

St. Johns RIVERKEEPER is a 501 (c) 3, nonprofit advocacy organization. Our mission is to be an independent voice that defends, advocates, and activates others to protect and restore the St. Johns River. Responses to this survey will be made public to our members and supporters.



St. Johns RIVERKEEPER Candidate Survey November 2018

Responses to this survey will be posted on our website at www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org and shared with over 20,000 members, followers and supporters throughout the state of Florida.

Threats to the River's Health

The health of the St. Johns River is threatened by many activities and problems, including:

- Pollution from excessive nutrients that cause toxic algal blooms, including fertilizers, stormwater runoff, municipal wastewater, septic tanks, sewage sludge (aka biosolids), industrial discharges, and agriculture;
- Fecal bacteria pollution from failing septic tanks, leaking sewage pipes, sanitary sewer overflows (SSO's), and animal waste;
- Over-pumping from the aquifer and reduced spring flows;
- Sedimentation from construction-site runoff that degrades water quality and the health of creeks and tributaries;
- Sea level rise that increases saltwater intrusion, water levels, and storm surge, and projects like dredging that will exacerbate these problems without mitigation;
- Loss of wetlands, springsheds, aquifer recharge areas, and other environmentally-sensitive lands due to rapid growth and development and lack of funding appropriated for acquisition;
- Elimination or weakening of environmental rules and regulations and lack of enforcement by state agencies for wastewater discharge and other permit violations.

1. *What do you consider to be the biggest threats to the health of the St. Johns River and its watershed and, if elected, what will you do to address these problems?*

#1 The biggest threat to the St. Johns River is lack of awareness of the public regarding the importance of the St Johns River system and the broad array of threats to the water in that system as well as fresh water in the state. The public, legislators, county commissioners, building departments, and other officials in areas that generate impacts on the system must be aware of how their area of purview can affect water quality.

Another threat is the politicization of the St Johns Water Management District. The primary authority should be the St Johns Water Management District as a science based, not political based organization as it has become under Governor Scott.

It is my understanding that current management philosophy of the Department of Environmental Protection is itself a threat to the health of Florida waters. The policies and leadership established by the Scott administration has resulted in lower quality waters. The Department of Environmental Protection must improve the sampling of our waters, increase research, and better enforce existing rules to better manage threats to the river system and our other water resources.

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Pollution

Unfortunately, the St. Johns River and its tributaries are receiving too much nitrogen and phosphorous from failing septic tanks, stormwater runoff, fertilizers, wastewater treatment plants, industrial discharges, and sewage sludge.

Excessive nutrients feed uncontrolled algal blooms that deplete oxygen in the water needed by fish, reduce light that is essential to submerged aquatic vegetation (SAVs), and threaten the health of both humans and aquatic life by emitting toxins. Toxic algal blooms and pollution also hurt businesses (marinas, kayak outfitters, fishing guides, realtors, boat dealers, restaurants, hotels, etc.), cost jobs, reduce property values and our tax base, and diminish recreational opportunities.

Potential policy solutions include: Increase awareness about proper use and application of fertilizers, increase funding to remove failing septic tanks, implement septic tank inspection program, increase enforcement actions on utilities for frequent sewage spills and permit violations, and prohibiting use of sewage sludge near waterbodies

2. What do you see as the most effective and necessary steps to protect the St. Johns from nutrient pollution and prevent algae blooms?

#2 Protection of the St Johns begins with public education, as well as management changes to restore effective Water Management Districts and Department of Environmental Protection as mentioned previously. The threats created by development: runoff, sewage and habitat destruction must be carefully managed. There are good examples to address some of the development issues through zoning, clustered development and maintaining rural areas. Central sewer as implemented by Orange County using the Wetlands Park has shown to be effective.

Septic Tanks

Thirty percent of the people in Florida rely on an estimated 2.6 million septic tanks for their wastewater disposal.

Thousands of these septic tanks are failing or malfunctioning, allowing bacteria, nitrogen, and other contaminants (pharmaceuticals, hormones, etc.) to leach into our waterways. While the 2017 Water Bill did provide programs and funding to remove some failing and poorly located septic tanks, more funding is needed and little is being done to curb the high volume of new septic tanks permits that are issued every day by county health departments. Developers of new subdivisions and single family homes are often not required or provided incentives to connect to existing water lines, or develop in areas where wastewater infrastructure already exists.

3. Would you support more funding for septic tank remediation and/or policies that protect waterways and sensitive lands by placing more stringent permit requirements on new septic tanks?

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4. Would you support a septic tank inspection program and requirements to properly maintain and repair septic tanks, when necessary? If not, please explain your answer.

#3&4 Existing septic systems that have been poorly sited or are not effective, but were permitted will have to be mitigated, either by upgrading the system or moving to an alternate collection or central sewer. There is a significant cost consideration and verification that the system requires modification must be validated and depending on the circumstances, financial responsibility will likely require some government contribution.

Wetlands

Since the early 1900's, Florida has lost nearly 44% of its original wetlands. Yet, thousands of acres of wetlands continue to be destroyed each year throughout the state. Wetlands are critical for water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, storm and flood protection, and filters for our waterways. A 2015 University of North Florida economic study of the Lower St. Johns River found that "wetlands result in in almost \$3 billion dollars in savings for flood prevention or \$15,000 for each residence within the flood zone, and the wetlands provide an economic value for nutrient removal that exceeds \$400 million/year for Nitrogen and \$5.3 million /year for Phosphorous."

5. Which statement best describes your perceptions of our current wetland protections?

- a. **Current rules and regulations are sufficient to adequately protect wetlands.**
- b. **Current rules and regulations are not sufficient to adequately protect wetlands and need to be strengthened or improved.**
- c. **Current rules and regulations are excessive and need to be curtailed.**
- d. **Current rules and regulations are sufficient but are burdensome to businesses and need to be curtailed in order to stimulate job growth.**

#5 The answer is B. It is evident that current rules are not being enforced by the DEP adequately. Having rules that are not utilized is the first problem to resolve.

Water Conservation and Supply

The State of Florida is already reaching the sustainable limits of its predominant source of water, the Floridan Aquifer. Current water supply plans are looking to draw on surface water from our rivers and lakes in order to meet future demand. The St. Johns River Water Management District has developed plans to withdraw up to 160 million gallons of surface water a day from the St. Johns River. Removing millions of gallons a day from the flow of the river or its tributaries, such as Black Creek and the Ocklawaha River, will worsen existing pollution problems, increase salinity levels, and adversely impact the fisheries, wildlife, and submerged vegetation in and along the St. Johns. We are committed to preventing withdrawals and advocating for more sensible solutions, such as water conservation and the reuse of reclaimed water. Some of the proven conservation strategies include, tiered utility rates, incentives for the purchase of water-efficient plumbing fixtures and appliances,

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incentives for water-efficient landscaping and building practices, water audits, mobile irrigation labs, Consumptive Use Permit fees based on the quantity of water used, and building codes that require water-efficient fixtures and irrigation systems.

6. What will you do to demonstrate leadership on water conservation to ensure that proven reuse and conservation strategies are implemented and water is conserved and more efficiently utilized in Florida?

#6 Reuse is generally good, however there is the potential for heavy nutrient concentrations creating issues with surface waters. Clearly, conservation is the low hanging fruit and a system of carrots and sticks that helps all users reduce must be employed.

7. Currently, Consumptive Use Permits (CUPs) do not include a fee based on the quantity of water used by the applicant. Would you support a fee on water withdrawn from the aquifer?

#7 As our population grows we are finding that there are limits to what we can deplete from the natural environment. The Floridian aquifer is threatened with salt water intrusion and as such must be protected and withdrawals diminished. Similarly, the springs that are beautiful and the source for significant parts of what makes Florida special are endangered due to withdrawals. The waters of the state must be managed in a way that serves not just business, employers, or residents or visitors, but all who live, work and play in Florida. These competing interests all have the common desire for water and all understand the water is a limited resource and as such has a value.

Springs Protection

Florida's springs are unique and iconic natural treasures of our state, with a greater concentration of springs in Florida than in any other region of the world. More than 100 springs are located within the St. Johns River watershed providing approximately 30% of the flow. Unfortunately, many of our springs are in serious decline due to encroaching development, agricultural and urban runoff, groundwater pollution, failing septic tanks, and the reduction in levels of our underground aquifers.

As a result, many springs have experienced significant decreases in flow, water clarity, and fish biomass with alarming increases in nitrate levels and algal blooms. Silver Springs, a National Natural Landmark, is a perfect example of the tragic situation that is taking place. Discharge rates have declined from a historic average of about 824 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 465 cfs in 2017, which is a 43% reduction in flow since 1955. Fish biomass has decreased by 92%. Nitrates have increased from an average background level of less than 0.05 milligrams per liter (mg/l) to an average above 1 mg/l which represents about a 20- fold increase.

One of the major contributors to a decline in the health of Silver Springs is the existence of the Kirkpatrick Dam or Rodman Pool on the Ocklawaha River. The Dam has flooded more than 7,500

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acres of forested wetlands, 16 miles of river and at least 20 springs. It also blocks passageway for migratory fish and manatees that historically wintered at Silver Springs.

8. What kinds of measures would you support to protect our springs and springsheds?

#8 Recognizing the importance of the springs as critical to our environmental systems and as a part of Florida's economic prosperity in both tourism and quality of life, restrictions or regulations that protect Florida springs flow and quality are necessary as our demands for water and population continues to stress these vulnerable natural resources.

9. Would you support breaching the Kirkpatrick Dam and restoring natural flow to the St. Johns, Ocklawaha, and Silver rivers? Why or why not?

#9 The Cross Florida Barge Canal will never be realized. The economic cost benefit to keeping the dams does not exist. The damage that was done when they were created will not be easily be corrected, but the ongoing impacts can be with restoration of the natural flows of these rivers.

Resiliency

It is estimated that 28% of Florida's total assets are located within the 100-year floodplain, or \$714 billion. Climate scientists are predicting slower, wetter and more intense storms, further increasing the risk to low-lying communities in the state. When widespread flooding occurs, water can infiltrate pipes causing sewer systems to back up and sewage to be discharged into nearby streets and waterways. Over 28 million gallons of wastewater spilled across Florida in the wake of Hurricane Irma. For septic tank users, rising groundwater levels prevent proper drainage, causing them to back up and overflow. Blooms that can be toxic to fish, wildlife, and humans can grow. Flood waters also often flush chemicals and contaminants from roads, parking lots and industrial and hazardous waste sites into surrounding neighborhoods and our river, creating additional health hazards.

10. What policies or programs would you support that aim to protect our communities from rising waters?

#10 National flood insurance should be constructed to discourage new development in areas prone to the expected conditions. The public cannot possibly bear the financial burden on the scale that is likely should the worst expectations be realized. At the same time, the worst of the predicted conditions will develop slowly over time and as the realization that this is real, significant and lasting will or won't be known. Doing what we know must be done to protect our environment given the current conditions is a heavy lift in itself. Keeping in mind the long-term weather forecast as we consider our immediate concerns should bias our decisions to embrace this forecast when we have the opportunity, would be wise.

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Growth Management

Growth management policies and programs that influence new development in order to promote sustainable communities and protect our environment have been cut or weakened in the last eight years. Incentives and requirements for redevelopment, green infrastructure, and low impact development are often not strong enough or do not exist in many communities. Unsustainable growth and the development of environmentally-sensitive regions of our state impacts water quality through wetland loss and stormwater runoff, makes us more vulnerable to storms and flooding, fragments wildlife corridors and destroys habitat, and requires costly new roads, infrastructure and services that some municipalities may not be able to adequately provide for its residents.

11. Do you support growth management policies that promote, encourage, or require sustainable development practices? If so, please describe the type of policies that you think are necessary to better manage growth in our state and more effectively protect our waterways and natural resources.

#11 As I have mentioned earlier, zoning and growth management are central to protecting our natural environment and building livable communities. By livable, I mean access to groceries, services, schools and work that minimizes land use in areas that have sensitive lands. Roads are expensive to build and maintain, and as growth continues roads are costly to expand and the construction barrels are inconvenient for the years it sometimes takes to expand the roads. Florida can be confident that it will be a destination for many years in the future, building a transportation system that includes light rail can provide the access that people want without the overwhelming reliance on personal transportation that breaks the backs of many cities across our nation. We are the home of the US Space program, of SpaceX and a lot of smart people. I think we can do better.

Conservation Land

A huge majority – over 75 percent – of Florida voters approved the Water and Land Conservation Amendment to the Florida Constitution in November 2014. The title was clear: “Dedicating funds to acquire and restore Florida conservation and recreation lands.” The amendment requires that 33 percent of the proceeds from the already existing real estate documentary-stamp taxes go for land acquisition. A judge ruled in June 2018 that the state legislature to date has failed to appropriately allocate these funds based on the voter intent and the language of the State Constitution.

12. Do you think the Florida Legislature has properly and sufficiently allocated funds from the real estate documentary-stamp tax for land acquisition? What expenses do you think are appropriate for the use of these dedicated funds and what type of land conservation projects do you think should be prioritized by the state?

#12 The courts have ruled, the Legislature ignored the will of the people when they and the governor failed utilize the dedicated funds as they were intended. Clearly the funds

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are intended to purchase unique treasures in our state. Restoration of the rivers, agriculture land south of lake Okeechobee, and endless other projects must be considered. Priority must take in to account the contribution to our environment, the degree the property is threatened or degraded.