



**Lake County
WATER AUTHORITY**

Michael J. Perry, Executive Director • Neil Kelly, Secretary-Treasurer

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August 25, 2017

Honorable Jennifer Sullivan
Florida House of Representatives, District 31
Unit D
2755 South Bay Street
Eustis, FL 32726-6587

Dear Representative Sullivan,

Members of the Lake County Delegation have recently been sent a letter from the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council regarding the Council’s request for the delegation to contact the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to initiate a review of Florida’s on-going lake restoration programs, specifically a review of restoration activities of the SJRWMD, FWC and LCWA for Lake Apopka and other lakes within the Harris Chain of Lakes.

The request by the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council was initiated by a professor from the University of Florida who expressed his opinion at the August 11, 2017 meeting of the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council that the Council should be the “General” in charge of the restoration effort. He stated that the agencies are not doing what the Council wants the agencies to do and is being brushed aside. He felt that the agency participants on the Technical Advisory Group are nothing more than “talking heads” for their agencies. He also stated that he felt that the Council’s annual reports are not being read or paid attention to by the legislature and he felt that an OPPAGA review would put the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council in charge of prioritizing agency restoration projects.

This particular critic has had a long history of difference of technical opinions with the SJRWMD and the FWC. He has close relationships with members of the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council that allows him to appear to influence the direction of the Council. Because of this relationship and influence, the Council has directed 100% of any legislative funds expended by the Council to this professor through the University of Florida.

The Water Authority is governed by a Board of elected officials who are elected county-wide and responsive to the electorate. The Board implements projects that meet the purposes of the Water Authority as defined by the legislature. The Water Authority often works cooperatively with other state agencies and local governments to achieve the restoration goals as identified in the SWIM plans for Lake Apopka and the downstream lakes. For example, the Water Authority Board has emphasized working cooperatively with local governments to implement stormwater treatment projects. Since 1996, the Water Authority Board has awarded grants to local governments for stormwater retrofit projects that will reduce the load of pollutants that currently flows to lakes, streams, and wetlands. There have been 52 stormwater projects completed under this initiative. Using the Lake County Water Authority’s \$7.4 million as project seed money, local agencies are able to complete projects worth \$27.2 million.

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In addition, the Water Authority has constructed and operates the world's largest off-line alum treatment facility that intercepts and treats water leaving Lake Apopka. Water leaving the alum treatment facility achieves state specified standards prior to being discharged downstream to the Harris Chain of Lakes. The St. Johns River Water Management District provided the land on which the facility was built and the Water Authority received \$3,700,000 in cooperative funds from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to construct the facility.

Water quality improvements have been documented and fish and wildlife habitats have expanded and are healthier as a result of the St. Johns River Water Management District's, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's and the Lake County Water Authority's restoration activities on the Harris Chain of Lakes. Lake Griffin, once the Harris Chain's poorest quality lake, now exhibits some of the clearest water in the Harris Chain. This clearer water allows for significant areas of desirable submerged vegetation to become established resulting in a healthy sport fish population. The increase in the number of fishing tournaments and pounds of fish necessary to win a tournament in Lake County is testimony to the improved health of the lake systems. Other lakes in the Harris Chain have exhibited similar improvements. Because most of Lake Apopka is in Orange County, the Lake County Water Authority has focused its efforts on water coming from Lake Apopka and the lakes downstream.

The Lake County Water Authority is confident that an OPPAGA review of the St. Johns River Water Management District's, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's and the Water Authority's restoration activities on the Harris Chain of Lakes would be favorable, however the Water Authority Board questions the intent behind the request for this review and the need for the review itself. The Water Authority has fully participated with the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council and has provided all of the information requested in a complete and timely manner. The Council sent a letter dated August 29, 2016, to the St. Johns River Water Management District, the Lake County Water Authority, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida Department of Health requesting answers to questions on twelve issues and budget and spending information. The Water Authority provided detailed answers (attached) and Michael Perry, LCWA Executive Director gave a detailed presentation regarding the Water Authority's responses at the Council's March 3, 2017 meeting.

The Lake County Water Authority discussed this matter at its August 23, 2017 meeting and feels that significant progress in improving the Harris Chain of Lakes is being made and that an OPPAGA review is an unnecessary redirection of resources of a small staff that could be better utilized to continue the restoration efforts. Please contact me or Michael Perry, Executive Director if we can be of any further help in this matter.

Respectfully,



Adam Dufresne
Chairman, Lake County Water Authority

Cc:

Honorable Dennis Baxley, Florida Senate, District 12
Honorable Kelli Stargel, Florida Senate, District 22
Honorable Larry Metz, Florida House of Representatives, District 32
Honorable Don Hahnfeldt, Florida House of Representatives, District 33
Noah Valenstein, Secretary, Department of Environmental Protection
Kevin Coyne, Department of Environmental Protection
Nick Wiley, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Dennis Renfro, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Dr. Ann Shortelle, Executive Director, St. Johns River Water Management District
Mark V. Hoyer, Director, Florida LAKEWATCH, University of Florida
Bob Johnson, Chairman, Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council
Skip Goerner, Board Member, Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council
Don Nicholson, Board Member, Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council
Stephanie J. Bishop, Board Member, Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council
John Stump, Board Member, Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council
Keith Truenow, Board Member, Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council