

## **Polk County Water Stakeholder Meeting December 8, 2009**

Gary Fries from the Polk County Utilities welcomed everyone and thanked them for taking time to discuss this important local and regional issue.

Shelley Lauten, President, *myregion.org* and John Prowell, Member ULI TAPS Committee, provided a brief overview of *myregion.org* and the Regional Water Strategy Project currently being undertaken under the leadership of the Central Florida Congress of Regional Leaders and the three water management districts in the region.

### **Initial Comments and Questions:**

Suggestion that it is important to continue conversation beyond the seven-county borders and go further west to include Tampa Bay Region. Polk County looks at Polk County as part of the answer.

Question about the difference between supply assessment and actual future demand. In perfect world they would be the same, but that is not typically the case.

Do the WMD's include conservation when determining future water demand deficits? Depends, based on the district.

As listed in the Polk County Comprehensive Water Supply Plan 2009 (Polk WSP), Polk County has a 27 MGD public supply deficit in 2030 based on recent SWFWMD demand projections. Updated deficit demand projection numbers will be available in SWFWMD's 2010 Regional Water Supply Plan (RWSP). Conservation will also be addressed in the 2010 RWSP, however the conservation numbers will be presented in a separate table.

What is the availability of the Kissimmee River for surface water? Appears that there is little water available except around Lake Toho area, which would likely be used by Osceola County. Question is if there is enough water to be a feasible project.

Problem statement is very similar to what Polk County asked in their county wide program. Important to look at balance between economically sound and environmentally sustainable.

Should eco-tourism be included in the problem statement? Can be subset under industry and the environment.

### **Group Exercise:**

Participants were broken up into four groups with each group given a question based around the following premise:

*It's the year 2050 and Central Florida is recognized as international leaders managing its regional water supply in an environmentally and economically sustainable way.*

Each group provided input into the big issues and what would have to be done to achieve the stated goal for 2050 while also providing barriers to reach the preferred future. After 20 minutes, each group reported on their question and then any additional points or comments were provided by other participants.

Below are summaries of what came out of the entire exercise:

**Question 1: What did the region do to provide for an economically and environmentally sustainable supply of ground water?**

Encouraged coastal communities to develop alternative water supplies, thus reducing their need for groundwater and minimizing salt water intrusion in central counties.

Counties and municipalities inter-connected, allowing water to be moved around and relieving pressure on particular sites.

Created “Beltran Backbone” or Polk County Regional Pipeline Grid, named after Polk County’s consultant. The grid will connect the east and west with water supply sources and take pressure off the center part of Polk County to find water supply sources.

Land Use Transition wells or mitigation wells are a viable option for groundwater, converting agriculture wells to domestic use wells, pending retirement of the existing wells and compliance with District requirements.

**Barriers:**

Governance issues. Ensuring that equity was maintained. Whoever had the most usage had the most cost. Proportional share.

Need for continued state funding to be able to accomplish the “Beltran Backbone.”

**Question 2: What did the region do to provide for an environmentally and economically sustainable supply of ground water?**

Build reservoirs for groundwater storage.

Create a multi-jurisdictional groundwater authority. This removed city and county parochialism.

United with other authorities.

Public education was big part of success. Must get people to understand the importance of conservation and of being cooperative with your neighbors.

ASR Wells for storage.

Need to store water when there are wet times.

**Barriers:**

Groundwater is something you can’t see, so it is a challenge to deal with politically.

Polk County is the headwaters for three river systems however large quantities of water supply are available downstream in other counties instead of within Polk County’s boundaries.

Money and funding.

Regional cooperation.

Lack of large water supply resources, particularly in Polk County.

Difficulty in using ASR technology because of arsenic issues when water is withdrawn.

**Question 3: What did the region do to provide for an environmentally and economically sustainable supply of reuse water to reduce overall demand?**

*Maximized Supply By:*

Regionalizing wastewater treatment facilities with an interconnected system.

Increased the level of treatment beyond current standards to illustrate that it is a viable and clean potential water source.

Conversion of septic tanks to more central sewage systems.

Increased the use of AWS by augmentation and storage.

*Maximize Use By:*

Identified who would be the most efficient users. Golf Courses, Power Plants, Residential.

Management through education and other procedures to increase efficiency.

Rate structures helped control the demand.

**Barriers:**

Barrier related to septic tanks is primarily an economic issue.

What is injected in ground in Polk is significant for entire state, so it is important to regulate what is pumped into the ground.

Consistent regulatory guidance.

Funding.

Governance and equitability of costs.

**Question 4: What did the region do to reduce demand for water in an environmentally and economically sustainable manner?**

Reduced landscaping through codes and irrigation design.

Need for acceptance on new landscaping standards.

Soil moisture sensors and other technology advances to reduce demand.

Water restrictions are effective, but hard to enforce. Need to encourage people to do things right through education, rather than in enforcement.

Education and outreach for kids is effective.

Green construction.

Reduce lot/lawn sizes.

Alternative power sources that help reduce water use (reduces cooling towers).

Retrofit program.

Need for annual inspections of irrigation systems.

Need for water restrictions that are consistent across the region.

**Barriers:**

Changing human behavior.

Convincing builders to do things differently while keeping marketability.

Economics/disincentive for the public utilities.

Public acceptance, changing what people do.

Jurisdictional constraints. Equitable costs and regional collaboration. Subsidies for desalination for the coast that levels playing field so coast can use desalination and center of state can use groundwater.

**Other Comments:**

Often question of public perception about some uses.

Need to have communication with the water utilities.

**Specific Polk County Issues:**

Consider the fact that Polk County doesn't have much surface water available, primarily groundwater. There is some potentially available, but it is very expensive. The Green Swamp and Peace River both flow into water systems that are the water supplies for other places, so they are not available for reuse. This water is used by communities both to the West and South of Polk County.

Polk County still has a very large and viable agricultural piece. So agricultural water supply is still very important.

You may not see agricultural demand decrease much in Polk County, while you see an increase in residential land.

In last 15 years the amount of land used for citrus has decreased, but the amount of citrus produced has increased.

There is a major bottling company in Polk County. Leads to questions about industry and water rights. How much water are they entitled to have?

SFWMD and SWFWMD are now working closely with the County on water strategies ("Polk County Comprehensive Water Supply Plan" 2009). There was once a significant amount of distrust between the WMDs and the cities and county however, over time there was a trust created.

During the development of the Polk WSP, the project team didn't try to tell people what to do. Instead, the team asked Polk County's cities and municipalities to make choices and be involved where they thought it was beneficial.

SWFWMD developed a utility outreach program in Polk County with goal of meeting with all utilities in the county to discuss the Polk WSP and ensure the cities and municipalities understand the plan. The cities and municipalities were involved from the beginning of the plan development. Getting their input was helpful and created buy-in.

WMDs have funding available that can steer cities and counties in the right direction.

### **Close of Meeting**

Commissioner Johnson closed meeting by discussing the importance of addressing issues regionally through the Congress of Regional Leaders. Want to create and keep focus on working together regionally. Eventually should lead to some very good regional solutions that help move everyone forward.

Commissioner Reed expressed a pleasure that water has become a major issue being addressed regionally and super regionally.