

FACT SHEET: CROWLEY MUSEUM AND NATURE CENTER

- ❖ Crowley Museum and Nature Center owns a tract of land along the Upper Myakka River in Sarasota County. The Nature Center was established in 1974 to protect the natural habitats and wildlife indigenous to the area and to educate the public about the natural and cultural history of Southwest.
- ❖ Nature Center lands encompass a hardwood forest of oaks, tupelos and other trees bordering the Myakka River. Because these lands are contiguous with the river, they are vulnerable to any upstream changes to the quantity and timing of river flows (hydroperiod), as well as changes in water quality. Thousands of tree in this forest community are now either dead or dying.
- ❖ Upstream of the Nature Center, thousands of acres of vegetable farms use “flood irrigation,” an extremely wasteful irrigation practice that supplies water by raising the water table to a level within the plants’ root zones. Flood irrigation is particularly intense during the Spring and Fall dry seasons.
- ❖ Millions of gallons per day of excess irrigation water flows or seeps downstream into tributary streams which then flow into an area of the Upper Myakka River known as Flatford Swamp. All of these water withdrawals are permitted by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, which also reviews and funds water control systems that are supposed to prevent the runoff and waste of irrigation water.
- ❖ Flatford Swamp is an approximately 3000 acre bottomland hardwood flowing swamp that was purchased by the South Florida Water Management District in 1991 using funds from Florida’s Save Our Rivers land acquisition program.
- ❖ The Swamp was purchased because of its unique environmental characteristics and the major influence the Swamp had on the flow regime (hydroperiod) and water quality of the River downstream from the Swamp including the portion of the River which flows past the Nature Center.
- ❖ Without the addition of irrigation water, the River in its natural state would run completely dry during some portion of the dry season and the Swamp would have a springtime drying-out period.
- ❖ Approximately 90% of the trees in the bottomland hardwood community in the District owned Flatford Swamp are now either dead or dying.
- ❖ The District knows from its own studies that the cause of the tree die-off in Flatford and on the lands of the Nature Center is due to excess irrigation water that floods the Swamp and the River during what would normally be the dry season of the year and knows that allowing these flows to continue would result in additional tree deaths.

- ❖ Despite this knowledge, the District has continued to allow vegetable farms to dump excess irrigation water into District land in Flatford Swamp from where it flows downstream into lands of the Nature Center.
- ❖ The excess flows have continued because the District failed to ensure that private agricultural water recovery systems it helped design and fund were constructed in a manner that would halt damaging off-site flows, failed to ensure the systems were operated and maintained in a manner that would halt damaging off-site flows and failed to even monitor the systems' performance.