
Closer to sealing the deal

Pending final review, a water contract to sign

Cat herding would have been easier to orchestrate. After more than two years of complex inter-county wrangling, the Peace River/Manasota Water Supply Authority has a contract to present to four counties.

We urge commissioners in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties and the city of North Port to approve the contract so that the authority board can ratify the agreement Oct. 5 at its next meeting.

The agreement's provisions are spelled out in black and white, with some last-minute revisions marked in red and blue. Amendments were done "on the fly" Wednesday and need to be carefully reviewed by member counties.

Board members should be commended for their perseverance in working on the contract, which brings the authority much closer to fulfilling its stated mission as a regional water supplier.

The board, which is comprised of county

commissioners Jerry Hill of DeSoto, Adam Cummings of Charlotte, Patricia Glass of Manatee and Shannon Staub of Sarasota, showed remarkable resolve in working through individual and collective disputes to forge the agreement. Staff members in all four counties and the city of North Port also worked innumerable hours, along with the authority's executive director Pat Leaman and attorney Doug Manson.

Now, it's time to move forward with the \$123 million expansion of the regional plant in DeSoto County that will allow the authority to safely pump an additional 14 million gallons a day starting in 2009.

"We need to move on with turning some dirt on this," Staub said Wednesday during the authority's meeting in Arcadia.

As we have stated previously, the regional water approach is vital for Southwest Florida's future. This agreement provides a starting point. Now it's up to the member governments to seal the deal.