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Environmental protection urged

By LEONORA LaPETER
Special to *The Gazette*

Local residents need to work together to protect the area's environmental resources.

That was the message Tuesday night at a South of the Broad Democratic Club forum, which featured officials from the Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Beaufort County Council Chairman Thomas C. Taylor and Hilton Head Island environmental consultant Todd Ballantine.

All of the speakers had different messages, but all stressed protection of the environment and local citizen involvement.

"We live in one of the most beautiful places in the world, and we must protect the water and we must protect our rivers," said Taylor, standing before the 80 or so residents who turned out for the meeting on Hilton Head Island. "I believe strongly we have a yeoman's job ahead of us in Beaufort County, but we'll continue to work on it."

Taylor said leaking septic tanks, which contaminate waterways and close oyster beds to harvesting, may be the single worst environmental hazard in Beaufort County. He said he would like to see the state pass more stringent requirements for septic tanks, laws that would never allow septic tanks to be installed in the county again.

Ballantine said he believes the county is experiencing several environmental challenges, conflicts that will not go away until people get together and resolve them.

There are conflicts over oyster beds, crabbing rights and personal watercraft use in local waterways. "You could say all of Beaufort County is at a crossroads," Ballantine said. "I would say it's always been at a

crossroads."

Hilton Head Island, in particular, has been rediscovered decade after decade as the population increases, as much as 88-fold since the first bridge was installed in 1956, he said.

It has become increasingly urbanized "in spite of itself," he said.

"Now that we have (urbanization), we all need to recognize that denial is not a river in Egypt," Ballantine said. "It is something planners shouldn't have."

As it ages and sees an increase in population and traffic problems, Hilton Head Island is becoming more homogeneous, Ballantine said.

This may result in the loss of a tennis tournament such as the *Family Circle Magazine* Cup, because tournament organizers might be attracted by the fanfare and glare of newer places.

"This is what happens in tourism," Ballantine said. "The newest and brightest get the big spenders ... as you get more and more people, each spends less and less per capita. The economy begins to slip. I believe we're in a slip already."

Meanwhile, Parris Island officials said they are committed to environmental protection of their island just north of Hilton Head Island. They have won half a dozen environmental awards in the past two years and are committed to cleaning some 29 contaminated sites on the island, including a landfill that dates back to the 1920s and an area next to a dry cleaning site.

Ballantine said Parris Island is Beaufort County's "Savannah River Site," but it's nice to see the government making efforts to clean it up. Parris Island encouraged citizens to join a citizens' advisory board for the Parris Island cleanup.