

John L. Hoblick: A shared conservation ethic

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John Hoblick has written a thoughtful article in the [Gainesville Sun](#) about water use in Florida. Indeed, farmers and ranchers may have a different perspective on our water problems than environmentalists, but we do share a common conservation goal.

Threats to our groundwater are equally serious to both groups, and our imperiled rivers and aquifer are important to all— hence the Ichetucknee Alliance’s bumpersticker “No Water, No farms, No Food.”

Such is the situation that we would like to see farmers and ranchers join us in our several-years-old battle to ban fracking

in Florida.

Fracking contaminates the earth on the surface and deep inside, uses huge amounts of groundwater, and poses health hazards to all. The resulting poisonous wastewater is a perennial problem for disposal. Farmers should be on the forefront of those groups trying to stop big oil companies from pushing this into Florida because it ruins the land and the water. Fracking and farming are totally incompatible.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

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By John L. Hoblick / Special to The Sun

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Our contemporary society is often characterized as a mass of diverse individuals who have very different family backgrounds and life experiences.

Diverse frames of reference add to the potential for suspicion

and frustration over policy issues. As one social scientist has noted, "The same facts can have different meanings when seen from different perspectives."

For this year's Earth Day we might pause to consider two perspectives on water policy in our state.

One viewpoint emphasizes measurements that show a reduction in the flow of water to some of the state's first magnitude springs. In addition, the spread of algae in and around these springs combined with the nutrient content found in rivers and lakes raise the specter of a declining quality of the resource.

This frame of reference looks for improvements at the ecosystem level. Such a vantage point leads some observers to zero in on agriculture. In other words, water use and the application of fertilizer on farms and ranches are identified as the main sources of the ecosystem-wide problem.

From the perspective of farm families, missing from this conclusion is the recognition that urban residents are the primary consumers of freshwater in the state. Official data verify this fact.

More immediately, farmers and ranchers continue to reduce their own water use by adopting progressively more efficient methods of irrigation such as drip line and micro-jet techniques. Most of them have cut their water applications by 50 percent in the past two decades – while growing more food.

According to field tests made by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, farmers across the state conserve more than 12 billion gallons of water a year.

On-farm measurements reveal that agriculturists have achieved real success in enhancing water quality. The South Florida Water

Management District, for example, has reported that growers in the Everglades Agricultural Area reduced the phosphorus content in water leaving their farms by 70 percent last year.

In other words, from the farm families' perspective, they are already helping to solve the problem. By themselves, they cannot change whole ecosystems that have been affected by human use for many decades. But they are achieving tangible success on the patches of earth they call home. They make a living and pay taxes in support of their local communities as they do so.

The noted forester and naturalist Aldo Leopold once pointed out that, "The practice of conservation must spring from a conviction of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient."

I am convinced that both perspectives share the same conservation ethic. They embrace a commitment to the perpetual sustainability of Florida's prime resource. Starting positions separate them, not the values or the intentions of the people who hold them.

Guided by such an ethic, the prospects for stronger partnerships on water policy could not be better.

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