittee deliberations as these budgetary issues are debated and ultimately finalized. Then DEP program managers, grant recipients and local governments will apply the budget allocations come July 1, as necessary.

Specific bill proposals

After press time for this column, there will be plenty of time for other natural resource and environmental regulatory proposed legislation to be prefiled in both the House and Senate. Then, as the Legislature kicks into gear after the opening bell, other bills could spin off various of the legislative budgetary items referenced above or as proposed committee bills.

So keep dialed in and watching for those developments if you are monitoring legislative activities this year. In the meantime, here are a few measures that will be up for consideration.

Senate Bill 546: Well Stimulation. The "Stop Fracking Act" would broadly ban "all stages of a well intervention performed by injecting fluids into a rock formation in order to propagate fractures in or dissolve the rock formation to increase production at an oil or gas well."

Senate Bill 64/House Bill 263: Reclaimed Water. This bill would require certain domestic wastewater utilities to submit to DEP by a specified date a plan for eliminating nonbeneficial surface water discharge within a specified timeframe; require domestic wastewater utilities applying for permits for new or expanded surface water discharges to prepare a specified plan for eliminating nonbeneficial discharges as part of its permit application; provide that potable reuse is an alternative water supply and that projects relating to such reuse are eligible for alternative water supply funding; and require counties, municipalities and special districts to authorize graywater technologies under certain circumstances and to provide incentives for the implementation of such technologies.

Senate Bill 336: Large Scale Agricultural Pollution Reduction Pilot Program. This proposed bill would create a pilot program within DEP as a partnership with dairy farms, and authorize DEP to grant general permits for certain department-approved large scale dairy farm pollution reduction pilot program participants.

The finale

With a new Senate President and House Speaker for 2021, changing committee chairpersons and several new members in both chambers, the steering currents and outcomes leading up to an early May legislative adjournment are tricky to forecast. One common denominator remains even over my years as an active participant in the process or watching from a more sedentary catbird seat: There will be unexpected surprises as well as a somewhat confusing and anxiety-provoking last week of activity when the finish line is in sight, but time is running out.

Which brings to mind another lesson learned from Wade Hopping. During those early sessions I worked, it was notable that a number of slightly grizzled, long-in-the-tooth lobbyists hung around the outer edges of the Capitol Rotunda. Wade always strategized to have client legislative goals wrapped up or poised for favorable results before that last week of session.

It seems that many of the participants I noticed were ex-trial lawyers who traded in their law practices for lobbying when the Florida Evidence Code was enacted. That spoiled a lot of their fun in court. So now their legislative specialty was springing traps they had set in "trial by ambush" gambits during that last week of session. Other versions of that strategy continue to persist even to this day.

So be careful out there and I wish us all well during 2021!

Bill Preston practices Florida environmental law from his office in Tallahassee. Contact him at bill@wprestonpa.com.

Environmental Services

FEDFILE

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proval under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act.

Florida agricultural department officials declined the requests for "special local needs" both times, noting that there is no evidence showing that Temik 15G works any better than chemicals already in use.

The clock ran out before the end of the Trump administration for EPA to rule on loosening aldicarb restrictions. It now falls to the Biden administration's incoming EPA administrator, Michael Regan, to oversee the decision.

NASA launches satellite to measure sea level. Late in 2020, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration launched its Sentinel-Six Michael Freilich satellite that contains instruments to accurately measure global sea level over the next five years.

At the end of the five-year period, a replacement satellite will be launched to provide a full decade of uninterrupted high precision sea level measurements.

The satellite, named after Michael Freilich, the former director of NASA's Earth Science division, uses emitted radar signals to accurately measure sea level within one inch of accuracy from an altitude of 800 miles.

This level of accuracy is important because multiple factors influence sea level rise. These include melting ice and expansion due to increasing temperatures of seawater.

These effects are not equal across the globe and even small changes in sea surface elevation are reflected in the velocity and other changes in sea currents.

The new satellite will become an important oceanographic and meteorological tool and data source.

HAB biomass as a potential source of biofuel. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for navigable waters of the U.S. and is increasingly expected to mitigate harmful algal blooms and their economic effects.

The corps' Engineers Research and Development Center focuses on harmful algal blooms as part of its Aquatic Nuisance Species Research Program.

Within that program is a research focus to produce something useful from cyanobacteria blooms biomass, named Harmful Algal Bloom Interception Treatment and Transformation System, or HABITATS.

HABITATS, in cooperation with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, is developing a three-stage process of interception, treatment and transformation of algal bloom organisms.

The first stage, interception, has been demonstrated in Lake Okeechobee by scientists and engineers from AECOM.

Literally tons of wet cells are easily harvested during a bloom. Physically removing them from the water removes nitrogen and phosphorus that is recycled from dying cells into new algae cells during a persistent bloom.

After AECOM harvested cells from its 2019 pilot study, scientists at PNNL performed laboratory studies to determine if the algal biomass could be converted to biocrude by subjecting the harvested cells to heat and pressure conditions that mimic the hydrothermal conditions in the ground responsible for the production of petroleum fuels in geological settings.

The initial experiments to produce biocrude were successful as proof of principle. The cyanobacteria biomass produced a hydrocarbon mixture that was more viscous and contained more solids than geological crude.

In the next stage, PNNL scientists will modify treatment conditions, including the use of catalysts to obtain diesel fuel grade biofuel from the biocrude.

Interim guidance on PFAS disposal. In mid-December, EPA released new interim guidance on the destruction and disposal of specific perfluorinated alkyl substances.

The new guidance considered waste materials such as firefighting chemicals and lubricants containing PFAS.

The guidance does not address the disposal of non-stick cookware or clothing/textiles—two classes of high-volume waste.

The EPA publication described "thermal treatment, landfill and underground injection technologies that may be effective in the destruction or disposal of PFAS and PFAS-containing materials."

To help ensure informed decision-making, noted the agency, "the technology-specific information describes uncertainties and how those uncertainties should be weighed given situation-specific factors, such as the waste's physical phase (liquid, solid or gas)."

The document ranked methods from "less uncertainty to more uncertainty," perhaps a new metric that EPA invented just for PFAS.

The document does not specify the use of any particular technique or method.

"With this interim guidance, EPA is providing important scientific information on available technologies that can assist with the destruction and disposal of PFAS," said EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. "This action is a critical part of our efforts to increase the understanding of PFAS and support our federal, state, tribal and local partners as we address these emerging chemicals of concern."

WasteDive, a trade magazine of the waste disposal industry, noted that "the waste industry is searching for clarity and solutions on how to handle PFAS … The guidance document is the first time the EPA has previewed possible solutions companies could implement and ranks them in order of perceived safety and viability, but it stops short of offering concrete regulations or standards."

The document described techniques that landfills use already, such as double-wall liners, leachate reduction techniques, and leak detection, but does not provide information on how much PFAS are disposed of and what materials they are used in.

In an August, 2020, article in *Chemosphere*, the Environmental Working Group criticized the EPA's "disposal guidelines" for PFAS.

The group characterized PFAS waste disposal methods as ineffective. The alternative they prefer is for EPA to ban or restrict the "nonessential" use of PFAS.

The EPA described the release of the new interim guidelines as "aggressive efforts under the PFAS Action Plan," despite the fact that the document contained little information that was new.

Latest TRI released. In January, the EPA released its 2019 Toxic Release Inventory summary. The tally of emissions of chemical wastes from permitted facilities reported that, in 2019, the release of toxic chemicals by industries, power plants and other sources decreased by nine percent. 2019 is the most recent year for which data have been fully analyzed.

In EPA Region 4, 91 percent of chemicals in waste subject to reporting were recycled, used for energy recovery or treated—rather than being released to the environment.

Also in Region 4, the one-year decrease in waste emissions was five percent.

The primary contributor to progress in reducing waste emissions was the significant reduction in chemical emissions to the air. Air emissions have decreased by 65 percent in Region 4 since 2007.

The decrease in the level of air emissions by electric utilities is the largest decrease on record.

Much of the reductions occurred in Region 4 due to the implementation of new source reduction activities, such as installing stack scrubbers in updated power generation plants.

Source reduction reporting rates are also among the highest in the computer/electronic products manufacturing sector. There, 19 percent of facilities reported source reduction activities.

This report is based on 2019 data provided by permit holders.

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no further action on the Section 404 permit application.

Staffing increases to meet what is anticipated to be a substantial expansion in DEP's administrative and permitting workload remain unclear.

In assuming Section 404 permitting authority, DEP specifically established the authorization to delegate permitting.

The consensus of legal opinion is that such delegation refers to transferring permitting authority to the state's five water management districts.

Considering how eager recent Florida governors have been to hire private consultants to take over administrative functions, attorneys and consultants may find rich new business opportunities in evaluating Section 404 permit applications, even if DEP officials sign the final approval.

Not only would that be quicker, but the state would retain no chain of accountability for the decision.

Recent Florida legislators have been more eager to increase fees than taxes for government services. Permit applicants should expect to pay more under DEP reviews regardless of whether they are done in-house or by third-party entities under a contractual arrangement.

Beyond permitting matters that affect applicants, the Section 404 transfer makes a couple of substantial changes to the legal framework supporting permitting and applications.

The federal Endangered Species Act has been the primary environmental protection measure that has prevented some permit applications for dredging and filling. Applicants who would damage critical habitat for endangered species found their permit applications denied.

An applicant has two ways to meet ESA requirements to modify their dredge and fill plan to protect such species.

The first is through an inter-agency consultation to obtain a Section 7 Incidental Take Permit. The other is to establish and follow a habitat conservation plan under ESA Section 10.

The ESA provisions affect federal agencies only. DEP-reviewed permits are not subject to inter-agency consultation.

During the process that led to the assumption of permitting, DEP performed a one-time programmatic review to determine what effect permitting assumption would have on 133 listed endangered species.

The review established a biological opinion that will be used to create additional procedural and permitting requirements to protected species in the absence of ESA requirements formally used.

Neither permit applicants nor environmental advocates can challenge decisions affected by DEP's additional procedures and permitting requirements based on the National Environmental Policy Act.

Florida does provide an administrative hearing process as a first step to challenging agency decisions, but it remains to be seen how this hearing process will affect the permit approval speed and influence interpretation of permitting requirements.

It may slow things down initially until sufficient precedents accumulate to guide common but ambiguous situations.

The Florida Bar takes a more legally-nuanced stance on Section 404 permitting that may provide more guidance for applicants. Their advice to permittees looking for an extension of a current permit may be useful to a subset of applicants.

In mid-January, Earthjustice led a coalition of environmental advocacy groups in filing a federal lawsuit against delegation of Section 404 permitting to the state.

Other members of the coalition party to the suit are the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, the Sierra Club, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, the Florida Wildlife Association, the Miami Waterkeeper and the St. Johns Riverkeeper.

The lawsuit, filed in the federal court of the District of Columbia, alleged that the transfer violated provisions of the Clean Water Act and the Administrative Procedures Act.

In the plea, Earthjustice said the transfer should be set aside because Florida's permitting program is not as stringent as that of federal law.

In addition, the transfer would establish unprecedented arrangements unlawful under federal rules, they claimed.

The lawsuit argued that Florida's assumption sets a precedent for the transfer of CWA Section 404 permitting authority to other states with the same practices not allowed under federal law.

The suit was filed on Jan. 14, 2021, and could remain in the court system for some time. In the meantime, DEP will begin reviewing Section 404 permits.

In response to a *Specifier* query, the DEP press office said that some Section 404 applications had been transferred from the corps to DEP.

The department has also received an unspecified number of Section 404 permit applications directly from applicants. But as of Jan. 28, Florida had not granted any dredge and fill permits.

DEP has issued 300 environmental resource permits and 752 ERP exemptions statewide since Dec. 22, 2020, according to the office.

LEADERSHIP

From Page 1

a unique blend of regulatory agency experience and a professional education and scientific background in environmental science.

He will be joined in the Biden administration by a group of notable and highly qualified advisors and administrators.

Gina McCarthy accepted the post of National Climate Advisor. She served as EPA administrator during President Obama's second term and, in the last four years, served as executive director of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Her specialty is air quality and climate change. As EPA administrator, she managed the establishment of the first U.S. standards for carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, the Clean Power Plan, which was blocked by the U.S. Supreme Court and later shelved by the Trump administration.

John Kerry, former secretary of state under the Obama administration, will serve as Biden's International Climate Envoy. Kerry represented the U.S. during negotiations for the Paris Climate Accord.

McCarthy's portfolio will be domestic climate issues while Kerry will represent the U.S. position internationally.

Pete Buttigieg, the incoming secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation, endorsed setting higher mileage standards to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during his presidential campaign. He is expected to play a major role the new administration's climate agenda.

LEADERSHIP

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SURVEY

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cess, especially in the last 10 years. The survey showed great program dedication from the contracted PRP companies. This resulted in an uptick in closures before funding was paused. The program has performed a large number of site assessments and many sites will soon enter the more expensive remediation stage of the cleanup. It will be important to have sufficient funding to get these sites started. Removing program impediments, such as lack of funding and overly managed sites, will lead to more closures.

13. Comment on the value of the industry to Florida, the progress made by the industry, and how taxpayers, site owners, lenders, real estate professionals and citizens benefit with clean water. Our communities expect and demand a clean environment—air, soil and water. Florida has some of the most precious water in the U.S. and our need to continue to have programs focused on clean water and environment is paramount to the future of Florida citizens, communities, tourism and growth.

Support questions:

14. Education of government officials regarding the economic and environmental benefits of the program is critical for the remainder of this fiscal year and into the future. Are you willing to send a call-to-action letter to your local legislators and communicate the urgency of this matter with them? (If so, contact one of the associations working together on this matter.) Industry professionals are ready to do what they need to do to get the program moving again with sustainable budgets, work to educate legislators as to the importance of the program, and try to get sustainable budgets to get all the needed work accomplished.

Again, my wish is that we were not in our current position. But I have never been more comforted with the efforts of the ICEA.

I have experienced at least four of these type of industry/monetary slowdowns over my history with the program. We have never had a better group of incentivized people working with DEP and the state Legislature to get our points across and to get us all back to do, cleaning up Florida's contaminated soil and groundwater!

Keep the faith. I AM!

Glenn MacGraw, PG, is a partner with Clean Asset Environmental in Tallahassee and can be reached at Glenn@cleanasset environmental.com.

NOTES

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Frederick Aschauer, Jr., was named as a shareholder at Lewis, Longman & Walker PA. Aschauer specializes in matters related to litigation and environmental regulation.

Prior to joining LLW in 2017, he served as general counsel for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Advanced Environmental Laboratories will be losing two long-timers who have each been with the lab for over 20 years.

At the end of February, Walter Kronz, vice president, will retire. Then in March, Kelly Bortle will retire as corporate quality control officer.

Kronz joined AEL in 2001 in the sales department. Over the past 20 years, he was instrumental in growing AEL to the largest environmental laboratory network in Florida with seven labs.

Bortle started at AEL in 1999 as a laboratory analyst. After moving to Quality Assurance, she developed company-wide QA processes, procedures and training.

"It is difficult to quantify just how much Walter and Kelly contributed over the years in building AEL into what the company is today," said AEL President Chuck Ged. "They both leave behind legacies with big shoes to fill."

In other AEL news, Brandon Beck, was promoted to vice president of operations and Todd Romero moved from his role as strategic accounts manager to director of client services. In addition, Robert Bartolo transitioned from LIMS and automation coordinator to corporate technical director.

Company news. Miller Environmental Group Inc. completed the acquisition of Monarch Environmental Services late last year. Miller provides environmental and emergency response services throughout the eastern U.S.

Montrose Environmental Group Inc. acquired Orlando-based MSE Group in January. MSE predominately provides environmental assessment, compliance, engineering and design services to the U.S. federal government. MSE will join the company's Remediation and Reuse Segment.

Tampa-based HSW Consulting LLC, formerly HSW Engineering Inc., was acquired by Hull & Associates. The transaction was facilitated by Round Table Capital Partners, a private equity firm.

LEADERSHIP

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Arizona Congressman Deb Haaland was nominated as secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. She has been an environmental activist and community organizer for the Democratic Party in Arizona.

More of a generalist than most other cabinet appointees, Haaland will oversee the administration of U.S. public lands and the U.S. Geological Survey, one of the nation's integral data science agencies.

About a month after naming his climate team, Biden rounded out his administration's top science leadership by naming Professor Eric Lander, PhD, of Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, and also as a presidential science adviser.

Lander has an impressive resume laden with first rank accomplishments in multiple fields. He is likely best known as one of the principals in the Human Genome Project.

By all accounts, the Biden administration has assembled a top notch team of experts to aggressively address the serious work of protecting public health and the environment.

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