

John Robert Middlemas
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Board of Commissioners, Bay County
840 West 11th Street
Panama City, FL 32401

Dear Commissioners:

At your last regular scheduled monthly meeting one of the items that you considered was whether to lease separate tracts of land from the St. Joe Company for the purpose of drilling 10 water supply wells in northwest Bay County.

I regret that a prior commitment prevented me from attending the meeting, but I want to comment on this proposal, and I hope that as the application for the project proceeds you will consider the concerns that I express.

As I understand it the proposed wells would be available as a backup source in the event that the Deer Point Lake water source was “compromised”. The reservoir has been our source of water for over 40 years, and we have had no backup supply during that time, and no such alternative water supply has ever been needed. During the life of the dam we have experienced tides as high as ever recorded, those of hurricanes Eloise and Opal. Our Deer Point water supply was never “compromised” by those tides and because of the good work of our utility department to restore the reservoir’s gates, the dam is now stronger than it has ever been.

A recent story in the *News Herald* also stated that county “officials” stated that, “A wreck on the road that crosses the dam also has the potential to spill dangerous material into the water.” This is not a reasonable prediction: any material spilled from a vehicle on the dam road would flow downstream into North Bay, not Deer Point Lake.

The arguments for the need for these wells are not persuasive, particularly because after more than 40 years of the dam’s existence they are just now being offered. A critical test for a Water Use Permit of this size is “Need”, which I do not think that the County has established. One has to wonder if there are unmentioned reasons for the proposal and from whence they come.

But, even if there is a legitimate concern that our Deer Point water supply is threatened, any permit for the use of the wells should absolutely prohibit any extraction unless an emergency actually exists, and such withdrawals should last only during such emergencies. As I read the description of the permit application, withdrawals of up to 5 million gallons per day would be allowed whether or not an emergency occurs, and after

five years 10 million gallons per day would be allowed. What is the reason for permitting any withdrawals when no emergency exists?

Lastly, I do not think that enough attention has been given to the potential dreadful effects on the Floridan Aquifer and the surface water levels of our sand hill lakes and wetlands; Burnt Mill and Crooked Creeks' stream flows to West Bay; and area springs in Washington County and North Bay County. There is much evidence that the extraction of 10 million gallons per day could result in long lasting damage to the wonderful fresh water resources of our area. We must realize that fresh water is not a commodity to be sold and/or traded away; it is a natural resource owned by all of the people of our state.

We have too much at risk when we consider the high quality of our historic lakes and streams. It would be a shame to have Bay County and our affected neighboring Washington County become just another damaged area as are many parts of Central Florida due to poorly placed and regulated well fields.

If it can be demonstrated that the possibility of a temporary loss of water from Deer Point Lake is a real one, then no responsible person should object to backup wells or to moving the Deer Point Lake Utility water intakes closer to the mouth of the Econfina Creek as DEP has suggested. If any wells are permitted their use should be allowed only in proven emergencies and no extractions should be permitted for any other reasons.

I hope that you will insist on such restrictions in any permit agreement that you are asked to execute.

Sincerely,

John Robert Middlemas