

# FUTURE OF RODMAN RESERVOIR/KIRKPATRICK DAM

## KEY STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP SESSION NOTES

September 29-30, 2021

SJRWMD Offices, Palatka, Florida

The following notes were captured by facilitator Karen Pelot and are for use at the discretion of the St. John's Water Management District leadership. These notes are not intended to stand alone as fact; information included is not a transcription; and notes are not intended to be fully comprehensive regarding any interest, opinion, statement, or fact.

## PURPOSE OF FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

The SJRWMD organized and hosted four facilitated focus group sessions, with key stakeholders of the Rodman Reservoir / Kirkpatrick Dam. There were two primary purposes of these sessions:

- Provide each stakeholder group the opportunity to share opinions, interests, facts, data, and anecdotal information, in a forum wherein each could be fully listened to, without interruption.
- Assist in assuring any future decision (made by the proper authorities) is well informed and includes the voices of each stakeholder group.

## PROCESS

The SJRWMD reached out to key members of each stakeholder group to invite volunteers to participate. DEP representatives were also invited to attend each session, along with two members of the SJRWMD leadership team.

Each session was intentionally kept to a small group (maximum 12), to allow adequate time and opportunity for each participant to be heard.

Sessions were scheduled for two hours, and each followed the same agenda and format:

- Welcome by SJRWMD and DEP
- Participant introductions
- Facilitated discussions around five questions:
  - What would you like to see happen with the Rodman Reservoir and Kirkpatrick Dam?
  - What is the most important piece of information that supports your position?
  - What is your biggest concern, should your desired outcome not be achieved?
  - Can you imagine a scenario, short of fully achieving your desired outcome, you could support?
  - Is there anything, not already covered, you feel is important to share?
- Close by Tom Frick

## SESSION SCHEDULE

Date	1:00 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	10:00 a.m.	Stakeholder Group
Sept. 29	X			<b>Restoration:</b> SJRWMD, DEP, FORCE, Audubon FL, Defenders of Wildlife, FL Springs Institute, St. Johns Riverkeeper, Putnam Land Conservancy  11 Participants
Sept. 29		X		<b>Anglers &amp; Recreational users*:</b> SJRWMD, DEP, 2 Anglers, Bartram Trails Society of FL, North Star Charters, Paddle Florida  9 Participants
<p>*The organizers intended for this meeting to include attendees from all sides of the issue. For various scheduling reasons, this meeting turned out to be attended only by the supporters of restoration. It is important to note supporters of Lake Ocklawaha views are represented in the two focus groups identified below that included local anglers, members of the Save the Rodman organization, and fishing tournament organizers that were intended to attend the Anglers &amp; Recreational Users group.</p>				
Sept. 30			X	<b>Save Rodman:</b> SJRWMD, DEP, 4 representatives of Save Rodman Reservoir (Lake), Putnam County Commissioner  9 Participants
Sept. 30	X			<b>Economic Interests:</b>  SJRWMD, DEP, 2 Mayors, 2 Chamber Representatives  8 Participants

# SESSION RESULTS BY QUESTION

## 1. What would you like to see happen with the Rodman Reservoir / Kirkpatrick Dam?

### RESTORATION

- Partial restoration:
  - Create a bridge w/ 200' spillways; re-establish historic river v. canal
  - Restore natural connections; offset damage, maximize benefits to wildlife and humans
  - Create a successful transition for reconnecting waterways
- Full restoration of connectivity:
  - Eliminate artificial flooding
- Invest in new infrastructure and enhance economic benefits for the local community

### ANGLERS/RECREATIONAL USERS

- Follow FDEP plan: partial restoration
- Full restoration
- Decrease man's influence on natural habitats
- Restore as much as possible to natural state

### SAVE RODMAN

- Retain, preserve, and stabilize the dam:
  - Establish wildlife and manatee preserves
  - Provide protection for land and sea wildlife
  - Create observation areas and kiosk of local and larger watershed history
  - Reopen campground w/ kayak facilities

### ECONOMIC INTERESTS

- Don't know. Trying to separate fact from fiction
- Retain and preserve in its entirety

## 2. What is the most important information that supports your position?

### **RESTORATION**

- Ecology: 2016, 2001 studies showed
  - High water is drowning feeder creeks, as well as the obvious local impact
  - Saltwater intrusion
    - 100 M gallons of fresh water will be restored
  - Current 16-mile loss of springs/spring runs
- Up and down stream are impacted, not just local
- Water loss is great threat to manatees: Water too cold in winter, too warm in summer
- Restoring the corridor of connectivity will support regional wildlife
  - > 100 miles of aquatic habitat, wildlife transitions, terrestrial wildlife
  - Restore grasses to naturally clean waters
  - Reduce algae outbreaks
  - Invasive plants and herbicides are damaging water and habitat
  - 7,500 acres of wetland are compounded by the reservoir
- Economics
  - Data supports increased visitation and revenue to area
  - Avoid \$57M cost of potential failure
- Top legislative priority
  - Restoration checks all boxes for priorities
- Plan has been fully vetted and is ready to go
  - Plan – Land – Science: results all align
- See USGS reports and success stories from around the country for ecologic and economic benefits

### **ANGLERS/ RECREATIONAL USERS**

- See 1997 plan: It is complete, just needs to be implemented
- Reference studies (i.e.: Dr. Ed Lowe's)
  - None support keeping the dam/reservoir
  - Ramifications of saltwater intrusion
  - Loss of aquatic vegetation
  - Habitat degradation to estuary
- Additional 150M gallons of water flow per day
- 1,000 starved manatees

- Retention is a “sin against humanity”
- Economic impact: Negative if kept, positive if connectivity is restored

### **SAVE RODMAN**

- 21B gallons of water, 19 ft above sea level: SJR flows at stagnant rate and is at sea level
- FL Defenders sued the state to force them to do exactly what the dam and lake do naturally right now: natural water purification
  - Look around the state to locations where water systems are being built to do what occurs here naturally
- Current vegetation is doing its job: Ecosystem has adapted in the last 50 years; this is a safe habitat for wildlife species (including endangered) supported by the lake; removing the dam would kill the ecosystem
- See 2016 study, UF study re: Increase in human population negatively impacts nutrient increase

### **ECONOMIC INTERESTS**

- Region-wide economic and ecological implications if restored
  - Decreased tourism
- Losing \$500k - \$2M per fishing tournament in local economy

## 3. What is your biggest concern should your desired outcome not be achieved?

### **RESTORATION: Retention causes...**

- Total collapse of the 100 mi. SJR estuary
- Reduced life cycles and viability of sea life
- Lost cascade: fish life, migration
- Further poisoning of waters and associated costs
- Further deteriorating water quality
- Losing the state's biggest opportunity to remedy the manatee crisis
- Lost opportunity for this and future generations to experience the “real, natural Florida”
- Losing all momentum of public awareness, state and federal funding, and economic opportunities (Bass Pro Shops)
- Losing our biggest opportunity for ecological improvement

### **ANGLERS/RECREATIONAL USERS: Retention causes...**

- Ecological collapse followed by economic collapse
- The compounding of past mistakes – all science shows it was a mistake from the beginning
- Refer to all the dead lagoons: In our lifetime, retaining it will kill this waterway too
- 2015 report: Cost of repairs; probability of flooding/ people in harm's way; herbicide and muck build-up
- We have the opportunity now for state and federal funding to benefit Putnam County – don't miss this chance

### **SAVE RODMAN: Restoration causes...**

- The whole area becomes a wasteland: declined population of wildlife, degradation of ecosystem, old Florida goes away forever
- The area turns into mosquito infested, disgusting mud hole for 50+ years to come
- Our way of life will be gone forever, particularly damaging the local minority population relying on the lake for sustenance
- Destruction of the ecosystem
- Economic harm

### **ECONOMIC INTERESTS: Restoration causes...**

- Lost economic impact: Trickle-down effect of damage, we have grown >100% in bed tax; lost opportunities via camping, birding, fishing, canoeing
- DEP study showed a potential 55% reduction in tourism and recreation
- Devastation to environment: there are too many unknowns about how the ecosystem will be impacted

## **4. Can you imagine a scenario you could support, short of achieving your desired result?**

### **RESTORATION**

- Partial restoration is a consensus (compromise) position, it is the middle ground
- Permanent draw down below historic measures would be better than nothing
- NO and:

- Establish a restoration and recreation infrastructure
- Draw down while executing restoration
- There are misconceptions about manatee viability w/ lock

### **ANGLERS / RECREATIONAL USERS**

- Longer draw-down and gradual removal of dam, phased process
- See 1992 plan: Allow river to flow; establish another bass hole
- See the example of the Suwannee River: Restoration + Recreation (economic boost), there is an easy start now
- Nothing that limits freshwater flow to counter saltwater infusion
- None without restoration of river flow

### **SAVE RODMAN**

- No

### **ECONOMIC INTERESTS**

- No
- If benefits to Putnam county's economy and ecology could be factually demonstrated, would consider; final resolution must be fact-based

## 5. What other information is important for decision-makers to have?

### **RESTORATION**

- The benefits of restoration reach down to the S. Atlantic Ocean
  - The dam is here, but the ecologic reach is a multi-regional issue
- There is currently a wide base of political support, and this project is the most comprehensive way to meet legislative priorities
- Fish in the spring runs have reduced from 5xs that of the reservoir to 3xs.
- Atlantic manatees are moving here
- This is a unique opportunity to restore a "lightly managed" real Florida
- There will be an uncontrolled influx to riverside communities and the SJR if failure occurs
- There are endangered plant species throughout the corridor



## **ANGLERS / RECREATIONAL USERS**

- There are successful examples of restoration around the country, follow them
  - Designations (scenic rivers restored from dams) paid for with federal \$
  - Go get the federal \$
  - Comparatively inexpensive to restore
- Dam's lease is up, restoration will be a simple line-item on state budget
- Rodman is the kidney of the St. Johns River: Is there data about cleansing the waters via the curving Ocklawaha?
- See UF studies: 81% boost to Putnam County visitation during drawdowns
- Improved quality of life for residents
- We have the most public land on the SJR and have huge economic opportunities: campgrounds, piers, influx of business, as-is keeps them away
- There is much misinformation amongst residents: Local politicians support it and important voices have been excluded; politics are winning over facts and science
- People with unpermitted encroachments are being listened to

## **SAVE RODMAN**

- Pay attention to history: All waterways are connected; this is a much bigger issue than this local area
- Restoration would cause area lakes to go down and wells to run dry
- This greenway is the #1 spot for visitors and top 3 bass fishing in the country (\$267M – it is already a world-class destination in an economically depressed location)
- Learn the facts (truth) about what will happen if the dam is taken out
- There are mitigating factors for springs and spring runs that are unrelated to Rodman
- There is no mercury warning for fish from Rodman
- We have the best of all worlds here: Diverse economic streams and diverse recreation opportunities

## **ECONOMIC INTERESTS**

- We have twelve different habitats supported by the lake – more now than prior to the dam being built
- Nearly every large (record) bass comes from Rodman; winning bass most often comes from Rodman; Rodman bass is always in top 5
- Concern for maintaining current equipment and structures: Current political environment may not share commitment

- Manatees are here and flourishing because they have food, they come and go through locks
- Rodman herbicide spraying is minimal
- There are overwhelming campaigns of misinformation
- Fishermen contribute exponentially more to economy than other recreational activities
- Wolfson's bass tournament affords us additional lock time