



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

Sierra Club

Newsletter

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 VOLUME 42 • NUMBER 4 • April 2012

Fighting Slime Crime

Implications for Florida Water Quality

BY CRIS COSTELLO

Nutrient pollution in Florida is a controversial issue. In the last few years, we have experienced the worst toxic algae outbreaks ever seen on the Caloosahatchee and St. Johns Rivers, the choking beyond recognition of our state's most iconic springs with algae, and repeated red tides and fish kills along our beaches. At the same time, we have experienced a full court press from the state's Department of Agriculture and the fertilizer and pest control industries to defeat strong urban fertilizer controls that can help to prevent such environmental disasters.

Despite the controversy, nearly 50 municipal and county governments along the southwest Gulf Coast have adopted the strongest urban fertilizer codes found not only in the state but also in the nation. Each of those strong ordinances was adopted because local residents mobilized to get the job done. In addition, the Florida Association of Counties, Florida League of Cities, Florida Stormwater Association, hunter/angler advocates and environmental organi-

zations have worked together to defeat attempts to preempt local regulation of urban fertilizer management in the state legislature six legislative sessions in a row. These efforts to reduce nutrient pollution at the local level coincide with a statewide movement to compel the EPA to once and for all meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act and ensure the implementation of adequately protective nitrogen and phosphorous pollution limits for Florida's waters. Unfortunately, that movement has been met with a joint effort between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the state's biggest polluters to replace the EPA pollution limits with an ineffective state rule. That struggle is being fought in the courtroom, the Florida legislature and the U.S. Congress, and will be ultimately determined, like in the urban fertilizer fight, by the level of public involvement we are able to mobilize.

Cris Costello has been a Regional Organizing Representative for the Sierra Club since May 2007. In her current position, she coordinates the Florida Red Tide Campaign, a sub-campaign of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Resilient Habitat Campaign, to prevent harmful algal blooms in both coastal and inland waters by eliminating point and non-point sources of nutrient pollution. During her four-plus years with the Red Tide Campaign, she has mobilized concerned citizens,

GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, April 5, 7:30 p.m.
 Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus ** room 3118 **

FIGHTING SLIME CRIME

CRIS COSTELLO
 SIERRA CLUB REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE



civic organizations, homeowner associations, waterfront businesses, religious institutions and partner environmental organizations around the following issues:

- Local urban fertilizer management administrative policies and ordinances
- State-level urban fertilizer management administrative policies
- Local control versus state preemption of urban fertilizer regulation
- Numeric nutrient criteria for Florida's fresh and estuarine waters

WATER WARS	2
ICO UPDATE	4
STEARNS' BRILLIANT IDEA TO SELL PUBLIC LANDS	6

Whiskey Is for Drinkin'

BY DAVE WILSON

With the publication of his classic tome "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations" in 1776, Adam Smith will always be remembered as the founding father of capitalism. However, within this work, Smith provides the reader with some fascinating commentaries on "value." Consider this quote from page 44: "Nothing is more useful than water: but it will purchase scarce anything; scarce anything can be had in exchange for it. A diamond, on the contrary, has scarce any use-value; but a very great quantity of other goods may frequently be had in exchange for it."

This diamond-water paradox is fast fading in Florida. On March 7, I attended a public meeting of the North Florida Regional Water Supply Partnership at the Alachua City Hall. The mission of this partnership between the St. Johns River and Suwannee River water management districts is "protection of natural resources and cost-effective, sustainable water supplies." The stated purpose of the meeting was to bring stakeholders together in a public forum to discuss water supply issues.

While several hundred people attended, only a dozen spoke. While the tone of the meeting was flat in comparison with the anger expressed at the November meeting in Lake City, items mentioned included the fact that the Jacksonville Electric Authority could be pumping 155 million gallons a day from the Floridan Aquifer by 2031, and the Adena Springs Ranch near Fort McCoy is asking for a consumptive use permit

to pump 13.5 million gallons a day to irrigate 30,000 acres of pasture for grass-fed cattle and a slaughterhouse operation. Also discussed was the formation of a Stakeholders Committee to provide citizens input to the Partnership. The only problem is that environmentalists have been allotted only two of the 12 seats. The rest will go to users such as agriculture, industrial mining, and commercial power generation.

After the meeting, Whitey Markle and I decided that the water grab is on big-time, and the real mission is to give the water away before it is too late.

What can you do? At this month's general meeting, Cris Costello will be talking about tracking "Slime Crimes" in Florida.

In words attributed to Mark Twain, "Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting." If you have any interest in these issues, please contact us. Whitey and I need all the help we can get.

Visit the National and Local Sierra Club Websites!

National: www.sierraclub.org

Local: <http://ssjsierra.org>

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News from the Conservation Chair

Moneyed Citizens Buying Privilege in the Water War of Florida

BY WHITEY MARKLE

A billionaire named Frank Stronach is buying up and developing a huge part of our area in the name of good beefsteak. Not only has he bought up most of Fort McCoy in northeast Marion County, but he has also bought up approximately one-third of Levy County for the same supposed purpose. Obviously, Mr. Stronach loves water, like we all do. He has applied for a consumptive use permit (CPU) to pump 13.5 million gallons per day to 30,000 acres in Ft. McCoy, supposedly for the purpose of growing grass for the Angus cattle. That permit will very likely be approved by the St. Johns River Water Management District.

There will be a public information workshop at Central Florida College at 6p.m. on April 3 put on by the newly formed Silver Springs Alliance. Perhaps this newsletter will reach you before then. If so, please join us there.

This new group was formed in the last few months to protect Florida's premier landmark. Adena Springs Ranch has asked for 89 ten-inch wells and over 400 four-inch wells over the 30,000 acres. The CUP equals the amount of clean

aquifer water the City of Ocala uses each day.

We suspect the same kind of water grab will occur in Levy County as well. After all, the public has been told lately by the water management districts that the districts will be amalgamated along with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection from this point forward.

What this really means is the Governor is streamlining the processes involved in future water transfer. Some authors have coined the term "The Californication of Florida," meaning that eventually there will be a grid of pipelines - North, South, East and West - all across Florida, so that whatever water is available here in the rural north will also be available equally in the already polluted and over-populated southern part of Florida. After all, by national law, our water is not "our" water.

Originally, the policy of the state was to require local governments to seek local water before asking for regional water. They also were "required" to seek "alternative water supplies," such as desalination and recycling before drawing off surface water from the lakes, rivers and streams. However, that policy went by the wayside in 2005 when the City of Sanford was given a huge daily CUP to

use part of the upper St. Johns River for their municipal supply.

So much for rules in Florida.

In Keystone Heights, the Clay/Putnam water augmentation meetings continue. We were told by the St. Johns River Water Management District's representatives last week that all of the "stakeholders" are merely there to listen, not to advise. The

most serious part of the discussions have been an approved \$500,000 for the purpose of drilling a "pilot" well to pump over a million

"So much for rules in Florida."

gallons per day in an experiment to see how much of the pumped water the sandy-bottomed lakes will hold. The biggest problem with this experiment is that the pumped water will end up being from the sub-Floridan aquifer, which is unlike our Floridan water in that (some experts think) it will cause chemical problems in the targeted lakes. They also are talking of injecting recycled ("reclaimed") water back into the aquifer. Experts also agree that reclaimed/recycled water has drugs, chemicals and pathogens that may permanently affect our drinking water.

Again, the SSJ Conservation Committee needs volunteers from the membership to help wage these fights for our natural resources.



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Inner City Outings: Connecting Children With Nature

BY MARYVONNE DEVENSKY

As months went by, so did the Inner City Outings. On Feb. 29, the Lake Forest ICO group – 11 students in all – went to Morningside Nature Center for a long hike along the Sandhill Road and the North Perimeter Trail. The hike turned into a run through the palm fronds for some, while others observed baby spiders and termites along the beautiful trails on the warm afternoon. We stopped for a snack by the new bridge over the (very dry) swamp pond. Thank you to our volunteers Sallie Dickinson, Gladys Lane and Harvey Goldstein.

Then on March 24, the Lake Forest group joined the Girl Power group to visit the Butterfly Rainforest at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Going through the two doors that open into the rainforest is like stepping into a very special “space.” It is a world where butterflies pass you by and stop for a while on your shirt (they like white shirts the most). Most of us slowed down and sat on the benches to be part of the rainforest and butterfly world for a little while. Students took pictures of the birds, small Chinese painted quails and fish that are also part of this very special place created by the museum.

After touring the rainforest, we explored the other exhibits of the Museum of Natural History. Then we had a picnic near the Natural Area and took a walk along the Natural Area created near the Phillips Center. Thank you to the Compassionate Outreach Ministries Church for providing a van for our group, and to James, our driver.

At the end of the day, the students asked, “When is the next outing?”

Next month, on April 18, we plan to explore the Green Acres Park, a beautiful space in the heart of Gainesville.



ICO students visited the Butterfly Conservatory at the Florida Museum of Natural History, where Ronald met a Morpho Blue butterfly (top). Photos courtesy of Maryvonne Devensky.



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Paynes Prairie Bird Walk Reportback from Feb. 25 Outing

BY DAVE WILSON

Despite chilly weather and a brisk breeze, 18 hearty souls ventured out on Paynes Prairie at 8a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 25, to see what wildfowl might be present that day.

Quite frankly, I was worried because I had conducted my own reconnaissance trip a few days before and had seen few birds of interest. I attributed the poor showing to the severe drought we have experienced the past few months (and years). Little did I know there is a reason to employ experts like Adam and Gina Kent to lead such an outing.

When you are with people who know what they are doing, you discover the unusual. With even a quick glance at Adam's report (filed on the website at ssjsierra.org), you can see we had an amazing day. Not only did we see the usual birds that I had seen many times before, but we also saw birds I had never heard of, including a sora, a yellow-rumped warbler and a northern parula. Since Adam is an expert on sparrows, it is not surprising that we saw such a variety of this species. All in all, everyone had a great day.

To see more photographs from the birdwalk, check out the "Outings" page on our website at ssjsierra.org.

Photos courtesy of Dave Wilson.



Bottle Battle Winner Announced Plastic Water Bottles - Reduce the Use

For the last few months, the Suwannee-St. Johns Sierra Club has been collecting environmental projects created by high school and college-age affiliated groups to help spread the word about the detriments of plastic bottles to the environment. Specifically, SSJ commissioned students to help educate the public on the environmental, health, and economic issues related to the use of single-serve bottled water.

We offered a cash prize in three categories:

- Best video, three to five minutes, \$700.
- Best music recording, three to five minutes, \$400.
- Best mixed media, poster and brochure, \$400.

Now it's time to present the winner(s), and we invite you to the public ceremony as part of the 5th Avenue Arts Festival in Gainesville. On Friday, April 20, at 6p.m., we will honor the winner and show the group's award-winning project in the A. Quinn Jones School auditorium at NW 10th Street and 7th Avenue.

Join us to celebrate an end to unnecessary waste and a future of education in partnership with student groups.

Stearns Must Abandon Absurd Idea to Sell Off National Parks

BY DAVE WILSON

The following article was originally published as a guest editorial in the Orlando Sentinel on March 25. See more at orlandosentinel.com.

There are few things in our nation that represent our Teddy Roosevelt-Republican spirit better than our national parks. In every corner of the United States, these parks provide resplendent beauty that can be enjoyed by all — and every year Americans make more than 280 million visits to our nation's parks to do just that.

With family and friends, I have personally visited a multitude of parks including Bryce, Zion, Glacier, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Acadia, Mount Rainier, the Smokies and, of course, the Everglades.

In Colorado, I have climbed 33 of the state's 54 14,000-foot peaks including Long's Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park. I love these parks and have no doubt that millions of others feel the same way.

In Florida, we are particularly blessed to have 11 national parks, preserves and memorials within our borders. In addition, we have thousands of acres of national forests and wildlife reserves. We like them so much that last year more than 10 million of us took the time to visit.

What's often overlooked about our parks, however, is that they aren't just places for families to relax and nature to thrive. They are actually a plus for the economy.

In 2010, in the middle of an economic downturn, visitors to Florida's national parks generated nearly \$600 million in economic activity for our state, supporting more than 8,000 Florida jobs.

So what exactly is U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns thinking? Recently, Stearns remarked that we should "sell off our national parks," likening

them to a luxury item we can no longer afford.

While we understand a human error when someone fails to say exactly what he means, Stearns actually reiterated this thought. Once such a remark is reaffirmed, it becomes a position — and it's hard to know where to begin with such an absurd position.

At best, if Stearns' ideas came to fruition, it would mean that our once-pristine parks would be degraded by high entry fees and interstate-type eyesores. Imagine paying \$100 to get the family into the Everglades only to be surrounded by billboards.

At worst, Stearns' reckless ideas could lead to more drilling in our parks and off our shores, leading to the destruction of our national treasures while we are left mopping up megamesses.

Stearns says he suggested putting our parks on the auction block because he's concerned about our national budget deficit.

We understand his concern — and it would be much easier to believe if he weren't so reckless with the rest of our tax dollars.

Stearns has consistently supported special tax treatment for big oil companies. Right now, oil companies are raising prices at the pump and

pulling in record billions in profits, all while being awarded more than \$4 billion in tax subsidies and handouts from the federal government every year.

In comparison, the entire budget for our National Parks is slightly less than \$3 billion per year. Stearns knows full-well these budget arguments don't hold water.

Not only is the National Parks budget a pittance when compared to our huge outlays for defense, Stearns' own district benefits economically from the millions of visitors to the Ocala National Forest sitting adjacent to his district.

While we understand that Stearns is under pressure for a variety of different political reasons, we now need strong voices more than ever that support the special places that make America unique.

We need champions who recognize that nature is not ours to spoil.

And we need forward-thinking legislators who recognize that our parks are part of our national legacy that not only belong to us, but to future generations as well.

I urge Floridians to make their voices heard so that Cliff Stearns reconsiders his position.



Zion National Park, Washington County, Utah, March 2011.
Photos by Markusnl, courtesy of CreativeCommons.org.

Stearns' Brilliant Idea for Selling Park Land

The following was published as a letter to the editor on March 20 in the Gainesville Sun. See more at www.gainesville.com.

BY DAVE WILSON

As a life-long hiker in our national parks, I applaud U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns' efforts to balance the federal budget by selling off federal land. As a hiker of the Appalachian Trail, I think it would be great to have a Starbucks at Clingmans Dome.

Heat stroke would be much less a problem on the Bright Angel Trail in the Grand Canyon if Coca-Cola provided ice cold bottles of Dasani along the way.

Yosemite would provide a great setting for a Disney theme park.

My wife would love to steam her own critter at a Red Lobster along the shores of Lower Geysers Basin in Yellowstone.

Since Stearns failed to mention which parks should be placed on the block, give him a bit of help by sending him your suggestions.

SSJ Sierra Club Celebrates Earth Day!

Tuesday, April 24

10a.m. to 2p.m.

Oak Grove

Santa Fe College Campus

3000 NW 83rd St.

Gainesville, FL 32606

Reportback from Santa Fe Canoe Trip, March 11

While this trip was originally scheduled for February 26th, it was postponed because of the prospect of canoeing in a cold rain. While such inclement weather might be tolerated on a hike, it can sure make for a miserable canoe trip.

For the rescheduled outing Bob Kerckel led a dozen Sierrans on a late afternoon paddle on the Santa Fe River beginning at the Route 47 Bridge. Bob's strategy was to have us put our canoes in the water at the time when he figured the college kids would be headed home. Sure enough, just as we put our boats in the water several other parties were pulling their boats out and headed for their cars. We almost had the river to ourselves. Since the water level was low and fed by Ginny, Devil's Eye, and the multitude of other springs along the river, the water was almost clear. Despite a few clouds and a warm drizzling rain, his strategy worked to perfection. The serenity was magnificent. Along the way we spotted a turkey, a kingfisher, and a few mullet jumping. Lilies were everywhere in the woods. Bob also pointed out a number of geologic features including a cut in the limestone that drops 50 feet into the aquifer. After two miles of paddling two miles upstream, we reached a quiet dinner spot on the bank. Everyone had a great time pulling out a variety of dinners and snacks varying from chicken to sandwiches, to birdseed to wine. A good time was had by all.



Want to get involved with the SSJ Sierra Club newsletter?

Writers and Editors Needed!

Contact Newsletter Editor Jessica Newman at jnew751@gmail.com for more information.

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APRIL 2012 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL 3—Public Forum on Silver Springs and Adena Springs, 6p.m., in the Ewers Century Center Klein Conference Room at the College of Central Florida in Ocala at 3001 SW College Road. See pg. 3 for details.

APRIL 5—SSJ Sierra Club Group general meeting, Thursday, 7:30p.m., in the Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus, room 3118. See Pg. 1 for details.

APRIL 12—SSJ Sierra Club Executive Committee meeting, Thursday, 7pm, at the Santa Fe College Downtown Gainesville Campus Board meeting room.

APRIL 14—SSJ outing opportunity to bike Micanopy's back country road. Contact Kate Lee at 352-378-2344 for more information.

APRIL 21—Great American Clean-Up at Palm Point Park, 7401 Lakeshore Drive, from 8a.m. to 12p.m. For more information, please email Riley Peck at peckfamily@cox.net.

APRIL 27—Folding Party for the May newsletter at Scott Camil's house. Call 352-375-2563 for more information.

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