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OPINION

Let's revisit water management district fees; concentrate on water quality issues | Opinion

Vince Lamb, Guest columnist Published 4:00 p.m. ET April 17, 2020 | Updated 3:20 p.m. ET April 19, 2020



FLORIDA TODAY's Isadora Rangel discusses the Indian River Lagoon with MJ Waters, past chair of the Indian River Lagoon Coalition. Florida Today

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Floridians' support for clean water is longstanding, with Brevard voters consistently voting to fund solutions. We live here because we love the ocean, the parks, the Indian River Lagoon and all the opportunities these natural resources provide us. Our citizens voted in favor of the Water and Land Legacy Amendment (2014), the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program and the Brevard County Save Our Lagoon Sales Tax initiative (2016).

A recent poll by FAU confirmed that statewide support for clean water is strong throughout the state and across political parties. And most Floridians say they are worried about water quality issues in the state, and that government at all levels needs to do more to address the problems. And most residents say they are willing to pay slightly more to fix the water quality problems facing the state.

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The Brevard Indian River Lagoon Coalition, together with the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County, commissioned Florida Atlantic University (FAU) to conduct a statewide poll of voter's views on the quality of Florida's waterways. More than 81% of respondents agree or strongly agree that state and local governments need to do more to protect water quality in lakes, rivers, springs and estuaries. Impressively, "Overall 62% of Floridians are willing to pay \$2 per month to help pay for projects to clean up our waterways," according to FAU.

While Florida's budget will be challenging due to the economic effects of the COVID-19 virus, water quality remains a critical issue for the state's future residents and visitors. In order to address water quality issues across the state, the Brevard Indian River Lagoon Coalition and the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County are on record in favor of partially restoring water management district fees. Both coalitions propose a modest rate increase of .10 mills, or an average of \$1.59 per month for a median-priced Florida household.



Vince Lamb, chairman of the Brevard Indian River Lagoon Coalition, is well known for his environmental work with the lagoon and sea turtles and is a recognized nature photographer. (Photo: Malcolm Denemark/FLORIDA TODAY)

The fee proposal would partially restore the cuts that were made in 2010, which could have been used to prevent increases in algae blooms, fish kills, and water pollution problems across the state. It is estimated the coalitions' proposal would raise approximately \$160 million a year to be used as a 50% match for cities and counties to implement projects for water pollution problems like septic system to sewer line conversions, upgrading municipal sewerage treatment plants, and for finding alternatives to applying sewer sludge (bio solids) for use as agriculture fertilizer.

These numbers are encouraging and reflect the passion of people to hold on to the beauty and health of our lands and waters. Our resolve to do this needs our personal commitment in terms of our own behaviors, funding and legislative action. During this year's legislative session in Tallahassee, bills authored by our own legislators Sen. Debbie Mayfield and Rep Randy Fine passed, providing the potential to significantly reduce pollution from septic tanks, wastewater treatment facilities and stormwater discharges. Both measures were backed by the governor. While these bills represent meaningful steps in the right direction, much more is needed. Without specific regulations, the pollution of our waters will continue to harm our economy, our health and the quality of life people moved here to enjoy.

More: [Advocates say it's time to see how well tax to clean Indian River Lagoon is doing](#)

Florida's water management districts are uniquely qualified to administer grant programs utilizing these funds. This regional approach to funding should allow each region to address high priority needs. Guidelines need to be developed to ensure to ensure that Florida taxpayers receive the best return on these funds in terms of pollution reduced or removed.

Our economy and environment are interwoven, providing jobs, recreation and attracting visitors from throughout the world. We need to preserve the unique waters for the benefit of all, including generations to come.

Vince Lamb is chairman of the Brevard Indian River Lagoon Coalition.

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