

Letter to the editor: Don't believe the argument that clean-up strategies are working

July 31, 2006

I'm just stupefied by the letter to the editor ("Florida's strategies to clean up Everglades are working," July 24) from Coleen Castille of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Carole Wehle of the South Florida Water Management District. Let's look at the truth:

1. Lake Okeechobee is near total collapse with phosphorous levels off the scale.
2. Toxic blue-green algae is present in Lake Okeechobee and is just waiting for the first big releases to come our way.
3. Seventy percent of dolphins in the Indian River lagoon have cancerous lesions.
4. A recent study from Harbor Branch Oceanographic concluded that the river's algae and fecal problems are directly related to lake discharges.
5. Last year the river was closed to humans for four months because of high fecal counts that still exist.

Phosphorous levels are too high in the lake and estuary for three reasons:

- 1) Back pumping from the sugar fields;
- 2) Discharges from the 20-plus industrial size dairies and other farm operations above Lake Okeechobee; and
- 3) Urban runoff from developments north of the lake.

And to profess that the DEP and SFWMD are doing their job is a sad joke on the public. A recent report by PEER (www.peer.org) reported that pollution control in Florida is a joke. A recent DEP employee climate survey showed 45 percent of the enforcement staff didn't feel safe to speak up about violations, 36 percent feared reprisals if they did, and nearly 50 percent said there is no effective leadership.

The motto of the South Florida Water Management District is "Managing and protecting our regions water resources." If you believe that, you also believe O.J. Simpson is still looking for his wife's killer.

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