



## **Ocklawaha River Restoration Factsheet**

### **Background**

- The headwaters of the Ocklawaha are located in Lake County and the Harris Chain of Lakes.
- The Ocklawaha River flows north/northeast until reaching the St. Johns River in Putnam County.
- The Ocklawaha is the largest tributary of the St. Johns River.
- The Rodman Dam was constructed in 1968 as part of the Cross Florida Barge Canal project.
- The damming of the Ocklawaha River flooded more than 7,500 acres of forested wetlands, 16 miles of river and at least 20 springs.
- President Richard M. Nixon halted construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal in 1971.

### **Current Conditions**

- The Rodman Pool is often choked with invasive, exotic vegetation and requires regular drawdowns to provide boating access and to avoid fish kills.
- The Rodman Dam restricts the flow of water to the remaining 12 miles of the Ocklawaha east of the Rodman Pool, causing significant harm to the publicly-owned floodplain wetlands and depriving the St. Johns River of fresh water filtered by the floodplain.
- The Florida Department of Environmental Protection estimated necessary repairs and improvements for the continued operation of Buckman Lock, Kirkpatrick Dam and Spillway and the Eureka Lock and Dam will cost approximately \$14.1 million.

### **Ocklawaha River Restoration Benefits**

- Enhances and expands recreation, tourism and economic opportunities
- Restores the natural fresh water flow from the Ocklawaha River to the St. Johns River
- Allows valuable recreational and commercial fish species free access to their traditional range in the upper parts of the river and Silver Springs, including striped bass, channel catfish, mullet, American shad and eels
- Re-establishes approximately 7,500 acres of one of the most threatened ecosystems in Florida, the floodplain wetland forest – a natural bio-filter for nutrient removal
- Restores more than 8,000 acres of existing floodplain forest that lies between the dam and the St. Johns River
- Restores more than 20 springs submerged as a result of the dam
- Protects existing wetlands and submerged aquatic vegetation in the St. Johns from the detrimental effects of rising salinity
- Benefits wildlife, including manatees, black bear, and indigo snakes, by restoring natural land and water connectivity and increasing habitat

## **Federal and State Agencies Support Ocklawaha River Restoration**

### **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):**

"EPA strongly supports the restoration of the Ocklawaha River, as detailed in USFS Forest Supervisor Martha Kearney's January 4, 2002 NEPA Record of Decision on the FEIS for the Ocklawaha River restoration."

"EPA supports the Ocklawaha River Restoration. The restoration should proceed as soon as possible."

### **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):**

"The purpose of this letter is to encourage the USACE to reconsider including removal of the Kirkpatrick Dam as mitigation for the Jacksonville Harbor Navigation Study."

"It is our (USDA) position that removal of the dam infrastructure and restoration of the Ocklawaha River would result in substantial downstream and upstream benefits for water quality, recreation and endangered species."

"Multiple existing studies have addressed potential effects of removing the Kirkpatrick Dam and many of these have shown clear connections with resource concerns in the St. Johns River."

### **NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS):**

"NMFS continues to recommend the Jacksonville District evaluate further restoration of the lower Ocklawaha River as mitigation for impacts to tidal freshwater wetlands. Restoration of the lower Ocklawaha River would benefit tidally influenced freshwater forested wetlands, provide water quality improvements, dilute increased salinities, and benefit federally managed fisheries and endangered species habitat (such as Atlantic Sturgeon), as well as lands managed by U.S. Forest Service."

### **FL Department of Environmental Protection 1997 Environmental Resource Permit:**

"It should be emphasized that the proposed project is an ecosystem restoration project with the objectives of restoring the historic functions of the Ocklawaha River and its floodplain within the project area. As such, the project is expected to remediate the adverse conditions discussed above. In addition to these net environmental benefits, other socioeconomic benefits are expected to be generated by the proposed project including: (1) the elimination of public tax expenditures for the operation and maintenance of Buckman Lock and for the continued management of exotic and nuisance aquatic vegetation, and (2) the provision of enhanced recreational opportunities on the restored river."

### **Summary**

Numerous scientific studies, agencies, and independent scientists have supported the restoration of the Ocklawaha River over the last four decades. Breaching the dam will be the first and most important step toward finally restoring the Ocklawaha River and achieving the anticipated ecological benefits to the Ocklawaha, St. Johns River, and more than 20 springs, including Silver Springs.