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# Save Our Rivers: Celebrating Five Years of Progress

The Governor's Office Tallahassee, Florida

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# *Save Our Rivers*

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Celebrating Five Years of Progress • October 1986

FRONT & BACK COVERS The Peace River near Wauchula, Florida.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

# Save Our Rivers

Celebrating Five Years of Progress • October 1986

This book was produced through the Governor's Office,  
Florida's five water management districts and  
the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation.

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the public recent activities and accomplishments in the Save Our Rivers program.

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# Introduction

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The time: Some day in the not too distant future.

The place: An oxbow in a seemingly unspoiled river that meanders slowly through a marshy floodplain just north of Lake Okeechobee.

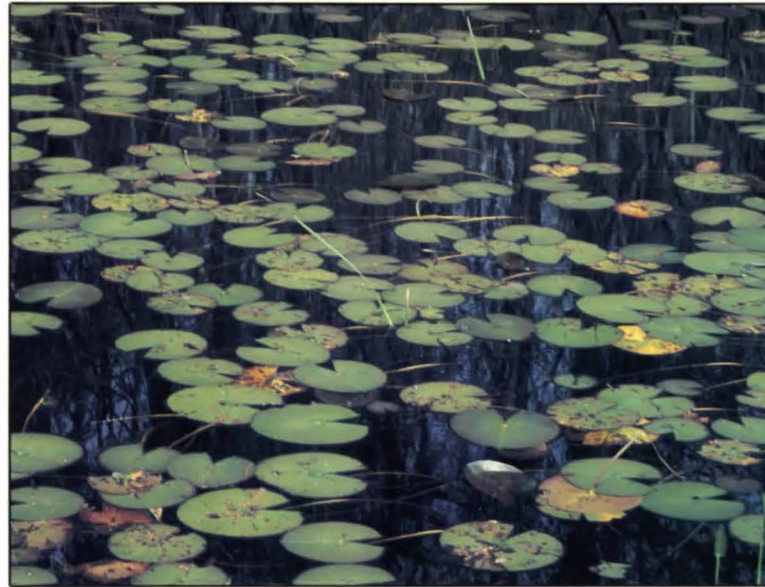
The event: Nothing special.

A lone canoe ripples silently through the quiet, brown water, disturbing the faint wavering reflections of the palm trees that line the low banks and the late afternoon thunderclouds that hang overhead.

Just overhead, a pair of white egrets swoops gracefully down to land somewhere out of sight around a bend in the oxbow. In the distance, angry crows are arguing with a blue jay; and above, a pair of red-tailed hawks soars lazily, calling to each other across the breeze.

On the marshy bank of the river, a great blue heron watches the canoe pass without much interest. It is a common event these days, and the heron is not afraid. A frog, startled by the ripples as they touch the bank, leaps into the river with a splash and the heron's slight attention is diverted.

Frogs are important, canoes are not.



The time: The same day.

The place: Hundreds of miles south.

The event: Again, nothing special.

The sound is most noticeable — a steady throb from several huge pumps that suck water from the ground and into pipes that lead to the teeming city just over the horizon. The land 'round-about is flat and a summer sun beats down on it.

And the pumps throb.

Why take notice of two events that are "nothing special"? There can be no possible connection between the canoe gliding through the quiet, brown water so many miles to the north and the ceaseless pulsing of the pumps in the south. Or can there? Could it be that without the water that the canoe glides across, these pumps might be silent? Yes.

The water, the canoe, the egrets, the great blue heron, the frog, and, to a lesser extent, even the hawks, the crows, and the blue jay are there — at least in part — because of an innovative Florida program called *Save Our Rivers*. Announced in 1981 by Governor Bob Graham, the *Save Our Rivers* program aims to protect Florida's natural waterways, wetlands and the state's drinking water.

ABOVE Lily pads dot Florida's lakes and rivers.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

OPPOSITE Trees are mirrored in the calm waters of Blue Springs.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

# Introduction

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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.

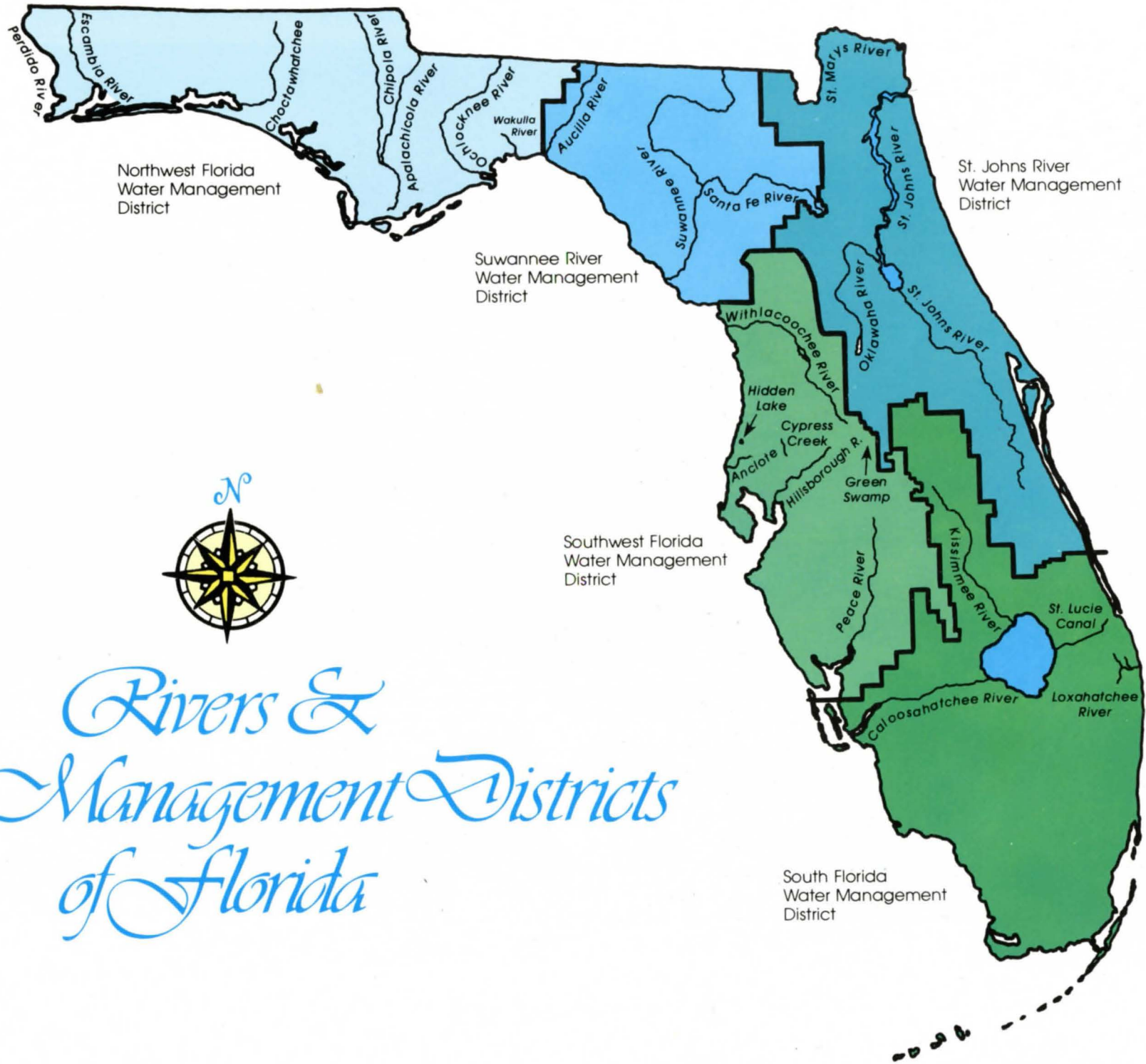
The five cents add up. They are a small part of the money (50 cents) collected under the state's Documentary Stamp Tax for each \$100 worth of property sold; the other 45 cents buy environmental and coastal lands or are sent to the General Revenue fund to help operate Florida's government. New growth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





Northwest Florida  
Water Management  
District

St. Johns River  
Water Management  
District

Suwannee River  
Water Management  
District

Southwest Florida  
Water Management  
District

South Florida  
Water Management  
District

# Rivers & Water Management Districts of Florida



# Northwest Florida

## Water Management District

The Apalachicola River is formed by the convergence at the Florida border of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers, which originate in Northern Georgia. Approximately three-fourths of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin is in Georgia and Alabama. The Apalachicola flows south 107 miles from the Jim Woodruff Dam to Apalachicola Bay. It has the largest flow of any river in Florida — an average discharge of more than 25,000 cubic feet a second.

The Apalachicola River was described in glowing terms to the 1825 Florida Legislative Council, meeting for the first time in Tallahassee. Governor William P. Duval compared the lands around the river with the Mississippi River floodplain and insisted to council members that the climate was even better for production of sugar cane and cotton. "The bold and navigable rivers which run through our territory will be of more value than mines of gold," he exclaimed.<sup>1</sup>



### Save Our Rivers Purchases

Acres Purchased: 91,593

Cost: \$28,005,030 (including bonds)

### Selected Parcels

Wakulla Springs: 2,888 acres

Escambia River floodplain: 17,998 acres

Choctawhatchee River floodplain: 35,198 acres

Apalachicola River floodplain: 35,509 acres

The varied bottomland hardwood habitats in the floodplain of the Apalachicola River are known to be immensely important as sources of nutrients for the highly productive Apalachicola Bay. The *Save Our Rivers* purchase of over 35,000 acres, in conjunction with the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, provides an unusual amount of protection to this great resource. Georgia, Alabama, and Florida are working with the Corps of Engineers and navigation interests to develop a navigation plan for the river that will protect its environmental integrity.

Four of Florida's five largest rivers originate out of state, and three of the four are in the Northwest Florida Water Management District: the Escambia, the Choctawhatchee, and the Apalachicola. Only the Apalachicola is a part of an organized *interstate* river management program. Each of the three rivers has had *Save Our Rivers* purchases in its floodplain.

# *Northwest Florida*

*Water Management District*



ABOVE The Wakulla River glides through North Florida's woodlands.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

PAGE 4 Alum bluff on the Apalachicola River.  
(Northwest Florida Water Management District)

PAGE 5 River flow is important to Apalachicola Bay oysters.  
(Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission)

# *Northwest Florida*

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*Water Management District*



ABOVE Cypress knees line banks along Florida's rivers.  
(Northwest Florida Water Management District)



# Suwannee River

## Water Management District

“*Way* 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”



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.

### 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

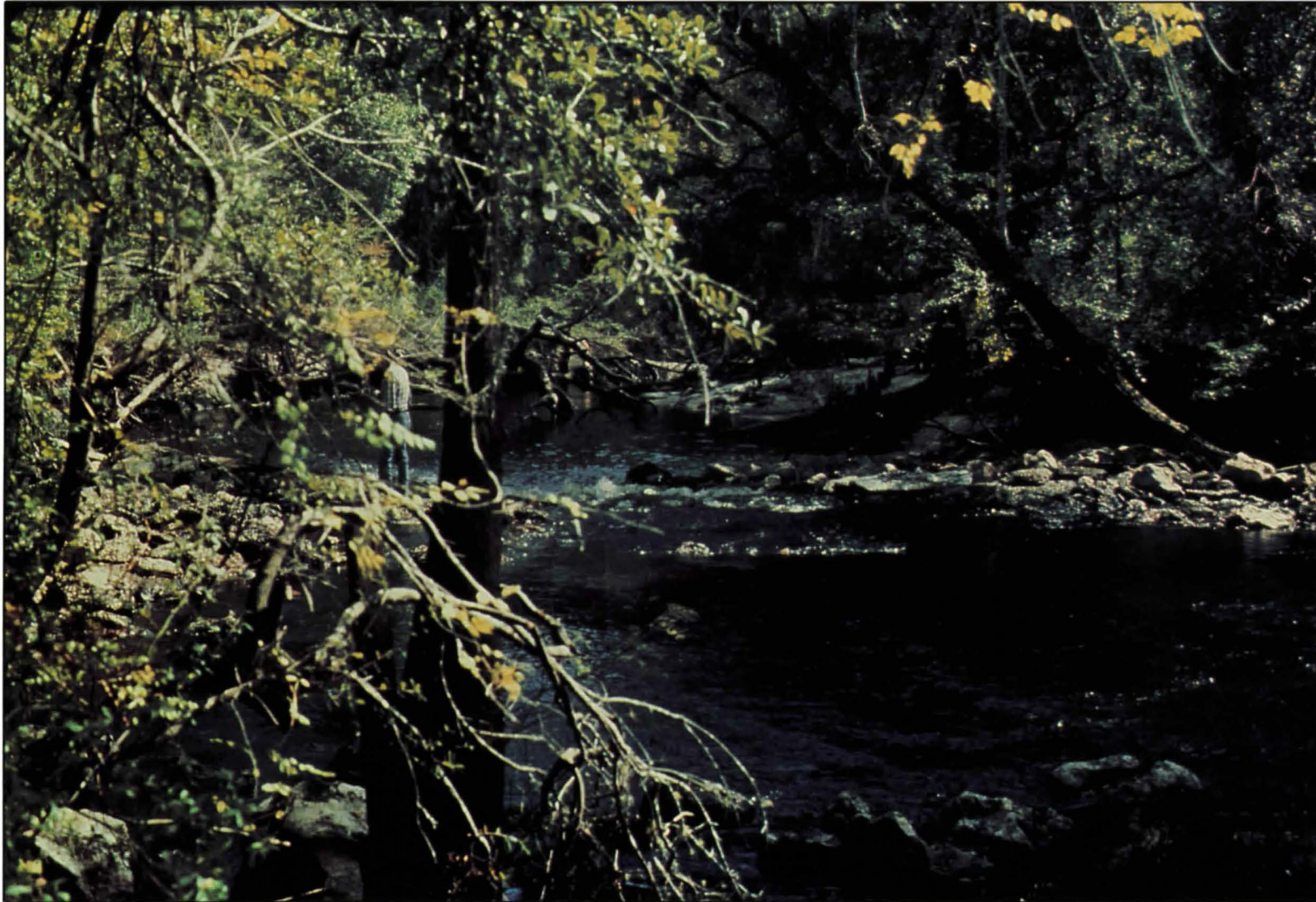
Christian Tract: 327 acres

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.

# *Suwannee River*

*Water Management District*



ABOVE Sunlight dapples the clear waters of the Aucilla River.  
(*Suwannee River Water Management District*)

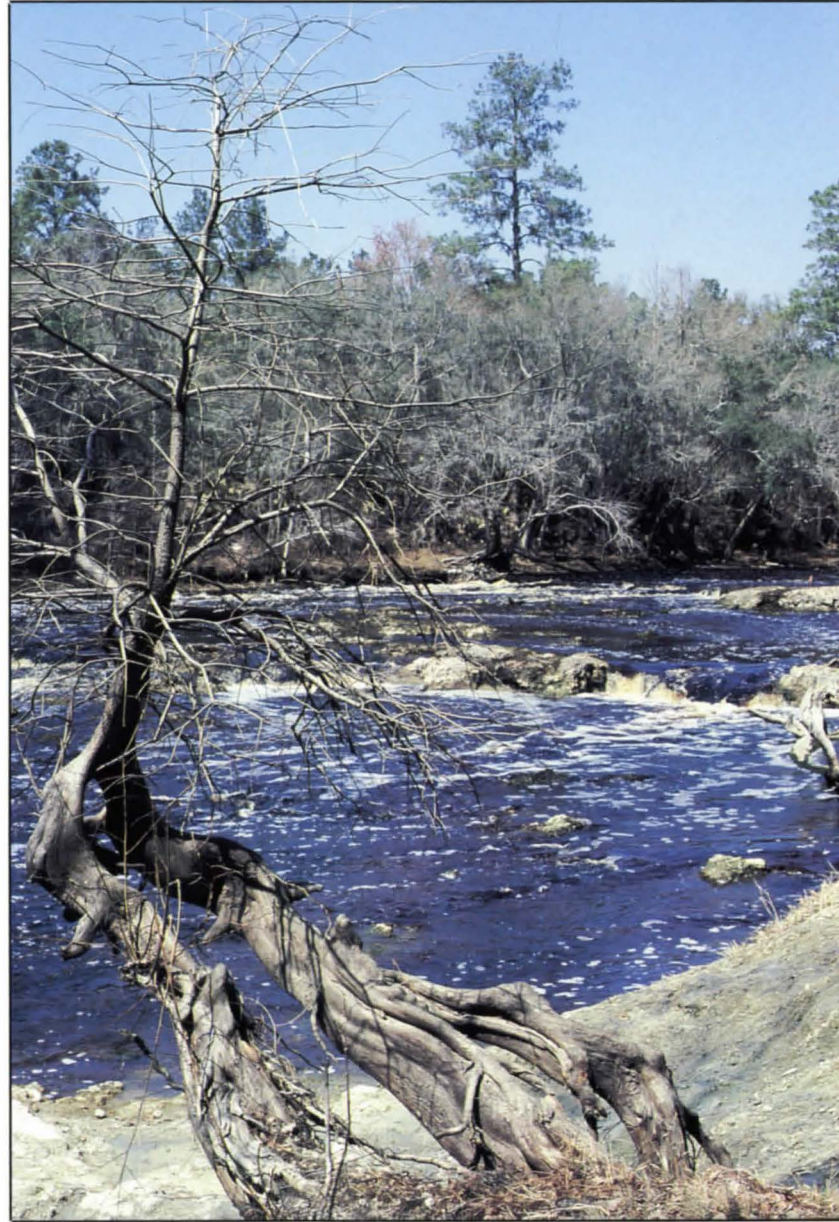
PAGE 8 Explorer William Bartram described the Suwannee River as "the cleanest and purest of any river."  
(*Florida Department of Commerce*)

PAGE 9 The mouth of the Suwannee River is a haven for manatees.  
(*Florida Department of Natural Resources*)



# *Suwannee River*

*Water Management District*



ABOVE Big Shoals, on the Suwannee River, offers a taste of white water.  
(Suwannee River Water Management District)



# St. Johns River

## Water Management District

The St. Johns River is the largest river system that is entirely in Florida. It is one of the very few rivers in North America that flows north. It is Florida's longest river; its 300-mile length drains 9,100 square miles, almost a sixth of the state. Its largest tributary, the Oklawaha River, was once the route of part of the long-proposed and now-defunct Cross Florida Barge Canal.

The St. Johns was an aquatic highway from the earliest days. It was a path into and through Eastern Florida and was part of innumerable schemes for an intracoastal waterway to the south, as well as for the water passage across Florida to the Gulf of Mexico.

Early travelers in Florida used the St. Johns River as a safe route to St. Augustine and the interior of Florida. The alternative was the perilous trip by sea. St. Augustine travellers would complete their journey by horse from Picolata on the river.

"Here on the St. Johns," wrote author and river resident Harriett Beecher Stowe, "a water coach is more to the purpose, in the present state of our wood roads, than any land carriage...."<sup>1</sup>



In the 1870s, large steamboats could easily navigate the river as far south as Palatka, and the more adventurous could travel much further south. Holidays on the river became a favored pastime. The river wildlife — its bird life, but especially the alligators — was a major attraction and as the river narrowed in the middle and upper reaches, steamboat captains soon were forced to prohibit the shooting of alligators from the decks.

One result of travel on this water highway was the opening up of the eastern interior and the upper river to agriculture.

Today's problems on the river stem in large part from agricultural drainage of the upper reaches of the river where more than 60 percent of the floodplain has been lost, including 42 percent of the annual floodplain. This loss, along with channelization of the river and drainage to the coast, creates a water supply problem during dry periods. These are the areas where *Save Our Rivers* purchases are attempting to restore a more normal hydroperiod.

### Save Our Rivers Purchases

Acres Purchased: 48,325

Cost: \$53.5 million (including bonds)

### Selected Parcels

Seminole Ranch: 14,000 acres

Latt Maxcy: 9,800 acres

Lake Miami Ranch: 2,800 acres

Greenbaum: 3,970 acres

D. C. Scott: 4,100 acres

Fellsmere: 8,000 acres

Silver River: 1,100 acres

# St. Johns River

Water Management District



ABOVE Clear water bubbles from the earth at Silver Springs.  
(Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission)

PAGE 12 The St. Johns is Florida's longest river.  
(Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission)

PAGE 13 Alligators bask in the sun along the St. Johns River.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

# St. Johns River

Water Management District



ABOVE The Oklawaha is a major tributary of the St. Johns.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)



# South Florida

## Water Management District

The Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades system is a highly managed imitation of the natural system that once allowed water to flow from the upper reaches of the Kissimmee River, through the lake, and then to filter slowly through the Florida Everglades to salty Florida Bay.

Today, the same water races down the Kissimmee River Canal — gathering pollutants from dairies, beef cattle operations, and other agricultural activities as it flows by — into the lake. Inside Lake Okeechobee, the water is held, then is released to the St. Lucie or Caloosahatchee Rivers, or into canals that deliver it to the three water conservation areas where it is stored before being parceled out to replenish Broward and Dade counties' water supplies or to help meet the water needs of the Everglades National Park where, briefly, it resumes its former natural flow to Florida Bay.

As part of the overall effort to restore the Kissimmee River — an effort that currently includes adoption and use of best management practices by agriculture throughout the Kissimmee Basin, and a demonstration project to restore marshlands along the river — the South Florida Water Management District is using *Save Our Rivers* money augmented by bond funds to purchase marshland along the river. Nearly 9,000 acres



### Save Our Rivers Purchases

*Acres Purchased: 273,846*

*Cost: \$45.9 million (including bonds)*

### Selected Parcels

*Loxahatchee River floodplain: 451 acres*

*Water Conservation Areas: 217,429 acres*

*East Everglades, Canal 111: 38,000 acres*

*Kissimmee River floodplain: 17,900 acres*

of the more than 50,000 acres of floodplain have been acquired so far under the *Save Our Rivers* program. Some 19,000 acres of Kissimmee River floodplain now are under public ownership.

The District's *Save Our Rivers* purchases in the Kissimmee are integral parts of the state's *Save Our Everglades* program, which intends to make the Everglades system of the year 2000 look more like it did in 1900 than it does today.

The District's *Save Our Rivers* purchases along the Loxahatchee River are to assure the continued protection of one of the nation's newest Wild and Scenic Rivers. When the *Save Our Rivers* purchases along the Loxahatchee are complete, some 1,500 acres of floodplain will be protected from development, helping to assure the base flow and the water quality of the river.

District acquisitions in the vast water conservation areas are designed to protect the storage areas for the South Florida and Everglades National Park water supplies as well as to protect Florida's largest wilderness haven for fish and wildlife. The District is acquiring selected parcels in fee and is purchasing mineral rights on other lands.

# South Florida

Water Management District



ABOVE Cypress trees are an integral part of the South Florida landscape.  
(South Florida Water Management District)

PAGE 16 Restoration of the Kissimmee's gentle meanders began in 1984.  
(South Florida Water Management District)

PAGE 17 Marjorie Stoneman Douglas described the Everglades as a "River of Grass."  
(Florida Department of Commerce)





ABOVE Drought sometimes plagues the Everglades system.  
(*South Florida Water Management District*)

# South Florida

Water Management District



ABOVE The Roseate Spoonbill is tied closely to the Everglades water cycle.  
(Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission)

# *South Florida*

Water Management District



ABOVE Tree islands are havens for wildlife in the Everglades.  
(South Florida Water Management District)



# Southwest Florida

## Water Management District

Our rivers radiate outward from the Green Swamp in West Central Florida. Although the Green Swamp is wholly within the Southwest Florida Water Management District, one of the four, the Oklawaha River, is a major tributary to the St. Johns River.

In addition to being the headwaters of four of Florida's major rivers — the Oklawaha, the Withlacoochee, the Hillsborough, and the Peace — the Green Swamp is Central Florida's major groundwater recharge area. The swamp and the river system it gives birth to are essential to the preservation of the potable groundwater supplies of West Central Florida.

Geographically it is between Tampa Bay and Orlando (home of Disney World), two of the fastest-growing areas of the state. The building of Disney World set off a land boom in Central Florida that threatened to spill over into the Green Swamp. As a result, it was made an "Area of Critical State Concern" under the state's Environmental Land and Water



Management Act to protect its valuable recharge functions.

Land acquisition programs of the Southwest Florida Water Management District are aimed largely at protecting the drinking water supplies for a fast-growing area of the state. The Cypress Creek, the Anclote water storage lands, and the Green Swamp land acquisitions *all* include protection of water supplies. Of course these acquisitions and others also save important environmental habitats — pine flatlands and wetlands of various types including cypress domes and the hardwood floodplains of the river headwaters — in an area in which natural lands are rapidly disappearing.

The *Save Our Rivers* acquisitions along the Withlacoochee River join 50,000 acres already purchased under other District programs. The goal is to eventually have a large part of the river's five-year floodplain under public ownership and protection.

### Save Our Rivers Purchases

Acres Purchased: 12,442

Cost: \$15,784,871

### Selected Parcels

Hidden Lake: 589 acres

Sawgrass Lake: 51 acres

Cypress Creek: 427 acres

Anclote Water Storage Lands (Anclote River):  
2,528 acres

Green Swamp River Systems (Withlacoochee River):  
8,845 acres

# *Southwest Florida*

*Water Management District*



ABOVE The Peace River near Wauchula, Florida.  
(Florida Department of Commerce)

PAGE 22 Snowy egrets are a common sight in west-central Florida.  
(Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission)

PAGE 23 Agriculture and natural systems co-exist in southwest Florida.  
(Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission)

# Footnotes

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## **Northwest Florida Water Management District**

1. *Land Into Water — Water Into Land: A History of Water Management in Florida.* Nelson A. Blake, University Presses of Florida. 1980, p. 10.

## **Suwannee River Water Management District**

1. *Land Into Water — Water Into Land.* op. cit. p. 10.
2. IBID, p. 23.

## **St. Johns River Water Management District**

1. *Land Into Water — Water Into Land.* op. cit. p. 64.

## **Southwest Florida Water Management District**

1. *Report to the Governor: Florida Rivers Study Committee.* January 31, 1985.





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