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Licensing of Geologists in Florida:
A Result of the Population/Development
Explosion and Political Environmental Awareness

By

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LICENSING OF GEOLOGISTS IN FLORIDA: A RESULT
OF THE POPULATION/DEVELOPMENT EXPLOSION AND POLITICAL
ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

After five attempts to pass a bill requiring the licensing of professional geologists in Florida, a bill was finally passed into law in 1987. The first two attempts in the mid-1970's were poorly organized and the geologic community was not uniform in its support. By the mid-1980's the dissention among some factions of the profession had all but disappeared, the engineering profession supported the concept, and ground water and environmental concerns were on the minds of every legislator and on the front pages of local newspapers. With approximately 1,000 people moving to Florida every day the associated infrastructure development and the potential for natural environmental destruction are enormous. Because Florida obtains more than 92% of its drinking water from ground water, Florida's informed population has learned to recognize how vulnerable the ground water is to degradation or complete destruction as development continues its suburban sprawl. By legislation, geologists are now required to be licensed and sign off on all documents containing interpretative geology.

INTRODUCTION

The general public is more aware of geological/environmental problems now than ever before. Global topics receiving constant attention by the news media include: deterioration of the ozone layer and the possible impact on global temperature, sea-level rise and associated enhanced ultraviolet radiation; pollution and contamination from landfills; oil and mineral shortages; and poor land-use planning. One result of this environmental awareness has been the registration requirement for geologists many states have implemented in recent years.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Licensing of geologists in Florida was first introduced as a legislative bill in 1976. This and three subsequent attempts were unsuccessful for many reasons. The main factor was that the elected officials and for the most part the public in general did not perceive earth resources conservation and development or environmental issues, as a real concern worthy of their attention. Another contributing factor which led to the failure of the licensing attempts was the

lack of a consensus in the geologic community itself that licensing would be beneficial and therefore desirable. The academic members were for the most part opposed to licensing because early versions of the law would not give more than four years credit for full-time teaching, towards the proposed seven-year experience requirement. In addition, the engineering profession was not convinced there was a need for licensed geologists and opposed the concept.

During the last decade Florida has continued to grow and develop at a rate never before seen. Approximately 1,000 people are added to Florida's population statistics as new residents daily. The expanding population creates large demands for raw materials, requiring the development of the infrastructure and greatly impacting the natural environment. A further complicating factor is that Florida obtains more than 92% of its drinking water from ground water, and most of its population lives near the coast where overpumping of the aquifer can cause salt water intrusion problems.

Specific environmental problems in Florida constantly reported in the news media include ground water contamination, mining and associated land destruction, sinkhole occurrences, peat mining and subsidence, radon, coastal erosion, wetlands destruction through development fill, expansive clays in soils, oil drilling and the perceived associated environmental degradation.

It is clear the news media is more environmentally aware, and as a result our citizens and elected officials are also.

Partially as a result of this informed citizenry, a bill requiring the licensing of professional geologists was passed in 1987. At this time the geologic community voiced total support and the engineering profession did not oppose the bill. The professional engineers seemed to welcome the released liability to another professional.

Florida's law as passed in 1987 included a "grandfather clause" which allowed those geologists meeting all the requirements to be licensed without taking the exam. Over one thousand geologists were licensed during that first year, with about one-third being out-of-state residents. There are now nearly thirteen hundred geologists licensed in Florida.

In Florida, the licensing regulation is administered by the Department of Professional Regulation. Within that department there is a professional testing branch which, in conjunction with a number of professional geologists, formed a test design committee to prepare the exam. The Florida exam is different from most other states in that it does not just test on fundamental geology basics. It is assumed the applicant who has a Bachelors Degree in Geology (or a related subject with 30 hours in geology) already knows the basics. So the test is designed with application of these principles in mind. How a geologic problem would be solved or an interpretation made is emphasized. In this way it is more of an "applied test" in contrast to a knowledge test. The exam has been received favorably by other states' boards and the examinees.

The profession is regulated by an appointed board. The Florida Board of Professional Geologists is comprised of six licensed professional geologists and two laypersons. As required by statute, one of the geologists is the State Geologist; all others are appointed by the Governor.

CLOSING COMMENTS

As geologists most of us have historically been involved with mapping the earth, primarily to find mineral deposits. The population of our planet will continue to demand the raw materials and energy to continue to better our lifestyle. We have a great opportunity to continue to play a major role in this prosperity in that not only can we be the primary scientist involved with initial exploration, we also can contribute towards the recommendation of the most environmentally compatible approach for development.

Florida's estimated non-fuel production in 1989 was valued at \$1.6 billion. The demand for portland cement, clays, construction sand and gravel, and crushed stone continues to climb. Florida ranks fifth nationally in total mineral volume, second in industrial mineral sales and nineteenth in metal value.

Florida is first nationally in phosphate and peat production and in the top three in cement and crushed stone.

It is clear in the years ahead geologists will have increased opportunities in both resource development and conservation, and in environmental protection. This will also bring increased visibility of the profession. We have witnessed the first major evidence of this in Florida with the required licensing of professional geologists.

REFERENCES

Florida Board of Professional Geologists, Dept. of Professional Regulation, The Northwood Centre, 1940 N. Monroe St., Suite 60, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0750, Phone (904)488-1105.

Florida Statutes Chapter 492

Florida Administrative Code Rules 21DD



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