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**** PRESS RELEASE ****

**Huge Crowd Defends Fertilizer Ordinance, Opposes Preemption Legislation
At Rally in Rockledge**

Rockledge: A crowd of over 100 sticker-covered, sign-waving Florida taxpayers rallied today in front of Rockledge City Hall at a “Stand Up to Big Fertilizer! Stand Up for the Indian River Lagoon” event organized to defend the recently adopted City of Rockledge urban fertilizer ordinance. The ordinance, one of over 50 local government ordinances in the state that include strong fertilizer pollution controls, is threatened by preemption legislation in this last week of the legislative session.

Rockledge taxpayers gathered to send a clear message of support to the Rockledge City Council, which is not only defending its ordinance from the attack on home rule coming from Tallahassee, but is also feeling great pressure from the biggest supporters of preemption, the commercial fertilizer applicators, who want the City Council to weaken the ordinance by giving applicators a free pass to fertilize whenever they want.

Rockledge became ground zero for the statewide fight to protect water resources from urban fertilizer pollution when their own Representative Steve Crisafulli started the preemption attempt a week after the Rockledge ordinance was adopted in March and at about the same time the Indian River Lagoon became national news for the historic number of algae-related manatee deaths. Moreover, the fate of preemption legislation this year is in the hands of area Senator Thad Altman, who has the ability to keep preemption off of his bill, SB 1684, when it comes to the Senate floor for a vote on Thursday.

Two Rockledge City Councilmen, Frank T. Forester, and Ted J. Hartselle; Leesa Souto, Executive Director of *Marine Resources Council*; Laurilee Thompson of *Dixie Crossroads* (commercial seafood); and Maureen Rupe of the *Sierra Club Turtle Coast Group* spoke to rally participants before the City Council meeting that began at 6 pm.

Rally participants then flowed into the City Council chambers to support strengthening the local ordinance and to oppose weakening it.

“The best way to kill our lagoon, the fastest way to kill local jobs, is to tie local government hands so they cannot protect them” said Maureen Rupe.

Councilman Forester and Councilman Hartselle both spoke of the dire situation in the Indian River Lagoon today and how absolutely necessary it is for Rockledge and other local governments to retain the right to keep strong fertilizer controls in place. Forester stated: “We have to do something. We can’t sit and study it to death and wait and wait and wait”.

Mark Jacobs of *Save Our Aquifer* said: “We need to stop polluting the lagoon with lawn fertilizers. It is more important to have a healthy lagoon than to have unnaturally green turf grass. Many people

I know have healthy turf grass and use no fertilizers; polluting the lagoon with lawn fertilizers is a completely senseless and unnecessary waste.

“The Lagoon here is toxic. To sea grass, manatees, pelicans, and if it’s toxic to them, it may be toxic to us. It is certainly toxic to our quality of life” stated Leesa Souto.

All the speakers urged Senator Thad Altman to save the day and stop preemption.

The *Creature from the Black Lagoon* made a special appearance at the event to announce he has moved into the Indian River Lagoon, changed his name respectively, and now joins the dead manatees in chasing away the fisherman and tourists.

Among the many signs and stickers denouncing state preemption and supporting the Rockledge ordinance, the most striking visual at the rally had to be the photos of the more than 100 dead manatees killed by toxic algae found in Brevard County since last July; the heading on the photos was: How many is too many?

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