

Level of rivers down to trickle in dry Georgia

There's less fishing, and ATVs crossing river beds threaten the ecosystem's health, vitality

By Teresa Stepzinski
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NAHUNTA, GA. | Greg Zink has more time these days to play fetch with Diogi and Zen, his black and yellow Labrador retrievers. While that's not a bad thing, it doesn't help pay their bills.

The bait and tackle shop owner's clientele has dropped with the water level of the Satilla River a couple miles away.

"Business is a little slow. ... People aren't fishing the Satilla right now. You can walk across it and barely get wet because it's so low," said Zink, who relies on Diogi and Zen for company at his small but well-stocked shop, SHOPPING MaN SPORTS.

Popular with fishermen, the Satilla, St. Marys and Suwannee rivers are down to a trickle in some places because of the prolonged drought. Deeper and faster moving, the Altamaha River also is below normal levels, albeit to a lesser extent, in some areas.

None is worse than the Suwannee River, where the channel at Fargo was about three inches wide and half an inch deep last week.

Standing in the nearly dry river channel Tuesday, Grady Mixon of Fargo said he hadn't seen it that low in the 17 years he has lived there, and few could remember it drying up almost completely.

"My grand young'uns came the other day and wanted to go swimming. I said, 'Not in this river,'" Mixon said.

RIVERS continues on B-4



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Gary Parr's truck and Grady Mixon's golf cart are parked off the end of a boat launching ramp in what should be a flowing Suwannee River at Fargo last week.

RIVERS

Continued from B-1

As a result there's little fishing and no kayaking and canoeing, said Wayne Clifton, owner of Satilla River Outfitters where his canoes sit unused.

"Right now, everything ought to be kicking. It's vacation time," he said of business, "but you need a foot and a half [of water depth] at the bridge."

The only ones fishing are the locals who know how to walk the sandbars, wade the shallows and fish the few deep holes, he said.

Because all of the Suwannee's water at Fargo comes out of the Okefenokee Swamp, the swamp will have to fill a little before there's much change in the river, Clifton said.

"We're waiting for the rain. July is supposed to be our seven-inch month," he said.

The dry Okefenokee has been burning since late April, some argue because of the breaching of the Suwannee River Sill, a low dam that once maintained the water levels in the swamp. Clifton has a different view.

"That fire's going to open up lakes in there we've never seen," he said.

'AS LONG AS IT FLOWS'

Recent rains have helped somewhat but all Southeast Georgia's rivers remain low, leaving them exposed to ecological damage from all-terrain vehicles, trash and pollutants, conservationists say.

"Unfortunately, every time you have low flow, you have problems," Satilla Riverkeeper Bill Miller told the Times-Union.

"The main problem is people on ATVs riding illegally in the river bed, which destroys the river bed for sunfish and other fish and destroys aquatic plants," Miller said. "Another of the biggest problems is vegetation infiltrating the river and growing on the sandbars because the water is so low."

Also, the trash and litter in the river and on its banks becomes a greater problem in low water conditions, Miller said.

Fish kills are common when river levels are low because it affects the amount of oxygen in the water, but so far the Satilla has had none, he



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Greg Zink owns and operates SHOPPING MaN SPORTS bait and tackle shop in Nahunta with his coworkers/dogs Zen and Diogi. Business has been slow with low rivers.

said. The Satilla at Atkinson is narrow at the U.S. 82 bridge. It typically has about 3½ to 4 feet of water. Last week it hovered around 2½ feet deep, according to U.S. Geological Survey data.

"As long as the river flows," Miller said, "there is still life in it."

The Altamaha River is faring better but nonetheless suffering the effects of the prolonged drought along with its main tributaries, the Oconee, Ochopee and Ocmulgee rivers, said Deborah Sheppard, Altamaha Riverkeeper executive director.

Sheppard said they've received several reports of people driving vehicles in the river bed.

The main problem, however, is the lower the water level, the harder it is for the river to handle pollutants and materials permitted by law to be discharged into it, Sheppard said.

"In the main stem of the Altamaha, pollutants and permitted discharges have a greater impact on the water quality because of the lower flow," Sheppard said.

The reduced water flow "definitely has an impact on the ecosystem, but at this point we've not received specific reports of any negative impacts."

The Satilla is known for redbreast, a prized pan fish. The worse river conditions are, the worse the fishing.

"People who normally fish here are going to the Satilla at Burnt Fork or the Altamaha where the water's deeper right now," Zink said. He estimated fishing on the Satilla at Atkinson is down about 20

percent.

'SIGNIFICANT EFFECT'

The St. Marys River is in similar shape. Although it has some deep pools, the river's running slow and shallow in its north prong and other places, said Chip Campbell of Folkston, co-chairman of the St. Marys River Management Committee.

The committee is an intergovernmental panel of elected and appointed members from four counties along the river: Charlton and Camden in Southeast Georgia and Nassau and Baker in Northeast Florida. It monitors the river and its health.

"We're seeing very low water, very early in the year. ... The upper river is pretty much impassable but below Traders Hill it's passable," said Campbell, an outdoor guide and conservationist.

Blackwater rivers like

SOUTHEAST GEORGIA RIVER LEVELS

River levels, which are affected by location, flow rate and channel width, were as follows Friday at these locations.

- **3.7 feet:** North Prong St. Marys River near Moniac.
- **1.4 feet:** St. Marys River near Macclenny, Fla.
- **2.7 feet:** Satilla River at Atkinson.
- **4.2 feet:** Satilla River near Waycross.
- **2.7 feet:** Little Satilla River at Offerman.
- **0.04 feet:** Suwannee River at Fargo.
- **1.7 feet:** Altamaha River near Baxley.
- **2.2 feet:** Altamaha River at Doctortown.
- **4.2 feet:** Altamaha River at Everett.

Sources: U.S. Geological Survey and Southeast River Forecast Center.

the St. Marys seem to tolerate drought better than others. The longer the river remains low, however, the greater the impact on fish and plant life, he said.

"Prolonged low water can have a significant effect on fish spawning," Campbell said that fishermen come to the St. Marys for redbreast.

The Satilla's low level is typical, say longtime Brantley County residents who are accustomed to the river's seasonal ups and downs.

"I've seen it this low before. It gets low every year. I've also seen it over the road before. ... That's just part of it," said Franklin Depratrer of Nahunta.

Georgia editor Terry Dickson contributed to this report.

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Wednesday, July 6, 2011

NW FLORIDA WATER DISTRICT ALSO ISSUES WATER SHORTAGE ADVISORY



LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), which governs roughly the eastern half of Jefferson County, has had a phase I water shortage advisory in place for months now because of the drought

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Photos of the Chipola River's Look and Tremble rapids in October 2010 and again in June 2011 after nine months dramatically show the effects of the drought. Photos are courtesy of Bill Cleckley and Tyler Macmillan of the NFWFMD.

Water District

Cont. From Page 1

and the associated declines in ground and surface water levels.

And now the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD), which governs roughly the western half of the county, is also warning of declining ground and surface water levels due to the drought and increased use. The NFWFMD last week issued a water shortage warning order, effective immediately.

The district reports that record high temperatures and scant precipitation have deepened drought conditions across the panhandle, resulting in record low daily flows for some rivers and lakes and causing groundwater levels to approach record lows.

"Everyone is urged to voluntarily reduce water use as much as possible," NFWFMD Executive Director Douglas E. Barr said. "Extreme to exceptional drought conditions exist across the district's 16 counties and monthly rainfall totals have been below normal for nine months."

The district reports that the northern portion of Jefferson County, along with the northern

parts of Gadsden and Leon counties, are experiencing "exceptional drought conditions", considered the most intense drought category. In fact, the entire region east of the Apalachicola River and including Gulf County is experiencing extreme drought conditions per the U.S. Drought Monitor; the NFWFMD reports.

The district notes that many cities and water systems in its 16 counties have implemented or are encouraging voluntary conservation measures, and at least one municipality is enforcing mandatory conservation measures with warnings and even fines.

"We urge people to voluntarily reduce water consumption and maximize conservation," Barr reiterated, leaving unsaid that if drought conditions continue or intensify, instances of localized upconing of salt water in some coastal well is likely to increase, and water resources may be impacted to the point that the district is forced to impose mandatory conservation measures. The SRWMD has also indicated as much.

For the present, however, the NFWFMD is urging residents and businesses that are not under local utility restrictions to abide by the following guidelines.

- * Limit outdoor watering to no more than two days per week and water only during the low evaporation hours of 5 p.m. to 10 a.m.

- * Limit hours of golf course irrigation.

- * Reduce the pumping, diverting or otherwise use of water for such nonessential activities as filling duck ponds.

- * Discontinue aesthetic uses of water that are primarily for decorative purposes, such as fountains.

Interested persons can learn more about the water situation by visiting the district's website at www.nfwfmd.state.fl.us. The "publications" link on the website offers several water conservation brochures, including the 3 R's of Water, 50 Ways to Save Water, and An Indoor Water Audit. Ideas include using rain barrels to harvest roof runoff, planting drought-tolerant natives species, and fixing plumbing leaks.

The Great Suwannee River Cleanup 2011

Submitted

In 2010, Current Problems formed a partnership with the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail Working Group and the Suwannee River Water Management District to coordinate a cleanup of the Suwannee River from the Georgia state line to the Gulf of Mexico. The cleanup was a huge success! More than 500 volunteers removed almost 30,000 pounds of trash! We hope you will join us for the 2nd Great Suwannee River Cleanup and build on the success of last year's event.

The 2011 cleanup will occur during a three-month window from September through November. Businesses, civic clubs, fishing and boating groups, churches, government agencies, non-profits, chambers of commerce, and groups of friends are all encouraged to participate. Go to the event map at <http://tinyurl.com/3wadbd4> to determine your section based on mileposts and GPS coordinates. Then register your group, the date of your cleanup, and your river section online at

<http://tinyurl.com/44d3obr>. Shortly after registration, your cleanup will appear on the event map.

Current Problems is available to assist you as you plan your cleanup and to provide supplies (grabbers, buckets, trash bags, etc.). If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Current Problems' Executive Director Fritzi Olson at 352-264-6827 or e-mail her at aar@currentproblems.org. Pete Butt is coordinating dive cleanups and can be reached through Fritzi Olson.

If you can't participate but would still like to support this effort, the partnership is looking for sponsors to help out with expenses and will gladly accept in-kind donations. Call or e-mail Fritzi to learn more about sponsorship opportunities.

A kickoff celebration will be held at Ivy Memorial Park in Branford, Florida, on September 10th from 10 am until 2 pm. Come out and join the fun as we celebrate the beginning of the 2nd Annual Great Suwannee River Cleanup!



A view of the Suwannee River from the bridge on SR 6 in Eastern Hamilton County. - Photo: Joyce Marie Taylor

VANISHING WATER

Epic drought raises concerns

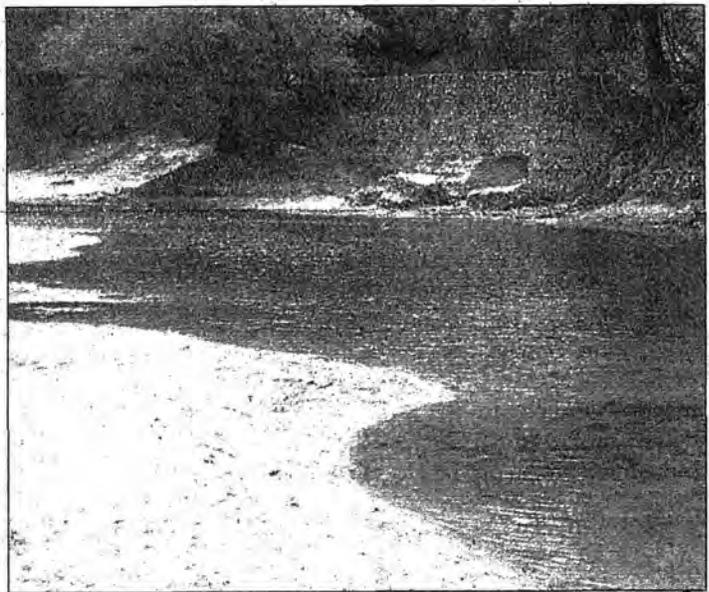
By **Stephenie Livingston**
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An erstwhile thriving tourist destination built on the banks of its White Sulphur Spring, residents of the now-quiet town of White Springs in Hamilton County say their life-source is drying up. With the upper Suwannee experiencing record lows during this year's epic drought season, and some area springs remaining dry year-round, many wonder, "Will my children's children know this river as I did?"

"As our springs, streams and rivers, including the Suwannee River, dry up, so does our future," said Dr. Helen Miller, mayor of White Springs.

The month of May was the driest since 1932, as the Suwannee basin experienced a 25 inch rainfall deficit compared to an average year, according to the Suwannee River Water Management District. Several months of drought has led to the record-breaking lows on the upper Suwannee, which includes White Springs with records going back to 1906. Gages on the upper Santa Fe reported that flow has ceased. Coastal rivers fell much below normal after five months of near-normal flow, and all 16 District-monitored lakes were below their historical average level.

District Executive Director David Still said flow levels are low all over the state. Although



A view of the Suwannee River at Suwannee Springs. - Photo: Suwannee River Water Management District

SUWANNEE RIVER DATA

	Dowling Park	Suwannee Springs	White Springs
Flood stage	50 feet	67 feet	77 feet
Historic low	21.12 feet (June 2002)	35.96 feet (June 24, 2011)	49.25 feet (June 25, 2011)
Previous Historic low	N/A	36.04 feet (May 2007)	49.49 feet (May 2007)
Current elevation (As of July 6, 2011)	21.14 feet	36.03 feet	49.39 feet

Data: Suwannee River Water Management District. The current elevations are slightly higher due to recent rain activity, according to SRWMD's Megan Wetherington.

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VANISHING WATER

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river and spring flows in Suwannee County have not reached the dire conditions of the upper Suwannee, he said they could if drought conditions persist.

Recently, drought has caused groundwater levels to fall in 92 percent of the District's monitored wells. Levels in the Suwannee River Basin fell to the 22nd percentile for the period of record, meaning that almost 77 percent of the time they have been higher than they are now, painting a critical picture.

Groundwater supplies will not meet future demands within the District's jurisdiction, a study formally accepted by the District last December showed. The study said that groundwater levels have dropped by 6 feet in some areas since the early 80s.

"It's ankle deep just a little bit below my property," said Deb

Odem who lives on 25A in Hamilton County. "If you walk upstream from the Highway 41 bridge in White Springs, you'll see the entire river flow in about a three foot wide channel. Mind boggling."

In the midst of these concerns, last month, the St. Johns River Water Management District approved a 20-year permit for Jacksonville's utility (JEA)—the largest to date. The permit, which could mean groundwater pumping in an excess of 160 million gallons a day (mgd), has ignited discussion and controversy.

Described by Live Oak's mayor Sonny Nobles as "crusaders" for local rivers and springs, Miller and White Springs Vice-Mayor Walter Mckenzie were present at the St. John's District Governing Board meeting last month when the permit was issued. Miller spoke before the board, asking that they freeze JEA's water use at the current level for a period of five years and develop a wide-ranging technical and financial plan that would fully restore the historic potentiometric surface to all areas of the Floridan Aquifer, returning springs and surface waters to their pre-development levels, and provide adequate water from alternative sources, such as desalination, to meet JEA needs—in addition to other suggestions.

"I believe we made rational and realistic recommendations that would benefit all of us in both water management districts, but it was clear that the Governing Board was going to grant JEA's permit, no matter what data were presented," said Miller.

During the meeting, a JEA representative attributed low levels, in the case of White Sulphur Spring, to the local PCS phosphate mine, Miller said.

In recent years, the

mine has been striving to cut its water use in half.

Alleging "gross misrepresentations" in JEA's presentation to the St. John's District Governing Board, Still sent a letter to the executive director of St. John's District. He stated that Suwannee District officials attended the meeting with their "conviction that the water resources and future economic well being of the SRWMD have been impacted and are under continued threat from withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer system in northeast Florida."

Still argued that the utility "manipulated information" and "misrepresented" data found in the Suwannee District's 2010 Water Supply Assessment. He said statements and conclusions regarding the District's WSA was misleading by indicating that deficit rainfall along with withdrawals from Georgia, St. John's District and Suwannee District were potential causes of impacts. Still said the assessment, in fact, did not conclude rainfall was a reason for declining water levels.

The WSA states, "This decrease is apparently a result of groundwater withdrawals originating in the District, the St. John's River Water Management District, and the State of Georgia."

Still also wrote that the presentation did not mention a U.S. Geological Survey report on a study which found that flow reduction in White Sulphur Spring was due to groundwater withdrawals east of the site.

Statements made by JEA that the utility's "withdrawals do not adversely impact the SRWMD" and that PCS is responsible for the cessation of flow in White Sulphur Spring, Still called "unfounded."

Miller agrees that St. John's District was misled.

"I believe JEA's consultant misrepresented

data he presented at the meeting, and it is this questionable data on which the governing board based its decision to grant the permit for increased water use," she said. "The meeting was a mockery of the public process."

Local city officials are concerned they will not be able to achieve economic development goals, since they feel it is clear that the endangered water supply could come into play, not only when it comes to growth, but the continued viability of their communities, according to Miller.

"I think it's really a travesty," said Nobles. "While they siphon off our water, we're the ones who will have to suffer."

Miller echoed, "We need water for household and personal use, for our businesses, for agriculture, and for ecotourism."

Mckenzie said he understands the current drought-condition is the principal reason for the low flow levels on the upper Suwannee. However, he is skeptical that the problem will be solved once the drought is over.

"When we get out of this drought, we're still going to have a problem," he said. "I've seen the river low before, but I've never seen it and the spring this low at the same time."

Though not as severe as the upper Suwannee, levels further 'down upon the Suwannee River' are also lower than average. Some of Suwannee and Lafayette's springs are disappearing.

"This spring is done," said Dan Saether, who operates River Rendezvous in Lafayette County, home of the once popular diving site Convict Spring. "We'll need lots of rain to bring this one up again."

While phosphate mining, farming and other local contributors are factors, one local geologist believes water use

age in the Suwannee District is minor compared to south Georgia and JEA's impacts on water levels in the region.

"Water we use in the Suwannee River Water Management District does not exceed the recharge (of the aquifer)," said Dennis Price who, as a geologist for over 35 years, has worked with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Suwannee District. "It's not us that's causing the problem."

Price said he understands and does not object to St. John's making sure the utility can continue to provide water to its population.

"Obviously people need to drink water," he said. "What I object to is the board dismissing all of our concerns."

Price believes groundwater pumping along the Atlantic coast of Florida, pulling from local sources, is a major contributor to the dry condition of some area springs. He also theorizes that drainage of flat-woods and wetlands in order to harvest timber for the last 50-100 years in south Georgia and locally is another major contributing factor. He believes if there were more water in the swamps, there would be more recharge of the aquifer.

A solution?

Price believes the only remedy would be to further address groundwater pumping along the coast and for scientists to work towards designing a plan to recharge the aquifer.

However, he is not hopeful that north Florida's springs and rivers will be saved in time.

"Someone from twenty years ago might look at this and say not much has changed. Someone from one hundred years ago would look and say, 'Boy, what happened, this is awful,'" he said. "Old-timers recognize the difference."

Miller believes a solution lies in an organized

effort to save the water supply by officials and Florida residents alike.

"Nature does not pay attention to artificial boundaries created by man, irrespective of political affiliation or the largesse of a consulting contract," she said. "We've got to get our collective heads out of the sand and get organized to save the future of our communities."

Still said while the District has not had any issues with wells going dry, it has taken steps to warn residents of severe drought conditions threatening groundwater, and urges them to cut back on water usage. The District has issued a water shortage advisory, first declared by the District's Governing Board in December. The advisory asks all users to voluntarily reduce water consumption indoors and outdoors until further notice.

"The advisory simply calls upon all of us to take voluntary steps to reduce both indoor and outdoor water use during times of drought and until conditions recover," Jon Dinges, District director of water supply and resource management said in a press release.

Once drought conditions improve and groundwater and surface water levels rebound, the governing board may cancel the advisory. Should conditions worsen, however, the District's board may impose mandatory water-use restrictions.

As for our children, and our children's children—will they photograph the Big Shoals and dive into the chilling waters of Suwannee Springs? Kayak on the upper Suwannee? Will they know these rivers and springs as we did?

"I don't think they will, this thing is on a downward spiral," Price said. "For them, it will be nothing like what we're familiar with."

The JEA was not immediately available for comment.

A River Reunion 4th

Staff

Hundreds turned out for the Branford River Reunion held on Independence Day.

Vendors were set up throughout

Hatch and Ivey Park selling crafts, food or just giving out information. A Patriotic Pet Con-

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A River Reunion 4th

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test, bedrock derby and a duck race were enjoyed as well.

The majority of those who attended gathered on the banks of the shallow Suwannee River at 2 p.m. to watch the famous Rotary Club of Branford Duck Race. Hundreds of people bought a raffle ticket for a rubber duck, which were tossed into the Suwannee River from the bridge near Ivey Park Monday. The second place finisher lost by only a bill.

The top four winners of the duck race were: 1st - \$500 to Robert's Diesel, Sponsored by John Lacquey, Pine Straw; 2nd - \$300 to Jeanne Webster, Sponsored by Capital City Bank; 3rd - \$200 to Juanita Rogers, Sponsored by North Florida Pharmacy in Branford and last duck in the shoot - \$100 to Ray Vincent, Sponsored by Dr. Nancy Cooper.

The winners of the pet contest were: 1st place - Kelly hunter with dog Win-

nie; 2nd - Ms. Holler and Max and 3rd - Austin Anderson and Duchess. The sponsor for the Patriotic Pet Contest was Lafayette State Bank. They donated the bags and prizes. Everyone received a gift bag.

The winning pets were selected as the ones sporting the most patriotic attire.

The winners of the derby were Cole Humphries, 8, and Kade Humphries, 10.

Hundreds converged on Hatch and Ivey Park throughout the day Monday for Branford's Fourth of July celebration, the Branford River Reunion. The day ended with a spectacular fireworks show.



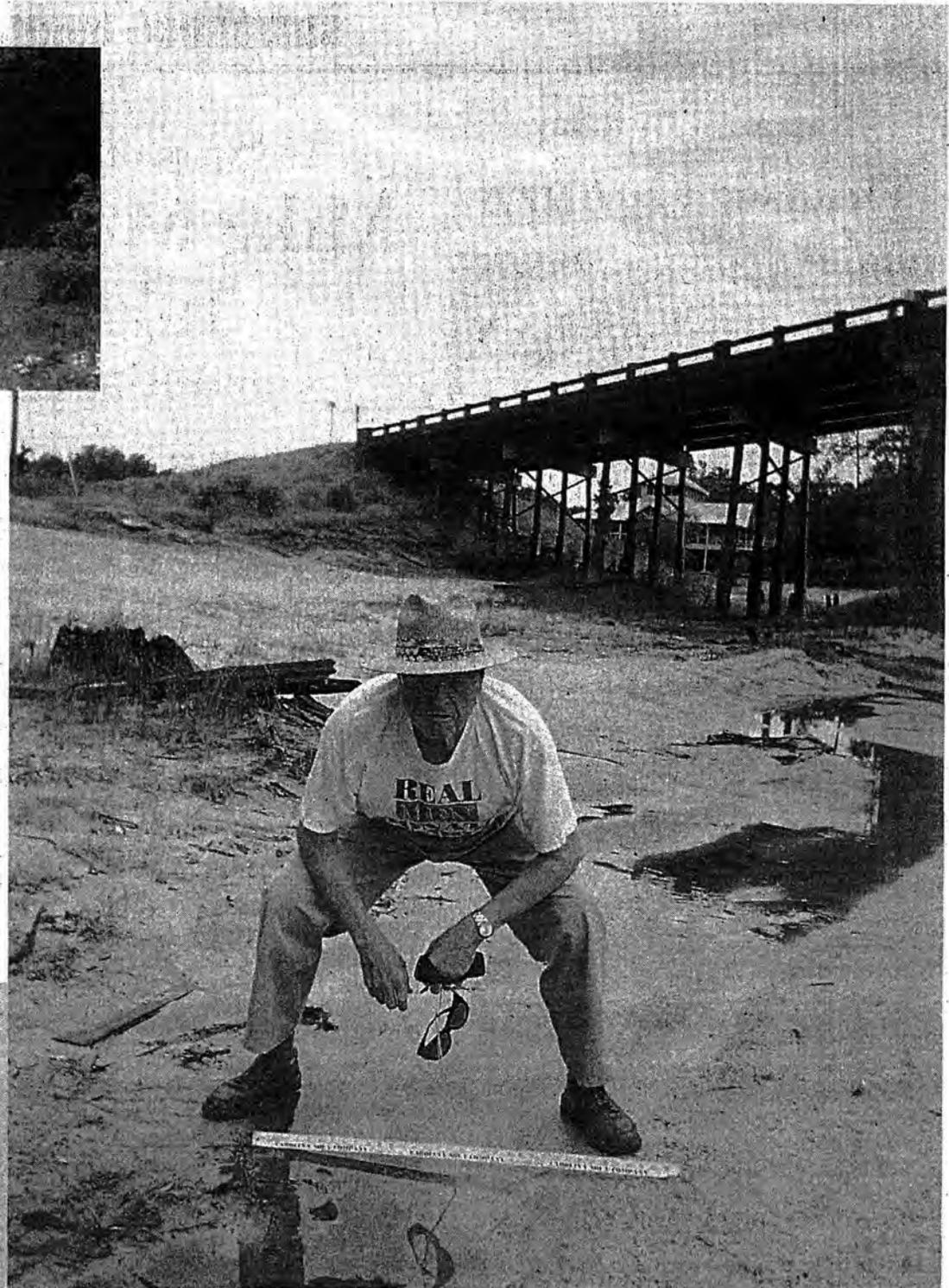
A water starved river

ABOVE: This photo of the Suwannee River was taken at Suwannee Springs recently.

- Photo: courtesy of Thomas "Joe" Skierski

RIGHT: Dowling Park residents Otto and Margie Hunerwadel visited the Suwannee River, or what remains of it, on June 28 near Fargo, Ga. There was barely a flow and Otto recorded at one spot the trickle was 16 inches across. Search "vanishing water" at www.suwanneedemocrat.com for related story.

- Photo: Margie Hunerwadel



Eleven Counties, Including Levy, Get Payment in Lieu of Taxes from SR Water District

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) will pay \$346,345.32 to 11 counties for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT).

The PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when the State or District acquires lands. Since land owned by the District is tax-exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

The District will pay PILT funds to counties until their populations reach 150,000.

The following are totals that each county is scheduled to receive:

Bradford: \$15,093.45
Columbia: \$42,992.68
Dixie: \$24,196.21
Gilchrist: \$44,619.14
Hamilton: \$37,943.47
Jefferson: \$9,223.41
Lafayette: \$77,306.21
Levy: \$25,108.88
Madison: \$20,464.85
Suwannee: \$30,429.59
Taylor: \$18,967.43

District staff will distribute PILT payments to the county commissions from July through August.



Sache Farms Among Those Honored for Their Efforts to Protect Environment

"Farming since he was a boy," Wesley Sache can talk for hours about how farming has changed over the years. He remembers when his grandfather plowed with a mule, his family purchased a tractor, and his father installed an electric fence to keep the hogs in.

He has also seen changes to farm practices that have improved the environment. One of the most notable, he recalls, is the advent of the drip irrigation system his farm now uses to irrigate watermelons and cantaloupes.

Sache cultivated his first crop of melons in the 70s when he was studying agriculture in college. Irrigating them with stationary guns and pipe that had to be rotated around the field was a chore.

"We would water an area for two hours and then have to move the pipes to another location," he remembers of the daunting task. "It took 24 hours just to water 20 acres."

Now through drip irrigation, Sache says he can irrigate 40-80 acres of melons at one time on his



Sache Farms, Levy County, was recognized at the 11th Annual CARES dinner on June 30. Pictured from left, Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, the Sache family, and Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick.

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Sache Farms *continued from page 1*

Levy County farm. The method saves time, fuel, and water and can also be used to apply fertilizer.

Watermelons and cantaloupes are planted in raised beds. Irrigation piping and tubing are installed. Sheets of plastic are placed around the crops, covering beds and pipes.

The method applies water and fertilizer near the root zone to give a precise application. The result is a healthier crop and environment.

"There is less evaporation when irrigating a covered bed, and precision application allows the plant to utilize more nutrients and water, so less is lost to the environment," said Hugh Thomas, who has assisted Sache in his efforts to protect the environment through the Suwannee River Partnership (SRP).

With the help of the SRP, an organization that works with farmers to protect and save water, the Sache family farm is now managing nutrients and irrigating more efficiently than ever.

The farm's center pivot irrigation systems have been upgraded to save water and precisely apply fertilizer. Irrigation management practices, such as irrigation scheduling and soil moisture testing, conserves water. Testing crops for nutrient concentration helps reduce the amount of fertilizer needed and protects water quality. Global positioning system (GPS) and light bar equipment prevents overlap of fertilizer and chemicals.

Sache's farm has been in his family since his great-grandfather settled in Levy County from France. He, a Levy County Farm Bureau board member, and his son, Jake, who serves as a board member for the Levy County Soil and Water Conservation District, take great pride in preserving the integrity of the land his family has long called home.

"The best management practices on our farm help protect and save water, fuel, and energy and have increased production," he said. "I plan to pass those practices on to future generations who will farm on this land."

Sache's hard work hasn't gone unnoticed. He and his son were among 19 area farmers recognized on June 30 for the role they play in protecting the environment at the 11th Annual County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship (CARES) dinner. The CARES farmers were recognized and congratulated by Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam and Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick at the UF/IFAS Research and Education Center in Suwannee County.

The Florida Farm Bureau and the SRP created CARES to highlight efforts by farmers to conserve water and improve nutrient management in the Suwannee and Santa Fe river Basins.

For more information about the CARES program, contact Darrell Smith at 386.362.1001. You may also call your county Farm Bureau office or Scot Eubanks, Florida Farm Bureau Federation, at 352.384.2633.

Following are those recognized at the CARES dinner and the counties in which their operations are located: Green Acres Farm (Alachua), Graham Farm (Alachua), UF/IFAS Boston Farm/Santa Fe River Ranch Beef Unit (Alachua), Jerry and Sam Williams, Cognito Farm (Bradford), Rodney Dicks and Sons (Columbia), Nolan C. Galloway III, Canaan Ranch Timber Farm (Gilchrist), MoBo Angus (Gilchrist), Goolsby Farms (Hamilton), Father and Son Farm (Hamilton), Morgan and Washington Hay Farm (Hamilton), Swift Creek Farm (Hamilton), Stormant Farms (Hamilton), Edward Carter Farm (Hamilton), Lafayette Dairy, LLC (Lafayette), Lyons Poultry (Lafayette), Sache Family, Sache Farms (Levy), KayLee Farm (Madison), Hunter Farm (Madison), and Cannon Farms (Suwannee).

Lafayette County gets a big check from SRWMD

Joyce Marie Taylor

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At the July 11 commission meeting, the Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners received a check in the amount of \$77,306.21 from Suwannee River Water Management District's Executive Director David Still and Alphonas Alexander, vice chairman. Clerk of Court Ricky Lyons, said the monies will go into the general fund.

"This is called payment in lieu of tax," Lyons explained. "It's land that SRWMD has purchased through the years from individuals in Lafayette

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Lafayette County gets a big check from SRWMD

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County."

The assessment value at the time of purchase, Lyons said, is paid to the board for the value of the taxes. These are funds that would have been paid by property owners if the SRWMD had not purchased the land.

Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) is explained by the SRWMD on their website as follows:

"When private property does become public property, it is taken off the county tax roll. Although the impact on county revenues is minimal - only 0.2 percent annually - the Legisla-

ture established a payment in lieu of taxes program in 1992 to reimburse local governments for the loss of revenue.

Twenty-five percent of all Save Our Rivers land management funds are set aside to pay for the program. To qualify for this program, a county in which the District has purchased land must have a population of less than 150,000. Payments are made each year for the previous year's taxes."

Eleven counties within the SRWMD have received a total of \$326,314 in PILT funding this year in comparison to the \$177,012 they received last year.

Thursday, July 14, 2011 THE NORTH FLORIDA HERALD

Alachua man named to board of Suwannee River Water Management District

By Derek Gilliam
For The Herald

ALACHUA — An Alachua man has been appointed by Gov. Rick Scott to the governing board of the Suwannee River Water Management District.

Kevin Brown began his term on June 3 and will serve on the board until March 1, 2015.



Kevin Brown

Brown will represent the Santa Fe and Waccasassa rivers basins.

Brown graduated from University of Florida with a degree in agriculture.

He currently serves as an advisory board member for the Con-

servative Trust for Florida. He also is a state-certified gen-

eral real estate appraiser and has served as chief appraiser for Farm Credit of Florida since 1990.

Brown declined to be interviewed for this story.

Comments about this story can be left under the online version of it at *The Herald's* Website. Stories are generally placed online each week by Thursday evening at:

www.NorthFloridaHerald.com

SRWMD To Distribute PILT Funds To County

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) will pay \$346,345.32 to 11 counties for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT).

The PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when the State or District acquires lands. Since land owned by the District is tax-exempt, PILT funds

offset the loss of tax revenue when the District purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection.

The District will pay PILT funds to counties until their populations reach 150,000.

The following are totals that each county is scheduled to receive:

• Bradford: \$15,093.45

• Columbia:

\$42,992.68

• Dixie: \$24,196.21

• Gilchrist: \$44,619.14

• Hamilton:

\$37,943.47

• Jefferson: \$9,223.41

• Lafayette: \$77,306.21

• Levy: \$25,108.88

• Madison: \$20,464.85

• Suwannee:

\$30,429.59

• Taylor: \$18,967.43

District staff will distribute PILT payments to the county commissions from July through August.

Jefferson County Journal

Friday, July 15, 2011

Aucilla & Wacissa Rivers May Soon Get National Recognition

SEVERAL BENEFITS EXPECTED FROM DESIGNATION

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

The Aucilla, Wacissa and Econfinia (AWE) rivers could well become nationally recognized recreation destination that attracts eco-tourists and contributes to economic development.

That, at least, is the aim of a resolution that the Jefferson County Commission approved on Thursday morning, July 7.

The resolution expresses the commission's support of the National Recreation Trail designation that the Office of Recreation Services (ORS) of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

is seeking from the National Park Service for the three waterways.

The ORS proposes to call the combined trail of the three waterways the "Rivers of AWE".

Among the reasons that the ORS offered for approval of the resolution:

* Anticipated benefits of the designation would include national recognition, as well as widespread promotion of the three waterways on maps and websites, which exposure would translate into increased tourism dollars and related revenues for local businesses.

* The region's draw, which is largely based on the variety of its ecosystems and the diversity of its wildlife, natural beauty and

unspoiled vistas, would be enhanced by the designation, making the area more appealing to those tourists who are seeking an opportunity to experience the undeveloped and pristine part of the state.

* A new map and area guide that the ORS recently produced in partnership with the Suwannee River Water Management District provides an invaluable planning tool for visitors and local residents who are looking for outstanding recreation opportunities, given that the Aucilla and Wacissa Rivers are already designated State Canoe Trails and Outstanding Florida Waters.

Please See *RIVERS* Page 4A

Rivers Cont. From Page 1

Liz Sparks, of the FWC, presented the request for the resolution, which the commission approved unanimously and with a minimum of discussion.

The resolution recognizes both the health and economic benefits of the region's outdoors recreational activities and urges the U.S. Department of Interior, which oversees the National Park Service, to approve the designation.

The Jefferson County Tourist Development Council supported the adoption of the resolution.

Perry News-Herald

SRWMD to give county \$19,000

The Suwannee River Water Management District will pay Taylor County nearly \$19,000 as part of its Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT).

In all, the district will pay \$346,345 to 11 counties for lands it owns.

The PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when the state or district acquires lands.

Since land owned by the district is tax-exempt, PILT funds offset the loss of tax revenue when the district purchases property for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resource protection, district officials said.

Originally, the program required the district to pay taxes on public lands for a 10-year period, but with legislation passed last year, counties will now receive PILT funds until their populations reach 150,000.

In addition to Taylor County's \$18,967, nearby counties will receive the following: Bradford, \$15,093.45; Columbia, \$42,992; Dixie, \$24,196.21; Gilchrist, \$44,619.14; Hamilton, \$37,943.47; Jefferson, \$9,223.41; Lafayette, \$77,306.21; Levy, \$25,108.88; Madison, \$20,464.85; and Suwannee, \$30,429.59.

District staff will distribute PILT payments to the county commissions through August.

SRWMD land manager among 11 recognized as outstanding forester



Bob Heeke

Bob Heeke, of the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), is one of 11 foresters chosen to receive the Presidential Field Forester Award from the Society of American Foresters (SAF). Heeke

was nominated and selected by his peers from among all practicing foresters within the SAF's southeastern region of Florida, Alabama, and Georgia.

Heeke, who has a 31-year career in the field of forestry, has worked at the SRWMD since 1987. He currently serves as the senior land resources manager within the Department of Land Acquisition and Management where he oversees all land management activities on the District's 160,000 acres of land. Heeke oversees projects that facilitate the restoration of the natural structure and function of lands the SRWMD acquires and manages for flood control and the protection of surface and

groundwater resources.

Some of Heeke's most noteworthy accomplishments at the SRWMD follow:

- Established the land management program.
- Directed harvesting on more than 15,000 acres for natural community restoration.
- Developed and supervised the prescribed burning program.
- Supervised salvage operations after the 2001 Mallory Swamp wildfire.
- Established an exotic plant control program.
- Directed the implementation of hydrologic mitigation projects across the District.

"Heeke's heart and soul are in the land. He has an unparalleled understanding of the natural communities

on District lands and is skilled at applying land management techniques effectively and efficiently," said Charlie Houder, SRWMD assistant executive director. "At the end of the day, our water resources and public lands are in better shape because of his skill and professionalism."

The Presidential Field Forester Award is given annually to one SAF member from each of the 11 SAF districts. Heeke, who has been active in SAF since 1981, is a member within SAF's District X, the organization's southeastern region.

The nominees will be announced and recognized at the 2011 SAF National Convention in November.

Founded in 1900, the Society of American Foresters is the national scientific and educational organization representing the forestry profession in the United States and is the largest professional society for foresters in the world. Members of the Society include natural resource professionals in public and private settings, researchers, CEOs, administrators, educators, and students.

Very low groundwater levels persist despite rain

By Cindy Swirko
Staff writer

From a wildfire perspective, the typical summer weather of rainy afternoons over the past month has largely put an end to the blazes that were popping up daily.

But river and groundwater levels are still low and it will take a lengthy, rain-filled — as in tropical storm — system to begin replenishing the aquifer and surface waters, said Megan Wetherington, senior engineer for the Suwannee River Water

Management District.

“We saw a bunch of record low groundwater levels for this time of year. Groundwater is real low, springs aren’t flowing much and we really need the rain now to punch the rivers back up,” Wetherington said. “You are looking at a pretty good amount of rain that is needed. It’s not something that just afternoon thunderstorms would help.”

The region and much of Florida were wilting under heat and sun through much of June, exacerbating a drought and causing crops to

droop, lawns to brown and fires to burn. The spell broke in the final week of June with the onset of afternoon thundershowers.

State Division of

Forestry district spokeswoman Ludie Bond said Alachua County and much of the region is now in the normal range on a drought index used to

RAIN on Page 4A

RAIN: Helps revive lawns, plants that had been in distress

Continued from 1A

help prepare for wildfires.

The afternoon showers, she added, have helped tamp out most smolders that remained from a heavy fire season.

“Fire activity has decreased significantly since the summer rains have started moving through,” Bond said. “We had our fair share of fires from when our drought started last fall and went through most of June. For a while there, we were experiencing very little rain and a lot more lightning.”

The rain has also helped revive lawns and plants that had been in distress during the drought.

But the moisture brings new concerns, such as root rot, said Wendy Wilber, environmental horticulture agent with the Alachua County Extension Service.

“The plants are beginning to regrow and to not struggle as much. But with that comes its own set of problems, like

Two straight mornings of record lows

Tropical Storm Bret’s path along Florida’s east coast, and then eventually north out to sea, helped drop Tuesday morning’s low temperature to a record in Gainesville for July 19.

National Weather Service meteorologist Eric Zappe, based in Jacksonville, said the high pressure system to the northwest of Florida, coupled with Bret to the northeast, helped drag cooler air down from the north.

The low hit a record 63 degrees at 6 a.m. Tuesday at

the Gainesville Regional Airport, that city’s official weather station. Gainesville’s previous record for July 19 was 65 degrees in 1967.

Gainesville also set a record Monday morning with a low of 66 degrees.

However, the record lows are not expected to continue. Today’s expected low of 73 is distinctly warmer than the record of 67 for July 20, while Thursday’s forecast low of 72 is nowhere near the record of 67 for July 21.

— Joe Callahan

fungus,” Wilber said. “I’m going to be particularly looking out for gray leaf spot, a disease that gets on St. Augustine grass and gets worse when things are wet and stay wet for awhile.”

Most vegetable plants are done for the season, Wilber added.

But area rivers and the aquifer show little sign of recovery. Wetherington said it’s impossible to calculate how much rain would be needed to bring water systems up to normal levels. Historically, though, some storms could give clues.

Conditions were dry in 2008 before Tropical Storm Fay delivered six inches of rain that brought groundwater back to normal, Wetherington said.

Wetherington said the low water levels impact water quality, aquatic life and recreation.

The Santa Fe River has had no increase in flow in some time while some areas of the upper Suwannee River remain too low to paddle easily, though it does have a certain beauty, she said.

“The effects on the upper Suwannee are water quality — we are starting to see some algal growth. Water is warm, dissolved oxygen is low — you have potential for fish kills in this kind of environment,” Wetherington said. “Even though the river is really cool looking, it’s just difficult to paddle. The exposed limerock on the banks and the tree roots — it looks like something prehistoric. You would expect T-Rex to pop out.”

Water conditions worsen

USGS to begin comprehensive study



Water pours from Suwannee Springs through an arch into the Suwannee River in June 2010.

- Photo: Janet Politano (Memories of Suwannee Springs Florida Facebook page)



The same location at Suwannee Springs Monday.

- Photo: Stephenie Livingston

By Stephenie Livingston

stephenie.livingston@gafnews.com

Streamflow and groundwater conditions continue to worsen during July, with Suwannee Springs ceasing to flow through its famous main, arched window into the Suwannee River last week, Megan Wetherington with the Suwannee River Water Management District said.

Although the water began trickling back through this week, officials said that's thanks to recent rainfall, but Wetherington noted the rain is supposed to be scarce now.

New historic lows have been reached on waterways in Georgia and adjacent parts of Florida and Alabama, including the Flint, Suwannee, Ochlockonee, Alapaha and Apalachicola rivers, due to lower than normal rainfall, the US Geological Sur-

vey (USGS) reported Monday.

Although recent rain storms have restored normal levels on the Withlacoochee River, the upper Suwannee River continues to thirst, according to Wetherington.

"We need rain," she said. "The Withlacoochee got a pretty good rain on Saturday, but now it's supposed to stop raining."

She said the area of the upper Suwannee that flows through White Springs in Hamilton County, is still "extremely low".

To determine the impact of the drought on water resources and ecology in the area affected, researchers from three USGS water science centers in Alabama, Florida and Georgia will conduct field studies in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-

- To learn more, visit the U.S. Geological Survey website at <http://www.usgs.gov/>

- You can find real time river levels by visiting the Suwannee River Water Management District's website at <http://www.srwmd.state.fl.us/>. Click on water resources, and river and lake levels.

SEE WATER, PAGE 13A

Continued From Page 1A

Flint and Aucilla-Suwannee-Ochlockonee river basins over the next few days.

"This is the first effort of its kind ever completed during the peak of the

summer irrigation season," Assistant Director of the USGS Georgia Water Science Center Brian McCallum said. "This effort will help us see hydrologic and ecological conditions at their most stressed condition."

Nearly two dozen scientists and researchers will visit more than 200 stream sites and 400 private and public supply wells to assess streamflow decline and drops in groundwater levels. Field crews will also collect water-quality

information that will help determine the drought's impact on ecological conditions in the region. They will visit the same stream sites later in the summer to assess populations of fish and mussels that have been affected.

SRWMD proposes to cut millage rate 3%

Last week, July 12, the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) Governing Board approved a tentative fiscal year 2011-12 budget of \$47,124,589 and proposed millage rate of 0.4250.

Local attorney Ray Curtis is Taylor County's representative on the governing board.

The tentative budget represents a 17 percent reduction over last year's budget and the tentative millage rate reflects a three percent reduction over

last year's millage rate, officials said.

Under the proposed millage rate, those who own property with a taxable value of \$100,000 will pay \$42.50 in property taxes to the district. Owners of property with a taxable value of \$150,000 will pay \$63.75 to the district.

Taxes paid to the district fund numerous public services, including protection of rivers and springs, water monitoring programs, water resource development and water supply planning, officials

said.

The district will hold two public hearings--Sept. 13 and Sept. 27--before the budget and millage rate are adopted.

Both meetings will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the district's headquarters in Live Oak at the corner of U.S. 90 and CR 49. The final budget and millage rate will be adopted at the Sept. 27 hearing.

The public is invited and encouraged to attend. For more information call (800) 226-1066 (Florida only) or (386) 362-1001.

Dixie County Advocate

Thursday, July 21, 2011

SRWMD approves tentative millage rate and budget

LIVE OAK, FL, July 15, 2011 - The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) Governing Board on July 12 approved a tentative fiscal year 2011-12 budget of \$47,124,589 and proposed millage rate of 0.4250. The tentative budget represents a 17 percent reduction over last year's budget and the tentative millage rate reflects a 3 percent reduction over last year's millage rate.

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SRWMD Approves Tentative Millage Rate And Budget

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2011 Great Suwannee River CLEANUP



Call For VOLUNTEERS

In 2010, Current Problems formed a partnership with the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail to coordinate a cleanup of the Suwannee River from the Georgia state line to the Gulf of Mexico.

THE CLEANUP WAS A HUGE SUCCESS!

More than 500 volunteers worked tirelessly along the shorelines, from boats, from kayaks, and on scuba to remove almost 30,000 pounds of trash!

We hope you will JOIN US for the 2nd Great Suwannee River Cleanup and build on the success of last year's event.

HOW TO SIGN UP:

The 2011 cleanup will occur during a three-month window from September through November. If you or your group wishes to clean up a section of the river, go to the event map at <http://tinyurl.com/3wadbd4> to determine your section based on mileposts and GPS coordinates. You may also view a spreadsheet at <http://tinyurl.com/44zt2l8> to see what sections are taken and who to contact if you would like to join someone else's cleanup. Then register your group, the date of your cleanup, and your river section online at <http://tinyurl.com/44d3obr>. Shortly after registration, your cleanup will appear on the event spreadsheet and the map.

Current Problems is available to assist you as you plan your cleanup and to provide supplies (grabbers, buckets, trash bags, etc.). If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Current Problems' Executive Director Fritz Olson at 352-264-6827 or e-mail her at aa@currentproblems.org. Pete Butt is coordinating dive cleanups and can be reached through Fritz Olson.



The Great Suwannee River Cleanup 2011

In 2010, Current Problems formed a partnership with the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail Working Group and the Suwannee River Water Management District to coordinate a cleanup of the Suwannee River from the Georgia state line to the Gulf of Mexico. The cleanup was a huge success! More than 500 volunteers removed almost 30,000 pounds of trash! We hope you will join us for the 2nd Great Suwannee River Cleanup and build on the success of last year's event.

The 2011 cleanup will occur during a three-month window from September through November. Businesses, civic clubs, fishing and boating groups, churches, government agencies, non-profits, chambers of commerce, and groups of friends are all encouraged to participate. Go to the event map at tinyurl.com/3wadbd4 to determine your section based on mileposts and

GPS coordinates. Then register your group, the date of your cleanup, and your river section online at tinyurl.com/44d3obr. Shortly after registration, your cleanup will appear on the event map.

A kickoff celebration will be held at Ivy Memorial Park in Branford, Florida, on September 10th from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

AQUIFER PROTECTION ORDINANCE IS AGAIN PULLED FROM AGENDA

DELAY IS TO MAKE MEASURE CHALLENGE PROOF

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

A second scheduled public hearing on the aquifer protection ordinance was again cancelled at the last minute at the request of the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD).

Jefferson County Commission Chairman Stephen Fulford informed the audience at the beginning of the meeting on Thursday evening, July 21,

that the SRWMD had requested that the hearing be delayed another 30 days to give its staff additional time to review the document. Fulford said the SRWMD wanted to make sure that the ordinance could withstand a legal challenge.

Planning Attorney Scott Shirley, who drafted the ordinance and worked with the SRWMD attorney to overcome the district's initial objections to the document, said this latest delay

was the result of "a mix up on the SRWMD's part".

"All the staff that should have reviewed the ordinance didn't get a chance to review it," Shirley said. "We will now approach the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWMD) as well to make sure it also doesn't have objections."

Added Fulford, "It's the desire of this board and the SRWMD that whatever we adopt is defensible. If it's chal-

lengeable, it will lead to a lawsuit immediately."

The last-minute postponement of the hearing disappointed the numerous audience members who had come to the meeting specifically in support of the measure. The group's basic question to the board was why the last-minute postponement, given the ordinance had been in the works for months?

It was a question the *News* asked. Please See **ORDINANCE** Page 13A

Ordinance

Cont. From Page 1

SRWMD Executive Director David Still on Monday: Why the last-minute delay when the revised ordinance had had the participation of the SRWMD attorney and had supposedly passed muster, insofar as the district's original concerns?

Still said the issue causing the district concern was the same one that had existed from the start, that being the ordinance's preemption of the district's exclusive regulatory authority over consumptive water use.

"I don't want to put Jefferson County in a position where it will get sued by a third party," Still said.

He said that even though the district had reviewed the ordinance and signed-off on the revisions, some staff members still questioned whether the ordinance didn't infringe on the district's regulatory authority. He said the district wanted to make absolutely sure that the ordinance was "rock solid" insofar as withstanding a legal challenge, as the district would also have to defend it.

Still offered that alternatives other than water and land-use regulations might exist for addressing the county's concerns.

"Jefferson County may be able to get what it wants through another avenue," Still said, offering that the regulation of truck traffic was one possibility.

Whatever the out-

come of the district's evaluation, Still said the review would be complete within 30 days.

The county's proposed ordinance is ostensibly aimed at aquifer protection. Even so, Nestlé Waters of North America (NWNA), which is conducting controversial tests of the Wacissa River for possible water bottling purposes, sees the measure as aimed directly at its project.

Thus, a NWNA representative issued a statement on Thursday urging the commission to reject the measure, calling it discriminatory against the bottled water industry.

"Nestlé Waters North America employs 800 people in Florida, responsibly using a renewable natural resource to create good jobs, economic opportunity, and produce the healthiest bottled beverage available," Kent Koptiuch, Nestlé's natural resource manager in Florida, said. "Everywhere we operate, we support strong regulations that ensure water resources are protected, use sound science for determining land use and water withdrawals, and treat all water users equitably and fairly. Like the community, we also strive to preserve the Wacissa watershed. Unfortunately, the proposed Jefferson County land-use regulation meets none of these criteria."

Koptiuch said the pro-

posed regulation singled out the bottled water industry and golf courses for new, arbitrary regulations that did nothing to strengthen groundwater protection or encourage responsible economic development.

"Additionally, these regulations would not apply to other water users, such as brewers or soda bottlers," he said. "Other Florida counties, like Marion County, have benefited from land-use ordinances that both protect local water resources and facilitate responsible economic growth."

Per earlier statements made by Shirley, the revised ordinance that commissioners were scheduled to hear on Thursday evening remained basically unchanged from the original, with the exception of two key provisions that the SRWMD had found objectionable.

One new provision addresses the county's right to regulate the installation of infrastructure, including infrastructure associated with bottling operations. The second requires a supermajority vote of the board for approval of any development having anything to do with water bottling, meaning that four of five commissioners must vote for the measure.

"The ordinance will do exactly what the original did, but in a different way," Shirley said.

Where the county ran afoul of the SRWMD in the original version was that the ordinance sought to regulate the consumptive use and transportation of water, powers granted exclusively to water management districts by state law. The revised version instead focuses on the county's well-established rights to regulate land-use activities under its Land Development Code.

At the time of the revisions, the SRWMD attorney who worked with Shirley on the changes expressed satisfaction that the changes addressed the district's concern.

The ordinance was originally scheduled for a public hearing on April 21. It was pulled from the agenda at the last minute when the SRWMD protested that the measure granted the county water regulatory powers that were exclusively the district's.

Among other things, the ordinance originally attempted to prohibit the removal of surface or ground water from the county's geographic boundaries for outside use, absent a supermajority vote of the commission; it also disallowed surface and ground water withdrawals unless the withdrawals were necessary to serve existing land uses and did not exceed the amounts necessary to serve the lawfully designated land uses.

SRWMD approves tentative millage rate and budget

Submitted

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The public is invited and encouraged to attend. For more information call 800.226.1066 (FL only) or 386.362.1001.

SRWMD urges water conservation as drought persists

As drought conditions continue to worsen, the Suwannee River Water Management District (District) urges all water users to eliminate non-essential uses of water.

"We had the ninth driest May since 1932, and the upper Aucilla, Suwannee and Santa Fe basins experienced rainfall deficits of nearly 25 inches compared to an average year," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer.

Several months of below-average rainfall has led to record-breaking low flows on the upper Suwannee River, including the Suwannee River at White Springs with records going back to 1906. Gages on the upper Santa Fe reported that flow has ceased. Coastal rivers fell to much below normal after five months of near-normal flow, and all 16 District-monitored lakes were below their historical average level.

Groundwater levels fell in 92 percent of monitored wells. Levels in the Santa Fe Basin were near the 15th percentile for the period of record, meaning that almost 85 percent of the time they have been higher than they are now. In the Suwannee River basin, levels fell to the 22nd percentile.

According to recent drought report, the National Weather Service classified drought conditions in the Suwannee River basin as severe. The Florida Division of Forestry estimated the fire danger for most of

the area as high or very high.

The District has taken the following actions to urge the public to cut back on water use:

Water Shortage Advisory: Declared by the District's Governing Board in December 2010, the advisory asks all users to voluntarily reduce water consumption indoors and outdoors until further notice.

"The advisory simply calls upon all of us to take voluntary steps to reduce both indoor and outdoor water use during times of drought and until conditions recover," said Jon Dinges, District director of water supply and resource management.

Once drought conditions improve and groundwater and surfacewater levels rebound, the governing board may cancel the Water Shortage Advisory. Should conditions worsen, however, the governing board may impose mandatory water-use restrictions.

Landscape Irrigation Rule: Adopted into Florida Administrative Code in January 2010, the rule requires homeowners, businesses, and others to limit lawn and landscape watering to two days during daylight saving time and one day per week during standard time. Irrigation should not occur between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

"The landscape irrigation rule is a year-round conservation measure aimed at stretching our water supplies for the

long term," Dinges said.

The advisory and irrigation rule applies to residents within the District's boundaries, which means all of Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor and Union counties, and portions of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Jefferson, Levy and Putnam counties.

For more information, contact the District at 386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (FL only).

The District offers the following tips to conserve indoors and outdoors:

- Fix leaky faucets and toilets, which can waste up to 100 gallons per day.
- Replace older fixtures and appliances with low-flow, water-saving models.
- Turn off tap while brushing teeth, shaving, or washing dishes.
- Water lawns and landscapes only one day per week and not between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Use Florida-Friendly Landscaping™.
- Equip hoses with automatic shutoff nozzles.
- Wash vehicles infrequently and only on porous surfaces.
- Use a broom or blower – not a hose – to clean sidewalks, driveways, parking areas.
- Take shorter showers; staying under 5 minutes can save 1,000 gallons per month.
- Don't use toilet as a waste basket.

Nestlé: Wacissa River too low to tap

By Jennifer Portman

Democrat senior writer

Nestlé Waters North America has abandoned its plans to tap the headwaters of the Wacissa River as a potential bottled water source.

After a year of study, company officials announced Wednesday evening that results from four test wells in the Jefferson County community showed there was not enough water there for a satellite source for its Madison County water bottling plant.

"After a thorough review of the data, we have determined that while the Wacissa River springs complex continues to produce an abundant 200 million gallons of water per day or more, Allen Spring is naturally subject to seasonal low flows that do not meet our strict selection criteria for a stable, sustainable water supply," Nestlé's Florida Natural Resource Manager Kent Koptiuch said in written statement.

There are at least 12 springs that make up the Wacissa River springs complex. Nestlé's test wells were at Allen Spring on private property owned by the Boland family.

Nestlé spokesman Ryan Duffy added: "Ultimately, science is what made the decision."

Members of Friends of the Wacissa, a grassroots group of area residents and outdoor enthusiasts who opposed Nestlé's plans, were thrilled.

"We are elated by this news," said Georgia Ackerman, one of the group's founders.

Duffy said the company has no plans to explore other sites in the county, but will continue to look at options throughout north Florida.

"We have a number of possible sites we will consider, but nothing formal," he said. "There is nothing even close to starting a test well."

While Nestlé's plans for the Wacissa have ended for now, Ackerman said her group will continue to be vigilant and continue its public awareness campaign.

"Florida will continue to deal with commercial water extractors," she said. "We have to preserve our natural resources for the people of Florida. The Friends of the Wacissa are just getting warmed up."

NESTLÉ' ABANDONS WACISSA AS A BOTTLED WATER SOURCE COMPANY SAYS SPRING WON'T SUSTAIN THE USE

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

Nestlé Water North America (NwNA) has now officially pulled the plug on its controversial water-monitoring project at the head of the Wacissa River, an activity designed to test the water for possible use in its Madison County bottling operation.

In a press statement released late Wednesday afternoon, July 27, a company spokesman said the data derived from its yearlong testing of Allen Spring indicated that the site failed to meet Nestlé's criteria.

"After a thorough review of the data, we have determined that while the Wacissa River springs complex continues to produce an abundant 200 million gallons of water per day or more, Allen Spring is naturally subject to seasonal low flows that do not meet our strict selection criteria for a

stable, sustainable water supply," said Kent Koptiuch, natural resource manager for Nestlé Florida.

Koptiuch emphasized on Thursday morning that solely the scientific data, not political pressure or the grassroots opposition that had coalesced around the project during the last 13 months, accounted for Nestlé's decision.

"Absolutely not," Koptiuch said in response to the question of whether the protests of the Friends of the Wacissa and other groups and the Jefferson County Commission's consideration of an ordinance to bar the project had in any way influenced the company's decision.

"We made the decision based strictly on the scientific evaluation," Koptiuch said. "It had nothing to do whatsoever with what was going on

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politically in Jefferson County. We understand and respect our critics' point of view. But if the science had shown that the project was worthwhile to pursue, we would have pursued it."

Koptiuch said the company at present had no other Jefferson County site under consideration, nor was it likely that the compa-

ny would explore any other site here. But he would not absolutely rule out such a possibility in the future.

"I can't definitely say we'll never come back to Jefferson County," Koptiuch said, noting that it was one of his primary responsibilities to seek new water-bottling sources within his territory, which extends from Tennessee to Florida. And yes, the company would continue to search for other sites in north Florida, he said.

Regarding the greater Wacissa Basin, Koptiuch said nothing in the data indicated that any of the system's several other springs met Nestlé's water quality and quantity parameters. As for Allen Spring, the data showed that it would not sustain the 300,000 to 400,000 gallons per day that the company planned to withdraw, he said.

He said the current drought conditions had aggravated the situation at Allen Spring, but even absent the drought, the spring had exhibited a propensity for being stressed that made it unacceptable for Nestlé's purpose.

Koptiuch said it was one of his company's qualifying criteria for a spring that it not dry up.

"If we dry it up, it wouldn't be spring water," he said.

Beyond that, it was against state law to harm a spring, he said.

"But even if it wasn't required by law, it's against our corporate philosophy to harm a spring," Koptiuch said.

"It's our philosophy to harvest water in a sustainable way so the springs will last, as they are critical for the health of the environment. For us, a spring is a magic place that we don't want to harm."

Whether it was because of their collective efforts or not, opponents of the project were celebrating Nestlé's decision.

"People are excited by the good news," Georgia Ackerman, one of the founders of the Friends of the Wacissa, said Thursday morning.

Even so, Ackerman injected a cautionary note into the celebratory mood. She said that in talking with other communities where Nestlé and other bottling operations had tried to set up shop, the lesson learned was that these companies didn't give up easily.

"They can be very patient and wait for years to return," Ackerman said.

She said the Friends of the Wacissa and other of the opposition groups would not simply drop the work of the last 13 months. She said these groups would continue to press the Jefferson County Commission for adoption of the aquifer protection ordinance that is currently under consideration.

"We expect the ordinance to show up in the August agenda," Ackerman said. "We're hopeful that Jefferson County will continue to look at the long-term protection of the springs and proceed with adoption of the ordinance."