

Our Mission | To defend
the St. Johns River and
advocate for its protection.



WATERSHED WATCH | FALL 2025

WATERSHED-WIDE CRISIS REQUIRES A WATERSHED MOVEMENT

Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is the foundation of our river's health. Alarming, SAV is struggling throughout the St. Johns Watershed. We are witnessing the decline of SAV in the Upper, Middle and Lower basins.

SAV is the river's canary in the coal mine.

The St. Johns River is a Class III water that should have healthy fish habitat and waters that are fishable and swimmable.

Currently, the St. Johns does not meet this standard. Our river deserves to be fishable and swimmable. Now.

For three years, we have surveyed 14 sites, from Doctors Lake to Lake George, three times each year during the SAV growing season as part of the **SAVe Our River's Grasses Expedition**.

In early 2025, we **added protective enclosures to 10 of our 14 sites** to determine if SAV could recover once protected from grazing pressure.

All 14 of our monitoring sites are showing signs of **intense grazing pressure from wildlife, high, dark water and frequent algae outbreaks.**

In Clay and St. Johns Counties, there is additional stress from **frequent salinity spikes**.

From Georgetown to Welaka, the river consistently looks like pea-green soup and **tests positive for toxic cyanobacteria**. In this segment, there is an almost complete loss of this ecosystem's vital eelgrass.

We are encouraged to report that there is SAV growth within most of the temporary protective enclosures and in some cases near to historic levels. However, outside the protected areas, the submerged grasses are grazed to near stubble.

So while SAV can still thrive in the St. Johns, multiple stressors may be slowing SAV growth enough for it to succumb to background grazing pressure. Stressors include saltwater intrusion, less light availability due to higher, darker water, frequent algae outbreaks, herbicide spraying, and invasive species.

While there is not a silver bullet solution that will **SAVe Our River's Grasses**, there are restorative and proactive measures that can reduce stress sooner than later. StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/blog

READ OUR RECENT BLOG FOR A MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE ISSUE

[STJOHNSRIVERKEEPER.ORG/BLOG](https://StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/blog)





Backpack Program

St. Johns **RIVERKEEPER**®'s Backpack Program allows students to test water samples from the St. Johns and its tributaries and share scientific water quality data with their communities.

Each backpack comes with all the water quality testing materials a class needs for an entire semester or school year. This is a free program, and we have a few backpacks available for the upcoming semester!

Contact: jamie@stjohnsriverkeeper.org

Field Trips & Classroom Programs for All Ages

Our education team provides a variety of field trips - from river cruises, to water testing on a local urban farm, to cleanups at local parks. They also travel to classrooms - K through 12th grade - to offer individualized programs for different age groups, abilities, and relevant subject matters.

Please visit StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/education to see all of our offerings!



Investing in River Communities: Resilient Ribault Update

Launched in 2023 in partnership with LISC Jacksonville, the Resilient Ribault initiative continues to address the challenges facing the waterways and communities in the Ribault River and Moncrief Creek watersheds. We work with community partners to provide equitable access to the river, clean water for locals to enjoy, and the necessary infrastructure improvements to mitigate flooding and improve community resilience.

Some highlights from our efforts this year:

- Thanks to a grant received by LISC, we partnered with Riverview Collective Community Organization to **install an oyster reef at Riverview Park to improve water quality and protect the shoreline from storms and erosion.**
- More than **150 trees** have been installed at **seven parks** in the project area.
- **Quarterly stakeholder meetings** are held with residents, community organizations, and city officials to gather feedback, share ideas, and identify solutions.
- Workshops led by the Nonprofit Center of NE Florida helped **strengthen partner organizations** in the project area with capacity building skills & resources.
- **13 boat trips** allowed residents and local stakeholders to experience the Ribault River by water and gain a new perspective of their community.
- Our afterschool program at Sallye B. Mathis Elementary **educated students about the surrounding waterways in their community**, while an anti-litter art contest emphasized the importance of protecting our rivers and creeks.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND GET ON THE WATER WITH US!

[STJOHNSRIVERKEEPER.ORG/EDUCATION](https://StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/education)

Get Your Feet Wet!

Discover what the St. Johns has to offer, and *Get Your Feet Wet* with us! Visit StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/events. Check out a few photos of what we've been up to:



Riverview Park POOSH Module Installation, August 5



Blue Cypress Park Cleanup, September 14



Reunite the Rivers Gathering, November 7



Volunteer Appreciation Cruise, November 12



Tomorrow's River Advocates

Thanks to the generosity of Flying Fiber Farm, all gifts made to St. Johns RIVERKEEPER® through December 31 will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to \$25,000, to launch the *Lynda Orth Next Wave Leadership Academy*.

This new program honors the life and legacy of our executive director's mother, a dedicated public school teacher and St. Johns RIVERKEEPER® supporter who influenced the lives of countless young people during her lifetime. The Academy that bears her name will continue that work—empowering high school students to become the next wave of leaders and advocates for the St. Johns River.

Your year-end gift will help ensure that the next generation is equipped to face the challenges ahead. The river continues to experience pressure from pollution, habitat loss, and rapid development. By investing in young leaders today, we strengthen the river's voice for tomorrow.

When you give now, your impact is **doubled**. Visit SJRK.org to make a gift.

FIND A CLEANUP OR OTHER RIVER EVENT NEAR YOU!
StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/events



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Thank You

Your support helps strengthen our mission and fuels our work for the St. Johns River.

A very special thank you goes out to everyone who participated in this year's Oyster Roast. Your generosity and commitment helped make this our most impactful fundraiser to date. We are proud to report that we raised over \$350,000 to support our mission to protect and defend our river.

StJohnsRiverkeeper.org

Address Service Requested

TOXIC PFAS IN OUR WATERWAYS

A recent Waterkeeper Alliance monitoring project confirmed per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are persistent in U.S. waterways. **PFAS, or "Forever Chemicals," are linked to a variety of health effects** including cancer, liver and kidney disease, and harm to immune and reproductive systems.

Waterkeeper groups collected samples across 19 states—finding one or more types of PFAS in 98% of sampling sites. **Elevated levels were found** at 95% of sites downstream of wastewater treatment plants and **80% of sites downstream of lands applied with sewage sludge.**

Meanwhile in the St. Johns Watershed, nutrient pollution is increasing due in part to sewage

sludge. **This sludge is also not tested for toxic PFAS, let alone regulated.**

We are working to end the use of sludge potentially contaminated with PFAS on lands in our watershed to protect the health of our communities and our river.



PLEASE CONSIDER A GIFT TO SUPPORT OUR ADVOCACY WORK FOR THE ST. JOHNS RIVER.

StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/Give