

If you missed the Florida Native Plant Society's screening of the documentary about the benefits of removing the Rodman Dam, freeing the Ocklawaha River and restoring the Great Florida Riverway, [you can see that here](#). The presentation is about an hour followed by an extensive Q&A.

[The Great Florida Riverway](#), a vast 217-mile system, reaches from the Green Swamp and Lake Apopka in Central Florida to the Atlantic Ocean via the Ocklawaha and St. Johns rivers. The Great Florida Riverway is home to more than 50 springs including one of the largest artesian springs in the world, Silver Springs.

The Ocklawaha River, the heart of the Great Florida Riverway and the largest tributary of the St. Johns River, was dammed in 1968. Constructed for a canal that was never completed and never served its intended purpose, the dam flooded more than 7,500 acres of forested wetlands, 20 springs and 16 miles of the Ocklawaha River.

Outside of the Everglades, this is the greatest opportunity for large-scale ecological restoration currently being discussed in Florida. It would obviously be a major boon for native plant habitat in the region.

Florida again made national environmental headlines for all the wrong reasons last week as an ecological nightmare unfolded near Tampa Bay. Phosphate mining and production has been one of Florida's most environmentally devastating industries for decades and the Piney Point "gypsum stack" – a surface pond containing hundreds of millions of gallons of toxic water used in the mining process – nearly gave way. The catastrophe caused the release of roughly 500 million gallons of toxic waste water into the Tampa Bay estuary, [erasing 15 years of work](#) to restore the ecosystem there in a matter of days. Water quality had reached levels not seen since the 1950s. All gone.

Ecological disaster is not a quirk of mining and extraction industries, it's a feature. This tragedy reinforces that. Heavy blame must also be placed on Florida's absurdly lax Department of Environmental Protection which, over the course of numerous governors, has routinely ignored these problems, sided with industry and [failed to regulate these operations](#). Piney Point has widely been reported as a problem since the early 2000s.

Speaking of extractive industries, an oil company is applying for permits to drill in the Big Cypress National Preserve, threatening all the plants and animals living there. [Click here to send an automated letter in opposition](#).

Lots of bad news, here's a little good. A fellow Ixia member, Betsy Harris, and myself helped organize a native plant installation along a popular bike and walking path in Fernandina Beach (corner of Simmons Rd and First Ave) with help from Keep Nassau Beautiful. Almost 300 plants were put in including butterfly milkweed, tropical sage, muhly grass, seaside oxeye, black eyed Susan and tickseed. Anyone in Nassau County who'd like to become involved in helping us with projects like this – and more are coming – feel free to contact me directly at: [chaddscott@hotmail.com](mailto:chaddscott@hotmail.com).