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<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

### **NITRATES IN THE HOMOSASSA**

by Priscilla Watkins

The draft report on a Total Maximum Daily Load for the Homosassa River was released on September 25<sup>th</sup> to the public by the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) leading scientists, Kristina Bridger, James Dodson and Gary Maddox. Their findings are expansive and they are recommending a maximum of 0.23 mg/L, very close to the historical level between 1946 and 1972. HRA can support that recommendation and now push forward for action to implement the reduction in the quickest possible timeframe.

Three problems are harming the Homosassa River: lower water flow increasing staying times for toxins; sea rise, making it more saline, now up 6 inches in the past fifty years; pollutants, causing harmful algae growth. Our major pollutant is an increased overload of nitrates causing algae growth and mats and subsequent loss of beneficial sea grasses.

SWFWMD states that our recent lower flow rate is entirely due to the cycle of drought. In good years we can get 54 inches of rain, in poor we are lucky to get 43 inches. We note that they refuse to attribute flow loss to a dramatic increase in population and pumping permits in our Northern basin. Sea rise is being caused by global warming and is now considered unstoppable. Changing the first two causes are, to date, beyond our political will in Florida but we can do a lot about nitrates. It will take public pressure.

Historically typical nitrate concentration in the Homosassa main spring area was 0.20 mg/L in 1946. With more people, livestock and farms, over the past 66 years that ratio has increased. By 1972 the ratio was 0.26 mg/L; by the end of 2012 it is between 0.62 and 0.67 mg/L (page 37 of Report). "The TMDL is a scientific determination of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive each day and still be considered healthy." (page 12 of Report).

The latest listing of the source of nitrates in the Homosassa River is up on the Southwest Water Management District's (SWFWMD) site under the Springs section - [swfwmd.state.fl.us/springs/Homosassa/dashboard](http://swfwmd.state.fl.us/springs/Homosassa/dashboard) as of 9/25/14.

Their pie chart allocates nitrate sources as follows: septic tanks = 5%; fertilizer = 6%; cattle = 20%; fertilized pastures = 26%, and – hold it – 'other' is 43%.

So, added into the fact that most of our springs have been under siege from fertilizers for the past forty years, what is the hold-up in the Legislature? Why not have a

state-wide requirement for slow-release fertilizers and sludge containment for confined cattle? Why not use the effective biomass converters that recover drinkable water while creating fertilizers of the solids? Where is the pressure from our Commissioners to save our springs and aquifer?

For heaven's sake, The Clean Water Act passed back in 1972 to give people access to healthy systems. Making the reduction immediately should be the state target. Let's get it done!

***Message From The President***

It would seem that we have finally gotten the attention of our state government. We believe that our legal action against the state DEP for that agency's failure to enforce the Outstanding Florida Water Act was a key factor. There are several bills being introduced to allocate funding to restoring our waterways.

On another note, our fellow organization, the Homosassa Civic Club, has spent the summer remodeling the old Homosassa Firehouse and is now available to assist youngsters with homework and improving math and reading skills. Adult literacy classes are planned as well as adult classes in computer use. A safe boating course is planned for the near future.

Ideas and volunteers are needed. Anyone interested can reach Executive Director Joann Bartell at 601-6785.

***Jim Bitter***

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**We'll Miss Her**

Tess Cornett, who served as the Homosassa River Alliance Treasurer for many years, recently moved to Texas to be with her children.

We will miss Tess but we sincerely wish her lots of luck and happiness in this new chapter of her life.

**ATTENTION MEMBERS**

**HOMOSASSA RIVER  
ALLIANCE ANNUAL  
FUNDRAISER**

Please be watching the mail in October for information regarding the Homosassa River Alliance Annual Fund Raiser.

You will receive an envelope explaining how you can purchase raffle tickets a to win a gift basket(s). The drawing for the basket(s) will take place on November 9, 2014 at the Homosassa Seafood Festival. You do not need to be present to win.

This is our main fundraiser and we hope you can support our organization. These funds help us continue in our effort to save our waters from further degradation.

If you have any questions, please call the Alliance Secretary, Mr. Bob Jeeves, at 628-0091.

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL**

**The membership file has been updated. Please look at your address label. To the left of your name will indicate the last year you paid your dues. If you have not done so, please consider updating your membership with the River Alliance for 2015. Your support is needed and very much appreciated.**

**CHARLIE DEAN: TRY AGAIN  
NEXT YEAR**

**Saturday, March 22, 2014:**

**“Senate Oks Dean’s springs bill”**

(headline in the March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 issue of the Chronicle).

“I’m proud to say “We passed it”, was Senator Charlie Dean’s comment. A committee had just given unanimous support to his springs protection and restoration bill. Senate Bill 1576 was developed with a team of other senators. It was met with opposition but they overcame and converted various opponents and reached out to environmentalists in their journey. The bill was 38 pages long. Senator Dean believed that even if parts of the bill was accepted, it was a beginning. “We just want to have enough to do a little good,” he said.

The bill would create the Florida Springs and Aquifer Act. It would require the Department of Environmental Protection to delineate the springs protection and management zones for each outstanding Florida spring. It would prohibit specified activities within the zones. It addressed minimum flows and levels, runoff, waste treatment, septic tanks, fertilizer, agriculture and the roles of local government and water management districts.

What was even better was that funding would come from documentary stamp tax revenues.

**Friday, May 9, 2014:**

**“House fails to protect Florida’s  
resources”**

(headline in the May 9, 2014 Editorial Section of Citrus County Chronicle)

The article began, “The Florida House and Governor Rick Scott lost a real opportunity to protect the state’s troubled springs when they failed to support Senator Charlie Dean’s proposals for protection comprised the beginning paragraph of this article.

The article goes on to say that Speaker Weatherford blocked it from even getting before a House committee. It outlined Senator Dean’s proposal which hoped to reduce the pollutants and deal with some of the flow issues.

Powerful business lobbyists went to work in the House and stopped the bill from seeing the light of day. Campaign contributions still rule the day in Florida it would seem.

The Florida House and governor ended the session by blocking progress and letting a token amount of springs funding to dribble through

This is unfortunate because he bill would have gone a long way towards protecting Florida’s most important springs

**Sunday, September 14, 2014:**

**“Florida’s springs a treasure in  
jeopardy”**

(headline in the September 14, 2014 issue of the Chronicle)

In this article, Mr. Dean shared his fond childhood memories of family outings to Florida springs as a child. He continues to chair the Senate Committee

on Environmental Preservation and Conservation and puts the protection of our springs at the forefront of his attention.

Mr. Dean is disappointed that the bill did not succeed but feels that it provided much-needed attention. He will continue to work on the legislation and offer it again next year.

### **TEN THINGS WE CAN DO TO SAVE OUR SPRINGS**

Our springs are at a crossroads. Groundwater over pumping, pollution and regulatory neglect are ruining our springs.

We are all part of the problem but together we can solve it. We can restore our springs and aquifer by increasing spring flow and aggressively decreasing or eliminating pollution. It's going to take education and regulation, commitment, leadership and action.

#### **Here's what we can do right now:**

1. **Use less water.** Be mindful of your water footprint, every day.
2. **Grow Native! Get Real about being Florida Friendly.** Chemical fertilizers, pesticides and human waste are polluting our springs, lakes, rivers and coastal waters. We get to decide: Do we want to drink from, live near or play in a toxic soup or a healthy, vibrant ecosystem? Do we want artificially green lawns or naturally blue springs?
3. **Visit a spring and take your loved ones.** Support the vibrant and vital economies our springs enable.

4. **Volunteer or donate** to organizations working towards springs restoration and protection, and land conservation.
5. **Support Florida farmers** who use water wisely, grow the right crop in the right place and stop pollution at its source by avoiding chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
6. **Contact your local officials.** Tell them that you want clean water, not green water.
7. **Stay informed.** Are our water managers promoting polluter profits or protecting public waters?
8. **Speak up.** The survival of our springs depends on public advocacy.
9. **Vote** as if the fate of our springs hangs in the balance. IT DOES.
10. **Create your Own Springs Project.** Dream and scheme, collaborate and innovate. You too can be a voice for our springs.

Go to [springseternalproject.org](http://springseternalproject.org) for more information. The site can provide information and listings or organizations to which you can donate. It can also give you details on taking action to help save our springs.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The Weeki Wachee Spring system is amazing for so many reasons but one bit of data is just cool: some of its massive cavern systems are just 200 feet below US 19.

**SPIT IN THE BUCKET: IT'S A  
START**  
**Priscilla Watkins**

Money approved by the Legislature in its 2014 session for Everglades and springs restoration was finally apportioned on September 14<sup>th</sup> by the Joint Legislative Budget Commission.

Springs restoration will get \$25 million for 27 projects recommended by Governor Rick Scott and the DEP Secretary Herschel Vinyard in August. It will be a multi-year effort added to other funds from Water Management Districts and county governments. Project life spans were not given.

Only one of the springs funded is in Citrus County: the Chassahowitzka River, an Outstanding Florida Water. Up to \$6 million has been set aside to upgrade the wastewater plant in Sugarmill Woods allowing reclaimed waste water to be used at nearby golf courses for irrigation. The News Release said DEP will add in \$4 million and SWFWMD will provide \$2 million. However those dollars support existing required processes under the Clean Water Act, and are not directly involved. Citrus County is expected to add \$4 million to match the DEP amount.

The Chassahowitzka River is suffering from nitrate pollutants as well as reduced flow and sea water rising. How much impact the reduction of fresh water for golf course irrigation will help is expected to be minimal, but is a start towards helping with flow.

The state has more than 1,000 springs, nearly all are drastically impaired by excess drawdowns from the aquifer and pollutants. Five of the state's 33 first-magnitude springs are located in or next to Citrus County: Weeki

Wachee, Chassahowitzka, Homosassa, Crystal River, and Rainbow.

**KATHERINE'S BAY –  
HOMOSSASSA SPRINGS**

If you live off Hall's River Road in Homosassa, you may want to take note of this. On October 9, 2014, the Board of County Commissioners voted 5-0 to approve a project at Katherine's Bay, a property which lies approximately 2 miles west of Highway 19 off Hall's River Road. The applicant can now move forward in developing 9.95 acres. The developer plans to have 55 sites which will be used to accommodate large, upscale recreational vehicles.

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## AMENDMENT 1

### FLORIDA WATER AND LAND INITIATIVE

The **Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative, Amendment 1** is on the [November 4, 2014 ballot](#) in the state of [Florida](#) as an [initiated constitutional amendment](#). The measure, upon voter approval, would dedicate 33 percent of net revenues from the existing excise tax on documents to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund.

The Land Acquisition Trust Fund would be expended to acquire and improve conservation easements, wildlife management areas, wetlands, forests, fish and wildlife habitats, beaches and shores, recreational trails and parks, urban open space, rural landscapes, working farms and ranches, historical and geological sites, lands protecting water and drinking water resources and lands in the Everglades Agricultural Areas and the Everglades Protection Area. The fund is designed to manage and restore natural systems and to enhance public access and recreational use of conservation lands.

The leading organization campaigning for the initiative is *Florida's Water and Land Legacy, Inc.*

For a referred amendment to win in Florida, it must win a supermajority vote of 60 percent of those voting on the question, according to [Section 5 of Article XI](#). This change was made via [Amendment 3 in 2006](#).

This amendment does not increase or decrease state revenues. The state revenue restricted to the purposes specified in the amendment is estimated to be \$648 million in Fiscal Year 2015-16 and grows to \$1.268 billion by the twentieth year. Whether this results in

any additional state expenditures depends upon future legislative actions and cannot be determined. Similarly, the impact on local government revenues, if any, cannot be determined. No additional local government costs are expected.

### **Background**

The Land Trust Acquisition Fund (LATF) was created by the [Florida Legislature](#) in 1963. The LATF was designed to fund the Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Program, which would primarily purchase land for parks and recreation areas. Originally, the legislature allocated revenue from a five percent tax on outdoor clothing and equipment, including bathing suits. In 1968, the legislature abandoned the tax and funded the LATF through the sale of recreation bonds. These bonds were paid for by a documentary stamp tax on real estate transactions and financial documents. Since 2009, however, appropriations for the fund have been slashed. The initiative is an attempt to provide a new revenue source for the LATF.

### **Support**

The measure is sponsored by the organization *Florida's Water and Land Legacy, Inc*

**For pros and cons of this  
Amendment, go to  
[ballotpedia.org](http://ballotpedia.org)**

## WHY DO WE NEED TO PROTECT OUR SPRINGS?

### Iris Rose

- **Fish:** Many of Florida's most common and also unique fish use our springs – they provide a natural aquarium for them. Because we are close to the Gulf of Mexico, our springs are home to a diverse group of fish – both fresh and saltwater.
- **Birds:** The blue heron, pelicans, osprey, eagles, and many other birds are found at our springs. The springs are a source of food for them.
- **Mammals:** Otters can be found at the springs year around. Most popular and loved by all - the manatee - finds the warm waters of the springs a refuge in the winter.
- **Reptiles and amphibians:** The American alligator and loggerhead turtle can be found in and around the springs.
- **Plants:** Plant life such as cypress trees, lilies and lush underwater eel grasses are supported by the constant year round temperatures. These grasses provide a freshwater food web that is among the most unique in all of North America.

So, next time you're in or near a spring, think about all of the wonders that are going on around, above and below you. With a single visit to a spring, you can see a manatee, an alligator, a river otter, a variety of fish and birds – **LIFE!**

## ON A FINAL NOTE – SOME GOOD NEWS!

A study which was conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey has found that sensible rules on pesticides has shown some improvement in America's rivers and streams. 200 major rivers and streams across the nation were examined. Previously, from 1992 to 2001, 17 percent of agricultural streams and 5 percent of mixed land-use streams had pesticide levels above that considered healthy for humans. But from 2002 to 2011, only one agricultural stream and no urban or other streams exceeded that pesticide level.

Reductions in the use of heavy chemicals was credited for this decline. Also, we as homeowners are finally using more efficient and environmentally friendly methods to treat our homes and lawns. The same could be said for farmers.

In addition, the government nudged the pesticide industry to move away from producing the harshest agents so less toxic products are being produced.

So when you hear that clean water regulations and maintaining wetlands are job –killers, don't believe it. Regulations, private enterprise and personal responsibility can all contribute to the greater good. It also shows how adaptable manufacturers and consumers can be when they are committed to solving a health challenge. We recognize the importance of water quality.

In summary, we as a nation have a long way to go to clean and restore our waters to what they once were. We can all play a part in helping to keep America's water and streams healthy for everything and everyone.