

This new quarterly newsletter will highlight our work to defend and advocate for the St. Johns River - and the many ways you can get involved.



ST. JOHNS
RIVERKEEPER®
For the river. For us all.

WATERSHED WATCH | NOVEMBER 2019

LOOKING BACK - AND AHEAD

It's hard to believe, but St. Johns Riverkeeper is turning 20 at the end of this year. We will soon be celebrating our joint accomplishments over the last two decades and sharing our vision for the future. But first, let's look back on this past year and how it represents the barrage of new threats that frequently emerge and the critical need for a persistent, powerful, and independent voice for the St. Johns River. One thing we've come to learn is: you can't let your guard down, and you can't give up. With your ongoing support, we never have and never will.

Since our inception, one of the most vexing problems facing the St. Johns River has consistently been excessive nutrients - nitrogen and phosphorous.

The good news is that over the years we have had success with two major legal victories that forced the state to reduce nutrient loading into the St. Johns. We've successfully advocated for fertilizer ordinances in numerous counties in the Watershed. We've held major polluters accountable, resulting in fewer violations and more protective wastewater discharge permits.

As a result, significant reductions in nutrient loading have occurred. However, the problem is far from resolved and the number of threats and sources of pollution continue to multiply throughout the Watershed.

Further reductions in nutrient pollution are clearly necessary. Our river still experiences frequent toxic algae blooms that are fueled by excess nutrients, as we witnessed this past spring and summer in over 100 miles of the St. Johns.



Hurricane Irma flooding
Florida Times-Union

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Inset photo of Cannon Springs (one of 20 lost springs in the Ocklawaha River) during the last drawdown in all its glory, in contrast to its dark and flooded conditions resulting from the Rodman Dam.

FREE THE OKKLAWAHA

The time has come to finally free the Ocklawaha River. Restoration of the Ocklawaha's historic flow, floodplains and natural connectivity will provide significant ecological benefits to the St. Johns and to Silver Springs, while expanding recreational and economic opportunities.

For over 50 years, the Ocklawaha River (the largest tributary of the St. Johns River) and its springs and wetlands have been impacted by a dam built in Putnam County in the late 1960's as part of the failed Cross Florida Barge Canal. The Rodman Dam (now known as the Kirkpatrick Dam) resulted in the clearing and flooding of approximately 7,500 acres of floodplain forests, while submerging over 20 springs beneath a massive pool of water.



LOOKING BACK, CONT.

While nitrogen has typically received most of the attention, phosphorous took center stage this past year as a major source of pollution undermining the river's health. Phosphorous-laden runoff from South Florida's sewage sludge applied to farm and ranch lands in the headwaters of the river is now having a devastating impact to water quality, undermining the progress made by downstream communities to improve water quality.

We have become one of the most vocal critics and persistent advocates fighting for tougher regulations and comprehensive legislation to prevent runoff from the land application of sewage sludge. We are hopeful that strong rules will soon be adopted to put an end to this unsustainable and harmful practice.

WE NEED BOLD ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE - NOW

Climate change is also increasingly a more significant and urgent threat to our river's health. Sea level rise is causing saltwater to move further upriver, damaging aquatic grasses and wetlands. Saltwater is also infiltrating our aquifer, threatening our drinking water supply. More intense storms and rainfall are flushing more chemicals, fertilizers, and manure into our waterways. Rising groundwater levels are preventing septic tanks from properly draining and treating sewage. Warmer waters in the river are increasing the likelihood of more algae blooms. And the list goes on. This is all happening now, requiring urgent action.

Our team has been hard at work advocating for policies and actions that will make our river and our communities more resilient.

If this past year tells us anything, it is that we must remain vigilant, focused, and nimble. We will continue to stand up for the St. Johns in the face of existing pollution problems, but we must also stand ready for the emerging threats on the horizon. We can do so with your loyal support. **By making a year-end gift, you can help strengthen the river's defense, amplify her voice, and better equip Riverkeeper for an exciting year ahead. Stay tuned for more ways to get involved to help protect our river!**

NEW WEBSITE!

Your destination for everything St. Johns River! We've redesigned our website with you, our loyal followers and river citizens, in mind. Now, it's easier than ever to take action for our river. Get your feet wet and dive into our pages - we hope you'll check out our latest advocacy initiatives, take our River Friendly pledge, and explore our many river resources. See for yourself at StJohnsRiverkeeper.org.

BRIDGING HISTORY WITH SCIENCE: BARTRAM'S FROLIC!

This past September, St. Johns Riverkeeper education staff and volunteers frolicked along the St. Johns River with several living historians and environmental organizations to provide hands-on learning experience to over 600 2nd graders in Putnam County. These students had the opportunity to learn about William 'Billy' Bartram and his adventures and about local ecology through guided activities including boat rides on the St. Johns River. **Since 2017, over 1,000 Putnam County students have participated in this cultural enrichment opportunity thanks to generous local donations.**



The annual Bartram's Frolic would not be possible without the vision of our dear friend and longtime member, Sam Carr, who brought the Frolic concept to life. Director of Putnam County Blueways and Trails, Sam's on a mission to highlight the significance of this region of the river by retracing and celebrating Bartram's historic footsteps. From leading educational programs on Bartram's travels to spreading awareness about serious algae blooms in the area and more - Sam is one of the river's greatest treasures and advocates. Thank you for all you do!



OCKLAWAHA DRAWDOWN DATES ANNOUNCED!

This pool behind the dam is drawn down by the State every 3 to 5 years to remove invasive plants that flourish and choke the waterways. During the drawdown, many of the "lost springs" and many more ecological and historical treasures reemerge.

The drawdown began in early October - the blue waters of Cannon Springs and others have already begun to reemerge! Water levels will reach the lowest point in mid-November and then remain at this level until March 1, 2020. Don't miss the opportunity to experience the Ocklawaha's hidden wonders during the drawdown.

St. Johns Riverkeeper is working with a coalition of advocates to develop an action plan to Free the Ocklawaha. Check our website for opportunities to experience the drawdown and how to get involved!

PLEASE CONSIDER A YEAR-END DONATION TO SUPPORT OUR ADVOCACY WORK FOR
THE ST. JOHNS RIVER! STJOHNSRIVERKEEPER.ORG

18TH ANNUAL
OYSTER ROAST

18th Annual Oyster Roast

Join us for live music from The Firewater Tent Revival, an outstanding silent auction and raffle, and delicious oysters and seafood as we celebrate the St. Johns River and support St. Johns Riverkeeper.

Friday, November 15, 7pm
Garden Club of Jacksonville

Get tickets online at
StJohnsRiverkeeper.org
or call (904) 256-7591.



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WATERSHED HIGHLIGHTS



2019 Bartram's Frolic partners at the St. Johns River Center in Palatka.



International Coastal Cleanup in the Headwaters of the St. Johns River.



Toxic Puzzle film screening and panel discussion on toxic algae blooms in Clay County.



River Patrol spreading the word during River Ruckus at Riverside Arts Market in Jacksonville.



Salon 2000 Aveda, winner of our AVEDA EARTH MONTH CHAMPION for raising the most funds for the St. John River!

DON'T MISS OUT ON THE NEXT EVENT! SIGN UP AT STJOHNSRIVERKEEPER.ORG/EVENTS