

Desalination vs. Reclaimed Debate Heats Up

Reclaimed, from Page 1A

groundwater withdrawal stresses, and increased potable water usage on Longboat Key.

St. Denis has been encouraging the use of reclaimed water as a possible alternative to using potable water on the Key.

In the study, three naturally occurring water constituents are instrumental in defining the "quality" of the groundwater for irrigation use.

The key parameters are chloride, total dissolved solids (TDS), and sulfate. TDS is a measurement of dissolved solids including chlorides, sulfates, calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, and bicarbonates.

Poor water quality — namely saline water — causes stress and injury to plants. Soluble salts, such as chloride and sulfate salts, can impede plant growth, according to this report. The accumulation of these salts in plants and soil cause dehydration and nutrient uptake deficiencies. The desired chloride and TDS levels for irrigation water are less than 350 milligrams per liter.

Testing was done by the Town, and groundwater quality information was also gathered from existing Swiftmud databases.

The outcome was that in the four quadrants of the Key, the northwest and northeast portions had elevated TDS levels, but were within the desired irrigation thresholds.

However, the southwest and southeast portions of the Key had TDS levels above the desired irrigation thresholds.

"The southwest and southeast portions of the Town of Longboat Key have the greatest amount of permitted groundwater withdrawal, permitted wells, and the poorest groundwater quality," according to that 2002 study. "Historically, groundwater wells on Longboat Key have experienced a general decline in water quality. Continued use of the groundwater resources as practiced today may lead to further decline of groundwater quality."

Local Opposition

A resident, Virginia Saunders, wrote a letter to St. Denis and the Town commissioners this week because she was worried that the reclaimed water could be a danger to the health of the community.

Saunders cited references from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection; the Water, Science, and Technology Board of the National Research Council; and Manasota 88, a watchdog organization.

We included Saunders' letter in this week's Longboat Key News.

Saunders also referred to an article written by Al Meyerhoff and William Schultz in the Sarasota Herald Tribune on Sept. 28.

Meyerhoff and Schultz wrote a string of scathing remarks concerning the tributaries of Salinas River, which is "a system of virtual sewers from agricultural runoff and flooding," and have also made an allegation that "since 1995, there have been 20 other E. coli poisonings of spinach and lettuce, eight in Salinas Valley — where nearly every waterway violates national clean-water requirements."

Guy Plunkett, who is a scientist at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, says it's no surprise that cow excrement makes people sick. It only takes as few as 10 to 100 E. coli bacteria to infect a human being.

And, it is true, that the Environmental Protection Agency reported that livestock operations pollute our waterways faster than all other industrial sources combined.

Go for Desalination

To Longboat Key Commissioners and Town Manager:

I cannot believe that you voted to renew discussions with Sarasota on reclaimed water. (Cheers to Commissioners Siekmann, O'Connor, and Whatmough for voting against it). Let me again bring some warnings to your attention.

A letter from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection dated May 2000 says, "From a health perspective, the key issue that must be addressed pertains to the potential for contamination of the aquifers by reclaimed water. A number of factors need to be investigated such as: viability of pathogens, presence of viruses, transport and die-off rate of pathogens in ground water, and infective doses of pathogens."

This issue is not only the quality of the reclaimed water used for irrigation, but the potential for this water to contaminate the drinking water aquifers and wells."

The Water, Science, and Technology Board of the National Research Council states that reuse projects should be an "option of last resort" due to the many uncertainties and potential health risks.

Manasota 88, an excellent watchdog organization, has this to say: "Manasota 88 opposes the use of reclaimed water for irrigation purposes. Reclaimed water has not been demonstrated to

be environmentally acceptable and is a threat to public health and safety. Domestic waste-water has the potential to contain pharmaceuticals, endocrine disrupters, and other industrial and medical wastes."

Did you know that up to 90% of drugs taken by humans are passed into waste water and many are highly water soluble? These same drugs continue to appear in water as it leaves the treatment plant, including estrogens, antibiotics, analgesics, beta-blockers and many, many more.

The recent news of E-coli contaminating the spinach supply should make you stop and think twice. See attached article (*Editor's note: This Sarasota Herald-Tribune Sept. 28 article by Al Meyerhoff and William Schultz is mentioned in the article written by Lia Martin on Page 1 on reclaimed water.*)

The city of Cape Coral on the Gulf Coast, where population has grown from 12,000 to 85,000 in the past 25 years, is almost entirely dependent on desalinated water for drinking. The city has one of the biggest desalination plants in the state (of Florida).

Why doesn't the Town of Longboat Key team up with the golf course owner and go for desalination? Think about it!

Virginia Saunders
Longboat Key

It is also true that Salinas Valley waterways including the Salinas River, Gabilan Creek, Towne Creek, Tembladero Slough and the Old Salinas River Estuary are known carriers of E. coli bacteria.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the FBI worked together to find the source of the E. coli which contaminated spinach. It was traced back to San Juan Batista and Salinas, California.

They say it could be cattle feces runoff, worker practices or any number of things.

What is known is that for decades, if not generations, the Salinas Valley — which is one of the major breadbaskets in the world — has produced crops safely by irrigation practices using reclaimed water.

Reclaimed water is piped in, and is safe from local contamination from cattle.

Reclaimed water used in irrigation is not on the FBI or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration list.

Reclaimed Water in Action

Monterey, Calif. is located in the middle of some of the most touted agricultural land in the world. It is also known inter-

nationally because of John Steinbeck, the author. He wrote about Salinas Valley and the people who farmed it.

Water has been a precious commodity for decades now, and irrigating their farmland is becoming progressively dicey.

Keith Israel is the general manager for Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency. They provide reclaimed water from its treatment plant to farmers in north Monterey County.

"Tell the public you're watering your crops with reclaimed sewage and it makes the vegetables a hard sell," Israel told a reporter at a local paper this week. Israel feels the pressure since the E. coli bacteria scare in spinach. The bacterial content of water used for irrigating crops is more of a public issue than ever.

Israel still insists that recycled water is safe for crops.

The agency's water irrigates 12,000 acres in the county as part of a program that began with studies and field testing since 1998 by a task force of 40 scientists, farmers and health officials. His scientists worked with the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Health Services to

get the data to substantiate reclaimed water irrigation, he says.

It is used for landscape and golf course watering in Marina, Seaside, Del Rey Oaks and Monterey.

In Truckee, Calif, the sanitation agency is a major contributor of reclaimed water and is undergoing a \$66 million expansion to accommodate new development. Gen. Manager Craig Woods told the Lake Tahoe Bonanza they have three goals: to increase capacity from 7.4 million gallons of wastewater per day to 9.6 million gallons, install new equipment to remove nitrogen from the system because it's better for water quality, and develop an additional way of separating water from solid material.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District in California says they save 5.5 billion gallons of water every year. This is what they say they accomplish by reclaiming their water: they conserve their drinking water, they reduce pollution from running into San Francisco Bay, and they provide water for irrigation and industrial purposes.

What the Pros Say

"Water reuse involves taking domestic wastewater, giving it a high degree of treatment, and using the resulting high-quality reclaimed water for a new, beneficial purpose. Extensive treatment and disinfection ensure that public health and environmental quality are protected," is the philosophy expounded by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on their Web site.

DEP Secretary Colleen Castille says that by "reusing water, we are reducing the demand on our surface waters, recharging groundwater and saving taxpayer dollars by eliminating the need to develop additional water sources."

This is a fact. Water is a precious commodity and expensive.

This is a fact. Reclaimed water has been used for years to not only irrigate lawns, but to irrigate vegetables.

This is a fact. Reclaimed water is not only used over potable water because it is less expensive, and it is a way to conserve drinking water, which is fast becoming a luxury even in this county.

Is It a Solution for Longboat?

St. Denis seems to think so.

Three commissioners — Bob Siekmann, Peter O'Connor, and Jeremy Whatmough — are against it.

The question has to be asked.

What are the reasons for not wanting to use reclaimed water to irrigate on Longboat Key? Is it the expense, or are there other considerations which need to be investigated?

Lia Martin will look at the commissioners and Mayor Joan Webster's response in the Longboat Key News next week.

Café On The Bay Opens Tonight

If you are really lucky — or have already made a reservation — tonight you will be dining at a brand-new Café on the Bay at their brand-new location in the Centre Shops at 5350 Gulf of Mexico Drive.

They open at 5 p.m. tonight for dinner.

While I was there on Thursday, former patrons were pleading with manager Ken Parsons to please let their lady's group sit in the little front room reserved for business meetings, or that special party.

Immediately after Parsons handled their concerns, a couple walked in worried there would not be room for them on Friday...

Remember, Café on the Bay has been

feeding and pampering Longboat Key residents and tourists alike for the past 11 years.

Habits die hard.

These are the facts when you are trying to consider where to eat tonight:

Chef Keith Daum, who worked at Café L' Europe years ago, will be the restaurant's new chef. Need I say more about the food?

They have a cozy bar tucked into an intimate corner. The restaurant has an outside dining area with a pastoral garden view, and a newly remodeled interior, which looks like the inside of a very elegant, wonderful yacht. There are paintings

lining the walls from Abbott Galleries on St. Armand's Circle, which will be rotated every two weeks.

Of course, the famous photographic mural by photographer Stephen LeBlanc is on the back wall of the boats and docks of the Moorings. While you are sitting there, you decided whether or not it is real or not, especially after that special glass of wine.

All I can say is I'll be the one sitting at the bar enjoying that glass of Coppola Bianco Pinot Grigio from Monterey, California toasting your arrival.

Ciao!