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The District presented a check for \$400,000 to Alachua City Commissioners to celebrate the first installment of funding for the Mill Creek Sink project which has been long-awaited by state and local environmental partners. Pictured left to right: TJ Muller, Vice Chair, National Speleological Society Cave Diving Section; Gary Hardacre, Commissioner, City of Alachua; Adam Boukari, Assistant City Manager, City of Alachua; Ken Cornell, Chair Commissioner, Alachua County; Robert Knight, Executive Director, Howard T. Odum Springs Institute; Marian Rush, City Attorney, City of Alachua; Jacqui Sulek, Chapters Coordinator, Audubon Florida; Shirley Green Brown, Vice Mayor, City of Alachua; Gib Coerper, Mayor, City of Alachua; Traci Gresham, City Manager, City of Alachua; Ben Boukari, Jr., Commissioner, City of Alachua; Robert Wilford, Commissioner, City of Alachua; Noah Valenstein, Executive Director, Suwannee River Water Management District.

LOCAL PARTNERS SEEK TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY OF SANTA FE RIVER

LIVE OAK, FLA, Feb. 16, 2017 – The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) has successfully secured initial funding for a project that will significantly reduce pollutants and improve water quality to the Santa Fe River basin.

Located in Alachua, FL, the Mill Creek Sink Water Quality Improvement Project is estimated to reduce nitrogen pollutants by 70%, helping to ensure the water recharged to the Floridan aquifer meets regulatory and health standards for the Santa Fe River. The District's \$400,000 will cover phase one of this important project, with additional phases funded in the future.

Phase one of the project will allow for land acquisition and stormwater engineering and design to treat water flowing from portions of interstate 75 and highway 441. The businesses developed

along the Mill Creek Sink corridor were established prior to stormwater permits. The project will capture and treat available stormwater from those areas.

Once phase one is complete, funding for phase two will allow for construction and potential acquisition of additional property.

Land surrounding the sink has long been of interest to area environmental groups and agencies for public management after a dye trace connected the cave system to the Santa Fe River and Hornsby Spring, an Outstanding Florida Spring. The seven-mile long dye trace was made popular by the movie "Water's Journey" in 2003 and showcases the sink's connectivity to groundwater, unique fauna habitat, and impact of pollutants.

The sink, swallet and surrounding 8.5 acres make up the Mill Creek Sink Nature Preserve, which was established 1992 and is currently owned by the National Speleological Society.

"We are extremely thankful for the hard work of our local partners who made this project possible," said Noah Valenstein, executive director for the District. "The District and our partners have long desired to protect the water quality entering into Mill Creek Sink and further highlight this amazing resource."

"Opportunities to purchase land and improve stormwater treatment in an urbanized setting to protect such valuable resources are rare," said Tom Kay, executive director for the Alachua Conservation Trust. "This project will serve as a model for future planning and land acquisition of environmentally-sensitive areas not only for Alachua County, but throughout the state."

"Reduced nitrogen loading is critical to the long-term survival and quality of our springs – springs are not eternal," said Dr. Robert Knight, director for the Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute. "This project is a vital step towards sustainability of our area's water resources."

"Water quality has always been a top priority for Audubon Florida. We give much praise to the leadership at the Suwannee River Water Management District for effortlessly pursuing this treasure and bringing the project one step closer to completion," said Jacqui Sulek, chapters coordinator with the Audubon Florida.

"Mill Creek Sink is a natural wonder," said TJ Muller, vice-chair of the National Speleological Society Cave Diving Society. "Protecting and ensuring that this feature is available for future generations to explore is vital."

The mission of the Suwannee River Water Management District is to protect and manage water resources using science-based solutions to support natural systems and the needs of the public. The District holds true to the belief of water for nature, water for people. Headquartered in Live Oak, Florida, the District serves 15 surrounding north-central Florida counties.

For more information about the District, visit www.mysuwanneeriver.com or follow us on Facebook and Twitter, search @SRWMD.

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