

Florida Specifier

Practical Information For Environmental Professionals

Increased efficiency of state cleanup programs more important than ever

By STEVE HILFIKER

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Florida's population grew from 2.7 million in 1950 to 20.6 million in 2016. And we may grow to 30 million by 2045, according to the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

This increase in population will require a renewed focus on growth management planning. Groundwater resource managers and government planners will need to work together to accommodate this growth.

Where are we going to put 10 million more people? The best option is urban redevelopment—crucial for a sustainable environment. Many of these projects will be built on contaminant-impacted properties where risk management strategies, state-funded cleanup programs and brownfields redevelopment incentives will help get the job done.

Any development of raw land must be carefully considered because these properties are needed to sustain the environment. Proper management of Florida's natural resources, including Everglades restoration, groundwater quality and quantity, and land preservation are legislative priorities that are here to stay.

In 1978, the total cropland in Florida was 4,298,952 acres. In 2007, the total was 2,112,129 acres. These U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics speak volumes about the urbanization of the state. Over 2.1 million acres in Florida would now be considered to have had historical agricultural land use. Some of this land may have gone back into production since 2007, but considering the acreage developed prior to 1978, it's safe to say that former cultivated land in Florida exceeds two million acres.

There are three important points to consider in assessing growth management. First, we must continue to fund and encourage economic and regulatory incentives to accelerate sustainable redevelopment on land best suited for that purpose.

Second, we must carefully manage land

preserved under the Florida Forever program, Everglades restoration, wildlife corridors, springs and other natural resource management and conservation issues.

Finally, we must protect human health and the environment to sustain our growing population.

One of the most important considerations is groundwater quality. With roughly 90 percent of our drinking water coming from groundwater resources, consistent annual funding of state cleanup programs is important. Each year, various environmental industry associations with interest in maintaining and developing these programs demonstrate to legislators why increased and consistent funding is so important. It is not too early to start planning those conversations for the 2019 legislative session. Now is the time to communicate the message to your local lawmaker.

Funding for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Petroleum Restoration Program must return to the higher levels of a few years ago and be established as a consistent annual appropriation until the intent of the program is achieved—the successful rehabilitation of all sites eligible for funding.

According to the April, 2018, DEP Dashboard Report, there are a total of 19,342 eligible sites. Of these, 10,180 have been rehabilitated, 6,419 are in some stage of active restoration, and 2,743 await funding. The PRP has experienced substantial progress over the past few years and success is not too far off into the future. This is not the time to reduce appropriations.

Consistent funding at a higher level must also be provided to the Drycleaning Solvent Cleanup Program. Additional funding will go a long way to ensure that these sites are cleaned up and do not pose a threat to potable water supplies.

According to DEP data as of Jan. 1, 2018, there were 1,421 eligible drycleaner and wholesale supply sites. 381 assessments have been completed and 67 assessments were active at the end of 2017.

Remediation has been initiated at 251

facilities and 166 sites have met closure or natural attenuation monitoring criteria and do not require additional active remediation, or operations and maintenance. 210 sites have achieved closure, 21 through voluntary cleanup and four using risk-based corrective action through 2017.

The Brownfields Redevelopment Act was passed in the 1997 legislative session. The initial visionaries of the state program consisted of legislators, developers, lawyers, consultants and bankers who understood the economic opportunities that would result as land became increasingly scarce. They knew that urban land available for redevelopment, although contaminated, had the potential to provide large returns on investment and created regulatory and economic incentives to encourage it.

The regulatory and economic incentives accrue to both the development community and the local governments that assists them, with DEP reporting over \$80 million in voluntary cleanup tax credits to developers and municipalities. As of 2017, DEP reports that approximately \$2.7 billion in lender and equity investment is projected in designated brownfield areas.

Risk-based corrective action was introduced to Florida in 1997 through the administrative codes that govern contaminated site cleanups. The process established institutional and engineering controls to prevent exposure to impacts. Not surprisingly, most developers and property owners prefer RBCA as an effective risk management strategy for real estate transactions and redevelopment activities.

In the next 25 years, Florida may become the nation's second largest state in terms of population. With an increasing focus on redevelopment, the efficient use of state cleanup and brownfield programs will become even more important if we want to maintain the quality of the environment around us.

Steve Hilfiker is president of Environmental Risk Management Inc. in Fort Myers. He can be reached at 888-368-6468 or steve@ermi.net.