

Statement by E. Dwight Adams, Administrative Chairman
Suwannee – St. Johns Group of the Sierra Club
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As a long-term activist interested in protecting the environment, I have interacted with EPD on many issues. In all cases, EPD has been effective and efficient. I will comment below on any situation where this has not been the case. Rather than duplicating services of other agencies, EPD usually fills a void left by inadequate protection of state or federal agencies. It is a fallacy that “meeting all state and federal standards” means the desired level of protection. EPD frequently has provided the missing element of protection that is needed. EPD has acted appropriately in carrying out Commission policies in all areas with which it has dealt. The gutting of the Water Management Districts by the Scott administration has left a gaping hole in protecting water supply and quality. It would be great if EPD could fill this role, but without additional funding and authority this will be a difficult role. EPD’s priorities must remain protection of Alachua County’s special assets and interests. The Commission must assure that EPD has the resources necessary to do this, given the cutbacks in state resources.

A few areas of my interaction with EPS are mentioned below:

Alachua Progress Center Research Park

In this case, EPD was the only agency at any level including state and federal involved in the issues peculiar to this site. Unfortunately a site had been chosen for the chemical-intensive (later changed to bio-medical) research and development park in the stream-to-sink basin that contains the Alachua well field. Any leaks from the development would imperil the drinking water wells of the city. Chris Bird recognized the problem and was instrumental in having hazardous materials management plans developed for the site. Bird contacted a nationally known expert in managing hazardous materials and arranged a presentation before the County Commission.

Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project

While most of the interest in protecting sensitive areas has been concentrated on wetlands, Alachua County, through the Environmental Protection Department, has also taken steps to protect numerous ecologically sensitive upland areas. The Ecological Inventory Project report has played a significant role in identifying sensitive upland areas for protection through the comprehensive plan and for purchase when voters have approved plans for land acquisition. Significantly, some owners of parcels in the County have sought to have them annexed into the City where regulations are more lax.

Gainesville Well-Field Protection

With the approval of industrial development by the City along North Main Street, protection of the City Well-Field just north of 53rd Ave. became critical. EPD developed a well-field protection ordinance surrounding the wells and shepherded it through the Commissions to provide the protection necessary for this critical resource. EPD has had a continuing involvement in protection of the water supply as the hazards of the Cabot Koppers site linger on, since neither DEP nor EPA has prevailed on the site owners to clean up this “superfund” site. This is an example of lack of state or federal protection where EPD could step in if it had adequate funding and authority.

Protection of Water Quality and Quantity

Lack of State and Federal protection of water quality and quantity has caused EPD to take an active role in this area. Unfortunately, it lacks funding and authority to fill the vacuum left by state and federal agencies failure to act.