

Sugarland
Maggy Hurchalla
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The promise of this meeting is to come together peaceably in the heart of South Florida to save the heart of South Florida. It's about coming together to get something done.

It is not about coming together to fight with each other and blame each other.

We're like a family reunion of passionate people. It's not Hatfields vs. McCoys, but it's like you got all the Hatfields together in one place. It's not going to be easy because most of us are mad as Hell. But if we don't refrain from fighting among ourselves, the McCoys will win.

We come from different perspectives. The West Coast wants to know why they are getting dumped on more than the East Coast. They are tired of hearing about our toxic blue-green algae as if our crisis was superior to their crisis.

The East Coast is an estuary in Hospice. If this keeps up it will not survive. We're about to have a dead estuary with irrevocable damage. We can't understand why that damage can't be shared.

You have a whole town full of people here in Clewiston who live in the shadow of a failing dike.

I've heard folks question in public meetings whether the risk is real. At Lake levels of 18ft there is a 40% chance of dike failure. In 2004 we had hurricanes that raised the Lake level over 3.5 ft in 30days. In 2008 the Lake went up 2.5ft in a week. It's September. Until November we won't be safe.

I don't want my estuary to die, but I don't want to share the pain by having people die here in Clewiston. My father was the first reporter to get here after the '28 hurricane. He told us stories of the rowboats towing bodies behind them.

I remember when the FPL dike broke west of Indiantown in 1979 . That year it rained over 20 inches in September. It kept raining in October and the dike for the big FPL cooling pond broke on Halloween. They euphemistically called it a "failure event". A train was passing by west of the dike when the failure

event happened. It knocked the train off the tracks. It would have been a catastrophe, but in the vast area west of the dike break, there wasn't anyone there but the train..

There are people here south of the Lake. We can't risk a dike failure.

So if we can't blame each other, who can we blame?

Better still, what can we do about it?

We need to stand together and say we're not going to let the dike break. We need to stand together and say we are not going to let the coastal estuaries be killed. Most of all, we need to stand together to restore the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. We need to do it loudly, continuously, and peacefully.

Being a politician I can share the perspective that a lot of politicians have towards rallies and crowds and protests and angry people filling their meeting rooms. They don't like it.

First, they will tell you to be quiet or they will clear the room. They will warn you to be polite so everyone can be heard. They will ask you to choose a representative to speak for all of you so you won't repeat yourselves. They will give the representative two minutes to speak.

If you do that, the politicians will ignore you. Later they will say they didn't hear you.

If you make a lot a lot of noise they will say you are unruly and illogical.

Luckily they won't shoot you or gas you.

You have to keep talking. You're going to need to talk loud. You're going to need to get together in big groups to demand action. Every single one of you – and all your friends and relations and acquaintances - are going to have to individually talk and facebook and write and sign petitions and reach out to bring in other folks to do the same thing.

And you will need to keep doing it.

This crisis will be over. If it doesn't rain, the "emergency measures" will work wonderfully well. If it rains too hard the dike might break.

But sometime in the next five years this will happen again.

To get something done, you will need to understand the responses of politicians.

First they will blame someone else.

They will begin by blaming God. We have heard over and over that this was an unexpected record breaking rainy season that could not be dealt with. It's true they couldn't deal with it. We weren't loud enough for long enough in the last crisis to get them to put real solutions in place. But it is not true that this was unexpected.

Florida is a land of extremes. We may be in a drought next year, but we will have extreme rains again and the system will not be able to deal with it. I'm 72 years old. When I heard this was the wettest time ever, I wondered how they could say that. It's because they haven't been keeping records that long. I remember 1947 when it rained over 100 inches in South Florida. It was lots of fun if you were 7 years old because you could swim anywhere. Daddy couldn't find a place to milk the cow because the bucket floated away, so he milked her into the floodwaters.

This is not an act of God that we could not have planned for. Rainwise, it will happen again.

The next thing a politician is likely to do is to blame someone else. Don't let them get away with it.

Everyone likes to blame the Corps because they built the dysfunctional system that is causing all the trouble and because they are bureaucrats who are not allowed to fight back. They built it because Florida demanded it and Congress ordered it.

After blaming the Corps, our politicians will blame Washington. Look at that big dike. There is not one single drop of water in it that came from Washington DC. It's Florida's water and Florida's Lake and our Everglades and our estuaries. We done done it to ourselves.

But in 2000 Congress made a commitment in authorizing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan to do their part in restoring America's Everglades.

It was a 50/50 partnership. It is the largest environmental restoration ever attempted in the world to save the second largest wetland in the world. It's not just about the Everglades. It is about the Greater Everglades Ecosystem that stretches from coast to coast and from Orlando to the reefs off the Florida Keys.

Over 13 years the partnership has degenerated into sibling rivalry – like a bunch of kids in the backseat on a long drive.

First one partner behaved and the other didn't. Then they changed places. Then they blamed each other.

We can't just tell them we're going to stop the car and make them all walk home.

We have to tell everyone who tries to blame someone else that they need to trek to Washington or wherever they have laid the blame and lobby effectively to make things work.

What needs to happen?

We need to get CEPP authorized by Congress to build storage and treatment areas and flowways to move water south.

Don't stop there. With CEPP authorized and funded, we need to continue to build plans to move more water south.

Congress needs to fund CERP. They say there is no money. How come there is money released from the sequester to fund control towers at small airports? We need to accelerate CERP funding to build reservoirs on the Caloosahatchee and the St. Lucie and to build CEPP. Somehow, someday, we have got to turn out a lobbying effort of all of our public officials and all of us to say this is not a good year to shut down the government. It's a time to do something.

And at the grass roots level here, all of us who care have to find a way to rally supporters all over the country to tell their Congressman to meet the national commitment to save America's Everglades.

The state legislature needs to appropriate money to buy land. Florida had a long term program backed by both parties to spend \$300 million a year on environmental land purchases. They stopped buying land. The State/Federal partnership depends on the state buying all of the land necessary for CERP projects. The Corps can't buy land. They build projects. If the land isn't there, they can't plan the projects and engineer them and build them. The state needs to recommit to buying land.

We need to fix water management regulations at the local, regional and state level so we don't increase the amount of water running off to the wrong place every time we develop a piece of property. We need to fix water use permits so we don't give away water we don't have. We need to fix water quality standards so polluters pay to clean up what they cause.

Don't get distracted by quick fixes and silver bullets. Don't get distracted by invitations to fight among yourselves. The only way we can get out of this mess is to put Humpty Dumpty together again and rebuild the State/Federal partnership and accelerate the comprehensive solution.

This is a democracy. We can make this happen. We are the people and we are the only ones that can make it happen.