

[Bluffton Today](#) » [Opinion](#)

He says ... Funeral pending for May and Okatie rivers

Fri., July 10, 2009

By [Joe Croley](#)



He says...

When life is fair, the citizens of Beaufort County will put the funeral of Michael Jackson behind them and prepare for a much bigger memorial, the death of the May and the Okatie rivers.

Well, OK, the Okatie has for all intents and purposes been dead for a few years, since the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control declared parts of it unsafe to harvest certain shellfish.

However, the final nail in the coffin for that particular river is about to be proposed to the town of Bluffton's Planning Commission. It will come in the form of a request for approval of more development along the east side of the river.

The proposed development will include plans for, of all things, a hotel-type building at the restricted headwaters.

This surely means hundreds of thousands of additional square feet of impervious surface being introduced to the area, which will produce even more stormwater runoff into the river.

From 2000 to 2004, county taxpayers paid about \$9.2 million through the Rural and Critical Lands Program to buy approximately 180 acres of land in the immediate vicinity, on the west and south side of the river, for the purpose of preserving the headwaters from additional pollution.

What's the use of protecting two sides of the river when developers who were compensated millions of dollars are allowed to pollute it from a third side?

I am sure they will produce paid "experts" who will state they in no way will add to the problems of the river. If they don't, who does? The river was clean before this development craze began.

This brings me to our illustrious Department of Health and Environmental Control, DHEC.

About this time last year they gave a presentation on the Okatie boasting about their proposed program that introduced something called Total Maximum Daily Load, TMDL that was to be a cure-all for our problems.

Last week, they gave the same presentation and told the same lame jokes to the stormwater board, but after a year they had no conclusions, no recommendations, just the need for more data and study.

This department has a Water Quality Division with a \$20 million-plus annual salary budget in 2007. Yet it produces no results after a year of study as the river is about to become even more polluted.

So, unless the town and county step up to a moratorium on new construction along the banks of both of these rivers, we might as well rename them the Dead and Soon To Be Dead Rivers.

The state is not coming to the rescue anytime soon and we will continue to buy land that will not achieve any purpose except making developers richer on the taxpayers' dime.

In the meantime, you can contact **Joe Croley** at Whenlifeisfair@hargray.com