

# RiverWatch

Visit our website at [Stewardsonline.org](http://Stewardsonline.org)

Spring 2003

## *Our Mission:*

*To restore, preserve and protect the waters of the St. Johns River Basin and to serve as a voice for the River.*



## An Evening on the River Gala

Our third annual fund-raising gala will be held on May 10, 2003 at the Florida Yacht Club at 7 PM.



Mayor John Delaney will be Master of Ceremonies for the festivities that include a delicious, full buffet dinner, dancing to the BayStreet Band and silent auction with outstanding art work, creative gifts and bargains at some of your favorite places.

Awards will be presented to the 2003 Friend of the River and other dignitaries will be recognized.

The evening will also debut a short clip of a documentary entitled "The River Returns - America's First River", produced by Stewards' Board member Michael Hartman and Digital Video Arts. It will tell the story of the beautiful St. Johns River and how the river is being saved from pollution. Designed to entertain and educate viewers about the River's rich and fascinating history, the video project spans nearly two years of research and was created to be shown on public broadcasting stations.

### INSIDE

Protecting the Aquifer

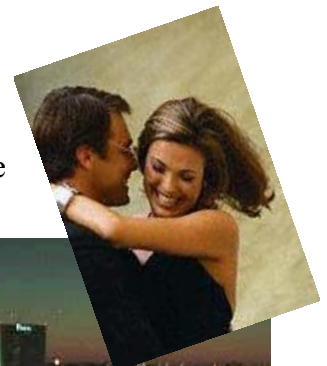
River Restoration Plan

In Memoriam-Fortson

Belleville Speaks

Make your reservations early for this memorable event by calling our Hotline 800-338-7757 for information, reservations or to purchase a corporate table.

Tickets are \$50 per person and are a tax-deductible donation to support our mission of serving as a voice for the river. Dress is jackets for gentlemen.



# Protecting the Floridan Aquifer



PHOTO by GEORGE SKENE  
ORLANDO SENTINEL March 2, 2002

*Roy Relyea shines his dive light down into a portal of the Floridan Aquifer at Blue Spring near Orange City in Volusia County. Sunken trees crisscross the opening of the popular diving spot and manatee haven. The flow here is diminishing as more water is pumped from the surrounding aquifer for human needs.*

Most of northeast Florida's drinking water comes from aquifers, particularly the Floridan aquifer. Aquifers consist of geologic layers within the earth's crust that store and move water. Void spaces in these limestone and sand/shell aquifers are filled with water.

The Floridan aquifer system, which was formed under a marine environment, is one of the largest aquifers in the United States. Contrary to popular belief, Florida does not get its water from large underground rivers that come from the Carolinas. Recharge water for the Floridan comes from rainfall that seeps into the ground. The aquifer

averages 1,000 feet thick but can extend to a depth of 2,000 feet below the land's surface.

In some areas, water in the Floridan is unfit to drink without treatment. Saltwater, which is heavier than freshwater, sometimes seeps into drinking water wells — known as saltwater intrusion — making the water too salty to drink. Though saltwater is present everywhere in the aquifer deep below freshwater, saltwater intrusion happens when wells are drilled too deep or too much freshwater is pumped from the aquifer allowing saltwater to replace freshwater.

In some areas, the aquifer is confined by a thick layer of  
*(continued on the next page)*

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Carol Matthews

## *RiverWatch*

**P.O. Box 54123, Jacksonville, FL 32245**

RiverWatch is a publication by the Stewards of the St. Johns River, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to serving as a voice for the St. Johns River and its tributaries since 1990. The newsletter is published quarterly.

We welcome comments from our readers. Please share our message with your friends. Invite them to become a Steward.

**NEWSPAPER  
STAFF  
Carol Matthews  
Donald Loop**

Member of River Network  
National Environmental Group

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## The Floridan Aquifer

clay and then by more sandy sediments up to the land's surface. Where the Floridan is confined, water in the aquifer is under pressure, which allows the water to rise above the top of the aquifer. Artesian wells occur where the water level in a confined aquifer rises above land surface.

Uncontrolled, poorly constructed or deteriorating artesian wells can have an adverse impact on the quantity and quality of water in aquifers and other water bodies. Florida law requires well owners to control the discharge from artesian wells.

The District's abandoned artesian well plugging program is designed to assist well owners in complying with state law in properly abandoning artesian wells. Assistance is offered through cost-share programs, technical guidance and oversight of licensed well contractors while the well is being permanently "abandoned," or plugged. On average, the St. Johns River Water Management District assists 100 well owners each year to plug abandoned wells.

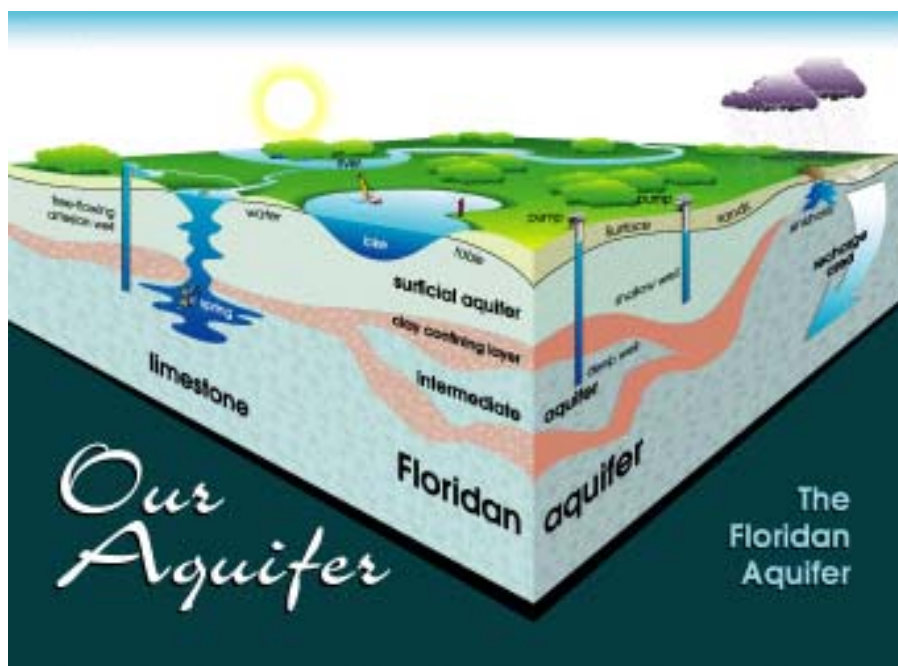
In addition to its well plugging program, the District is actively protecting the aquifer through its water supply plan. This plan, adopted in April 2000, identified sources of water adequate to meet the needs of Florida's water users for the next 20 years without resulting in unacceptable adverse impacts to the aquifer system or related wetlands, springs and surface waters.

The District's 1998 water supply needs and sources assessment report indicates that about 40 percent of the District is likely to experience water resource problems if current plans for future water use through the year 2020 are implemented. Alternative supplies will need to be developed, including use of surface water from the St. Johns River, brackish (slightly salty) groundwater, reclaimed water, conservation and artificial recharge of the Floridan aquifer. The District is working with a host of partners to develop alternative water sources.

Individuals can help protect the aquifer system in simple ways. For example, conserving the use of water in our homes means less water must be withdrawn from aquifers. We each can reduce the amount

of chemicals used on our lawns, reducing contamination of groundwater, and we can report abandoned wells that need to be plugged.

To notify the St. Johns River Water Management District of a free-flowing well, call (800) 741-WELL (9355). Other information about the District and its work is available online at [sjrwmd.com](http://sjrwmd.com)





# River Restoration Plan

by Don Loop

projections. Severe decline has already occurred in the quality of water that people can safely swim and recreate in, to say nothing of the disappearance of many kinds of fish that our commercial fisherman and sport fisherman and bird population need to enjoy.

River Summits have been held since 1997 supposedly to come up with a St. Johns River Restoration and Protection Plan. Thus far, no such plan exists.

Now, a River Restoration Group formed under the leadership of Mayor John Delaney appears to be finally taking steps toward a multimillion dollar restoration plan for the St. Johns River. The panel overseeing the River Restoration Initiative agreed to ask governments in a dozen counties to propose a work plan of needed projects by early May. The River Restoration Working Group, including the Executive Director of the Stewards, Don Loop, also proposed plans to create a private, non-profit organization that would coordinate and seek funding for the projects throughout the 310 mile river.

The need for a River Restoration Plan for the River is critical. The 19 counties in the lower basin contained a population of 3 million people in 1990. It is expected that the river will have to carry the waste of over 6 million people by 2020 according the St. Johns River Water Management District's

The River Restoration Working Group held its first meeting on Feb. 28, 2003 and will finish work on May 2, 2003. The group will propose a list of restoration projects and goals consistent with the proceedings of the 2003 St. Johns River Summit and will outline a permanent organization structure for the implementation of the River Restoration Plan. This private organization, tentatively called the St. Johns River Alliance, will have the responsibility to coordinate between counties and raise funds that might be prohibited within government. This organizational structure would essentially replace the American Heritage River Committee which was created after former President Clinton designated the St. Johns River as one of 14 waterways with national significance.

The vision of the St. Johns River Alliance is to assign representatives to a working group for the purpose of prioritizing worthy river projects. Mayor Delaney will name the Duval County's representative. State environmental and water management agencies will also be represented along with interests from agriculture, environmental groups and others.

The following priority issues areas will serve as a structure for pursuing a comprehensive plan to protect and restore the St. Johns.

# Plan Appears To Be A Reality This Time

## **Water quality**

- A. Point Source Program**
  - Sewage treatment-100 % removal BNR, AWT, and then 0 % discharge
  - Implementation of TMDLs
  - Restoration tools and investigations
- B. Non-point Source Program**
  - Urban Stormwater Treatment
  - 100 % master planned
  - 100 % retrofitted sediment stabilization
  - enforcement and compliance
  - compliance with NPDES
  - Rural Stormwater Treatment (AG)
  - 100 % Best Management Practices
  - 100 % stormwater treatment
- C. Establish PLRGS ( for TMDLs)**
- D. Septic tank remediation**
- E. Land acquisition to support bullets**

## **Aquatic Habitat Restoration Program**

- A. Contaminated sediment treatment and remediation**
- B. Habitat restoration**
- C. Sediment remediation**
- D. Land acquisition to support bullets**

## **Restoration tools and investigations**

**A. Necessary tools and investigations to restore river to Class III designation or better and maintain its health.**

**B. Additional draft objectives were included for Water Supply, Access/Recreation, Education/Public Outreach, and Structure/Implementation**

Once this NGO (non-government organization) is formalized, it will support the work of the River Navigator and the programs of the

American Heritage River Initiative. As a result, the new NGO will function more like a public/private partnership than a stand alone organization.

The question that many long time river advocates have is “ will such an organization be able to formulate and administer the much needed comprehensive plan for restoring the St. Johns River?”

The distinguishing characteristic of the proposed St. Johns River Alliance is that it will bring all of the above participants together in a unified group with the common mission to clean up the St. Johns River.

The Stewards of the St. Johns are active participants in the River Restoration Working Group. The Stewards feel that there is currently more “positive momentum” for River Restoration than at any previous time. A great deal of credit must be given to Mayor Delaney for his consistent vision and determination to cleanup the St. Johns River.

Hopefully, this time around, the momentum will be strong enough to accomplish the cleanup objectives which are essential to the current and future health of our lovely St. Johns River.



## **In Memoriam**

### ***Capt. Thomas E. Fortson***

***1923 - 2003***

Thomas Fortson, a recipient of the Steward's "1997 Friend of the River Award", passed away March 23, 2003 at the age of 80. Tom was well-known to state and local officials in his relentless battle to get a river restoration plan adopted with strict water quality standards. He literally wrote hundreds of letters to elected officials, the governor, and regulatory agencies stressing the need for such a plan.



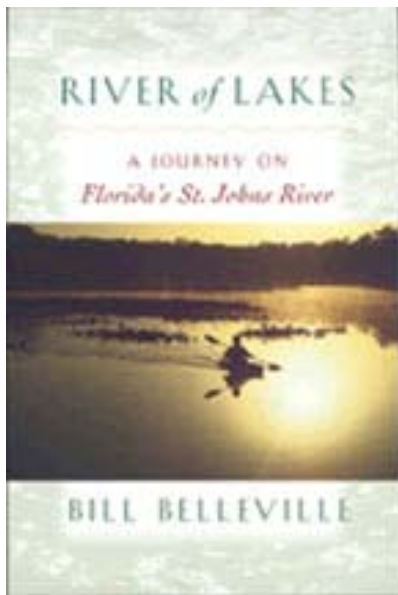
Unfortunately, his death came in the same week that officials gathered to begin the restoration plan process. Many participants expressed hope that finalizing a restoration plan would be a fitting memorial to Fortson's dedication and passion for the river. Jim Maher, Department of Environmental Protection, said, "I had the greatest respect for Tom and his tenacity was ever an inspiration. He will be so greatly missed. The River and the River Community has lost a true friend, but will always be better because of his tireless work." Dana Morton, City of Jacksonville, Aquatic Biologist, remarked, "I consider myself better for knowing Tom, and he has motivated me to do more and work harder for the River. I'm sure if we were all as dedicated and passionate towards the river as Tom was, we would have a better and healthier St. Johns River. I was proud to work with him, and to be considered a trusted ally in his fight for the River. My biggest regret is that he never got to see the St. Johns River Plan further along than it is."

Mr. Fortson spent much of his youth sailing and enjoying the St. Johns River. He served in the Navy for 29 years including commanding a guided missile destroyer and the USS Sacramento, a support ship during the Vietnam War. He also headed the Navy's fleet modernization program before retiring to his home on Fleming Island in 1978.

Don Loop, a close friend and neighbor for the past 23 years, spent many hours with Tom on his riverfront sun porch discussing river issues. Don has fond memories of Mrs. Pat Fortson bringing them cokes and cookies while they worked. Mr. Loop, who gave Fortson's eulogy, said, "I have few role models, but Tom Fortson was certainly a role model for me. Everything he did, he did with excellence. I just don't think you can live life much better than Tom did—with a successful naval career, a lovely family, and a committed concern for his community.

Tom and two other close friends, John Adsit, who passed away in 2001, and Tom Beal were together as a team for the last decade laboring to preserve the St. Johns River. Many people will benefit from their legacy.

A memorial service was held on March 27 at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church on Fleming Island, with burial at Arlington National Cemetery.



## Author Bill Belleville to Speak

Bill Belleville is an award-winning environmental journalist, filmmaker, and diver living in Sanford, FL. His books include, "River of Lakes: A Journey on Florida's St. Johns River" and "Deep Cuba: The Inside Story of an American Oceanographic Expedition." His book on the St. Johns River received the Michael J. Shaara award for Excellence in Writing for the year 2000.

He has been a writer/researcher on several Discovery Channel expeditions to Cuba, the Galapagos and the Dominican Republic. He has co-produced and scripted three Florida PBS documentaries, all of which won national awards.

Here is an excerpt from his book:

"The St. Johns is a river of infinite potential, a place to indulge myths, to evoke shards of timeless magic, to search for the natural realities that are sublime instead of merely virtual and safe. After all, this is a river where dreams have been chased through the early morning mist for centuries on the peninsula, from inside the heart-pine log dugouts of the earliest Paleo-Indians to the sleek polymer hulls of the most modern canoeist and boater. If we are lucky, we may yet find enough wildness left here to take the shrillness of civilization out of us, to discover a place, as Sherwood Anderson once wrote, where we can still "learn the trick of the quiet."

**Bill Belleville is giving a lecture at the University of North Florida on Wed. April 23rd at 7:30 PM. Admission is free and open to the public.**

**Don't miss this special environmental event.**



*YES! I want to join the Stewards of the St. Johns River and serve as a "voice for the river". Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of:*

- |  |   |                                       |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Member   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Steward  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Patron |
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Mail to: P.O. Box 54123  
Jacksonville, FL 32245-4123

**DIAL 800-EDU-SSJR**

## **RiverWatch Hotline**

### **800-338-7757**

**For all communication, such as reporting spilled fuel, sewage discharge, illegal dumping or any hazards. A Steward will provide information, or direct your call to the proper authority and follow up. Please call to volunteer or request meeting times and dates.**

**STEWARDS OF THE ST. JOHNS RIVER, INC.  
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