

FLORIDA TRIBUNE

COVERING THE POLICY, PEOPLE AND POLITICS OF FLORIDA GOVERNMENT

State won't block sale of conservation lands

No Comments

February 02, 2011

By: Bruce Ritchie

A **Department of Environmental Protection** initiative to provide guidance to state agencies on the sale of lands originally bought for conservation appears to have changed course, with DEP officials now saying such guidelines will be only voluntary.

The **Suwannee River Water Management District** is continuing to list some land for sale and is moving to identify other lands that can be sold, according to district officials. Some environmentalists say they're troubled by the agency's actions and the precedent that could be set.

With Florida facing tight budgets in recent years, some Democratic and Republican House members have been saying the state has too much land and should consider selling some. The state has purchased more than 2 million acres for conservation since 1990 in what has been the largest land-buying program in the nation. But the program, which had received \$300 million a year since 1990, has received only \$15 million in the past two years.

Environmentalists, including representatives of **Audubon of Florida**, said last year that agencies should follow the process already established in the Constitution, which says the Cabinet can get rid of land only if it is "no longer needed for conservation purposes." (See "**Groups want Crist to Stop Sale of State Lands**," (<http://apps.lobbytools.com/tools/tc.cfm?a=article&id=18826582>) June 25.)

In a Sept. 21 [letter](http://static-lobbytools.s3.amazonaws.com/press/20110202_letter_crist_to_srwmnd.pdf) (http://static-lobbytools.s3.amazonaws.com/press/20110202_letter_crist_to_srwmnd.pdf), Gov. Charlie Crist told the Suwannee River Water Management District it should halt land sales while DEP develops guidelines for agencies to follow. The district had proposed selling nine parcels totaling more than 700 acres. In November, the district decided to proceed with land sales and develop its own criteria for selling land.

"A decision was made not to wait on DEP," said **Terry Demott**, senior land resource coordinator with the district.

"We received a request from DEP and the governor -- (now) the former governor -- to wait on that," Demott said. "But the governing board made a decision not to wait but to go forward with our own program."

DEP officials told the state **Acquisition and Restoration Council** (<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/arc.htm>) in December they had limited rule-making authority on the issue, according to draft council minutes. The issue is not on the council agenda when it meets next week.

DEP spokeswoman **Jennifer Diaz** said the department is working on voluntary guidelines for agencies but she provided no timetable for completing the work.

Environmentalist **Eleanor Dietrich** of Tallahassee, who last week attended a Suwannee River Water Management District meeting on its own proposed criteria, said she's concerned that the district is moving too swiftly. The board is expected to consider the criteria on March 8.

Dietrich said critics want the agency to use specific criteria for selling land that also take into account other conservation features besides water resources, such as endangered species and proximity to other public lands.

"We don't want it to be so quick that the criteria, and application of those criteria, would result in land that shouldn't be sold being sold," she said.

Originally published in the Florida Current - exclusively distributed via [Lobbytools \(http://www.lobbytools.com\)](http://www.lobbytools.com) - Florida's Premiere Legislative and Media Monitoring Service.

[Add new comment \(/comment/reply/1085#comment-form\)](/comment/reply/1085#comment-form)

Copyright 2010 Florida Tribune | [info@fltrib.com \(mailto:info@fltrib.com\)](mailto:info@fltrib.com)

5 area state parks may fall prey to budget cuts

By *Stephenie Livingston*

Five area state parks from Peacock Spring to Big Shoals may be closed by summer in a plan to help Florida close its \$3.6 billion budget gap. With the future of local springs already on the minds of many in our area, the proposition has raised concerns.

"That's ridiculous," said Bradford's John Sale, who lives on the Santa Fe and used to cave dive at Peacock Springs, one of 53 state parks included in the list.

Others local parks in the proposal are Big Shoals and the Suwannee

River Wilderness Trail/ Nature Heritage Tourism Center, both in White Springs; and Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park. All were included in a list of parks the Department of Environmental Protection presented to state lawmakers last week in response to Gov. Rick Scott's order that all state agencies trim tentative 2011-12 budget requests by 15 percent.

Although Sale said he understands the state must cut somewhere, the number of parks that

SEE 5 AREA, PAGE 12A

5 area state parks may fall prey to budget cuts

Continued From Page 1A

may be closed seems steep.

"It's cutting too much," he said.

Ray Rousch of Live Oak said he sees the need for drastic cuts.

"They want to save money, that's the way to do it," he said.

Olustee Battlefield in Columbia County is the site of Florida's largest Civil War battle that took place in 1864. Big Shoals State Park in White Springs is home to the largest whitewater rapids in Florida, Class III under the best circumstances, according to the park website. The Suwannee River Wilderness Trail/Nature

and Heritage Tourism Center draws tourists and revenue to the White Springs area.

The FDEP's proposal, which was submitted in October but was just made public Friday, would close public access to 53 state parks. These parks were chosen based on their visitation numbers during fiscal year 2009-10, said DEP spokeswoman Kristin Lock. She said they reflect the parks with the lowest visitation that do not offer camping or other overnight accommodations.

Gov. Scott has not released his recommended budget and the Legislature has not acted on the Fiscal

Year 2011-12 budget yet, therefore, Lock said "the proposed closures are still just that, proposed."

The 53 state parks total attendance for Fiscal Year 2009-10 was 1,099,650. The same year's attendance for all Florida State Parks was 20,110,021.

Suwannee River Water Management Deputy Executive Director Charlie Houser said closure of the White Springs locations would affect the District, since there are projects ongoing at Big Shoals and especially Suwannee River Wilderness Trail.

"Any impact to that (the projects) would be something we would have to work through," said Houser.

er.

For now, he said the District is monitoring developments and awaiting the Governor's final budget.

Owner of The Spirit of the Suwannee James Cornett said though he understands the state has to make cuts, he hopes that if closed, the parks will not remain so for long. "We're very supportive of the state parks here," said Cornett.

If the parks are eventually closed, he said they will be greatly missed by locals and tourists.

"These parks will be missed in the system while they're closed, and hopefully they can open back up again soon," he said.



February 3, 2011

FSU students rally for community river

Emily Ostermeyer

Contributing Writer

Over 100 community members gathered in the Dorothy Cooper Spence Community Center on Thursday night for an informational meeting regarding the protection of the Wacissa River. The Friends of the Wacissa, a local group, organized the meeting in response to the potential threat of commercial water mining at the Wacissa River by the water-bottling company Nestle Waters North America.

“

If you love FSU, if you love Tallahassee, then this is the best way to get involved and use your voice, because it is a voice that people listen to.

—Elizabeth Swiman Director of Campus Sustainability at FSU

”

The first part of the of the meeting was informational, during which Jon Dinges, director of Water Supply and Resource Management at the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), gave a presentation to explain how the SRWMD issues permits for consumptive use of water to companies such as Nestle.

The goal was to facilitate concerned citizens' understanding of the factors and criteria that the SRWMD considers when evaluating permit applications.

"We want the citizens to understand how the permitting process works," Dinges said. "We want them to understand that it's a public process and all the information is open to them once the permit application comes in, and they can get involved by reviewing the applications to make comments to the water management district during that process."

The second part of the meeting involved an update from citizen coalition members that discussed what is currently happening with the Wacissa River in the wake of the Nestle attempt.

After receiving the necessary exploratory permit in June 2010, Nestle Waters North America is currently in the process of evaluating the use of the Wacissa river as a harvesting source for their water bottling facility located in nearby Madison County, according to the "Save the Wacissa" website. If Nestle decides to pursue and gains approval for a consumptive use permit, Nestle will use the Wacissa watershed as a satellite spring source that the company would transport by tanker truck from the spring to the Madison County facility.

"We're not really sure if they're going to pursue it," Georgia Ackerman of Friends of the Wacissa said. "I believe strongly that they will, but right now, they're evaluating and testing it."

Nestle released a Frequently Asked Questions notice regarding the Wacissa Satellite Spring Source, where it addressed community concerns. According to the information, if Nestle does pursue the satellite spring, the maximum amount of water the company would harvest per day is 1.6 million gallons, as permitted by the SRWMD. Additionally, the maximum amount of truckloads Nestle can run

in a single day ranges between 60 and 70.

"Nestle Waters works with local communities to make certain that our tankering operations are not disruptive to the lives of the residents," the FAQ read. "We will study the Wacissa Springs' ecosystem to ensure that, if we move forward, our water usage would be sustainable and that the local environment would remain unharmed."

Despite these assurances, locals' concerns abound, and were voiced at Thursday's meeting.

"The majority of Wacissa residents oppose any type of satellite spring, what's called a bulk transfer station, in their community because there's going to be big trucks running up and down the road," Ackerman said. "And if you've ever been to Wacissa, it's a small tiny, quiet, rural community. Having 50 to 60 trucks running up and down your roads everyday, past the bus stop where the little kids wait, it's just going to completely upset their community. That's one of their biggest concerns."

Community members are also concerned about the potential damage the satellite spring would pose to the aquifer. Currently, a Phase I Water Shortage Advisory was issued in December by the SRWMD in response to recent drought conditions, and is still in effect.

"Clearly, pumping water from the aquifer when we have an advisory warning, drought level conditions going on, is bad for the river," Ackerman said. "It's bad for the ecosystem. It's bad for the springs, so that's what's upsetting the regional people."

The community meeting reached a capacity of standing room only, with people from four different local counties present.

"There were residents from Jefferson County, Waculla County, Leon County and Gadsden County who were concerned about this across the region," Ackerman said. "So that, for me, is extremely encouraging. A lot of people care and a lot of people don't want water mining happening on our rivers and our springs in the area."

Ackerman said that the meeting helped disseminate awareness of the Wacissa River issue.

"I think a lot of people left last night with a good understanding of how the permit process works, and as well as how they can get involved," Ackerman said. "If this is something that they care about and want to help protect the Wacissa River, they now have the means to get involved, and that was one of our goals."

Elizabeth Swiman, director of Campus Sustainability at FSU, was present at the event.

She said issues such as the protection of the Wacissa Springs are hugely important because of their direct effect on the local community.

"You know, we have these beautiful spaces in our community that we want to remain beautiful and untouched and open to the public," Swiman said.

Swiman encourages students to become aware and engaged in these environmental issues.

"This is the town you live in," Swiman said. "This is where you spend four or more years of your life. This is where you work, and this is where you go to school and this is where you play and it's also a chance for you to purport those skills of being an engaged citizen, and this is the perfect time to practice that. If you love FSU, if you love Tallahassee, then this is the best way to get involved and use your voice, because it is a voice that people listen to."

Students are heeding the call. The Environmental Service Program (ESP) at FSU, for example, is an SGA-affiliated project that hosts events on campus and in the community to educate people on environmental issues, and is currently organizing a canoe trip on the Wacissa River to raise awareness.

"We're organizing it with FSU Outdoor Pursuits, so there will be really knowledgeable and experienced guides on the trip, and we're going to give out information about the political process and the local ecology," said Rachel Walsh, FSU senior majoring in biology and an active member of ESP. Walsh said that the canoe trip, currently scheduled for March, would help provide an opportunity for students to see the river for themselves and hopefully instill a better appreciation for it.

"We talked to some local activists about how our organization could best become involved and one of the things that they suggested was taking the people to see the river, because people are willing to protect what they have experienced and what they love," Walsh said. "So I hope that to see the river will help them to gain an appreciation and concern for it."

Students interested in attending the canoe trip can sign up through Outdoor Pursuits. For more information about the Wacissa River issue, visit savethewacissa.com.

SRWMD Governing Board meeting Florida Trail Association meets Feb. 14

Submitted

On Tuesday, February 8, 2011, the Suwannee River Water Management District's Governing Board will meet at 9:00 a.m. at District Headquarters, 9225 County Road 49, Live Oak, Florida. The meeting is to consider District business and conduct public hearings

on regulatory and land acquisition matters. A workshop will follow the Governing Board meeting.

On Monday, February 21, 2011, 1:00 p.m., a Governing Board teleconference meeting will be held at District Headquarters in Live Oak, Florida.

All meetings, workshops, and hearings are open to the public.

Submitted

The Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association will hold its monthly meeting on Monday, February 14, 2011 at the Suwannee River Water Management District Office from 7-9 PM, on US 90 and CR 49, 2 miles east of Live Oak. The public is welcome!

Our program will feature: Kitty Tolson Carroll of Accipiter Enterprises. Learn more about birds of prey and watch a falconry demonstration. Check out their website at www.birdsofprey.net. For details on the program contact: Donna Ellis at: ellistrek@windstream.net or 386-362-6874.



FEBRUARY IS FLORIDA HIKING TRAILS MONTH

[Feb 3rd, 2011](#)

by [Submitted](#).

Take a hike, or a stroll, on SRWMD lands



LIVE OAK, FL, February 3, 2011 – Sylvia Dunnam found solace from the hustle and bustle of the city when she moved to Suwannee County from West Palm in 1986. It was nature that drew her to north Florida.

“I wanted to be closer to nature and I knew I would have access to the Florida Trail,” she said.

After Dunnam made her home in McAlpin she discovered that her hiking opportunities were not limited to the Florida Trail – one of eleven National Scenic Trails.

Dunnam, who founded the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association, helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips, some of which take place on lands owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District (District).

“We enjoy bird watching and admiring the flora and fauna along the way,” Dunnam said. “One unique feature of this area is the different types of geology.”

On a recent hike on the District’s Jennings Bluff Tract in Hamilton County, Dunnam was among a group of 19 who observed the Dead River, a winding creek that takes water from the Alapaha River and funnels it into a sinkhole.

“This is a spectacular place to visit,” said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer. “The river reemerges 16 miles downstream as the largest single freshwater spring in the state before flowing into the Suwannee River.”

Wetherington said the karst geology in this part of Florida causes many rivers and streams to flow underground through sinkholes.

Edwin McCook, the District's land management specialist, said other interesting features that hikers may encounter on District lands include unique wildlife, whitewater rapids and champion trees – the largest of trees within a species.

In addition, more than 50 miles of the Florida Trail traverses District land. The District invites the public to explore nature by hiking on District lands during the month of February to celebrate Florida Hiking Trails Month.

“The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of the 183 miles of trails that provide hiking, biking and equestrian opportunities on District-owned lands,” said McCook.

The Florida Trail Association provides ongoing planned hikes and other recreational opportunities, some of which take place on District lands.

“If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a self-guided hike on District property anytime,” said McCook.

All District hiking trails are free and open to the public every day of the year. Following is a list of some of the best hiking opportunities:

- Bell Springs, Columbia County
- Big Shoals, Hamilton County
- Holton Creek, Hamilton County
- Falling Creek Falls, Columbia County
- White Springs Tract, Hamilton County
- Little Shoals, Columbia County
- Gar Pond, Columbia County
- Stephen Foster Tract, Hamilton County
- Camp Branch, Hamilton County
- Ellaville Tract, Madison County
- Anderson Springs, Suwannee County
- Black Tract, Madison County
- Mill Creek North, Madison County
- Mill Creek South, Madison County
- Owens Spring, Lafayette County
- Cabbage Grove, Taylor County
- Steinhatchee Falls, Taylor County

Maps to each of the above tracts are available under the Best Recreational Opportunities link on the District's website. It can be accessed at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation. For more information contact Edwin McCook at 386.362.1001 or ejm@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386.362.3256 or visit www.suwannee.floridatrail.org.

Take a hike, or a stroll, on SRWMD lands

Sylvia Dunnam found solace from the hustle and bustle of the city when she moved to Suwannee County from West Palm in 1986. It was nature that drew her to north Florida.

"I wanted to be closer to nature and I knew I would have access to the Florida Trail," she said.

After Dunnam made her home in McAlpin she discovered that her hiking opportunities were not limited to the Florida Trail — one of eleven National Scenic Trails.

Dunnam, who founded the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association, helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips, some of which take place on lands owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District.

"We enjoy bird watching and admiring the flora and fauna along the way," Dunnam said. "One unique feature of this area is the different types of geology."

On a recent hike on the District's Jennings Bluff Tract in Hamilton County, Dunnam was among a group of 19 who observed the Dead River, a winding creek that takes water from the Alapaha River and funnels it into a sinkhole.

"This is a spectacular place to visit," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer. "The river reemerges 16 miles downstream as the largest single freshwater spring in the state before flowing into the Suwannee River."

Wetherington said the karst geology in this part of Florida causes many rivers and streams to flow underground through sinkholes.

Edwin McCook, the District's land management specialist, said other interesting features that hikers may encounter on District lands include unique wildlife, whitewater rapids and champion trees — the largest of trees within a species.

In addition, more than 50 miles of the Florida Trail traverses District land.

The District invites the public to explore nature by hiking on District lands

during the month of February to celebrate Florida Hiking Trails Month.

"The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of the 183 miles of trails that provide hiking, biking and equestrian opportunities on District-owned lands," said McCook.

The Florida Trail Association provides ongoing planned hikes and other recreational opportunities, some of which take place on District lands.

"If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a self-guided hike on District property anytime," said McCook.

Maps to each of the above tracts are available under the Best Recreational Opportunities link on the District's website. It can be accessed at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation. For more information contact Edwin McCook at 386-362-1001 or ejm@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386-362-3256 or visit www.suwannee.floridatrail.org.

The District acquires and manages lands for flood control, water quality protection and natural resource conservation. District lands are open to the public for recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and horseback riding.

Following is a list of some of the best hiking opportunities:

- Bell Springs, Columbia County
- Big Shoals, Hamilton County
- Holton Creek, Hamilton County
- Falling Creek Falls, Columbia County
- White Springs Tract, Hamilton County
- Little Shoals, Columbia County
- Gar Pond, Columbia County
- Stephen Foster Tract, Hamilton County
- Camp Branch, Hamilton County
- Ellaville Tract, Madison County
- Anderson Springs, Suwannee County
- Black Tract, Madison County
- Mill Creek North, Madison County
- Mill Creek South, Madison County
- Owens Spring, Lafayette County
- Cabbage Grove, Taylor County
- Steinhatchee Falls, Taylor County

Take a hike, or a stroll, on SRWMD lands

Special to the Citizen

Sylvia Dunnam found solace from the hustle and bustle of the city when she moved to Suwannee County from West Palm in 1986. It was nature that drew her to north Florida.

"I wanted to be closer to nature and I knew I would have access to the Florida Trail," she said.

After Dunnam made her home in McAlpin she discovered that her hiking opportunities were not limited to the Florida Trail — one of eleven National Scenic Trails. Dunnam, who founded the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association, helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips, some of

which take place on lands owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District (District).

"We enjoy bird watching and admiring the flora and fauna along the way," Dunnam said. "One unique feature of this area is the different types of geology." On a recent hike on the District's Jennings Bluff Tract in Hamilton County, Dunnam was among a group of 19 who observed the Dead River, a winding creek that takes water from the Alapaha River and funnels it into a sinkhole.

"This is a spectacular place to visit," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer.

"The river reemerges 16 miles downstream as the



COURTESY PHOTO

Members of the Suwannee Chapter of the FTA hike a trail on the SRWMD's Holton Creek Tract in Hamilton County.

largest single freshwater spring in the state before flowing into the Suwannee River."

Wetherington said the karst geology in this part of Florida causes many rivers and streams to flow underground through sinkholes. Edwin McCook, the

District's land management specialist, said other interesting features that hikers may encounter on District lands include unique wildlife, whitewater rapids and champion trees — the largest of trees within a species.

In addition, more than 50

miles of the Florida Trail traverses District land. The District invites the public to explore nature by hiking on District lands during the month of February to celebrate Florida Hiking Trails Month. "The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of the 183 miles of trails that provide hiking, biking and equestrian opportunities on District-owned lands," said McCook.

The Florida Trail Association provides ongoing planned hikes and other recreational opportunities, some of which take place on District lands. "If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a

self-guided hike on District property anytime," said McCook.

All District hiking trails are free and open to the public every day of the year. Maps of free hiking trails can be accessed at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation.

For more information contact Edwin McCook at 386.362.1001 or ejm@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386.362.3256 or visit www.suwannee.florida-trail.org.

Take a hike, or a stroll, on SRWMD lands

Sylvia Dunnam found solace from the hustle and bustle of the city when she moved to Suwannee County from West Palm in 1986. It was nature that drew her to north Florida.

"I wanted to be closer to nature and I knew I would have access to the Florida Trail," she said.

After Dunnam made her home in McAlpin she discovered that her hiking opportunities were not limited to the Florida Trail - one of eleven National Scenic Trails.

Dunnam, who founded the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association, helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips, some of which take place on lands owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District.

"We enjoy bird watching and admiring the flora and fauna along

the way," Dunnam said. "One unique feature of this area is the different types of geology."

On a recent hike on the District's Jennings Bluff Tract in Hamilton County, Dunnam was among a group of 19 who observed the Dead River, a winding creek that takes water from the Alapaha River and funnels it into a sinkhole.

"This is a spectacular place to visit," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer. "The river reemerges 16 miles down-

SEE HIKE, PAGE 2A

Continued From Page 1A

stream as the largest single freshwater spring in the state before flowing into the Suwannee River."

Wetherington said the geology in this part of Florida causes many rivers and streams to flow underground through sinkholes.

Edwin McCook, the District's land management specialist, said other interesting features that hikers may encounter on District lands include unique wildlife, whitewater rapids and champion trees - the largest of trees within a species.

In addition, more than 50 miles of the Florida Trail traverses District land.

The District invites the public to explore nature by hiking on District lands during the month of February to celebrate Florida Hiking Trails Month.

"The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of the 183 miles of trails that provide hiking, biking and equestrian opportunities on District-owned lands," said McCook.

The Florida Trail Association provides ongoing planned hikes and other recreational opportunities, some of which take place on District lands.

"If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a self-guided hike on District property anytime," said McCook.

All District hiking trails are free and open to the public every day of the year. Following is a list of some of the best hiking opportunities:

- Bell Springs, Columbia County
- Big Shoals, Hamilton County
- Holton Creek, Hamilton County
- Falling Creek Falls, Columbia County
- White Springs Tract, Hamilton County
- Little Shoals, Columbia County
- Gar Pond, Columbia County
- Stephen Foster Tract, Hamilton County
- Camp Branch, Hamilton County
- Ellaville Tract, Madison County
- Anderson Springs, Suwannee County
- Black Tract, Madison County
- Mill Creek North, Madison County
- Mill Creek South, Madison County
- Owens Spring, Lafayette County
- Cabbage Grove, Taylor County
- Steinhatchee Falls, Taylor County

Maps to each of the above tracts are available under the Best Recreational Opportunities link on the District's website. It can be accessed at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation. For more information contact Edwin McCook at 386-362-1001 or ejm@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386-362-3256 or visit www.suwannee.florida-trail.org.

The District acquires and manages lands for flood control, water quality protection and natural resource conservation. District lands are open to the public for recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and horseback riding.

Take a hike, or a stroll, on SRWMD lands

Sylvia Dunnam found solace from the hustle and bustle of the city when she moved to Suwannee County from West Palm in 1986. It was nature that drew her to North Florida.

"I wanted to be closer to nature and I knew I would have access to the Florida Trail," she said.

After Dunnam made her home in McAlpin she discovered that her hiking opportunities were not limited to the Florida Trail - one of eleven National Scenic Trails.

Dunnam, who founded the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association, helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips,

SEE TAKE, PAGE 4A

Continued From Page 1A

some of which take place on lands owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District.

"We enjoy bird watching and admiring the flora and fauna along the way," Dunnam said. "One unique feature of this area is the different types of geology."

On a recent hike on the District's Jennings Bluff Tract in Hamilton County, Dunnam was among a group of 19 who observed the Dead River, a winding creek that takes water from the Alapaha River and funnels it into a sinkhole.

"This is a spectacular place to visit," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer. "The river reemerges 16 miles downstream as the largest single freshwater spring in the state before flowing into the Suwannee River."

Wetherington said the geology in this part of Florida causes many rivers and streams to flow underground through sinkholes.

Edwin McCook, the District's land management specialist, said other interesting features that hikers may encounter on District lands include unique wildlife, whitewater rapids and champion trees - the

largest of trees within a species.

In addition, more than 50 miles of the Florida Trail traverses District land.

The District invites the public to explore nature by hiking on District lands during the month of February to celebrate Florida Hiking Trails Month.

"The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of the 183 miles of trails that provide hiking, biking and equestrian opportunities on District-owned lands," said McCook.

The Florida Trail Association provides ongoing planned hikes and other recreational opportunities, some of which take place on District lands.

"If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a self-guided hike on District property anytime," said McCook.

All District hiking trails are free and open to the public every day of the year. Maps to each of the above tracts are available under the Best Recreational Opportunities link on the District's website. It can be accessed at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation. For more information contact Edwin McCook at 386-362-1001

or ejm@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386-362-3256 or visit www.suwannee.florida-trail.org.

The District acquires and manages lands for flood control, water quality protection and natural resource conservation. District lands are open to the public for recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and horseback riding.

County Hopes To Get Reduced Permit Fees

LAZARO ALEMAN

ECB Publishing

Senior Staff Writer

County officials are seeking to save thousands of dollars in permit applications fees for public projects overseen by the water management districts.

To qualify for the fee reductions and waivers, which Florida law allows, counties must have a population of 75,000 or less, and their officials must avow that their counties either face financial hardship or that a particular project or activity has a valid environmental necessity.

Local officials, in short, must certify in writing that the cost of the permit processing fee would impose a financial burden for one of a number of reasons.

The reasons include that the per-capita taxable value is less than the statewide average for any given fiscal year; the percentage of assessed property value that is exempt from ad-valorem taxation is higher than the statewide average for a given fiscal year; or the ad-valorem operating millage rate for a given fiscal year is greater than a eight mills.

Government entities that qualify for the reduction are assured that permit fees will not exceed \$100, or that if the original fee is less than \$100, it will be waived in full.

Consultant engineer Alan Wise, of Preble-Rish, recommended to the commission on Thursday, Jan. 20, that it apply for the permit fees reduction. He explained that in order to qualify, the commission had to submit a certified copy of the minutes of a meeting, or adopt a resolution, attesting to its population and citing the reason for the alleged financial hardship.

Wise noted that the need for applying for the fee reduction had come to him in light of his dealings with the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWMD) over the stormwater work at College Park, i.e., the horse arena. But he conceded, in response to a citizen's question, that the fee reductions could well also be sought from the Suwannee River Water Management District, which oversees the eastern half of Jefferson County.

SRWMD employee recognized for 10 years of service

Jerry Bowden, of the Suwannee River Water Management District (District), was honored for 10 years of outstanding service at a governing board meeting Feb. 8.

Bowden, a senior professional engineer, works in the Department of water supply and resource management. He inspects commercial and subdivision development projects to ensure they are in compliance with permitting requirements and assists with the implementation of drainage and alternative water supply projects.

Bowden joined the District in February 2001 and has 35 years of consulting and design experience in the areas of soil and water resources. Prior to employment with the District, he worked for 11 years as a consultant and 14 years as the president and owner of an engineering and construction company in South-west Florida.



SRWMD Governing Board Chairman Don Quincey, left, and Jon Dinges, District director of water supply and resource management, right, present an award to Jerry Bowden for 10 years of service. - Courtesy photo



Bowden Honored By SRWMD

Ken Allen



- Jerry Bowden, of the Suwannee River Water Management District, was honored for 10 years of outstanding service at a governing board meeting

February 8th. Bowden, a senior professional engineer, works in the Department of water supply and resource management. He inspects commercial and subdivision development projects to ensure they are in compliance with permitting requirements and assists with the implementation of drainage and alternative water supply projects. Bowden joined the District in February 2001 and has 35 years of consulting and design experience in the areas of soil and water resources. Prior to employment with the District, he worked for 11 years as a consultant and 14 years as the president and owner of an engineering and construction company in Southwest Florida. In the photo, SRWMD Governing Board Chairman Don Quincey, left, and Jon Dinges, District director of water supply and resource management, right, present the award to Jerry Bowden for 10 years of service.

FEBRUARY IS FLORIDA HIKING TRAILS MONTH

Take a hike, or a stroll, on SRWMD lands

Sylvia Dunnam found solace from the hustle and bustle of the city when she moved to Suwannee County from West Palm in 1986. It was nature that drew her to north Florida.

"I wanted to be closer to nature and I knew I would have access to the Florida Trail," she said.

After Dunnam made her home in McAlpin she discovered that her hiking opportunities were not limited to the Florida Trail - one of eleven National Scenic Trails.

Dunnam, who founded the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association, helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips, some of which take place on lands owned by the Suwannee River Water Management District (District).

"We enjoy bird watching and admiring the flora and fauna along the way," Dunnam said. "One unique feature of this area is the different types of geology."

On a recent hike on the District's Jennings Bluff Tract in Hamilton County, Dunnam was among a group of 19 who observed the Dead River, a winding creek that takes water from the Alapaha River and funnels it into a sinkhole.

"This is a spectacular place to visit," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer. "The river reemerges 16 miles downstream as the largest single freshwater spring in the state before flowing into the Suwannee River."

Wetherington said the karst geology in this part of Florida causes many rivers and streams to flow underground through sinkholes.

Edwin McCook, the District's land management specialist, said other interesting features that hikers may encounter on District lands include unique wildlife, whitewater rapids and champion trees - the largest of trees within a species.

In addition, more than 50 miles of the Florida Trail traverses

District land.

The District invites the public to explore nature by hiking on District lands during the month of February to celebrate Florida Hiking Trails Month.

"The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of the 183 miles of trails that provide hiking, biking and equestrian opportunities on District-owned lands," said McCook.

The Florida Trail Association provides ongoing planned hikes and other recreational opportunities, some of which take place on District lands.

"If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a self-guided hike on District property anytime," said McCook.

All District hiking trails are free and open to the public every day of the year. Following is a list of some of the best hiking opportunities:

- Bell Springs, Columbia County
- Big Shoals, Hamilton County
- Holton Creek, Hamilton County
- Falling Creek Falls, Columbia County
- White Springs Tract, Hamilton County
- Little Shoals, Columbia County

· Gar Pond, Columbia County

· Stephen Foster Tract, Hamilton County

· Camp Branch, Hamilton County

· Ellaville Tract, Madison County

· Anderson Springs, Suwannee County

· Black Tract, Madison County

· Mill Creek North, Madison County

· Mill Creek South, Madison County

· Owens Spring, Lafayette County

· Cabbage Grove, Taylor County

· Steinhatchee Falls, Taylor County

Maps to each of the above tracts are available under the Best Recreational Opportunities link on the District's website. It can be accessed at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation. For more information contact Edwin McCook at 386.362.1001 or ejm@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386.362.3256 or visit www.suwannee.floridatrail.org.

The District acquires and manages lands for flood control, water quality protection and natural resource conservation. District lands are open to the public for recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and horseback riding.



SRWD launches e-newsletter

[Feb 17th, 2011](#)

by [Jacob](#).

LIVE OAK, FL, February 17, 2011 – It's out with the old and in with the new for the Suwannee River Water Management District's *RiverFronts* newsletter. The monthly publication is converting from print format to an e-newsletter that will be posted on the District's website beginning this month.

For about 10 years, *RiverFronts* was printed and mailed to subscribers quarterly before production was temporarily suspended last year, due in part to budget constraints. Now, via its website, the District is able to offer timely information in an attractive newsletter format at no cost. The new electronic format is also a plus for readers who are accustomed to being able to enlarge the size of type for easier readability.

The newsletter will present highlights of current District topics and events. Some of the features in the first edition include a list of hiking opportunities available to the public on District lands, answers to questions about current drought conditions and rainfall totals, and a reminder to resume to twice-a-week lawn irrigation with the start of Daylight Saving Time.

Readers can sign up to be notified by email when the newsletter is posted each month through the website's Notify Me feature, located under Quick Links on the homepage at www.mysuwanneeriver.com.



SRWMD E-Newsletter



Ken Allen
Fri, Feb 18, 2011

It's out with the old and in with the new for the Suwannee River Water Management District's RiverFronts newsletter. The monthly publication is converting from print format to an e-newsletter that will be posted on the District's website beginning this month. For about 10 years, RiverFronts was printed and mailed to subscribers quarterly before production was temporarily suspended last year, due in part to budget constraints. The newsletter will present highlights of current District topics and events. Some of the features in the first edition include a list of hiking opportunities available to the public on District lands, answers to questions about current drought conditions and rainfall totals, and a reminder to resume to twice-a-week lawn irrigation with the start of Daylight Saving Time.

Wednesday, February 23, 2011

ANOTHER RIVER RALLY PLANNED

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

Although relatively quiet in recent months in terms of media coverage, the Nestlé Waters/Wacissa River issue came roaring to the forefront again this past weekend with the theft and vandalism of scores of anti-Nestlé signs in the Wacissa area.

According to area resident Roland Brumbley, of the Friends of Wacissa, one of the groups fighting the potential extraction of Wacissa River water by Nestlé Waters for bottling purposes, the thefts and vandalisms occurred late Saturday evening or early Sunday morning, Feb. 19-20.

Brumbley said that with the exception of four small signs in people's backyards and one large roadside sign, all the 'Say No to Nestlé' signs in the area were stolen or vandalized, even though many were deep in private property. He said two large roadside signs were torn down or otherwise damaged.

"Needless to say, this act of violence against the citizens that oppose Nestlé Waters coming to the Wacissa River has this community and all its supporters outraged," Brumbley said on Monday morning, Feb. 21.

He said a count was being conducted to determine the exact number of missing or damaged signs, which number he estimated would be upwards of 200. At an average cost of \$13 per sign for the small ones and \$140 each for the large ones, Brumbley said the monetary loss could well exceed \$2,500.

He added that the Sheriff's Office was investigating the incident, and that a reward was being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the culprit or culprits.

In related news:

* Concerned Citizens of Wakulla, Inc. (CCOW), a Wakulla-based group describing itself as being dedicated to the betterment of community, went on record in opposition to Nestlé Waters' proposed withdrawal of water from the Wacissa River.

"CCOW is strongly opposed to any water withdrawal from the ecological-significant state-designated 'Outstanding Florida Waterway' the Wacissa River," Dr. Howard Kessler, CCOW chairman, wrote Jefferson County Commission Chairman Stephen Fulford on Feb. 14.

Dr. Kessler noted that his group opposed the proposed extraction of Wacissa River water for the same reasons that it had successfully opposed several similar attempts to extract groundwater near Wakulla Springs for commercial purposes.

"Specifically, CCOW supports protection of ecologically important lands and waterways and supports ecotourism and nature-based businesses, particularly those that frequent the Wacissa region," Dr. Kessler wrote.

He argued that water extraction, by its very nature, was an industrial activity, and hence incompatible with surrounding agricultural land uses and "near pristine ecologically important areas" in the Wacissa area.

"The flow of water from the Wacissa River joins the Aucilla River and flows into Apalachee Bay

Please See Signs Page 6A

Signs

Cont. From Page 1

approximately five miles from the Wakulla border and affects fish life along the shoreline of the bay in Wakulla County," Dr. Kessler wrote. "Untold numbers of people ride many miles and spend many hours just to visit the Wacissa River and its springs and Apalachee Bay. We believe that the proposed withdrawal of water out of this region will provide little, if any, economic benefit to this region; in fact, the overall economic impact will be negative."

The group reportedly sent a copy of the letter to the Suwannee River Water Management District, which agency will

determine the issuance of the consumptive water use permit if, or when, Nestlé Waters makes an application. The Switzerland-based company is currently conducting tests on the Wacissa River to determine if the water quality and quantity are suitable for bottling purposes.

* On Feb. 3, Brumbley alerted the Jefferson County Commission to what he described as unusual activity and heavy equipment placement at Nestlé Waters' river testing site. He asked that county officials inspect and determine the nature and legality of the activity.

"There's concern that structures have been built on the Wacissa," Brumbley said.

County officials indicated they would look into the matter. If officials followed up on the complaint, however, they have yet to report their findings.

* Opponents of the water bottling operation are planning a second picnic and rally at the head of the Wacissa River on Saturday, April 9. Brumbley said his and other groups are asking the public to show up and demonstrate their opposition to the water withdrawal project.

Box Copy Advertis

Thursday, February 24, 2011

SRWMD launches e-newsletter

LIVE OAK, FL, February 17, 2011 – It's out with the old and in with the new for the Suwannee River Water Management District's River-Fronts newsletter. The monthly publication is converting from print format to an e-newsletter that will be posted on the District's website beginning this month.

For about 10 years, River-Fronts was printed and mailed to subscribers quarterly before production was temporarily suspended last year, due in part to budget constraints. Now, via its website, the District is able to offer timely information in an attractive newsletter format at no cost. The new electronic format is also a

plus for readers who are accustomed to being able to enlarge the size of type for easier readability.

The newsletter will present highlights of current District topics and events. Some of the features in the first edition include a list of hiking opportunities available to the public on District lands, answers to questions about current drought conditions and rainfall totals, and a reminder to resume to twice-a-week lawn irrigation with the start of Daylight Saving Time.

Readers can sign up to be notified by email when the newsletter is posted each month through the website's Notify Me feature, located under Quick Links on the homepage at www.mysuwanneeriver.com.

SRWMD launches e-newsletter

Submitted

LIVE OAK, FL, February 17, 2011 – It's out with the old and in with the new for the Suwannee River Water Management District's RiverFronts newsletter. The monthly publication is converting from print format to an e-newsletter that will be posted on the District's website beginning this month.

For about 10 years, RiverFronts was printed and mailed to subscribers quarterly before production was temporarily suspended last year, due in part to budget constraints. Now, via its website, the District is able to offer timely information in an attractive newsletter format at no cost. The new electronic format is also a plus for readers who are accustomed to being able to enlarge the size of type for easier readability.

The newsletter will present highlights of current District topics and events. Some of the features in the first edition include a list of hiking opportunities available to the public on District lands, answers to questions about current drought conditions and rainfall totals, and a reminder to resume twice-a-week lawn irrigation with the start of Daylight Saving Time.

Readers can sign up to be notified by email when the newsletter is posted each month through the website's Notify Me feature, located under Quick Links on the homepage at www.mysuwanneeriver.com.



NORTH AMERICA

NESTLÉ RESPONDS TO SIGN THEFTS AND VANDALISM

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

Nestlé Waters North America (Nwana) is taking seriously the theft and vandalism of anti-Nestlé signs in the Wacissa area during the past weekend.

Ryan Duffy, a spokesman for the company, told the *Jefferson Journal* on Wednesday, Feb. 23, that the company wanted the record set straight: it would never engage in illegal activity.

"Nestlé Waters North America respects all citizens' rights to express their own opin-

Please See *Nestlé*
Page 6A

Jefferson County Journal
Friday, February 25, 2011

Nestlé

Cont. From Page 1

ions," Duffy said. "We don't condone stealing signs nor would we condone trespassing on private property."

Duffy went on to say that a company representative had contacted the Sheriff's Office and offered to cooperate fully in the investigation, an offer that Sheriff David Hobbs confirmed.

"Nwana remains fully committed to being a good corporate citizen of the Wacissa River,"

Duffy said.

The theft and vandalism of scores of small and large signs in the Wacissa area occurred sometime late Saturday evening or early Sunday morning, Feb. 19-20.

The incident, which the Sheriff's Office continues investigating, comes amidst the ongoing controversy surrounding Nwana's testing of the waters of the Wacissa River for possible bottling purposes,

and organized opposition to the effort from local and area groups concerned about the operation's potential environmental and ecological impacts.

As of Wednesday, Feb. 23, NNFA had not applied for a consumptive water use permit, according to John Kruse, a water use specialist with the Suwannee River Water Management District.

"We have no application," Kruse said.