

Richard Baker: Save our state — listen to the people on Amendment 1

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We are the environment — the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. We depend totally upon our environment for life. Tiny amounts of pollutants can poison us. When fish, birds and manatees start dying, we know we are in trouble, too.

What we do to our surroundings, we do directly to ourselves. If we didn't have birds, insects and vermin would overrun us. Our life depends on the many and diverse organisms and microorganisms that clean our air, water and land. We need nature to survive and sustain our economy.

Our No. 1 ecological lesson: Everything is connected to everything and everyone. Our bodies contain more than 60 percent water, our blood is 92 percent water and our brain and muscles are 75 percent water. All of us are filled with air — some say “hot air!” — about 6 quarts. We cannot survive longer than a week without water or a few minutes without air. And 90 percent of our food comes from the land. All are essential for our survival.

However, rather than conserving those precious resources, we humans seem to think of just one dimension for our survival: our economy. We ignore, at our own peril, that our economy depends upon our planet's health and we depend on the sustainability of our community.

Our reckless activities seem completely at odds with our survival and our desire to leave a better world for our children. We are not protecting the lands we will hand over to them. Humans dug canals diverting the waters from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. We continue to allow Big (Subsidized) Sugar and other agribusinesses to pollute Lake Okeechobee, and thus the St. Lucie River and our Indian River Lagoon.

We allow offshore oil drilling that threatens marine resources and beachside economies and fracking that threatens our groundwater. Corporations siphon off and deplete our freshwater springs for a profit. Eating fish, clams, shrimp and oysters can be unhealthy, and even swimming like old times in our Indian River Lagoon and rivers can be dangerous.

We, thus, are killing Florida.

We the people voted overwhelmingly, with an approval rate of 75 percent, for Amendment 1 to purchase lands that are dwindling fast. But legislators, funded by big industries, have not heeded our voices and our vote. Developments with no effective limits are encouraged; traffic congestion is horrendous. With more people migrating to Florida, just like we did, our forests, coasts and wetlands are paved over, and strip malls with homogenized franchises accommodate our burgeoning population.

Florida is losing its essence, turning into being like everywhere else.

It is still a wonderful state with grasslands, swamps and unique tropical flora and fauna, but Florida will not survive if we allow rampant development and disregard realities of what we have done to our Earth. Keep the oil in the ground; keep our unique lovely oaks, slash pines and native palmettos. Preserve the swamps and birds, panthers and bobcats. Remove invasive species and preserve lands from the most invasive species the world has ever seen: homo sapiens.

Please write to your legislators (http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2015-contact-lawmakers-list_10448199) and Gov. Rick Scott to fund Amendment 1 as we, the voters, intended. It is now part of our Florida Constitution and must be enabled to do the work necessary to pass on the natural legacy of our marvelous state. Let's work together to save our Florida!

Richard Baker is a University of Florida professor emeritus and president of the Pelican Island Audubon Society.