



**THE FACTS ABOUT SEWAGE, MANURE,
AND FERTILIZER IN FLORIDA DRINKING WATER**

Earthjustice Responds to Attack on Clean Water for Florida Citizens

- Florida's water pollution problem is a matter of public health, and the public must be protected. A 2008 Florida Department of Environmental Protection report found that half the state's rivers and more than half of its lakes had poor water quality.
- After years of foot-dragging, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is finally agreeing to set legal, enforceable limits on the state's worst water pollution problem: high levels of sewage, manure and wasted fertilizer in lakes and rivers.
- High levels of sewage, manure, and fertilizer trigger outbreaks of toxic algae and red tide that contaminate drinking water, force lengthy beach closings, foul rivers, lakes and springs with green slime, and send vacationing beachgoers to emergency rooms. They cost Florida billions of dollars every year.
- During an algae outbreak on the St. Lucie River and estuary in 2005, Martin County homeowners had their waterfront properties posted with health warning signs because exposure to blue-green algae toxins – when people drink the water, touch it, or inhale vapors from it - can cause rashes, skin and eye irritation, allergic reactions, gastrointestinal upset, serious illness, and even death. The polluted condition of the river caused a half *billion* dollar decrease in waterfront property values in Martin County alone.
- The claim that it could cost \$50 billion to upgrade Florida's sewage treatment plants is ridiculous. The cost of upgrading all the sewage treatment plants in the *entire United States* (including federal grants, state contributions, and leveraged bonds) from 1988 to 2007 was only \$58 billion. (EPA statistics, <http://www.epa.gov/owm/cwfinance/cwsrf/cwnims/pdf/invus.pdf>)

“For it to cost Florida \$50 billion, they'd have to buy gold-plated toilets for every house and trailer in Florida,” said Earthjustice lawyer Monica Reimer. “They don't even know what standards are being proposed and nobody will know for another two months. The standards will be set by scientists at the EPA, using data from the Florida DEP. Lawyers are not involved.”
- In June 2008, a water treatment plant serving 30,000 people was forced to shut down after a toxic blue-green algae outbreak on the Caloosahatchee River threatened the plant's water supply. The cost of upgrading *one single* drinking water plant in California to address drinking water contamination caused by nutrient-fueled algae outbreaks was \$200 million.
- As groundwater sources diminish, Florida cities are forced to turn to new sources for drinking water supplies. That means it is even more important to keep sewage, animal manure and fertilizer out of public waters.

- The best way to control nutrient pollution is at its source. Taxpayers are on the hook for billions of dollars in water cleanup. The Everglades cleanup now stands at \$11 billion.
- It is ludicrous to call enforcement of the Clean Water Act a “federal water tax.” Cleaning up Florida’s waters is a public health necessity, and it is long overdue.
- There is no “federal takeover.” In January 2009, Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Michael W. Sole acknowledged the state’s serious nutrient pollution problem and agreed that EPA needed to deal with it. He issued this statement:

“The State of Florida recognizes that more needs to be done to address nutrient pollution in our rivers, streams, lakes and estuaries, and these actions will help our State and all of our stakeholders prevent and better manage sources of nitrogen and phosphorus from entering our waters.

“Excess nitrogen and phosphorus levels (nutrient pollution) in water bodies can cause harm to aquatic ecosystems and threaten public health. Nutrient pollution can lead to water quality problems such as harmful algal blooms, low-oxygen “dead zones” in water bodies and declines in wildlife and wildlife habitat. These effects also disrupt recreational activities and pose threats to public health.

“Water quality degradation from nutrient pollution is a significant environmental issue in Florida. Florida’s 2008 Integrated Water Quality Assessment revealed that approximately 1,000 miles of rivers and streams, 350,000 acres of lakes, and 900 square miles of estuaries are impaired by nutrients. The actual number of miles and acres of waters impaired for nutrients is likely higher, as many waters that have yet to be assessed may also be impaired.”

- The state’s biggest polluters are now trying to get out of complying with standards that will make our public waters clean and safe. Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson is using tax dollars to side with the polluters instead of protecting the public.
- Florida has allowed polluters to voluntarily control their messes, in a weak regulatory program called “Best Management Practices.” The green slime covering the St. Johns River shows, starkly, that they don’t work. The program has developed into a secret “honor code” system for politically powerful industries. A political favor, now enshrined in state law, says agricultural operations don’t have to install pollution controls unless the measures will either *increase* a company’s profits or are *cost-neutral*.
- The only fertilizer that runs into lakes and rivers is fertilizer that’s wasted. Properly applied, it is supposed to be on the plants. When agriculture operations apply fertilizer more judiciously, they will save money and protect waters.
- Earthjustice filed its clean water suit in the Northern District of Florida on behalf of the Florida Wildlife Federation, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida, St. John’s Riverkeeper, and the Sierra Club in July 2008. The suit challenged

an unacceptable decade-long delay by the state and federal governments in setting limits for nutrient pollution. The EPA's action settles that lawsuit.

PHOTOS OF TOXIC ALGAE OUTBREAKS CAN BE FOUND AT:

<http://www.earthjustice.org/library/background/photos-florida-nutrient-pollution-and-algae-blooms.html>