



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
JOHN PEYTON
MAYOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MAYOR AND PARTNERS CELEBRATE *THE RIVER ACCORD* ANNIVERSARY

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Aug. 6, 2008 – Mayor John Peyton today joined *The River Accord* partnering agencies, the University of North Florida (UNF), Jacksonville University (JU), Sen. Jim King, Eric Hughes of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative (AHRI), and other community leaders to celebrate *The River Accord's* second anniversary with the release of the *State of the River* report, recognition of the 10th anniversary of the AHRI designation and provide an update on the status of projects benefitting the river's health.

Launched in July 2006, *The River Accord* is a 10-year initiative to improve the health of the St. Johns River's lower basin – an area extending 2,750 square miles from Putnam County through Jacksonville to the Atlantic Ocean. *The River Accord* partners include the City of Jacksonville, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), JEA, St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and Water Sewer Expansion Authority (WSEA).

Together, the partners will invest \$700 million and are working to improve water quality, monitor and reduce sedimentation and improve access to this tremendous natural resource, while measuring and tracking program accountability.

"The city and its partners took a giant step with the River Accord two years ago and because of our collective work, decades of concern about the river are turning into the promise of real progress," said Mayor Peyton. "I truly believe that which gets measured, gets done. I applaud the team for working together to document our successes, note the challenges we still must tackle and stay the course to make good on the commitments we have made."

To ensure program accountability, the partners have collaborated with a team of academic researchers from UNF and JU to publish an annual *State of the River* report. Funded by the City of Jacksonville Environmental Protection Board, the report tracks data considered essential to evaluating the river's health and engaging the community in its future.

Led by JU Marine Science Program director Daniel McCarthy, Ph.D., the research team has reviewed and compiled information on river health indicators including water quality, fisheries, aquatic life and contaminants. How each indicator contributes to, or signals, overall river health is then discussed in terms of its current status in 2008 and trends over time.

The report shows that while there is still much to be done to improve the river's health, some gains have been made. For example indicators such as turbidity and fecal coliform bacteria levels in the main stem and several species of fish and aquatic life are a satisfactory level.

In addition to the full technical document, the research team has condensed the findings in an easy-to-use eight-page brochure. Both elements, as well as links to other St. Johns River resources may be found at a new easy-to-use Web site launched by the team today at <http://www.SJRreport.com>.

At the event Mayor Peyton and Eric Hughes of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative (AHRI) also recognized the 10th anniversary of the St. John's River's designation as one of 14 American Heritage Rivers. Launched in 1998, the AHRI is an innovative response to help river communities that seek federal assistance and other resources.



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The formation of the St. Johns River Alliance, a 501(c)3 organization created in 2004, is a direct result of the AHRI designation. The Alliance is made up of 13 member counties and nine citizen members who reside in the in the upper, middle and lower basins of the St. Johns River. The Alliance meets quarterly, rotating its meetings from basin to basin. Former Jacksonville mayor and current president of the University of North Florida John Delaney chairs the group.

Initially, the Alliance focused its efforts on an awareness campaign raising funds for and producing "The River into the New World," a one-hour documentary that has run in 300 television markets nationally. Today, the Alliance is focused on several initiatives including: completing the comprehensive river restoration plan; working with partners to protect and expand public access to the river; reviewing existing scientific literature to spot gaps in research on the river's health; continuing outreach efforts to connect residents with the river; working with member counties to link existing and planned trail corridors to the river and creating a river-wide water conservation program.

Partner Updates

City of Jacksonville

On July 22, 2008, the City of Jacksonville adopted two new laws to be codified in Chapter 366 of the Ordinance Code. The fertilizer ordinance will assist in meeting the nutrient Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements for the St. Johns River as set forth by state and federal regulations, by addressing fertilizer application and storage practices for retail garden centers, commercial fertilizer applicators and homeowners. The irrigation ordinance enacts landscape irrigation restrictions and requirements that are based upon the SJRWMD's model ordinance to minimize runoff and conserve water. The SJRWMD has asked local governments to adopt ordinances consistent with its lawn and landscape irrigation rule, and the city of Jacksonville is among the first in northeast Florida to formally adopt an irrigation ordinance.

In addition, the city is working to create more opportunities for residents to enjoy the river and its tributaries. Amenities have been added to the Julington-Durbin Preserve (which is jointly owned by the SJRWMD and the state of Florida) was completed this year. Negotiations are underway for acquisition for 10 additional acres at Huguenot Memorial Park, discussions ongoing regarding increasing access at numerous properties and various phases of construction are poised to begin or are underway at six other public lands.

The city has also strengthened its stormwater management program to more fully address the needs of the St. Johns River. It has focused on improvements through participation in basin management planning, implementation of dedicated funding for stormwater projects through the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility, improved floodplain management and specific stormwater projects to address drainage and water quality concerns in the basin.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

In August 2003, the FDEP adopted a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), or water quality target, based on state water quality standards, for nutrients 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 nutrient discharges to the basin to achieve the allocations shown in the basin management action plan (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, non-structural and agricultural Best Management Practices; environmental education; and water quality credit trading.

"Considerable progress has been made in the development of the basin management action plan for the TMDL," said Greg Strong, FDEP's Northeast District Director. "This plan will pave the way for significant improvements in water quality in the St. Johns River by including a clear commitment to implement specific actions that reduce pollution. An absolutely essential element of this public process has been the solid collaboration among the many diverse stakeholders involved."



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JEA

JEA has voluntarily reduced the amount of nitrogen it discharges into the St. Johns River by nearly 50 percent compared to its baseline in 2000. The utility is working to continue to reduce the amount of nitrogen it discharges into the river, by increasing reclaimed water use, retiring the remaining old-technology treatment plants and upgrading its large current-technology treatment plants

"I am encouraged by the great strides JEA is making with its partners to improve the health of the St. Johns River. We remain committed to the River Accord by improving the wastewater treatment process and aggressively increasing the amount of reclaimed water," said Jim Dickenson, JEA, CEO/Managing Director.

SJRWMD

Through cooperative efforts between the St. Johns River Water Management District and local government partners, more than 20 reclaimed water projects and two wastewater plant upgrade projects are expected to be completed by the end of 2012. These projects are intended to remove nitrogen discharges from the river, which helps to improve water quality in the Lower St. Johns River Basin. At the same time, they will make reclaimed water available for irrigation, which will expand existing drinking water supplies.

When these reclaimed water projects are fully implemented, they will remove 1.6 million pounds of nitrogen per year and remove 32 million gallons per day — or 11.68 billion gallons per year — of discharge through beneficial wastewater reuse. Current project partners include JEA, Clay County Utility Authority, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, St. Johns County, the cities of Palatka, Atlantic Beach and Jacksonville Beach, and the town of Orange Park.

"We have made great strides in reducing nutrient loading and diverting wastewater to beneficial reclaimed water use. The results of these projects will go well beyond state and federal water quality requirements," said District Executive Director Kirby Green. "However, this is just a starting point. The District is continuing its work with local governments to identify and jointly fund approximately \$230 million more in reuse projects."

WSEA

Thanks to a state funding appropriation, the WSEA will complete the final phase of the Better Jacksonville Plan Septic Tank Phase Out area, Oakwood Villas Estates, and is working on a pilot project in Lincoln Villas. Moreover, the City of Jacksonville has named the WSEA, Septic Tank Phase Out lead agency for all future projects. Moving forward, the WSEA will streamline and improve processes to serve as a one-stop-shop for all septic tank elimination in Jacksonville.

"The Water and Sewer Expansion Authority (WSEA), in support of the Mayor's commitments, has made great progress in obtaining over \$14 million dollars from the state to phase out failed septic systems in Jacksonville," said Fred Odom, WSEA Executive Director. "These failing systems present a significant environmental and health threat to the Lower St Johns River Basin and the citizens of Jacksonville. We are thrilled to officially take the lead on septic tank phase out projects, community outreach and program education."

The River Accord Report

To ensure that the program meets its goals, spends money wisely and measurably improves the river's health, *The River Accord's* steering committee, composed of representatives from the city, JEA, SJRWMD, DEP and WSEA, have also released *The River Accord Biennium Report*. A complete version of this report is available at www.coj.net (Mayor's Office page, River Accord page).

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