

## **February Newsletter**

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### **Suwannee-St. Johns Sierra Club Grou February 2016 Newsletter: Plum Pudding, Water Works Presentation**

#### **This Month's Meeting: Water Works**

Four Sierra Club executive committee members will be sharing a new presentation describing the impact of problems with Florida's water resources upon people living in Marion, Citrus and Levy counties. Water Works: Stand Up and Act Now is an interactive, presenter-led PowerPoint program that we will compare to data we gathered for Alachua County. The presentation will feature Kathryn Taubert, Whitey Markle, Gary Green and Jon Brainard.

"This program differs because it makes difficult things easy to understand," says Whitey Markle, Conservation Chair for the Suwannee-St. Johns Sierra Club. "Water Works translates scientific facts into common language, detailing the specific impact of Florida's and the tri-county's water problems on jobs, property values, lifestyles, ecotourism and most importantly, our drinking water," further states Markle.

Developed by a Sierra Club Working Group from a variety of scientific and governmental resources, Water Works: Stand Up and Act Now also describes the impact of population growth and development in the next 15 years upon current and future water resources in the tri-county area as well as specific things individuals can do to help.



## Letter from the Chair

By Maryvonne Devensky

### **RALLY BY PROTECT PAYNES PRAIRIE COALITION**

As I am writing this, we are on the eve of the January 23 Rally to Protect Paynes Prairie, organized by a coalition of local environmental group members and community people concerned about the future of the State Parks. I know that some of you (a lot of you I mean) will be there even in the cold and windy weather that is predicted...I feel it will be a success as we all want to tell our Governor and our DEP Secretary Mr. Jon Steverson: "Leave Paynes Prairie Alone" or "The State Parks system is good: It is not broken. Don't fix it!". I want to thank everyone on the planning committee, and also everyone who took the time to come!!!



Now, on January 26, I can write that the Rally last Saturday was very successful with more than 300 people attending the event. However we all need to keep on educating friends, neighbors and colleagues about the fact that timbering and hunting are already allowed on more than 6 Million acres of public land in Florida (Yes 6 Million, you read it). So we need to fight to keep our State Parks (660.000 acres in Florida) for recreation, ONLY recreation. State Parks are a place to shoot animals only with our cameras. To help distribute flyers to the public about the threats to our State Parks either at LaChua Trail or at Sweetwater Wetlands Park, please contact Maryvonne at [maryvonne.deven@gmail.com](mailto:maryvonne.deven@gmail.com). Link with [www.ProtectPaynesPrairie.org](http://www.ProtectPaynesPrairie.org) to sign

the petition and to stay informed on the future of the parks.

### **WE OPPOSE THE SABAL TRAIL PIPELINE:**

On Saturday January 16, some SSJ Sierra members went from Gainesville to the Suwannee River State Park for a meeting with Suwannee Sierrans, WWALS and the Spectrabusters alliance members. The meeting was well attended by 40 people full of energy to oppose this project. We shared our concerns and we came up with a plan of action and 2 petitions. To give you some information shared at the meeting, please read my letter to the Suwannee County Board of County Commissioners dated Tuesday January 19, 2016.

Link to letter to Suwannee BOCC....

Link to Petition against Sabal Trail Pipeline...

## **ICO OUTINGS**

December 9 was at Sweetwater Wetland Park and January 12, 2016 was at the Cade Museum. They say a photo is worth a thousand words, so you can see how involved and happy some of these kids are...

We are having an ICO Planning meeting on February 2, at 6:00pm. We invite anyone interested in joining this program. Contact me at [maryvonne.deven@gmail.com](mailto:maryvonne.deven@gmail.com) for more information.

## **PLUM CREEK**

Thank you to Mike Byerly for speaking at our January general meeting and updating us on the Plum Creek Development. If you have any interest in Plum Creek and want to be informed on the 2nd proposed plan for the County, please mark your calendars to attend two Meetings: **Tuesday, February 16th at 5:00 pm Eastside High School Auditorium** to listen to the County Staff arguments followed by the Plum Creek Presentation. **Public Comment will be open after the Plum Creek presentation.** Then on **Thursday, February 18, at 5:00pm, Public comment starts at 5:00 pm.** Commission discussion and vote will follow public comments.

For more information: please go to [www.Standbyourplan.org](http://www.Standbyourplan.org). **Please come and prepare a short 3 minute comment on what you think about Plum Creek and Envision Alachua! The Commission wants to hear your voice!**

Well, now is the best time of the year to enjoy hiking on Paynes Prairie, so get out there and see what you missed on La Chua Trail last Monday, MLK holiday.....See the Photos....AND if you want to volunteer to help Protect Paynes Prairie, let me know. We need to educate the public about the change proposed by our Governor for all the State Parks. Sierra Club Florida is planning a statewide **"HAVE A HEART - LOVE YOUR PARKS"** event on Saturday, February 13. Go to [www.SierraClubNews.org](http://www.SierraClubNews.org) for further information.

## **Conservation Report** **by Whitey Markle**

### **WATER BILL HOAX**

The *WATER BILL*, SB 552, was signed into law by the good governor on January 21. The Republicans in Tallahassee were absolutely giddy. The TV room was occupied by the perpetrators: The Bill's designer (he claims to be the "author" although we know all Tallahassee bills are written by lobbyists), State Senator Charlie Dean was there to take credit by the governor for his "3 years of hard work" on the bill. Well, it wasn't near 3 years in the making. It was passed by several committees in the Senate in the 2015 session but never got to the floor because of a logjam over medical funding that caused very lengthy debate and subsequent

adjournment. A special session followed the regular session, but Water wasn't mentioned. When the legislature reconvened, we had done our homework in lobbying the legislators involved, including suggestions of amendments to the water bill. David Cullen, Florida Sierra Club's Tallahassee lobbyist suggested some 17 amendments to key Senators and the Florida Springs Council's legislative liaison, Dr. Bob Palmer introduced another 4 amendments at the same time to some of the same key legislators. On television and in the newspapers, Senator Dean agreed to "listen to any suggestions on amendments". Senate President Gardiner and House Speaker Crisafulli both said there would be a "fast-track" movement on the Water Bill and no amendments would be allowed.

At this point, Senate Bill 552 had not changed one word since its stall at the end of the 2015 session; and it didn't change. A grand total of 2 Senate committees "vetted" the bill. Charlie Dean (lame duck from Inverness) chaired the Senate Environmental Conservation and Preservation Committee and Senator Hayes of Umatilla chaired the Appropriations Committee. Eventually Senator Soto, a Republican, introduced the 4 Amendments recommended by the Florida Springs Council into the final committee hearing, but Senator Dean's committee and senate staff nixed every one. Senator Soto withdrew his amendments and the Bill passed the Senate committee unanimously.

The fact is Senator Dean didn't write the Water Bill, was unable to debate any challengers on the issues in the bill, and was unwilling to deliberate any suggestions from the environmental community. At least his House Counterpart, Representative Caldwell who chairs the House State Affairs Committee and sponsored a companion bill in the house didn't lead the public into believing he would allow or consider any amendments. He told us before the session began that "We are on a fast-track with this bill and we won't consider any amendments".

And "Fast-track" it was. The new session began in Tallahassee in the second week of January, 2016. The Water Bill was one of the first bills to hit the full floor of the legislature . By then David Cullen and Bob Palmer had prompted all the amendments in the appropriate places. All 4 amendments introduced to the floor were Dr. Palmer's and one of the 4 (monitoring) was also one suggested by Cullen. The "debate" was a series of denials by Senator Dean that any one of them had merit. They were overruled by a voice vote and the Water Bill was passed with 2 NAY votes by the Florida legislature.

The governor said in his press interview after he signed the Water Bill, "This is a landmark bill that will protect Florida's water for our children and grandchildren". We can look for more of the same tactics this session. "We're gonna have a lot of fun this session!" said the governor , and they all laughed.

And the water turns blacker. Agriculture and utilities are immune to the same water policy we citizens must abide by and private entities are allowed to withdraw and pollute our water with fewer state and local regulations. Water Management Districts that lack for water (for growth) will be able to withdraw water from more conservation-oriented Districts. This is the beginning of the *CALIFORNICATION OF FLORIDA*, the beginning of a pipeline grid like that of water-broke California. The bottom line is Florida already has too many people, there are already more gallons (30 million/day) permitted for pumping than can be recharged . In addition, the governor and his minions have a one track mindset about growth. Obviously the regulation of finite resources like our water is an irritating obstacle to their plans, so why should they bother with any debate or deliberation that would hinder their “success”?

There is a constitutional revision commission forming now for the purpose of the periodic review and improvement of our state constitution. We need to work hard to secure our role in the governmental process. Obviously appointed authorities like the Public Service Commission, the Florida Wildlife Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, etc. need to become elected like 95% of the United States.

### **OCKLAWAHA/SILVER STUDY**

The SSJ Group, the St. Johns Riverkeeper, the Florida Defenders of the Environment, and the Silver Springs Alliance have negotiated a contract with the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Science Center for Economic Research to conduct and analyze the economic impacts of recreation in the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers. The study will be conducted at various recreational sites on those water bodies over the next year. Our purpose for the study is to gain a realistic view of the economic activity surrounding the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers which gives us a very useful tool in negotiating the eventual restoration of those rivers. Hopefully this data will end the decades-long argument over the economic impacts of the area.

The study will be conducted in 3 phases which will more-or-less coincide with the seasonal recreational activities that occur. Each phase will cost around \$15,000, so each of the 4 organizations will be responsible for their proportionate amount of funding. In our case, we have already committed \$2500 to be matched by \$2500 for the Florida Sierra Club Chapter, and we are planning to raise funds as the study continues. We hope our members and fellow environmentalists will be generous in helping us achieve this funding goal this year. (We will look at the results of phase 1 before committing to phase 2, etc.). Any and all contributions to the Ocklawaha/Silver River Economic Study Fund will be much appreciated. Items like Porsches, weekend cabin rentals, kayaks, canoes, guided tours, etc. that we can use to generate funds will be just as appreciated as cash donations. We will keep our members abreast of the details as we develop this fundraising campaign.

## **FRACKING FOR GAS IN FLORIDA LIKELY REALITY**

House Bill 191 has passed through the State Affairs House subcommittee and is headed for the house floor for finalization. Rep. Shawn Harrison, a Tampa Republican who spoke in support of the bill, said it would place regulations on fracking. "Fracking is currently legal in Florida, and the bill is going to place guidelines on it," Harrison said. But critics contend that fracking poses threats to the environment and to people's health and question the need for drilling as oil prices have dropped.

If these proposed regulations are anything like the federal regulations, we won't have a clue about the drillers' techniques nor materials. The *HALLIBURTON RULE* in the federal system exempts frackers from disclosing the toxic chemicals they use in their destructive process. I would not be surprised to see the same kind of rules in this state's regulations. As David Cullen stated to the press, "There are better ways to get the energy Florida needs." I would suggest a strong commitment to research, development, and implementation of solar electric generation as a beginning for the eventual shift to renewable energy in Florida.

## **STATE PARKS, CONSERVATION LANDS FACE MORE CONTROVERSY**

Florida's state parks and conservation lands are in for a new round of danger. State Representative Matt Caldwell (R-Ft. Myers) said lately that he intends to introduce a bill to allow further timbering, grazing, and hunting in Florida's state parks. So it looks a lot like the state parks' plan for privatization and exploit which is unarguably opposed by the vast majority of Florida citizens, as well as the further sale of state-owned conservation lands not inside the state parks suffering the same fate as that of the Amendment 1 mandate and the plight of the endangered Florida Black Bear.....Total disregard for the public's opinion . These guys seem to be an elite group of rulers who push their policy through the legislature regardless of the public's concerns.

One member of the Florida Sierra Club Chapter's State Parks Committee stated in a recent conference call that in his home state of Tennessee, ALL state parks are now filled with golf courses and condominiums. This is just a glimpse of what may happen here in Florida if we don't stay abreast of these guys who blatantly disregard their constituents. We must keep up the vehement protests. These guys don't go away.

## **PLUM CREEK LAND USE CHANGE HEARING COULD BE A GAME-CHANGER**

Plum Creek's application for a Comprehensive Plan change which will determine the fate of 52,000 acres of wetlands and wildlife corridor in eastern Alachua County will be the subject of 2 public hearings at Eastside High School in Gainesville on February 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. We should all try to attend and show support for the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan as it stands.

Our friend , George Sibley, has finished the podcast *PLUM PUDDING* that completely describes the Plum Creek/Envision Alachua snow job. It is a must listen.

<http://ssjsierra.org/conservation/plumpudding/>

Hopefully Commissioner Hutchinson will come to his senses and listen to his electorate for a change. There must be a time when politics and manipulation end and environmental protection begins. We hope to see as many people as possible at the hearing.

### **Tri-County Working Group Update**

The Tri-County Working Group of the Suwannee St. Johns Sierra Club welcomed **Rick Zay** of Solar Lights and More to its monthly meeting in Crystal River. We were pleased to have the company's owner, Kevin McMonigle, as a guest as well to answer questions.

Rick spoke about the history of solar energy and its importance to Florida, especially in the future with the need for renewables that do not contribute to climate change. We learned about new projects in Florida, at the Coleman Prison, Disney World and in the town of Fruitland Park. The trends and future look bright for solar which is good news for all of us!

Sierra Club is very committed to solar energy and our working group has decided to produce a new PowerPoint that will deal with solar energy in the state. Plans for it have just begun recently.

Next month, the tri-county group will meet at 5:30 in the Dunnellon Public Library on February 16. If you live in the counties of Marion, Levy or Citrus, please join us.

### **Water Works: Stand up and Act Now!**

*Water Works: Stand Up and Act Now!*, the new educational program developed by the Tri-County Working Group is off to a rousing start, with more than 14 presentations scheduled through April, 2016. A facilitated, interactive PowerPoint program, *Water Works* describes problems with Florida's water resources upon people in Marion, Citrus and Levy counties. What makes *Water Works* different from similar presentations is that it makes difficult things easy to understand by translating scientific facts into common language, focusing upon the impact to local jobs, property values, lifestyles, ecotourism and drinking water. Using regional economic data, before and after photos, questions and answers and handouts, *Water Works* helps participants understand the problem locally, what's in it for them and their communities and how to help.

Developed by a team of 10 Tri-County Sierra Club members, *Water Works* serves as a model for other SSJ counties. Instructional designer Kathryn Taubert, as a newly elected member of the SSJ Executive Committee, is now available to help, at no charge, other SSJ county Sierra club members who wish to develop similar programs for their communities. To learn more about this new service offered by the SSJ Ex-Com, contact Gary Green, [garryegreen@centurylink.net](mailto:garryegreen@centurylink.net) or 352.817.8077.

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