

# Columbia, Inc.

Your marketplace source for Lake City and Columbia County

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2011

LAKE CITY REPORTER

1C

## Bringing Bellamy Beaver to life

**B**ringing Bellamy Beaver to life for The Ichetucknee Partnership won't be possible without support from the community.

TIP needs \$2,500 to create a life-size version of the official springs ambassador.

The total amount of the project is \$10,000.

The project already has \$7,500 from TIP members including the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club of Lake City and Suwannee River Water Management District.

Also a grant from the Florida Wildlife Foundation is contributing funds for the project.

"We need a couple thousand more to finish him," said John Wheeler, project coordinator.

Bellamy Beaver is the mascot for TIP and is named after the first federal highway to cross Florida near the Ichetucknee, he said.

Ichetucknee is the native American word for beaver pond, which is why the animal was selected as the mascot.

"If you're floating down the river you'll see trees gnawed down by beavers," Wheeler said.

The character advocates for protecting the springs, similar to the way Smokey Bear repre-

sents fire prevention.

"Up until now he has existed only on the Internet or print," Wheeler said. "We want to bring him to life."

Protecting the springs is important for several reasons.

"We know the springs is important to us," Wheeler said. "Clean drinking water is important to our health."

Also the springs bring value to the local economy because of the tourism it promotes.

"Thousands visit the area," he said. "It's important to the economy."

TIP selected Street Characters Inc. to create the mascot, Wheeler said. The company has created mascots for the National Football League, Major League Baseball and National Collegiate Athletic Association.

"It's so expensive because we have to do it right," Wheeler said. "We have to make sure it's durable and safe for the actor who actually mans it."

Once a life-size version of Bellamy Beaver is available, it will appear at community events such as parades and ribbon cuttings in Columbia County, he said.

A translator will be on hand to share Bellamy's message of springs protection, Wheeler said.

Bellamy Beaver stress-



JASON MATTHEW WALKER/Lake City Reporter

Suzanne Moses, general manager of the Super 8 Motel, poses next to a cutout of Bellamy Beaver. "I love the idea that Bellamy Beaver will be made into an actual costume," Moses said. "I think it's a great plus for the area. It definitely puts the focus on the springs and taking care of the environment."

es the need to use less fertilizer and water, use Florida-friendly plants and maintain septic tanks.

"It will bring the message to life," he said.

TIP thinks its biggest gains in people changing the way they live is through reaching

the younger generation with a character such as Bellamy Beaver, Wheeler said.

The goal is to have Bellamy Beaver by the annual Christmas Parade.

Donations of any amount are needed for

the project, he said.

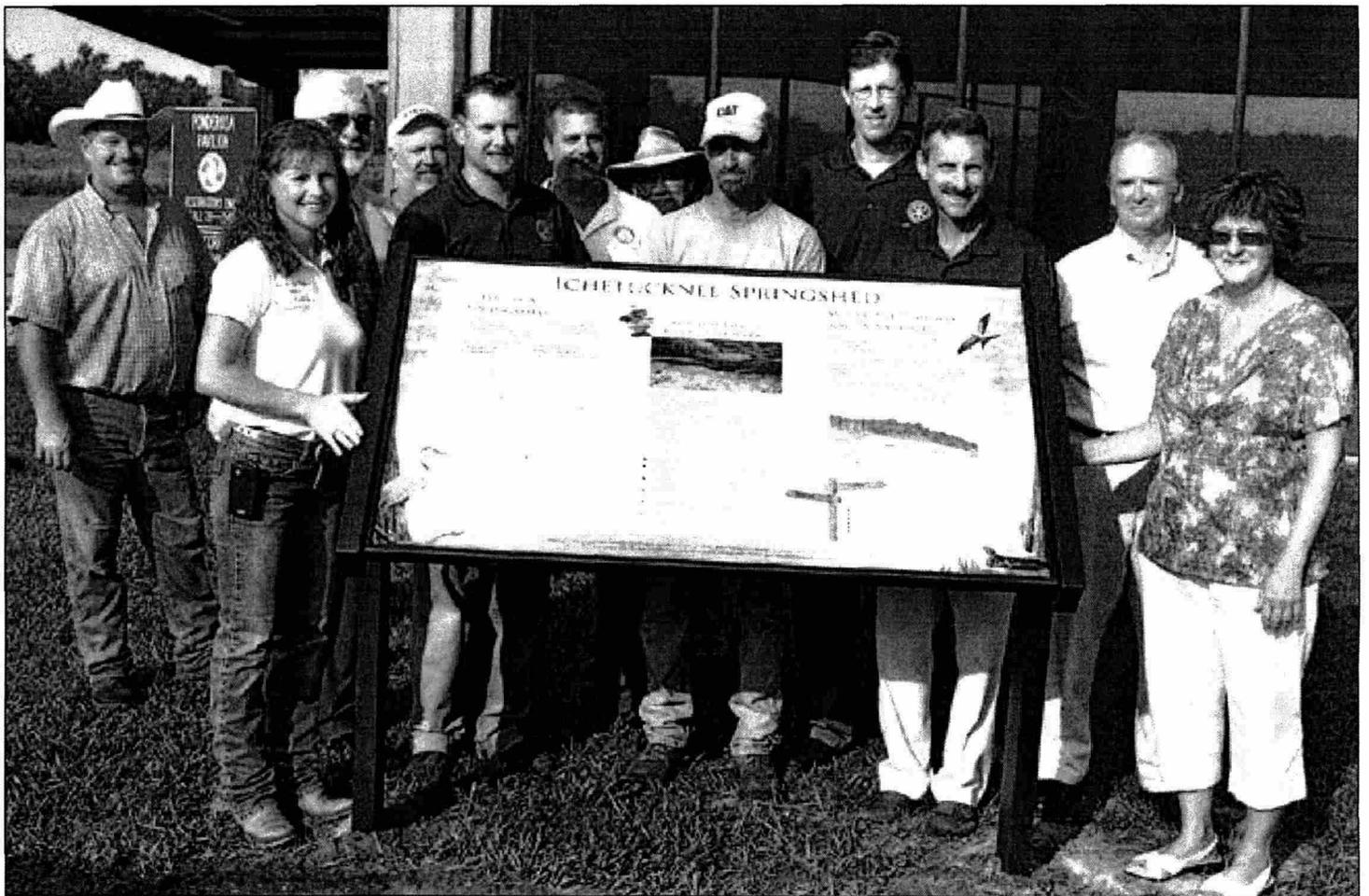
Send donations with a check payable to the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce. Include Bellamy in the memo line.

Checks can be mailed to 162 S. Marion Ave., Lake City, FL 32025

or dropped off at the office.

Contact Wheeler for more information at (386) 752-8660 or Joel Foreman at (386) 752-8420.

"Bellamy will become an essential part of TIP," he said.



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](mailto: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.

## WATER MANAGEMENT

# Budget cuts in the millions

## *Five positions axed*

By Jeffry Boatright

jeffry.boatright@gafnews.com

Five positions at the Suwannee River Water Management District were cut after the District lost federal and state funding along with a cut in its millage rate resulting in \$9.4 million in budget cuts, according to Executive Director David Still.

"This is the first time the Legislature has ever

set the District's millage," Still said. "Up to this point, our board of directors approved the budget and then it went to the governor for approval."

Senate Bill 2142 requires the Legislature to annually review the preliminary budget for each water management district and set the maximum amount of revenue that

**SEE BUDGET, PAGE 11A**

## Budget cuts in the millions

Continued From Page 1A

may be increased during the next fiscal year through its ad valorem tax.

The amount of revenue generated from the ad valorem tax for the SRWMD during the 2011-12 fiscal year is set at \$5.4 million. Ad valorem revenues the District received during the 2010-11 fiscal year was \$5.9 million.

The ad valorem revenue projections included in the tentative budget are based on a millage rate for the district of 0.4143. This is 9.9 percent below the roll-back rate. The ad valorem revenue only accounts for about 11 percent of the District's overall revenue.

The SRWMD budget indicates a decrease in federal and state funding as well. Federal revenues have fallen from nearly \$2.8 million to just over \$1 million for the new fiscal year. However, miscellaneous revenues have increased from \$3.9 million to \$5.3 million.

In all, the District would be left with a \$56.5 million budget, after \$9.4 million in cuts.

The District is also facing other changes as well.

"In addition to cutting five positions, we have halted land acquisitions," Still commented. "Conservation easements have been stopped as well."

During the 2010-11 fiscal year, SRWMD employed 68 full time workers.

## The Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association meeting

The Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association will hold its monthly meeting on Monday, September 12, 2011, at the Suwannee River Water Management District Office, 9225 CR 49, Live Oak, from 7-9 P.M. (The office is located on the corner of US 90 and CR 49, 2 miles east of Live Oak.)

The program this month will feature a presentation by Aventuras Naturales, a Florida based eco travel company, on La Ruta Maya: Ex-

ploring the Life of the Ancient Maya. The public is cordially invited to attend.

The Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trails Association maintains many miles of the Florida National Scenic Trail along the banks of the Suwannee River in Madison, Hamilton and Suwannee Counties for the hiking public.

Contact: Chapter Chair, Sylvia Dunnam, 362-3256, [dunnams@windstream.net](mailto:dunnams@windstream.net) for more information on the association or the program.

# 9-year-old girl ejected from boat

*FWC officials say the boat struck some exposed rocks in the Suwannee River.*

**By Karen Voyles**  
Staff writer

Falling water levels on the Suwannee River are getting the blame for injuries that sent a 9-year-old to the hospital Sunday afternoon.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission said Shelby Fitzgerald, of Live Oak, was ejected from a boat north of the Dowling Park boat ramp after it hit some rocks.

Shelby received several cuts on her knees and face and received a few stitches at a nearby hospital before being released, FWC spokeswoman Karen Parker said.

Shelby was one of four people on the boat, according to the FWC. She was seated in the front of the 14-foot-long jon boat and was the only one ejected, Parker said.

The others on the boat included Shelby's sister, Lauren Fitzgerald, 4; the girls' father, Michael Fitzgerald, 45; and Michael Fitzgerald's stepbrother, Aaron Gross,

all of Live Oak.

FWC investigators said the boat apparently hit some rocks that are normally well below the surface of the river, but instead are at or just below the surface this month because of the ongoing drought.

Suwannee River Water Management District hydrologist Megan Wetherington said the Suwannee River is approaching a historic low level in the area where the accident happened.

The river water level was recorded at 21.28 feet by the water district's gauge at Dowling Park on Sunday, Wetherington said, while the record low ever recorded at Dowling Park was 21.04 feet in June 2011.

"We started to hit record lows this spring in the upper Suwannee River, but it takes longer for us to reach records on the lower portions of the river," Wetherington said. "We haven't gotten any type of tropical recharge, which is what we need to bring things up quickly at this time of year."

According to the National Hurricane Center, there are no tropical systems that are likely to come close to Florida in the near future.

# Sampson Lake water debate continues

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD  
Telegraph Editor

Representatives from the Suwannee River Water Management District came with their proposal to deal with the Sampson Lake water control structure, but with residents divided over what needs to be done, it was clear consensus will be difficult to reach.

Jon Dinges, SRWMD's director of water supply resource and management, made it clear that all of the decisions have not been made and that meetings like the one held last week at the Santa Fe College Cultural Building were about collecting public input and answering questions.

First, it seemed important to Dinges and his colleagues to make one thing clear: Three Pipes, the former lake control structure, is a thing of the past. The pipes are gone—all five (not three) of them. The district replaced the former system with the three-gated structure under C.R. 225 in 2001.

"Maybe we can change it from Three Pipes to Three Gates," at this point, stressing the purpose of the meeting was not to rehash decades of history.

Megan Wetherington, a senior professional engineer for the water management district, went on to explain that the science doesn't prove the existing gates could prevent flooding.

Flood prevention is one of the major concerns when it comes to operating the gates and managing water flow from the lake, although it didn't seem many present had experienced property damage from past floods like those resulting from Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004 when lake levels were the second highest in recorded history.

Wetherington showed the 54-square-mile watershed that impacts Sampson Lake, a large watershed particularly when you imagine 10 inches of rain being dumped into that area in a short period of time.

Using a computer model, Wetherington demonstrated that opening the gates



fully at such a time would actually do very little to prevent flooding. Real data, such as data from Tropical Storm Faye in 2008, supported that the lake level rises much faster than the river can carry it away.

How can that be, when gates are quite large? Actually they're quite small considering the 3,000-foot length between the gates and the lake. Wetherington also showed a survey of the bottom of the channel, which revealed it is higher at points than the bottom of the gate culverts, meaning it is controlling the lake level by slowing the flow of water and keeping it from "rip-roaring" through the gate culverts.

It's not just what happens upstream that's important, Wetherington said, but what happens downstream as well. After five or six miles, the Sampson River flows into the Santa Fe River. It is not a straight channel, however. The water

flows through swampy and woody areas, she said. Even the Santa Fe "isn't a proper river" in this area, she said. It's braided and also flows through swampy areas. When the water level in the Santa Fe rises, it can back up the flow from the Sampson River.

So argument one for replacing the current control structure is that it doesn't perform as everyone assumes in the first place.

Flooding is only one concern of those who live on the lake, however. They don't want the lake too high, but they don't want it too low either. A low lake devalues properties and diminishes the lake as a boating and recreation spot for residents and visitors alike. There are boat ramps that are barely usable now, one resident complained.

See WATER page 4A

## WATER

Continued from page 1A

Wetherington said if the gates are left open all the time, "then you've got no lake." More accurately, the lake would be much like it was at the end of last year when drought conditions caused a record low.

So the gates can't merely be left open as some living downstream also wanting water suggested, and they cannot be left closed, since no action can be taken that might increase future flood potential. Operating the gates when flooding is imminent, however, does little to actually prevent flooding.

Dinges said goals were collected at a similar meeting in 2009 that include maintaining the lake, allowing lake drawdown for the health of the habitat, minimizing flooding and maintaining river flow during a drought. He said the district is focused on all of those goals as well as a fifth one, simplifying the system.

"Historically there's been trouble trying to get it just right, and that's what we want to do is try to get it right, and we want to work together to try to do that," Dinges said.

So how does the water management district propose to change the future? By constructing a fixed control structure downstream from the current gates that cannot be operated. Dinges said water would be allowed to flow freely through the box culverts under C.R. 225, but the fixed structure would keep the lake from dropping too low during a drought. A controlled flow would pass through the cement structure and, when water levels rise, over it as well so there is no increase in flood risk.

The gates would also be removed so there are no future problems operating, maintaining them or worrying about them being tampered with.

Some present were not comfortable with even this level of control, preferring that there be nothing at all regulating the flow of the river, though this did not sit well with lake dwellers.

There were those as well who were concerned with what was best for the habitat, which would seem to be a lake whose levels are allowed to rise and drop naturally. Some said they wanted everything left in God's hands. One citizen wanted to know why the district would go to the expense of replacing the structure that's

already in place.

Dinges said the existing structure may work, but asked if it was optimal. The structure can leak, become blocked, be tampered with and require repairs. Even if the plan is to leave the gates alone, the presence of operable gates means someone is going to want to operate them, he said. It will be an ongoing maintenance cost. In the long run, he said replacing the gates with a fixed structure should save taxpayers money.

To say fixed structure is somewhat misleading, as well. The proposed structure could be raised using extraordinary methods like a crane. That would occur only if necessary to draw down the water level for the health of the lake.

With no shortage of opinions on what should or shouldn't be done and no consensus, the water management district will have a lot to consider before the next public meeting. Dinges said that meeting would be held in a few months once some decisions have been made. Information at that time will include design concepts for the proposed structure.

Bradford County Telegraph • Thursday, Sept. 15, 2011

## SRWMD holding budget hearings

The Suwannee River Water Management District Governing Board held a first public hearing Tuesday on its tentative fiscal year 2011-2012 budget of \$47.4 million (\$47,389,589) and a proposed millage rate of 0.4143 mills. The tentative budget represents a 16-percent reduction over last year's budget and the tentative millage rate reflects a 6-percent reduction over last year's millage rate.

Under the proposed millage rate, those who own property with a taxable value of \$100,000 will pay \$41.43 in property taxes to the district. Owners of property with a taxable value of \$150,000 will pay \$62.15 to the district.

Taxes paid to the district fund numerous public services, including protection of rivers and springs, water monitoring programs, water resource develop-

ment and water supply planning.

The district will hold a final public hearing Sept. 27 before the budget and millage rate are adopted. The meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the district's headquarters in Live Oak at the corner of U.S. 90 and C.R. 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 or 386-362-1001.

### District to distributes funds to counties

The district paid \$346,345.32 to 11 counties for payment in lieu of taxes.

The PILT program was created by the Florida Legislature to help reduce the fiscal impact to rural counties when the state

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

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

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

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

## SRWMD to hold public hearings to set millage rate and budget

LIVE OAK, FL, September 9, 2011 – The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) Governing Board will hold its first public hearing on Sept. 13 to discuss the proposed budget and millage rate. The hearing is scheduled for 5:30 p.m., immediately following the board's regular monthly meeting, which will be held at a special time, beginning at 3 p.m.

The tentative fiscal year 2011-12 budget is \$47,389,589 and the proposed millage rate is 0.4143. The tentative budget represents a 16 percent reduction over last year's budget and the tentative millage rate reflects a 6 percent reduction over last year's millage rate.

The final budget and millage rate will be adopted at a second hearing on Sept. 27 at 5:30 p.m. Both hearings will be held at the District's headquarters in Live Oak at the corner of U.S. 90 and CR 49. The public is invited and encouraged to attend. For more information call 800.226.1066 (FL only) or 386.362.1001.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2011

DIXIE COUNTY TIMES, CROSS CITY, FLORIDA

## SRWMD To Hold Public Hearings

### To Set Millage Rate And Budget

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# COUNTY OFFICIALS TAKE 1ST STEP TOWARD PROTECTING THE AQUIFER

## ORDINANCE'S FINAL HEARING IS OCT. 6

**LAZARO ALEMAN**  
*ECB Publishing*  
*Senior Staff Writer*

It took a while, but Friends of the Wacissa and others concerned about the river and water quality in general had their patience rewarded on Thursday evening, Sept. 15, when the Jefferson County Commission voted unanimously to proceed with adoption of the long-awaited aquifer protec-

tion ordinance.

Mind, per the rules of the game, the ordinance won't be formally and officially adopted until Oct. 6, when it is scheduled for a second and final public hearing and expected adoption by the commission.

But after months in the making and several postponed hearings because of last-minute legal questions, reevaluations and revi-

sions, and a public noticing error, proponents couldn't be blamed for breaking into applause when commissioners voted 5-0 to approve the ordinance on Thursday evening.

The ordinance, which amends the Jefferson County Land Development Code, reaffirms the county's right to regulate the in-

**Please See AQUIFER**

**Page 3**

stallation of infrastructures, including those associated with bottling operations; and it makes a supermajority vote of the board necessary for approval of any development having anything to do with water bottling operations, among other things. A super majority vote means that four

of the five commissioners must vote for the measure.

As ordinance author Attorney Scott Shirley said in his brief remarks to the board, the measure aims to provide additional protection for groundwater quality in general and more specifically seeks to protect the health

and biodiversity of the Aucilla/Wacissa rivers ecosystem and the many springs and streams that feed into this system.

Implied if unsaid, of course, the ordinance took form and substance against the backdrop of Nestlé Water North America's testing of Allen Spring

on the Wacissa River for possible transport of the water to its bottling operation in Madison County, and the opposition that the company's plan engendered.

That opposition ranged from local and area groups such as the Friends of the Wacissa, all the way to Corporate Accountability International, a Boston-based nonprofit organization that since 1977 has mounted high-profile campaigns on behalf of public health, the environment and human rights, and whose *Think Outside the Bottle* national campaign promotes the use and protection of the nation's public water systems.

Nestlé pulled the plug on the Wacissa River project on July 27, saying the testing had determined that

Monticello News

Wednesday, September 21, 2011

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although the Wacissa River springs complex continued to produce an abundant 200 million gallons of water daily, Allen Spring was subject to seasonal low flows that did not meet the company's selection criteria for a stable, sustainable water supply.

The project's opponents, for their part, interpret Nestlé's withdrawal as the company recognizing and bowing to the will of the people.

Georgia Ackerman, a board member of the Friends of the Wacissa, has been regularly attending commission meetings and monitoring the Nestlé's situation and the ordinance's formulation since the inception of each.

"Nestlé's pullout is a clear indication that the corporation is feeling pressure from the grassroots and that we

are having an enormous impact in reasserting the right of communities to govern their water over profit-driven transnational corporations. These victories are harbingers of more to come," Ackerman is quoting saying in a press release emailed by Corporate Accountability International immediately after the commission's vote.

Ackerman, for her part, urged the commission on Thursday evening to set up next a committee that could work to formulate a more detailed and comprehensive springs protections plan, an idea that Shirley endorsed and recommended was worthwhile pursuing once the aquifer protection ordinance was in place.

# LOCAL & STATE

Small plane catches fire at Gainesville airport, 2B House speaker says Florida p

## Bottling group has 2 years to begin plant construction

*The company hopes to pump up to 150K gallons of water per day from the spring.*

**By Christopher Curry**  
Staff writer

A long-lingering plan for a water-bottling plant near the Santa Fe River in southern Columbia County now has two years to become reality.

On Sept. 19, the company behind the plant, a Tampa-based limited liability corporation called Santa Fe Springs, sent the Suwannee River Water Management District a letter

of intent to start construction of the plant within two years.

It was back in 2000 that a permit was originally approved to pump up to 150,000 gallons a day out of the ground at Sawdust Spring, which lies across the Santa Fe River from Ginnie Springs.

Since then, the water district's board has approved a series of modifications that allowed extension of the timeline for construction to start. Meanwhile, the clock has been ticking on the 20-year water withdrawal permit, which is slated to expire in 2020.

In mid-August, Santa Fe Springs' manager, Tampa attorney Stephen



SOURCE: Suwannee River Water Mgt. Dist.  
ROB MACK/Staff graphic

Cheeseman, sent the Suwannee district a request for a two-year extension to produce a letter of intent.

At the time, the company faced a Sept. 24 deadline to secure the letter, or the water district would

**PLANT** on Page 5B

## PLANT: Local environmental group opposes bottling water

*Continued from 1B*

begin the process of revoking the withdrawal permit.

In his request, Cheeseman also sought an additional two years from the time the letter of intent was secured to when construction had to start. Cheeseman wrote that the "obvious economic situation" in Columbia and surrounding counties led to the extension request.

Water district staff recommended a six-month extension to secure the letter of intent and

the district's governing board took a more stringent approach and was going to give six months to start construction, said Carlos Herd, a senior hydrologist with the district.

Santa Fe Springs then forwarded a letter of intent.

Local environmental group Our Santa Fe River has traditionally opposed water-bottling applications for springs along the river and this is no exception.

In an email, the group's president, Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson, wrote that its members

do "not support our public water supply being used for bottled water, thereby diminishing our natural resources, namely the very fragile Florida springs."

She also questioned how much water the company could actually pump under the permit. Conditions attached to the approval limit the amount of water that could be pumped based on the flow at a gauge on the Santa Fe near Fort White.

For example, the full 150,000 gallons per day may be pumped when the flow is above 753 cubic

feet per second. When the flow falls below 510 cubic feet per second, no pumping is allowed.

These conditions were attached to the permit 10 years ago and the water district is now in the process of establishing minimum flows and levels for the Lower Santa Fe. Those will designate the level from which further withdrawals would have a negative environmental impact on the river.

The letter of intent the company secured came from Lake City-based Kent Harriss

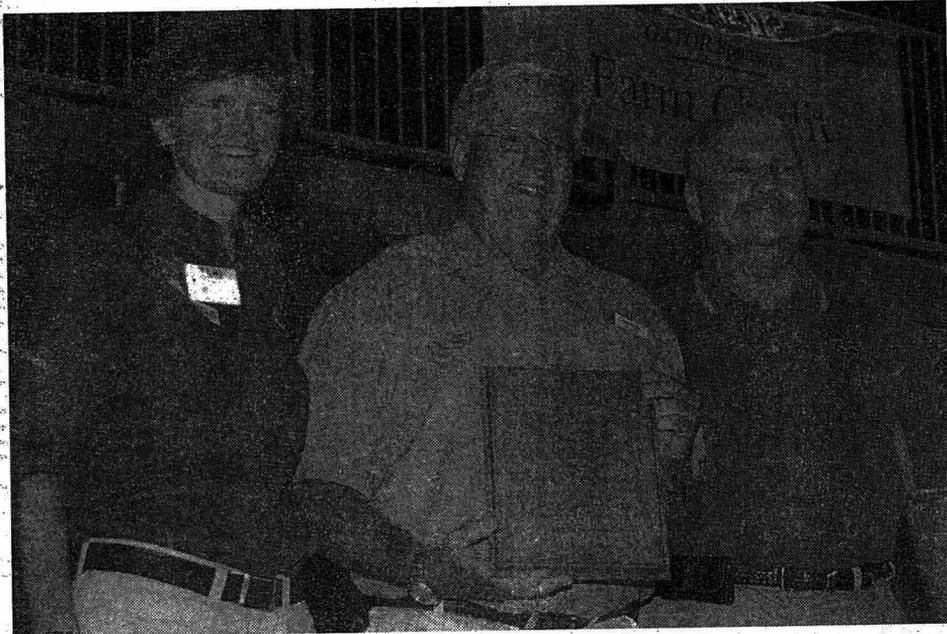
Construction. Their agreement called for a 6,000-square-foot building with bays for 18-wheelers to be built next to the water withdrawal site.

The bottling plant must still apply for and receive zoning approval from Columbia County.

Cheeseman could not be reached for comment for this article.

Contact Christopher Curry at 374-5088 or [chris.curry@gvillesun.com](mailto:chris.curry@gvillesun.com).

## Quincey Given UF's Award of Distinction



Don Quincey of Chiefland was honored with the University of Florida's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences: Award of Distinction. Quincey was recognized as an active leader in support of the University's research and extension services related to pastures and cattle.

Yoana Newman, an assistant professor who nominated Quincey, described him as an

outstanding leader in Florida's agricultural community " with a real passion for the land and public service."

Quincey, the owner of Quincey Cattle Company, is the current president of the Florida Cattleman's Association. He also serves as chairman of the Suwannee River Water Management District.

# Cheeseman gives letter of intent to build bottled water plant

By Jenna Hostetler  
For The Herald

FORT WHITE – A recent letter of intent to build a water bottling facility just south of Fort White in southern Columbia County has made its way into the conversations of residents, and few are ready to extend open arms to the project.

Stephen Cheeseman, owner of Santa Fe Springs, LLC, wrote the letter after the Suwannee River Water Management District board chairman not only denied Cheeseman's modification re-

quest to extend his permit again, but also shortened the time he would need to start construction from two years to six months, Senior Hydrogeologist Carlos Herd said.

Cheeseman withdrew his modification and turned in his letter of intent on Sept. 19, just in time to meet the 2-year deadline he was given to write it. In order to keep the permit, Cheeseman will need to start construction within two years, Herd said.

According to Cheeseman's letter of intent, he will use Kent

Harriss Construction, Inc. to build the 6,000-square-foot production building. He estimated the cost of the structure to be \$60 per square foot.

Cheeseman was out of town and unavailable for comment.

Cheeseman has held on to the same permit since 2000, and Our Santa Fe River President Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson has dedicated her time to make sure nothing comes out of it.

Malwitz-Jipson doesn't believe water should be taken from the springs. If Cheeseman does build

the plant, he would be permitted to take up to 150,000 gallons of water a day.

But the water district has set regulations that would prohibit Cheeseman from drawing water from the spring when the levels are too low. For example, if the water level drops to less than 510 cubic feet per second, then no water may be extracted.

Malwitz-Jipson has been checking the Fort White gage every day. She said the readings were so low this weekend, that had Cheeseman already finished con-

struction, he still wouldn't be permitted to take any water at all under the current conditions.

Herd said he wasn't surprised by those numbers.

"It's very low right now," he said. "We're in a drought. I don't think that's any secret."

Malwitz-Jipson said residents don't want the plant for a number of reasons, including the traffic it would bring in, but the main concern has been and always will be the conservation of the springs.

"Ultimately, it's the spring

we're really concerned about," she said. "We think it's a public resource. We all own it, and we think it's unnecessary to put it in bottles."

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