

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?

Of the threats listed above, all of which are critically important, I feel that the most serious are loss of wetlands, elimination and weakening of environmental rules and excessive nutrients running off into the water.

My first priority would be to reinstate the law that all septic tanks be inspected every five years. The motivation behind elimination of the 2010 law was purely political. I would also favor laws against the application of chemicals and of pasturing animals too close to bodies of water. I would listen to the environmental scientists in determining a safe perimeter.

I would fight to make sure that all of the funds collected under the 2014 Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative are spent on wilderness acquisition as was intended when the voters approved the referendum.

I will do everything in my power to make sure that existing environmental laws are enforced and that regulations that were rescinded over the last eight years are re-implemented. Finally, I would work with the new governor to make sure that the Florida Department of

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Environmental Protection is staffed by people with science backgrounds who actually care about the environment.

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?

As stated before, it is imperative that we reinstate the law that all septic tanks be inspected every five years.

I understand that replacing leaking septic tanks would be a burden for some people, so I would offer a tax incentive to assist them in the purchase and installation of new equipment. I would also encourage and support municipalities in hooking up residents, especially those near waterways, to sewer lines.

I would work with environmental scientists to determine a safe perimeter around bodies of water and the appropriate substances to prohibit and support laws that would ban the application of those substances close to bodies of water

I would propose a "Green Yard" designation for homeowners and businesses who choose to use local plants resilient to our climate. They would be rewarded with a tax incentive and a "Green Yard" sign for posting on their property.

Septic Tanks

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

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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?

First, I would support laws to require new subdivisions and homes to connect to existing sewer lines where they exist. I would support a prohibition on the placement of new septic tanks in close proximity to waterways and wetlands.

Finally I would support a tax credit for the replacement of existing septic tank equipment and a larger credit for connecting to sewer lines.

The first priority would be to address septic tanks where the plume is in close enough proximity to leak into our waterways.

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.

Emphatically, yes.

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.**

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- d. ***Current rules and regulations are sufficient but are burdensome to businesses and need to be curtailed in order to stimulate job growth.***

b. It is imperative that we prevent the future loss of wetlands. Once lost, they are nearly impossible to recover. As Marjory Stoneman Douglas said, "You can't conserve what you haven't got."

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, 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?***

I am adamantly opposed to the withdrawal of surface water from the St. Johns and other waterways. Instead, we need to be promoting and enforcing conservation.

As a first step I would propose that all new subdivisions and homes have sustainable Florida-friendly landscaping. All of the water saving initiatives described above should be applied to new developments. For existing residences and businesses, I would favor tax incentives to encourage compliance. I would also support a yearly tax holiday on water efficient fixtures and appliances.

- 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?***

Yes I would. I propose a sliding scale in which municipalities and businesses that demonstrate good water conservation practices would receive reduced rates.

Springs Protection

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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 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?

I would favor the prohibition of new development within a certain distance from an existing spring, the safe distance to be determined with the help of environmental scientists. I would also require an environmental study to determine whether new permitting would endanger the rate of flow from existing springs. I have always felt that excessive withdrawal from the aquifer affects water pressure flowing into the springs.

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

Yes. I know that Rodman Reservoir is a fishing attraction that is important to local economies. But our water in Florida is part of an interconnected and interdependent system that includes the Floridan aquifer, our lakes, rivers, streams, and springs plus the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico and the Everglades. Any action, or inaction, involving a body of water could affect our waterways statewide.

If the situation is left alone, Rodman will eventually suffer from the extra nutrients and reduced flow of the Ocklawaha and Silver rivers, the damage will spread and tourism will be even further impacted.

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

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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?

The Union of Concerned Scientists is predicting that Florida will be one of the states hardest hit by rising sea levels. There will be property loss and, as you described, the spread of contaminants into our water.

As discussed previously, septic tanks need to be inspected remediated and, even better, replaced with connection to sewer lines.

Since Irma, I have heard very little of how the state and local municipalities plan to prevent the release of toxic substances and nutrients into our waterways during major storms. I would support a statewide audit requiring each municipality to submit their plan to prevent the discharge of sewage into our water during and following hurricanes and flood events.

I would be in favor of a ban on new roadways and parking lots close to waterways.

I would like to see more science behind how the St. Johns dredging project would mitigate its potential flooding propensity before I could endorse it.

Long-term, we need to live up to the title of "Sunshine State" and promote the use of solar energy. The first step is to rescind the law that prevents homeowners from using their Federal stipend to directly pay contractors to install solar panels on their homes. Let's also allow shopping malls and business parks to sell power generated by solar panels directly to their tenants. Finally, I would vote to allow residents and businesses to sell power back to utilities at the same rate that the utilities charge.

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.

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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.

Yes. Right now the process is to allow a developer to go ahead and build and then worry about roads, schools, sewage, water supply, runoff from lawns and roads, etc. These issues need to all be addressed up front. The developer should work in conjunction with municipal authorities, environmental scientists, schools and other stakeholders to determine whether a site is suitable for building and then how best to mitigate the impact.

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: “Dedicates 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?

No, the Florida Legislature has not lived up to its commitment. This is not unusual. Many citizen driven amendments are ignored, partially implemented or have their funding diverted to other uses.

I believe that the Water and Land Conservation Amendment, like other ballot referenda, should be implemented as written and approved by the voters. In the case of the amendment in question, all funds from allocated 33% portion of the real estate documentary stamp tax should go towards the purchase of conservation and recreational lands.