

**Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council**

Please address correspondence to **Robert (Bob) Johnson**, *Chairman*  
Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council.  
P.O. Box 867, Mount Dora, FL 32756

August 11, 2017

Senator Dennis Baxley  
206 S. Hwy 27/441  
Lady Lake, FL 32159

Dear Senator Baxley,

The Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (HCOLRC) (**F.S. 373.467 and 373.468**) writes to you as Chair of the Florida Senate's Committee on Governmental Oversight and Accountability to request that you contact the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to initiate a review of Florida's on-going lake restoration programs. Specifically, we seek a review of restoration activities by the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) and the Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) for Lake Apopka and other lakes within the Harris Chain of Lakes.

SJRWMD, FWCC, LCWA and other state and local governments have spent over \$300 million and failed to restore the lakes (Expenditures for SJRWMD are through 2012 and do not include the Marsh Flow way, FWCC 2012-2015). SJRWMD data proves this, and the agencies have requested over \$20 million for 2017.

The Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council makes this request because the actions or inactions of the involved agencies are also making it very difficult for the Council to meet its statutory obligations, and the agencies continually fail to implement Council recommendations.

The Florida Legislature, in response to the 1986 August 120 square mile algal bloom in Lake Okeechobee created the 1987 Surface Water Improvement and Management Act (SWIM) (**F.S. 373.451-4595**) to address nonpoint source pollution issues and restore damaged ecosystems like Lake Okeechobee and Lake Apopka. The passage of SWIM created great expectations that our waters would be restored. By 1995, it was clear that there were problems with SWIM. OPPAGA initiated a review of the implementation of SWIM by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the water management districts (WMD) (Report No. 95-20).

OPPAGA concluded that while some improvements had occurred to water quality and natural systems, the conditions that created the need for the SWIM Program still existed to a large extent despite the expenditure of approximately \$177 million for the period October 1987 through December 1994. FDEP and WMD staff contended that SWIM funding was not sufficient to fully implement SWIM plans. OPPAGA noted that while FDEP and the WMDs had developed goals and objectives for the SWIM Program, they have not defined the overall outcome they hoped to achieve for each water body. OPPAGA recommended that FDEP and the WMDs take steps to

measure program results and tie outcomes to strategies and expenditures.

OPPAGA provided a Follow-Up Report on SWIM in March 1998 after expenditures had risen to \$265 million with little determination of what these expenditures had accomplished (Report No. 97-58). OPPAGA concluded that FDEP and the WMDs still had not systematically evaluated the results of SWIM expenditures in terms of surface water protection and improvements. However, the WMDs reported that they were in the process of defining management objectives, as well as developing environmental indicators with numeric targets for certain parameters such as nutrient levels and submerged aquatic vegetation growth to better evaluate efforts to improve surface water conditions. OPPAGA concluded this effort should result in clearly defined and realistic outcomes, estimated costs to achieve the outcomes, and planned completion dates. They also noted that defining outcome goals will help legislators and program staff to make better decisions about how to best target available resources.

Failure to implement these recommendations led the Lake County legislative delegation in 2001 to establish the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (HCOLRC) within the St. Johns River Water Management District, with assistance from FWCC, FDEP, and the LCWA. HCOLRC was given the power to review audits and all data specifically related to lake restoration techniques, sport fish population recovery strategies, data and strategies for shoreline restoration, aquatic vegetation establishment, sediment control and removal, exotic species management, floating tussock management or removal, navigation, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat improvement, particularly as they may apply to the Harris Chain of Lakes. After 16 years of diligent work by the HCOLRC, reported to the Florida Legislature in annual reports, it is clear the agencies have not clearly defined realistic outcomes, estimated costs to achieve the outcomes, and planned completion dates.

Members of HCOLRC receive no compensation for their services. The question arises, what is the purpose of the HCOLRC if the management agencies fail to implement programs that have realistic outcomes, estimated costs to achieve the outcomes, and planned completion dates. FDEP and the WMDs have relied on phosphorus control because phosphorus is generally the limiting nutrient for algal growth. HCOLRC is now aware that phosphorus is not always the limiting environmental factor and sole reliance on nutrient control will fail to restore our waters.

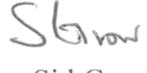
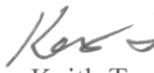
The stated reason for the purchase of the farms on the north shore of Lake Apopka and west of the Beauclair Canal to restore the lands to wetlands and to connect these areas to Lake Apopka. This was the justification to the Florida Legislature for the funds for land purchase and future expenditures. Some of the lands west of the Beauclair Canal have been connected to Lake Apopka (wetlands are the kidney of the lake). The connections of the north shore and the lands to the east of the lake have not been accomplished.

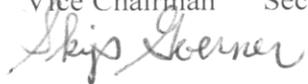
While the HCOLRC is concerned about the roles of the Council, FDEP, SJRWMD, FWCC and LCWA in the restoration of Lake Apopka and the Harris Chain of Lakes, it is deeply concerned that after the expenditure of tremendous sums of money our waters, including the priority lakes, Lake Okeechobee and Lake Apopka, they have yet to be restored and no completion dates have been established. Programs that do not work are still funded with no end in sight.

OPPAGA identified the major problems in 1995 and 1998 and HCOLRC believes another review is necessary if cost-effective, environmentally realistic management strategies are to be implemented to restore the State of Florida's waters.

Most of the 16 years of material collected by HCOLRC would be made available to OPPAGA.

Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council

      
Robert Johnson    Skip Goerner    Don Nicholson    Sid Grow    Keith Truenow  
Chairman            Vice Chairman    Secretary

  
Skip Goerner

   
John Stump            Stephanie Bishop