

FLORIDA WATER COALITION, INC.

Sent via email

July 7, 2011

Dear Congressman,

As the photos attached to this letter sadly show, Southwest Florida's Caloosahatchee River has been hit yet again with a nauseating toxic algae outbreak that is a public health threat. A drinking water plant on the river at Olga, which serves 30,000 people, is shut down due to contamination.

Florida Department of Health authorities are warning people not to touch the river, because the toxic algae causes "harm to fish, animals and humans." It is a direct result of sewage, manure, and fertilizer pollution.

The toxic algae crisis on the Caloosahatchee River is a grim reminder of why we need enforceable water pollution limits in Florida to protect our drinking water and our health. Repeated toxic outbreaks are fouling drinking water supplies, killing fish, closing popular tourist beaches, sickening swimmers, and devastating the tourism-dependent economy. Five million people visited Lee County, where the Caloosahatchee is located, in 2010, and tourism employs at least 50,000 people in the area.

The situation is dire: Lee County Commission Chairman Frank Mann told local television news reporters the Caloosahatchee "is as foul as I've ever seen it with pollution. In front of my own house there's an algae scum nearly an inch thick. It smells as though you were standing by a septic tank with the lid taken off."

As an elected representative and public servant, it is your duty to protect Floridians' jobs and public health. It would be a clear dereliction of that duty to allow this public health threat to continue.

One of your colleagues, U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, swam in the same type of toxic algae outbreak in Grand Lake, Oklahoma, the last week of June and said he became "deathly sick" that night with an upper respiratory illness. "There is no question," Inhofe told a reporter from the *Tulsa World*, that his illness came from the toxic algae in the lake. Oklahoma health officials had warned people not to touch the water, swim in the popular lake, or eat fish from it. Like Florida's outbreaks, the one in Grand Lake is fueled by the so-called "nutrients," nitrogen and phosphorus, which come from inadequately treated sewage, fertilizer, and manure pollution.

We urge you to protect your constituents by supporting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's numeric nutrient criteria for Florida. Having enforceable standards will prevent overloading waterways with the phosphorus and nitrogen which spur these repeated toxic algae outbreaks. This pollution is poisoning the rivers, lakes and streams that supply the water from Floridians' kitchen taps. Floridians deserve clean drinking water, not water polluted with sewage, fertilizer and manure runoff.

The Florida Water Coalition is a non-profit, non-partisan organization comprised of many of the leading environmental, public health and public interest organizations in the state. The mission of the Florida Water Coalition is to deliver persistent, result-oriented advocacy and educational outreach that furthers three major themes:

- ❖ Water Must Be Clean and Safe ❖
- ❖ Waters and Submerged Public Lands Must Not Be Privatized or Misused ❖
- ❖ Water Management Must Protect Natural Systems ❖

The toxic algae pollution in Florida has become so serious that The Florida Department of Health now hands out educational materials that ask people: "Have You been Slimed?" Callers to the state's Aquatic Toxins Hotline hear a recording which warns: "It is very important that pets, livestock and small children are kept out of water suspected of having a blue green algae bloom since there have been many reported animals dying after drinking highly contaminated water."

You will remember that the St. Johns River was closed to fishermen in the summer of 2009 and again in the summer of 2010 because a sickening toxic green slime outbreak poisoned fish, making them unsafe to catch or eat. In 2005, the St. Lucie River and estuary in Southeast Florida was covered with bright green slime and it wasn't safe to even touch the water. Waterfront property values in the area suffered a permanent decline of \$500 million after the outbreak.

As summer temperatures warm, toxic algae outbreaks are starting again on the Caloosahatchee, the St. Johns, and on many popular Florida springs and swimming holes where Floridians take their families for a cool dip.

This type of pollution is preventable. We can combat it at its source -- by upgrading old sewer plants, using modern manure management on agricultural operations and being smarter about applying fertilizer.

Florida's Department of Environmental Protection first sounded the alarm about the dangers of toxic algae outbreaks in a 2000 scientific report – eleven years ago. The EPA standards were developed jointly by EPA and DEP scientists, who reviewed 13,000 water samples at 2,200 sites around Florida to come up with the right numbers.

It is time to get on with cleanup. Floridians support these pollution limits to protect public health. When the EPA asked the public to comment on the new water pollution standards, the agency received 22,000 comments, and 20,000 were in support of the new standards.

Floridians are tired of all the political wrangling. We urge you to support these EPA standards for the sake of Floridians' jobs and health.

Sincerely,



Manley Fuller, President, Florida Wildlife Federation

Becky Ayeche, President of Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida

David Guest, Florida Managing Attorney, Earthjustice

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WARNING: ALGAE ALERT
STAY OUT OF WATER

 **NO DRINKING**
BY HUMANS OR ANIMALS 
NO EATING FISH

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
CALL (239) 274-2204
LEE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Caloosahatchee 2011



Caloosahatchee 2008



Caloosahatchee 2005

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Inhofe blames illness on Grand Lake algae

by: JIM MYERS World Washington Bureau
Saturday, July 02, 2011
7/2/2011 5:40:16 AM

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For more information on blue green algae.

WASHINGTON - U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe said Friday he is convinced he became ill after swimming in the algae in Grand Lake earlier this week.

"There is no question," the Oklahoma Republican said, linking what he thought was a routine dive into the lake last Monday morning to a severe upper respiratory illness.

"That night, Monday night, I was just deathly sick."

Inhofe and his wife, Kay, have had a home at the lake for decades, and he has never seen that kind of algae in the water previously.

"I didn't think anything about it," he said, recalling that he had encouraged his 13-year-old granddaughter to join him in the water but she declined.

"She didn't want to get in that green stuff."

Inhofe, whose Grand Lake home is located in Ketchum Hollow, said he is tracking the Grand River Dam Authority, which has issued a warning against direct contact with the water in the lake.

After leaving for Tulsa mid-week and missing a few votes, the 76-year-old senator expressed confidence he has turned the corner on the illness and plans to return to the U.S. Capitol next week.

Inhofe's sense of humor already has kicked in again.

One of the leading Republican voices on such issues, he suggested a few humorous takes from others: "The environment strikes back" or "Inhofe is attacked by the environment."

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Associated Images:



On the mend
Jim Inhofe: He's feeling better and plans to return to the U.S. Capitol next week.