

This past legislative session, Doug Barr was up for reappointment to the position of Executive Director of the Northwest Florida Water Management District. Despite pleas to our local senators, Mr. Barr was not confirmed and is now retired.

Florida has five water management districts which provides for local control of water resources. Four of these districts are very bureaucratic with burdensome regulations of their own making permitting difficult and in some cases management of the resource difficult. These local rules are all different and make it difficult and costly for regulated entities working in more than one jurisdiction to get anything done. The FDEP has stepped in to provide consistency in rules among the districts. They started their work with an attempt to understand the problems by hosting listening workshops across the State. Unfortunately they discounted or actually dismissed the concerns of the utilities in the Northwest District. Presently under a program called CUPCON, FDEP is developing rules to be used by all districts. It is very likely this effort by FDEP will benefit four of the districts and hurt one which is ours. The CUPCON initiative was presented to the NFWFMD Board in May by the district staff. The staff was seeking authorization to enter into rulemaking. The Northwest Florida Utility Managers Council presented at the board meeting and subsequently the vote to approve rulemaking was a split vote. It was split when the staff advised the board that they had the option of not adopting the rules after proposal. It is hoped that the FDEP is not trying to tear down local control of water resources but only stepping in to resolve a particular situation. But it is sort of hard to believe they will step back after this task is completed.

The Northwest Florida Utility Managers Council hosted a farewell luncheon to honor Doug Barr. This event was well attended and the program was a fitting salute to Doug. He has been the only Executive Director most of us have ever known and he was an Executive Director much admired. Now we have a new ED and we must learn to engage his vision for the Northwest District and help him manage our precious water resources.