

# RIPARIAN COUNTY STAKEHOLDER COALITION (RCSC)

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## THE RCSC

*The RCSC, comprised of the six riparian counties that border the Apalachicola River, includes Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, and Liberty counties. The RCSC was created by Resolution in 2007 and by Compact Agreement in 2012 to protect, support, and maintain the values of the Apalachicola River riparian counties both individually and collectively. The RCSC allows for the six counties to speak in one unified voice, provide a one point-of-contact for management issues and programs relating to the Apalachicola River, and promote the need for State and Federal funding to conduct technical evaluations and documentation.*



*Scientists and engineers meet in Spiders Cut (Gulf County) to discuss strategies for sediment removal in the slough*

## THE RCSC AND THE APALACHICOLA CAUCUS

The Chairman of the RCSC hosts bi-weekly calls for members and interested technical associates interested in actions and activities associated with the Apalachicola Chattahoochee Flint Stakeholders. This call is shared by RCSC and the Apalachicola Caucus representing Florida water users and stakeholders. This citizen initiative brings water users throughout the ACF basin to discuss issues and related to the equitable distribution of water from the river system. Presently this is the only voice discussing the basics of watershed management.

## NIDIS AND DROUGHT MANAGEMENT

A major initiative of the ACF Stakeholders is the funding and support of the NOAA Drought Early Warning System and the National Integrated Drought Management System. RCSC funded an examination of the NIDIS program as well as examining how Florida deals with drought in the ACF basin.

### ACF Basin DEWS Strategic Plan

The ACF DEWS Strategic Plan outlines priority tasks and activities across the region to build drought early warning capacity and resilience. It includes a list of current partners, outcomes, and key milestones. This Plan is a “living document” to which additional actions and partners may be added as needed

## STATE OF FLORIDA VS GEORGIA/EARTHJUSTICE VS USACE

The health of the floodplain of the Apalachicola and Chipola Rivers is tied to how closely the United States Corps of Engineers (USACE) decides to mimic the natural flow regime from the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, Flint River system. We have long heard about how the State of Florida is contesting the exploitation of water by users within the State of Georgia, specifically agriculture and water supply. Unregulated withdrawals and overuse seriously impact the flow regime of the Apalachicola River. This challenge is continuing through the legal process and will be again heard by the Supreme Court. This case is important and should be supported.

Running parallel to this case Earthjustice has challenged the way the USACE has continually modified the way water is controlled (stored and discharged) through the large reservoirs along the Chattahoochee River.



### Notice to Mariners from the US Coast Guard – Public Service Announcement

#### AL/GA - CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER - LAKE EUFAULA- Channel Conditions

Continuing through September 15, 2020, the USACE will be dropping the water level of the Walter F George Reservoir, commonly known as Lake Eufaula, in by an estimated three feet. Lake Eufaula, located in the middle reach of the Chattahoochee River, is known for its trophy bass. Water management techniques will be used to lower the elevation of the reservoir by an estimated 0.25 feet - 0.5 feet per week, until an elevation of 186 feet is reached. Lake Eufaula is estimated to remain at 186 feet until January 1, 2021, to allow repairs to the upstream face of the dam. During this period, aids to navigation in Lake Eufaula and Chattahoochee River between Mile 154.0 to Mile 75.0, will be marking a river channel between 9-foot to 6-foot water depth. Mariners are urged to exercise extreme caution when transiting in Lake Eufaula and the Chattahoochee River system, as the water depth of aids to navigation may vary depending on pool stages.

The recent change to the Water Control Plan which is the written process of how water is managed is even more damaging to the Apalachicola floodplain and bay than the one it replaced.

Key to the Earthjustice case is the belief that the floodplain and bay is not to be considered in how the USACE manages the reservoirs and importantly why the USACE did not abide by the comments by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as is required as part of the NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act).

Both cases deal with the ongoing issues related to less flow as well as changes in the flow regime in the Apalachicola River. Both cases require continued support from local governments and users along the Apalachicola River. Hunting, fishing, boating and kayaking are all affected. The Tupelo honey industry is harmed by the documented loss of Tupelo trees directly due to the changes in the natural flow regimes promulgated by the USACE through the old and now even worse through the new Water Control Manual. The old manual was bad for natural resources within the Apalachicola basin, this new manual is devastating.

Oliver Wendell Homes wrote:

*“A river is more than an amenity, it is a treasure. It offers a necessity of life that must be rationed among those who have power over it.”....”-the upstream state-had “the physical power to cut off all the water within its jurisdiction.” ..... But .... “clearly the exercise of such a power to the destruction of interests of lower States could not be tolerated”*

### APALACHICOLA SLOUGH RESTORATION (NFWF)

RCSC reviewed, provided input and a letter of support to the National Fish and Wildlife Federation for a Slough Restoration grant that was won by the Apalachicola Riverkeeper. This five-year \$5 million dollar grant will provide funding to excavate sediments from Spiders Cut off the Chipola River, Douglas Slough on the Apalachicola River south of Wewahitchka and the East River which flows into East Bay. These sediments have long clogged the slough systems, impacting floodplain where we have seen devastating loss of the Tupelo Tree which significantly affects honey productions. Flow through East River may divert needed freshwater into the most productive regions of the Apalachicola Bay system. Success on this pilot project may mean future funding for the 20 other slough systems in the mid to lower reaches of the Apalachicola River.

### BUDGET REQUESTS AND FUNDING

RCSC has submitted its 2021 request for continued funding through each of the county budget administrators. We have maintained our funding at \$5000 per year to support a coordinator and the Apalachee Regional Planning Council for administrative support. We use this money to support technical and facilitation exercises consistent with our charter and mission statement. Please help us keep this small amount in the County budgets.

## Contact Us

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## RCSC SELECTS A NEW COORDINATOR

At the request of the ARPC the RCSC has chosen Mr. Ken Jones, a professional engineer with expertise in watershed dynamics, planning and construction as well as coastal systems to provide the RCSC assistance in planning, administration and technical support for issues and important to the riparian counties related to the Apalachicola River basin. Mr. Jones is available to the counties for expert consulting through this contract.

## HOW CAN THE RCSC HELP YOU

The RCSC can provide technical support and expertise in areas of concern related to issues within the Apalachicola River floodplain and bay watershed. We can support your initiatives with State and federal agencies.