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<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

THE MFL PROGRAM – AUTHORIZED DESTRUCTION OF THE SPRINGS AND RIVERS

“It is not an unreasonable expectation based upon this state’s history that if an MFL for the Chassahowitzka will allow a reduction of 11% percent of its current flow, inevitably groundwater pumping will be permitted from the springsheds that will permanently reduce the river to that level. In other words, the District is setting the stage for groundwater withdrawals that will permanently lower the river’s flow to this level and the projected 15% reduction in habitat will no longer be scientific theory but permanent fact in perpetuity.”

Sonny Vergara, Executive Director, SWFWMD 1997-2003.

Vergara’s statement applies to all of the coastal springs and rivers. The Minimum Flows and Levels Program (MFL) is a directive to SWFWMD to define how much water can be taken before incurring significant harm to the water resources or the ecology of the area. They have, arbitrarily, defined significant harm as a 15% destruction of species or habitat. Once viewed as protective of water resources, the MFL has evolved into setting consumptive objectives: 11% for the Chassahowitzka River, 5% for the Homosassa River and yet to be determined % for the Crystal and Withlacoochee Rivers. Planners and engineers have already defined where the first well fields will be for “regional distribution” of the Homosassa and Chassahowitzka waters.

The MFL program has become a statewide project to create a map of water sources available for developments. There will be no contesting the taking of water up to the MFL. The catch is that once wells are in place there is no way of measuring if the MFL is being exceeded on coastal rivers. You cannot put a specific level or flow on a tidal river. If you say the river cannot go below a certain level it assuredly will when the tides and winds push the waters out of the rivers Therefore all regulatory controls will depend upon computer models which will be found inadequate.

If unchanged, the MFL program can and will lead to destruction of our already impacted springs, rivers and lakes. The Homosassa River Alliance has joined with citizen groups from the Chassahowitzka, Crystal River, Withlacoochee and Lake areas to argue for better protection for these Outstanding Florida Waterways.

Ron Miller

GOOD NEWS FOR PELICANS AND THE GULF

I received an e-mail from David Yarnold, President and CEO of the Audubon Society regarding BP's commitment to help fix some of the damage they caused in the Gulf.

"A historic agreement in Congress has taken place to begin large-scale restoration of the Gulf Coast. Audubon has played a key role in the partnership that has helped craft this agreement, and our chapters and activists have provided critical support to make this agreement possible. After more than a year of difficult negotiation, senators representing the Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida have finally **reached agreement on a proposal to restore the Gulf coast** following the devastation of the BP oil spill.

This agreement will represent an **unprecedented investment in restoring coastal Louisiana** and other critical habitats of the Gulf coast. The agreement will **direct at least \$5 billion toward Gulf restoration**, drawing from BP penalties under the Clean Water Act levied as a result of the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

Audubon chapter leaders and activists have helped keep the pressure on legislators to reach this agreement. Audubon's national policy office, along with our partners from Environmental Defense Fund and National Wildlife Federation, has worked tirelessly with members of Congress from both parties to bring this conservation achievement within reach.

Total fines from the BP Gulf disaster are expected to range from \$5.4

billion to \$21.1 *billion*. The RESTORE Act of 2011, would capture 80% of these fines and divide them among Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, and would fund a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council. The rest would go into a fund for future spill cleanups. Please email your Representative and ask for support for the RESTORE Act of 2011."

Ron Miller

WHAT IS LAKEWATCH?

Florida LAKEWATCH is a volunteer citizen lake monitoring program that facilitates "hands-on- citizen participation in the management of Florida lakes through monthly monitoring activities.

Coordinated through the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences/Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, the program has been in existence since 1986. In 1991 the Florida Legislature recognized the importance of the program and established Florida LAKEWATCH in the state statutes (Florida Statute 1004.49). LAKEWATCH is now one of the largest lake monitoring programs in the nation with over 1800 trained citizens monitoring 600+ lakes, in more than 40 counties.

On February 24, 2005, four members of the Homosassa River Alliance were certified to participate in the Florida Lakewatch Program. Water samples are taken from Bluebird Springs, Pepper Creek and the Homosassa River each month. Water samples are tested by the University of Florida and test results will be included in the State's database. When test results are received, they are listed on our website, www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org.

CLEAN WATER ACT DEFINITION OF “WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES”

Americans depend on clean and abundant water. However, over the past decade, interpretations of Supreme Court rulings removed some critical waters from Federal protection, and caused confusion about which waters and wetlands are protected under the Clean Water Act. As a result, important waters now lack clear protection under the law, and businesses and regulators face uncertainty and delay. The Obama Administration is committed to protecting waters on which the health of people, the economy and ecosystems depend.

U.S. EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have developed draft guidance for determining whether a waterway, water body, or wetland is protected by the Clean Water Act. This guidance would replace previous guidance to reaffirm protection for critical waters. It also will provide clearer, more predictable guidelines for determining which water bodies are protected by the Clean Water Act. The public comment period for the draft guidance has now closed. To review submitted public comments, visit the [docket on Regulations.gov](#). Public input received will be carefully considered as the agencies make final decisions regarding the guidance.

The draft guidance will reaffirm protections for small streams that feed into larger streams, rivers, bays and coastal waters. It will also reaffirm protection for wetlands that filter pollution and help protect communities from flooding. Discharging pollution

into protected waters (e.g., dumping sewage, contaminants, or industrial pollution) or filling protected waters and wetlands (e.g., building a housing development or a parking lot) require permits. This guidance will keep safe the streams and wetlands that affect the quality of the water used for drinking, swimming, fishing, farming, manufacturing, tourism and other activities essential to the American economy and quality of life. It also will provide regulatory clarity, predictability, consistency and transparency.

For more information regarding the Clean Water Act, go to <http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/guidance/wetlands/CWAwaters.cfm>.

WHAT WE HAVE:

Florida has nearly **8,000 lakes** and **700 freshwater springs** - the largest concentration of springs on the planet

Florida's average **54 inches of rainfall a year** is among the highest in the nation.

Upwards of a **quadrillion gallons** of water flow underground

Damage we've done

With that abundance, it's hard to believe that each region of Florida is **tapped out**.

But Florida's permitted water use is demonstrably more than our natural systems can handle.

THE SYSTEM APPROACH

Many years ago as a young engineering student I had a professor who would push us to picture the entire system when considering a problem. Let's try it with our waters and see if it helps our view.

I know a doctor - a bright, hard-working and skilled one - who had a well drilled and was so pleased that his expenditure gives him all the water he wants for his grass and everything else just for the cost of the well. As bright as he is, he does not seem to realize that, in effect, he is just sinking another straw into his neighbors' and our shared pool of ground water - the aquifer. As more and bigger straws are sucking water out of the aquifer, less water is available for other people, our rivers, our lakes, our springs and our estuaries. In Citrus County almost any water taken out of the ground is reducing water to the lakes, the springs, the Coastal Rivers and the Coastal Estuaries. Ground water pumped to other counties also hurts Citrus County.

The water management districts including Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) have been mandated by the Florida Legislature to determine for each water body how much water (by level for lakes and by flow for rivers) can be removed before significant harm is done to the waterway. The process is called MFL (Minimum Flows and Levels). But many water lovers worry that **any** loss of water from lakes, springs and rivers is significant. SWFWMD is being more open, patient and cooperative with the public than ever before as the public is showing more knowledge and interest in

the process. Large public meetings have been held in June and July with more being scheduled.

Our water is limited, particularly when rains have lessened as in recent years. We need to look at the entire system and what influence we have. Our water is too important and valuable for us to use half of our purified drinking water to grow grass. That's right; half of our purified drinking water is used for grass.

We will never run out of water. As water becomes more scarce it will become more expensive. Eventually our main supply will be desalinated water (saltwater or brackish water treated to remove the salt). It is an expensive process and it requires filters and lots of electricity. As we move toward "desal" there will be a scramble of competitors for lower cost ground and surface water. The scramble is in progress.

What can we do? The first, simplest and least-cost solution is conservation; a water diet - **use less water**. Simple approaches that can be effective include turning off the water while brushing your teeth then turning it back on to rinse and a similar approach to shaving.

Florida Friendly landscaping uses plants and systems that are more tolerant of dry times while still looking attractive and healthy. Don't fight Mother Nature, use water gently. Even Florida Friendly grasses that are dormant in the dry season can save a lot of water. How we landscape may be the biggest single improvement to the system.

There are other potential approaches. Reuse/treated water can

replace potable water on golf courses and can even lower costs of watering. It can also help reduce nitrogen in our ground water. Let's make our system work and work well for our futures, our families' futures and for intelligent growth.

It is one system entrusted to all of us, let's work together to keep it healthy.

Al Grubman is President of TOO FAR, a retired Professional Engineer and Chair of the Citrus/Hernando Waterways Restoration Council - Citrus County Task Force

**MONTHLY MEETINGS OF THE
HOMOSASSA RIVER ALLIANCE
ARE HELD ON THE 2ND
THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH –
P.M. - CIVIC CENTER OF OLD
HOMOSASSA**

***THREE SISTERS SPRINGS -
WELL DESERVED HONORS
AWARDED***

In May 2011, special honors were given to some of our local folks for their impressive efforts in saving the Three Sisters Springs. Recognized were Helen Spivey, co-founder of Save the Manatee organization, Jim Green and Lace Blue-McLean of the Friends of the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, Michael Lusk, manager of the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge and Hal Flowers, one of the previous owners of the property. In a ceremony held in Atlanta, Georgia, Regional Director, Cindy Dohner, honored them with the 2010 Regional Director's Conservation Awards for the three-year

effort to raise public awareness and find the funds to buy the \$10.5 million property known as Three Sisters Springs.

Three Sisters Springs was in danger of heavy development when the partner/owners agreed to consider selling the 57.8 acre area and its springs into conservation as part of the Crystal River refuge for manatees. It took a stunning drive to raise the funds, which were drawn from the U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund (\$3.3 million) under the North America Wetlands Conservation Act; \$5 million was appropriated by the State of Florida; \$300,000 came from the City of Crystal River, Citrus County and the Citrus County Tourist Development Council. Close to \$2 million was raised from residents through directed donations to the Conservation Fund, the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the Friends of Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex, the Save the Manatee Club and other groups.

This joint venture assures manatees have continued access to a protected area during the colder days of the year and eventually will offer walk-by views to the public of these amazing and endangered animals.

On the same date, Helen Spivey received a lifetime achievement award from the U.S. Congress, presented by U.S. Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, "to honor her long fight to protect Florida's incredible natural wonders and to protect much needed habitat for the Florida Manatee." The full text will be in the Congressional Record for that date.

Priscilla Watkins

