

THE KINGFISHER

KEEPING WATCH OVER OUR RIVER



Vol. 12 Spring 2015

Riverkeeper Update



Men may dam it and say that they have made a lake, but it will still be a river. It will keep its nature and bide its time, like a caged animal alert for the slightest opening. In time, it will have its way; the dam, like the ancient cliffs, will be carried away piecemeal in the currents.

— Wendell Berry

The Ocklawaha, the largest and arguably the most important tributary of the St. Johns River, is one such river that has been biding its time for far too long. Unfortunately, the Ocklawaha and its springs and wetlands have suffered for more than 45 years, as a result of efforts in the 1960's to create a quicker maritime route across Florida, the Cross Florida Barge Canal. President Nixon put a permanent end to this boondoggle project in 1971, but not before the Rodman Dam (now known as the Kirkpatrick Dam) was built across the Ocklawaha and the Rodman Pool was created. According to wetland scientist Robin Lewis, "the construction of the Kirkpatrick Dam and devastation of the wetlands above and below the dam saw the loss of a free, natural, nutrient-cleansing machine, approximately 15,000 acres in size... All that habitat, all that water-cleansing power, could be harnessed to improve the environment and improve the river." Restoring the Ocklawaha is also one of the key steps in eventually restoring the St. Johns.

In addition, a free flowing Ocklawaha would help to offset some of the damage from dredging farther downstream. Numerous federal and state agencies support Ocklawaha restoration as mitigation.

Unfortunately, the Army Corps of Engineers not only ignored these recommendations, but decided to require virtually no mitigation in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As a result, St. Johns Riverkeeper agreed to work with Jax Chamber and the City of Jacksonville to advocate for a restored Ocklawaha, independent of the EIS. While we remain opposed to the proposed deep dredge, we are committed to better fortifying our river should the dredging move forward. This agreement gives us one more chance to do just that. If our efforts to restore the Ocklawaha are unsuccessful, we will move forward with a legal challenge and continue to fight for more mitigation.

Regardless of the outcome of the proposed dredging, we will continue with our campaign to free the Ocklawaha. The time has come for this Outstanding Florida Water to finally run free, once again.

Marjorie Carr, the courageous "Micanopy house wife" who led the campaign to stop the barge canal, said the effort to save the Ocklawaha is "not a north central Florida local issue. The Ocklawaha River is a glorious part of Florida's natural heritage. Floridians should be aware that if they can't save the Ocklawaha they have little chance of saving any of the remaining lovely wild places in Florida."

Together, we must free the Ocklawaha. Together, we must save the St. Johns.

For the River,

Lisa

Lisa Rinaman – Your St. Johns Riverkeeper



Lisa Rinaman kayaked Blue Cypress with activists in the Upper Basin of the St. Johns to coordinate advocacy efforts.

Welcome Aboard, Justina!

Justina Dacey was recently hired to serve as an Education Specialist, working with public schools in Clay County, and our new Volunteer Coordinator. She helps organize events, recruit and manage volunteers, and provide support for our outreach and education programs.

Justina has been an active volunteer and River Patrol member since 2012. Justina received her Bachelors of Science from Florida State University in Biological Sciences and is currently working on her Masters in Marine Science at Jacksonville University. Her thesis involves quantifying the proportion of groundwater discharging from first magnitude springs of the St. Johns River.

As a native Floridian, she enjoys spending time out on the water whether for research or recreation.

If you would like to join Justina and our active group of volunteers, register with us online or come to the next volunteer orientation.



News & Notes

Throughout 2015, cultural institutions in the Jacksonville area are collaborating to offer a variety of exciting "Year of the River" programs, exhibits and activities. Check our website for upcoming Year of the River events.

Rising Tides completed another year of cleanups along McCoy's Creek, an urban tributary of the St. Johns. More than 470 volunteers removed 561 bags of trash and 120 tires, plus countless shopping carts, a vending machine and a boat from the creek. In February, the group planted native trees, grasses and shrubs along a section of the creek to create a buffer for litter and stormwater runoff. Learn more and get involved with this ongoing project!



Education Director Jennie Busey presented a workshop at the League of Environmental Educators in Florida conference about how to engage all ages of students in citizen scientist water quality monitoring programs.



St. Johns Riverkeeper partnered with MOSH and the Jacksonville Environmental Protection Board for the annual Water Education Festival in February. More than 400 passengers joined us for boat trips and more than 2,400 children and parents enjoyed the educational water displays and activities at the museum.

SJRK joined advocates from all over the state for the Clean Water and Amendment 1 Rally in Tallahassee organized by Floridians for Clean Water Declaration. Shannon Blankinship was one of the featured speakers during the event, representing the Northeast Florida region.



FREE THE OCKLAWAHA



LEARN MORE AND TAKE ACTION AT STJOHNSRIVERKEEPER.ORG.

BENEFITS OF RESTORATION:

- Restores more than 15,000 acres of floodplain forests – a natural bio-filter, the “kidneys” of the ecosystem
- Restores more than 20 submerged springs
- Allows valuable recreational and commercial fish species to access the upper Ocklawaha and Silver Springs
- Increases habitat for wildlife, including the endangered manatee
- Improves water quality in the Ocklawaha, St. Johns and Silver Springs
- Expands recreation and economic opportunities

IMAGE OF RESTORED OCKLAWAHA

1. This image shows the restored natural channel.
2. The spillway infrastructure, along with the existing park and river access below the dam, would remain intact.

SJRK volunteers hosted a water station at the Gate River Run, hydrating and cheering on the runners!



SJRK collaborated with Keep Jacksonville Beautiful to organize the 20th annual St. Johns River Cleanup. In total, 887 volunteers spent over 2,751 hours pulling 1,113 bags



of trash from our waterways, estimated to weigh nearly 36,000 lbs! Our River Patrol led the effort to clean up Exchange Island and Rising Tides celebrated with Brats n’ Brews after cleaning up Pottsburg Creek.



Congratulations to St. Johns Riverkeeper Volunteers of the Year Peter and Beth Welch. Peter and Beth have piloted the “Kingfisher” boat frequently to help maintain our visibility within the community, provide tours for the media and local officials, investigate the river with St. Johns Riverkeeper Lisa Rinaman, and provide safety boat support for major river events like the P1 powerboat race and the Jacksonville Dragonboat Festival. Thanks Peter and Beth, and all our volunteers. We appreciate you!



Calendar

- April 18
Ortega River
Boat Trip
- April 18
McCoys Creek Cleanup
- May 2
Kayak Amelia
Guided Tour
- May 10
Mother's Day
History Boat Trip
- June 6
Black Creek Boat Trip
- July 4
River Ruckus @ RAM



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As we celebrate our 15-year anniversary, St. Johns RIVERKEEPER is launching the Save the St. Johns Campaign to engage and activate citizens throughout the watershed, more aggressively defend the St. Johns, and advocate for the river's protection and restoration.

Help us raise \$250,000 for technical, scientific, legal, and public relations support necessary to defend the river when necessary and advocate for sensible solutions whenever possible.

For every dollar you donate, the Delores Barr Weaver Fund will match your gift up to \$125,000!

The Campaign will also include a 12-day boat tour of the entire 310 miles of the river in October.

Learn more and donate today!
www.savethestjohns.org

Become a member or donate online at www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org.

