



Vol. 16, No. 1

Spring, 2014

<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

## **Water Groups from across Florida met on the steps of the State House**

Andy and Terri Auner

Tallahassee – February 18, 2014

Back in October of 2013, there was a large gathering of water groups from all over the State of Florida. We met at the UCF campus in Orlando, and were told over 300 groups were represented. The issues we have here in our Springs and Rivers, it turns out, are Statewide. This Statewide group decided to take a stand on the State House steps.

In our opinion, we know that “fixing” one river or spring will not solve the problem. This one group, made up of many, has different goals depending on where they are located, but in the big picture, we are all looking for the same thing.

“ **We want clean water, and we want it now!**” This was the theme of the 250 people in nine buses, from all over Florida who took the time to stand and make our legislators listen.

There were many speakers, but most notable to us was Hernando County resident, our Senator Simpson. He vowed to help in any way he can through the Legislature to save our valuable waterways. Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson from the Santa Fe River Group, has headed up the Springs Area by challenging the water districts’ policies of giving away water to anyone who asks.

Not to minimize the importance of every speaker, they all basically said the same thing, “We want clean water, and we want it now!” There were several media representatives there, unfortunately none from the Tampa Bay area, even though they had been notified of the event.

We must all recognize that the neglect of the Clean Water Act, and the local ordinances, that have been ignored, over many years, has caused death and degradation of

our beautiful rivers. It will take a total commitment and enforcement of the laws to make a difference. It will take money, lots of money and lots of time.

Florida residents and even the tourists who come from all over to enjoy our waters can help, by not letting this slip by and continue to be ignored. The Statewide group has written a "Florida Declaration of Clean Water" which has been signed by our lawmakers, and many citizens as well as visitors. We will make sure there are copies available at the Homosassa River Alliance upcoming meetings.

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### *Message From the President*

As I sit down to write this message, the "Silly Season" has begun in Tallahassee with a ray of hope and a cloud of despair. Nine of our most influential state senators have sponsored meaningful legislation aimed directly at cleaning up our badly deteriorated water bodies and diminishing potable water supply. It is the first serious effort in many years to address the problem. It is our belief that our efforts, combined with the efforts of many groups similar to ours throughout the state have finally gotten the attention of our legislators (our enduring legal action against the state DEP is no small part of this mix).

There is a downside however. As we go to press a companion bill is needed in the House of Representatives and the Speaker of the House - the Honorable Will Weatherford - is saying it is not going to happen this session. We can only hope this attitude will change. Our efforts will continue. It is a terrible thing when private citizens have to drag state agencies into court to make our politicians do the right thing. As our fellow group TOO FAR says in their motto - we will "never give up."

On a final note: We have been asked recently to speak to several groups about our work. If any of our members and/or readers belong to a group that would like to hear what we are all about, please feel free to contact me at 628-1563.

*Jim Bitter*

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**Nutrient TMDLs for the  
Chassahowitzka and Homosassa  
Rivers**

Brad W. Rimbey, P.E.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has begun developing Nutrient Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for the Chassahowitzka and Homosassa Rivers. TMDL rule development is mandated on these rivers because they are both on the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 303(d) Verified Impaired Waters List for Nutrients (algal mats) and Mercury (in fish tissue).

On February 19, 2014, the Homosassa River Alliance and the Chassahowitzka River Restoration Committee met with FDEP's Kristina Bridger and James Dodson to share local knowledge regarding the current and historical condition of our rivers. FDEP was particularly interested in observations and data related to the presence and proliferation of algal mats since algal mats are the primary indicator of nutrient pollution on spring-fed rivers.

Although the algae causing these mats are a normal part of the natural environment, excessive algal growth occurs when the natural water chemistry is out of balance. If left unchecked, algal growth will literally choke the life out of our spring-fed rivers.

The primary pollutant fueling algal growth (mats) on our spring-fed rivers is excessive nitrate in the water. Other factors, such as reduced flow (increased residence time), also contribute to excessive algal growth.

In Nutrient TMDL development, FDEP must determine how much nitrate pollution a particular waterbody can tolerate without being impaired by algal mats. FDEP has established a nitrate pollution level of 0.35 mg/L as the maximum allowable limit on any spring-fed river in Florida. However, FDEP will set a lower nitrate pollution level on a particular spring-fed waterbody if they determine that 0.35 mg/L is too high to allow the waterbody to recover from its nutrient impairment.

According to the Florida Geological Survey, nitrate levels were less than 0.05 mg/L in Florida's springs before human activity began polluting the aquifer in our springheds. In protected areas of the state (such as the Ocala National Forest), nitrate levels in the aquifer are still below 0.05 mg/L. FDEP's 0.35 mg/L maximum allowable pollution level represents a 600% increase over natural levels.

According to Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), the current level of nitrate pollution in Chassahowitzka is 0.63 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L in Homosassa. Nitrate pollution levels in both rivers are continuing to rise. These nitrate pollution levels are nearly double the maximum FDEP allowable nitrate pollution levels for spring-fed rivers and approximately 1,200% higher than natural nitrate levels.

After FDEP establishes an allowable level of nitrate pollution on a waterbody, they must develop a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) to address the various sources of pollution which are causing the impairment.

Unfortunately, compliance with FDEP's BMAPs will be largely voluntary.

We are far beyond the point where we should be politely asking chronic polluters of the aquifer to please stop fouling our drinking water and destroying our spring-fed rivers. Compliance with BMAPs should be mandatory not voluntary.

According to 1997 data from SWFWMD, the primary sources of nitrate pollution for Chassahowitzka's springs comes from Beef Cattle (33%), Poultry (27%), Fertilizer - Residential, Golf Course, Pasture (21%), Dairies (8%), Wastewater - Septic, Sewage Effluent (6%), Other - Row Crops, Citrus, Sludge Disposal (5%). For Homosassa's springs the primary sources of nitrate pollution are Other - Sludge Disposal, Row Crops, Citrus, Poultry, Dairies (43%), Fertilized Pasture (26%), Beef Cattle (20%), Fertilizer -Residential, Golf Course (6%), and Septic Tanks (5%).

FDEP will continue to gather public input on the TMDLs for Chassahowitzka and Homosassa for several months. If you have any data or observations which may be useful in the development of these TMDLs please contact Kristina Bridger at (850) 245-8023 or [Kristina.Bridger@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Kristina.Bridger@dep.state.fl.us)

To view a complete list of our local impaired waters, go to <http://bit.ly/1eMZldW> .

To view springs related presentations recently made to the FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services Water Policy Advisory Council, go to <http://bit.ly/1pVWWSk> .

To view current West-Central spring status from SWFWMD, go to <http://bit.ly/NNEQTM>

### **Florida Water and Land Legacy Conservation Amendment**

Iris Rose

A campaign was launched to collect signatures from around the state to have an Amendment to protect Florida's water and land for future generations. More than 685,000 valid signatures were obtained and Amendment 1 will be on the November 2014 ballot.

For twenty years, state revenues from real estate transactions have been directed to the state's Florida Forever program to protect important streams, wetlands, forests, and beaches. However, since 2009, the Legislature has slashed funding for conservation programs by 97.5 percent.

The goal of the amendment is to keep the dedicated funding source away from the state's general revenue fund, controlled by the legislature. The guaranteed stream of revenue is expected to raise more than \$5 billion for water and land conservation in Florida over the next ten years and \$10 billion over the 20-year life of the measure, without any tax increase.

If approved by 60% of Florida voters, the amendment would dedicate more than \$10 billion over 20 years for the protection and restoration of environmentally sensitive lands and water resources.

The Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment requires no

new taxes. Instead, it calls for one-third of the documentary tax paid on real estate transactions to be set aside for conservation spending programs such as land purchases and protecting drinking water sources.

To see the text of the amendment and to help get it passed in November, see: <http://floridawaterlandlegacy.org>.

Also, check out [voteyeson1fl.org](http://voteyeson1fl.org) for more information.



**RIVER ALLIANCE AWARDS FOR  
2014 SCIENCE FAIR**

Jane Perrin and Karen Johnstone

Student scientists displayed 320 posters at the 2014 Citrus Regional Science and Engineering Fair which was held on January 28<sup>th</sup>. Our mission as representatives of the Homosassa River Alliance was to pursue projects related to preservation of Florida waterways. Fair organizer Amanda Crawford directed us to the categories of environmental science and environmental management.

The students eagerly discussed his/her efforts and displays. As professionals in health fields we were geared to examine each student's hypothesis, research techniques, conclusions and illustrations. After careful consideration, the following students/projects were selected:

**Frank J. Ward, Jr.**  
**Academy of Science, Senior**  
***Save Our Sea Grass***

Frank sought a cost-effective way to repair destruction from boat propellers. He replaced roots and rhizomes from floating fragments, but these did not survive. Further trials recommended.

**Phillip Thomas, Jr.**  
**Academy of Science, Junior**  
***Comparative Treatment of  
Polluted Water***

Phillip addressed treatment of 3 water pollutants: over fertilization, dirt particles and salt water. Treatment trials for each were constructed: lagoon system (black mangroves), filtration and reverse osmosis. Osmosis was the most efficient, but mangrove action was only three days in duration.

**Logan Niblett**  
**Middle School**  
***Green is Mean; Algae Growth***

Logan added water from several natural sources to soil plates which were treated with synthetic fertilizer and turkey manure organic fertilizer. Algae growth was least with no fertilizer, less with manure than with synthetic fertilizer.

These young men received cash awards from the River Alliance for their outstanding efforts in completing such excellent projects..

Phillip presented his project at the Homosassa River Alliance meeting which was held on March 13<sup>th</sup>. He discussed research, conclusions and career interests.

It was gratifying to meet young persons appreciative of their beautiful State of Florida and who may pursue careers to better the environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

**SOS NOW UPDATE**

Priscilla Watkins

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has failed to respond to our legal Petition regarding SWFWMD's failure to address degradation of the Springs, which they received on 28 March 2013.

After a great deal of internal dithering, the Department set a hearing date for 10 September 2013 before legal counsel Adrienne Vining, not the Secretary of the Department as stated by Law.

At that hearing our attorney, John R. Thomas, presented our case. We also had the support of many other individuals and organizations concerned about the condition and neglect of our Florida Springs.

The presiding officer, DEP's legal counsel Adrienne Vining, stated for the record at least twice that her "findings" would go to Secretary Vinyard. When asked when we would receive a copy, she restated that her comments would go to Secretary Vinyard.

We consider this a matter of grave urgency since our MFL on the Homosassa River was approved by the SWFWMD governing Board in October of 2012.

Yet six months after the Hearing on our case we have not seen a copy or received one of her "findings." One year from our original notice of neglect, we have received no written response from Secretary Vinyard. We have been working on this issue since before 2006. When will we begin to see our government working for the people, in accord with the Law?

**HOMOSASSA RE-VEGETATION PROJECT**

Chris J. Anastasiou, Ph.D.  
Southwest Florida Water Management District

The Southwest Florida Water Management District has designed a five year plan to protect the first-magnitude springs and their associated rivers. One goal is to improve fish habitat and water clarity in these springs and rivers, which include the Homosassa River. Restoration is the key.

The effort to re-vegetate areas of Kings Bay and the Homosassa with eelgrass began in 2013. This is a partnership between the District, the University of Florida, Duke Energy, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

Eelgrass is a native aquatic plant critical to improving water quality and sustaining good habitat. A large supply of eelgrass will be grown at the Duke Energy Mariculture Center in Crystal River. Grasses will be grown in a one-acre pond using a technique developed by UF where the plants are rooted in coconut coir mats. "Rock Star" Eelgrass has been selected because of its hardy nature, salt tolerance, and ability to grow in almost anything.

**REMINDER:**

If you have not done so, please consider updating your membership with the River Alliance for 2014. Your support is needed and very much appreciated. This summer the eelgrass mats will be transferred to Hunter’s Cove in Kings Bay and the upper section of the Homosassa River. The mats will be laid on the bottom, much like rolling sod on a lawn. Protective cages will prevent manatee and other aquatic animals from eating the grass. Ultimately the cages will be removed and the “Rock Stars” will provide food for manatee as well as habitat for fish. Larger re-vegetation efforts will follow in 2015.

SWFWMD has also initiated a four-year project on the five major spring systems to track the fishery status and trends.

Visit [WaterMatters.org/Springs](http://WaterMatters.org/Springs) to learn more about these efforts to restore our springs and rivers.



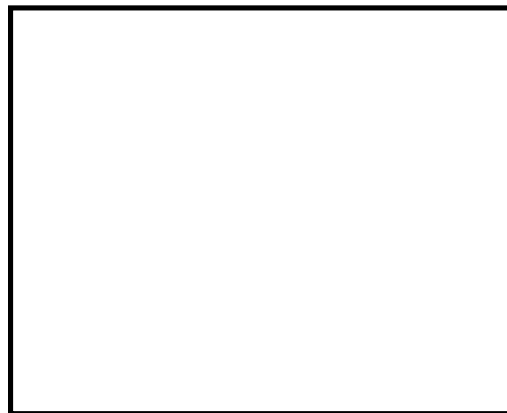
**We Need Your Input**

If there are any questions, speakers, or subjects which you may want to inquire about regarding our waterways, or action we are taking in their regard, let us hear from you. See page 2 for contact numbers.

**WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THIS PLACE CALLED THE NATURE COAST?**

Iris Rose

I can only speak for my husband and myself but we came to live in Homosassa for the beautiful waterways. If you have been on the river lately, surely you have noticed the changes. Barnacles now attach themselves to the bottom of our boat. The grasses are disappearing at an alarming rate. The spring waters are no longer crystal clear. Please give this some thought: The River Alliance needs members in many ways. Your dues are so appreciated and needed but participation in monthly meetings, informing yourself and actively getting involved is crucial. Many of us are retired and may not want to commit but the river cannot help itself – it’s up to us.



**PLEASE GET INVOLVED IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IN PROTECTING OUR WATERWAYS.**