

## **FLORIDA LEADERS ORGANIZED FOR WATER (FLOW)**

### **Florida's Water Future**

Floridians need leadership for our water future.

Throughout North Florida, springs, lakes, wells and rivers are going dry. Saltwater is intruding into the potato fields of Hastings, the drinking water of the town of Cedar Key, even the recreational mecca of Silver Glen Springs—clear evidence that the level of the Floridan Aquifer that supplies our clean drinking water has dropped. In South Florida, smelly algae blooms are wreaking havoc on property values and making swimmers sick. Green slime and "No Swimming" signs are not the sights that our tourists come here to see.

### ***FLOW: Who, What & Why***

Florida Leaders Organized for Water (FLOW) is a group of elected officials from towns, cities and counties throughout North Florida who organized under an Interlocal Agreement in early 2012 because of concerns about Florida's water future.

A combination of three factors motivated us to organize: (1) a huge water permit that was issued by the St. Johns River Water Management District; (2) the recent loss by Ichetucknee Springs—one of our area's most important recreational sites—of approximately 20% of its flow, attributed by some scientists to increased groundwater pumping in Northeast Florida; and (3) the reduced water levels and increasing pollution of our region's lakes, rivers and springs.

FLOW's members represent the diversity of North Florida's population and are committed to building consensus and finding solutions to our water problems.

### ***Our Water Problems & Solutions Are Political***

We know what our water problems are, and they aren't all caused by drought. Increasing population is a large factor. Our "water bank account" is overdrawn. Too much water is being pumped out of the aquifer and too much pollution is going into it. Many of our wetlands, which supply the moisture that creates rain, have been drained. Many of our upland sand hills—prime areas for aquifer recharge—have been built on or paved over, which prevents rainwater from percolating down into the aquifer.

Why do we have these problems? We believe it's because Florida has, until now, lacked the political will to make changes in the ways we live with water.

***FLOW believes that at their core, Florida's water problems—including reduced water levels and increased pollution—are political problems that require political solutions.***

### ***Costs: Pay Now or Pay Later***

Historically, Florida has not dealt with water problems until those problems became so severe that their fixes cost millions or billions of dollars. Look, for example, at the costs of restoring the Everglades (multi billions of dollars) or building Tampa's desalination plant (over \$100 million).

*Valuing Florida's Clean Waters*, a recent independent study by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) based at Tufts University, found that water pollution now costs Floridians between \$1.3 billion and \$10.5 billion each year.

***As of 2010, FDEP reports showed that Florida had assessed 10,476 river miles (20 percent of the river miles in the state) and that 53 percent or 5,587 miles had a nutrient-related impairment - meaning that they are no longer clean enough for a specified use. Florida had also assessed 54 percent of lake and reservoir acres (1,124,399 acres) and of those lake acres assessed, 82 percent or 919,000 acres had nutrient-related impairments. Florida had assessed 5,317 square miles of estuaries constituting 100 percent of the state's estuaries, of which 32 percent or 1,795 square miles had nutrient-related impairments.***

(See: <http://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/ValuingFloridasCleanWaters.pdf>)

Whether it's a lake that's deemed unsafe for swimming or a spring that's dried up—whether it's saltwater intrusion that forces us to abandon or relocate our family farm—whether it's our municipal well that's contaminated or our agricultural or residential well that's gone dry—whether it's the dry lake bed behind our house or the stinky green algae in a nearby river that's caused our property value to plummet—the degradation of our water affects all of us who live and work in Florida. If our water problems are left unsolved, this degradation will adversely affect the amount of revenue Florida gains from tourists and property taxes.

We have a choice: We can pay to fix our water problems now, or we can leave those problems for our children and grandchildren who will pay much more. We also need to consider these questions: Who is it that pays to fix our water problems? Who is it that profits? How angry will Florida's citizens be if the financial burden of these fixes falls on them when the State of Florida has long held a mandate to preserve and protect our natural resources? (Florida Constitution, Article II, Section 7)

Finally, what will our water legacy be?

### ***A Better Water Future***

Everyone in Florida who uses water is simultaneously part of the problem and part of the solution. We have choices: We can opt for the status quo, or we can choose to work together **now** for a better water future that, over time, saves everyone money.

Instead of grabbing headlines for its water woes, Florida could choose to become an international model of wise water use. FLOW calls upon the Florida Legislature to show

leadership **now** by enacting solution-based legislation that addresses diminished water quality and quantity that affect business, future economic development, local and state government budgets, and public health.

In particular, FLOW recommends:

- A statewide moratorium on new consumptive use water permits until aquifer and surface water levels are restored.
- Adoption of new state policies and a state budget that address restoration of damaged surface waters, springs and aquifer.

- Adoption of legislation that addresses water deficits and over-pumping.
- Adoption of legislation to educate Floridians about wise water use.