



# THE RIVER ACCORD

## A PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ST. JOHNS

### Florida Department of Environmental Protection

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The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is committed to addressing water quality issues in the lower St. Johns River. The Department has consistently worked with its federal and local partners to restore this critical natural resource.

Florida's water quality standards are among the highest in the nation. Firm regulation and collaborative partnerships are cleaning up pollution faster and better. Since 1999, Florida has invested more than \$3.1 billion to upgrade and improve water and wastewater facilities and clean up stormwater pollution, funding about 1,800 projects statewide.

#### CHALLENGE

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has identified several segments of the main stem of the Lower St. Johns River Basin to be impaired by nutrients.

In 1999, Florida took unparalleled steps to implement the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program, embarking on a bold initiative to identify, evaluate and restore degraded waterways.

#### PROJECT UPDATES

The restoration effort in the St. Johns has been a collaborative effort. A Stakeholders Group was formed in 1999 to discuss technical issues related to a scientific model used to create the numerical limit for nutrients that the St. Johns River can handle. The scientists developing the model and the TMDL criteria reviewed technical details with this group. FDEP and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) also consulted stakeholders during the preparation of the *Development of Total Maximum Daily Loads and Pollution Load Reduction Goals for the Lower St. Johns River Basin: Plan of Study*, which was first drafted in 2000 and published in September 2001.

In July 2002, FDEP convened the Lower St. Johns River TMDL Executive Committee to provide input to the development of a TMDL for the basin and to assist in developing a Basin Management Action Plan to achieve the nutrient reductions needed to restore the river.

In August 2003, the DEP adopted a TMDL, or water quality target, based on state water quality standards, for nutrients in the Lower St. Johns River using sound science and a panel of experts committed to the restoration of the river.

The Lower St. Johns River restoration plan represents the collaborative effort of local stakeholders in the basin to identify current and planned management strategies to reduce discharges nutrients to the basin to achieve the allocations shown in this BMAP. It contains both structural and non-structural strategies, including:

- Wastewater treatment plant upgrades;
- Redirecting wastewater discharges to beneficial reuse for irrigation and other purposes;
- Stormwater retrofits;
- Urban structural Best Management Practices;
- Urban nonstructural Best Management Practices such as cleaning and maintenance activities;
- Agricultural Best Management Practices;
- Environmental education; and
- Water quality credit trading.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

With implementation of the projects outlined in this plan, reductions in the nitrogen and phosphorus loads to the river are expected to improve the conditions of the river so that it meets water quality standards. As a result, we expect:



- Improved water quality in both the marine and freshwater portions of the Lower St. Johns River;
- Decreased loading of target nutrients (TN and TP) in the water column, which leads to improvement in dissolved oxygen conditions and other secondary water quality characteristics, such as decreased turbidity and organic carbon;
- Lowered concentrations of chlorophyll *a*, which indicates that there are fewer algae in the water column and, therefore, fewer algal blooms;
- Enhanced understanding of basin hydrology, water quality, and pollutant sources;
- Decreased number of toxic algal blooms and the associated health risks;
- Fewer fish kills;
- Increased native aquatic vegetation; and
- Enhanced public awareness of pollutant sources, impacts, and management actions.