

Tallahassee Democrat
Wednesday, August 3, 2011

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Organized opposition also influenced Nestle

Nestle Waters claims "science" alone guided its decision to abandon plans for extracting water from the Wacissa River. No doubt that played a part, but it's far more likely the organized opposition played an equal, and probably greater, role in persuading the company to look elsewhere for its outrageous profits.

In very short order, residents from throughout the Big Bend rallied in defense of the Wacissa. Paddlers, airboat and fishing enthusiasts, elected officials — all understood what was being threatened, and all quickly and publicly declared their opposition.

But this struggle was far more than simply one side reciting a monotonous litany of "no." Hydrology experts volunteered their research on the status of the region's aquifer; a handful of attorneys offered legal assistance; Friends of the Wacissa swiftly organized and learned what could be done to protect this amazing resource. Veterans of other environmental battles came forward.

And once educated, the movement became an irresistible force. Even in the face of vague, unspecified actions by Nestle, the Jefferson County Commission and Suwannee River Water Management District held firm, declaring they wanted protections capable of withstanding any challenge.

Nestle's decision to abandon the Wacissa is good news, and let no one underestimate the power and influence of motivated people working to protect that which they hold most dear.

ART CARLSON
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SRWMD Governing Board meetings

On Tuesday, Aug. 9, the Suwannee River Water Management District's Governing Board will meet at 9 a.m. at the R.O. Ranch Equestrian Park Visitor Center, 10807 S. State Road 51, Mayo, Florida 32066. 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, Aug. 29, at 1 p.m., a tentative intermediate Governing Board meeting will be held at District headquarters in Live Oak, Florida. Public should check the District website at <http://www.srwmd.state.fl.us/> or contact the District at 386-362-1001 to confirm that the meeting has not been canceled or rescheduled.

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

\$38K from SRWMD



Alphonas Alexander, right front, from Suwannee River Water Management District presents the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners with a check in the amount of \$37,943.47 in PILT funds. - Photo: Joyce Marie Taylor

Story / Below

County coffers get \$38K from SRWMD

Joyce Marie Taylor

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At Tuesday's Hamilton County Commission meeting the Board received a check in the amount of \$37,943.47 from Suwannee River Water Management (SRWMD).

Steve Minnis, governmental affairs director and Alphonas Alexander, vice chairman of the Governing Board, presented the commissioners with the lump sum check, which is for payment in lieu of taxes, or PILT funds, as they are called.

"It's an honor for me to do this," Alexander said. "In these economic times I know everybody is stretched for funds."

According to a press release from the SRWMD,

SEE COUNTY, PAGE 2A

County coffers get \$38K from SRWMD

Continued From Page 1A

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.

In plain English, this payment to Hamilton County is for land that SRWMD has purchased from individuals in Hamil-

ton County. The assessment value at the time of purchase is paid to the board for the value of the taxes. They 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 Legislature 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.

Lake City Reporter

Tuesday, August 9, 2011

www.lakecityreporter.com

Vol. 137, No. 166 ■ 75 cents

Will county go to court over area water rights?

Could join forces with Hamilton in fight against St. Johns Mgmt. District.

By ANTONIA ROBINSON
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Protecting the waters of Columbia County is a major concern for the Board of Commissioners.

"At the end of the day, our waters are the lifeblood of the community," said Commissioner Chairman Jody DuPree. "People come to the county to go to the springs. If we lose that we lost the very core of the community. We have to do everything in our power to protect it."

Commissioners passed a resolution Aug. 4 to examine their options - including possible participation in a lawsuit - concerning recent action by the St.

Johns River Water Management District.

The SJRWMD Governing Board approved a 20-year consumptive use permit for JEA, an electric, water and wastewater utility company in Jacksonville, on May 10. The permit consolidates 27 JEA water-use permits, which have a combined allocation of 155 million gallons of water per day, into one permit.

WATER continued on 3A

WATER: County may join lawsuit

Continued From Page 1A

County Attorney Marlin Feagle will research a lawsuit brought against the district by Hamilton County, DuPree said.

The permit will allow JEA to use 173 million gallons of water per day to cool its towers to generate electricity.

The flow of the average spring in the Columbia County is 68 million gallons per day, Dupree said.

Farmers have a hard time getting a permit from water management districts, yet JEA is allowed to have one that spans 20 years, he said. Most permits are three to five years in length.

"That's just absolutely devastating," DuPree said.

Columbia County is steadily losing water, he said. White Springs is gone.

Some experts claim excessive water consumption in northeastern Florida is draining the Floridan Aquifer, which underlies area counties.

Allowing such a permit for JEA could have a disastrous affect on the area, DuPree said.

"In less than 10 years, we will not have water in the river," he said.

The commissioners want to send a message to the water management district

by taking legal action.

"They can't abuse and take our water," DuPree said.

The district also has a responsibility to notify all interested people that could be affected by such a decision, he said.

"They do this on their own accord and we're out of the loop on that kind of stuff," DuPree said.

Feagle will then bring

back a report to the board for it to determine what legal action it can take and how to proceed forward.

"We can't just sit back and allow them to do this," he said. "I'm certainly going to do everything in my power to protect Columbia County's interest."

Movement afoot to restore spring

By Jeffrey Boatright
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A recent movement that has been initiated for the purpose of restoring one of North Florida's most beloved landmarks and natural springs seems to be gaining support. Friends of Suwannee Springs (FOSS) thus far has been an Internet Facebook community. According to group organizers Janet Politano Nix of Jacksonville and Bobbie Tomlinson of Jennings, their first meeting was held July 31, allowing dozens of interested supporters to learn more about the history of the location.

Both ladies recall growing up in Suwannee and Hamilton counties and now enjoy

the pleasant memories derived from the quenching waters Suwannee Springs offered swimmers of all ages, during the sultry summers of North Florida.

However, Nix and Tomlinson both have become saddened by the current condition of the wall that has for so long been synonymous with the spring.

The FOSS group argues there are too many memories and the history is too rich to allow the historic place to further deteriorate.

Finding a solution to such a problem, however, is a great challenge, according to Nix.

"There is no money to fix it with," she readily admits. "That is why we are thinking outside of the box. Private funding might be an option."

The Suwannee River Water Management District currently owns the spring and 125 acres of adjoining land. Two

wood structured cabins that are in excess of 100 years old remain on the property near the spring. While Nix and Tomlinson believe the cabins are salvageable, Charlie Hauder, assistant executive director for the SRWMD noted that a University of Florida survey has documented that while the cabins are interesting, the ability to restore them is doubtful.

Local resident Quinn Leibfried recounts memories of staying in the cabins at Suwannee Springs during her childhood. She can also

SEE OUR, PAGE 2A

Our vanishing history

Continued From Page 1A

remember the bathhouse that was once a fixture at the spring, but is long gone.

"We have a simple passion not to lose what we have there," Leibfried said.

Ultimately, FOSS would like to see Suwannee Springs and the historic wall that partially surrounds it placed on the National Historic Registry. That within itself is quite an undertaking, according to organizers of FOSS.

The group's primary interest is raising an awareness of the historical spring. Ultimately,

they would like to see the wall preserved but according to Hauder, even with adequate funding, research would have to be conducted to ensure the wall's base and structure are sound. Hauder added that while the state owns the spring, it is technically a sovereign land, belonging to the state and not specifically to SRWMD.

"With the right group of partners it could be a great asset for Suwannee County," Hauder said. "We would love it if a local group could adopt the property and help us out."

The Friends of Suwannee Springs have collect-

ed an immense amount of history relating to Suwannee Springs. Nix notes that in 1883, one of the largest hotels in the southern states at the time was erected at Suwannee Springs. It was sprawled out on over an acre of land and had 125 rooms. There was a central courtyard, fountains, and sub-tropical plants for vacationers to adore. Unfortunately, the structure burned after just one year, leaving many to reflect what might have been, had it remained.

Visit the Friends of Suwannee Springs on Facebook.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 2011

Saving history

Movement to save spring gaining momentum

By Jeffrey Boatright

jeffrey.boatright@gafnews.com

A concerned group of friends on Facebook has made it their mission to see that one of North Florida's most beloved landmarks and natural springs is preserved. Friends of Suwannee Springs (FOSS) has, so far, been an Internet Facebook community with 189 members as of Thursday morning. According to group organizers Janet Politano Nix of Jacksonville and Bobbie Tomlinson of Jennings, their first meeting was held July 31 at Suwannee Springs off US 129 North in Suwannee County, allowing dozens of interested supporters to learn more about the history of the location.

Both ladies recall growing up in Suwannee and Hamilton counties and now enjoy the pleasant memories derived from the quenching waters Suwannee Springs offered swimmers of all ages, during the sultry summers of North Florida.

However, Nix and Tomlinson both have become saddened by the current condition of the wall that has for so long been synonymous with the spring.

The FOSS group argues there are too many memories and the history is too rich to allow the historic place to further deteriorate.

Finding a solution to such a problem, however, is a great challenge, according to Nix.

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property near the spring. While Nix and Tomlinson believe the cabins are salvageable, Charlie Hauder, assistant executive director for the SRWMD noted that a University of Florida survey has documented that while the cabins are interesting, the ability to restore them is doubtful.

Local resident Quinn Leibfried recounts memories of staying in the cabins at Suwannee Springs during her childhood. She can also remember the bathhouse that was once a fixture at the spring, but is now gone.

"We have a simple passion not to lose what we have there," Leibfried said.

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Visit the Friends of Suwannee Springs by finding them on Facebook.

HEARINGS ON AQUIFER PROTECTION, CODE ENFORCEMENT RESET AGAIN

**SNAFU ACCOUNTS
FOR LATEST
POSTPONEMENTS**

LAZARO ALEMAN
*ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer*

Citizens expecting to attend public hearings on the code enforcement and aquifer protection ordinances on Thursday evening, Aug. 18, will be disappointed. The hearings on the two ordinances have been rescheduled for Sept. 1 and 15 respectively.

Blame the rescheduling on a snafu, itself the result of miscommunications and misunderstanding. The bottom line is

that county staff failed to advertise the hearings in the newspaper as required. The staff offers assurance that procedures are being instituted to ensure the problem doesn't occur again.

The code enforcement ordinance was supposed to undergo its final hearing before adoption on Thursday evening. The ordinance has been more than a year in the drafting, and more than three years in discussion.

The measure, which had the first of two required hearing on July 21, most significantly creates the position of a code enforcement officer and a seven-member code enforcement board. It also establishes procedures for the enforcement of regulations that are found in some 16 state and local codes, including the Florida Building Code, the Florida Accessibility Code, and Florida Fire Prevention Code; and it establishes notification and hearing procedures for due process,

Please See *Aquifer PROTECTION* Page 3A

Aquifer Protection

and sets fines and penalties for violations.

Proponents say the ordinance is needed and that it will do little to change what is being done presently; they say it will merely fine-tune the process and put some teeth into enforcement for those instances when good will alone won't get the job done. Critics say the ordinance will lead to people being put out of their houses and that it will change the county's amiable and easygoing culture.

The aquifer protection ordinance largely stems from the efforts of Nestlé Water North America (NWN) to establish here a possible resource site for its water bottling operation.

Notwithstanding the company's recent decision to abandon its testing of the water at the head of the Wacissa River for possible bottling pur-

poses, county officials indicated on Aug. 4 that they planned to proceed with adoption of the aquifer protection ordinance.

At the same time, Planning Attorney Scott Shirley, who drafted the measure, said he was continuing to work with the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) to address those aspects of the ordinance that had caused the district renewed concern.

But Shirley said the document would definitely be ready for the Aug. 18 hearing. He added that just to be on the safe side, he planned also to run the ordinance past the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NWFWMND), to make sure that the latter didn't have a problem with the measure.

NWN officially announced the abandonment of its controversial

water-monitoring project at the head of the Wacissa River on July 27. The testing was to determine the quality of the water for possible use in its Madison County bottling operation.

In its press statement and subsequent statements to the media, Nestlé emphasized that its decision was data driven, based on the scientific findings that Allen Spring was naturally subject to seasonal low flows that did not meet the company's strict selection criteria for a stable, sustainable water supply.

The company, however, did not absolutely rule out Jefferson County as a potential future source of bottling water.

"I can't definitely say we'll never come back to Jefferson County," Nestlé Florida Natural Resource Manager Kent Koptiuch told the *News*.

Although the pro-

Continued from Page 1

posed ordinance is ostensibly aimed at aquifer protection, Nestlé views the measure as specifically targeting the water bottling industry. In a memo to the commission prior to a second planned hearing on the ordinance (which hearing was cancelled at the last moment because of concerns raised by the SRWMD), Koptiuch charged that the ordinance singled out the bottled water industry and golf courses for new, arbitrary regulations and 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," Koptiuch said at the time.

It is such statements that caused the SRWMD pause and that led to the district's expressed con-

cerns that, as originally proposed, the ordinance might not withstand a legal challenge.

Specifically, the original version sought to regulate the consumptive use and transportation of water, powers granted exclusively to water management districts by state law. Working with the SRWMD, Shirley amended the language to put the focus of the ordinance's enforcement on the county well-established rights to regulate land-use activities under its Land Development Code.

Still, the SRWMD expressed concerns as recent as last month, which led to the withdrawal of the ordinance from the agenda at the last minute on the scheduled hearing on July 21. This latest rescheduling makes the third time that a scheduled hearing of the ordinance is cancelled for one reason or another.

Kicking Off The Great Suwannee River Cleanup 2011



A Kickoff celebration for the 2nd Great Suwannee River Cleanup will be held at Ivey Memorial Park in Branford, Florida, on September 10th from 10 am until 2 pm. There will be down-home BBQ and great music provided by the Celebration Band to kick off this year's event.

The 2011 cleanup will occur during a three-month window from September through

November. There are 5 cleanups scheduled in September to be conducted by Amigos Dive Center and the Ax Men, the National Association for Cave Divers, Nestle Waters, Houston's Crew, and the Missed Dinner Bell gang. If you're interested in joining a cleanup in September, go to the URL listed below to find contact information for the group leaders.

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/3wqdbd4> 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 Fritz Olson at 352-264-6827 or e-mail her at aar@currentproblems.org. Pete Butt is coordinating dive cleanups and can be reached through Fritz 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 also gladly accept in-kind donations. Call or e-mail Fritz to learn more about sponsorship opportunities.

This year's sponsors include American Rivers, Amigos Dive Center, Bronson Hardware, Coin & Jewelry Gallery, Columbia County, Karst Environmental Services, Karst Productions, Normandeu Associates, Inc., The Ocean Conservancy, Plum Creek Foundation, and Suwannee County.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2011

SUWANNEE DEMOCRAT/LIVE OAK

The SRWMD reopens its Santa Fe Swamp tract following wildfire

Though charred trees and open space are a reminder of the wildfire that swept through the Santa Fe Swamp, new plant growth indicates the area is in recovery.

Over the last few weeks, District land managers and workers with Florida Forest Service (FFS) have worked to rehabilitate fire lines and make other repairs to prepare for the District's property within the swamp to reopen. The tract, located in Alachua and Bradford counties, officially reopened to

the public August 11.

The District, which owns 5,708 acres within the swamp, closed its portion of the property after lightning sparked a wildfire in early June. The fire was declared out by FFS on July 19.

"Before reopening the tract, we wanted to ensure that the hydrology and public access in recreational areas were restored back to conditions prior to the fire," said Edwin McCook, District land management specialist.

The FFS, formerly the

Florida Division of Forestry, worked around the clock to extinguish the fire. Firefighters used aircraft to drop fire retardant and water from the sky and used various equipment to maintain burn lines to contain the fire on the ground.

"The best we can do against a swamp fire is keep it within the perimeter of the swamp and let it burn out," said Kurt Wisner, a spokesperson for FFS.

With the exception of only a few small escapes which were extinguished

fairly quickly, fire crews were successful in containing the blaze within the swamp. No personnel were injured and no structures were damaged, said Wisner.

According to GPS measurement of fire lines, 5,679 acres within the swamp were burned. This number is lower than earlier reports because GPS measurement is more accurate than estimates reported during an incident, said Wisner.

In addition to reopening the swamp, the District has also lifted its ban on camp

fires on all District property.

Though the District continues to experience drought conditions, the ban was lifted based on the Keetch-Byram drought index (KBDI), which tracks soil moisture content to evaluate the risk of wildfires. As of mid July those levels on District lands fell within a normal range.

SRWMD reopens Santa Fe Swamp

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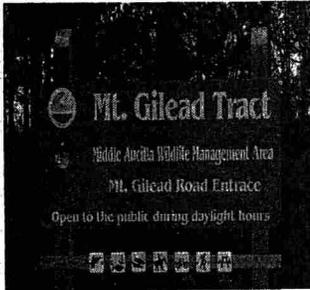
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DIXIE COUNTY TIMES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18, 2011

Hunting Season To Begin Soon On SRWMD Lands



Mt. Gilead, part of the Middle Aucilla WMA, provides hunting opportunities in Jefferson, Madison and Taylor counties.

Hunting will soon begin on nearly 100,000 acres of Suwannee River Water Management District-owned lands. Deer, hog, turkey and small game hunting is available on limited days from September-March.

Hunting on these lands is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

The following is a list of areas available for hunting:

- Big Shoals: Hamilton County
- Cypress Creek: Hamilton County
- Holton Creek: Hamilton County
- Little River: Suwannee County
- Troy Springs: Lafayette County
- Twin Rivers: Madison County
- Mallory Swamp: Lafayette County
- Steinhatchee Springs: Lafayette, Dixie and Taylor counties
- Lower Econfina: Taylor County
- Middle Aucilla: Jefferson, Madison and Taylor counties
- Aucilla: Jefferson and Taylor counties
- Log Landing: Dixie County
- Devil's Hammock: Levy County
- Santa Fe Swamp: Bradford County

Holton Creek is a mobility impaired hunting area. It is closed to the public during hunt dates, except to persons hiking the Florida Trail.

Persons using WMAs are required to have appropriate licenses, permits and stamps.

For more information, contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 386.758.0525 or visit the website at www.myfwc.com.

The SRWMD Reopens Santa Fe Swamp Tract Following Wildfire

The Santa Fe Swamp in August 2011 after a wildfire swept through most of the area.

Though charred trees and open space are a reminder of the wildfire that swept through the Santa Fe Swamp, new plant growth indicates the area is in recovery.

Over the last few weeks, District land managers and workers with Florida Forest Service (FFS) have worked to rehabilitate fire lines and make other repairs to prepare for the District's property within the swamp to reopen. The tract, located in Alachua and Bradford counties, officially reopened to the public August 11.

The District, which owns 5,708 acres within the swamp, closed its portion of the property after lightning sparked a wildfire in early June. The fire was declared out by FFS on July 19.

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Santa Fe Swamp continued from page 14

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Friday, August 19, 2011

COUNTY REAPS \$9,000 PLUS IN LIEU OF TAXES PAYMENTS

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

A representative of the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) recently presented the Jefferson

County Commission with a check for \$9,223.41, the same amount as last year.

George Cole, newly installed on the SRWMD Board of Directors, presented the check to Clerk of Court Kirk Reams on

Thursday, Aug. 4, on behalf of the district.

Steve Minnis, SRWMD director of governmental affairs, explained that the check came compliments of the payment in
Please See TAXES Page 3A

Taxes Continued from page 1

lieu of taxes (PILT) program.

Created by the Florida Legislature in 1999, the aim of the PILT program is to lessen the impact of revenue losses to rural counties when state-owned lands are removed from the ad-valorem tax rolls.

"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," Minnis explained.

The legislation initially required that the districts make the PILT payments for a 10-year period that was slated to end in 2009. Three or so years ago, however, the Legislature amended the law so that counties would continue to receive the funds until their populations reached 150,000.

The change meant that the majority of counties in the SRWMD saw increases in their PILT revenues in 2010, given that the taxes were reinstated for properties that had earlier fallen off the program because of the original 10-year cap.

Collectively, in fact, the 11 counties within the SRWMD received combined PILT revenues of \$326,314 last year, compared with \$177,012 the previous year. For Jefferson County, the increase was \$9,192.52, from the \$30.89 received in 2009 to the \$9,223.41 received last year and again this year.

The records show that the SRWMD owns a combined 5,762 acres in Jefferson County, which acreage has a taxable value of \$5,609,790 and would pay about \$90,675 in property taxes under the agricultural classification, or about 10 times more than the PILT check.

The district uses the land for flood control, water quality, water supply and natural resources protection.

RAINFALL REMAINS BELOW AVERAGE DURING JULY

LAZARO ALEMAN
*ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer*

The average rainfall in the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) during July was 5.90 inches, representing 76 percent of the historical average of 7.74 inches for the month. Meanwhile, the average 12-

month deficit increased to 7.8 inches, with deficits of nearly 25 inches persisting in the Suwannee and Santa Fe basins.

The report shows Jefferson County received 5.77 inches of rainfall in July, compared with the July average of 6.50 inches. The county received 10.59 inches of rainfall during the last three

months and 43.52 inches during the last 12 months.

Madison County, meanwhile, received 6.48 inches in July, compared with the July average of 6.18 inches. The county received 12.27 inches during the last three months and 47.17 inches during

Please See **RAINFALL** Page

2A

Rainfall Continued from Page 1

the last 12 months.

River flows along the Suwannee River improved modestly in July, following the record-breaking low flows in June, but the Aucilla, Econfina, Fenholloway and Steinhatchee rivers remained below normal or extremely low. Lake levels, meanwhile, remained generally stable, if below their long-term historic averages.

The report indicates that, on average, groundwater levels dropped 3.5 inches.

"Average conditions across the district, compared to the historic July data, fell to the 15th percentile, making July the fifth consecutive month with conditions below the 25th percentile (based on records beginning no earlier than 1978)," the report states.

The U.S. Geological Survey categorizes the Suwannee River and its tributaries as being in moderate

severe hydrologic drought, and other basins in the district as being below normal.

The SRWMD continues its phase-one water shortage advisory, urging voluntary reduction of water consumption. It reminds homeowners and others whose water use the district doesn't regulate via a permit that they are required to limit landscape irrigation to two days per week between March and October.

The district compiles the hydrologic conditions report using water resource data collected from radar-derived rainfall estimates, groundwater and surface water levels, and river flows, among other variables.

The district encompasses all or parts of 15 counties in north-central Florida, including Madison County and the eastern half of Jefferson County.

Farm could help offset untreated pollutants

By MARK SCOHIER

news2@chieflandcitizen.com

A Trenton farm could help alleviate pollution that could potentially make its way into Fanning Springs due to a new wastewater treatment plant proposed for the Town of Fanning Springs, area officials and representatives said at a meeting last week.

Hugh Thomas, a spokesperson for the Suwannee River Partnership, told a group of about 40 concerned citizens and representatives from various agencies at a Fanning and Manatee Springs Working Group meeting that the owner of Simpson Farm, Douglas E. Simpson, was considering taking re-use water as an added measure to reduce nitrates not eliminated by the Town of Fanning Springs' proposed wastewater treatment plant.

Thomas said Simpson wasn't fully committed to the idea yet. "It's kind of in a holding pattern right now."

But if the deal goes through, Simpson would use the water to irrigate and fertilize some of the crops grown on his 400-acre operation near Trenton. Thomas said Simpson's farm was chosen because of the amount of crops he grows, the farm's irrigation capabilities and, most importantly, because it is only about a mile away from the proposed site of the wastewater facility. Thomas said the Suwannee River Water Management District has already signed on to

cover the \$400,000 cost to pipe the water to the farm.

A sprayfield is our only alternative at this point," Thomas said.

See **SPRINGS 15A**

SPRINGS

Continued from 1A

The wastewater treatment plant, to be built next year, is about two miles from the spring and proposes using a 13-acre sprayfield to help neutralize some of the nitrates coming out of the system, according to the working group's coordinator Carol Lippincott. Lippincott, though stating the proposed wastewater treatment plant would get a lot of city residents off of ground-leaching septic tanks, said there is concern that the facility's technology is outdated and will not do enough to curb the already-high levels of nitrates in Fanning Springs, especially given the sensitive nature of the areas topography.

"This was state-of-the-art in the 1970s," she said. The average nitrate effluent in water treated at

a secondary wastewater facility, such as the one proposed for Fanning, is at 10 milligrams per liter, according to Lippincott. Advanced wastewater facilities show levels at about 3 milligrams per liter. The town was given the option by SRWMD to construct an advanced system, she said. But it chose the secondary system because state standards only require that groundwater have no more than 10 milligrams per liter, which is strange, she said, because the state also has a target level of .35 milligrams per liter for surface water, such as what's in area springs and rivers.

Fanning Springs, at 5 milligrams per liter, has the highest levels of nitrates of the 58 springs the Florida Department of Environmental Protection monitors. Lippincott said elevated nitrates have been shown to be responsible for Blue Baby

Syndrome. The pollutants also encourage plant smothering algae growth and are toxic to certain species of fish, frogs and insects. She said scientists are even doing studies because of a concern that elevated nitrate levels could be linked to cancer.

All the more reason to pump some of the nitrate-laden water to a farm, according to Thomas. It will help reduce nitrates, he said, by allowing the roots of crops to use it as sustenance. Although, he added, it can only be used on crops that will be processed at some point or are contained in a shell, such as peanuts.

The plan will also decrease the amount of water Simpson draws from the water table, another issue affecting the health of the springs. Problems stemming from nitrates are amplified when water flow is reduced.

Scott Knight, an environmen-

tal scientist with Wetland Solutions Inc., said systems using sprayfields definitely have an impact on water quality.

"The wastewater treatment plant, most likely, will be a big improvement. But will it be enough?" he said.

Knight, after presenting data on sprayfields from wells in the Santa Fe River basin, said, "Advanced wastewater treatment is definitely preferable."

And though many stated the proposed wastewater facility would be a positive thing for Fanning Springs because of its elimination of septic tanks, FDEP Florida Geological Survey scientist Tom Greenhalgh said it's not certain how much septic tanks in the town contribute to nitrates in the springs. Greenhalgh, giving a presentation on the source of nitrates, said chemical analysis shows that

nitrates in Fanning are both organic and inorganic, meaning that they come from manmade fertilizers and waste.

The biggest contributor of nitrates in the Suwannee Basin's groundwater, at 44 percent, is row crops, he said. Improved crops account for about 28 percent. There's also an estimated 5,400 dairy cows in the basin, which dump about 621 tons of nitrogen into the springshed each year.

And then there's the sprayfield for Lancaster Correctional Facility, which, though untested, may also be affecting nitrate levels at Fanning. Last year, Greenhalgh led a field trip to the area that highlighted the sprayfield's proximity to several geological features that lead directly into groundwater. A dye trace for the area was proposed, but funding ran out.

Outdoors & aw

Hunting season to begin soon on SRWMD lands

Hunting will soon begin on nearly 100,000 acres of Suwannee River Water Management District-owned lands. Deer, hog, turkey and small game hunting is available on limited days from September-March.

Hunting on these lands is managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

The following is a list of areas available for hunting:

- Big Shoals: Hamilton County
- Cypress Creek: Hamilton County
- Holton Creek: Hamilton County
- Little River: Suwannee County
- Troy Springs: Lafayette County

- Twin Rivers: Madison County
- Mallory Swamp: Lafayette County
- Steinhatchee Springs: Lafayette, Dixie and Taylor counties
- Lower Econfina: Taylor County
- Middle Aucilla: Jefferson, Madison and Taylor counties
- Aucilla: Jefferson and Taylor counties
- Log Landing: Dixie County
- Devil's Hammock: Levy County
- Santa Fe Swamp: Bradford County

Holton Creek is a mobility impaired hunting area. It is closed to the public during hunt dates, except to persons hiking the Florida Trail. Persons using WMAs are required to have appropriate licenses, permits and stamps. For more information contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 386.758.0525 or visit the website at www.myfwc.com.

Florida will slash \$700M from budget

Alachua County is part of two districts that will lose a combined \$44.9 million

By Lloyd Dunkelberger
Tallahassee bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Signaling a fundamental shift in the role of the state's water management districts, Gov. Rick Scott's administration on Wednesday announced its approval of more than \$700 million in spending cuts for the five districts tasked with protecting and controlling Florida's water resources.

Scott said the new budgets, which will be formally adopted by the districts next month, reflect his overall goal to refocus government agencies on their core missions.

For the water management districts, Scott said that means an emphasis on protecting water supplies, water quality and Floridians from floodwaters.

In a statement, Scott said the more austere district budgets "are just the first steps in ensuring that Florida's precious water resources are protected and managed in the most fiscally responsible way possible."

The Suwannee River and the St. Johns River water management districts both include parts of Alachua County. Northern and western Alachua County is in the Suwannee district. Eastern and most of southern Alachua County is in the St. Johns district.

The St. Johns River district plans cuts of \$35.5 million that would leave its budget at \$209.3 million. It plans to lay off 130 employees and 56 contract workers.

The Suwannee River district would be left with a \$56.5 million budget after 9.4 million in cuts, including elimination of five positions that would

THE GAINESVILLE SUN | THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 2011

WATER DISTRICTS: Will hold budget hearings

Continued from 1A

reduce its staffing to 63.

Some environmental groups decried the cuts — which include a \$210 million cut in local property taxes — as a major step in diminishing the role of the five water management districts.

"This effort to put lipstick on a pig is grotesque," said Charles Lee, a longtime lobbyist for Florida Audubon. "These districts are now burning through available reserves and will survive only about two years before a much more massive series of cuts — tantamount to extinguishing most agency functions — will occur."

Lee said the "core mission" being pushed by Scott amounted to "essentially 'do little, if

anything.'"

Herschel Vinyard, secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, which worked with the districts in developing the new 2011-12 budgets, defended the spending reductions as a way to bring more efficiency to the districts while at the same time continuing to develop and protect water supplies.

Vinyard noted the districts are still spending more than \$1 billion on their programs, which range from projects related to protecting the springs and rivers of North Central Florida and the restoration of the Everglades in South Florida to creating more water supplies in the Tampa Bay region.

"We're looking for projects that give the environment the

most bang for the buck," Vinyard said.

To achieve the savings, the districts — under the direction of the DEP — have made a number of significant policy changes, including a decision not to borrow any money for water-related projects. "Now is not the time to take on any new debt," Vinyard said.

The districts have also halted new land-buying projects, although they will be allowed to continue ongoing projects. Vinyard said the land purchases may be renewed after the state develops new standards "on why and when we buy land."

The water districts will hold hearings before submitting final budgets to Scott and the Legislative Budget Commission for approval.

SRWMD reopens Owens Spring Tract following timber harvesting

LIVE OAK, FL, August 18, 2011 - The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) on August 12 reopened its Owens Spring Tract after the completion of timber

harvesting operations. The property had been closed to public access since January.

Workers harvested 163 acres of timber in two operations - a pine timber harvest operation

and a hardwood removal. The goal was to thin the pines to encourage the growth of native groundcover. Long term goals for the area are to restore the forest back to its natural state and condition.

The District conducts various land management activities on its conservation lands such as timber harvesting, prescribed burning and tree planting for the purpose of meeting maintenance or restoration goals as directed by Florida statutes. During such activities, public access to District lands may be limited.

The Owens Spring Tract is a 474-acre property in eastern Lafayette County. It is open to the public for wildlife viewing, fishing, hiking, bicycling and horseback riding.

For more information about recreational opportunities on District lands visit www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation.

Cuts would mean loss of 5 positions at SRWMD

By **BILL KACZOR**
Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Rick Scott praised Florida's five water management districts on Wednesday for submitting tentative budgets that would slash their spending by more than \$700 million, or 40 percent, in response to his prodding.

The Republican governor made cutting water management spending a top priority upon taking office in January. He said the pending reductions "are just the first steps in ensuring that Florida's precious water resources are protected and managed in the most fiscally responsible way possible."

Scott requested, and the GOP-controlled Legislature approved, a \$210 million annual reduction in property taxes levied by four of the five districts. The Northwest Florida district's taxes are already capped at a rate much lower than the others and were not reduced.

The budget proposals, though, won praise from Florida Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham, a frequent critic of environmental spending cuts. Fordham said he was pleasantly surprised because he doesn't believe the reductions will jeopardize Everglades restoration.

The cuts would, though, result in hundreds of

employees being laid off, reduce salaries and benefits for those who remain and cancel plans for land purchases and borrowing.

The districts will hold hearings before submitting final budgets to Scott and the Legislative Budget Commission for approval.

The Suwannee River district would be left with a \$56.5 million budget after \$9.4 million in cuts including elimination of five positions that would reduce its staffing to 63.

In letters to the districts, Scott called for additional cuts of only \$2.4 million including deferred compensation payments. Scott also asked for more reductions in salaries and benefits.

Lake City Reporter

Thursday, August 25, 2011

www.lakecityreporter.com

Vol. 137, No.



ANTONIA ROBINSON/Lake City Reporter

Representatives of Columbia County, The Ichetucknee Partnership, Rotary Club of Lake City and the Wildlife Foundation of Florida unveiled a new information kiosk at Alligator Lake Park about the Ichetucknee springshed Tuesday.

Kiosk will help educate public on importance of fresh water supply

By **ANTONIA ROBINSON**
arobinson@lakecityreporter.com

Columbia County residents won't have to go far to learn about the connection between Alligator Lake and Ichetucknee Springs.

A new information kiosk demonstrating that link was unveiled at Alligator Lake Park Tuesday morning.

The project cost about \$2,300 and was partially funded by a grant from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, said Cindy Johnson, The Ichetucknee Partnership coordinator. Funding was also provided

by the Rotary Club of Lake City and the Suwannee River Water Management District.

"We thank all that contributed to make this hard work a success," Johnson said.

Graphics on the kiosk were designed by Deborah Parker.

Alligator Lake Park is a perfect location for the kiosk, said John Wheeler, TIP board member and Rotary member. The lake is the headwaters of Ichetucknee Springs.

The kiosk will help people understand what is a spring and what is a springshed and know what they have to protect the waters, he said. Visitors

to the park will see the information "and start connecting the dots."

The whole park is a means of education, said Clint Pittman, Columbia County parks and landscapes director. As the park has grown it has been upgraded to include educational elements, and the kiosk will tie in with those.

There are a lot of challenges today about clean water, said Tim O'Neil, Wildlife Foundation of Florida marketing director. The goal of the foundation is to educate the next generation.

"This is a perfect example of a great project," he said.

The Levy County Journal

August 25, 2011

BIDS

**INVITATION TO BID
SRWMD TEST WELL
TOWN OF OTTER CREEK,
FLORIDA**

Sealed BIDS will be received by the Town of Otter Creek, Florida at the office of the Town Clerk until 2:00 p.m. local time on September 14, 2011, at which time and place they will be publicly opened and read aloud.

The work consists of furnishing all labor, materials, equipment, incidentals and taxes to furnish and install a 6" diameter raw water test well including water quality testing and all associated work.

The CONTRACT DOCUMENTS may be examined at the following locations: Otter Creek Town Hall, 555 SW 2nd Avenue, Otter Creek, Florida 32683, (352) 486-4766, and Mittauer & Associates, Inc., Consulting Engineers, 580-1 Wells Road, Orange Park, Florida 32073, (904) 278-0030.

Copies of the CONTRACT DOCUMENTS may be obtained at the offices of Mittauer & Associates, Inc., (904) 278-0030 upon payment of a non-refundable charge of \$50.00 for each set. Only complete sets of plans and specifications will be distributed.

The Owner reserves the right to waive technical errors and informalities and to reject any or all bids.

Pub.: August 25, 2011.

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cycling and horseback riding.

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Owens Spring Tract

Fla. water districts cut proposed budgets \$700M

By Bill Kaczor

The Associated Press

Gov. Rick Scott praised Florida's five water management districts on Wednesday for submitting tentative budgets that would slash their spending by more than \$700 million, or 40 percent, in response to his prodding.

The Republican governor made cutting water management spending a top priority upon taking office in January.

He said the pending reductions "are just the first steps in ensuring that Florida's precious water resources are protected and managed in the most fiscally responsible way possible."

Reaction from environmentalists was split.

Audubon of Florida executive director Eric Draper said the cuts will reduce vital protection for wetlands, springs, rivers and other

water resources threatened by pollution, drought and overuse.

"How can you solve those problems without money?" Draper asked. "We need agencies focused on how to keep those healthy or else we are going to lose them."

Draper said this is designed mainly to let politicians boast that they've cut taxes.

Scott requested, and the GOP-controlled Legislature

approved, a \$210 million annual reduction in property taxes levied by four of the five districts. The Northwest Florida district's taxes are already capped at a rate much lower than the others and were not reduced.

The budget proposals, though, won praise from Florida Everglades Foundation CEO Kirk Fordham, a frequent critic of environmental spending cuts. Fordham said

he was pleasantly surprised because he doesn't believe the reductions will jeopardize Everglades restoration.

The cuts would, though, result in hundreds of employees being laid off, reduce salaries and benefits for those who remain and cancel plans for land purchases and borrowing.

The districts will hold hearings before submitting final budgets to Scott and the Leg-

islative Budget Commission for approval.

In letters to the districts, Scott called for additional cuts of only \$2.4 million including deferred compensation payments. Scott also asked for more reductions in salaries and benefits.

The combined water management budgets would still spend more than \$1 billion in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 even after the cuts.

Water management cuts would save \$700 million

Scott sought cuts for property tax reductions; hundreds of layoffs loom

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE | Florida's five water management districts have submitted tentative budgets that would slash their spending by more than \$700 million, or 40 percent.

Gov. Rick Scott had made cutting water management spending a top priority upon taking office in January. He said Wednesday the pending reductions "are just the first steps in ensuring that Florida's precious water resources are protected and managed in the most fiscally responsible way possible."

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CUTS continues on B-8

CUTS

Continued from B-1

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The St. Johns River district plans cuts of \$35.5 million that would leave its budget at \$209.3 million. It

plans to lay off 130 employees and 56 contract workers. Scott told St. Johns district officials Wednesday to cut payrolls and other benefits by \$576,000.

The combined water management budgets would still spend more than \$1 billion in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 even after the cuts.

"We're looking for projects to give the environment the most bang for the buck," said Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel Vinyard.

Vinyard said the districts are abiding by Scott's directive to focus on their core missions of water supply, flood protection, water

quality and natural system protection.

The South Florida district still has the largest proposed budget of \$557.1 million after cutting \$519 million. That includes a \$128 million, or 32.2 percent, reduction in property tax revenues. The district proposes savings that include shedding 270 jobs, reducing benefits to match those of other state agencies and eliminating contracts, flight operations and other expenses considered non-critical. It plans to save \$194.2 million by cutting land acquisition.

Times-Union writer Steve Patterson contributed to this report.

SRWMD faces standardized reserve ruling from Gov. Scott

Florida Gov. Rick Scott announced Wednesday his changes to the Suwannee River Water Management District's (SRWMD) tentative budget, affecting its operating reserve in an effort to standardize reserves between the state's five water management districts.

The SRWMD governing board approved a \$47.1 million tentative budget in July, but new legislation passed this year gives the governor the authority to disapprove, in whole or in part, the budget of each water management district.

Scott and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Herschel Vinyard announced Wednesday that following work between the districts and DEP, the districts' tentative budgets reflected a year-over-year reduction of

more than \$700 million.

The remaining combined budgets total approximately \$1 billion.

"The core mission of Florida's water management districts is: water supply, flood protection, water quality and natural systems protection," Vinyard said Wednesday. "Today I'm pleased to announce that the districts have done a great job of refocusing their efforts to meet these core mission responsibilities...and that effort is reflected in their fiscal year 2011-12 budget proposals."

Among the ways Vinyard said they had found savings was to reduce taking on debt.

"Now is not the time to take on new debt," Vinyard said. "We've got to slow down land acquisitions until new standards are in place."

SRWMD's tentative budget

represents a 17 percent reduction over last year's budget and its tentative millage rate reflects a three percent reduction over last year's millage rate, officials said.

According to SRWMD staff, the new budget reflects the district's 22nd consecutive year with no increase in full-time equivalent staff positions.

"The Suwannee River district will continue its work removing nitrogen from surface waters, increasing water monitoring data, and establishing minimum flows and levels in the river and nearby springs. We've got to protect the health of our springs," Vinyard said.

In addition to the cuts already made, Scott sent letters Wednesday to each of the five districts, outlining

→ Please see page 3

Scott wants reserves representing two months of operating expenses

SRWMD

Continued from page 1

cuts and changes in their budgets he made with his new authorization, totaling some \$2.4 million, consisting mostly of salary reductions.

In his letter to SRWMD Chair Don Quincey Jr., Scott said, "I want to note that I appreciate the governing board and its staff for cooperating with the department in finding efficiencies and savings, thus enabling the submission of your district's fiscal year 2011-12 tentative budget at a savings of \$9.4 million.

"Your submission included the reduction of \$4.4 million in land acquisition, \$144,000 in salary and benefits and \$51,000 which will no longer be used to buy out excess employee leave," Scott said.

"I also appreciate the governing board's past practice in maintaining the same staffing levels for 22 consecutive years and the the governing board's strengthened commitment to

staff efficiencies by reducing staff levels in the current budget."

As for changes in the district's tentative budget, Scott said he disapproved the district's scheduled operating reserves in the amount of \$1,240,000.

"In response to inconsistencies among the districts, I have set a consistent operating cap of 16.5 percent (representing two months of operating expenses)," Scott said in his letter.

The SRWMD governing

board 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.

Legislation to tax bottled water resurfaces

Bill faces opposition from bottlers, business groups, anti-tax senators

By Michael Peltier
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE | A proposal to tax bottled water was filed Monday in the Florida Senate, re-igniting a water war that has pitted Sen. Evelyn Lynn against bottlers and business groups.

Lynn's bill (SB 118) is identical to a bill she filed last year that failed to get a committee hearing.

Given \$700 million

in budget cuts to water management districts and other cuts to statewide water quality programs, Lynn, R-Ormond Beach, said providing a source of money to pay for mitigating the environmental damage caused by discarded bottles may find more sympathy.

"This would be an effective way to set aside money for environmental cleanup," Lynn told the News Service of Florida

on Monday.

But opposition is expected to be fierce as Lynn battles bottlers like Nestle North American Waters and business groups that rely upon bottled water sales for a growing part of their businesses.

She will also face an uphill fight against leaders in her own chamber, who have taken an ardent anti-tax stance.

"Florida's bottled water industry generates millions of dollars in revenue for local communities and any efforts to penalize Florida's bottled water consumers will ultimately

drive business to neighboring states where it is not taxed," said Ryan Duffy, a Nestle spokesman. "The industry supports 8,800 jobs in Florida while utilizing less than 0.1 percent of all water usage in the state."

The bill would levy a 6 percent surcharge on the sale of bottled water in containers under a gallon size.

The money would be deposited in the Ecosystem Management and Restoration Trust Fund.

Americans use 2.5 million plastic bottles an hour, making the bottled

water industry a \$7.7 billion market in the United States alone, according to some industry estimates. If recycled, bottles save energy, but uncollected containers have become increasingly targeted by recycling groups and have been banned in some municipalities.

Past efforts to bring a surcharge to Florida have been opposed by bottling companies, convenience stores and the national groups representing vendors, including the National Automatic Merchandising Association and their state affiliate.