

## Lawsuit gaining broader support

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The list is growing — and so is the momentum.

One by one, individuals, organizations and governments in our area are pledging money to an important cause: a lawsuit designed to force the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to stop discharging polluted water from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.

The Rivers Coalition Defense Fund, based in Stuart, filed the lawsuit in November on behalf of 22 homeowners who claim the Corps "violates the federal constitution when it degrades the riparian property of waterfront land owners along the estuary." The suit claims damages in the amount of \$50 million — the combined appraisal value of the 22 plaintiffs' waterfront properties — though financial compensation is not the real objective. Instead, the plaintiffs and the Rivers Coalition want to stop the discharges and restore the estuary.

The latter has suffered extensive environmental damage wrought by phosphorus-laden discharges from Lake O. The lawsuit is a direct challenge to the Corps, which is responsible for implementing this flawed policy.

Until excess water from the lake is taken care of — it flowed south, naturally, years ago — the condition of the estuary and lagoon will continue to deteriorate. And the riparian rights of property owners will continue to be violated.

Thankfully, the lawsuit is gaining broader support throughout our area.

The town of Sewall's Point was the first government entity to set forward, pledging \$50,000 to help finance the legal battle. The city of Stuart has pledged \$25,000. Private individuals and conservation-minded organizations have followed their lead, pushing the total to \$300,000. Developer Wayne Huizenga recently wrote a check for \$50,000 and pledged another \$50,000 for next year.

Rivers Coalition officials estimate it will cost \$750,000, over several years, to finance the lawsuit.

All the cities and counties in our region affected by pollution in the estuary and lagoon should commit funds to this cause. And they should begin planning, now, to set aside funds in their 2008 budgets.

### **TO LEARN MORE**

... about the Rivers Coalition Defense Fund and the lawsuit the organization has filed against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, log on to [www.riverscoalition.org](http://www.riverscoalition.org)