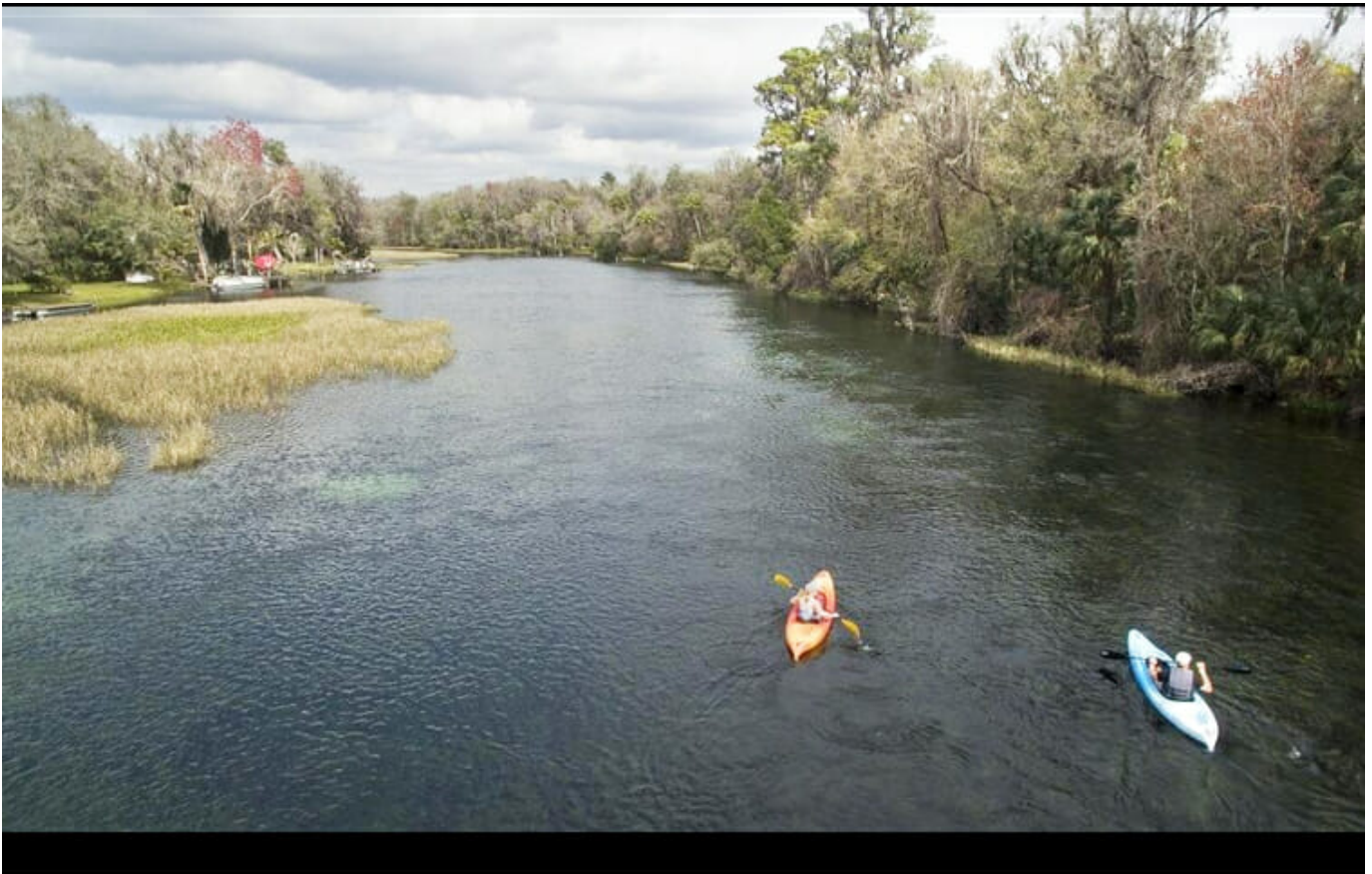


Future Generations Are Being Robbed

December 24, 2017



Rainbow River

The opposite poles related to water issues described below are extremes—what our water authorities did to Silver Springs, Crystal River and the Rainbow are inexcusable and indefensible. What Sierra Club, Environment Florida and associates accomplished with Pilgrim's Pride is huge. But again, that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection allowed the law to be broken for decades is inexcusable.

The water management districts and administrative law judges are

literally destroying our best springs and river before our very eyes. In our lifetime we are witnessing this destruction which is allowed because of greed. Future generations are, at this moment, being robbed by non-thinking, non-caring individuals who have no place as leaders.

It is paramount that we support those organizations who have the courage, foresight, intelligence and funds to combat the “MAKE-MORE-MONEY-MINDSET,” which has come to the forefront in the absence of leadership in Florida.

This new article on the springs by Dr. Robert Knight is in the [Gainesville Sun](#) and can be seen at this [link](#).

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

Robert Knight: A mixed year for the health of Florida's springs

Posted Dec 21, 2017 at 2:00 PM



Bob Knight

The past year has been a mixed blessing for Florida's springs. Mother Nature started the year with an extended drought that nearly depleted the flow in many intermediate-sized springs and promoted an explosion of filamentous algae in many larger ones.

Mother Nature changed her tune in June with the beginning of North Florida's wettest four months in history, resulting in a welcome excess of rain that partially re-filled the limestone aquifer, accompanied by increased spring flows.

This year Florida's state agencies also gave our springs a mixed bag of tricks. The Legislature added another \$50 million to its Springs Legacy funding, amplified by millions from the state's water management districts and many local utilities. Some of this money will be spent on springshed land acquisition, helping to prevent future development pressure.

However, the lion's share is earmarked for questionable projects, upgrading wastewater treatment systems and eliminating a trivial number of septic tanks, while simultaneously permitting more new homes with septic systems. The state's expenditure of taxpayer dollars intended for springs protection is not likely to move the needle very much toward improved springs health.

Sadly, the region's water management districts made a full-frontal attack on springs health this year under the guise of establishing protective minimum flows. Ignoring decades of declining flows at Silver Springs, the St. Johns River Water Management District approved a highly-flawed minimum flow rule, green-lighting dozens of additional groundwater pumping permits. The district also permitted another 1.2 million gallons per day of Silver's diminished flows to Frank Stronach, the Austrian billionaire who continues to pump excessive amounts of groundwater for his large herds of cattle.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District passed emergency minimum flows for the Rainbow River and the Crystal River springs groups, a collection of nearly 100 outstanding springs. Only 40 years ago these springs were pristine, but now, having lost from 20 to 50 percent of their historic flows, their water clarity and much of their native vegetation, they are mere shadows of their former beauty.

To make matters even worse, the district is opening the barn doors for hundreds of additional groundwater extraction permits that will further diminish flows in these economically and ecologically important springs.

Fortunately, one environmental event during 2017 is truly inspirational. A group of lawyers from Washington, D.C., and their cohorts in Florida took on a behemoth international corporation for ongoing environmental degradation, and won! Heather Govern, attorney with the National Environmental Law Center, representing Environment Florida, the Sierra Club's Suwannee-St. Johns Group and individual petitioners, sued Pilgrim's Pride Corporation under the U.S. Clean Water Act for discharging excessive nitrogen and other pollutants directly into the Suwannee River near Live Oak.

In a landmark mediated settlement, Pilgrim's Pride, the world's second-largest chicken processing company, is required to upgrade their treatment process, remove their direct discharge of about 60 tons of nitrogen per year from the Suwannee, pay \$180,000 in civil penalties, and contribute \$1.3 million into a "Sustainable Farming Fund" to be used to reduce nutrient-related and other agricultural impacts in the Suwannee basin.

This rare but decisive victory for Florida's imperiled environment is cause for renewed hope and a gift to our springs this holiday season. JBS S.A., located in Brazil, is the world's largest meat processing company grossing over \$50 billion per year, and owns a controlling interest in Pilgrim's Pride.

Kudos to JBS and Pilgrim's Pride's executives who decided it made better business sense to clean up their facility than to try to defend their harmful practices. Let's hope this precedent is noted by the hundreds of other corporations that continue to poison Florida's waters.

Robert Knight is director of the Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute.