

Rainbow River Conservation, Inc. Summer Newsletter 2017

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

Rainbow River Ranch

The SWFWMD purchase of 112 acres of the Rainbow River Ranch is now complete. This land abuts about ½ mile of the river on its north and SW 190th Avenue on its east. The six docks which were illegally installed over seven years ago have been removed. SWFWMD anticipates deriving a plan for management of this land by the Rainbow Springs State Park. Gerald Dodd has retained 11 acres abutting the river and 75 acres upland abutting CR 484. James Gissy now owns 57 acres on the west end of the Rainbow River Ranch.

River Activity

Summer is here and boundless activity is occurring on the Rainbow River. All access points are crowded with recreationists, especially on weekends and holidays. Tubers come from all over and create congestion on the river and at KP Hole Park and Blue Run Park. This leads to diversion of boats into shallow areas where they tear up the native vegetation of the river, thus destroying the food sources and habitat of the fish life, upsetting the ecological balance of river life. In spite of RRC's best efforts to advocate for a river management plan, no agency has stepped forward to take control of this matter.

RRC Events

RRC once again participated in Dunnellon Boomtown celebration April 22nd with its education booth. RRC also held its annual River Cleanup event May 20th with approximately 150 participants. Volunteers, including the Sheriff's Dive Team, in kayaks, canoes, paddle boards, pontoon boats, and skiffs scoured the river from the headwaters to the Withlacoochee convergence and found such items as a lead acid car battery, car tires, and pieces of lumber with protruding nails as well as the usual collection of disposable containers. A picnic followed and all had an enjoyable and rewarding day.



Recent Water District purchase of Conservation Lands



Some of the over 150 participants of the 2017 Rainbow River Cleanup in May next to the trailer where river debris was prepared for disposal.

River Impairment

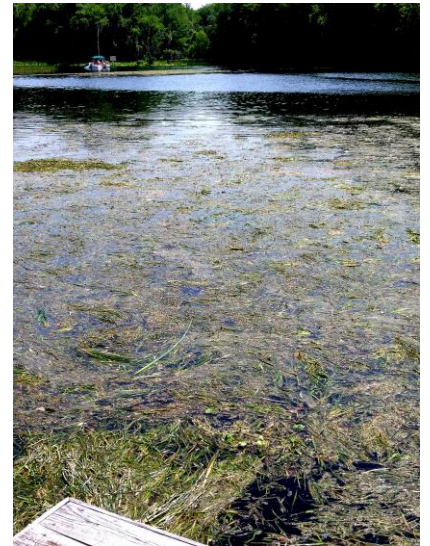
People enjoy the Rainbow River. It has been noted for its natural attractions. But, for those who have watched it and studied it over the last several years, it is apparent that it is losing its special attributes. It has been suffering from increased pollution, loss of flow and level, increased turbidity, decreased clarity, loss of its natural ecology, and growth of toxic algae. The river was classified as an impaired water body in 2010 by the FDEP because of elevated levels of nitrates causing the growth of algae. A Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) was developed to define projects within the 700 square mile spring shed to reduce nitrates by 82%. This would require serious reductions of fertilizer and advanced treatment of waste water in the spring shed. Unfortunately, since the BMAP was put into place two years ago nitrate levels have continued to rise.

Minimum Flows and Levels

One of the adverse effects on the quality of the river water is the reduction of its flow. This occurs due to long term lack of rainfall to replenish the aquifer and the pumping of water from the spring shed. Reduced flow leads to increased nitrate residence time in the river and further germination of invasive algae. In our Spring Newsletter we reported that the SWFWMD board of directors had voted to adopt a 5% allowable pumping reduction to support new development. RRC and many individuals objected to this allowance and the fact that it was an invalid application of the MFL statute. As a consequence SWFWMD withdrew their proposed MFL rule. However, a month later they proposed a revised rule which placed no limit on spring shed withdrawals and set a minimum flow at 95% of the historic average from 1965 to 2015.

SWFWMD's interpretation of the 95% minimum flow, however, is that each succeeding year's flow is added to the historic flow to determine a new long term average to compare that to the 95% of the 50 year historic average. This means that the flow over succeeding years could be very low, whether due to dry weather or spring shed pumping, before the long term average would fall to 95% of the chosen 50 year average. For instance, the average flow over the five year period from 2015 to 2020 could be as low as 45% of the 50 year historic average before the resulting 55 year average would fall to the minimum flow. Needless to say, this arbitrary (non-scientific) definition of the minimum flow is ludicrous.

Someone must challenge this kind of rule-making by SWFWMD and other WMDs. RRC has committed to challenge the Rainbow MFL by petitioning an Administrative Law Judge for a hearing on the invalidity of application of the MFL statute. This will require a substantial cash outlay for legal assistance and the testimony of experts. **We are asking that concerned citizens dig deep to make contributions to RRC, P.O. Box 729, Dunnellon, FL 34430 to help us with this challenge.**



Floating vegetation collects at the Rainbow River convergence due to low water levels and excess recreational use on summer weekends.



Rock in Rainbow River is normally underwater but with flow and water levels down the rock is exposed by more than 18 inches