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Save the Springs

By [Brad Rogers](#)

Editorial page editor

Published: Sunday, April 1, 2012 at 6:30 a.m.

Probably no issue generates more agreement and passion in Ocala/Marion County than water. And there is probably no better or beloved barometer of our water health and wealth than the iconic Silver Springs.

So when billionaire Frank Stronach's handlers announced that plans for his 24,000-acre Adena Springs Ranch, just a few miles north of Silver Springs, included pumping 13 million gallons of water a day from the aquifer, it turned the community's collective head.

Because of the ranch's proximity, it is only logical to ask: What impact will pumping that much water have on the aquifer, especially Silver Springs? Surely, with that kind of water withdrawal, more than the city of Ocala pumps every day, answers are warranted — indisputable answers.

Silver Springs watchers, like longtime researcher Bob Knight and green-leaning former county commissioner and Ocala city councilman Andy Kesselring, wondered who would defend the Springs in what is certain to be an intense, indeed historic debate over the Stronach permit request.

It turned out there was no one. The once active Silver Springs Working Group dissolved last year, a victim of Gov. Rick Scott's deep cuts to water management budgets.

So those who knew the Springs best decided Silver Springs needed an advocacy group. Rainbow Springs has one. Wekiva Springs has one. So does Wakulla Springs. But the granddaddy of Florida's 700 springs, arguably the biggest and most famous spring in the world, had no one to speak for it.

Well, it does now. And they are wasting no time speaking up. The newly formed Silver Springs Alliance, led by Kesselring as its president, will host a community forum on the Adena Springs permit from 6-8 p.m. Tuesday night at the Klein Center at the College of Central Florida. The public is invited, and it is free.

"We want to be the go-to community organization to help preserve and enhance Silver Springs," Kesselring told me. "It wasn't born to be in opposition to anything, it's really to be an advocate for something — for Silver Springs."

The Silver Springs Alliance believes the Adena Springs permit is the perfect issue to hang its hat on. Tuesday's meeting will feature someone from the water district and experts on water ethics and the health of the Springs, plus a panel discussion and Q&A. The group has also invited Adena Springs' representatives.

The aim is to provide “good science” to the public.

“Hopefully, if reasonable people can come together, we can have a sustainable development out there,” Kesselring said. “It’s probably going to happen, so what can we suggest to make it better.”

If every effort isn’t made to protect and preserve the Springs, he lamented, its survival is in question, pure and simple. “We’ve got some real significant problems out there at the Springs,” including high nitrate levels, declining flows, disappearing fish populations and increasing plant “monocultures.”

“... Those are things that are not indicative of a healthy river. There are a number of things that show the river is under stress. Our goal is to study the causes of these things and come up with reasonable solutions for bringing (The Springs and river) back.”

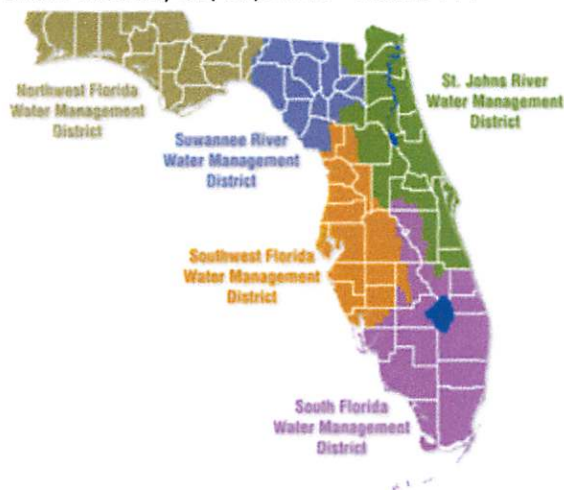
Tuesday night will be the Silver Springs Alliance’s first step toward rallying the community around that goal.

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From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Subject: Fw: WMD Budget Bill
Date: March 8, 2012 7:29:57 AM EST
To: Jack Sullivan <jesull@comcast.net>
Reply-To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>

----- Forwarded Message -----
From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 8, 2012 7:29 AM
Subject: WMD Budget Bill

House, Senate budget chairmen agree on water management districts' budgeting bill
Bruce Ritchie, 03/07/2012 - 10:15 PM



The House and Senate budget chairmen agreed Wednesday night on language in **SB 1986**, a budget conforming bill involving oversight of water management district budgets.

Florida has five independent water management districts governed by appointed boards with the power to collect property taxes. Critics say the districts lack oversight by elected officials.

Last year, **SB 2142** cut water management district property tax revenues by \$210 million. Environmentalists were especially critical of the cuts, with former **U.S. Sen. Bob Graham** [in November calling](#) on **Gov. Rick Scott** to restore funding for the districts.

SB 1986 as passed by the Senate lifts revenue caps while requiring legislative approval of some spending. But the governor's staff has raised concerns about legislative involvement in the review process, according to senators.

Compromise language approved Wednesday would lift the budget caps and provides that the Legislature may annually review preliminary water management district budgets. If the Legislature takes no action by July 1, the districts can proceed based on their preliminary budgets, according to a bill comparison.

The modified bill language also specifies that the Legislature may enact legislation to set the property tax rate, which some environmentalists oppose. The tax rate now is set by the Legislature in state law and in the **Florida Constitution**.

SB 1986 provides the Legislature with more "interplay" in the districts' budget-setting process while recognizing their constitutional independence, **Senate Budget chief JD Alexander said**.

"We are responsible for the decisions they make without having us get into micromanaging water management districts," Alexander said. "It keeps us more aware than we have been in the past but it transfers most of the authority to the governor" to ensure the districts carry out their missions.

Janet Bowman, an attorney who is **The Nature Conservancy's** director of legislative and conservation strategies, said the bill is an improvement because it lifts the revenue caps. But she said the compromise version involves the Legislature more in budgeting than in an earlier House version.

"We greatly appreciate the caps being removed," she said. "However, the bill increases legislative and

gubernatorial control over the water management district budget at the end of the day. And we hope this new authority is used judiciously with the protection of water resources being the goal."

From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Subject: Fw: 2012 session summary: environment & natural resources
Date: March 13, 2012 5:23:57 PM EDT
To: Jack Sullivan <jesull@comcast.net>
Reply-To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>

— Forwarded Message —

From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2012 5:16 PM
Subject: 2012 session summary: environment & natural resources

2012 session summary: Environment and Natural Resources
Bruce Ritchie, 03/13/2012 - 12:50 PM

Former **U.S. Sen. Bob Graham** and **Nathaniel P. Reed** of Hobe Sound were among the speakers in November during an environmental rally outside the Capitol. They called on **Gov. Rick Scott** to show leadership on environmental issues and for the Legislature to undo some of the harmful law and budget changes they said occurred during 2011. Environmentalists didn't get what they were calling for, but they may have somewhat begun to turn the tide that has been running against the programs they support. Any success those groups enjoyed during the 2012 session may be better measured not by what was passed as by what didn't pass. Efforts to restrict local fertilizer ordinances and to encourage oil drilling on state lands failed. Other bills were modified to gain environmental support. However, a bill repealing the statewide requirement for septic tank inspections passed. The **Sierra Club** and **Florida Stormwater Association** opposed the bill's new restrictions on local septic tank inspection programs. Meanwhile, visitors to state trails and state parks could see advertising and herds of African wildlife. The Florida Forever land-buying program and Everglades restoration received some funding, but not as much as environmentalists had hoped.

KEY ISSUES

TRAILS, STATE LANDS: SB 268, which is headed to the governor, allows businesses and groups to sponsor trails and put their advertisements at trailheads. The bill still faces opposition because it allows the **Department of Environmental Protection** to negotiate agreements for trails other than the seven identified in the bill. ... **HB 1117**, which is headed to the governor, would allow giraffes, elephants, rhinos and other zoo animals to roam state parks with approval by the Cabinet. A provision in **SB 1998**, a budget conforming bill related to transportation that is headed to the governor, requires an expedited hearing process for a legal challenge to the proposed dredging in Biscayne Bay to deepen the port of Miami. ... **HB 1103**, which environmentalists opposed as a state-lands giveaway by changing the definition of submerged state lands, stalled after its first committee stop. ... **HB 695**, encouraging oil and gas exploration and drilling on state lands, died on the House calendar.

WATER QUALITY: The 2010 requirement for septic tank inspections statewide will be repealed if **Gov. Rick Scott** signs **HB 1263**. That **Department of Health** reorganization bill contained the language from **HB 599**. The bill also places limits on local septic tank inspection programs, prohibits inspection requirements when a home is sold, and prohibits local ordinances requiring advanced "performance-based" septic tanks until a DOH study is completed. ... The Legislature in **HB 7051** waived approval of water quality rules proposed by the **Florida Department of Environmental Protection**. Those rules, which face a legal challenge filed by environmental groups, would replace federal rules that utilities and industry groups oppose. The bill was signed by Scott on Feb. 16. ... There was a fight again this year between environmentalists and the landscaping industry over local

fertilizer regulations. **SB 604**, exempting certified landscaping professionals from local ordinances, was killed by the **Senate Committee on Environmental Preservation and Conservation** by a 4-3 vote.

WATER POLICY AND PERMITTING: **HB 503** resembled an environmental permit streamlining bill that passed the House last year but wasn't voted on in the Senate. **Rep. Jimmy Patronis**, R-Panama City, was praised by environmentalists for resolving a variety of concerns. The bill also fixes 2010 recycling legislation that would have allowed counties to claim recycling rates in excess of 100 percent. ... Environmentalists also backed **HB 639** dealing with treated wastewater after an objectionable provision was removed. The bill encourages the use of such "reclaimed water" by exempting it from water management district permitting. ... **HB 1389**, which would exempt landowners from wetland regulations for participating in environmental water storage programs, passed during the final day of the session. ... **HB 7003** directs the **Florida Department of Environmental Protection** to undertake writing a statewide **Environmental Resource Permit** rule. ... **HB 7045** allowing permits for up to 37 years for alternative water supply projects passed the House 116-0 but wasn't taken up by the Senate.

BUDGET: **SB 1986**, a budget conforming bill that lifts the property tax revenue caps imposed in 2011 by the Legislature, passed the House and Senate. The **Florida Conservation Coalition** initially opposed a requirement in the bill for legislative approval but dropped its opposition after the language was modified ... After vetoing **Florida Forever** spending authority last year, **Gov. Rick Scott** requested \$15 million for the program in fiscal year 2012-13. The Legislature provided \$8.3 million. ... Scott also requested \$40 million for **Everglades** restoration. The Legislature provided \$30 million for Everglades restoration plus \$5 million for the northern Everglades (north of Lake Okeechobee) and estuaries programs. ... The budget also includes \$10 million for beach sand restoration projects, \$4.8 million in debt service towards a \$50-million wastewater plant in the Florida Keys, \$5.6 million for St. Johns River restoration projects, \$125 million for petroleum contamination sites and \$4.8 million for Lake Apopka restoration.

AGRICULTURE: **HB 1197**, which gives the **Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services** sole authority to regulate beekeeping, is on its way to the governor. Language from other bills that were languishing was added to **HB 1197**, including an exemption from local government stormwater fees for farms. Citrus harvesting equipment and fruit loaders would be added to the list of farming vehicles that are exempt from paying state motor fuel taxes. The beekeeping provisions of **HB 1197** were prompted by local restrictions on beekeeping cropping up in some suburban areas. **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** is calling for a veto because of a Senate amendment the group says would allow chicks and bunnies to be sold at Easter and then discarded. ... **HB 1237**, which returns the executive director of the **Department of Citrus** to being an appointed position without Senate confirmation, also is headed to the governor.

From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Subject: Fw: Senate fails to confirm Scott appointees
Date: March 14, 2012 9:48:12 AM EDT
To: Jack Sullivan <jesull@comcast.net>
Cc: Nancy Smith <nsmithnhs@aol.com>
Reply-To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>

FYI.

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 14, 2012 9:45 AM
Subject: Senate fails to confirm Scott appointees

Fla. Senate fails to confirm Scott appointees

By GARY FINEOUT

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) -- Gov. Rick Scott's picks to run universities, colleges, state agencies and other important boards are now in limbo.

The Florida Senate failed to confirm more than 400 appointments Scott has made in the last year during the regular 60-day legislative session that ended last Friday.

Some of those who were not confirmed include the heads of the state's prison agency, as well as the agency that works with the disabled and the agency that oversees Florida's elections.

The Senate also refused to confirm four members of the State Board of Education, the panel that hires the education commissioner and is responsible for setting policy for the state's public schools.

Others who were not confirmed include members of university and college boards, water management district boards, the Florida Citrus Commission and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Under state law, all these people must leave their posts by April 23 unless Scott reappoints them.

If the Senate refuses to confirm the appointees a second time they must leave their post for at least one year before they can be reappointed.

Lane Wright, a spokesman for Scott, said that the governor would start reviewing the appointments between now and the rapidly approaching deadline.

"We will reappoint or make new appointments within the required time period," Wright said.

A spokeswoman for Senate President Mike Haridopolos said that the Senate did not act on many of the executive appointments because it was caught up in other matters, including a controversial bill that makes changes to the state's mandatory auto insurance law.

The session ran all the way up to midnight on Friday.

"The Senate simply ran out of time to confirm executive appointments on the last day of the session," said Lyndsey Cruley. "We had a number of pressing issues to get to that day."

The Senate, however, during the session did confirm eight Scott appointments, including Secretary of Transportation Ananth Prasad.

All eight of the appointees were up for confirmation last year but the Senate did not vote on them at that time. That meant that Prasad was in danger of losing his job permanently if the Senate had not acted this time around.

Lawmakers hand setback to environment

Saturday, March 17, 2012 at 12:58 am (Updated: March 17, 1:00 am)

THE ISSUE: Repeal of septic tank inspection law.

OUR OPINION: A de facto license to pollute.

To protect Florida's springs and groundwater, the state Legislature in 2010 took an important water quality step forward with the passage of SB 550, which required statewide septic tank inspections every five years by 2016.

However, in response to a backlash by lobbyists and rural residents in the Florida Panhandle, the Legislature during its November 2010 special session passed a bill to delay implementation of the septic tank inspection law. Fearing then-Gov. Charlie Crist would veto the measure, the Legislature did not send it to the governor's desk until Gov. Scott assumed the office, upon which he allowed the delay to become law without his signature.

Supporters of the septic tank inspection law were concerned that delayed implementation was nothing more than political subterfuge aimed at ultimately repealing it. Their concern was realized during the waning minutes of the recently concluded legislative session when the House voted to repeal the law as part of the Florida Department of Health reorganization bill, HB 1263.

Supported by powerful special interests such as the Florida Onsite Wastewater Association and Associated Industries of Florida, HB 1263's repeal of statewide septic tank inspections in favor of setting parameters for a local inspection program raises the specter of Florida's springs and groundwater going from bad to worse.

While the bill calls for counties with first-magnitude springs to adopt the parameters for a local inspection program, it allows them to opt out by a 60 percent vote of the county commission. As for those counties without first-magnitude springs, they are free to opt in or opt out.

Additionally, HB 1263 places restrictions on local septic tank inspection programs and prohibits local governments from inspecting septic tanks when a home is being sold. Further, it defines a system failure as only occurring if sewage flows onto the ground, into a surface water or backs up into a house.

As noted by the Environmental Protection Agency, septic tanks are the second greatest contributor to groundwater contamination. Therefore, with more than half of Florida's 2.6 million septic tanks more than 30 years old, and less than 1 percent of those that fail being actively maintained, HB 1263 is a significant step backward for water quality because it is akin to a de facto license to pollute.

This de facto license to pollute our springs and groundwater will be exacerbated by future growth since sewers are neither available nor planned for many undeveloped lots throughout Florida. Also, state and federal grants to assist with the cost of extending sewer lines will be scarce for the foreseeable future.

Given the present and future threat of leeching septic tanks into our springs and groundwater, the successful political maneuvering by those septic tank owners, legislators and special interests favoring repeal of statewide septic tank inspections promises to be a Pyrrhic victory.

From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Subject: Fw: Doug Barr becomes last of five WMD directors to go
Date: March 22, 2012 10:31:43 PM EDT
To: Jack Sullivan <jesull@comcast.net>
Reply-To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 22, 2012 10:31 PM
Subject: Doug Barr becomes last of five WMD directors to go

Douglas Barr becomes last of five water district directors to go in past year

Bruce Ritchie, 03/22/2012 - 04:06 PM

Northwest Florida Water Management District Executive Director Douglas Barr on Thursday told his district board that he is leaving the agency, an agency spokeswoman said.

After 20 years as executive director, for Barr becomes the last head of the five water management districts to quit, retire or be forced out in the past year.

Barr, who was in staff meetings and not available for comment Thursday, did not indicate why he was leaving or whether he was not being reappointed by the governor, said **Lucinda Scott**, the district's public information coordinator. A spokeswoman for the governor's office said she was looking into the question.

Barr was among about 400 appointees who had [not been confirmed](#) by the Senate when the legislative session ended March 9. He told his board he is leaving on April 23, which is when those holding the positions must leave if they are not reappointed.

"Today at the governing board meeting, he told the governing board and advised them on how to set up a selection committee and get started on the hiring process," Lucinda Scott said. She is not related to the governor.

Four other water management district chiefs were among those who were not confirmed when the legislative session ended. One of them, **David Still** of the **Suwannee River Water Management District**, [resigned](#) on Feb. 14 under pressure from his board.

The other executive directors have given various reasons for leaving but it's obvious to some observers that the changes brought by Scott and the Legislature are playing a role.

Sonny Vergara, a former executive director of the **Southwest Florida Water Management District**, said last month that Still's ouster shows that the state is trying to operate the districts out of Tallahassee.

Last year Scott signed **SB 2142** cutting water management district budgets by \$210 million. This year, **SB 1986** would remove the caps while maintaining legislative approval of some spending.

Barr was hired by the Northwest Florida Water Management District in 1977 as assistant to senior hydrologist. He served as deputy executive director from 1989 to 1992 before being appointed executive director.

He play a key role as advisor to Florida governors in the legal fight with Alabama and Georgia over water from the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river system. He was the longest-serving director among Florida's five water management districts even before the others began leaving within the past year.

Barr was confirmed in February by the **Senate Committee on Environmental Preservation and Conservation**. But **Sen. Jack Latvala**, R-St. Petersburg, criticized the agency during the confirmation hearing for having a "business as usual" approach that included keeping \$30 million in unallocated reserves.

"I hear that you think business as usual is fine and you have not gotten the message maybe there is a

different world out there now in the water management district business," Latvala said. "And because your board likes you, that makes everything OK to continue."

Barr responded that he doesn't think business as usual is the way to go while assuring the senator that he and his board are not opposed to growth in the region.

"The status quo has never been adequate in my view," Barr said, "if there is a better way to serve business and serve the public and if there is a better way to accomplish our mission while not interfering with the business of people who come to Northwest Florida to conduct their business."