



Press Release

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SJRWMD Survey Results Demonstrate Strong Support for Ocklawaha River Restoration

The recent month-long, online public survey launched by St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) regarding the future of the Kirkpatrick Dam and Rodman Reservoir resulted in 10,482 responses. Initial analysis of the results indicated overwhelming support for restoration. Of 9,793 submittals answering the question “What would you like to see happen with the Rodman Reservoir and Kirkpatrick Dam moving forward?” over 86.5% of the respondents expressed a desire to restore a free-flowing Ocklawaha River, and 5.9% were in favor of retaining the dam and reservoir. The remaining responses did not reflect a clear pro-restoration or pro-dam and reservoir position.

According to the SJRWMD press release launching the survey, the process was designed “to collect feedback from local community members and stakeholders regarding the Kirkpatrick Dam and Rodman Reservoir” and “to help inform future key decisions regarding the best path forward — continued management and operation of the structures or an alternative restoration strategy.” The complex survey requested written answers to four questions. SJRWMD posted the raw online survey results at <https://www.sjrwmd.com/rodman>.

“In addition to the extremely positive pro-restoration responses survey-wide, we were very pleased to see the strong pro-restoration results from Marion and Putnam counties, two counties bordering the Rodman Reservoir and Ocklawaha River,” said Margaret Spontak, Free the Ocklawaha River Coalition for Everyone. The initial analysis revealed that 63.6% of survey respondents in Putnam County indicated they were pro restoration of the Ocklawaha River with 19.5% supporting retention of the dam and reservoir. In Marion County 75.3% of respondents

logged in pro restoration answers with 15.6% responding in support of maintaining the dam and reservoir.

Elizabeth Neville, Defenders of Wildlife and co-chair of the coalition's advocacy team, enlisted a professional data analyst volunteer to help review the survey response data. "While our preliminary analysis was very careful and conservative, we are thrilled to see that such a strong majority of stakeholders support restoring the Ocklawaha — a project that will greatly benefit fish, manatees and other wildlife." she stated.

Demonstrating statewide and national interest, survey respondents came from sixty-six of Florida's sixty-seven counties plus 17.23% or 1,327 total survey completers came from out-of-state. National stakeholder groups such as Bassmaster, American Rivers, and Defenders of Wildlife solicited comments from members beyond Florida.

The coalition plans are to engage a professional survey group to produce a more detailed analysis of the full survey responses. "Our team is very interested in what subjects and outcomes are of interest to stakeholders of all backgrounds and positions. By better understanding everyone's point of view, we can continue to identify shared solutions and recreation amenities that can meet a variety of user group needs," shared Spontak.

The stakeholder survey resulted in many responses from a variety of stakeholders with a keen interest in this subject. This is unlike more formal scientific surveys that pull data from a small, random sampling of targeted individuals that may not have deep engagement in the survey topic. Neville also explained, "The survey question structure provided open-ended qualitative, not quantitative data. In our review of the raw data, every effort was made to be objective, all-encompassing, and precise; however, with so many individual responses there is no perfect way to summarize this type of qualitative data." A forthcoming holistic, manual analysis of the full survey responses will provide additional findings.

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