

Quit Lowering Bar On Water Levels

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The [Gainesville Sun](#) has published an editorial about the disgusting shenanigans perpetrated by the water scientists at the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). Likely because of pressure from above, they are working very hard to withdraw more water out of the Rainbow River, all the while pretending that they are doing an excellent job at not harming the river. This of course is impossible but they keep trying.

This is the same song we hear over and over. At Dunnellon we asked why it is our managers always try to see how much they can take out without harming “significantly” our rivers, instead of seeing how much they can help our rivers, which is what they

should be doing.

We surmise that this backward policy will continue as long as our present political force is in Tallahassee, or until the river is dry. Or maybe until enough people quit standing for it. We heard quite a few in Dunnellon, we need a lot more.

Continue reading [here](#) in the [Sun](#) for the complete article.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

Quit lowering bar on water levels

Lowering the bar seems to be the standard in setting Florida water policy. The latest case in point came last month when officials for the Southwest Florida Water Management District held a public meeting in Dunnellon to discuss their new report on setting minimum flows and levels (MFLs) for the beloved Rainbow River. Their stunning finding? The river can withstand a 5 percent reduction – that is, pumping – from its current level.

It was an astounding and confounding recommendation. The district itself, known as Swiftmud, has officially designated the river “impaired” because of long-term decreases in water flow and increases in nitrate and other pollution. Forget about scientific tests – most of which confirm the river is in deep trouble – showing nitrate levels at six times the governmental standard or that the district’s own independent peer review panel says the river is already at or below the MFL, the point at which “significant” environmental harm occurs to the river’s ecosystem. It simply doesn’t pass the eye test. Wetlands and their fauna are struggling to survive. Algae is blanketing the spring floor and riverbed. The water level keeps going down.

This is a river that is deemed such a treasure that it has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water and a National Natural Landmark. This is a river on which Floridians have played and lived and whose crystal-clear waters have bolstered the local economy for generations. This is a river that now is impaired, and our state water managers are telling us it is OK to remove 5 percent more water to help quench the thirst of growth and development.

The problem is, at some point, these competing challenges collide and something has to give. And when those who want the water want it to be cheap and easily available – now – and those interests happen to control both the purse strings and the levers of power, we end up with inexplicable policy decisions like allowing for a drawdown of 5 percent of the impaired and, we would say, imperiled Rainbow River.

The overflow crowd at Dunnellon City Hall on Feb. 23 included scientists, veteran environmentalists and former public policy makers, and they were having none of the Swiftmud message. To try and quell the hostile crowd, the water district officials tried assuring the citizens that they were there to protect the river. The crowd did not buy it – understandably.

We have no doubt that, as the MFL report states, Swiftmud met the letter of the law in reaching its conclusion. But if water managers seriously believe they are protecting the Rainbow by allowing for its flow to be lowered even more, then we give a nod to Mr. Bumble in Dickens' "Oliver Twist," who said, "If the law supposes that, the law is a ass – a idiot."

Quit lowering the water policy bar and the level of our water bodies and start using common sense. The Rainbow and other springs and rivers in our region are slowly but steadily drying up. All water officials have to do is open their eyes. It is

really that simple. – *This editorial was written by the Ocala Star-Banner, one of The Sun's sister publications.*

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