

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



ST. JOHNS
RIVERKEEPER®

WATERSHED WATCH | SPRING 2026

FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE SESSION 2026 - BIG WINS, BIG DISAPPOINTMENT

The Florida Legislature **delivered a big win for the St. Johns** this year, with the most significant biosolids reform package in nearly 20 years.

To protect farm and ranch families from land/crop/cattle contamination, the Department of Agriculture's 2026 Farm Bill **banned the land disposal of Class B biosolids by 2028**.

This ban will **stop the annual transfer of 70,000 tons of South Florida's sewage sludge to the Upper Basin of the St. Johns River** that has resulted in a \$1 billion cleanup liability for downstream counties.

The ban will also increase the production of Class AA biosolids, which is cleaner than Class B, but can still be a pollution threat if not used appropriately. To date, Class AA is not regulated.

Fortunately, Senator Bradley and Representative Shoaf passed HB 1285/ SB 1474 to provide regulatory **guardrails for Class AA biosolids to ensure that increased production does not result in increased nutrient pollution runoff**.

The end of the 2026 Session **also resulted in a big disappointment**. While we got closer than ever to finally restoring the Ocklawaha River, the Northeast Florida, Rivers, Springs, and Community Investment Act (SB1066/HB981) did

not make it to the Governor's desk.

The House and Senate bills sailed through six committees with only one legislator voting in opposition, and HB 981 passed the Florida House 107-3 with **overwhelming bipartisan support**. Unfortunately, the Senate President refused to bring the legislation to the floor for a vote.

We are grateful to the bill's champions, Rep. Wyman Duggan and Sen. Jason Brodeur.

The Act paired restoration with locally informed state investments in outdoor recreation and the economy to maximize benefits to people, rivers and springs, and fish and wildlife.

Local leaders, elected officials, businesses, anglers, and thousands of Floridians spoke out in support.

While we are disappointed, **the progress made this session was extraordinary**. Support for restoring the Ocklawaha River continues to grow across Florida.

Together, we have built a powerful movement. **Success is clearly in sight. With your ongoing support, we will prevail and reunite the Ocklawaha, Silver, and St. Johns Rivers.**

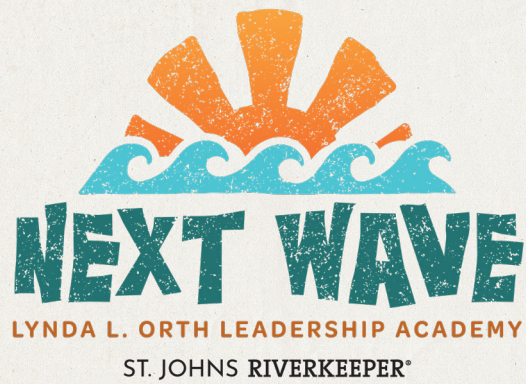
[READ OUR BLOG FOR A MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE ISSUES](#)

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



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SUMMER LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

St. Johns RIVERKEEPER® is launching the Lynda L. Orth Next Wave Leadership Academy to **inspire and equip the next generation of river advocates**. This summer, 12-15 students will take part in hands-on field experiences, advocacy training, and a student-led final project that directly benefits the St. Johns River and our community.

Scan this QR code with your phone's camera to learn more and apply.



BARTRAM FROLIC & FESTIVAL

Every April, the city of Palatka transforms into a living museum of 18th-century Florida for the Bartram Frolic!

St. Johns RIVERKEEPER® will be leading educational boat tours aboard the Pride of Palatka for 2nd graders from all over Putnam County the entire week, April 20-24. **You can join the fun over the weekend, April 24-26**, when the festival opens up to the public. Come by our tent and say hello!



ADVANCING SAV RESTORATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

SJRK recently visited our Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) research sites with Jacksonville University's GIS team. Using drones, we captured aerial imagery and video to measure grass bed width, length, and canopy height. This will **help us track SAV recovery across protected areas** and understand why some sites recover faster.

During the visit, we also connected with Dr. Mary Miller, Dr. Malcolm Hill, and their team, who are surveying freshwater sponges in the St. Johns - including at several of our SAV sites. These sponges are **important for river health** - they filter bacteria, algae, and organic matter, support nutrient cycling, and provide habitat. They observed **more sponge habitat inside our enclosures** than outside, **consistent with our SAV findings**, and we look forward to their full results.

Check out our **2025 SAV Report** that compiles three years of data from the SAVe Our River's Grasses Expedition on our website: StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/SAV.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CURRENT INITIATIVES



SAVE Our River's Grasses



Resilient Ribault



Vertical Oyster Garden (VOG)



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:



SJRK Team Cleanup on the Ribault River, January 21



Rodman Reservoir Drawdown Paddle, February 5



McCoy's Creek History & Service Outing, February 21



Great St. Johns River Cleanup (Jax), March 21



NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS: IMPROVING WATER QUALITY ONE OYSTER AT A TIME

In the St. Johns River estuary in Jacksonville, we have been investing in expanded habitat for nature's water filter: the oyster. **A single adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day**, removing pollutants and excess nutrients from the water.

By creating and expanding oyster habitat in areas of the river and her tributaries where we know oysters can thrive, we're helping the river reclaim its own superpowers to **improve water quality**.

Our **Vertical Oyster Garden (VOG) Program** allows community members to get involved with river restoration in their own backyards.

We've also supported the installation of a man-made **oyster reef at Riverview Park, on the Trout River** in Jacksonville. With help from volunteers, we'll be expanding it soon. StJohnsRiverkeeper.org/volunteer

Scan this QR code to learn more about these projects.





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 For the river. For us all.

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STATE OF THE WATERSHED

On Earth Day 2026, April 22 at 5:30 p.m., St. Johns **RIVERKEEPER®** is proud to host our very first State of the Watershed event.

Our team will share a vital update on the current state of the watershed – the status of our river’s health, the challenges that threaten its future, and what we must do to protect this extraordinary waterway.

Get your tickets today: SJRK.org

Address Service Requested

WIN FOR FLORIDA WETLANDS

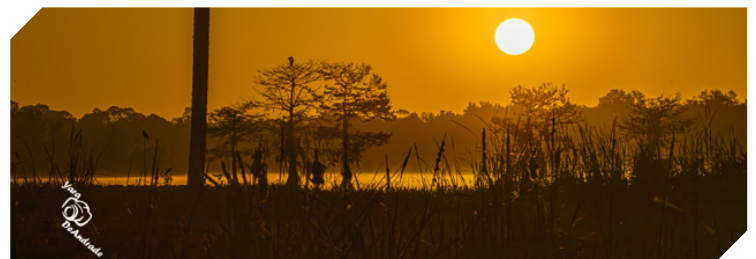
Earthjustice is representing St. Johns **RIVERKEEPER®** and six other organizations in a legal case to protect Florida wetlands. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia recently ruled in our favor - confirming that permits to build in wetlands should stay in the hands of federal regulators rather than the state.

The ruling upholds a 2024 decision by a U.S. District Judge who held that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service **violated the Endangered Species Act** when the agencies approved Florida’s wetlands permitting program in 2020.

Florida has the second-most wetlands in America, and **developers have long said turning over**

permitting under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to the state was their “Holy Grail” because it would make bulldozing wetlands easier and faster.

“Protecting Florida’s wetlands is critical to preserving our rivers, lakes and streams. **This ruling is a tremendous win for the St. Johns, for its wildlife, and for all of us that value the vital role of wetlands and Florida’s wild spaces,**” said Lisa Rinaman, your St. Johns Riverkeeper.



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