



Vol. 18, No. 1

Winter, 2016

<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

HOMOSASSA RIVER MARKERS

It was brought to our attention by one of our members that the Channel Markers in the River are not where they should be and are not in very good condition. This could and has, caused dangerous situations where boaters are not aware that the steel or wooden pilings may be broken off just below the water's surface. The recent replacements have been using floating buoys which also can be dangerous since they break free and drift, or just drift with the wind and storms. The buoys are difficult to see on a clear day, but more so at night. The Coast Guard is responsible for Navigational Aids.

The River Alliance has written a letter outlining the problem to Senators Bill Nelson, Marco Rubio, Representative Nugent, the Citrus County Commission, and the Commander at the Coast Guard Station St. Petersburg. Senator Nelson's Office has offered to write and send a letter to the Coast Guard to encourage them to accept this project to insure the safety of the public. The County actually asked the River Alliance for help. BOSN4 Darren Pauley of the Coast Guard contacted us via email, asking us to meet with him to look into the problem. According to the Board of County Commission (BOCC), the Coast Guard has been trying to make the County take over this task. The Coast Guard is telling us that the water is too shallow in the river for their barges to get in to pound in new pilings. They also would like Hell's Gate to be SLOW SPEED all year. That can likely be accomplished through the BOCC.

After speaking to BOSN4 Pauley on the phone, we find out there is a story behind the story. In the recent past - the 1990s - there was a contract out for bid to replace a number of pilings. A company from out of town won the bid, then hired a local company to do the work. The specifications were for very large posts to be installed which would have required a very large barge. The barge was probably too large for the shallow water in that part of the river. The local company discovered this and asked that the specifications be changed. They then performed the work. BUT, down the line, where we are now, the Coast Guard has it in their records that the river is too shallow for them to maintain. The Coast Guard sent an email with many very specific questions. I was unable to answer them all correctly, so I requested a River Alliance member who is very knowledgeable of the river to contact the Coast Guard person so he can answer the questions for them.

I am following up on that, waiting for a response to see if anything else is needed to begin. I was told that they have started by clearing out nine old wrecks and many broken posts. This is a great start.

Hoping to have the worst areas done by scallop season.

Terri Auner, Secretary

Message From the President

We have all experienced the situation where we learn of unanticipated consequences of actions we have taken. I did not expect it to have a serious impact on my e-mails. Apparently, environmental groups (and individuals) share e-mail addresses. My volume has increased by at least half. Sometimes I received the same information 4 or 5 times. At least I have to conclude that we have an active and effective information network.

The fact that we have a community where many individuals have useful historical and technical information has been shown by the several speakers we have had in the past months. Their willingness and even enthusiasm to share with us has been wonderful.

We began with Gerry Mulligan, publisher of the Citrus County Chronicle, who has a long-term history in the community. Next we heard from Veronica Crow, Springs and Environmental Flows Manager for Southwest Florida Water Management District, who offered an excellent slide overview of a field test and the SWIM plan. (More info on SWIM on p. 6-7). Most recently we listed to Kimberlee Tennille, manager of the Homosassa State Wildlife Park, who led us through the history of the park, its features and programs. Representatives from the Florida Department of Transportation are scheduled to give a presentation and answer questions about the Halls River Road Bridge Project at 7:00 p.m. during the March River Alliance meeting on 3/10/16 (see p. 6).

The response of the members and guests to these speakers has been enthusiastic. The quality of the

questions and comments made me very proud to be associated with the Alliance.

Please remember that our annual meeting is to be held at Bluebird Springs Park on April 14th at 4 p.m. Bring your covered dish to share and I will bring the Off.

Ron Schultz

**Homosassa River Alliance
P.O. Box 124
Homosassa, FL 34487
Board of Directors**

Ron Schultz, President
Joanne Bartell, Vice President
Terri Auner, Secretary
Rosey Rendueles, Treasurer
Corresponding Secretary, Steve Minguy

Jim Bitter	Al Grubman
Jake Jacobs	Gail Jannarone
Ron Miller	Winston Perry
Brad Rimbey	Iris Rose
Priscilla Watkins	

Contacts:

Board Issues: Ron Schultz
eda@tampabay.rr.com

or

Newsletter: Iris Rose 628-7481
IBROSEFLA@tampabay.rr.com

**SOME SECOND THOUGHTS ON
HYACINTHS AS A FILTERING**

AGENT

Jim Bitter

When I first starting fishing the Homosassa River in 1956, there were some hyacinths growing in the river. It was not a major issue. By the mid sixties the river had become choked with this rapidly growing weed. It had become a hazard to navigation. The river was a solid mat of hyacinths from the spring to the salt line slightly west of Riverhaven Village.

Many hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent by the state to eliminate what was then regarded as a noxious weed. This eliminated the hazard to the navigation problem but left us with a river bottom covered with muck and today, a river near death.

When the idea of reintroducing hyacinths as a filtering agent into the river again was suggested, I was opposed to this. I based this on my original observations. I now realize that hyacinths may be a last best chance to save this river. There is one major factor that has led to my change of mind. Manatees! In the 50's and 60's there were no manatees using Citrus County waters. Now there are – by the hundreds in the winter. So we have added a new harvesting factor. We grow the hyacinths in the warm months as a filtering agent and the manatee would harvest it as their food in the winter months. I believe this is something that should be investigated. Perhaps we can interest our friends at SWFWMD.

Let's approach this with an open mind and remember that we need to put all ideas on the table to save the Homosassa River.

RIVER CLEAN-UP

It's time to get the Homosassa river cleanup back in action!

The Rotary Club of Homosassa Springs will hold it's next lynchbya cleanup on May 30 from 9 am to 11 am.

In only a few cleanings at the end of 2014, with your help we managed to remove almost 20 tons of lynchbya and muck from the river.

Please join us at the parking lot just past the park entrance on Fishbowl Drive around 8:30 am as we prepare to do our part to keep our river clean.

Just make sure to wear clothes that you don't mind getting dirty and comfortable close toed shoes.

We will supply everything, just bring yourself or better yet invite a friend!

Hope to see you there!

Your friends from the
Homosassa Rotary Club

**NEXT RIVER ALLIANCE
MEETING WILL BE ON MARCH
10, 2016 AT 7 P.M. AT THE
HOMASSA CIVIC CENTER**

**HOMASSA RIVER ALLIANCE
ANNUAL PICNIC**

DATE: April 14, 2016
TIME: 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: Bluebird Springs

Please join us for our Annual Meeting/Picnic. All you need to do is to bring is a covered dish to share.

Join us for an afternoon of fun and good food!!

**RUNOFF FROM HIGHWAY
19 PROJECT WILL FINALLY BE
COMPLETED**

The Alliance's first newsletter was dated Spring/Summer 1999. It contained an article by then County Commissioner Gary Bartell where he stated: "Other water improvements include work on the Homosassa South Fork area to improve treatment of stormwater runoff." We are now, some 17 years later, about to have the project completed.

In the late 1990's it became generally recognized that there had been significant degradation to the rivers quality. The county set a goal of reversing this trend by attacking the two identified major sources of pollution. The first was wastewater effluent from septic tanks and packaged wastewater treatment plants. This led to the Homosassa Wastewater Collection System Project. The second was untreated stormwater runoff going into the river. For this the **Homosassa Southfork Water Quality Improvement Project** was started.

This project was divided into several phases which allowed progress as funds became available. We knew that major canals drained runoff from about ten square miles of US Highway 19 and the adjacent lands into the headwaters of the river. These canals had been dug by our Mosquito Control District in their quest to control these pests. We, like the rest of Florida, believed in the mantra "Drain the Swamps".

Given the technology of the time there was no overall hydrological analysis to plan these canals. The first phase of the project therefore was to locate and identify these ditches. Funded

cooperatively by the County and the District, a survey was conducted in the 1998/99 period.

The second phase was to restructure the site known as the Homosassa Lion's Club located east of US 19 and adjacent to CR 490 (Homosassa Trail). Funded jointly by the County and SWFWMD, the site was regraded, new storm drains and a stormceptor structure treatment structure constructed. The site was then able to discharge into the mosquito ditch behind the property that leads to a drainage culvert under US 19. This phase was completed in 2000.

At the same time an evaluation of the entire watershed was started in order to create a comprehensive plan for addressing the stormwater and flooding issues. Jointly funded by SWFWMD and the County an engineering analysis and plan was completed in 2002. This phase 3 identified the need to create wetland treatment areas so that stormwater runoff coming from the ditches could be held and treated before discharging into the river.

The plan was based on the fact that 90% of our rain events yield one inch or less of water and that some 90% of pollution runoff comes with that first one inch. In 1998 the Alliance and the Wildlife Park, with funding from SWFWMD, conducted a yearlong study to determine how much hydrocarbons were being sent into Pepper Creek. It was shown that very little was actually being sent into the River. In 2014 former president Priscilla Watkins reported that research released by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection showed that "Our major pollutant is an increased overload of nitrates causing algae growth and mats and subsequent loss of beneficial sea

grasses.” This reinforced the idea that extensive storm water containment would allow natural processes to filter and remove significant amounts of the pollutant.

The program then ran into a major speedbump when a 1994 legislative appropriation of \$500,000 was vetoed by Governor Bush. These monies were to be used to purchase the lands needed for the retention ponds that would hold the waters.

After that setback the Department of Transportation budgets were used as vehicles for allocating the monies needed to keep the project going. Land purchases were made from 2006 through 2012. The last was the very important purchase of what had been the Fishnet Motel property fronting on Halls River road and adjacent to the culvert that runs beneath that road. These lands will meet the county’s needs as well as providing space for the drainage retention areas that will be needed for the US19 construction.

The 2002 water management plan and engineering report was then updated during 2014/15. This plan now calls for the creation of two retention ponds, associated piping, check dam and drop structure west of US 19 behind the shopping centers. The retention areas will be approximately 24 acres and sufficient to cope with the additional runoff expected from the widening of US 19. These ponds will drain into Pepper Creek with the current control structure, that maintains the depth in the creek before it is allowed to drain into The river, functioning as the primary control point for the entire system.

This phase, now funded jointly by the County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District, is budgeted at 1.9 million dollars including the costs

of the land. It is expected that it will go out to bid in April, with construction starting in August with an anticipated completion in January of 2017.

The completion of this project will have a significant impact on our river. We need to compliment the tenacity and foresight of the various agencies that have worked for over a decade and a half to bring this about.

Ron Schultz
President, River Alliance

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM OUR MEMBERS

This newsletter is dedicated to giving a voice to all who have concerns about the Homosassa River and water quality in general. So, I am putting out this request to all of you who read this publication. Let us know your concerns, questions or suggestions so we can post them. Share them with us and others.

Iris A. Rose
ibrosefla@tampabay.rr.com

RIVER ALLIANCE WEBSITE UP AND RUNNING

Our website has a new look. Please check it out at:
<http://www.HomosassaRiveralliance.org>

MEMBERSHIP DUES

To see if your membership is current, just check the mailing label of this newsletter. The number to the left of your name represents the year you last paid your dues. Thanks for your support! **Note:** membership dues can now be paid on our website through Paypal.

HALLS RIVER BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION

Steve Minguy

Construction of the new Halls River Bridge is set to begin this June and will take over a year to complete. Representatives from the Florida Department of Transportation are scheduled to give a presentation and answer questions about the project at 7:00 pm during the March River Alliance meeting (3/10/16). This will be a full replacement of the bridge which was built in 1954 and had a scheduled lifespan of 70 years. A 2013 bridge rating report indicated that the bridge is now “functionally obsolete” and fails to meet current road design standards. The new bridge will be almost twice as wide as the one built over 60 years ago. Increasing the bridge width from 29 feet to 59 feet will allow for (2) 12 foot travel lanes, 8 foot wide shoulders and 5 foot pedestrian sidewalks in each direction and will meet current bridge specifications. The height of the new bridge will remain basically the same with an overall increase of approximately 1 foot. According to DOT, a higher bridge would have required longer approach lanes and there is insufficient right of way available to accomplish this.

SPRINGS COAST SWIM TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETINGS BEGIN

Brad Rimbey, P.E.

In 1987 the Florida Legislature created the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Act to protect, restore and maintain Florida's highly threatened surface water bodies. Under this act, the state's five water management districts identify a list of priority water bodies within their authority and implement plans to improve them.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District's (SWFWMD's) SWIM Program is administered through the Natural Systems & Restoration Bureau, which is responsible for many of SWFWMD's water quality and natural systems initiatives. With the help of state agencies, local governments and other organizations, the SWIM Program focuses on water quality and habitat restoration projects to accomplish these department initiatives.

In 2014, SWFWMD added the Weeki Wachee, Chassahowitzka, and Homosassa rivers to their SWIM priority water bodies list. Other SWFWMD SWIM priority water bodies which were already listed were Tampa Bay, Rainbow River, Crystal River/Kings Bay, Lake Panasoffkee, Charlotte Harbor, Lake Tarpon, Lake Thonotosassa, Winter Haven Chain of Lakes, and Sarasota Bay.

In January 2016, SWFWMD began conducting SWIM Technical Working Group meetings to gather input for the Weeki Wachee, Chassahowitzka, and Homosassa rivers.

The intent of January's Technical Working Group meetings was to "define issues and drivers and set quantifiable objectives". Suffice to say a broad range of topics were discussed during the January Technical Working Group meetings. The issues discussed at the January 22 Homosassa Technical Working Group meeting included Nitrate Enrichment, Changing Salinity, Bacterial Pollution, Decreased Water Clarity, Petroleum Product Pollution, Reduced Flows, Hydrologic Alterations, Altered Aquatic Vegetation, Muck Accumulation, Altered Shorelines, Altered Benthic Substrate, and Channel Morphology Changes.

The output from January's Technical Working Group meetings was provided as input to the Springs Coast Management Committee on February 10 to set "management actions to support quantifiable objectives". The representatives of the Springs Coast Management Committees are

Agency	Representative
City of Crystal River	Dave Burnell
Citrus County	Ken Cheek
Hernando County	Alys Brockway
Marion County	Flip Mellinger
FDEP	Rick Hicks
FFWCC	Kevin Kemp
FDACS	Jessica Stempien
SWFWMD	Michael Molligan
Agriculture	Curt Williams
Public Supply	Richard Owen
Environmental	Charles Lee
Regional Planning Council	Maya Burke

Industry	Dave Bruzek
Academia	Dr. Mahmood Nachabe
State Parks	Rick Owen

The output from the Springs Coast Management Committee will be provided as input to the Springs Coast Steering Committee on April 6 to “approve projects that support management actions”. The representatives of the Springs Coast Steering Committee are

Agency	Representative	Title
City of Crystal River	Robert Holmes	City Council Member
Citrus County	Dennis Damato	County Commissioner
Hernando County	Nick Nicholson	County Commissioner
Marion County	Stan McClain	County Commissioner
FDEP	Tom Frick	Environmental Assessment and Restoration Bureau, Chief
FFWCC	Shannon Wright	Northeast Regional Director
FDACS	Darrell Smith	Office of Ag Water Policy, Assistant Director
SWFWMD	Michael Babb	Governing Board Member, Chair

The next Springs Coast Technical Working Group meeting will be held on March 16 from 9:00am to 4:00pm at SWFWMD’s headquarters in Brooksville. This meeting is open to the public and stakeholder participation is encouraged. More information on the Springs Coast SWIM meetings can be found on SWFWMD’s website <http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/springs/springs-coast/>