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Back-pumping into Lake O best option to restore supply

Tuesday, July 10, 2007

In response to "Forget back-pumping" (editorial, June 28): Water from the farms is cleaner than water in Lake Okeechobee and could help avert a water-supply disaster next spring. Lake Okeechobee recently was at its lowest level ever, and conditions north of the lake are so dry that there is little prospect of the lake returning to normal levels this year. Incredibly, a *Post* editorial responded to this issue with an out of-date position on back-pumping.

With no flow from the Kissimmee Basin to the lake for the past eight months and with Lake Kissimmee almost 2 feet below schedule, there is no prospect of flow any time soon. The South Florida Water Management District's latest projections show that we could enter next year's dry season with the lake 2 feet below where it was at the start of the drought. The prospect of a water supply disaster for Southeast Florida is real.

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This is not an issue just for the farms. Remember that just before the 2001 drought ended with heavy, late May rainfall, water utilities were forced to reduce water pressure to customers, nursery and landscape businesses were in trouble and large water-based businesses were hit with Phase III reductions. This year's drought forced West Palm Beach, which relies on Lake Okeechobee as a backup supply, to resort to mixing treated wastewater with water from the rock pits to meet residents' drinking-water demand.

Right now, we have one opportunity to help alleviate future drought damage. Capturing and pumping rainwater that falls south of Lake Okeechobee is the only man-made opportunity to add significant amounts of water to the lake at this critical juncture. Even in a dry summer, farms south of Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) produce substantial quantities of water that can be stored in the lake to provide additional water supplies for South Florida.

The assumption that farm water somehow will harm the lake is false. In fact, water leaving the farms has less phosphorus than water released from the lake to the farms. Specifically, water released from the lake at



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the S-2 and S-3 pumps has nearly 100 parts per billion more phosphorus than the water leaving the farms in those basins. Farm water in the EAA is cleaner than lake water.

As a result of farmers investing tens of millions of dollars over the past decade implementing best management practices to reduce phosphorus, water leaving the farms has much lower phosphorus levels than water that flows into the lake from all other sources, according to water-quality testing.

The Post's claims that farm chemicals would harm the lake for drinking-water supplies ignores the fact that decades of water-quality data show no such thing. Pahokee and South Bay's water treatment plants had issues with their antiquated treatment process that had nothing whatsoever to do with farm chemicals. In fact, both plants have replaced chlorine with chloramine and fixed the problem.

In time of extreme drought, it is absurd to object to storing the cleanest water available while praying for rain north of the lake to provide it with water containing high concentrations of phosphorus. Furthermore, the decision to capture this cleaner water must be made now. The South Florida Water Management District can add as much as a foot to Lake Okeechobee's level if it pumps from July through October. Every month we delay is a lost opportunity to add cleaner water to the lake.

ROBERT UNDERBRINK, vice president

King Ranch

South Bay

Florida set to build upon Live Earth's great success

Last Wednesday, we celebrated our independence from tyranny. We only can hope that someday soon, we can celebrate our independence from fossil fuels and the threat of global warming. The enormous turnout for the weekend's Live Earth concerts ("Live Earth beats climate drum," Sunday) and the upcoming Florida Summit on Global Climate Change ("Crist set to unveil greener future," also Sunday) should further this goal and, we hope, spur both state leaders and Congress to take action.

Scientists warn that we must reduce emissions of the pollutants that cause global warming within 10 years if we are to avoid the worst impacts, including increased drought and stronger tropical storms. With the right policies in place, we can take this daunting challenge and turn it into a tremendous opportunity. We need to make our vehicles go farther on a gallon of gas, make our buildings more energy-efficient and use more renewable energy such as wind and solar. In addition to reducing global warming, these policies will create jobs, improve air quality and protect our coastline from drilling.

Under the leadership of Gov. Crist, Florida already is acting to prevent new sources of global warming pollution. In Congress, South Florida Democratic Reps. Ron Klein, Robert Wexler and Alcee Hastings are making a difference by cosponsoring the Safe Climate Act, a bill that would harness American ingenuity to achieve science-based reductions in global warming pollution. Rep. Tim Mahoney should do the same.

Florida is in the cross-hairs of the impacts from global warming, and it is up to our leaders to take the finger off the trigger by supporting the Safe Climate Act.

MARK FERRULO

executive director

Environment Florida

Tallahassee

Sunrise Theatre a success; it's just wobbly

In response to "Ailing Sunrise Theatre turns to Lyric officials" (June 28), please consider:

The Sunrise Theatre is an important Treasure Coast cultural and economic asset in the same sense as our museums, parks, libraries, golf courses and baseball stadiums that directly impact quality of life. From that viewpoint, the theater warrants and deserves public support.

Since it reopened in January 2006, there have been more than 75 events there, with 65,000 people through the doors and in excess of \$2 million in ticket sales. The theater is not ailing; it is experimenting with programming, management and use in an effort to better define its niche in the industry.

Turning to Lyric Theater Chief Operating Officer John Wilkes and its executive director, John Loesser, is not an afterthought. They have helped off and on during the reconstruction period, and we believe them to be the best talent available for making the Sunrise Theatre the most successful it can be. Our theater is growing and a little wobbly as everything tends to be early in life.

DENNIS W. BEACH,

city manager

Fort Pierce

Plame had as much service as Libby

The Bush administration was so intent on going to war in Iraq that officials had no compunction in outing an undercover agent for this country and putting in jeopardy all her contacts in other countries.

They talk about all the years of service of the man involved in the outing, former vice presidential adviser I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby ("Libby spared prison term," July 3). What about all the years of service to this country by Valerie Plame and her husband, Joseph Wilson, who had been a career diplomat for more than 20 years and at one time was our ambassador to Iraq and knew intimately people and conditions in that country?

What a waste and gross injustice.

JEAN KRESS

Stuart

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