

I did not know George Barley. His tragic death came a few years before I became obsessed, as a journalist, with the story of water. In all that I have read and heard of him, there is one word that repeats. That word is “truth.” George Barley wanted Floridians and Americans to know the truth about the Everglades. He wanted them to know the truth about the sources of harm to the Everglades. And he wanted them to know the truth about the Big Money in politics that keeps us from fulfilling our obligation to the Everglades.

I could not be more honored to be chosen for the Conservationist of the Year Award that bears his name. Many of you know that I am queasy with the title. I am a journalist. That’s what I’m best at, and that’s all I ever want to be. I spent more than 25 years as a traditional reporter, the last 15 at Florida Trend, where I felt I could be most effective because my exposés were read by the very people who could do something to right wrongs. Two books later, I’ve learned what George Barley already knew. Too often, political and public-sector leaders who can do something won’t – even when they know the truth.

But another group will. As I travel around speaking and reporting on water, I’ve become convinced that our country and our state are populated by a vast, caring middle.

This caring middle is sick of the partisanship and the influence of Big Money in our nation.

This caring middle is very concerned about water resources.

And once this caring middle learns the truth, they can, they will, and they DO take action on behalf of water.

This caring middle can vote for candidates who value water more than campaign contributions. They will influence federal agricultural policy, which we saw last year in the debate over subsidies for corn ethanol. And they do change personal habits. When I wrote *Mirage*, Floridians’ per-capita use was 174 gallons a day. When I wrote *Blue Revolution*, it was 154 gallons. Next month, when the USGS presents its five-year report, we’ll see per-capita use has dropped that significantly once more.

Politics and government are not enough to save our freshwaters for future generations and ecosystems. Water management is not enough. The legal system is not enough. Big technological fixes are not enough. We need the caring middle. George Barley understood that changing our water fortunes means showing Floridians, and Americans, the truth.

In the memory of George Barley, I am so thankful for the work carried out by you in this room to find the truth and share it. In the memory of George Barley, I am so honored that you would recognize me for my work to do the same. I will do my very best to live up to the name on the award. Thank you.

- Cynthia Barnett
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