

Armstrong asks PRWC board to stall litigation

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POLK COUNTY –Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Executive Director Brian Armstrong told the Polk Regional Water Cooperative (PRWC) board Sept. 19 that he remembers how the water wars between Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties of the 1980s cost taxpayers millions, created animosity between government bodies and caused public distrust in government.

Armstrong told the PRWC board that he thought the PRWC May 2018 legal action against the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority (PRMRWA) was just as counterproductive as the water wars of the 1980s. The PRWC legal action alleged that PRMRWA authorities wanted to pull additional water out of the Peace River and that this would prevent Polk authorities from using the Peace River as a future alternative water supply.

Armstrong proposed that the PRWC board hold off on litigation while he negotiates a deal with water authori-

ties in Tampa to sell “significant water supplies” to Polk authorities, replacing any water that could possibly be pulled from the Peace River water in Polk County.

Armstrong said that water authorities in Tampa have proposed pumping around 30 million gallons per day of highly treated reclaimed water into brackish water under the ground around Tampa. Armstrong said this water could serve as a barrier, preventing salt water from further getting into the freshwater aquifer deeper inland. In doing so, Armstrong said the scientists say this may result in more than 20 million gallons of day of water that could be shared between Polk and Hillsborough counties from a well that would be built near the county line.

PRWC scientists say Polk could need as much as 46 million gallons per day more by 2035 to keep pace with population growth so water purchased from Tampa in this possible deal would not in itself solve the Polk water crisis, said SWFWMD spokesperson Susanna Martinez Tarokh.

However, such a deal with Tampa

could save Polk County taxpayers a substantial amount of money. Using PRWC 2017 estimates, around \$600M is planned to be spent studying and building two sets of wells into the Lower Floridan Aquifer, one that might produce 30mgd near Frostproof and another near Lakeland that may produce 15mgs. Conservation efforts could produce 4mgd and the “Peace Creek Integrated Water Supply” plan could produce another 5mgd.

PRWC Project Administrator Gene Heath said Sept. 19 conservation efforts are half as expensive as building LFA wells. If the PRWC board built one LFA well for 30mgd, they got 10mgd from Tampa and another 9mgd from conservation and recharging the Peace River Basin with stormwater, there may be no need to build the other LFA well near Lakeland.

The LFA well near Lakeland has an estimated cost of \$157M and taxpayers are currently paying another \$9.3M just to study whether there is any good water in the LFA near Lakeland. If the public pressured the PRWC board to invest more in conservation and using stormwater to recharge the aquifer in



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Brian Armstrong

Polk, it is possible the \$340M LFA well near Frostproof and the \$11.8M study of water near Frostproof may not be necessary either.

PRWC conservation experts say half of all water pumped out of the ground in Polk County is used to keep lawns and shrubs green. It costs next to nothing to pass tougher lawn watering restrictions.