

Alachua Sink

Is it protected?

by: C.L. Heuss

The Alachua Sink is located behind Sonny's restaurant just off highway 441 in Alachua. Mill Creek, which flows directly into the sink, due to recent rains, was transformed from its normal meandering soft flow into swift white water currents. The rushing creek dumped hundreds of millions of gallons of water into the sink that was gulped in at an incredible rate.

The sink remains on private land and is not under the direct control or protection of the City of Alachua or the water management district. The 8.58 acres of land is zoned commercial and is owned by the National Speleological Society of Huntsville, Alabama according to county property tax records. The property is listed on the county's tax roll at a 2002 certified agriculture land value of \$392,400. In 1995 it was valued at \$85,800. The property was donated to NSS in 1993 by Asgrow Florida Corporation, a division of the Upjohn Company.

A trip to the sink in mid March of 2003 showed the area around the sink was littered with cast away tires, beer bottles, personal items and assorted debris.

David Pope, Chairman of the Board for Suwannee River Water Management District said, "Suwannee River Water Management District only acquires property from willing sellers," when asked if the district had any plans to purchase the sink. Pope said the district's policy is outlined on their website at <http://www.srwmd.state.fl.us/resources/land+acquisition1.pdf>

Pope said the board has been very successful in protecting thousands of acres of land within the district and the staff of SRWMD does an outstanding job with a small staff and the amount of funding they receive.



The City of Alachua's Planner and Community Development Director, Laura Dedenbach, said language is being considered in the revision of the Land Development Regulations to specifically address sensitive areas such as the Alachua Sink and other high aquifer recharge areas within the city.

Will Building On WalMart Site Cause Environmental Damage?

Dear Mr Watson,

I am writing this email as a follow up on an email exchange that I had with Mayor Calderwood. I have been writing to her and she has been cc to you since last year about the cave systems that flows under the land that Wal Mart intends to place their super center on. The cave is a spring cave system that drains all of the run off water from Mill Creek and moves this water under that land and eventually to Hornsby Spring. Please see:

<http://www.gainesville.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?>

[AID=/20051126/LOCAL/211260311/1078/news](http://www.gainesville.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051126/LOCAL/211260311/1078/news) this article was in the Gainesville Sun newspaper last week. My last communication from Mayor Calderwood she pointed out to me that I needed to let experts determine if the cave will be damaged by construction or collapse and the effects of this on the cave and the area. I have contacted Suwannee River Water Management and they tell me that neither they nor WalMart are looking into this as the laws only require that study be done to a depth of 50 feet. No study is being done that I can find that will show either the effects to the cave, the possible increased pollution due to the presence of this large conduit of water or the effect on Mill Creek that the stoppage of this drainage would produce. If this were a man made drainage pipe I am sure you would be more aware of the problem but very few people outside of cave diving see caves as having this function, it is a new area of study.

I have several questions for you,

1. Who are the experts that Mayor Calderwood is referring to in her last letter to me? I need their names to I can give them valuable data on this matter.
2. If there are no experts currently working on this problem then does the City of Alachua plan to look into this prior to Construction of the Wal Mart Super Center?
3. May I please be allowed to present to the City of Alachua on this problem during one of your meetings? I can bring experts who can better explain the problem than I can and also give you information on how this problem can be handled to your satisfaction.
4. I have data that shows the cave does indeed go with in the designated 50 feet. There is a large sink hole on the land that the cave goes under. The bottom of that sink and the top of the cave are less than 50 feet apart. Will you ask Wal Mart for another environmental study that takes the cave, possible flooding of Mill Creek and increased run off dangers into account?

I am very concerned of course for the cave and the cave adapted animals that live within it. I know from your own City of Alachua Comprehensive Plan plan that you have a conservation

objective, Objective 1.1 Policy 1.1.a that speaks to the protection of unique geologic characteristics.

My final question is 5. Does the City of Alachua plan to abide by their own conservation policies?

If possible I would like to work with the City of Alachua in defining the area where this underground river runs for it's protection. I have the technology available to me to do this. My goal would be that the area over the cave would be protected just as you would protect the banks of a river flowing into the Santa Fe River. If this area were to be designated as a conservation area I know several groups who would be willing to replant the area with native plants and created a interpretive trail that can be a source of both information and recreation to the people of Alachua and it won't cost you a dime. Please give what I have written consideration, answer my questions and allow myself and a few others to speak with you. We can work together to prevent problems instead of creating them.

Cindy Butler

— PLEASE VIEW: WATER'S JOURNEY
by: WES SKILES

AlachuaPost.com

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City to hire outside experts to review Wal-Mart studies

By Alli Langley

For The Herald

ALACHUA — Studies related to the planned Wal-Mart Supercenter in Alachua will be reviewed by outside experts.

That was the unanimous decision of the Alachua City Commission Monday, Aug. 23.

The proposed Wal-Mart, to be located at the intersection of U.S. 441 and Interstate-75 behind the McDonald's restaurant, has been the source of much concern and controversy.

Many residents have welcomed the future retail giant and the jobs created, while others worry about its effect on traffic and small businesses.

Residents have expressed anxiety over environmental factors, due to the proximity of a

sinkhole and the Mill Creek underwater cave system to the projected Wal-Mart site.

The outside experts will review the transportation, market analysis and environmental aspects associated with building the largest retail business in the history of the area.

The commission unanimously approved the amount of \$40,000 to spend on the studies. Wal-Mart will reimburse the city for all outside expert review.

This action is the latest in a series of reviews implemented by the city, the Suwannee River Water Management District and Florida Department of Transportation.
