



FLORIDA'S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Align with Restoration of The Great Florida Riverway

Five environmental bright spots in the 2021 Florida legislative session included funding for 1) water resource improvement, 2) sea level resiliency and flooding reduction, 3) wildlife corridor acquisition, 4) springs protection and 5) manatee habitat. One unfunded Florida project, the restoration of the Ocklawaha River by breaching the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam, supports each of these significant priorities. The Ocklawaha River is the heart of The Great Florida Riverway, a 217-mile waterway extending from Lake Apopka near Orlando to the lower St. Johns River ending in Jacksonville.

Supported by a coalition of more than sixty conservation, recreation, faith-based and businesses organizations, the project provides Florida taxpayers a ten-year return on investment of 7.6% or a \$1.76 return for every dollar invested and an unprecedented environmental benefit. **The restoration project is estimated to cost \$25.9 million** without recreational improvements (FDEP Greenway Plan 2018).

1) WATER RESOURCE IMPROVEMENT

Quality: A free-flowing Ocklawaha River enhances water quality by removing the stagnant Rodman pool that is prone to algae blooms, and of the Lower St. Johns River by augmenting freshwater flow, increasing dissolved oxygen, and providing a more balanced nutrient supply. It reduces invasive aquatic weed growth and herbicide use.

Quantity: Breaching the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam generates 156-276 million gallons per day of additional natural water flow for the Lower Ocklawaha River and St. Johns River Estuary by uncovering 20 freshwater springs drowned by the waters behind the dam. It also eliminates substantial evaporation of valuable water resources from the reservoir.



Photo credit: John Moran



2) STATEWIDE FLOODING AND SEA LEVEL RISE RESILIENCY

Flood Hazard Reduction: Restoring the Ocklawaha River by breaching the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam eliminates the potential for emergency dam failure that could inundate over 500 properties and \$57 million in property damages downstream of the dam in Welaka. Repair of the dam to meet 2020 federal dam safety guidelines is estimated to cost well over \$14 million. The relic dam does not provide power, water supply, or flood protection.

Resiliency: By restoring the natural timing and increasing the freshwater flow into the St. Johns River Estuary from the Ocklawaha River, the salinity balance improves, lost submerged aquatic vegetation recovers and habitat for fish and other aquatic species is enhanced. These improved freshwater flows reduce the impacts of saltwater intrusion near Jacksonville and benefit recreationally and commercially important fish and shellfish resources.

3) FLORIDA WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

Reconnecting the riverway, filling the west side of the barge canal, and restoring 7500 acres of forested wetlands provides a vital link in the portion of the Florida Wildlife Corridor called the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor (O2O). **Reconnecting the Ocklawaha, Silver and St. Johns rivers restores critical aquatic migratory paths for manatees and historic fish, as well as a land connection for Florida panthers, black bears, wild turkeys, deer, and other wildlife.** Another 10,000 acres of stressed forested wetlands will be rejuvenated upstream and downstream.



Photo credit: fStop Foundation



Photo credit: Joe Cruz Photography

4) SPRINGS RESTORATION

Twenty “Lost Springs” of the Ocklawaha reemerge by eliminating the Rodman pool that inundates the springs, suppresses flow, and limits public access. Freeing these twenty springs and respective spring runs comprise the most significant springs restoration project currently available. **Restoration of the Silver Springs ecosystem can only be accomplished by breaching the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam, allowing migratory fish and other wildlife to travel from the Atlantic Ocean and the St. Johns River.**

5) MANATEE HABITAT

More than 761 manatees have died in Florida already this year, far surpassing total deaths in 2020, Florida’s iconic manatee population is under significant threat. **A free-flowing Ocklawaha River reconnected to Silver Springs provides warm water winter habitat for hundreds of manatees.** Several of the Ocklawaha “Lost Springs” and world-famous Silver Springs and Silver River provide ideal natural habitat with plentiful food. Silver Springs could become the most popular inland manatee viewing location in the state.



To learn more, go to GreatFloridaRiverway.com and view our documentary and leader viewbook – **Voices of the River**