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December 13, 2009

Mr. Leo Ochs
Collier County Manager
Administration Building F
3301 East Tamiami Trail
Naples, Florida 34112

Dear Mr. Ochs:

I have a concern with the letter written to you by Mary Anne Womble, the Chairwoman of the Pelican Bay Service Division (PBSD) Board dated December 3, 2009. A vote should not have been taken on such a substantive matter without being on the agenda and the letter should have been vetted by the Board before being sent. The first paragraph states that the “water quality analysis *may have* inaccurate conclusions that *would cast* the system and historical data in a negative manner.” The sentence should read “water quality analysis *has* inaccurate conclusions that *cast* the system or historical data in a negative manner.”

The remaining letter is predicated on the assumption that there is something wrong with Clam Bay. A position not shared by the former PBSD Clam Bay Subcommittee, the Mangrove Action Group (MAG) and the Pelican Bay Foundation as well as other organizations and residents outside of Pelican Bay. In the interest of resolving this unfortunate controversy the county should clearly articulate what the problem is before proceeding with costly studies. Are the mangroves dying along with fish and wildlife? Low dissolved oxygen levels are normal in a mangrove forest estuary and essential for the maintenance of the life cycle of many of Florida’s fish. In one study micro traces of pollutant metals were observed in the sediment. What is its significance? Possible sources can be leaching from the boardwalk pilings. But the mangroves grow majestically around them while the fiddler crabs, raccoons and other creatures climb all over the boardwalk. To my knowledge no three eyed fish have been observed. Less likely it could come from the county reclaimed water or perhaps county approved development exceeding the capacity of our water management system. Another consideration could be contamination from adjacent bodies of water and finally some unknown activity of the Colusa Indians.

Unless the county knows something that has not been shared with the public it appears that studies are being ordered to see if one can find an abnormal value. Then use this value to see if one can find something wrong. My training and experience teaches that you first observe something wrong then see if the wrong justifies doing expensive studies to find the cause and correct the problem. Any attempt to disrupt the ecology without sound justification would be counterproductive and costly.

Having said this I applaud your interest in having clear and accurate information and the desire to work together to resolve a controversy that should not exist. If the county has a problem it should articulate the details and I am confident that Pelican Bay would want to share in the solution. Thus far it appears that dredging is the common solution to whatever the problem is. The staff first applied for dredging permits for beach nourishment. This was withdrawn and replaced with a request to install lateral navigation signs which will only encourage an increased transit of power boats and all the pollutants they bring with them. This was first requested on the claim that it was a requirement of the USA Corps of Engineers. When this was refuted the request was not rescinded. These waters are non-navigable as noted on the NOAA charts. Under these conditions the county is exposed to liability. Is the plan now to dredge a channel for the signs?

I admit our position has been reactionary to the steps taken by the county. However if the county is truly focused on improving this critical environmental resource why has the county taken these steps? Fair, honest and accurate evaluation can only be undertaken when the county is open to the public and letter writing should wait until this occurs.

Sincerely

Theodore J. Raia, Jr.
Member of the Board
Pelican Bay Service Division

CC: PBSB Board
Mr. Neil Dorrill