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## **Ocklawaha River Restoration: Benefits for the Florida Environment: The Facts About Restoration & How You Can Help**

Florida Defenders of the Environment

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# **WHY RESTORE THE OCKLAWAHA RIVER ECOSYSTEM?**



Photo by Alicia Windham-Reid

**The Facts About  
Restoration &  
How You Can Help**



**T**hroughout Florida's history, the Ocklawaha River has been regarded as one of the state's most beautiful waterways—providing scenic beauty, valuable wildlife habitat, excellent fishing, and abundant recreation opportunities.

When the Army Corps of Engineers began work on the Cross Florida Barge Canal in 1968, a 16 mile section of the river was dammed and 9,000 acres of its floodplain forest were destroyed. Successful citizen efforts to stop the barge canal project prevented destruction of another 20 miles of the Ocklawaha. What remains is a shallow, weed-choked impoundment—Rodman Reservoir.

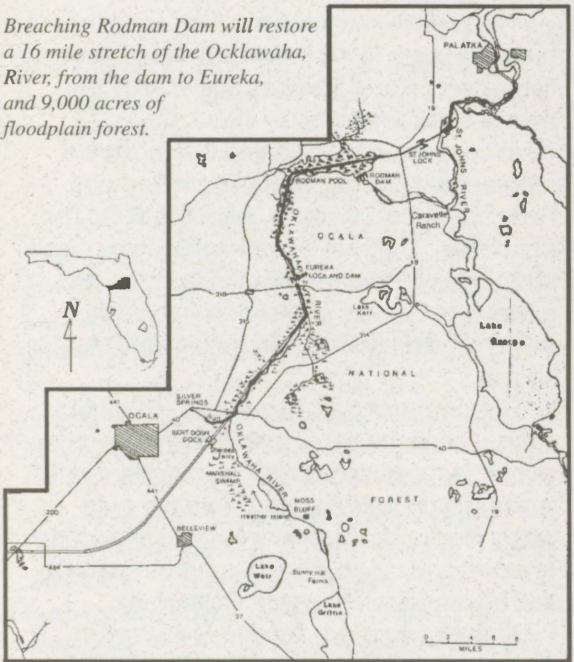
**Fortunately, the Ocklawaha River can be restored—and at a savings to taxpayers.**

Restoring the Ocklawaha can be relatively quick and straightforward. Beneath Rodman Reservoir, the original river channel still exists and will quickly adjust when the reservoir is drained. The area will rapidly revegetate as a result of ample, viable seed sources that still exist on the floodplain. In fact, it would take a Herculean effort to keep the forest from regenerating.

Numerous studies have evaluated Rodman Reservoir and the Ocklawaha River—studies regarding the ecology, economics, hydrology, geology, recreational use, environmental quality, and impacts on wildlife. The merits of restoring the Ocklawaha are well documented.

**Florida has much to gain by freeing the Ocklawaha River . . .**

*Breaching Rodman Dam will restore a 16 mile stretch of the Ocklawaha River, from the dam to Eureka, and 9,000 acres of floodplain forest.*



## Taxpayer Savings

- The best available cost estimate to keep and maintain Rodman Reservoir and Buckman Lock is about \$700,000 per year—**indefinitely**.
- Once restored, the Ocklawaha River would maintain itself at virtually no cost, resulting in a savings to taxpayers.
- Controlling aquatic weeds will not be a problem in the restored, swift-moving Ocklawaha. Weeds will forever be a problem in Rodman and, unless controlled by expensive herbicide treatments and manipulation of water levels, will result in low oxygen levels and fish kills.
- The most recent and extensive economic studies conclude Rodman Reservoir has a negligible effect on the local economy.



## Fishing & Fish Habitat

- The Ocklawaha has been famous for over a hundred years for its lunker bass and sunfish—over 85% of the fish population in the river is comprised of such sportfish.
- In contrast, popular game fish that once represented the majority of fish in Rodman Reservoir now constitute only 16% of the fish population. They have been replaced by small-sized species that tolerate the warmer, less oxygenated waters of the reservoir, such as eastern mosquitofish, sailfin molly and bluefin killifish.
- Species such as striped bass, channel catfish, shad, mullet and American eels have all but disappeared above Rodman Dam which is a barrier to their historic migratory pathways. Restoring the river will again allow them to return and breed in the numerous springs and tributaries of the upper Ocklawaha.
- At least two major fish kills occurred in Rodman Reservoir—8.5 million fish in 1985 and 2.5 million fish in 1988. Low dissolved oxygen levels, caused by decaying vegetation, literally suffocated the fish. Fish kills can only be prevented by aggressively controlling aquatic weeds and raising water levels in Rodman Reservoir, the latter of which floods thousands of additional acres of forest.

## Refuge for Manatees

- At a time when habitat in Florida for the endangered manatee is diminishing, removing Rodman Dam will reopen river pathways to warm water refuge sites, such as Silver Springs, in the upper reaches and tributaries of the Ocklawaha. Access to the upper Ocklawaha will be granted to manatees only if the river is restored.
- The leading causes of manatee deaths in this area are the Rodman Dam floodgates and Buckman lock structures (at least 9 of 15 recorded deaths from 1974-1996).



## **Recovery of Floodplain Forest & Wildlife Habitat**

- Restoring the Ocklawaha will recover 9,000 acres of floodplain forest habitat, one of the most biologically rich, but rapidly disappearing, ecosystems in North America. The river hardwood forests above Rodman will be reconnected with those along the lower Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers.
- Restoration will enhance a vital pathway for wildlife between Ocala National Forest and forest habitat to the north of the Ocklawaha that is currently interrupted by Rodman Reservoir. This corridor is especially important to the Florida black bear, that are known to inhabit the area.
- The restored Ocklawaha, or “crooked river,” will have more miles of forested shoreline than does Rodman Reservoir. This will improve habitat for wildlife that live in swamp forests, such as river otters, black bears, bobcats, grey fox, wild turkey, wood ducks, swallow-tailed kites, hairy woodpeckers, prothonotary warblers, and Cooper’s hawks, species which are uncommon and whose habitats are diminishing statewide.

## **Downstream Productivity**

- The Ocklawaha is the largest tributary of the St. Johns River. Particulate nutrients, that once washed out into the St. Johns, contributed to the productivity of juvenile fish, blue

crab and shrimp, providing the base of the aquatic food chain and important fisheries. These nutrients are now impounded behind Rodman Dam.

- Restoring the Ocklawaha will reestablish this vital link between the particulate nutrients that flow into the Ocklawaha River and productivity in the St. Johns River.

## Recreation

- The restored Ocklawaha will provide high-quality river-based recreation of a kind that is fast-disappearing nationwide—providing a boost to state and local economies.
- The canopied, subtropical river has long been a favorite of canoeists. Restoration will allow a continuous canoe trail from the upper Ocklawaha downstream to the St. Johns River.
- Once restored, 20 natural artesian springs will reestablish themselves, providing a well-known source of enjoyment in Florida.



- State plans include additional access points along the restored river which will increase bank fishing opportunities for those without the power boats necessary to fish in Rodman Reservoir.
- Swimming is neither allowed nor attractive in Rodman Reservoir, whereas rope swings and picnic areas are a common sight along the Ocklawaha.
- Planned recreation and camping facilities along the restored river will provide new opportunities for nature-based tourism.

## YOU CAN HELP

**We rarely have a chance to right an environmental wrong. We have such a chance now!**

Citizens have fought for over 30 years to protect and restore the Ocklawaha River. After all this effort, special interests now want to keep Rodman for fishing at the expense of manatees, fish and wildlife habitat, springs, and numerous other natural resources -- not to mention the enormous and never-ending cost to taxpayers for maintaining Rodman Reservoir.

**In a very real sense, the fate of the Ocklawaha River is in your hands. There will be a "floor fight" in the state legislature this year over funding for restoration. Every vote counts--let your elected officials know how you feel. Please take a few minutes to:**

- Write or call your State Representative and Senator (call FDE if you need their names).
- Tell them that you are a constituent and support restoring the Ocklawaha River.
- Ask them where they stand on the issue.
- Let us know their response by calling or writing FDE.
- Call Governor Chiles at (850)488-4441 and thank him for his leadership on Ocklawaha Restoration.
- Help us restore one of Florida's great river systems!

*Please act now!  
Every letter and phone call  
counts!*



**Yes, I support restoring the  
Ocklawaha River.**

☐ I met\_\_\_ / wrote\_\_\_ / called\_\_\_  
Sen./Rep. \_\_\_\_\_. He/She is  
for\_\_\_ / against\_\_\_ restoring the Ocklawaha.

☐ Attached are notes, comments, or a  
response from my contact with the Sen./Rep.

☐ Please send me additional information  
about how I can help **"Free the Ocklawaha!"**

☐ Yes, I'm interested in participating in the  
Ocklawaha Day at the Capitol on March 17,  
1998. Please send me additional information.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Florida Defenders of the Environment  
4424 NW 13th Street, Suite C-8  
Gainesville, FL 32609

**Please help us ensure the Ocklawaha River  
is restored by joining Florida Defenders of  
the Environment.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make check payable to FDE  
and mail with this form to:

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