

Water Scientists Take Hit At MFL Workshop

April 29, 2017



On April 27, 2017 representatives of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) presented a public workshop where they first explained why they can reduce the flow in the Crystal River and Kings Bay, without harming the system, and then listened to quite a few people tell them they were wrong.

SWFWMD, after 40 years, is now forced to establish a Minimum Flow and Level for the Crystal River/Kings Bay system. Instead of trying to restore the system to what it used to be, they want to reduce it as much as they possibly can and still get away with it, avoiding what they decide is "significant harm."

In order to determine "significant harm," they go to great lengths with numbers and graphs, and models, but according to some experts, they pick and choose what they include, ignoring

at times data that do not bolster their case.

Melissa Gulvin, Government Affairs Program Manager gave the introduction and served as emcee, Gabe Herrick spoke a bit but Ron Basso did the main explaining.



Janet Barrow

Mr. Basso told us that the MFL is a “protective tool” to use. If the MFL draws down the river eleven per cent from its already greatly diminished flow, (about 58 % less than its historic number) we fail to see how that is protecting it. This type of logic filled the “Evaluation of Hydrologic Changes to the Crystal River/Kings Bay System,” as well as the rest of Mr. Basso’s explanation.

Such was his presentation that it sparked the ire of those in the audience. Strong words began with the comments of Mr. Don Clark, who opined that the district’s science was not “pure science,” but “motivated science.” Since in his view the reality of the river’s condition did not match what he was hearing from the SWFWMD scientists, he said “somebody is lying.”



Maxine Connor

Following Mr. Clark's comments, your historian also gave a strong negative opinion, included below, but the district employees got the verbal blistering of their lives when Dr. Robert Knight, respected and experienced water scientist with impeccable credentials, spoke his mind. Dr, Knight is also on the Advisory Board of OSFR.

He refuted with facts and numbers much of what Mr. Basso presented. According to Dr. Knight, the district scientists chose to ignore established and accepted data from U.S. agencies, as well as a four-year study by The Florida Springs Institute of the exact area of the Crystal River/Kings Bay system. This study was not even cited in the district's work. He told them their model was terribly flawed, (an opinion shared by other respected objective scientists) and that their conclusions were "nonsense." Because of their many shortcomings, he told them they were "intellectually dishonest."

Many intelligent and non-biased people who are concerned with the abominable water situation in Florida share Dr. Knight's views. Unfortunately, these criticisms can apply to other water districts, not just SWFWMD. The St. Johns comes immediately to mind as the most egregious, if only because of the notoriety of Florida's flagship Silver Springs and its inexcusable and unconscionable treatment of late.



Dr. Knight explains the shortcomings of the district's study

Following are the comments of your historian:

It is clear we have a problem with our water. The aquifer is dropping, our rivers and springs have flows that are greatly reduced from 50 years ago. Not only that, besides the quantity problem, we definitely have a quality problem from too many nitrates and other pollutants.

Florida has excellent water laws to protect our water resources. Our water districts spend lots of money subsidizing

dairies to pollute less, upgrading wastewater treatment systems, establishing management action plans, and doing studies. But our springs and rivers continue to decline in both flow and purity. Why? Maybe we should examine our mission or goals.

If our resources are in bad condition, should we not endeavor to make them healthy again? Let's use the word "restore." This is the logical answer, and the logical question is "How can you begin to restore the river if you reduce the flow even more?" You cannot.

So what is your goal, your mission? If your goal is not to restore the river and springs, why is it not? And if not, what is it?

The "why" will have to be answered by the governor. but I may have found a partial answer to the "what" in an editorial written recently by Jim Gross, who was a water manager at one time.

Current interpretation of Florida water law appears to be such that water management districts must issue permits for water, even if they have already permitted more withdrawals than MFLs allow. The districts are knowingly permitting increased withdrawals to new users even though the increased withdrawals will interfere with existing users such as utilities that have permits and capital investments in facilities for increased withdrawals they need in the near future.

This interpretation is self-defeating, non-logical, non-sustainable and likely illegal. It disregards all the Florida Statutes which give protections to our rivers and springs. It is not the answer. It is time for our leadership in Tallahassee, which is non-existent, to re-think this problem.

Meanwhile, I urge you to take no further withdrawals from the Crystal River.



Ron Basso attempts to reply to Dr. Knight's statement

The SWFWMD Governing Board will consider and vote on the acceptance of the staff's recommendations for the MFLs at the Brooksville headquarters on May 23. Information on this meeting will follow on this site.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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