Florida Geographer Readers:

The dust of the recent spring semester has settled, the summer rainy season is finally upon us, and issue 54 of the journal is now available. Bethune-Cookman University’s Hyun Jung Cho and Michael A. Reiter approached me more than a year ago to explain that a host of scholars had been exploring the Halifax River watershed for couple of years, and they proposed to generate a collection of papers that elucidate selected aspects of the Halifax River region. It seemed to me that Florida’s geographers would learn much from reading a wide-ranging series of essays about this popular but understudied part of the state; and now that these papers are here in final form, I suspect that you will learn much about the region as I did.

It is hard to pin the Halifax River down because it has no real beginning or end. It is part of the Intracoastal Waterway and most closely associated with Daytona and Volusia County, although one of its significant tributaries—Bulow Creek—originates in southern Flagler County. Other important tributaries include the Tomoka River and Spruce Creek. Physical geographers will appreciate that a series of gentle, north/south trending ridges in the region cause these tributaries to flow mostly between the ridges in a modified trellis drainage pattern, occasionally finding weak spots in a ridge through which they flow toward the Halifax. The northern end of the 20-something mile-long Halifax River is commonly understood to be that portion of the Intracoastal around the Volusia/Flagler County line. The southern end? You could define it as Ponce Inlet, just north of New Smyrna Beach, or perhaps a bit further south to New Smyrna proper. Either way, thanks to the century plus old Intracoastal Waterway, the Halifax is a northern extension of the Indian River Lagoon. Indeed, like its southern neighbor, the Halifax River is really an estuarine lagoon, heavily influenced by changing tides at Ponce Inlet as well as its more inland freshwater tributaries and canals.

As it happens, the Halifax River region has a long history of human use and modification. Native Americans were present thousands of years ago up to contact with Europeans in the 1500s. England established the King’s Road (or Old King’s Road), from southeast Georgia down to New Smyrna, just prior to the American Revolution. Several significant plantations appeared near the region’s waterways in the early nineteenth century, but most of these were destroyed during the war with the Seminoles in the 1830s—yet their ruins dot the Halifax watershed. By the later nineteenth century, railroads made their way to the region, and after World War II, additional roads for cars and trucks opened the floodgates to development in the area. Much of the Halifax River is now lined with intensive development, which will soon be threatened by sea level rise.
The collection of papers in this edition of the *Florida Geographer* expands upon all these themes, and thanks to electronic publication, there are a host of informative maps and attractive photographs to illustrate ideas in the text. After guest editors Hyun Jung Cho and Michael Reiter set the stage for the papers that follow, Prof. Cho provides a photo essay on the Halifax River. Benjamin Tanner then combines several maps, spectacular photos, and insights from a range of reports to describe the region’s alternating north/south ridges and their relationship to development patterns in the region. Charles Jacoby explains the network of waterways that feed the Halifax River as well as their historic use and occasional abuse over time. Kimberly Reiter outlines the historic development of mostly land transportation throughout the watershed—including the use of Daytona’s beaches for auto transport and racing. Zach Zacharias uses several images from Hyun Jung Cho to briefly tell the story of the region’s several early nineteenth century plantations. Janardan Mainali and Christopher de Bodisco use GIS and perspectives from economics to highlight the threat of projected sea level rise to intensive development along and near the Halifax River—and how we might handle rising seas moving forward. Michael Humphreys uses a restorative justice lens to ask if we might make better use of traditional ecological knowledge as a way of saving ourselves and honoring the long-departed Timucua Indians, who were ravaged mostly by European diseases for which they had no immunity. Finally, Michael Reiter does not just bemoan the loss of so much natural landscape in the region; he makes a plea for preserving more sensitive lands, partly for conservation biology reasons but also as a way of minimizing the damage from expected sea level rise.

I owe a giant debt of gratitude to Hyun Jung Cho and Michael Reiter of Bethune-Cookman University for their vision and work on this issue; and to each author who stayed the course, tolerated critiques with grace, and produced enlightening and thought-provoking essays. This special issue does not have any other review articles, book reviews, or my favorite Florida place essays. These features will resume in the next issue. As always, if you have research or an idea for an essay that might fit in this journal, please let me know. I am not hard to find: cmeindl@usf.edu

Warm Regards,

Christopher F. Meindl, Editor