

## **CITIZEN ACTIVISTS AND ST. JOHNS RIVERKEEPER, SIERRA CLUB TAKE LEGAL ACTION**

*Challenge of massive cattle operation filed today*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Jacksonville, FL – On Monday, June 2, 2014, St. Johns Riverkeeper and Sierra Club Northeast Florida filed a petition for an administrative hearing to challenge the permits sought by Sleepy Creek Lands (formerly Adena Springs Ranch). The two organizations are collaborating with concerned citizens, Karen Ahlers and Jeri Baldwin, who are also challenging the permits.

The legal challenges are in response to the recent announcement that the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) staff has issued an Environmental Resource Permit (ERP) and recommended approval of a Consumptive Use Permit (CUP) for this massive cattle operation located in the watershed of the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers and the springshed of Silver and Salt Springs.

The SJRWMD Governing Board would have decided upon the CUP permit request at its next meeting on June 10, but the legal action taken by St. Johns Riverkeeper, Sierra Club Florida, Ahlers, and Baldwin will postpone any decision by the Board.

In the first of three phases of a 30,000 acre beef operation that will ultimately withdraw 5.3 million gallons of water per day (mgd), Sleepy Creek Lands is seeking a permit to withdraw 1.46 mgd from an already over-tapped aquifer.

According to the petition, the SJRWMD staff has failed to account for the significant impacts to the flow of Silver Springs, Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers and Salt Springs and the increased nutrient loading that will result from the manure of 9,500 head of cattle and the use of large quantities of fertilizer and water. The petitioners also question the validity and accuracy of the modeling upon which the challenged permits are based. As a result, the SJRWMD has not provided reasonable assurances that water resources would not be significantly affected.

Unfortunately, Silver Springs and the Silver River, which flows through the Ocklawaha into the St. Johns River, are already under severe stress with flows in significant decline and nitrate levels exceeding the State of Florida's pollution limits. In 2012, the State mandated a 79% reduction from existing nitrate loading, in order to restore the health of these waterways.

"Silver Springs and the Silver River are already in serious decline," said Lisa Rinaman, the St. Johns Riverkeeper. "How could we possibly allow such an intensive project that will only make the existing pollution and flow problems worse and restoration efforts more expensive and difficult for us to achieve? It defies logic and is certainly not in the public's best interest."

Linda Bremer of Sierra Club Florida added, "It's unfortunate that we must resort to legal action to hold our state agencies accountable and protect these iconic waterways. However, we are committed to making sure that our aquifer is not further exploited, and more harmful pollution is not permitted. Our springs and rivers belong to all the citizens of Florida and are much too valuable to sacrifice for the fortunes of a few."

"Impacts to the Ocklawaha River from groundwater contamination and surface water runoff have been all but ignored," said Karen Ahlers, a private citizen and long-time advocate for Florida's waters. "The ranch was historically used to grow pine trees and provided significant habitat for wildlife. It has now been denuded to make way for irrigated pasture to support 9,500 head of cattle. The pollution runoff from this site will be horrific."

**The legal petitions that were filed are available upon request.**