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Governor Crist Applauds Partnership to Restore St. Johns River

--Restoration plan the result of hard work of unprecedented group of diverse local, regional stakeholders--

JACKSONVILLE – Today Florida Governor Charlie Crist joined Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Mike Sole, City of Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton, St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) Executive Director Kirby Green, JEA Chief Executive Officer Jim Dickenson and a host of community leaders to applaud the work of the Lower St. Johns River Total Maximum Daily Load Executive Committee in developing a plan to restore and protect the St. Johns River. Congressman Ander Crenshaw and State Representative Aaron Bean also attended today's event.

"Together, this group of stakeholders has dedicated itself to a clear set of specific actions to substantially improve water quality in the St. Johns River," said Governor Crist. "I applaud their hard work, vision and commitment to the protection of the river as well as its role in the local economy."

The restoration plan, formally named the Lower St. Johns Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), was developed under the coordination of DEP in partnership with local industries, cities, counties, the SJRWMD, environmental groups and many other stakeholders. It is a comprehensive roadmap for restoring and protecting water quality in the St. Johns River. Implementation of the Action Plan will benefit the segment of the St. Johns River that flows between the mouth of the Ocklawaha River, its largest tributary, and the Atlantic Ocean, encompassing a 2,750-square-mile drainage area. The portion of the St. Johns River that is covered in the plan is 101 miles long and has a water surface area of approximately 115 square miles.

"Protecting the health of the St. Johns River is one of my top priorities and water quality issues, conservation and access measures continue to be focus of this government," said Mayor John Peyton. "Because of collective work like that demonstrated by the Lower St. Johns River TMDL Executive Committee, the decades of concern are turning into the promise of real progress. I applaud the collaboration our Governor, our partners and this diverse group of stakeholders for their dedication and am encouraged by this important step toward realizing a healthier future for this great natural treasure."

The St. Johns River has long been the center of the ecology for the region, as well as the center of the economy. It is home to one of the largest

ports in the state; supplies a significant portion the region's source of shrimp, blue crab and catfish; provides recreational opportunities to residents and visitors alike; and is home to hundreds of businesses that dot the shoreline. The river is used for commerce, food, protection, power and transportation.

In 2008, the DEP adopted water quality restoration targets, called Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), to establish reduction targets for nutrient (phosphorus and nitrogen) loadings to impaired waterbodies. The TMDLs helped stakeholders evaluate and identify local actions to control nutrient discharges. The action plan now sets forth these improvements in detail, including a schedule for their implementation and the identification of potential resources to accomplish them. The Lower St. Johns River BMAP is the fourth to be developed under DEP's comprehensive approach to identify polluted waterways and build partnerships with local, regional and state interests to clean them. The progress of this plan will be carefully monitored by DEP to ensure the plan's implementation and that the river's health is restored and protected.

Among the programs and projects identified in the BMAP are wastewater treatment plant upgrades, redirecting wastewater discharges to beneficial reuse for irrigation and other purposes, stormwater retrofits, urban structural and nonstructural BMPs to reduce loading from stormwater runoff, agricultural BMPs and environmental education. These actions represent a commitment to invest more than \$625 million in measures that will improve the conditions of the river such that it meets applicable water quality standards, decreases algal blooms and enhances the growth of native aquatic vegetation. This will result in a net reduction of over 5.5 million pounds of total nitrogen in the fresh and marine portions of the river, and more than 200,000 pounds of total phosphorous in the freshwater portion of the river.

To view the St. Johns restoration plan visit
<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/northeast/stjohns/TMDL/Final-Draft-BMAP.pdf>.

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