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Daniel Moore Thompson



GUEST EDITORIAL

Getting Back to Nature

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things wild and free."

—Aldo Leopold,
A Sand County Almanac, 1949

Respect. That's what everything comes back to. In this case, I'm talking about respect for wildlife and the environment.

Living in Southwest Florida is a blessing. We enjoy evergreen beauty, lovely water, and gorgeous sunsets. But with this beauty comes responsibility.

We are all consumers. We all have houses, many of which have lawns and swimming pools. We build roads to get us from those houses to work, school, and play. With this consumption we are, undeniably, impacting the environment.

Florida panthers used to roam as far as Texas and range throughout the Sunshine State. Now, with the housing boom and steady influx of people, this fascinating cat lives only in and around the Everglades and is the most endangered mammal in the world. Experts say there are no longer any male panthers north of the Caloosahatchee River.

Smaller indicator species are vanishing too. Fiddler and horseshoe crabs have been disappearing due to pollution of our estuaries.

As people who live so closely to the water and earth, Southwest Floridians have a duty to respect the environment around us. And that doesn't have to be difficult. Florida's gentle native manatees, the subject of a photo essay in this issue, can be protected simply by obeying boat speed limits in manatee zones. It's an easy thing to do and so necessary to the future and health of this endangered mammal.

As a dedicated Lee County Commissioner, I care deeply about these issues.



One way we are trying to help the vanishing species and our future drinking water resources is to enact a strong fertilizer ordinance to help keep our estuaries free from chemical runoff.

Many people who live here don't realize how fragile the environment is. The good news is that there are lots of interesting ways to learn about Florida. One of the features in this issue takes a look at the growing interest in ecotourism in this area, which helps locals and visitors enjoy Florida's unique beauty while protecting it at the same time.

Traveling to the Keys? Stop by and experience the Theater of the Sea, also featured in this issue. The marine life there both entertains and educates visitors, helping to foster a lifelong appreciation for the aquatic residents of the state.

While we absolutely don't want to stop progress, let's learn to grow in concert with the natural environment. We'll be amazed at how much both we and the state can benefit from doing so.

Bob Janes
Lee County Commissioner