

# Bay Beacon

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## Demand soars for reclaimed effluent

By Del Lessard  
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Time was when no one wanted reclaimed sewage effluent in their back yard.

Now people can't get enough of it.

Some Niceville homeowners using highly purified wastewater

from the regional sewage-treatment plant to water their lawns lately are having trouble with low pressure in their sprinklers.

The advantage of using highly treated sewage effluent for irrigation is that it is clean, and, so far, free to the user.

Swift Creek Community

Owners' Association manager Beth White told Niceville City Manager Lannie Corbin and Okaloosa County Water and Sewer Department Director Jeff Littrell that she has recently received numerous complaints

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Some of Swift Creek subdivision's 310 owners have complained about low pressure in their irrigation systems, which use highly purified effluent from the regional sewage plant. Residents pay nothing for the water.

Beacon photo by Del Lessard

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from homeowners in the community about a lack of pressure in their irrigation systems. The complaints, she said, increased earlier this year after the Niceville Walmart opened. The giant store also uses the highly treated effluent known as "reuse water" for irrigation.

The 310-lot Swift Creek subdivision, off North Partin Drive, Niceville, is one of several users of reclaimed effluent for irrigation. Other longtime users are Rocky Bayou Country Club, Rocky Bayou Christian School, Heritage Gardens Cemetery, and the city's Mullet Festival site, including soc-

cer and baseball fields at the Twin Oaks Sports Complex.

Customers added more recently include the Swift Creek Plantation and Swift Creek Preserve subdivisions, Walmart, the Niceville City Hall complex and city softball fields.

Niceville and Okaloosa County each own 50 percent of the 2.7 million gallons a day of permitted reuse water capacity at the regional sewage-treatment plant in Niceville. The plant is permitted to process an average of 3.35 million gallons of sewage daily, but currently receives only about 2.5 million gallons a day.

Sewer plant manager Rick Helms said part of the pressure problem at Swift Creek is that irrigation customers generally want

to water their lawns at the same time—in the early morning. The Walmart site is connected through the Swift Creek system, he said.

A temporary solution would be to restrict watering to certain times and days, Helms said. This would spread out demand.

A long-term solution, Helms said, would be to increase the diameter of the 6-inch pipe supplying reuse water to Swift Creek subdivision and Walmart. But that would cost someone some money.

The feeder pipes to Swift Creek come off a 12-inch pipe along College Boulevard that supplies reuse water between the sewer plant and Rocky Bayou Country Club, the utility's oldest such customer.

Corbin and Littrell asked engineering firm Polyengineering to provide an estimate for upsizing the supply line to Swift Creek. After they get cost estimates, Niceville and the county will determine if they can afford the upgrade, officials said.

The sewer plant currently supplies reuse water free of charge because it would otherwise have to pay to dispose of it on land rented from Eglin Air Force Base. Thus, those who use it to water their lawns are, incidentally, performing a public service.

Littrell said that irrigation customers at Swift Creek were advised at the outset that the free water was only guaranteed for the first five years, a period that expired in 2005.