

Gus Olmos

From: bob palmer [rpa711@yahoo.com]
Sent: Sunday, May 13, 2012 8:44 PM
To: Gus Olmos
Cc: Chris Bird
Subject: Please post this Sierra Club statement on the EPD review

Statement by Dave Wilson, Chairman
Suwannee – St. Johns Group of the Sierra Club
May, 2012

The Alachua County Environmental Protection Department (EPD) is essential to protecting the welfare of its citizens. This department has the responsibility of protecting water, soil, and air quality, setting aside environmentally significant lands, minimizing impacts of hazardous materials, and providing oversight and management of clean-up at contaminated sites. Despite a pitiful budget (comprising less than 1% of the county budget) this department has done an outstanding job staying on top of this complex set of tasks. The driving force behind the successes of EPD has been Chris Bird, who has managed these issues since 1993.

Since the state of Florida has its own Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), one might ask why the county needs its own department. The first reason is that this department is stretched thin. The second is that North Central Florida has a unique set of springs and rivers found nowhere else in the world. These fabulous treasures need special protection. For example, a few days ago I visited Blue Springs (because Poe Springs is closed on Wednesday) only to find a slime and hydrilla choked stream. A young fellow is working 3 days a week pitch-forking the biomass into a canoe and hauling it to shore. One does not need a graduate degree in hydrology to understand that our beautiful springs are in trouble. A third reason is that local residents have knowledge and experience that is lost at the state level. In recent presentations Chris has pointed out local examples where a problem exists, a cause is identified, and a solution is proposed. He does a wonderful job creating awareness by local citizens of how their behavior impacts the environment. As he repeated states it is a lot easier to prevent a problem rather than repair it. The EPD effort to prevent discharges from underground fuel tanks through a program of inspection, compliance and enforcement is just one such example. Hazardous waste collection for households and businesses is another.

While one might also ask whether or not all these rules and regulations are bad for business and will cost the county jobs, it doesn't take long to understand that in-migration (particularly from the north) has been an important driver of our local economy. If people see that Alachua County is an unpleasant place to live, they will avoid relocating here. This phenomenon is already happening in other places around the country.

In summary, I have personally known Chris Bird for several decades. He is a hard working dedicated individual of the utmost integrity, who has done an outstanding job protecting the water, soil, and air of Alachua County. We are fortunate to have him and his excellent staff to guide us through these difficult times.