

We say ... Water sampling may save the May **We say...**

It has taken a while, perhaps longer than many would like, but local environmental officials are getting a handle on pollution in the May River.

A watershed sampling and laboratory analysis project is starting to pay off with findings that eventually will lead to solutions, as environmental watchdogs hoped when it was created in 2008.

Beaufort County has a color-coded map posted on its Web site that identifies seven "hot spots" for high potential fecal coliform bacteria counts.

That's narrowing the playing field in a huge watershed and allowing experts to change whatever dynamic is polluting the May River.

Pinpointing the May basin's troubled areas, through sampling and analysis, helps officials shape river protection plans, according to Dan Ahern, Beaufort County Stormwater Utility manager.

And water quality testing has already "changed the whole philosophy" of river protection and brought the push, now before the County Council, to set tough limits on the total volume of runoff, Ahern said.

Bluffton officials, who have been working closely with the county, are following progress of the proposed ordinance and should consider adopting a companion measure.

Bluffton last year committed \$325,000 over a three-year period to fund a water quality lab at the University of South Carolina Beaufort's Bluffton campus.

The protection effort comes not a moment too soon, as the state Department of Health and Environmental Control last year limited oyster harvesting in the May River headwaters.

The only way to reverse the DHEC restrictions is to document three years of water samples showing acceptably low levels of fecal coliform.

It's a slow process. But the expanded water sampling, local lab testing and analysis and positive government action have set the proper course.

Environmental hand-wringing and rabble-rousing may have sounded the alarm, but it will be the concerted professional follow through of a definitive strategic plan that could ultimately save the May.