



Restoring Everglades ecosystem best way to quench thirst

By JOHN ARTHUR MARSHALL, Special to the Daily News

Saturday, February 07, 2009

At the Town of Palm Beach political debates Jan. 26, a major topic was the need to address economic matters. What was demonstrated was the need for more environmental awareness and identification with the oft-cited fact that in Florida the environment is the economy.

Regarding improving the town water supply, it is very clear that restoring the Everglades ecosystem, and its historic cleansing marshes and swamps, is the most cost-effective approach to good, cheap drinking water. This also refreshes the aquifer from which much water is pumped, and will get clean fresh water to the West Palm Beach water plant, hence to the town, when done properly.

Anyone from New York where the Hudson River watershed was restored, an option chosen over high-tech approaches such as reverse osmosis to provide a big city drinking water, ought to recognize the natural systems approach as the citizen's choice. There are many spin-off benefits here as well.

Reverse osmosis, desalination plants and big pumps generate big energy requirements and big costs. They ought to be last resorts, when more economical approaches are available, and energy use and carbon emissions can be reduced by natural means, which also provides carbon sequestration.

Senior scientists have also concluded that restoration of the Everglades and its primary characteristic — sheet flow — is also a potential antidote to sea level rise and salt water intrusion. Both hold significant threats to the island, long-term. Here one needs to exercise the precautionary principle.

Beach renourishment by shoveling sand against the tide is geologically futile. The next storm washes the sand away before the cost is paid for. What is needed is a more aggressive approach using groins and breakwaters perpendicular to the shore. Such approaches would be much less intrusive on the reefs and turtle nesting, and have a much better effect on preventing beach erosion.

The Arthur R. Marshall Foundation has attempted to educate the candidates and incumbents. Two got a good perspective on a bus trip to the Everglades. Others would do well to make time to do the same. Clearly more big-picture understanding is needed about how the present approach may be an economic and ecologic disaster waiting to happen, and a great liability on future generations.

Gov. Charlie Crist has taken the natural approach as he noted in (a recent) speech to the Forum Club: Restore the missing link to revitalize the River of Grass and get multiple benefits far

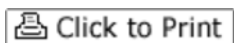
exceeding costs. Former Mayor Lesly Smith understands the implications here as well as anyone on the council, past or present. Both have exercised leadership by doing what's best for all.

Can the candidates and incumbents please give due consideration to a sustainable restoration and conservation approach by supporting Everglades restoration in a manner that will benefit all?

Mr. Marshall is chairman of the board for the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation & Florida Environmental Institute.

Find this article at:

<http://www.palmbeachdailynews.com/opinion/content/news/2009/02/07/EDITmarshallvoice0208.html>



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2008 Palm Beach Daily News. All rights reserved.