One of the most frequently asked questions I receive from family, friends, and customers is, “Do we have enough water?” With all the negative stories about water supply issues and water quality degradation, these concerns are both legitimate and understandable. As a longtime utility professional, I am expected to have the answers, and at least this time, I believe I do! But why am I so confident?

I’m confident because my utility at St. Johns County has many capable, competent professionals who take these very serious concerns to heart. I’m also confident because of the multiple, dedicated environmental consulting firms that allow us to access their many years of trial and error, and global and regional experiences. Like many utilities, we consider these consultants an extension of our staff.

Integrated Water Resource Plan

Two years ago, our utility conducted an extensive planning process entitled the Integrated Water Resource Plan (IWRP). This thorough process combined our staff with professional technical consultants from several national firms to conduct a complete analysis of our water supply options for the next 25 years. The process assumed several growth-rate scenarios and involved other stakeholders in our area, such as regulators, agricultural interests, neighboring utilities, and environmental groups. The process built a complex decision-making model that weighed, evaluated, and prioritized dozens of short- and long-term strategic water supply options.

The final report, available on our website (www.sjcfl.us), pointed out that while we have done a good job as environmental stewards, we are sure to encounter significant challenges in the years ahead. The plan goes on to lay out a roadmap for our future, which includes increased commitment to conservation, maximization of reuse water, and joint partnerships with our neighbors and other stakeholders. Our IWRP gives me confidence in our future.

Staffing

I’m extremely proud of the team we have built at the utility department. Over the years, the issues related to water supply strategies have become much more complex from a technical, legal, and regulatory perspective. At the same time, our staff has grown in both technical and professional expertise to assure our success.

Commitment

The employees of my department, like many others around the state, are committed to the residents, and visitors, of our county. As I have stated many times, no one cares more about our environment than the people who live here and raise their families here. It’s this dedication and commitment that motivate our staff to thoroughly analyze our situation, develop feasible options, and choose the best long-term water supply strategy for St. Johns County.

I feel good about the future of our utility department because of the quality and professionalism of our employees. While we can never be complacent, I believe that our customers can share the same optimism for our future, as should all customers of the many professional water providers throughout Florida. While we certainly have our challenges, I believe we have the best natural resource of all—our people!