

Rainbow River Conservation, Inc. Winter Newsletter 2016

RRC continues in its effort to protect and preserve the Rainbow River and its environment.

Annual Members Meeting

There was an excellent turnout for the annual meeting December 5th. Nathan Whitt, Dan Rutkowski, Jerry Rogers, Louise Kenny, Gordon Hart were elected to the Board of Directors. Officers elected for 2016 are President Burt Eno, Vice-President Jerry Rogers, Treasurer Gretchen Martin, and Secretary Louise Kenny.

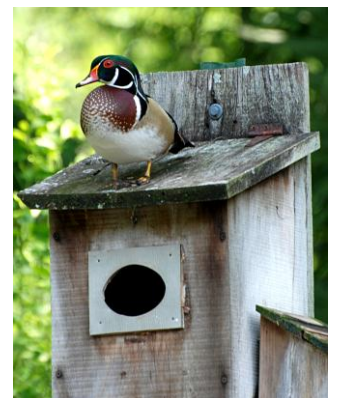
President Eno gave a review of RRC activities and accomplishments in the year 2015. Nathan Whitt and Jon Brainard gave an overview of the RRC sponsored Elementary School Field Study Education Program held at Rainbow Springs State Park. Bill Vibbert and Paul Marraffino gave an overview of RRC's role in the development of the Blue Run Park. The featured speaker, John Moran, gave a captivating overview of the plight of our springs and aquifer. Pictorially comparing our springs today to our springs 20 to 30 years ago, his message was clear. Our water resource is in serious trouble.



John Moran speaking at RRC Annual Meeting

Projects and Events

In the fall a team lead by Jerry Rogers maintained the 50 Wood Duck boxes that RRC has installed along the Rainbow River. New cedar bedding was put in each box and repairs were made to each box as necessary. Records kept during this maintenance cycle showed that in the last year 96% of the boxes had productive broods. The Wood ducks find the clear water, emergent vegetation, and safe homes, provided by RRC, an attraction that has encouraged the population to grow.



Male Wood Duck on box

One of the great reasons RRC wants to protect the Rainbow River is its abundant and unique population of wildlife. For instance, RRC member Sandra Marraffino recently completed a one-day survey of birds along the river and found 41 different species including three of the eight *listed* species she has seen in the past. Florida Sandhill Crane, Limpkin, Little Blue Heron, Osprey, Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis and Wood Stork are listed species often seen foraging on the Rainbow River.



White Ibis and Little Blue Heron next to river.

On October 22nd RRC held its second Springs Awareness for Educators Forum at the RS State Park. This forum, jointly sponsored by SWFWMD, Marion County Schools, Friends of Rainbow Springs, and Park personnel, was well attended with presentations given by Florida Springs Institute and SWFWMD personnel. In November several classes of 4th graders from Dunnellon Elementary, Romeo Elementary, and Dunnellon Christian Academy came to the Park and performed field studies such as testing water, building and testing a model aquifer, and a nature hike. To satisfy the demand for this very successful program we need more volunteers to serve as instructors and assistants. For a fun and rewarding experience contact jon.brainard@gmail.com.



Connie Hart teaching 4th graders about the turtle life cycle as part of the RRC Education program

Blue Run Park

Great strides continue to be made in fulfilling the Blue Run Park management plan. In recent months new kiosks, interpretive signs, benches, and bike racks have been installed. The greatest needs that remain are a bathroom facility, picnic pavilions, and a pedestrian bridge over the Rainbow River. Just last week the City of Dunnellon's Community Redevelopment Area Advisory Board voted to set aside \$30,000 to fund engineering and architectural planning for the bathroom facility. Marion County Parks and Recreation personnel are spearheading this development effort and hope to help fund the construction.



New kiosk at Blue Run of Dunnellon Park

Related Studies and Plans Completed

The Rainbow Springs Basin Management Action Plan and the Rainbow River Surface Water Improvement Management Plan are now completed by FDEP and SWFWMD, respectively, and are located at RRC's website www.RainbowRiverConservation.com. Both are guides to future improvement of water quantity and quality of the Rainbow River but they both lack the necessary enforcement to make the improvements happen. As we have pointed out previously agricultural practices are primarily responsible for excessive water withdrawals from the aquifer and the nitrate poisoning of the aquifer that feeds our drinking water and the Rainbow River. A good example is a 91 acre deforested patch only about a mile north of the Rainbow Springs headwaters under consideration for a SWFWMD permit to pump 141,700 gpd to irrigate and fertilize watermelons.

Water Legislation

Last year the Florida legislature failed to pass any substantive legislation to protect our springs and aquifer from over-pumping and nitrate pollution. This year water bills SB 552 and HB 7005 are zipping through their respective houses at warp speed. Unfortunately, they pertain primarily to water development and water use and do little or nothing for water conservation and protection from pollution. Therefore, the Florida Springs Council (FSC), of which RRC is one of 35 member organizations representing over 100,000 individuals, has taken a stand against these bills insisting that certain amendments be made to better protect springs. A summary of these bills is contained on the RRC website under RRC Advocacy.

Rainbow River Ranch Litigation

The egregious settlement agreement for the development of the Rainbow River Ranch remains in litigation. RRC and the individual intervenors, represented by attorneys Ralf Brookes and Tom Pelham, have filed an appeal to the circuit court's decision to deny due process to the intervenors and to approve the settlement agreement. The intervenors have filed their appeal brief with the Appellate Court, received an answer brief from the property owner, and then filed a reply brief. We are waiting for the Appellate Court to act on the case. Meanwhile, SWFWMD has shown an interest in purchasing the Rainbow River Ranch in order to protect the river and its appurtenant natural resources. Keep your fingers crossed.

RRC Membership Renewals

As of this writing we have received approximately 150 membership renewals for 2016 but are lacking such returns from about 100 members. Its only \$15 but the headcount is important. If you have not yet renewed please fill out the attached membership form and return it with your dues to the address given.