

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?

The elimination and weakening of our environmental laws are among the biggest threats to our river that we can do something about in Tallahassee. The current state house has repeatedly underfunded environmental initiatives for the sake of industry dollars. This de-regulation does nothing to create jobs, but instead allows these corporations to get away with poisoning our water at Floridan tax payer expense. As Florida District 12's state representative I will do everything in my power to ensure that we have a state house that protects our environment – not just because it creates and maintains good paying jobs in our state, but, also because it is the right thing to do for our children and grandchildren.

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

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(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?

First, I would want us to start with awareness. I am certain that most Floridians want to do the right thing when it comes to our river. We could begin with an aggressive multi-media campaign that would educate Floridians about how we can care for our river. I would also like to work with local entrepreneurs to see how we can market proper, environmentally safe products for our convenient use. We should also work with local governments to remove failing septic tanks and ensure that no more are built. I would also like to see us place a bit more emphasis on updating our building codes so that we can have more environmentally safe buildings in our community.

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?

I would. I would also work with local builders to help defray the cost of some of these initiatives.

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.

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I would. This will not be an easy solution to enact, but we need people in Tallahassee who make long term commitments to our environment, not ones who only support initiatives that are convenient.

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 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 not sufficient to adequately protect wetlands and need to be strengthened or improved.**

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 would favor incentives for water efficient landscaping and building practices. I would also advocate for mobile irrigation labs as well as the use of reclaimed water. We would need to do a lot to ensure the public that such water is absolutely clean and safe, of course. I would advocate for CUPs but not for the average consumer, instead I would begin with the major water users – offices, stadiums etc. – and start with them. I would not want to add to our already regressive tax burden for the average Floridian without first going to the entities that benefit the most from our waterways.

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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, but as stated earlier. Let's begin at the top so that we do not add to the burden on the average consumer.

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 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?

As you point out over-development is contributing to the loss of our springs. Currently, we have a system in place which incentivizes developing on undeveloped properties. We are also trying to re-build our downtown. I would reverse this process and incentivize and improving on already existing buildings so that we can stem the out of control overdevelopment currently taking place without hurting workers in the building industry.

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

I would support breaching the Kirkpatrick Dam and restoring the natural flow to the St. Johns. Not only will this restore nature's intentions but it would mitigate the effect that dredging of the St. Johns will have on the salinization of the St. Johns. We would also restore our springs which would help bring in some tourist dollars and create a vacation spot for Floridians who want to take a weekend off. Bass

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fishing would also be restored in the St Johns which would give the community a more vested interest in keeping our river safe.

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?

The federal government has largely abdicating from the responsibility to protect us from the effects of climate change. Imagine, if there was overwhelming evidence of an imminent terrorist attack and the government repeatedly tried to gaslight us into thinking it wasn't going to happen to curry favor with donor's special interest. This is exactly what is happening with climate change. It is up to Florida and other states to show the leadership that Washington is refusing to take and develop our own climate pact with one another and find a constitutional method of doing the same with other countries (assuming there is one).

To limit the effects that flooding has had on Jacksonville in particular we should invest in permeable asphalt for roads and parking lots. This would help us reclaim much of the water that builds up causing floods and to restore our aquifers.

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.

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I do support such measures. One aspect that we should concentrate on is to incentivize building on and/or improving existing properties. There are thousands of feet of square footage rotting away in our communities. This creates blight and lowers housing values for residents in those areas. Moreover, we need to update Florida's city planning models. We are living in cities which were planned in the 1950s and 1960s – the heyday of the car and the road. Nowadays, there is significant support for more walkable cities which are more environmentally friendly and community building. Rural areas should, of course, maintain their unique way of life, but the already existing urban and suburban areas should look to ways of developing structures which decrease reliance on cars and look to viable public transportation and walkable cities.

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 THEY HAVE NOT.

This is yet another example of the current make-up of the state house failing to heed to the needs and concerns of the citizens in favor of the special interests who control the flow of money in and out of Tallahassee. Not only do we see such cynical measures in regards to our environmental policy, but also to education policies and to fair districting policies. Establishment party politicians in Tallahassee take advantage of the good will of the Florida voter by simply ignoring their vote when it comes to enacting policies.

The State House should use all those funds to conserve lands dedicated to land conservation projects. To raise the price of pristine real estate so that it can be enjoyed by the people and help to enrich local communities through tourism. No one comes to Florida to see our strip malls.

The land projects that should be prioritized are the ones which protect our water. Water is literally vital and necessary to life. We should also protect our forests from

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fires by conserving can cultivating lands which are prone to burning especially in the summer months. I remember quite vividly the wildfires of 1998 when I was living in Orlando.

Thank you for taking the opportunity to read my responses. I cannot say that I am the most knowledgeable person when it comes to our river, but I will do my due diligence to protect our waterways. Thank you St Johns Riverkeeper for your tireless efforts in maintaining and supporting our beautiful, historic St. Johns!