

**The Wicked Ditch Will Never Die: The On-Going Controversy over Rodman Reservoir**

Steven Noll, *University of Florida*

David Tegeder, *Santa Fe College*

On January 22, 1991, Governor Lawton Chiles and the Florida Cabinet signed a deauthorization bill that finally ended the Cross Florida Barge Canal, the Army Corps of Engineers project designed to cut a 107 mile swash across the Florida peninsula. Started in 1964 and stopped in 1971 by both presidential edict and judicial decree, the canal lay dormant for twenty more years, with not enough political support to either re-start the project or officially stop it. Much of the credit for halting the canal went to Marjorie Harris Carr, the feisty Micanopy scientist and housewife who made it her life's work to fight against the canal and its destruction of her beloved Ocklawaha River. Though Carr and the Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE), the organization she

helped to found in 1969 to galvanize both public opinion and the scientific community, felt justifiably proud of their efforts, they also understood that their fight was far from over. Profound questions remained over the shape of the 77,000 acre linear park that was to take the place of the canal. The rancorous debate over the fate of the Ocklawaha River loomed largest of all. The Rodman Dam and its attendant Rodman Reservoir, built as part of the canal's infrastructure in the late 1960s, still remained intact and prevented the Ocklawaha from flowing freely. If the issue of the dam was not solved to the satisfaction of Marjorie Carr, if it still blocked the river, would her years of hard work be all in vain? After all, her efforts to prevent the canal from being built had started as a campaign to save the river itself.

The Rodman controversy provided the last, longest, and still on-going chapter in a story that began with European encounters in Florida as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Though Spanish explorers searched for a water passage across the peninsula, it was not until Florida became an American territory in 1821 that the push for the development of a cross- peninsular canal

took shape. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (during both territorial and statehood phases), Army Corps of Engineers personnel repeatedly surveyed Florida, looking for the optimal route for a canal. While the engineers determined a cross- peninsular transit was feasible, they simultaneously concluded that building it would be difficult, expensive, and probably not worth the effort. Supporters of a waterway, anxious to develop Florida as a center of trade and commerce, latched onto the possibility of building a canal and assiduously lobbied Congress for funding and support. However, it was not until September 1935, with a need for jobs in the wake of the Great Depression, that President Franklin Roosevelt allocated \$5 million for the construction of a ship canal across Florida from Jacksonville on the Atlantic coast to Yankeetown on the Gulf of Mexico. This 107 mile long, 30 foot deep gash would utilize the paths of the existing St. Johns, Ocklawaha, and Withlacoochee Rivers to cross the state. Within a year, however, construction was halted due to significant opposition from Florida agricultural interests concerned about the canal's potential for

destroying the state's fresh water supply. Refusing to concede their dreams of economic growth had failed, canal boosters re-designed the waterway as a shallower barge canal which would not harm Florida's fragile aquifer. Tying the necessity of the canal to national defense issues in a time of war, supporters from Ocala and Jacksonville pushed Congress to approve construction of the newly-designed barge canal along the same route as the defunct ship canal. In July of 1942, Congress authorized the building of the Cross Florida Barge Canal, but did not allocate any funds for that project. It would take twenty-two years for the federal government to finally provide funding for the canal- and in February 1964, President Lyndon Johnson came to Palatka and oversaw the long-awaited ground breaking for the project. Floridians remained profoundly divided about the necessity of the canal, and by the late 1960s public opinion shifted towards ending construction. Marjorie Carr of Gainesville and her environmental organization, Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE), proved crucial in that change. In 1969, FDE sued the Corps of Engineers to stop

construction, and in January 1971, both the courts and President Richard Nixon ordered work halted on environmental grounds: that continued canal construction would endanger the beautiful, subtropical Ocklawaha River. Carr and her allies had won a significant victory by halting canal construction, but it took twenty more agonizing years to turn canal lands into a state park. Even with that accomplishment, however, Rodman Dam still blocked the flow of the Ocklawaha, making Carr's success incomplete.<sup>1</sup>

The on-going controversy over the fate of Rodman reservoir reflects broader issues surrounding both the political and environmental history of modern Florida. FDE's success in stopping barge canal construction represented a watershed moment in the state, as citizen activists showed their ability to shape public policy. It seemed to portend a prospect where concern for Florida's fragile ecology would become a paramount issue in determining the state's political future. But the continuing Rodman deadlock indicated another path, one directed by conservative politicians more concerned about

development than the environment. The impasse over the ultimate disposition of the dam and reservoir, and the fate of the Ocklawaha River itself, reveals much about the nature of the political culture in the Sunshine State in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. With the tide seemingly irrevocably turning away from environmental issues and concerns, activists cling tenuously to the memories of their hard-won political victories (like stopping the Cross Florida Barge Canal) and hope they can re-energize.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1991, the Florida legislature began the process of preparing to decide how to best utilize the land once designated for the Cross Florida Barge Canal but now clumsily labeled the Cross Florida Greenbelt State Recreation and Conservation Area. When the federal government turned the canal property back to the state of Florida in 1990, it mandated that it be turned into a park for the benefit of state citizens. As the initial part of that process, the state legislature established the Canal Lands Advisory Committee (CLAC), an advisory board composed of politicians and interested citizens, whose input would

help shape the future status of the canal lands. In recognition of her importance to the issues surrounding the disposition of the property, the legislature appointed Carr to serve on the committee, representing “the public at large.” CLAC’s primary responsibility lay in creating a master plan for the best use of the land. That meant balancing a variety of competing interests, articulated during more than a year of local public meetings. For Carr and many in FDE there was not much to debate. They felt such passive recreational pursuits as hiking and canoeing should stand alone at the center of the greenway experience. On the east side of the canal cut, however, many of Putnam County’s residents remained steadfast in their demand for the retention of Rodman Reservoir as a bass fishing paradise. Spending the weekend trolling on a motorized bass boat, they saw “something magic about the shout of the adult female when she realizes she has caught her first fish. Take them to Rodman reservoir and enjoy life.” All of this was rather alien to Carr and her allies. For them, fishing was something better experienced on the free-flowing, densely canopied Ocklawaha with a

“canoe or johnboat, . . .not a noisy two-cycle smoke-belching gasoline guzzling outboard engine” on what they saw as the flat and unappealing waters of the stagnant Rodman reservoir.

On September 17, 1992, CLAC met in Ocala to issue its final report on the future of the Greenbelt, now called the Cross Florida Greenway. As an advisory board, its recommendations held considerable weight but the ultimate fate of the land rested in the hands of state officials. In many respects, CLAC validated much of Carr’s environmental vision. Yet, it abdicated its most important responsibility by refusing to address the contentious issue concerning the ultimate disposition of Rodman Dam and the Ocklawaha River. Instead, it voted for yet another study on what to do with the dam, this time proposing a three year review under the auspices of the St. Johns River Water Management District. This new review would once again examine the usual technical, environmental, and economic cost-benefits of the reservoir. The proposal left many members of FDE howling in protest at what they saw as just another round of delays. With Marjorie Carr now

weak with emphysema at the age of seventy-seven, FDE officials plaintively conceded their leader would not live to see her dream fulfilled. After the meeting, David Godfrey, FDE's Ocklawaha Restoration Project Director plaintively announced that "the river will not be restored in her lifetime. This decision today means that action may not even begin in her lifetime" (Panel: Study Rodman September 18, 1982).

The September committee meeting represented an important transitional moment. Besides wrestling with the issues associated with the deauthorization of the canal itself, it also introduced state senator George Kirkpatrick of Gainesville to the debate. A member of the state legislature since 1980, the fifty-three year old Democrat quickly became the face of the movement to retain Rodman Reservoir. Contentious and prickly, he reveled in his well-earned reputation as a political street fighter. "I'm someone who comes on the scene asking the questions that these frustrated rednecks have always wanted to ask," he remarked in a 1995 interview. "I keep refusing to take no for an answer. I'm perceived as arrogant. But if someone

manages to turn me on their side . . . then they've got their own personal Rottweiler." With the influence of senatorial seniority, he became the chairman of the powerful Senate Rules Committee in 1993 and remained a bitter adversary of Marjorie Carr and other environmentalists who wanted to see the Ocklawaha flowing freely (Dunkelberger February 6, 2003; Swirko February 6, 2003).

Even before the final CLAC meeting, Kirkpatrick organized a coalition of interests bent on preserving Rodman Reservoir, which had become a haven for recreational and sports fishing, even considered by some as one of the best bass lakes in America. In July, the Senator encouraged Dan Canfield, a professor at the University of Florida's Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, to conduct yet another study—this time specifically designed to refute FDE's claim that the reservoir was nothing more than a weed-congested ecological disaster. Funded in part by the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce, Canfield's forty-six page report added to the furor over the disposition of Rodman. Kirkpatrick and pro-Rodman supporters used Canfield's research to

buttress their position to protect the lake. Canfield concluded that his study was designed “to determine if a case could be made for Rodman Reservoir.” Asserting that the reservoir was “not a ‘dying’ water body that is destined for ‘biological senility’ in our lifetime,” he added it “would continue to serve as a refuge for not only fish and wildlife, but also anglers.” With consideration of the reservoir’s economic benefits for the local Putnam County economy, Canfield reached a simple conclusion: “we recommend that Rodman Reservoir be retained for now. . . . There is no compelling biological/ecological reason to rush restoration at this time.” The scientific rationale behind the Canfield report soon became the basis of support for keeping the reservoir intact (Canfield February 1993).

Canfield delivered his report to CLAC’s September meeting. Kirkpatrick praised the study as a significant improvement over previous studies done at the behest of FDE, which he claimed had “numbers . . . quoted from a study done in 1988 whose numbers were collected from a report done in 1978 which had been taken

straight from biased studies done . . . in the early 1970s.” Not surprisingly, FDE dismissed Canfield’s conclusions as “garbage” and accused him of being, in their biting words, a “biostitute” in the pay of pro-Rodman advocates. CLAC did not take FDE’s assertions at face value; instead, the committee played it safe and concluded that Canfield’s study necessitated even further scientific investigation. This further round of delays led many FDE members to see a more sinister reason for the decision in the very person of Senator Kirkpatrick himself. Marjorie Carr blasted him for his strong-arm bullying tactics. “Senator Kirkpatrick has clobbered them [CLAC members],” she fumed. “He has carried out the most intensive campaign of intimidation that I have ever seen.” FDE, recognizing Kirkpatrick’s power as the incoming chairman of both the Rules Committee and next session’s Appropriations Committee, accused the Senator of threatening various state agencies with budget cuts if they blocked any effort to study the lake and dam once again. Kirkpatrick downplayed his influence. “My effort,” he averred, “has been to make sure that the recommendation

is based on accurate information.” When asked about his alleged threats, Kirkpatrick played coy. “I didn’t do any of that,” he said. “I talked to DNR [Department of Natural Resources] and asked how we could come up with a compromise. There’s been no threats by me.” With the cockiness that became part of his persona, he loudly proclaimed FDE’s complaints were “just sour grapes” (Kirkpatrick n.d. 3; Rodman Decision Relayed September 18, 1992; Hamaker September 18, 1992; Panel: Study Rodman 3 Years September 18, 1982).

In December 1992, the Governor and Cabinet met in Tallahassee to review CLAC’s recommendations on turning the former canal into a linear park. Though the public meeting dealt with many of the broader concerns related to the transitional process, contentious debate centered squarely on the fate of Rodman Reservoir. Once again, adversaries descended on the capital and staked out their positions to hopefully sway government officials their way. This time, however, Marjorie Carr’s illness made her too weak to appear in person. Instead, her supporters brought along an emotional videotaped appeal from

their leader. In it, Carr called the Ocklawaha “a natural work of art” and asked the Cabinet to “restore it and care for it as if it was a Pieta by Michelangelo.” She summarily dismissed the economic and recreational concerns of those who pleaded for retaining Rodman Reservoir. “I realize bass fisherman will be inconvenienced,” she said. “I trust they will find good fishing in nearby lakes.” Heeding Carr’s words, Commissioner of Education (and Cabinet member) Betty Castor offered an amendment to the CLAC proposals that overrode their call for another study of the Rodman area. Directing the Department of Natural Resources to “immediately take steps” to “complete the restoration of the free flowing Ocklawaha River,” she called for the drawdown of Rodman Reservoir. Backed by Governor Lawton Chiles, who expressed frustration with the glacial pace of resolving the controversy, the amendment passed unanimously. This policy statement placed the executive branch and its agencies firmly on the side of Marjorie Carr and river restoration. FDE and fellow environmentalists were elated. Calling the amendment a “wise decision,” Timothy

Keyser of the Florida Wildlife Federation agreed that “restoration of the wildlife habitat is more important than maintaining a degrading [sic] system.” From Gainesville, Carr concurred, “It is a giant step forward for Floridians” (Cabinet: Pull Rodman Plug December 16, 1992; Cabinet Urges End to Dam December 16, 1992; Castor December 15, 1992).

Not all Floridians were as sanguine as Carr. In Putnam County, local fishermen expressed disbelief as the Cabinet appeared to pull the plug on Lake Ocklawaha. “I can’t imagine how anybody can go to Rodman,” announced fishing guide Billy Peoples, “and see what’s there and make that kind of decision.” Wes Larson of the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce bemoaned the estimated loss of 110 jobs and \$7.2 million in annual fishing revenue if the dam was removed. Putnam County Administrator Gary Adams concluded, “I think it is a terrible economic blow to Putnam County.” In Gainesville, George Kirkpatrick seconded Adams’ assessment. Embittered with the Cabinet meeting’s result, he claimed its vote was “based on strong emotions that had very little

relationships to the facts,” and concluded that the Cabinet “bypass[ed] an appointed task force and completely rejected all their recommendations” (Fishermen Worried About Another One Getting Away December 16, 1992; Cabinet: Pull Rodman Plug December 16, 1992; Beebe December 16, 1992; Cabinet Urges End to Dam December 16, 1992).

At first glance the Cabinet decision seemed to finally resolve the issue in FDE’s favor. However, buried in the language of Castor’s amendment was the phrase, “upon favorable legislative action,” which took the controversy out of the governor’s hands and placed it firmly in the hands of the state house. Even FDE recognized the tentative nature of their victory. We are “fully aware that only half the task is done,” David Godfrey admitted. “The unanimous vote gives us momentum going to the legislature, and that’s a whole other ball game. But it sends a strong message.” That message would be countered by George Kirkpatrick, who warned “the Cabinet decision Tuesday is far from the final say on the future of the Rodman Dam and the lower Ocklawaha River.” On the other side of the Capitol,

Ocala Representative George Albright concurred: “By no means is this cast in stone.” For the next few months, Kirkpatrick and his allies prepared for battle over the fate of Rodman (Cabinet Urges End to Dam December 16, 1992; Beebe December 16, 1992).

By the next legislative session, George Kirkpatrick dominated the debate surrounding Rodman Dam. Beating back numerous efforts to comply with the Cabinet’s decision, Kirkpatrick instead offered a plan to fulfill CLAC’s demand for further study. By the summer of 1993, the legislature passed a measure allocating \$900,000 for an eighteen month examination of Rodman Reservoir. In many respects, that study—managed by the newly established Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which then subcontracted most of the research to the St. Johns River Water Management District—was the summation of a generation of scientific research. And given the contentious nature of much of that work, the resulting twenty volume report, submitted in January 1995, offered no final resolution of the issue. Though it concluded that “no further studies

are necessary to answer the question” concerning Rodman, the report was often so ambiguous and technically arcane that both sides saw it as confirming their position. George Kirkpatrick most certainly thought so. After combing the report for any evidence that would favor his cause, he announced he was “elated by the findings included in the DEP report,” which “gave us even greater evidence of the positive environmental impact of the [Rodman] ecosystem.” Though small parts of the study may have supported his position, the thrust of the report clearly warmed Marjorie Carr’s heart. Hidden in the volumes of dense prose was the simple statement—“efforts should be directed instead at restoration of the Ocklawaha River” (Galantowicz 1994; George Kirkpatrick n.d.).

Following the report’s recommendation, Governor Chiles ordered the Department of Environmental Protection to begin an immediate drawdown of the reservoir in anticipation of restoration. Kirkpatrick lashed back, informing DEP Secretary Virginia Wetherell that he, representing the legislature, and not the

governor, was in charge. “Any movement towards restoration would presume . . . the legislature will eventually decide against keeping the structure [Rodman Dam].” He added presciently, “This would be highly premature.” Thus began what became an annual ritual of Florida politics. With the emergence of spring, the Governor and executive agencies, in addition to a majority of the state legislature, would call for the removal of Rodman Dam. And George Kirkpatrick, much like his Congressional predecessors who had blocked deauthorization, stood in the way (Kirkpatrick April 4, 1995).

When first examined, George Kirkpatrick’s commitment to Rodman Dam appeared rather unusual. Representing a university town that stood at the center of the movement to restore the Ocklawaha River, he seemed out of sync with much of his environmentally conscious constituency. However, his district stretched far beyond the city limits and embraced rural areas of north central Florida, particularly Putnam County. An avid angler, Kirkpatrick had an affinity for the lake created by the dam and the “good ole boys” who fished in it. As he

once noted, I “represent the interests of the folks who love, use and depend on the Reservoir for their livelihood.” He had to, for he recognized more than anyone that his political fate rested in their hands.

Kirkpatrick’s support came from those rural residents who saw him as a defender of their way of life. And with the Governor and Cabinet consistently calling for restoration, both he and the people of Putnam County joined forces to fight against what they considered an elitist alliance between government bureaucrats and scientific experts, who either at best ignored them or at worst dismissed them as ignorant rednecks (Kirkpatrick April 4, 1995).

Things were ironically coming full circle. In the summer of 1995, a group of Putnam County residents and recreational fishermen organized a group called Save Rodman Reservoir, Inc. to “fight off the wishes of ‘those who know better.’” Working within the neo-populist legacy of Ronald Reagan and the conservative revolution of the 1980s, they were determined to protect “their” lake from outsiders, those they considered “paid ‘enviro-wonks’ [who] pontificated at public

hearings about the evil that is Rodman.” Relying on strategies strangely similar to the nascent anti-canal movement thirty years earlier, they sought the preservation of Lake Ocklawaha and its new “ecosystem with abundant flora and fauna.” “Our band of ragtag supporters had grown into a throng,” Kirkpatrick reminisced, “with folks calling and writing from every place imaginable. Weary travelers made the trip to Tallahassee for committee meetings on a weekly basis just to make their presence felt. . . . Like a modern day barn raising, they rallied the troops with newsletters, phone calls and faxes. . . . Meanwhile paid consultants and strangers to Rodman pushed the anti-retention agenda.” Those very same words could well have described Marjorie Carr’s earlier efforts against the Canal Authority and the Army Corps of Engineers. Kirkpatrick’s chief legislative aide, Mike Murtha, certainly thought so. “They [FDE] had something they loved back in the Sixties and some bastards came and took it away from them,” he exclaimed. “Well, now we have something that we love and some bastards are trying to take it away from us”

(Kirkpatrick April 4, 1995; Patrick November 1998).

Over the next three legislative sessions, Kirkpatrick and his allies did their job well, as they blocked any effort toward restoration by Governor Chiles and the Department of Environmental Protection. For Marjorie Carr, eighty-two years old and now terminally ill, these setbacks must have seemed like all her work was for nought. Rodman Dam—“that obscenity, that ridiculous mistake, that hideous monstrosity”—remained. By the summer of 1997, “feeling lousy,” tethered to an oxygen bottle, and forced to move from her cherished Micanopy homestead to a patio home in the middle of Gainesville, Carr plaintively asked “will I live to see it [the Ocklawaha] run free or not? I don’t know.” What she did know was that George Kirkpatrick was now the source of all her frustration. Characterizing his defense of Rodman as “an obsession,” she added that the Senator’s success stemmed from the fact that “he is feared and I don’t think he cares.” Though no longer able to lead the battle for restoration, she still showed signs of her legendary feistiness. She railed against

those who failed to see the wisdom of Rodman's removal. She complained that bass fishermen "ought to be ashamed of themselves" for their unyielding support for the reservoir. At the same time, Carr reaffirmed her sentimental attachment to the river, sounding more like Sidney Lanier than a research scientist with a stubborn commitment to the facts. "Once the dam is gone," she reflected, "the manatees will be able to come up there during the winter. What a sight that will be" (Dewar February 4, 1990; Ritchie June 13, 1997).

On October 10, 1997, Marjorie Carr finally succumbed to her illness. Accolades immediately began pouring in for the woman now beatified as "Our Lady of the Rivers." Governor Lawton Chiles commended her as "a true giant in the environmental community." Senator Bob Graham, who had met with Carr only weeks before her death, said her "name will always be synonymous with conservation." She "served as the environmental conscience for Florida's leaders." Closer to home, her friends and allies within FDE sorrowfully lamented their loss. Her longtime colleague David Anthony reflected on her

commitment to the river. Considering she had dedicated nearly forty years of her life to the struggle, he lamented, "it's sad to realize that Marjorie has died without the Ocklawaha running free. It was our dream to have a celebration on its banks." Alyson Flournoy, current member of FDE's Board of Trustees, took Carr's death as a call to action. "Just as she was an inspiration in life . . . [in death] she can only inspire us to continue to work to see that restoration happens. It's the best tribute we can pay to her" (Martin October 11, 1997; Arndorfer October 17, 1997).

Six days later, almost three hundred people paid their respects to Marjorie Carr at Gainesville's First Presbyterian Church. The service featured eulogies from, among others, Lieutenant Governor Buddy MacKay. Reflecting on Carr's years of activism, MacKay commended her for establishing "the prototype of modern citizen advocacy groups in America." She "redefined our relationship to the environment," he continued, "causing movement from development based on the cash register to an ethic of sustainability." FDE's David Godfrey reinforced the bond

between Marjorie Carr and the Ocklawaha with a reading of Sidney Lanier's prosaic ode which had so inspired her to action. Pastor Robert Battles poignantly ended the service by reminding mourners that "Marjorie responded with passionate devotion to the common good. . . . From her, I caught a glimpse of what it means to be a steward of the garden of God." As pallbearers placed the casket in a hearse bound for Carr's final resting place in Gainesville's Evergreen Cemetery, a green and white bumper sticker mysteriously appeared on the back window of the big black Cadillac. It read, "Free the Ocklawaha River," a fitting legacy for Marjorie Carr's remarkable life. Her daughter Mimi, who had cared for her in those last difficult years, could only smile as she said, "maybe mother put it there." An editor from the *Gainesville Sun* went a step further. "In death," a headline announced, "she still had last word" (Arndorfer October 17, 1997).

FDE members hoped Carr's demise would signal a change of heart in Tallahassee. Their expectations were buoyed in late May of 1998, when the

legislature commemorated Carr by naming the Cross Florida Greenway after her. In many respects it marked the crowning achievement for a woman who had dedicated her life to environmental protection.

However, if FDE's membership thought this could provide the political momentum to finally restore the Ocklawaha, they were sadly mistaken. Indeed, the day after the legislature honored Carr with the name change, it also saw fit to memorialize her leading adversary by renaming Rodman Dam after Senator George Kirkpatrick. Calling the Senator "an avid bass fisherman, naturalist, and outdoorsman" with a "keen interest in the final disposition of Rodman Dam," the legislature complimented him for leading "the opposition to the removal of the dam throughout his Senate career." It was the worst form of tit-for-tat in an already rancorous debate

[http://election.dos.state.fl.us/laws/98laws/ch\\_98-398.pdf](http://election.dos.state.fl.us/laws/98laws/ch_98-398.pdf).

With the turn of a new century, the future of the Ocklawaha still remained unresolved. Even with such federal agencies as the U.S. Forest Service pushing

for Rodman's removal, nothing changed. Even with Jeb Bush, the popular new Republican Governor, publicly committed to restoring the river, nothing changed. Even with Kirkpatrick's forced retirement in 2000 due to term limits, nothing changed. With their nemesis now removed by state-mandated term limits, FDE mistakenly thought they had a chance for success. "Especially with George Kirkpatrick gone," one member asked, "who else is going to be there to champion the dam?" The answer was a bi-partisan coalition of north Florida politicians led by Republicans Jim Pickens of Palatka and Jim King of Jacksonville, and Democrat Rod Smith of Gainesville. Smith had not only taken Kirkpatrick's seat, but his passion for the reservoir. Not only would he block restoration efforts, he would even introduce legislation protecting the reservoir as the George Kirkpatrick State Reserve. If such a measure became law, it would make it nearly impossible to remove the dam. Though the legislation was vetoed by Governor Bush in 2003, it remained a legislative perennial, introduced session after session, which demanded FDE's constant vigilance. Even seemingly

insignificant issues placed environmental activists on the defensive. Every tax dollar spent on the reservoir's recreational facilities reinforced Rodman's permanence. Reservoir supporters argued that after nearly forty years of existence, the artificial lake had become part of the natural environment itself. As one explained, "it's got its own ecology. It's got its own value." Newspaper headlines as late as the spring of 2010 observed with a hint of frustration that "Year after Year, it's the Same Dam Debate," and that the "Ocklawaha Restoration Remains in Limbo;" the reservoir remained alive (Pfankuch March 13, 2000; Dunkelberger April 26, 2007; Dunkelberger April 26, 2007).

The dam, now renamed after its staunchest defender, may have endured, but its namesake, former Senator George Kirkpatrick, died suddenly on February 5, 2003 at the age of 64. His love of fishing, of course, closely identified him with the long-standing struggle to keep the reservoir intact. Ordinary citizens and politicians alike took a moment at his passing to express just what Kirkpatrick meant to their cause. Ed Taylor, a Palatka resident and

President of Save Rodman Reservoir, called the Senator “the greatest warrior for the survival of Rodman Reservoir I have ever known.” It was a fitting tribute for such a combative man. Representative Joe Pickens recognized both the importance of Kirkpatrick’s legislative chicanery and the necessity to continue that struggle. “We all know,” he said, “that I would have no Rodman to protect, no torch to carry, if it were not for Senator Kirkpatrick’s lifelong commitment to its preservation” (Kirkpatrick Hailed for Work on Putnam’s Behalf February 7, 2003).

George Kirkpatrick was no doubt a larger than life figure; much like his long time adversary Marjorie Carr. Considering how much they were singularly associated with the struggle over the river and the reservoir, they were equally associated with each other. Both were doggedly determined and willing to do whatever necessary to advance their cause. Thus it was only fitting that Kirkpatrick’s funeral eerily paralleled Carr’s. His service was not only held in the same downtown Gainesville church, but officiated by the very same pastor. What must Reverend Robert Battles have thought

knowing he had performed the same ceremony for Marjorie Carr just five years earlier? What did the mourners think when they caught a glimpse of another bumper sticker–this time a blue and white “Save Rodman Reservoir” one–attached to the Senator’s casket? The similarities continued even after the service was completed. Upon leaving the church, Kirkpatrick’s funeral procession ended its journey in Gainesville’s Evergreen Cemetery, where the Senator was laid to rest only yards from the grave of Marjorie Carr.

In the years since the death of both Carr & Kirkpatrick, little has changed. The dam and reservoir still remain and the Florida legislature still annually debates whether they should be removed. In 2003 both houses of the Florida legislature passed a bill creating the George Kirkpatrick State Reserve around the reservoir, virtually assuring the dam would remain. A veto by Governor Jeb Bush defeated the measure, insuring the controversy would continue. Similar bills were filed for the next four legislative sessions with no success for the supporters of the reserve idea. That did not mean, however, that pro-restoration forces

were any more successful in removing the dam. The latest iteration of the on-going battle occurred in 2009 when developers proposed building a \$2 million 400 slip marina on the reservoir, which would have essentially preserved the reservoir for the foreseeable future. Though supported by those in favor of keeping the dam intact, a coalition of government agencies and pro-restoration forces managed to defeat the measure in the Florida legislature. In spite of the continuous (and so far successful) efforts to retain Kirkpatrick Dam, Marjorie Carr's vision of a free-flowing Ocklawaha remains as a viable alternative. In 1996, a year before her death, she wrote that the effort to save the Ocklawaha "is not a north central Florida local issue. The Ocklawaha River is a glorious part of Florida's natural heritage. Floridians should be aware that if they can't save the Ocklawaha they have little chance of saving any of the remaining lovely wild places in Florida. The twenty-five year delay in the restoration of the Ocklawaha River is indeed a major scandal. The Ocklawaha must now run free."<sup>3</sup>

|

## References

- Arndorfer, Bob. October 17, 1997. "'Steward of God's Garden' Laid to Rest." *Gainesville Sun*.
- Beebe, Lucy. December 16, 1992. "Cabinet Votes to Restore River." *Ocala Star Banner*.
- "Cabinet Urges End to Dam." December 16, 1992. *Gainesville Sun*.
- "Cabinet: Pull Rodman Plug." December 16, 1992. *Florida Times Union*.
- Canfield, Daniel R., Eric J. Schulz, and Mark V. Hoyer. 1993. *"To Be or not To Be"—The Rodman Reservoir Controversy: A Review of Available Data*. University of Florida: Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Center for Aquatic Plants.
- Castor, Betty. December 15, 1992. "Motion by Commissioner: Historic Documents Pertaining to Ocklawaha River Restoration." FDE Headquarters, Gainesville, Florida.
- Dewar, Heather. February 4, 1990. "Barge Canal's Nemesis Still Fighting Victory in Sight after 28-Year Battle to Save Wild Florida River." *Miami Herald*.
- Dunkelberger, Lloyd, Gary Fineout, and Janine Young Sikes. February 6, 2003. "Ex-Senator Kirkpatrick Dead at 64." *Gainesville Sun*.
- Dunkelberger, Lloyd. April 26, 2007. "Ocklawaha Restoration Remains in Limbo." *Gainesville Sun*.
- . April 26, 2007. "Year after Year, it's the Same Dam Debate," *Ocala Star Banner*.
- "Fishermen Worried About Another One Getting Away." December 16, 1992. *Florida Times Union*.
- Galantowicz, Richard E., John R. Shuman, and Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 1994. *Environmental Studies Concerning Four Alternatives for Rodman Reservoir and the Lower Ocklawaha River: Executive Summary, Volume 1*. St. Johns River Water Management District: Florida.
- Hamaker, Elaine. September 18, 1992. "Rodman's Fate Put on Hold." *Ocala Star-Banner*.
- Joseph, Patrick. November 28, 1998. "The Battle of the Dams." *Smithsonian*. 52.
- "Kirkpatrick Hailed for Work on Putnam's Behalf." February 7, 2003. *Palatka Daily News*.
- Kirkpatrick, George. "Letter to Virginia Wetherell." April 4, 1995. *George Kirkpatrick Papers, Mike Murtha Collection*. Gainesville, FL.
- . "Memorandum to Members of the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund." n.d. *George Kirkpatrick Papers, Mike Murtha Collection*. Gainesville, FL. 11.
- . "Musings on Rodman." n.d. *George Kirkpatrick Papers, Mike Murtha Collection*. Gainesville, FL. 5.
- . "Musings on Rodman." n.d. *George Kirkpatrick Papers, Mike Murtha Collection*. Gainesville, FL. 3, 4, 6.
- . "Musings on Rodman." n.d. *George Kirkpatrick Papers, Mike Murtha Collection*. Gainesville, FL. 3.
- Martin, Doug. October 11, 1997. "Gainesville's Marjorie Carr,

Environmentalism, Dies at 82.”  
*Gainesville Sun*.  
“Panel: Study Rodman 3 Years.” September  
18, 1982. *Gainesville Sun*.  
“Panel: Study Rodman 3 Years.” September  
18, 1982. *Gainesville Sun*.  
Pfankuch, Thomas, B. March 13, 2000  
“Should the River Run Free?”  
*Florida Times Union*.  
Ritchie, Bruce. June 13, 1997. “Activist  
Recalls Fight to Let the River Run  
Activist Recalls Fight to Free the  
Ocklawaha Restoring the Ocklawaha a  
Restoration Effort.” *Gainesville Sun*.  
“Rodman Decision Relayed.” September 18,  
1992. *Palatka Daily News*.  
Swirko, Cindy. February 6, 2003.  
“Kirkpatrick Created Legacy of  
Action, Controversy.” *Gainesville  
Sun*.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>. For more on the broader history of the canal, see Steven Noll and David Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams: The Cross Florida Barge Canal and the Struggle for Florida's Future* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2009); Preston Blake, *Land into Water- Water into Land: A History of Water Management in Florida, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010), 199-215; Lee Irby, “The Big Ditch’: The Rise and Fall of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal,” in Jack Davis and Raymond Arseneault, editors, *Paradise Lost: The Environmental History of Florida* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005); Frederick Davis, “Get the Facts-and Then Act’: How Marjorie H. Carr

---

and the Florida  
Defenders of the Environment Fought to  
Save the Ocklawaha River,” *Florida  
Historical Quarterly* (83,1, Summer 2004)  
46-69; Luther Carter, *The Florida  
Experience: Land and Water Policy in a  
Growth State* (Baltimore : Published for  
Resources for the Future by the Johns  
Hopkins University Press, 1974), 265-312;  
Mark Derr, *Some Kind of Paradise: A  
Chronicle of Man and the Land in Florida*  
(Gainesville, Florida: University Press of  
Florida, 1998), 333-335, 362-364; Charles  
Bennett, “Early History of the Cross-Florida  
Barge Canal,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*  
(45, 2, October 1966) 132-144; Alexander  
Stoesen, “Claude Pepper and the Florida  
Canal Controversy, 1939-1943,” *Florida  
Historical Quarterly* (50, 3, January 1972)  
235-251.

<sup>2</sup>. For an examination of the broader environmental issues discussed in this article, see Christopher Morris, “A More Southern Environmental History,” *Journal of Southern History* (75, 3, August 2009), 581-598. For work on the history of modern Florida in a political and social context, see David Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans: Florida and its Politics since 1940* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007) and Gary Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>. For the story on the 2003-2007 Kirkpatrick Reserve battle, see “State Reserve Could Save Dam,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 25, 2003; “Year after Year, it’s the Same Dam Debate,” *Ocala Star*

---

*Banner*, April 26, 2007. For information on the 2009 marina controversy, see “Rodman Dam Removal Faces a New Twist: A Proposed Marina,” *St. Petersburg Times*, February 8, 2009; “River or Reservoir,” *Gainesville Sun*, March 6, 2009; “Ocklawaha River: Insult Upon Injury,” *Lakeland Ledger*, March 24, 2009. For the Carr quote see Marjorie Carr, “A Florida Scandal,” written November 1996, [http://www.fladefenders.org/marjorie\\_carr.php?page=floridascandal](http://www.fladefenders.org/marjorie_carr.php?page=floridascandal) (Accessed November 21, 2001), Emphasis in original.