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## **FEDS PUT ST. JOHNS RIVER ON POLLUTION DIET**

State DEP moves to over-ride pollution reductions

The St. Johns River, one of the Southeast's most (nutrient) polluted rivers, is officially on a pollution diet. On Monday, January 24, 2006, the United States EPA placed new restrictions on the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus that industry and domestic wastewater dischargers can dump into the lower St. Johns River. Nitrogen was one of the major causes of the unprecedented toxic algae blooms that occurred in the river last summer.

A successful lawsuit filed by the St. Johns Riverkeeper and Linda Young, director of the Clean Water Network of Florida, spurred EPA's action. The restrictions are called TMDLs (Total Maximum Daily Loads) and are mandated by the Clean Water Act when a water becomes too polluted for its designated uses – which in this case are fishing and swimming. The new pollution limits over-ride limits that were previously set by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). DEP's plan would have allowed almost three times as much pollution as the new EPA limits. Because of the citizens' lawsuit, EPA was required to take a closer look at the state's pollution limits. EPA found them inadequate under the Clean Water Act

“It is a shame that citizens have to sue to the government to make them follow the law, but we are thankful that we still have that ability in this country,” said Linda Young, a plaintiff in the case. “If we did not force EPA to do the right thing, the St. Johns river would continue to collapse biologically and would never be useable to the public again.”

Incredibly, Florida DEP, along with industrial polluters and sewage companies, have vowed to keep fighting for higher pollution levels for the St. Johns River. DEP held a public workshop last week to explain its plans to change the law that sets minimum oxygen levels currently in place to maintain healthy fish populations.

“The citizens of Northeast Florida love the St. Johns and want to use it and protect it,” said Neil Armingeon, St. Johns Riverkeeper. “Last year's toxic algae bloom was a wake up call. We must reduce the amount of nutrients being discharged into the river. The EPA's TMDL is a good first step.”

EPA says in its document that it will take a new look at DEP's change in water quality standards when they are submitted for approval. Young and Armingeon say they will fight DEP's attempt to weaken water quality standards for the lower St. Johns river.

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