



Walton County Democratic Party  
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Ray Padgett, Chairman

**What do you think should be done about upstream water pollution and water sharing?**

A clean and constant supply of drinking water is vital to our life. The critical nature of water for all citizens has led our courts to decide that the State of Florida legally owns all water located in our State. Thus, our State Government has assumed the responsibility of protecting and managing our water supply. The Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD) manages our water in the panhandle. Walton County, along with Okaloosa and Santa Rosa, are located in Region II of this district. The NFWFMD issues permits for public and private water wells, sewage treatment facilities, and pond construction. In conjunction with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) they monitor water levels and water quality in the district. The NFWFMD has a land purchase program financed by bonds and currently owns over 179,000 acres with plans to purchase another 112,000 acres. Purchases are made in areas deemed sensitive or important for groundwater recharge, run-off, water quality, and wetlands.

Saltwater intrusion, caused by over extraction of water from the aquifer, is the major source of pollution for our South Walton water supply. One of the Freeport wells is under precaution for salt-water intrusion and its pumping water volumes were cutback. Farm pollutants such as animal waste, herbicides and pesticides are no longer an important pollution concern in North Walton because farming here is almost nonexistent. One activity that could be a concern is the massive spraying of our forests to control insects such as the Pine Beetle. Such spraying could pollute our rivers and streams and in fact many believe it was linked to “red tide” in Choctawhatchee Bay. However, it should be easy to monitor and control because only the government and big timber companies could effectively carry out such a program.

While pollution is not currently a critical concern, we must establish strict monitoring and control of our water supply. The financial implications of not taking pollution control seriously are highlighted by what happened to the citizens of Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta was sued for their upstream water pollution and this year Atlanta citizens are paying three times the rate they paid two years ago for their water. We must be diligent and continue to improve our water quality monitoring efforts or it will cost us in lost water supply and in financial penalties.

According to the NFWWMD Water Supply Assessment, anticipated future water supply sources have not been identified to safely meet the projected future needs for Region II. This requires that the district create a Region Water Supply Plan with input from all public water suppliers in the region. Such a plan is now being developed to more closely monitor water resources and water consumption; project needs and identify the best source for future water requirements.

The primary concerns of the NFWWMD are to protect our water supply against water shortage and contamination. They do this by creating financial incentives to conserve and use water efficiently, by protecting aquifer recharge areas, and by monitoring our water supply volumes and contamination levels. Based on resources provided for their operation, we believe they do a good job.

The Walton County Democratic Party recommends that more emphasis be placed on water conservation and contamination monitoring. Water conservation methods such as Xeriscape landscaping, water reuse and water efficiency education should be required from water users and suppliers. While Walton County currently has excellent sources of potable water, we should plan to avoid situations like those in Las Vegas where the city is paying citizens to dig up their lawns and plant native, drought resistant plants. We recommend the NFWWMD and/or the DEP test private wells at strategic points throughout the panhandle on a monthly basis for water contamination.

We believe the NFWWMD should seriously consider using outflow from Morrison Springs to satisfy future water requirements for Walton County. Newspaper articles and political discussions indicate an interest by our state government to pipe water from our area to South Florida in order to satisfy their future potable water needs. We do not support this plan.