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ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE'S APPLAUDS INVALIDATION OF MFL RULE

The Ichetucknee Alliance is pleased that Judge Canter has ruled for invalidation of the proposed new rule for minimum flows and levels (MFLs) on the Ichetucknee River. It is our understanding that this ruling is based on vagueness of the language used by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Suwannee River Water Management District to describe how the minimum flows and levels were calculated.

We hope that the Suwannee and St. Johns River Water Management Districts and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will take this ruling to heart. The Alliance looks forward to working with these agencies to adopt a meaningful, science-based and enforceable MFL rule for the Ichetucknee River and its associated springs.

The Alliance also believes that this ruling is a good indication that Florida needs stronger and more responsible water stewardship and that our elected officials and water managers need to increase their efforts to preserve and protect our natural wonders.

Florida's waters are in crisis and the Ichetucknee is no exception. The river has lost roughly one-fifth to one-quarter of its historical average flow of 350 cubic feet per second (cfs). Because the Alliance's vision is for "a *healthy* Ichetucknee River System that is preserved and protected for future generations," our goal is to restore its flow to that historical average.

Strong protection is required, however, to protect not only the beauty and intrinsic value of the Ichetucknee but also the state's investments. The State of Florida spent nearly \$40 million to acquire the land that became Ichetucknee Springs State Park as well as nearby lands that helped to ensure protection of the water that feeds the springs and river. Since its inception, seven million people have visited the state park. The nearby communities of Fort White, Hildreth and Lake City all benefit from the park's 200,000 annual visitors. To protect the health of the river and the state's investments, the

Alliance believes that the waters of the Ichetucknee should be managed as a public trust—the same way that we would manage a financial trust fund for our children.

But this case is about more than the Ichetucknee River and springs; it is also about the Floridan Aquifer that is the source of our water supply, including our drinking water. The springs of the Ichetucknee are the top layer of that aquifer and when their flows decline, that can indicate falling aquifer levels. For each foot that the aquifer drops, the underlying layer of saltwater rises 40 feet. A falling aquifer can result in dry wells or saltwater intrusion.

Reduced flows on the Ichetucknee and a falling aquifer should raise red flags for all of us—utilities, agriculturalists, homeowners and business owners—because fixing water supply problems after they occur is much more expensive than preventing them in the first place. But if we can save Ichetucknee Springs, we can also save the aquifer.

Saving the Ichetucknee will not be easy; it will require all of us to change our behaviors and to reconsider whether we are all entitled to as much water as we want. Creating a culture of strong, responsible water stewardship requires hard work and shared sacrifices. The Alliance believes that the Ichetucknee River System is worthy of these efforts.

The Ichetucknee Alliance thanks the Florida Wildlife Federation for the courage to lead this challenge; the attorneys and employees of Earthjustice, who navigated a quagmire of relevant laws within a very short time frame; Attorney John Thomas, who provided us with early legal advice; and the amazing members of the Alliance whose heartfelt testimony in Tallahassee ensured that we were granted legal standing in this case. We also thank the Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute, under the leadership of Dr. Robert Knight, for providing us with the blueprint for our actions--the Ichetucknee Springs & River Restoration Action Plan.

Our young organization has just begun its work. We invite everyone who loves the Ichetucknee to join us in this noble cause.

For more information about the Ichetucknee Alliance, visit ichetuckneealliance.org.

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