

Introduction

Florida is blessed with water and rivers. From its largest river, the Apalachicola, in the north to the Everglades in the south, Florida is a land of water. Much of its past is tied to water. In Florida's roadless days, rivers were its interstates, its local roads, and its streets. The Apalachicola, the Suwannee, the St. Johns, the Kissimmee, the Caloosahatchee, and the St. Lucie Rivers were important highways during the heyday of river navigation in Florida.

Over the years, we have mistreated Florida's waters. The Everglades, and river swamps, and marshes, and other wetlands throughout the state, were drained by developers intent on opening this new frontier to homesteading, agriculture, and tourism.

Rivers, including the Apalachicola, were dredged and dammed; the St. Johns River headwaters dwindle to almost nothing in dry years, diverted elsewhere by agriculture and development. The Kissimmee, the Caloosahatchee, and the St. Lucie Rivers are canals, built to carry floodwaters and navigation. The Everglades were channelized, diked, and ditched, and changed from a slow but free-flowing "River of Grass" to a series of gigantic holding ponds that began to slowly change the ecology of a vast area of south Florida.

Even the serene Suwannee River in remote North Central Florida is affected, as man encroaches upon its floodplain with homes, camps, and mines.

Some of these rivers were — and are — important sources of water. A few supply water directly to people living nearby. Others supply water more indirectly. Their marshy floodplains filter pollutants brought from upstream; they store floodwaters, hold the water back for use during drought, and let it filter slowly down into Florida's underground reservoirs — the aquifers that hold the drinking water of almost every Floridian.

On one river, the Kissimmee, hundreds of miles from the wellfields that serve Florida's crowded east coast, a canoe floats, a heron patiently awaits the return of a frightened frog, and two hawks soar overhead.

The Kissimmee, a major tributary to Lake Okeechobee, delivers both water and pollutants to Florida's largest lake. And Lake Okeechobee is a major source

of the water that eventually flows through the Everglades, and through the canals man has dug through the Everglades, to recharge the shallow aquifers that feed those pumps that send the water to the teeming city just over the horizon. The lake and the river are especially important when the Everglades themselves are dry.

Hence the *Save Our Rivers* program, and hence the canoe, and the heron, and the frog.

Would you pay a nickel to protect your drinking water? Chances are you already have. Every person who has purchased a home or land in Florida over the last five years has helped to protect the water he or she drinks.

A nickel — five cents — may not sound like much, but add each and every five cents collected for the Water Management Lands Trust Fund over five years and you have have \$111,580,930 for Florida's innovative *Save Our Rivers* program.

The five cents add up. They are a small part of the money (50 cents) collected under the state's Documentary Stamp Tax for each \$100 worth of property sold; the other 45 cents buy environmental and coastal lands or are sent to the General Revenue fund to help operate Florida's government. New growth in Florida at least helps pay for itself.

The purchaser of a \$50,000 home pays \$250 in documentary stamp taxes. Of that, about \$25 goes to the Water Management Lands Trust Fund under *Save Our Rivers* to be used only to buy land "necessary for water management, water supply, and the conservation and protection of water resources... ."

Each of Florida's five water management districts buys land it thinks is most important for the water resources of its area. The South Florida Water Management District, for example, has purchased land along the Kissimmee River as part of its massive restoration program for the remainder of the canalized stream.

This booklet will tell you — and show you — how and where the districts are using your money to protect your water.