

A Failure To Protect Our Springs

September 22, 2014



Dr. Paul Still

Dr. Paul Still has written a clear and forceful commentary in today's *Gainesville Sun* regarding the failure of our water managers to effectively manage our state's water resources. Dr. Still is a strong advocate for water resources being protected in our basin. He was the original petitioner who saw the flawed science in the proposed MFLs , and supported by the Ichetucknee Alliance, was successful in challenging the Florida DEP and the water management district in Live Oak.

Dr. Still points out that the SRWMD claims they cannot adequately protect the water resources without MFLs, but that the district does indeed have the power to act without them. The fact that the DEP has had over 40 years to fulfill their obligation by law to establish workable MFLs , seems to be forgotten and seldom mentioned.

Dr. Still also writes that the chairman of the SRWMD governing board has repeatedly said that he owes his allegiance to the district staff. Are we to assume then, that this allegiance is at the expense of the springs, rivers and public interest? We might further suggest that why should we have a governing board

at all, if it “blindly accepts staff recommendations.” (Dr. Still’s quote).

You can see this fine editorial in its original form at this [LINK](#), or continue reading for a reproduction, for which OSFR wishes to thank Nathan Crabbe and the *Gainesville Sun*.

Paul Still: A failure to protect our springs

By Paul Still
Special to The Sun

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Administrative Law Judge Bram Canter’s ruling that part of the Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee River minimum flows and levels (MFLs) was invalid provides an opportunity to develop a regulatory strategy that will truly protect these rivers and the springs that flow into them.

I chose to challenge the proposed MFLs because the methods used by the Suwannee River Water Management District were seriously flawed. The peer review of the technical documents associated with the MFLs also pointed out serious flaws in the methodology. Numerous other groups and individuals also pointed out flaws in the rule itself and the supporting technical information. Yet water management district and Department of Environmental Protection staff refused to delay the MFL rule-making process to allow these flaws and deficiencies to be addressed. The department even had to have special legislation adopted to bypass the normal legislative review of the rule.

Taxpayer money spent by the water management district and department to develop the rushed and flawed MFLs for the Lower Santa Fe River is likely to exceed \$2 million. In times of limited resources, we shouldn't be asked to accept squandering taxpayer resources because of the poor judgment of agency administrators and senior staff.

The Suwannee district governing board's chair has repeatedly said he owes his allegiance to district staff. The governing board's goal should be protecting our water and making sure that taxpayer resources provided to the district are used efficiently and effectively. The board is clearly not serving the best interests of our area when it blindly accepts staff recommendations.

What is most disturbing was Suwannee district management's claim that the MFLs are critical to the protection of the area water resources. The district already has all the power it needs to protect our area's water in the existing permitting rules. It has repeatedly failed to use this power when it comes to issuing consumptive-use permits.

The recent granting of a consumptive-use permit for 2.44 mgd for ag use within 20 miles of Ichetucknee Springs illustrates this failure. The modeling results for the proposed water use showed an unacceptable impact on flow at the Ichetucknee head spring.

However, since the model also indicated that the groundwater would not be lowered at the property boundary of the ag site, the applicant was not asked to reduce the amount of water he was requesting. District staff chose to base their recommendation to approve the permit on the less restrictive property boundary modeling calculation.

If our area's water resources are going to be protected,

individuals, groups and local governments are going to have to become more actively involved in questioning the actions of the Suwannee River Water Management District management and governing board.

Paul Still lives in Starke.