

Editorial: 'Troubled Waters' a Call to Action for Saving Florida's Lifeblood

March 19, 2017



As Lisa Rinaman, the St. Johns Riverkeeper, states in Troubled Waters, "No one's being held accountable for their pollution. Agriculture's getting off the hook. Industry's getting off the hook. Our state government has basically opened up the doors to allow the polluters to come in and re-write the rules, and re-write the laws."

This is a reminder of the outstanding film "Troubled Waters" to be shown in Gainesville on April 14. A recent editorial in the Tampa Bay Times gives a great review following these comments. We will post another reminder as the date draws near.

On Friday, April 14, 2017 there will be a showing of the documentary "Troubled Waters" at Santa Fe College, 3000 NW 83 St., Gainesville, Florida 32606.

The showing will be from 6:30 until 8 pm and is free to the public. The documentary will be shown (48 minutes) followed by a panel discussion. Invited panelists include Lisa Rinaman, St Johns Riverkeeper, and OSFR advisors Jim Gross, [Florida Defenders of the Environment](#) and Dr. Robert Knight, Florida

Springs Institute.

This event is being hosted by [St. Johns Riverkeeper](#), [Florida Defenders of the Environment](#), [Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute](#), and [USGBC Heart of Florida Chapter](#). This documentary video, *Troubled Waters*, was funded by St. Johns Riverkeeper and produced by Ray Hays and [PRC Digital Media](#). Public questions will be encouraged during the panel discussion, which will address steps that we can take to protect Florida's troubled waters.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

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Friday, March 17, 2017 12:32pm



A giant sinkhole opened in August at a Mosaic phosphate plant in Mulberry, one of two environmental disasters featured in a new documentary about Florida's precious waters. T

In Tampa, the river turns green in celebration this time of year thanks to the Irish pride that Mayor Bob Buckhorn delights in sharing. Elsewhere in Florida, a green river means environmental disaster from fish-killing algae blooms fed by nutrient runoff. Still, the Hillsborough River and other local waterways face the same risks from human activity as the St. Lucie, Caloosahatchee and St. Johns – all rivers featured in an eye-opening documentary to screen Tuesday at the Tampa Theatre.

Troubled Waters, Connections and Consequences navigates the many threats Florida faces with the decline of its lifeblood – including its economy, the health of its people and its quality of life – and highlights small, citizen-based actions that have overcome institutional resistance and helped slow the decline.

The stories told in the documentary arise mainly from the scenic, historic St. Johns River that runs through urban Jacksonville and from the Palatka-based St. Johns Water Management District.

But there is much here that a local audience will find familiar – the scenes of kayakers, commercial fishermen and airboats cruising along mangrove-lined banks; the scourge of water-sucking St. Augustine lawns; the formation of sinkholes in areas where groundwater is overpumped.

A panel of local water experts will find plenty to talk about, in other words, when they convene after the free Tampa Theatre screening to discuss the documentary. The movie debuted with a panel discussion, in fact, on Nov. 20 in Jacksonville, and more were scheduled in Melbourne, Palatka, and Gainesville.

Troubled Waters is the work of people and organizations who advocate for protecting Florida's waters, chiefly the St. Johns Riverkeeper. The local screening is sponsored by the Sierra Club Tampa Bay Group and 1000 Friends of Florida.

They all are highly critical of moves made under two terms of Gov. Rick Scott to slash regulations and resources credited with helping preserve the quality of the state's waters against the pressures of population growth.

But it's hard to argue against the case they make.

Readers of the *Tampa Bay Times* and staff writer Craig Pittman are well aware of how regulatory shortfalls have threatened the health of the state's unique natural springs. *Troubled Waters* drives home the point with a tour of some of the springs closed to swimming statewide because they pose a danger to human health.

A central theme of the movie is connections, both ecological and political. Florida has a finite supply of fresh water and because all is connected – from rainfall to rivers to underground aquifer – all is at risk when any part suffers. And how that finite supply is allocated, one environmentalist notes, is entirely dependent on who has the best connections in Tallahassee.

With this in mind, a county commissioner from Seminole makes the point that nothing of significance gets done in Florida politically until disaster strikes. *Troubled Waters* declares that disaster struck, twice, this summer.

The film opens with twin images of the “Green Monster” of algae blooms that hit the Treasure Coast and Southwest Florida, and the colossal sinkhole that opened at a Mosaic phosphate plant just over the Hillsborough County line in Mulberry.

The film also points to a more chronic but equally threatening future of continued development at a time when the Scott administration has gutted statewide systems to make sure Florida has the water to accommodate it first.

Two cases in point: The proposed development of the Deseret Ranch north of Orlando would bring in half a million residents and use some 111 million gallons a day, and a University of Florida study shows a threat to the vital percolation of water into the state's underground posed by the paving of the Sunshine State.

As much as a third of Florida's landscape eventually could be covered by roads, parking lots and roofs, according to the study.

There is hope that people from all walks of life are growing concerned enough to nudge the pendulum back on protecting Florida's waters.

Well-heeled boat manufacturers came to Tallahassee last week to argue the case as an economic necessity. And *Troubled Waters* showcases one citizen who complained after seeing Jacksonville crews aiming leaf-blowers into the St. Johns River, resulting in environmental training for all parks and recreation workers.

With a movie as thought-provoking as this one criss-crossing the state, we can hope for even more advocates to take up this most vital of Florida causes.