

Late Monday January 12, a Hearing Officer issued his judgment regarding the challenge to our permit to use water from the St. Johns River. Our request, though fairly reviewed by the St. Johns River Water Management District was challenged by St. Johns County, the City of Jacksonville and the RiverKeepers organization.

In short, the Hearing Officer supported science and recommended the permit.

The permit has a very narrow focus with a request of up to 5.5 million gallons of water from the river—roughly one quarter of one percent of flow at the place we're proposing the withdrawal.

Across the board, the hearing officer recognized that our modest request would not harm the environment but would help us better manage our groundwater resources. In fact the Hearing Officer was persuaded that much more river water could be used without measurable impact to the river.

Our plan is to protect the quality of life of our community and central Florida. That means, among many other things, protecting the environment, providing affordable water of good quality and cooperating with our neighbors.

That is why we are pleased that the Hearing Officer recommended the issuance of our permit, but saddened that St. Johns County and Jacksonville have spent so much money to challenge a permit that poses no threat to their communities or to the river that we all love.

Given the economic challenges that our citizens now face, given the budget cuts we are all facing, given our shared goals to protect our residents and the river, we hope that St. Johns County and Jacksonville will join us in working through our problems, not in court, but cooperatively and collaboratively through our staff and our leaders.

We believe that doing so best serves the public interest.