

Our messages to Atlanta and Washington

In last month's column I wrote about the importance of going beyond the St. Marys city limits to work the General Assembly halls in Atlanta to protect the interests of our residents.

We collaborated with municipalities throughout the state to push the House to modify House Bill 170 in order to reduce the negative impact on our local revenue stream. We succeeded in making some changes, but not all we sought. The bill is now in the Senate and we will continue to push for added modifications.

Now we find we have to push beyond the state border to protect the interests of St. Marys and Camden County as we learn more about the potential negative local impact with the implementation of a 2010 Regional Coastal Supplement by the Army Corps of Engineers to the Wetlands Delineation Manual first published by



John Morrissey

Guest columnist

the Corps in 1987.

Why is this seemingly remote set of national rules and regulations causing local concern? Quite simply they could severely limit our future ability to generate economic growth and employment opportunities for our residents.

During next week's fly-in to Washington, D.C., I am presenting a paper to our elected officials in the U.S. House and the Senate ex-

pressing Camden County's objection to these new regulations and I am pleased that Camden County Joint Development Authority will be joining me. I disagree completely with the Corps' new supplemental interpretation of guidelines originally established and approved by Congress in 1987. Let me explain why.

The national Clean Water Act of 1972 included important elements to protect our environment, including the unique marshes and wetlands of coastal Georgia.

In 1987 the corps of engineers developed a set of guidelines to identify and safeguard growth in these areas. They developed indicators to determine how much of a designated property could be used for development and how much should remain pristine due to its valued environmental characteristics.

The corps published a re-

gional coastal supplement in 2010 that essentially tripled the number of criteria capable of designating property as wetlands and consequently significantly decreased the number of usable acres of land for development along the entire Georgia coast.

Whether the land has been in a family for generations or recently purchased by an investor with plans to develop new industry, all property owners are now facing increased hurdles with new rules governing usage.

I am personally a strong advocate for protecting our environment and our wetlands, but I find this overreach by the corps creates a circumvention of the original intent of Congress in the 1987 guidelines and is just too punitive.

As a city and as a county, we have finally begun to move forward in bringing

development and a healthier economy back to our community. We want to maximize our opportunities for the future, not limit them. If we want to create the kind of businesses and jobs to support a spaceport economy, for example, we cannot be hamstrung by an ever changing landscape of regulations that could limit our opportunities.

I firmly believe that we can protect the wetlands and coastal environment by following the 1987 manual approved by Congress. I have already spoken with our federal legislative representatives on this matter and will provide additional support for that argument next week.

Yes, my priority is always St. Marys, but there are times when local leadership is required to step beyond the city limits when our future can be impacted by seemingly inconsequential federal documents.

Reacting in a proactive manner regionally and nationally is one of the ways we can enhance our ability to thrive locally.

Will we have an impact in Washington?

I do not know, but if we do not speak up, we will be ignored. One of the objectives of our coalition of city and county leadership is to be proactive and vigilant on every issue that could positively or negatively impact the future of Camden and its people. This is one I feel strongly about and therefore am taking the lead. The results may be far down the road, but I will remain vigilant because this matters to St. Marys.

I thought it important that you know why I'm spending time outside of the city to promote the interests of the city and its citizens.

John Morrissey is the mayor of St. Marys.