

Bob Knight: Our quality of life is supported by springs

July 19, 2018



In his article in the [Gainesville Sun](#), OSFR advisor Dr. Robert Knight describes the importance of springs in our economy and our life. The very visible failures of our water managers are apparent in South Florida, but serious problems exist throughout the state.

Reaction is slowly coming, but our leaders act only under extreme pressure and almost never with forethought.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

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Posted Jul 18, 2018 at 2:00 AM

Summer in North Florida can be brutal. Working outside during 90-plus degree days is utterly draining. Just six hours spent landscaping and mowing on a recent Saturday made me feel like I was 150 years old.

I admire the many working folks who endure long days in Florida's intense sun and humidity. But why do those who have a choice continue to live here and why do more people move to Florida each day?

Visit the new Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park and, if you can get in, you will see what your neighbors do to tolerate the summer heat. They spend the day in the springs.

Our springs are 72 degrees year-round. Take a dip or a long soak in Blue Spring and you will feel clean and refreshed on the hottest day global warming can throw at you. Stay in the water for a few hours snorkeling, swimming or playing and your core temperature will be so low you will turn off the air conditioner when you get home.

When The Sun ran a poll several years ago to see what summer outdoor activity Gainesvillians prefer, visiting the springs was the No. 1 answer. When the University of Florida investigated the value of the area's springs to the local economy, it found a direct return of more than \$90 million annually with more than 1

million visits and 1,100 jobs supported.

Our quality of life is supported by healthy, flowing, unpolluted springs. Stand on Main Street or U.S. 27 in High Springs and count the number of cars with kayaks, canoes and tubes strapped to the top. Visit the Great Outdoors restaurant or the Springs Diner and soak up the conversations around you.

Vacationers, cave divers, tubers, campers and nature lovers are all converging on this rural "Gateway to the Springs." The economic future of High Springs is dependent on the ecologic future of springs because "Healthy Springs = Healthy Economy." Unfortunately, the corollary is also true: Unhealthy Springs = Unhealthy Economy.

With the establishment of the Florida Springs Initiative by Gov. Jeb Bush in 1999 and the founding of the Florida Springs Institute in 2010, Florida's unique assemblage of large springs has come to the attention of millions of people in Florida. Mention the plight of Florida's rivers, estuaries and beaches, and the springs are now included. Bemoan the degradation of the Everglades and the Apalachicola River/estuary, and more and more people include the demise of our springs in the same breath.

Just look at what is happening again this summer to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers in South Florida, and to the Indian River Lagoon and the coastal estuaries. You will see what government's environmental neglect and inaction in the face of political pressure can do to a former robust economy.

You don't need to look to South Florida to see horrific effects of lax enforcement of environmental laws. Just go to the Springs Eternal Project website and look for the YouTube video, "Florida Springs: Paradise Found or Legacy Lost?" (<http://bit.ly/floridasprings>).

John Moran, Lesley Gamble and Rick Kilby illustrate the transition from springs of unparalleled beauty to polluted and depleted springs due to Florida's uncontrolled population expansion. Lost are the crystalline water clarity, healthy native submerged vegetation, and abundant fish and other wildlife that once made springs so famous.

If you are concerned about what you see in Moran's before-and-after springs photos, the Springs Eternal Project website will help you act. Vote for political candidates who are truly strong on enforcing environmental laws. Do not vote for those politicians who receive contributions from Big Business and Big Ag.

Demand better service from your paid state environmental agency employees who are responsible for springs protection. Adopt your own water ethic and make changes in your life to use less water inside and outside. Say "no" to using fertilizer and groundwater on your lawn.

Join and become active with your local springs advocacy group. Visit your favorite springs and learn more about how they are changing and what steps need to be taken to restore them to their historic health.

It is hot outside. Take a dip in a spring to get in touch with your goose bumps!

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