

25th Annual Environmental Permitting Summer School Keynote
DEP Secretary Herschel Vinyard
Marco Island, Florida
July 20, 2011

Thank you, David, for that introduction. It's an honor to be here today and congratulations to the Chamber of Commerce on hosting this important environmental seminar for 25 years. I've enjoyed this summer school several times in the past. Of course, this year is my first experience representing the DEP.

In years past, I could go for a run on the beach or skip the sessions I didn't want to attend. Of course, no offense, David or Chuck. I even remember snagging Secretary Castille several years ago as she came off the podium to talk about an issue that was important to me. This year, while y'all are all enjoying your time on Marco Island, I get to visit a scrap metal recycling facility.

As you can imagine, it's been a busy six months. We've been working hard to develop priorities for the department and, of course, establish a leadership team that can execute on those priorities. First, I want to talk to you about a couple of members of my team who are here this week.

Those of you who attended the Early Bird sessions may have already met Jeff Littlejohn, DEP's Deputy Secretary for Regulatory Programs. And those who haven't met him yet will hopefully have a chance to visit with him here this week. When I first talked about the deputy secretary position, I said that I need a Cam Newton (who was Auburn's Heisman trophy winner last year), someone that had the talent to change the destiny of the entire team ... Jeff is my Cam Newton.

Jeff has already hired some great talent from the private sector and promoted some of our brightest folks within DEP to lead his divisions. He's challenged them to look at a better, smarter way of doing business. You should already be seeing some of those changes.

Jon Steverson is also here this week talking about the last legislative session and what's on the horizon in January. Jon's experience with the Jeb Bush Administration, the legislature and his knowledge of the state budget process has been invaluable.

Drew Bartlett, our new head of the Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration, is speaking later today about EPA's Numeric Nutrient Criteria and Florida's rulemaking efforts. He meets routinely with many of you and has done an incredible job of trying to balance multiple stakeholder interests.

Since I arrived in January, I've met many smart, talented and committed people at DEP. I continue to be impressed by the caliber of folks we have working in our agency and look forward to engaging them as we tackle some of the challenges ahead.

I've been asked to speak to you today about some of the issues facing DEP, and I'd like to begin with the top three:

1. We've got to ensure that we have a more certain regulatory process that is interpreted consistently across the state, and is protective of the environment;
2. We've got to get the water right in Florida;
3. And we need to give Floridians more opportunities to enjoy Florida's award-winning parks.

Today, I'll talk more about the first two than the last, but if you haven't visited one of our state park you should. We have the best state park system in the country. Nowhere else can you roll out of a sleeping bag and dive on a coral reef, or explore one of Florida's natural cave systems or swim with mermaids.

As many of you already know, I come from the private sector, where we focused on efficiency, consistency and customer service. The vision I have for DEP is no different. Our leadership team at DEP believes that government can effectively protect the environment and doesn't have to suppress job creation in the process.

DEP had a two-day strategic planning meeting last week and one member of the DEP team read us a quote from Virginia's Attorney General, "The only places on earth that have strived for a clean environment share two characteristics: free people and free markets. Economic success will help deliver environmental improvement far more effectively than any number of forcibly-applied regulations."

Environmental protection and economic growth are not mutually exclusive. In fact, you cannot have one without the other. At DEP, we want to foster a culture of customer service and regulatory certainty and consistency across the agency. But this doesn't mean we're relaxing environmental standards. Instead, I want our folks to focus more on the outcome, and less on the process.

That is one of the reasons the department has launched a Lean Initiative or for some of you a process improvement initiative. We are examining the way we do things. And if a step in our processes does not add value to the customer or the environment, we are eliminating that step in the process.

Earlier this spring I issued a memo to staff that outlined our new Request for Additional Information (RAI) process used in permitting applications. The memo requires DEP to better evaluate projects earlier in the process. As many of you know, the statewide RAI

process has been kind of like a tennis match ... we serve them, you return them, we send it back and it could continue like that for years sometimes.

This doesn't mean Jeff's people won't be asking questions. They'll just be more thorough in their review on the front end, and will be able to get the permit out the door in a more timely fashion. I'm happy to report we've already seen some success: we've seen a significant reduction in the number of multiple RAIs this year.

As you all know Florida's economy is dependent on the health of our waterbodies. And getting the water right in Florida is critical to the future of our state. This means improving the quality of the water, ensuring that we have an adequate water supply, and balancing those needs so that we are able to still live, work and play in Florida.

As you may know, DEP is taking a more active role in the oversight of Florida's five water management districts. After Melissa Meeker stepped into the Executive Director job at the South Florida Water Management District – where she has done a fantastic job by the way – Jon Steverson has stepped up to help coordinate with the water management districts as they prepare their budgets. I thank both Jon and the water management district staffs for their great work on this.

When Gov. Scott approved a tax cut for the water management districts, he did it because he knew we had an opportunity – and an obligation – to slim up our operations and refocus our priorities on our core mission of water supply, resource protection and flood control.

The water management districts are now eliminating non-core functions such as sponsorships and advertising. They are reconfiguring salaries and benefits package to better reflect today's economy, and flattening the management structure, much like I'm asking the department to do in Tallahassee. Bottom line, if it doesn't create more clean water, protect the natural resources or have any flood control impact, then we're not doing it.

To see the importance of water quality and water supply to our communities, businesses and the environment, just look at South Florida, where the state and its partners are working to restore America's Everglades. I recently had a chance to tour parts of the Everglades and witness some of the restoration progress.

Our tour guided us through the thousands of homes in the Palm Beach area and the thousands of acres of farmland, around Lake Okeechobee and around lands set aside for the Native American tribes in that area. We saw the restored Kissimmee River area ... and the 45,000 acres of stormwater treatment areas that are reducing the nutrients flowing to the Everglades. It is the largest wetland restoration project in the world.

Although we've made progress, we still have a long way to go to get the water right in the Everglades. We spend too much time and money trying to solve the problem in a courtroom. I'm an attorney by trade, but litigation has got to be our last option. It's time-consuming and costly, and continues to impede our progress in restoration.

We need to find a comprehensive solution that ensures our resources are spent on restoration projects, not litigation. And they've got to be projects where the environment gets the most bang for the buck.

I also believe that nutrient standards in Florida need to be developed by the state. Florida remains one of the few states that has a comprehensive nutrient reduction program and continues to lead the nation in developing innovative tools to ensure the health of the state's waterways.

For example, our state has collected more than 30 percent of all the water quality data in the nation, and DEP has already adopted EPA-approved rules for determining whether waters are impaired for nutrients. DEP is eager to implement our own nutrient criteria for Florida. We've prepared a draft regulatory concept and are hosting meetings seeking public comment. Florida's rulemaking efforts are, however, dependent upon EPA's approval or disapproval, per the Clean Water Act.

Finally, the National Academy of Sciences is studying the economic impact that EPA's numeric nutrient rules will have on our state. DEP will participate in that study to ensure that Florida's interests are represented.

Getting the water right in Florida also includes our work to restore resources that were damaged after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. More than a year after the spill, response and recovery efforts continue in Florida.

In April, Gov. Scott along with our other Gulf State partners secured \$1 billion in early restoration money from BP. That's money that we can begin using now to make our coastal communities whole. That is money we received without decades of litigation.

As I said earlier, environmental stewardship and economic development is closely linked in Florida. Our Gulf Coast restoration efforts are improving the health of our shorelines, but also improving local economies in impacted communities throughout the Gulf States. Everglades restoration is critical to ensuring the health of the ecosystem, but must also be balanced with appropriate flood control for the thousands of people who live and work in South Florida.

There's no denying the vital role Florida's natural resources have in our state's economy, and I am committed to creating an agency that cultivates a partnership between government and the private sector to protect those natural resources.

As I said earlier, we're going to be concentrating on:

1. Creating regulatory certainty, consistency and protection
2. Getting the water right in our state
3. Ensuring Floridians have access to the best state park system in the country.

As my leadership team and I continue to improve our processes to become a more customer-friendly, consistent and efficient agency, I'd like to ask for your feedback. As our customers and partners, we need your opinions and ideas to help us improve, while still protecting our natural environment. Feel free to reach out to us. Our customer service survey at the bottom of our e-mail is a great tool. Use it, because I read every one of those.

I'd like to thank you all for the chance to speak with you today, and look forward to working with you in the future. Thank you again.