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RIVER NEWS

Serving Tampa, Temple Terrace and Hillsborough County

WATER SUPPLY STRATEGY WOULD IMPACT MANATEES' HISTORIC ACCESS TO SULPHUR SPRINGS LAGOON



Imagine your favorite restaurant closing, one you depend on for food, drink and where you generally feel comfortable and safe. Manatees have such a spot in Sulphur Springs at the spring lagoon, one they have enjoyed year-round for decades if not longer. But that could come to an end soon if water managers have their way. A plan to raise the weir structure that prevents the backwash of salty river water and enter the lagoon is being considered so that as more water is diverted from Sulphur Spring at certain times then the river, at high flow, would still be prevented from flowing into the lagoon area. Raising the weir structure would also prevent manatees access in the future to a special spot they depend on being available.

Manatees are an endangered species. Threats from passing motor crafts, loss of vegetation to feed on and diminishing freshwater supplies all play a part in creating conditions that jeopardize these marine mammals being a part of our ecological future.

Anecdotal reports of manatees by the public in the Hillsborough River/Sulphur Springs area have been noted for years. This area of the river plays host to manatees year-round and upstream of the spring is an important birthing area for manatees

With the Sulphur Springs Pool facility adjacent to the lagoon, many people have had the pleasure of seeing manatees visit the lagoon, laze in the cool water, drink and then slip quietly back to the river. A variety of manatees have visited the lagoon; most recently a pod of 4 including a new born calf has been observed. Life guards at the pool state manatees are frequent visitors to the lagoon. The lagoon also serves as a critical warm-water refuge during winter cold snaps, a place for manatees to take cover in the warmth of the spring's temperate outfall.

This kind of opportunity, where the public can see wildlife in its natural state, in the heart of the city, should be carefully protected so that future generations can enjoy the same wonder of seeing a manatee, and maybe a calf, paddle into the lagoon for a slow lazy swim and to rest before heading back out into the river. Opportunities like this cannot be replaced or reproduced. They are gifts from nature. They excite and interest people and move them to learn more and do more for the environment. They are special moments.

There may be ways to sensitively accommodate both water supply needs and continued manatee use of the Sulphur Springs lagoon. Loss of this habitat area would add to the state-wide trend in manatee habitat destruction, something we as a community would come to regret.

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300+ DAYS and SHIFTING WATERS

Since October 4, 2006, there has been no freshwater inflow into the lower Hillsborough River from upstream of the dam. That translates roughly into over 300 days of no flow of freshwater into the lower Hillsborough River with the exception of minimal storm water contributions during spotty rain events that happened downstream of the dam. This number, 300, has been appearing with more frequency since records have been kept. This is due lack of rainfall in some years. Freshwater flow to the lower river has also decreased because demand by water managers for more water. This has kept the reservoir level lower than the 22.5-foot top of dam flow stage. Both these factors have become more prevalent in recent times, but help is on the way.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District, in an agreement worked out with the City of Tampa, Tampa Bay Water and Friends of the River, will soon adopt a rule that will require a minimum of 20+cfs of freshwater to the lower river. Interestingly enough, none of the water is "new" to the lower river with the exception of some water from the Tampa by-pass canal that may or may not have been introduced to the river anyway. This agreement proposes to shift Sulphur Springs, Blue Sink, and by-pass water from where they now enter the lower river system and focus a portion of these flows at the face of the dam, creating a minimum flow that is to benefit a very limited portion of the lower Hillsborough River basin with freshwater inflow. In this plan, Sulphur Springs and the by-pass canal will pay an ecological price for these diversions of water. The District's mandate in setting minimum flows (mfl) was to prevent further harm to ALL water bodies, not pick and choose which ones can suffer further degradation to meet the mfl needs and keep water suppliers satisfied. While it is worthy to note the attempt to establish an mfl for the lower river, the state's directed intent and outcome in this case falls short.

This situation is like having three hundred dollars in your wallet or purse consisting of different denominations of bills. You can shift the bills back and forth, in order of ascending or descending currency value, or leave them all jumbled up. You still only have three hundred dollars. No more, no less. You haven't added any value. The same principle holds true in the proposed mfl rule for the lower river. While in trying to "enhance" the use or value of the water sources available to meet an mfl, those sources aren't improved as proposed. In some cases they will be diminished and that shouldn't be supported.

By not adding any new money to your wallet or finding a way to meet a new minimum flow without waters that are already part of the lower Hillsborough River's system, potentially harming existing downstream water sources, where is the gain? Seems like no-flow days, or a lack of cash flow, will really remain the same, just not as apparent as it has been in the recent past.



SUMMER RAINS FINALLY KICK IN TO ADD WATER/FLOW TO RIVER

Weather conditions that help to build daily thunderstorms unleashed a near daily barrage of rainfall in the Hillsborough River basin over the last half of July. Water levels in the river were severely low in June and most of July shrinking away from the shoreline on a daily basis. June rainfall averaged about an inch below the 7-inch average. Boat ramps and docks stuck out far from the nearest waterline. Rock outcroppings appeared that had not been seen in decades. The rainfall pattern that usually appears in early June just didn't materialize. Water managers were extremely worried. The City of Tampa was forced to purchase millions of gallons of water from Tampa Bay Water to supplement the dwindling water supply in the reservoir. Hopefully, all that is behind us for the time being. July rainfalls have averaged 5.18 inches so far, more than 3 inches shy of normal. For the year, the Hillsborough River basin is almost 9 inches short of the 28 inches that normally fall by mid July. That's on top of a 9-inch shortfall for 2006.

So be glad when you see the clouds gather and rains pepper the area. With some luck we can make it through this recent water crisis. To do that, we will need lots more rain and we also need to conserve what water we have. Just because it rains doesn't mean the water shortage is over. It just means its over for the time being.



Conditions in June at the Temple Terrace Riverhills Park boatramp demonstrates just how low the water levels were in the river. Similar conditions were found further upstream at other public boat ramps located at Rotary Park and USF Riverfront Park. Needless to say few if any boats were launched from these sites in the early summer. Today, conditions have improved and the ramps are usable once again.

YOUR River Board wants to hear from YOU! Call the River Hotline at 272-5940 or visit our website at www.hillsboroughriver.org



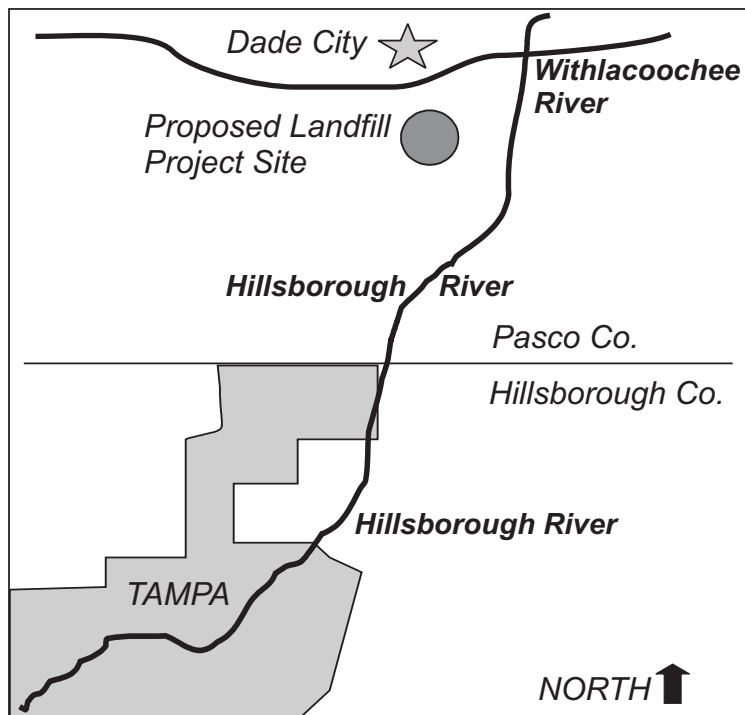
Pasco Landfill Near River Raises Water Quality Concerns

A proposed Class I landfill in eastern Pasco County has raised concerns about water quality impacts that could affect the Hillsborough River and the aquifer. Permitting for the landfill known as Angelo's Aggregate Materials, is under review by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The initial permit application was recently deemed incomplete by the FDEP and numerous questions remain to be answered before the permitting process can move forward.

The proposed landfill's location is near to the headwaters of the Hillsborough River, Tampa's primary water supply source, south and east of Dade City. Tampa's Mayor Iorio sent a letter expressing concerns about the site's location and the potential for sinkhole formation in the area that could cause problems with the river and the aquifer if the landfill should breach.

The proposed project doesn't come without local criticism. Environmental activists in Pasco have expressed water quality concerns that could be associated with the project and also believe expansion of an existing waste management facility would be more than adequate to handle Pasco's waste management well into the future, making this project an unnecessary risk to area potable water supplies.

FDEP has indicated review of the project will take some time before a determination can be made regarding permitting the project. The River Board & TAC will continue to monitor this permit application and provide comment to the FDEP.



Generalized location map for proposed landfill in Pasco County.

TAC Discuss River Issues at June Meeting

The Technical Advisory Council (TAC) met at the Tampa Union Train Station May 15, 2007. Among discussion items and reports made at the meeting were:

- An update on various minimum flows and levels processes underway by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) for the lower Hillsborough River, the Tampa By-Pass Canal, Sulphur Springs and the upper Hillsborough River. Action by the District on these items is expected at the August Governing Board meeting.
 - TAC discussion on the proposed draft Recover Strategy that will implement the proposed minimum flow rule when adopted. The TAC is awaiting a final draft of this document but expressed concern with impacts to associated water resources used to meet a minimum flow in the lower river as outlined in the draft available for review at this meeting.
 - A briefing on meetings held with Temple Terrace residents regarding the Hillsborough River's management within that community and their concerns about continued low water conditions that persist in that part of the river.
 - TAC discussion on Tampa's water loss of 4 billion gallons annually due mainly to old leaky pipes and other infrastructure. The TAC is requesting more information on this issue from the City.
 - A briefing on the Comprehensive Plan updates for Tampa and Temple Terrace. The TAC will be holding a special workshop to review and revise existing plan provisions for this update.
 - Reviewed and supported four Tampa Port Authority minor work permit applications to forward to the River Board.
 - A status report on recent Hillsborough River levels: The TAC was briefed on continued low water conditions in the river that persist mainly due to lack of rainfall. What little rainfall was received over the past month did little to relieve persistent dry conditions in the river corridor. There has been no flow over the dam since October 4, 2006.
 - The TAC voted to send a letter of support encouraging the City of Tampa in its effort to acquire the Trump site in downtown Tampa for public use/access to the Hillsborough River and to add to the Ribbon of Green in the urban core.
 - The TAC was invited to attend a June Tampa City Council meeting where Alan Wright was recognized for his work on Greenways & Trails and Blueways by naming the Blueway within the City of Tampa the Alan Wright Hillsborough River Blueway.
- TAC meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month. All TAC meetings are held at the Tampa Union Train Station, 601 N. Nebraska Avenue, Tampa, second floor meeting room unless otherwise noticed. Meetings begin at 1:30 p.m. To review River Board and TAC agendas, visit our website at www.hillsboroughriver.org and click on *Agendas* under the River Board/TAC logo or contact staff at 273-3774, extension 323.



RIVER NEWS

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Change Service Requested

Hey Mandy, want to swim up to Sulphur Springs lagoon to cool off and people watch at their pool?

Well then, how about making a trip to Big Bend power plant? It isn't as pretty as Sulphur Springs but at least we'll be welcome there.

People.



No way Manny!
Haven't you heard?
We've been blocked from going into the lagoon at the spring any more. It was such a nice place to relax.

OK, but you know it's a long trip to make, lots of boats to dodge along the way and not much to eat or drink either.

I wonder why, after all these years, we've been walled out from the comforts of our lagoon.

**WHAT HILLSBOROUGH RIVER
MANATEES MIGHT SAY IF BLOCKED
FROM SULPHUR SPRINGS LAGOON**