

Regional water system: We're all in this together

Occasionally I'm asked why DeSoto County is part of the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Authority? Why doesn't the county have its own water plant?

The Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority is a partnership that includes DeSoto, Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota counties. What in the world could such different communities have in common? It's water. It's water for schools and hospitals, water for homes and businesses, water now and in the future. In DeSoto County we need less water now, but in the future our needs will change. Charlotte County has relied on the Authority for water supply for many years. Sarasota County's



Peace River
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needs have grown over the 25-plus years the Authority has been in place and, like DeSoto, Manatee County will need water in the future.

DeSoto County is part of the Authority because planning for, investing in and developing water supplies is far more affordable acting together than any of us could do alone. Better still, together we qualify for grants and benefits from regional, state and federal agencies. We can't do that independently. Those

grants help offset the cost of water in all of our communities. No matter the resources in each of our communities, we all want to be good steward of the public purse.

Through the Authority, we're interconnecting our water systems. It's costly to do so, but so worth it. Just ask the residents of Charlotte County who would have been totally without water following Hurricane Charley if other water systems in the region were not connected. All of us learned that value then. Since then, we've been diligently working to interconnect to create resilience against disasters, to ensure all of us have water.

In short, we are better off together.

We're creating water security, something very few places have, something that's getting harder to achieve.

Our focus on being good stewards while seeking water security has dividends. Last year we applied for a 50-year permit to take water from the Peace River. This year it was granted. We will continue to ensure that the Peace River nourishes Charlotte Harbor, as we always have. The Harbor is vital to the economic vitality of our Charlotte County partners.

That 50-year permit is the cornerstone of our security for decades to come. In the intervening years, we're investing in expanding the Authority facilities, increasing intake, expanding treatment and adding

storage, another reservoir.

Many people in the area don't remember the horrible drought of the mid-1990s. It was so bad that newspapers were counting down the days until utilities in the region would run out of water.

Never again. We've planned, invested and developed a regional water system that is a model statewide. We've inter-connected. We've created a level of water security that few communities have. And, we've done it together.

That's why DeSoto County is part of the Authority. I suspect that my colleagues from Charlotte, Sarasota and Manatee would say the same.

Elton Langford is a

Desoto County commissioner and chairman of the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority.

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