

Letter: Attitudes about the environment have changed

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Not so long ago, environmentalists were labeled "tree-huggers" bent on stifling growth and development; anglers also had a jaundiced view of environmental conservation as infringing on their right to fish anywhere and any time they wished.

In 2008, St. John's Water Management District produced a defensible study which showed that a healthy Indian River Lagoon was worth \$3.7 billion to the Treasure Coast annually. Politicians now had to think twice about voting against environmental measures. Waterfront landowners, anglers, and boaters in general now demanded better water quality. At this year's Everglades Coalition Conference in Key Largo, a speaker went further and estimated the value of good water to the state of Florida in the trillions.

This convergence of interests was long overdue. Nowhere was the phenomenon more obvious than the recent discussions at the Indian River County Commission regarding the Oslo Boat Ramp. A long-proposed project (paving over areas critical to sea grass and fish spawning) was voted down. What had appeared to be a "done deal" was derailed: at one point, chambers were filled with enough Ph.D.'s to staff a small university — plus anglers, boaters, property owners and concerned citizens.

During the most recent general election, voters were asked to consider a constitutional amendment setting aside one-third of all documentary stamp taxes collected during the next 20 years, with the funds earmarked for measures to safeguard water quality and for conservation generally. Seventy-five percent of voters approved the measure.

I often think of the quotation attributed to several of our founding fathers: "If we do not hang together, then we shall assuredly hang separately."

We are all in this together and there is no Planet B.

Mary Chapman is a member of the board of directors of the Ocean Research and Conservation Association and of the Marine Resources Council.

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