



Providing Expanded Recreation Opportunities for Everyone

During the drawdowns that happen every three to four years, recreation activity goes up because it draws all kinds of outdoors lovers – anglers, paddlers, springs’ swimmers, hikers, campers, bird watchers, and sightseers. The last drawdown resulted in an 81% increase in visitation compared to the same months the two previous years (FDEP data). Economists project that this demonstrates a pent-up demand for diverse recreation on a more natural river.

Boating and Sight-seeing

Much of the Rodman/Kirkpatrick reservoir contains stumps from the 7,500-acre cypress forest that was decimated over 50 years ago. Many are not visible and can be a hazard to boaters, as are the buried logs that pop up from the lake bottom occasionally. These hazards would be minimized with a restored river system. The slow-moving warmer waters of the reservoir promote invasive aquatic vegetation that often blocks boat ramps and hinders movement through the reservoir until herbicide treatments are applied repeatedly. Sight-seeing boat tour operators stay booked throughout the drawdown months but have difficulty attracting sufficient business outside of that after the impoundment has been refilled. A free-flowing river would restore the historic natural blueway from Jacksonville to Silver Springs along the St. Johns and Ocklawaha rivers for all types of boaters.

Springs Visitation

Natural springs have been a magnet for Florida since its first visitors. Springs soaking, swimming, and snorkeling are some of Floridians’ favorite activities. Decades ago, 20 springs were submerged by the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam. Although some of these are very small springs, several would create great swimming holes. During drawdowns every three-four years, a few of those lost springs like Cannon Springs are revealed to show their splendor. Reconnecting the Ocklawaha to Silver Springs and the St. Johns River would bring back these springs, providing fish and manatee habitat and spots for springs hopping. Economists project that two of the larger springs with added infrastructure (restrooms and access) could bring in 30,000 new visitors and \$3 million a year.

Paddling

The natural sections of the Silver and Ocklawaha rivers attract canoeists, kayakers, and stand-up paddle boarders. Because of aquatic weed issues, less wildlife viewing, and lack of banks for stop overs, the impounded portion of the Ocklawaha is less attractive to this market. Paddlers prefer not to go through the Buckman Lock. The Great Florida

Riverway from Silver Springs to Palatka could become a magnet for paddlers, much like the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail, if the river was restored. As a special bonus, Deep Creek would be restored to the unique natural wonder it once was.

Fishing

Although the artificial Rodman Reservoir is a popular bass fishing location, its use has declined by an average of 3,627 visitor parties per year since 2010 (FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails). Many tournament boats are seen putting in at Kenwood, but locking out to the St. Johns, now ranked fourth in the Bassmaster's Southeastern United States rankings. Rodman Reservoir is ranked eighth. In addition to the good bass fishing the Ocklawaha was known for before the dam, a restored river is projected to bring back larger striped bass, other native fish species, and create a more sustainable fishery from the Ocklawaha to the St. Johns to the Atlantic Ocean. Restoring natural downstream flow of the Ocklawaha to the St. Johns would improve fish habitat in the St. Johns River, Palatka's top ranked fishing area. See more at <https://www.freetheocklawaha.com/fish> .

Putnam County has 260 lakes over 10 acres (FDEP Greenway Plan), but the Ocklawaha River provides a unique fishing experience. With partial restoration, the Eureka Pool would remain a favorite hot spot as well as all the creeks and cuts along the river. Anglers would fish in the wild Florida - a peaceful, relaxed setting.

Birding and Wildlife Viewing

As banks emerge during drawdown, so do alligators, deer, flocks of turkeys, and a wild array of birds. The natural eco-system emerges including thousands of bald cypress, red maple and other seedlings which are drowned after the drawdown ends. The beautiful, large cypress trees become visible, "the sequoias of the south." The drowned forest at the reservoir becomes a gathering spot for limpkins, ospreys, white pelicans, sandhill cranes and more. Conservation, paddling and other groups and individual sightseers come from miles away to see the river that comes alive. The same would occur on a restored, natural river.

Camping

During drawdowns, tents pop up on banks along the natural river from Eureka to the dam and near opened-up fishing banks at Paynes Landing and Orange Springs ramps. Those banks are now covered by the swollen waters from the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam. Under partial restoration, the artificial reservoir and associated marsh would permanently be replaced by a meandering natural river. Riverine boating and fishing, camping, and hiking would abound. Acres of additional land for primitive camping and possibilities for new public and privately run campgrounds would expand camping experiences.

Hiking, Hunting, and Horseback Riding

As the impounded waters of the dam come down to a natural river, additional areas for hiking emerge along the banks of the Ocklawaha. Overtime, 7500 acres of additional cypress forest will become available for hiking, potential for new or improved managed hunting areas, and horseback riding. In the near term, areas such as the Buckman Lock

can be repurposed creating a better Florida Trail trailhead, a possible duck hunting area, children's fishing area, outdoor center for hunters and anglers, and more.

The University of Florida College of Landscape Design Architecture created a vision for recreational opportunities that could be achieved as a result of restoration. Visit [Student Showcase - The Great Florida Riverway](#) to learn more about the student projects.