

# Bad news creates opportunity

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The listing of the Caloosahatchee River among the 10 most endangered rivers in America in 2006 ought to give some extra juice to the fight to protect the river and its estuary - and, we hope, to keep alive legislation that will give that fight a higher priority.

In a report released Wednesday, American Rivers, a nonprofit advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., ranked the Caloosahatchee No. 7 on its list of America's 10 most endangered rivers. This list, announced each year with considerable hoopla, is a good device for publicizing problems like those facing the Caloosahatchee. It adds weight to an already vigorous campaign to STOP THE MUCK, to use the slogan of The News-Press Opinion page.

The Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association and Conservancy of Southwest Florida nominated the Caloosahatchee for the list. The river's recent tribulations, largely the result of the release of nutrient-laden water from Lake Okeechobee and the resulting proliferation of algae, were so marked as to get the river listed the first time it was nominated.

## **ACT NOW**

So it's a good time for our readers to take action. One way is to urge the governor, the speaker of the Florida House and the president of the Senate to come to the aid of House Bill 1241, sponsored by Rep. Trudi Williams, R-Fort Myers, and its companion legislation in the Senate, SB 2586, sponsored by Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton.

The bills are struggling through committees in both houses, and with a little over a week left in the session, two things are needed: Gov. Jeb Bush's opposition needs to be overcome, and the speaker and Senate president need to be urged to make sure these bills reach the floor for a vote. What better occasion for a push than the listing of the Caloosahatchee as one of the most environmentally imperiled rivers in the nation?

The legislation creates an independent Caloosahatchee-St. Lucie Rivers Corridor Advisory Council to study the freshwater releases from the lake, and other sources of nutrients that have caused the devastating algae blooms in the Caloosahatchee and its estuary. Similar problems have developed in the St. Lucie River and its estuary on the east coast.

## **NEW VIEW NEEDED**

The governor is said to be worried about cost and duplication of authority. But the council would be around for a mere seven months or so and cost an estimated \$150,000 (out of a \$70 billion state budget). It is advisory only, reporting to the governor and Legislature.

Its members, appointed by the governor, the speaker and the Senate president, would provide an entirely new perspective on the problems and solutions in this crisis, representing a wide array of interests but dominated by none, and under the thumb of no agency.

It would be independent and focused on problems that have traditionally received a low priority from the South Florida Water Management District, based in West Palm Beach and responsible for an immense jurisdiction. This council would bring high-level attention to a problem that sweeps across the state.

The water management district has an ambitious and commendable agenda of projects for environmental restoration in South Florida, but we need an independent look at whether our area is getting a high enough priority.

So exploit this opportunity to push our leaders hard, now. It won't take too many repeats of the recent devastation to create a lasting catastrophe in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie systems.