

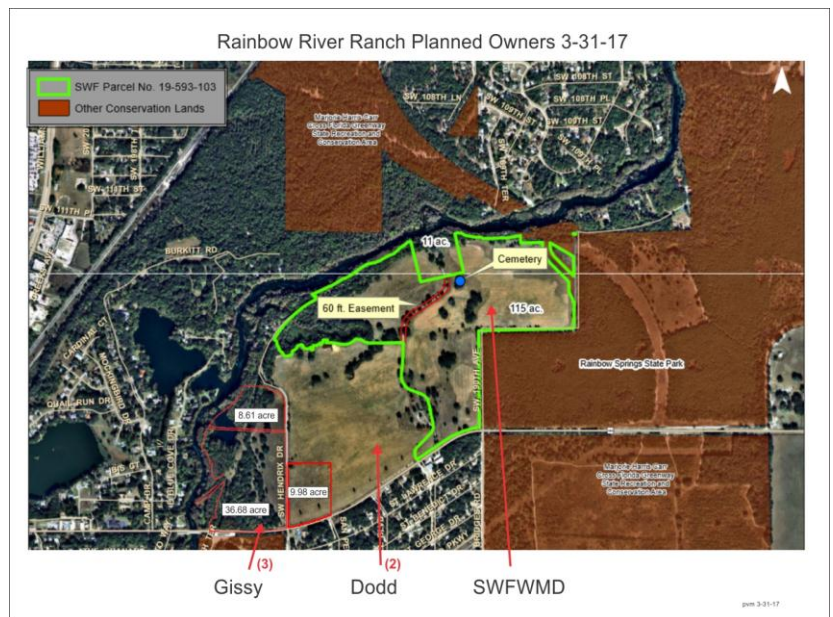
Rainbow River Conservation, Inc. Spring Newsletter 2017

Upcoming Events

RRC will have its education booth present at Dunnellon Boomtown April 15th. Rainbow River Cleanup is scheduled for May 20th. This event starts at Rio Vista Park at 9 AM and ends with a RRC sponsored picnic at noon. For further information see the attached announcement.

Rainbow River Ranch

Some very good news is that the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) contracted March 28th to purchase 115 acres along the north and east sides of the Rainbow River Ranch from Gerald Dodd in order to restore it and protect the Rainbow River. This includes approximately 2418 feet along the river. We reported to you previously that James Gissy bought 57 acres on the west end of the Ranch property including approximately 2250 feet along the river. Mr. Dodd will retain 11 acres, including the Cabbage homestead, along 620 feet adjacent to the river subject to a conservation buffer. He will also retain 75 upland acres adjacent to CR 484 and sandwiched between the Gissy and SWFWMD properties.



This purchase is the culmination of a long RRC led battle to prevent 351 homes and 25 acres of commercial development on the Ranch property. RRC had intervened in 2010 after the City of Dunnellon had acquiesced to this massive development and committed to provide several forms of infrastructure to it. After a legal battle through circuit court and then appellate court, RRC prevailed with a finding in its favor, protecting the property and the river and saving the city millions of dollars.

Rainbow River MFL Decision

Some very bad news is the fact that SWFWMD, on March 28th, adopted a minimum flow and level limit for the Rainbow River. This sounds good but, in reality, it is not. By the SWFWMD staff interpretation it amounts to a permitted extraction of 5% of the river water flow from its recharge area to support new development. This means that, even though natural conditions have resulted in a flow at least 15% below its historic average, an additional 5% can be diverted from the river.

The SWFWMD analysis was based on mathematical modeling of the effect of reduced flow to create no more than a 15% reduction of flood plain fish habitat under historic conditions. The 5% permitted flow reduction is then

assumed to apply to river flow under any natural flow conditions. The arbitrary 15% allowable harm and the modeling of flood plain habitat and water extraction are imprecise and highly questionable. Even though three independent scientific reviewers and some 140 objectors at the March 28th meeting recommended no further extractions from the river the Board of Governors voted unanimously to accept the staff recommendation. RRC and the Florida Springs Council are dissatisfied with this result and will soon determine possible legal action against this decision.

Blue Run Park

RRC members have assisted Marion County in applying for a Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) grant to fund the construction of a permanent bathroom facility in the Blue Run Park. The county has committed to match the grant. As long as the legislature and governor do not cut the proposed 2017 FRDAP budget we should be able to secure the grant. Meanwhile, the vice-mayor of Dunnellon arranged for a compliance review of the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) approved management plan of the Blue Run Park by an out-of-state consultant in order to bolster his argument that the city should make money off the park. This consultant, who never visited the park, criticized the fact that Marion County has an inter-local agreement with the city to manage the park and he offered the ridiculous conclusion that a bathroom facility should not be built that would encourage visitors to spend more time at the park. RRC is not interested in engaging in the argument of who should make money from this park. We believe the emphasis should be as originally intended, drawing eco-tourists to the park for passive recreation.

River Baseline Assessment Study

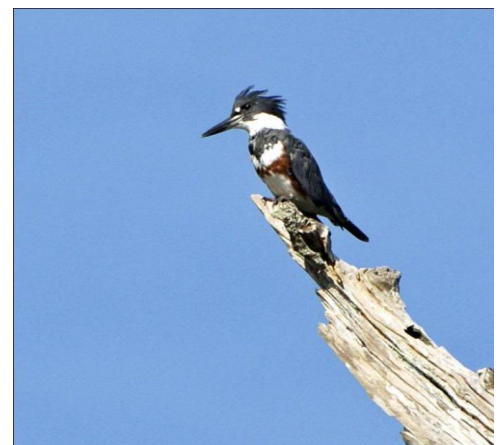
RRC members and volunteers are participating in the Florida Springs Institute (FSI) Springs Watch Program that will survey a number of parameters to determine the condition of the Rainbow River aquatic system. FSI Project Leader Emily Taylor has gotten the project off to a good start measuring horizontal visibility to determine water clarity, specific conductance to determine age of the water, vertical light attenuation, dissolved oxygen, and temperature, as well as documenting aquatic plants and wildlife including birds and apple snail eggs. Michelle and Ray Blasingame have graciously offered their boat and dock to support the project.



Emily Taylor and Martha Henwood performing water testing

State Legislation

It is that apprehensive time of the year when our Legislature is in session. Good bills and bad bills having an effect on the Rainbow River have been proposed. Senator Farmer (SB 1700) offers improvements to last year's industry-backed SB 552 water bill. Farmer's bill offers better protections to Florida's waters, including Outstanding Springs, and ensures that our tax money is being spent to benefit the environment. Our own Senator Bradley (SB 234) and Representative Stone (HB 551) offer bills which would direct \$65 million of the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (2014 Amendment 1 funds) to support water restoration projects in the St. Johns River Water Management District but nothing in the vicinity of the Rainbow River. The worst bills were put forth by Senator Perry (SB 996 and SB 940). SB 996 would require citizens who unsuccessfully challenge development decisions to pay the developer's legal costs. This would have had serious repercussions for RRC had we lost the challenge to the Rainbow River Ranch development. Fortunately, this bill seems to have died in committee. SB 940 requires local governments to include a private property rights element in their comprehensive plans and to weigh economic development more heavily than other development criteria.



Belted Kingfisher looking for insects