

# Michael Roth: A better use for spring water

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Protest at Ginnie Springs against Nestle and Seven Springs Water Co.

Using common logic, Mike Roth points out the many flaws in Risa Wray's weak attempt at justifying even more withdrawals for personal profit from the imperiled Santa Fe River, when what it needs is the opposite: more water, not less.

Read the original article in [the Gainesville Sun](#) here at this link. The article will likely appear in print on Sunday, Jan.12, 2020.

*Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.*

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*– A river is like a life: once taken,*

By Michael Roth/Special to The Sun

Posted at 2:00 AM



Mike Roth

A [guest column by Risa Wray](#) published last month closes with the question “What better use for spring water can there be than to provide water for people to drink?” Well, let’s talk about that.

Most of her comments relate to her family history starting in the early 1960s. While one might be able to credit members of her previous generations with recognizing the natural beauty of the springs and the springshed around it, one might also question how much profit motive contributed to certain preservation decisions.

No one would argue that the accumulation of lands surrounding such a beautiful natural phenomenon as the Ginnie Springs complex was a wise and potentially beneficial action, but as the family moved into the recreation park and campground business in 1976, one could begin to discern that perhaps “preservation” was taking a back seat to profits as the offspring began to manage the assets of their father’s dreams.

Ginnie Springs has been an “eternal spring break” style student mecca for decades, and during certain seasons the natural

disruption that is allowed to take place has certainly taken its toll on the degraded state of the springs and the Santa Fe River.

Kayaking the Santa Fe during tourist season, one encounters a river-wide flotilla of tubes supporting a horde of humans introducing not only a large infusion of suntan lotions and oils to the springs chemistry but also an extraordinary quantity of aluminum cans, plastic bottles, food wrappers and other human pollutants, much of which finds its way to the bottom of the river and the areas along the shores. Our Santa Fe River can certainly attest to this, as we have pulled hundreds of pounds of such detritus from the river during our cleanups over the years.

There is also the element of footfalls on the floor of the springs around the shores, disrupting the natural sub-aquatic vegetation and aquatic life therein, and the displacement of sand and silt into the vents. The Wray family was certainly aware of the damage since as campground owners they managed to obtain a permit to drop unusually large karst boulders on the shoreline where most of the erosion had occurred.

Wray talks about landfills and dairy farms as threats that they have defended against using deep-pocketed lawyers. Our Santa Fe River and other environmental organizations have confronted various boards and commissions over the years over these issues, but we have not seen the Wrays standing beside us as active advocates.

Perhaps it is because the family noted the steady degradation of the springs that their "fourth generation" (a generation far detached from the visions of the original land acquirers) that they formed Seven Springs Water Co., to begin selling water from the spring. Their initial working water contract was with

AquaPenn, which abandoned the operation after a few years.

Over the next decade two other water bottling companies – CCDA (Coca Cola) and Ice River Springs — came and went. None used more on the average than a quarter of the allowance by the water management district (CCDA had been known to use 300,000 gallons per day up to 850,000 gallons per day but not for any long period of time) and so public awareness of the effects have been slight – though several landowners in the area have reported sinkhole activity and well water issues.

Wray notes, “It would be extremely difficult for us to protect ... the property without (this) source of income to fuel our efforts.” It would seem that the tens of millions of dollars in annual sales at their profitable campground would be sufficient cover their conservation and preservation needs.

So maybe a good answer to her closing question is: leave the water in the springs, and have people drink the water from their taps. Leaving the water in the springs might contribute to the recovery of the springs and the river whose flows are running 30% lower than they were four generations ago and remain “impaired” and “in recovery” in large part due to excess pumping.

Maybe putting it in plastic bottles wasn't what nature intended. And maybe, if the river recovers, the family can get a few more years of income from the Ginnie Springs campground.

*Michael Roth is president of Our Santa Fe River Inc.*