



## Water Supply and the St. Johns River: *Central Florida's never-ending thirst threatens the River.*

Starting in early 2003, an influential group of business leaders, "The Florida Council of 100", met behind closed doors to divvy up the state's water supply. Later that year, the Council published a report entitled, *Improving Florida's Water Supply Management Structure*. The controversial report presented the idea of redirecting North Florida's precious water resources to booming Central and South Florida.

The report caused a firestorm. The opposition to the Council's report was so overwhelming that many believed the idea of water transfers had been defeated.

To the contrary, the State's Water Management Districts have embraced the concept and are moving forward with projects that will divert water to areas in need. The idea of taking water from one area of the state to meet the needs of another is no longer a concept; it is a reality. Unfortunately, the St. Johns and Ocklawaha Rivers are the testing grounds for this experiment.

### Overview

- According to the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), Central Florida has out-stripped the Floridan Aquifer's ability to provide a sustainable drinking water source beyond 2013. The District has told communities they will have to seek alternative water supply (AWS) sources, such as surface water and desalinization.
- The SJRWMD has stated that **155 million gallons of water per day (MGD)** can be removed from the St. Johns River between the headwaters and Deland (State Road 44) to provide water for Orlando and Central Florida without harming the health of the river.
- Because river water has a high salt or mineral content, most withdrawals will require treatment by reverse osmosis, or RO. A by-product of RO is high mineral content and/or very salty water. RO water is also high in nutrients. The byproducts, or pollutants, are called "concentrate". The SJRWMD recently began a study to determine the impacts of the concentrate on the river environment. The study will end in a year.
- The SJRWMD is also focusing its attention on the **lower Ocklawaha River**. Although District staff has not set a minimum flow level, or MFL, for the Ocklawaha River, the agency is telling counties to expect to be able to withdraw **90 to 108 MGD** from the Ocklawaha.
- The withdrawals from the St. Johns and Ocklawaha could total **263 million gallons per day**.
- Withdrawals from the St. Johns will impact the river's salinity line.
- One of the largest proposed water withdrawals, Yankee Lake, is planned in an area just south of the Wekiva Aquatic Preserve. Also, this plant could eventually discharge RO concentrate into the river.
- The only county proposing to withdraw water from the River that has a mandatory water conservation plan is Volusia County. **None of the other counties or municipalities that are planning water withdrawals has mandatory water conservation programs.**
- **The proposed withdrawals will cost over \$1 billion.** These plans will only provide drinking water needs until ~2030, less than 25 years into the future.

## St. Johns Riverkeeper Concerns

1. St. Johns Riverkeeper is concerned that the withdrawals from the St. Johns and the Ocklawaha could potentially cause significant harm to the health of both rivers.
2. The withdrawals will cause the St. Johns River's salinity line to shift upstream, especially during drought and low flow conditions. No one, including the SJRWMD, fully understands all of the potential impacts to the river's health and fisheries from the proposed withdrawals.
3. In addition to withdrawing water from the St. Johns and Ocklawaha, the SJRWMD is also proposing to utilize Aquifer Storage Recovery, or ASR. ASR is a process that injects minimally treated water back into ground water aquifers for storage until it is needed at a later date. There are significant risks associated with this procedure.
4. "Concentrate" from the RO process could harm the St. Johns River's health by adding additional pollutants to an already stressed system. Riverkeeper is concerned the SJRWMD could issue numerous withdrawal permits before the RO concentrate study is completed.
5. The SJRWMD has not required mandatory conservation programs in an attempt to reduce the need to withdraw river water, despite that fact that residents within the watershed of the St. Johns use approximately 150 gallons of water per person each and every day.
6. All of the District's studies rationalizing and/or minimizing the environmental impacts of water withdrawal have been done "in house", i.e. written by staff or consultants paid for by the District. There has been no independent review of any of these reports.
7. Once the river water withdrawal process begins, there may be no turning back, even if the act results in harm to the river's ecological health.
8. Riverkeeper is concerned that this may only be the beginning of water withdrawals from the St. Johns and its tributaries. As groundwater supplies continue to be depleted, there will be more pressure to continue this process and allow additional withdrawals in the future.
9. The SJRWMD has poorly managed our groundwater supplies and now wants to manage the withdrawal of water from our rivers. The District should turn its attention to water conservation, desalinization, and more sustainable planning practices before ever considering the St. Johns and Ocklawaha as alternative water supply sources.
10. The St. Johns River is one of the "laziest" rivers in the world, dropping less than 30 feet from its source to its mouth. This fact combined with tidal influences makes it difficult for our river to efficiently flush pollutants and sediments. Removing the amount of water that is being proposed will potentially worsen pollution problems.

## What You Can Do

Let Governor Charlie Crist, the SJRWMD Governing Board, and your local elected officials know that you oppose the proposal to withdrawal water from the St. Johns River and Ocklawaha River. Tell them to require and support water conservation and desalinization efforts first.

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