



MANATEE COUNTY FLORIDA

Jan. 29, 2013

The Honorable Representative Ray Pilon
371 House Office Building
402 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Representative Pilon:

On behalf of the Manatee County Commission, I'm writing to make you aware that Manatee County supports the current Governing Board makeup of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and to express our strong concern with the recently filed HB 147/SB 412. On Jan. 29, the Manatee County Commission voted to oppose this bill, along with any changes to the current makeup of the Governing Board.

As proposed, this bill would dilute Manatee County's representation on the Board, a prospect that would severely hamper local input on where local tax dollars are spent or even divert local tax dollars to projects outside our county. While we understand and fully appreciate the Governor's movement toward streamlined service and smaller government, this proposal would eliminate four unpaid citizen volunteers who represent our region ensuring local voices are heard within a large 16-county region. This loss of representation would come on the heels of the District's dissolution of the Manasota Basin Board, a representative board Manatee County found to be a positive tool for local government input and shared financial participation in environmental projects.

Manatee County's citizen representative was first appointed to the Governing Board in 1991 as acknowledgement by the state for the substantial efforts Manatee County invested in developing its utilities system. The Manatee County seat was hard won, but 20 years ago, the Legislature recognized Manatee's importance to the region as a water supplier, our commitment to sustainable water resources, our commitment to best practices and our dedication to the protection of our natural systems across the county. That importance hasn't changed.

Currently Manatee County not only supplies water for unincorporated Manatee County west of Lake Manatee, but for six municipal partners and to Sarasota County. In addition to our past and present role as a water exporter and sole provider for some of our neighboring communities, Manatee County was a founding member of the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority and maintains an active role in working toward regional solutions to ensuring water supply availability for our developing four county area.

Board of County Commissioners

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With SWFWMD and Environmental Protection Agency assistance, Manatee County developed our visionary Manatee Agricultural Reuse System providing reclaimed water from our three central water reclamation facilities to agricultural interests across the county, thereby greatly reducing the pumpage from the over-permitted Floridan Aquifer. Our record of progressive projects, stewardship of our water resources and reliability as a potable water supplier clearly underscore our right to direct representation on the Governing Board.

We believe the current makeup of the SWFWMD governing board is a good one and should not be modified. The SFWMD is uniquely large for good reasons. The losses in communication and coordination with the communities encompassed by SWFWMD far outweigh any minimal financial benefit from reducing the size of the Board and we ask that you not pursue this legislation.

If you would like additional information on the potential impact of this harmful bill, please do not hesitate to call me at (941) 745-3771.

Respectfully,



Larry Bustle
Chairman, Manatee County Commission

CC: Manatee County Legislative Delegation
Mitchell Palmer, Manatee County Attorney
Randall Reid, Sarasota County Administrator
Mike Merrill, Hillsborough County Administrator
Robert LaSala, Pinellas County Administrator
Jim Freeman, Polk County Administrator
Guy Maxcy, Desoto County Administrator
Ray Sandroek, Charlotte County Administrator
Carlos Beruff, Governing Board Member, SWFWMD
Blake Guillory, Executive Director, SWFWMD
Cari Roth, Esq., Bryant, Miller, Olive
Stephen James, Florida Association of Counties