

**Dammed Debate:
The Role Values and Perceptions of Water in the Rodman Dam/Ocklawaha River
Debate**

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In 1964, under the legislation of President John F. Kennedy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began the process of damming the Ocklawaha River to create the long-envisioned Cross-Florida Barge Canal, which resulted in Fitzpatrick Dam and Rodman Reservoir. Despite being well underway, President Nixon halted the project in 1971 because “the canal could endanger the unique wildlife of the area and destroy the region of unusual natural beauty” (Blake 1980: 109). Despite its decommissioned status and federally mandated orders for deconstruction, Rodman Reservoir stands today amidst a highly divided debate among local community members.

Since the 1820s, when proposals surfaced, the canal and resulting Rodman Reservoir have served as a “touchstone in the ongoing dialogue on the interactions of politics, economics, and environmental ethics” (Sloan 2005: 101). At the heart of this battle are competing value systems driving activism toward protection of the reservoir or restoration of the flowing waters of the Ocklawaha.

In this paper, I utilize contemporary scholarship on religious studies on religion and nature, which highlights the importance of understanding how humans perceive and negotiate relationships to the environment for projects pertaining to environmental ethics, conservation, and sustainability. By focusing on values, my paper offers a corrective to much of the contemporary literature on environmental conflict resolution, which tends to focus on

mechanisms and processes of conflict resolution. Instead, I advocate for understanding the importance of values when considering the underlying causes of conflicts over water usage, of which the Ocklawaha provides a powerful case study.