

## Guardians of Martin County participate in Washington DC Hearing on Contaminated Waters

The Guardians were pleased to be represented by Board member K.C. Traylor, her daughter (our youngest Guardian at age 4) and our science advisor, Greg Braun at U.S. Representative Patrick Murphy's Washington, DC legislative hearing on Lake Okeechobee discharges. Celia made instant friends with Congressman Murphy and many others as she presented them with oyster shells that symbolized the death of oysters and other marine life that has occurred as a result of freshwater discharges into the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.



Dozens of local advocates for clean water traveled to D.C. for two days of meetings, which began with the Everglades Caucus at which representatives from 16 counties in South Florida described to federal leaders their joint support for five key restoration projects: 1) Completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation, 2) Completion of Kissimmee River restoration; 3) Funds for completion of the C-44 & Indian River Lagoon South project; 4) Authorization for the Caloosahatchee Stormwater Treatment Area and 5) Federal approval of a 2013 Water Resources Development Act. Martin County Commissioner Sarah Heard hit her stride during presentations at both the Everglades Caucus and on the hearing the following day, as she and Commissioner Fielding met with key congressional leaders.

The primary focus of the two-day event was a four-hour hearing co-sponsored by Congressmen Patrick Murphy (D-Treasure Coast) and Trey Radel (R-who represents portions of Lee County). Various federal, state and local experts provided testimony regarding the devastating effects that the Lake Okeechobee discharges are having on the environment and the economy on both the east and west coasts of Florida. A bus full of Treasure Coast residents joined others to create such a standing-room-only crowd that an overflow room with live broadcast was opened so everyone could participate.

Celia was a media magnet, attracting the attention of various TV crews. With contacts provided by Sally Lewis-Heims, the Guardians' media advisor, Celia and KC were interviewed by CBS 12 (the TV affiliate in West Palm Beach) before the trip began. Updates were recorded as the meetings continued and as Celia distributed oyster shells to many elected officials. To view some of the news stories online, please click the following links:



[http://www.cbs12.com/news/top-stories/stories/vid\\_10440.shtml](http://www.cbs12.com/news/top-stories/stories/vid_10440.shtml)

[http://www.cbs12.com/news/top-stories/stories/vid\\_10445.shtml](http://www.cbs12.com/news/top-stories/stories/vid_10445.shtml).

Appreciation also goes out to Florida Oceanographic Society's Mark Perry, Indian Riverkeeper Marty Baum, the River Kidz and everyone who participated.

There are 23 projects in the draft 2013 Water Resources Development Act, and several key projects including the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP), which would divert approximately 20% of Lake Okeechobee's discharge away from our estuaries, are not presently included.

Considering the apparent lack of political will by state and federal elected officials for the buy-out of additional lands within the Everglades Agricultural Area, the current outlook is bleak that any significant improvements will be made to South Florida's artificial plumbing system anytime in the near future. Even if the Central Everglades Planning Project is approved and funded, construction would not be complete until at least 2024.

Luckily, the contribution of over \$75 million by Martin County residents through the voter-approved "Lands for Healthy Rivers" bond referendum has moved the Indian River Lagoon South project way up on the schedule. Construction is presently under way on Phase I, so we still need to lobby for funding of future phases.

The entire meeting was videotaped (link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJRyp\\_af07s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJRyp_af07s)) and will be entered in the congressional record for all members of congress to see.

Congressman Murphy's pre-planned fly-in seemed successful in drawing the attention of federal legislators. The hearing was followed by a press conference in the Capitol Triangle (photo at right), in which elected officials and hearing attendees expressed consensus that our water woes caused by the federal government's Central and South Florida project are "unacceptable" and that action must be taken before our beleaguered estuaries are moved past their current condition of being on "life support".



Ideas suggested included the federal government delegating authority for the maintenance and management of Lake Okeechobee to the State of Florida. And while there may be merit to that out-of-the-box thinking, given the current situation in Tallahassee and the gubernatorial appointees to the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board, one has to question whether or not the state would do any better than the Corps.

KC, Celia and Greg met with various legislators and governmental staff and came away optimistic that voices for change appeared to be heard by key decision makers.



Here are a few quotes that exemplify our reasons for optimism:

“This is a critically important issue, not just for Florida, but for the entire nation” Congressman Steny Hoyer, who also paraphrased former vice-president Spiro Agnew’s quote on another subject: “The cost of failure far exceeds the price of progress”.

“It’s not an issue, really, it is about our planet, and the participation by the community that is affected by it. Your being here and the support for this elevates this to an issue of national significance. These advocates have been very articulate on your behalf; and Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie River is not a partisan issue, it is an environmental crisis that requires our immediate attention”.  
Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi.

In spite of a current widespread lack of confidence in our political leaders by most Americans, and in spite of the darkness that currently surrounds the Capitol, the bi-partisan support of Congressmen Murphy and Radel and the warm reception we received by electrical officials from both sides of the aisle, there’s a feeling of confidence that we have solid support from senators and representatives from Florida.

What is needed now, is for Florida residents to reach out to legislators in other states to impress on them the need for the federal government to take action to address the havoc that the federal government’s projects is causing on our economy and environment.

If you have property in another state, please make contact with that state’s federal legislators. We need majority votes to get both the legislation passed and the appropriations made to make these projects become a reality. See [theguardiansofmartincounty.com](http://theguardiansofmartincounty.com) for lists of key decision makers, and thanks for your continued interest and support as we try to maintain *The Martin County Difference*.



The Board of Directors of the Guardians of Martin County gratefully acknowledges the contributions of our many donors and specifically a contribution by Skip Shattuck that allowed our participation at the hearings. Our word must be getting out, as PayPal contributions came in through [TheGuardiansofMartincounty.org](http://TheGuardiansofMartincounty.org) while the hearing was underway!