

Press Release

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Our Santa Fe River files for Petition for Administrative Hearing over Excessive Water Permit

Our Santa Fe River President, Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson, today, on behalf of Our Santa Fe River, filed a petition for Administrative Hearing with the Suwannee River Water Management District to challenge a recent Water Use Permit issued to W. Floyd Messer of Messer Farms, McAlpin, FL.

The water permit (WUP # 2-14-00021.001), which was processed and granted in less than one and one half months with a allocation of an average daily rate of 2.3 million gallons per day. The project is intended for agriculture which will substitute row crops for silviculture and sandhills in Suwannee County. The Messer Farms project area consists of 2,389 acres, of which roughly 1,783 are to be irrigated using groundwater delivered by 16 wells and 19 center pivots.

Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson says, " We need the WMD to carefully and systematically scrutinize EVERY permit. This permit took 1.5 months to issue hardly enough time to do a thorough assessment. Our WMD's are on a fast track to pump out permits without much regard to their directives to protect our natural resources".

OSFR contends that the applicant does not meet the requirements mandated for more water withdrawal, and that this action by the SRWMD is not consistent with the public interest and that such an excessive amount would result in adverse impacts to the surrounding Santa Fe and Ichetucknee River Basins.

The Santa Fe River has already been designated as in "Recovery" because of excessive, under managed and, until recently, unmonitored withdrawals, and thus OSFR contends that this new and huge water permit is directly in conflict with the Clean Water Act of 1972, which states that the State of Florida has the obligation to protect and preserve its rivers and springs. Unfortunately, what we are seeing here can in no way be construed as being anywhere within the bounds of that concept.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, is equally remiss in its obligations by failing to establish a scientifically accurate guideline by which to judge the condition of the river, thus allowing a consistent decline. The Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) proposed by the DEP and the SRWMD are woefully inadequate, as well as being based on flawed science which does not provide an accurate assessment of the river status. Furthermore, as a result of this failure to provide a basis "using the best information available" as mandated by Florida Statute 373.042, these MFLs are currently being challenged by EarthJustice, Ichetucknee Alliance and one individual.

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