

Hefty Topics Brought Out at SRWMD Meeting

July 12, 2016



Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson policy director of OSFR, here representing Sierra Club, addresses the board.

A day of interest for water advocates at Live Oak, headquarters for the Suwannee River Water Management District. Chair Don Quincey was absent and so the meeting was directed under the able leadership of Alphonse Alexander.

According to Tom Mirti's report, the amount of rainfall in southern Columbia County is not a great deal below average, which is surprising and not in accordance with our own personal observation, although we bow to science here.

He had no graphs for heat.

What was surmised to be a routine announcement regarding legal documents of the Sabal Trail easement began as such but did not remain so. At the beginning of the meeting, during the public

comments, Chris Mericle and Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson once again presented their case to the board, outlining in detail the inaccuracies, deliberate omissions and disinformation in the Environmental Impact Study that Sabal Trail submitted to FERC. Outlining also that FERC accepted Sabal Trail's flawed report at face value without question, and that two independent reports by qualified, objective professional geologists directly contradicted the in-house Sabal Trail report.

Counselor Reeves stuck solidly with the legal aspect, emphasizing repeatedly that the board had no authoritative role in affirming the legality of establishment of the pipeline or the issuing of permits and did not venture into the realm of justice, fairness and well being of the district in light of the passage of the pipeline through the district and the risks that might generate.

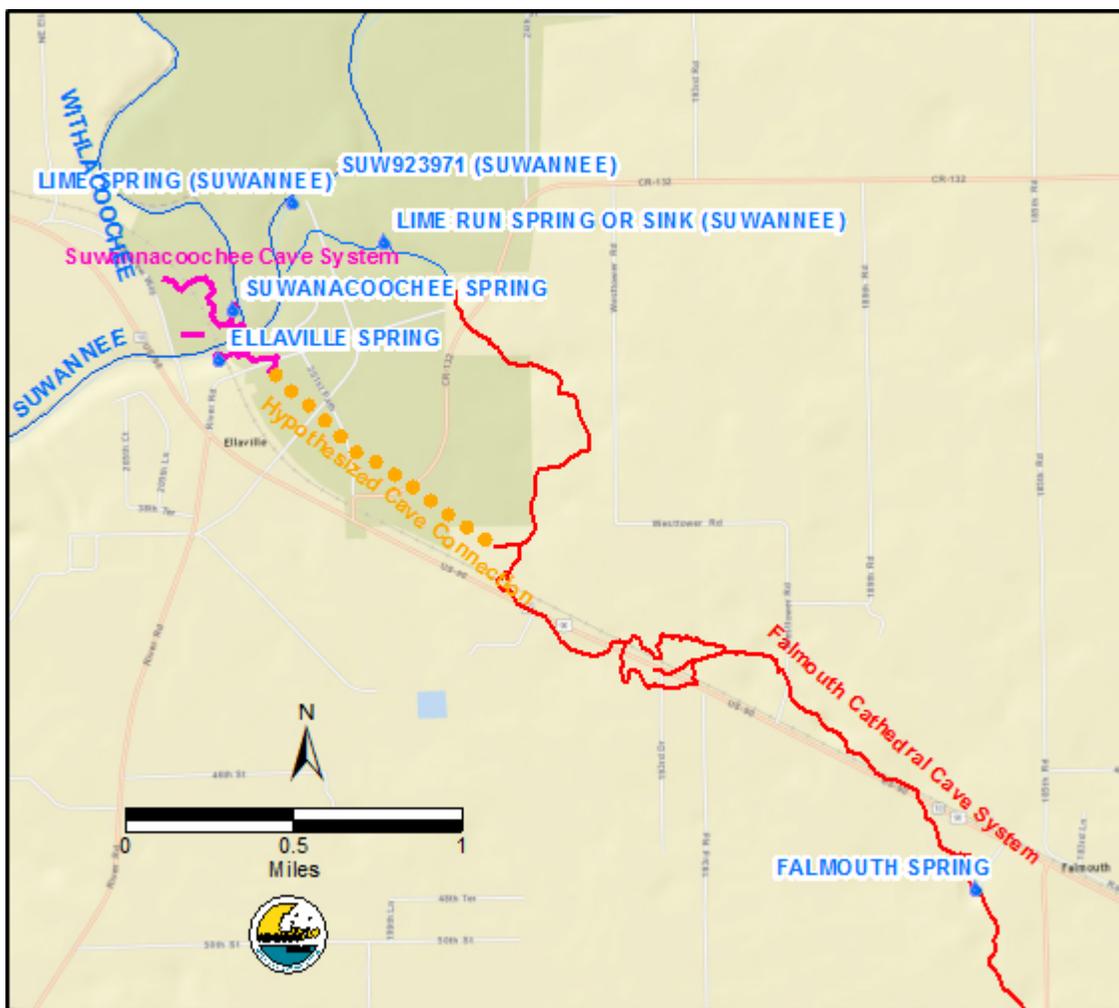
Non-the-less, Mr. Mericle and Ms. Malwitz-Jipson struck a nerve with some board members, since the latter asked questions regarding the status, (nay, competence and honesty?) of the permitting and reports, and wanted to know if all was signed off correctly and appropriately. From this point on it grew into a long discussion in which Chair Alexander allowed ample input from the public, specifically Chris Mericle and Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson, who did their very best to make the board understand the situation.

After much talk it became apparent that some of the board members indeed had gained an understanding and they expressed genuine concern that perhaps the pipeline going through the sinkhole and cave system was not a good idea. Members Bradley Williams and Virginia Sanchez posed direct questions about this.

During the discussion Executive Director Noah Valenstein expressed his intentions to inform by telephone the Army Corps

of Engineers, agency which is yet to issue a permit to Sabal Trail, of the concerns of the many environmental groups regarding the current proposed locations of the pipe crossings of the Suwannee River. Many agencies and groups have written to the Army Corps of Engineers and have not received a reply to their queries.

On another related issue, management staff member Tara Rodgers gave a report on recent activity and explorations in the Falmouth Cavern system. Recent dye tests have given more information on this elaborate and unique system, which has been explored for a distance of about nine miles, one of the longest systems in the U.S.

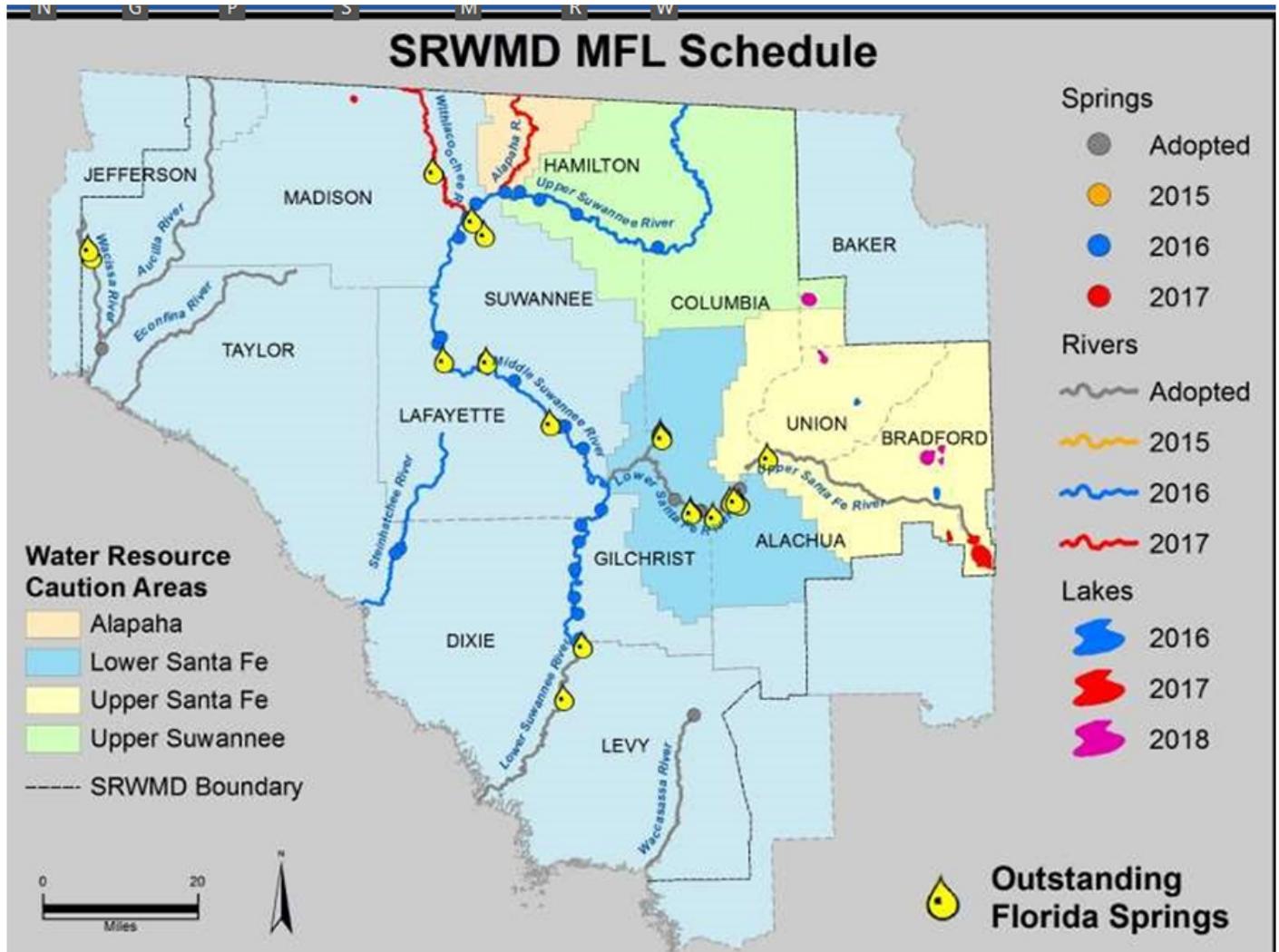


Earlier tests, reported on here (["Falmouth Dye Trace Reveals](#)

[Unknown Connectivity](#)“) rendered surprises, indicating there remains much about the system that is still not understood, all the more reason to tread cautiously when digging holes for pipe bombs to be buried in cavern ceilings.

Praises go to SRWMD for conducting this exploration, the results of which hopefully will find its way to the desk of some able decision-maker in the Army Corps. This agency must be made aware of what Sabal Trail wants to do in order to fill its pockets and of the company's abysmal safety record and disregard for the environment.

A report on Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) was presented by John C. Good, PE, of the staff. It outlined the ecological and water resource values when determining the MFLs, it provided an outline of a typical river cross section showing water resource values, it gave some components of the MFL process, opportunities for public input, maps of the MFL schedule including Water Resource Caution areas (of which the Upper Santa Fe River is one, including all of New River.)



The report also includes a map of Outstanding Florida Springs, a list of minimum surface water flows for the Santa Fe at Worthington Springs, of which three are below minimums; also a geologic cross-section and a map of the Upper Floridan Aquifer Confinement.

The latter part of the report is a bit of an enigma, or perhaps your writer does not completely understand Mr. Good's meaning here. The following seems to be an explanation or excuse for the below-minimum numbers, almost an exoneration. At any rate here it is:

a)The Upper Santa Fe is relatively disconnected from the Floridan Aquifer, when compared to the Lower Santa Fe River.

b)... is protected by the Lower Santa Fe recovery strategy as far as ground water withdrawals are concerned.

c)...has no permitted consumptive use of surface water.

And the report ends by saying the "...staff will continue to evaluate the existing status of the MFLs...."

We must say we do not see any relevance of a, b, and c to the problem of not meeting the MFLs, although Mr. Good may not either. The question we must ask, is what is to be done?

More pertinent to the public interest, how can we allow the phosphate mine to continue with its plans when any further withdrawals in their area can in no way be tolerated, rationalized, or made to appear legitimate by means of smoke and mirrors or any other ways we might devise?

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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