A MESSAGE FROM WATERKEEPERS FLORIDA

This past year presented challenges and opportunities for watersheds throughout the State of Florida. These challenges are complex and can often seem too formidable for one organization to address. That’s why Waterkeeper organizations from across the state came together to create a new, more powerful voice for clean water in our state – Waterkeepers Florida.

As Floridians, clean water is integral not only to our quality of life but also to our economy. Everglades National Park alone generates more than $100 million annually in tourism revenue. Our outdoor recreation industry generates $58.6 billion annually and our state is widely recognized as the Sport Fishing Capital of the World. Our waterways support billions of dollars in commerce each year and create tens of thousands of jobs for Floridians. These waters are as unique as our Florida springs and as beautiful as our scenic rivers. Any risk posed to these waterways is a direct risk to our economy and our livelihoods.

But, our important water resources are more at risk now than ever before. In light of Florida’s rapidly growing population and increasing development pressure throughout the state, it is essential that these waters are afforded the utmost oversight and protection to ensure that the resources on which we depend are adequately protected. Our state has been plagued with numerous pollution threats to our waterways including nutrient loading, wetland loss, and sewage spills resulting in devastating blue-green algae blooms, red tide, and a host of other issues.

For these reasons, Waterkeepers across the state banded together and took a stand for our water resources. Together, we speak out for clean water, protected lands, and healthy communities. We have unified our voice in support of strong protections for our waterways under the Clean Water Act. We demand action at the state level to address harmful algae blooms, dangerous sewage waste, and flooding. Together, we are fighting for better water quality standards for our lakes, rivers, streams, bays, and oceans.

As we tackle threats to clean water in our state, we are focused on the long-term sustainability of our region and are working diligently to ensure that our children and grandchildren have access to water that is clean enough for swimming, drinking, and fishing.

On behalf of our respective organizations, our hundreds of members, and more than 45,000 square miles of watersheds, thank you for joining us in taking a stand to protect Florida’s waters.

We look forward to another year of state-wide advocacy, engagement, awareness building, and positive change for clean water in 2020.

Yours in clean water,

Waterkeepers Florida
In October of 2019, Kissimmee Waterkeeper joined Waterkeepers Florida and Waterkeeper Alliance. The Kissimmee River headwaters extend into downtown Orlando and run south from Lake Kissimmee for over 100 miles to Lake Okeechobee. Based in Orlando, Kissimmee Waterkeeper will address the principal threats to the Kissimmee Basin including agriculture, urbanization, and climate change. Dr. John Capece will serve as the Kissimmee Waterkeeper. Dr. Capece has worked on hydrological issues of Central and South Florida since 1979 with both his University of Florida Master’s thesis and Doctoral dissertation in agricultural engineering investigating the hydrology, water quality, and simulation of lands in the Kissimmee River Basin.
Frequent testing, lobbying, and promoting sustainability. In the world. CCWK works to maintain these idyllic scenes, most pristine beaches, and most delicious fresh seafood. Southwest Florida is home to some of the most pristine beaches in the world. CCWK works to maintain these idyllic scenes, most pristine beaches, and most delicious fresh seafood. Collier County Waterkeeper is a nonprofit organization on behalf of the Apalachicola River and Bay. The 106-mile Apalachicola River meanders from Chattahoochee, Florida to the Gulf of Mexico in the Panhandle. It is Florida's largest river in volume. Its ecosystem includes 112,000 acres of forested floodplain and 280 square miles of estuarine habitat. The Apalachicola River is a significant source of freshwater flow and natural, life-sustaining nutrients into the Eastern Gulf. apalachicolariverkeeper.org

Founded in 1999, Emerald Coastkeeper is one of 300 (and counting) member organizations of Waterkeeper Alliance. We are a grassroots organization that monitors four main watersheds in the Florida Panhandle. Our mission is to investigate, educate and protect your right to swimable, fishable and drinkable water. This is accomplished by working proactively with other organizations and local governments. We believe that healthy waterways are directly connected to healthy communities and healthy people. emeraldcoastkeeper.org

Calusa Waterkeeper, headquartered in Fort Myers, Florida, is dedicated to the protection of the waters within our 1,000 square-mile jurisdiction including the Caloosahatchee River & Estuary, Lake Okeechobee, N. C odomus Slough, Charlotte Harbor and Estero Bay, through education, advocacy, and litigation where necessary. calusawaterkeeper.org

Lake Worth Waterkeeper is dedicated to the Lake Worth Lagoon and its watershed, considered the northern extent of the Everglades. It has endured significant change throughout history. Once a land locked freshwater lagoon connected by aquifer, the lagoon was changed into a coastal estuary a hundred years ago when inlets and canals were built changing its connection. This brings a unique management opportunity because we are effectively engineering a habitat from scratch. lakeworthwaterkeeper.org

Miami Waterkeeper’s mission is to defend, protect, and preserve South Florida’s watershed through citizen engagement and community action rooted in sound science and research. We work to ensure swimable, drinkable, fishable water for all. Through our efforts, we support a vibrant and resilient South Florida coastal community and environment for future generations. Our core issues include clean water, ecosystem protection, and resiliency. Serving our population of more than 4.5 million people across Miami-Dade and Broward counties, our approach combines education and outreach, scientific research, advocacy, and when necessary, legal action. miamiwatertkeeper.org

The mission of the Matanzas Riverkeeper is to protect the health of the Matanzas River and its watershed through advocacy, education, and community engagement. The Matanzas River is especially unique running through downtown St. Augustine with two historic forts on its banks and a thriving estuarine ecosystem where the water is clean enough to harvest oysters from. Our work includes everything from advocating for stronger water quality protections to helping children and adults alike how to be good stewards of our environment. matanzasriverkeeper.org

The Indian River Lagoon is the most diverse estuary in North America. Home to protected and endangered fish, mammals, reptiles and plants, this saltwater estuary stretches 156 miles from Palm Beach County to north of Cape Canaveral. Bridging temperate and tropical zones it is home for over 4,000 plant and animal species. The Indian Riverkeeper patrols the watershed, documents pollution, educates the public, agencies and elected officials and fights for protection. indianriverkeeper.org

The mission of Suncoast Waterkeeper is to protect and restore the Florida Suncoast’s waterways through enforcement, fieldwork, advocacy, and environmental education for the benefit of the communities that rely upon these precious coastal resources. Our efforts focus on protection of coastal waterways in and around Sarasota and Manatee Counties. suncoastwaterkeeper.com

The St. Marys River is a blackwater river which runs 126 miles from its origins in the Okefenokee Swamp to its mouth between Cumberland Island in Georgia and Amelia Island Florida. The St. Marys River watershed has over 3,000 miles of streams and tributaries, and over 40% of the watershed is comprised of wetlands. Founded in 2016, the St. Marys Riverkeeper represents over 400 members who are committed to the preservation of our watershed. stmarysriverkeeper.org

Collier County Waterkeeper is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of swimmable, drinkable, and fishable waters. Southwest Florida is home to some of the most pristine beaches, and most delicious fresh seafood in the world. CKW works to maintain these idyllic scenes, delicate ecosystems and crystal clear waters through frequent testing, lobbying, and promoting sustainability. colliercountywaterkeeper.org

St. Johns Riverkeeper is an environmental advocacy non-profit organization that serves to defend the St. Johns River and advocate for its protection. As a “watchdog” for our River’s nearly 9,000 square-mile Watershed, we’ll go wherever we need an independent voice. We tackle many issues for the St. Johns River, and accomplish our mission by educating and empowering citizens to help us protect it. We investigate pollution problems, such as toxic algae blooms we might see, we Advocate for policy change to seek sensible, holistic policy and solutions for clean water, we Educate the public by providing information to raise awareness about these issues, and we Activate others to get involved. stjohnsriverkeeper.org

Watershed Coalition advocates for conservation and stewardship of the Withlacoochee, Withlacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa Fe, and Suwannee River watersheds in south Georgia and north Florida through education, awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities. That’s the entire Suwannee River Basin, 9,950 square miles, 5,720 in Georgia and 4,230 in Florida, from the Okefenokee Swamp to the Gulf of Mexico.

wwals.net

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Suwannee Riverkeeper and its umbrella WWALS Watershed Coalition advocates for conservation and stewardship of the Withlacoochee, Withlacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa Fe, and Suwannee River watersheds in south Georgia and north Florida through education, awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities. That’s the entire Suwannee River Basin, 9,950 square miles, 5,720 in Georgia and 4,230 in Florida, from the Okefenokee Swamp to the Gulf of Mexico.

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The Matanzas River, located in our country’s oldest European city, St. Augustine, boasts the accolade of being one of the most pristine waterways in our state. The banks of the Matanzas are home to two historic Spanish era forts: Fort Matanzas and the Castillo de San Marcos. In addition to supporting a thriving estuarine ecosystem, the Matanzas River is one of the last places in northeast Florida where the water is clean enough to harvest and eat oysters from. But despite the apparent importance of the Matanzas River watershed, a variety of factors have led to a steady decline in the water quality. St. Johns County, where the heart of the Matanzas River is located, is the third fastest growing county in the state. As urbanization encroaches, natural areas are being lost along with the ecosystem services that they had previously provided. This threat is compounded by rising sea levels and marine debris. Matanzas Riverkeeper is working to ensure that these existing issues are addressed and that the Matanzas remains clean and healthy.

- In July of 2018, a development proposal threatened to destroy the environmentally and historically significant Fish Island on the Matanzas River. Over the next year, Matanzas Riverkeeper launched a grassroots advocacy campaign which generated overwhelming community support and stopped the development. Fish Island will now be permanently conserved for future generations.

- In April of 2019, Matanzas Riverkeeper launched its Litter Gitter program to take members of the community out on the river to remove trash and to learn about the issues surrounding marine debris and litter. The namesake of the program is the Litter Gitter II: a bright yellow, 24-foot Carolina skiff, specially equipped for removing large volumes of debris. Since its inception, the Litter Gitter has taken almost 300 volunteers out on 48 cleanups to remove over 8,000 pounds of trash from local waterways.

- During the summer of 2019, Matanzas Riverkeeper launched their St. Johns County 2070 project to analyze growth projections for St. Johns County and to explore smart growth policy tools that could help their community to grow in a more sustainable manner.

To learn more about the Matanzas Riverkeeper, check out their website at www.MatanzasRiverkeeper.org or follow them on Facebook.

Matanzas Riverkeeper is a non-profit organization that has been working to protect the health of the Matanzas River and its tributaries through advocacy, education, and community engagement since 2013. Jen Lomberk took the helm of the Matanzas Riverkeeper organization in December of 2017. Lomberk is an attorney with a specialization in environmental law and policy, which she uses to advocate for policies that will ensure the continued health of our beautiful waterways. Additionally, Lomberk serves as the Vice-Chair for Waterkeepers Florida.
PROJECTS

LAKE WORTH WATERKEEPER
In a partnership with the County’s Environmental Resources Management (ERM) office Lake Worth Waterkeeper has taken on the responsibility of maintaining living shoreline projects. ERM has been building mangrove islands and shorelines throughout the lagoon using recycled fill material. Volunteers have been cleaning, removing invasives, and planting mangroves.

INDIAN RIVERKEEPER
The mission of Indian Riverkeeper is to protect and restore the waters of North America’s most diverse estuary, the Indian River Lagoon and its watershed, fisheries and habitats, through advocacy, enforcement and citizen action. Projects include fighting sources of nutrient pollution, plastics pollution, loss of natural shorelines, and reckless development.

CALUSA WATERKEEPER
Among Calusa Waterkeeper’s proudest achievements is the formation and growth of our volunteer Ranger program. This band of citizen scientist Rangers, now numbering 84, works directly with Calusa Waterkeeper John Cassani and agency meetings, meet with local elected officials and attend town halls to monitor and report on water quality, attend town halls with appropriate regulatory agencies. Professionally trained volunteers are also essential in conducting visual surveys along with assisting in debris clean up events.

APALACHIcola RIVERKEEPER
River Patrol is core program of Apalachicola Riverkeeper. Our Riverkeeper is routinely on the water via kayak or motorboat conducting visual surveys, noting habitat change, pollution concerns and reporting problems to appropriate regulatory agencies. Professionally trained volunteers are also essential in conducting visual surveys along with assistance in debris clean up events.

EMERALD COASTKEEPER
Emerald Coastkeeper is currently working on several projects, including the City of Pensacola’s Proposed Tree & Landscape Ordinance, which will introduce municipal green stormwater infrastructure and a stakeholder with Escambia County and the City of Pensacola in the recovery and restoration of Carpenter’s Creek, an impaired waterbody on the EPA’s 303d list.

MIAMI WATERKEEPER
With hundreds of miles of coastline across South Florida, including canals, rivers, and Biscayne Bay, monitoring for pollution sources requires a lot of time and participants. Miami Waterkeeper’s 1,000 Eyes on the Water program is a volunteer-based water patrol training designed to educate community members on how to identify, document, and report pollution problems throughout our community and in our waterways so that we can ensure they are resolved quickly. Our goal is to train 500 people, or 1000 eyes, to be part of our water patrol team.

SUWANNEe RIVERKEEPER
Suwannee Riverkeeper opposes sewage on the Withlacoochee River, phosphate mines on the New and Suwannee Rivers, titanium mines on the Santa Fe River and the Okefenokee Swamp, Nestlé water withdrawals and bottles, fracking, and pipelines, while promoting solar power, water trails, better agriculture, water quality monitoring, songwriting, and frequent paddle outings.

SUNCOAST WATERKEEPER
Suncoast Waterkeeper’s Sick of Sewage campaign has succeeded in forcing municipalities in the Suncoast to make major investments in upgrading and rehabilitating failing sewage infrastructure in the Tampa and Sarasota Bay estuaries via enforcement of the Clean Water Act in Federal Court.

SUWANNEe RIVERKEEPER
St. Marys Riverkeeper is focused on identifying sources of non-point source pollution in our watershed through a dedicated citizen science water quality monitoring effort. We have also joined with local government to clean up tributaries impaired for high bacterial levels with EPA 319 coastal incentive grant projects.

COLLIER COUNTY WATERKEEPER
CCWK is in campaign to continuously test 33 sites twice a month in local waters including beaches, canals, rivers, and lakes to inform the public through swimguide if it is safe to go in the water. This is done in concert with community volunteers.

ST. JOHNS RIVERKEEPER
St. Johns Riverkeeper has successfully fought for more protective limits on the excessive nitrogen and phosphorous that are polluting our waterways. Unfortunately, nutrient pollution remains one of the most serious water quality problems. In 2019, we successfully launched a Don’t Feed the Algae grass-roots campaign engaging concerned citizens with advocacy and citizen-science tools they needed to take action. We educated and trained nearly 100 citizens through targeted Know Your Green programs in communities afflicted with algae blooms and now have toxic algae sampling kits in the hands of 20 trained citizen-science volunteers – ready to take action when the next algae bloom comes.

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Under the new definition of Waters of the United States (WOTUS), crucial waterways would lose guaranteed protection under the Clean Water Act's (CWA) pollution control, prevention, and clean-up programs. The new definition strips CWA protections from crucial waterways that feed our drinking water supplies, support our clean water economy, and provide numerous ecosystem services and resilience dividends. The Everglades alone is an irreplaceable driver of Florida's tourism, commercial and recreational fishing industries, outdoor recreation, biodiversity, and a source of drinking water for nearly 8 million Floridians.

Ecological impacts aside, the state of Florida relies on a clean water economy. Everglades National Park generates more than $100 million annually in tourism revenue. Outdoor recreation generates $58.6 billion annually and Florida is recognized as the Sport Fishing Capital of the World. Our waterways support billions of dollars in commerce each year and create tens of thousands of jobs for Floridians.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has estimated that more than 800,000 acres of wetlands in the Panhandle region would lose CWA protection under the rollbacks. In addition to this, almost half of Florida's 52,000 miles of rivers and streams could also lose their protection.

Any risk posed to these waterways is a direct risk to our economy and our livelihoods.

Waterkeepers Florida believes that the Environmental Protection Agency should be working to secure greater protections for these streams and wetlands, rather than revising the definition of WOTUS to put these important ecosystems at risk and will continue to fight against these changes.

Fighting WOTUS Rollbacks

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Amendment 1 - Protect Land, Protect Water

One of the best ways to protect our waterways is to protect the land around it. In 2014, 74% of Floridians voted to pass Amendment 1, which allocates an estimated $740 million to the state to purchase land for conservation to protect wildlife, habitat, and water resources. Unfortunately, instead of using the money as the voters intended, the majority of the funds have been used on salaries, vehicles, and other expenses that are not permitted by the amendment, leaving little to nothing for the purchase of conservation land. The Florida Wildlife Federation, St. John's Riverkeeper, and Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida filed suit over the misappropriation of these funds.

Waterkeepers Florida echoed the sentiments of the plaintiffs in this case by filing an amicus brief. Opposition quickly filed a response to the amicus brief, attempting to disqualify Waterkeepers Florida based on the incorrect claim that "Waterkeepers Florida is little more than an alter ego of St. John's Riverkeeper." The 13 independent Waterkeeper organizations that are members of the coalition include: Apalachicola Riverkeeper, St. Mary's Riverkeeper, Emerald Coastkeeper, Suwanee Riverkeeper, Tampa Bay Waterkeeper, Matanzas Riverkeeper, Suncoast Waterkeeper, St. John's Riverkeeper, Indian Riverkeeper, Calusa Waterkeeper, Collier County Waterkeeper, Lake Worth Waterkeeper, and Miami Waterkeeper.

A motion for leave to file a reply was filed by Waterkeepers Florida, along with an attached complete reply to the motion clearly outlining the two entities as different from one another. Despite demonstrating that Waterkeepers Florida is in no way the same entity as St. John's Riverkeeper, the 1st District Court of Appeal judge denied the briefs. While the result was unfavorable, the case is a reminder of the hurdles faced in environmental protection. Denial of briefs, however, will not deter Waterkeepers Florida from continuing to fight for land conservation to protect water quality.

Strengthening State Water Quality Standards

Waterkeepers Florida has expressed concern that Florida is at a tipping point at which red tide, blue-green algae, and brown algae may become a regularly occurring impediment to economic development and tourism, as well as a pervasive threat to public health. Under the Clean Water Act, states are required to conduct a comprehensive review of all of their water quality standards once every three years. This review is called a Triennial Review and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Water Quality Standards Program (WQSP) is responsible for this process.

Waterkeepers Florida has been engaging with FDEP regarding its ongoing triennial review to oppose weakening any current water quality standards and to advocate for increasing critical protections. Specifically, Waterkeepers Florida is pushing for the adoption of water quality standards for dangerous cyanotoxins and increased turbidity standards for coral reefs, along with additional workshops to facilitate public input in this process.
Putting an End to Plastic Pollution

Plastic pollution is a growing threat not only in our state, but globally. Unfortunately, in Florida, any municipality that attempts to phase out single-use plastics is subject to getting hit with a pricey lawsuit. Passed in 2008, the law (Fla. Stat. 403.7033) was intended to be temporary. The language stated that municipalities could not ban disposable plastic bags until the Florida Department of Environmental Protection provided a report that outlined the necessity for regulations of single-use plastics for the Legislature to adopt. The report was submitted to the Legislature in 2010, but no action was ever taken to update the statute. Ten years later, the outdated law is still on the books. Furthermore, another law (Fla. Stat. 500.90) similarly preempts municipalities from regulating expanded polystyrene (commonly known as styrofoam) within their own jurisdictions.

Luckily, cities have started to fight back. In 2016, the City of Coral Gables passed an ordinance banning single-use plastic bags and expanded polystyrene. Later that year, the City was sued by the Florida Retail Federation, which cited violations of the aforementioned laws. The judge at the trial court ruled in favor of the City on the basis that the statutes were unconstitutional. This led to a wave of cities and towns across the state following Coral Gables’s lead and enacting their own ordinances to phase out these dangerous sources of marine debris including a campaign by Miami Waterkeeper to ban single-use plastic bags, straws, and expanded polystyrene containers in the City of St. Augustine Beach. Unfortunately, the trial court’s decision was reversed on appeal which led many municipalities to repeal their single-use plastics ordinances for fear of getting sued. Now, the City of Coral Gables has decided to take the fight to the Supreme Court and Waterkeepers Florida is poised to file an amicus brief to support their position.

Taking on Cyanobacteria

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), especially blooms of cyanobacteria, have been increasing in frequency, duration, and severity in the United States, particularly in Florida in recent years. They have been widely considered to be one of the greatest threats to water quality and ecosystems in inland and coastal communities. Many major Florida watersheds including the St. Johns River, Lake Okeechobee, Harris Chain of Lakes, Caloosahatchee River, and St. Lucie River have been significantly impacted by this type of algae bloom.

Cyanobacteria blooms are typically associated with high nutrient levels in a body of water. Cyanobacteria, like many other species, require oxygen to survive. The bacteria’s oxygen consumption can lead to a condition of low oxygen levels in the water called hypoxia. These areas of low oxygen, also known as Dead Zones, can lead to mortality of fish and benthic organisms due to lack of available dissolved oxygen in the water.

Waterkeepers Florida has engaged the newly formed Blue-Green Algae Task Force and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to urge FDEP to adopt new water quality standards through the Florida Triennial Review process to address cyanobacteria blooms. This would ensure that swim advisories and water quality remediation actions take place in an appropriate timeframe.

Protecting the Clean Water Act

The state of Florida made a recent grab for federal Clean Water Act authority under Section 404. This part of the law requires permits for any discharge of dredge and fill materials into Waters of the United States such as wetlands, streams, rivers, canals, bays, and more. Waterkeepers Florida banded together to support the stance that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should allow the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to maintain its jurisdiction over Florida’s waters rather than grant the state’s request for jurisdiction.

In a letter to the Corps, Waterkeepers Florida writes, “Florida has particularly fragile and critical areas that are regulated by Section 404 dredge and fill permits, and which require the highest level of review and scrutiny.” The federal government is best able to achieve this necessary level of scrutiny and review due to their historic agency expertise and resources.

Waterkeepers Florida believes that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection does not have the resources to undertake this massive permitting responsibility. Nor does the agency have the intention to allocate any funding towards the training of new staff and other new resources required for a responsible permitting process. The state merely wishes to streamline a process specifically put in place to protect our valuable natural resources. The problem is that their version of streamlining will actually weaken the protections.

ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Moms for Clean Water Inspired by Florida’s First Lady

Earlier this year, First Lady Casey DeSantis made a powerful statement. “We feel an obligation as parents and we feel we should work on behalf of all the parents of this great state to make sure their children have a clean environment and clean water to grow up on.”

Waterkeepers Florida applauds the First Lady’s commitment to restoring and protecting our state’s waters, although it is clear our legislature does not share that same sense of urgency. Unfortunately, the 2019 legislative session failed to yield any meaningful protective policies for Florida’s waterways. Florida Moms demand better for our children and their children.

Moms for Clean Water represents moms around the state of Florida calling for greater protection for ALL of our water resources. We believe that our water should be clean for our children to safely fish, swim, and drink. This year, we collected 60 letters to First Lady DeSantis calling for her to protect all Florida Waters, stop pollution at the source, and protect our land to protect our water. Waterkeepers Florida hopes that this campaign will continue to drive the conversation into the 2020 legislative session for holistic protection of our water resources.

Public Interest Environmental Conference

Waterkeepers Florida came together early February for an in-person board meeting to set goals for the 2019 Florida legislative session. Waterkeepers gathered at the 25th Annual Public Interest Environmental Conference (PIEC) at the University of Florida Levin College of Law in Gainesville and participated in a panel discussion about the problems facing Florida’s waters and potential solutions. Since its inception in 1994, the PIEC has explored important environmental legal and policy developments in Florida and beyond, serving as a platform for meaningful interdisciplinary discourse among legal scholars, scientific experts, environmental attorneys, and students. As one of their first actions as a Waterkeeper Regional Entity, Waterkeepers Florida wrote and signed A Resolution Against Phosphate Mines in Florida. They joined several other environmental groups in opposing these mines and the impacts of their toxic byproducts including radon and uranium, effectively highlighting a lesser-known danger to Florida waters. Waterkeepers Florida looks forward to wishes of future coordinated efforts for the protection of Florida waters and continued participation in the annual Public Interest Environmental Conference.
Florida Sportsman Watermen Feature

This year the Florida Sportsman magazine launched its new TV show: Florida Sportsman Watermen. Florida Sportsman Watermen combines excellent how-to and where-to fishing tips with hard-hitting environmental advocacy featuring interviews with several Florida Waterkeepers.

In an episode featuring Blue Cypress Lake, St. Johns Riverkeeper, Lisa Rinaman discussed how the health of our springs are critical to the health of the St. Johns River. Lisa laid out how increased population is coupled with increased water consumption which has led to reduced freshwater flows and saltwater intrusion into the St. Johns River. Lisa also explained how sewage sludge land disposal is contributing to nutrient pollution in the St. Johns River.

In an episode featuring the Apalachicola Bay, Apalachicola Riverkeeper, Georgia Ackerman discussed the impact of declining freshwater flows on the oyster industry in the bay. She also outlined past attempts to pass legislation aimed at restoring Apalachicola Bay. She encouraged viewers to stay informed and to vote for leaders who will work to guarantee drinkable, fishable, swimmable water.

In an episode featuring Biscayne Bay, Miami Waterkeeper, Rachel Silverstein discussed the citizen suit provision of the Clean Water Act and their lawsuit challenging the Port of Miami shipping channel. During the dredging project for the channel, the sediment stirred up caused substantial damage to the surrounding coral reefs, including staghorn corals, leading Miami Waterkeeper to file an Endangered Species Act lawsuit against them.

In an episode featuring St. Augustine, Matanzas Riverkeeper, Jen Lomberk explained how rapid population growth and urbanization statewide is contributing to the degradation of our waterways.
Waterkeepers Florida is encouraged that our elected officials have stated an intent to make water policy a priority this upcoming legislative session. While broad policy goals supporting clean water are a step in the right direction, it is critical that these policies are supported by strong, enforceable, science-based regulations that protect our waters from the growing threats of existing pollution sources, rapid growth, and impacts from climate change.

**PRIORITIES**

**2020**

**Protect All Florida Waters**

Too often we see priority given to water resources in specific geographic or socioeconomic regions of the state while others are neglected. In Florida, all of our waterways are connected. To pollute one is to pollute them all. We urge comprehensive protections for ALL of our state’s waters, including sea level rise resiliency, adequate funding for restoration projects, and mechanisms to solve water quality issues rather than just move problems from one place to another.

**Stop Pollution at its Source**

The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is especially true when it comes to protecting our waterways. It makes so much more sense to keep pollution out of our waterways than spending the time, energy, and money to try to clean it up after it has become polluted. This legislative session, we are calling for policies that keep pollution OUT of our waterways, rather than attempting to clean it up after the fact including comprehensive sewage management reform, a clean waterways bill to strengthen regulatory tools, stormwater rule enhancements, and regulations aimed at reducing plastic pollution.

**Protect Our Land to Protect Our Water**

One of the best ways to protect our waterways is to protect the land around it. Conservation land provides a variety of ecosystem services including water purification, resiliency, and habitat protection. Land that is conserved in its natural state supports vegetation that is extremely effective at removing nutrients and other pollutants from stormwater and keeping them out of our waterways.