

# Suwannee River

## Water Management District

**O**ay down upon the Suwannee River"  
— those words are known around the world, wherever Stephen Foster's *Old Folks at Home* is sung. But few know that Foster's song immortalizes a river the composer never saw.

The Suwannee River is born deep in the Okefenokee Swamp in Southeastern Georgia. It ends in the Gulf of Mexico at the town of Suwannee after a meandering, 265-mile journey through Florida. The Suwannee, the second largest river in Florida, changes character as it flows southwestward through the state.

When it first crosses the Georgia-Florida line, the Suwannee is a slow, brown-water swamp stream. A few miles farther downstream, the Suwannee cuts through steep, limestone banks and for a while even provides Floridians with an example of a whitewater river as it cascades through shallows such as Big Shoals and others near the town of White Springs. Still further downstream, spring waters begin to dilute the tea-colored tannic Suwannee River, and the pools where the springs discharge into the river are crystal clear.

Explorer William Bartram described the Suwannee River as "the cleanest and purest of any river"



### Save Our Rivers Purchases

Acres Purchased: 16,925\*

Cost: \$5,438,659\*

### Selected Parcels

Santa Fe Swamp (donated): 5,358 acres

Andrews Tract: 576 acres

Baynard-Zeisse Tract: 1,063 acres

Sunbelt Tract: 578 acres

Brown Tract: 600 acres

Christian Tract: 327 acres

Chotiner Tract (donated): 63 acres

\* Includes the 8,300-acre Brunswick Tract, which has been resold to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for \$1.9 million, and other donated land.

with water "almost as transparent as the air we breathe."<sup>1</sup> The Suwannee is still relatively unspoiled. With the exception of a few localized problems, the Suwannee River's water quality is among the best in the state.

The major problem today along the Suwannee River is encroachment along its floodplain. The water management district has worked closely with the counties the Suwannee flows through to develop floodplain ordinances that, if properly implemented, will keep development off the floodplains.

At one time its future as a river was in doubt. The Suwannee became tied up in dreams of a canal linking the Mississippi, the Gulf of Mexico, and Florida's Atlantic coast to the populated cities of the northeastern seaboard. "Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee River were too far south to provide the most promising route. ... More exciting was a route that would link the Suwannee River...with either the St. Marys River or the St. Johns River...."<sup>2</sup>

The idea did not go away; but it did change Florida's rivers.