

Rainbow River Conservation, Inc.

Summer Newsletter 2019

Rainbow River Cleanup

RRC held its annual river cleanup May 18th. The weather was gorgeous and about 150 volunteers participated in the cleanup and enjoyed a picnic afterwards. Groups that participated included the Marion County Sheriff's Dive Team, Boy Scouts Troop 422 from Clearwater, Next Level Dive Club and Meadowbrook Church from Ocala. More trash was collected this year including five tires, a lawn chair, cement block anchors, and the usual bottle and cans. The most unusual item was a prosthetic leg recovered by Meagan Siegfried.



Cleanup youngest participant award

River Assessment Program

RRC SpringsWatch volunteers recently attended an updated training meeting at the Florida Springs Institute where they were introduced to new on-line presentations of SpringsWatch data. One of these is the "Dashboard" which presents water quality data from all of the monitored springs while another is the "Fish Field Guide" that features videos of fish with field marks and comparisons of each species. Monitoring equipment was checked, batteries replaced, and the Rainbow SpringsWatch team is prepared for another season of data gathering.



Bill Vibbert, Gretchen and Brooks Martin attend training

Give Springs a Break (GSAB) Event

The Florida Springs Institute held its 6th annual GSAB event at the Rainbow River last month. This event is aimed at educating college students and young professionals about Florida springs. Over 50 participants camped at Gissy Springs for two nights and listened to lectures over three days about such topics as springs ecology, hydrogeology, and springs management. The group combined these serious discussions with some fun such as lessons in stand-up paddleboard yoga and a paddle down the river for dinner at Swampy's. The event was sponsored by the First Magnitude Brewing Company.



GSAB event training

River Safety

Some 200,000 recreationists ply the Rainbow River each year. Unfortunately, this year two individuals drowned, one due to a medical problem which resulted in him tipping over his kayak and the other due to exhaustion leading to him being carried on his tube into shoreline vegetation where he fell into the water and submerged. As a result the Dunnellon City Council appointed an ad hoc River Safety Committee to determine ways in which recreation on the river could be made safer and some results were presented by the committee at a June 19th city meeting. Two suggestions which seemed to have merit were to number docks along the river and record GPS coordinates to aid rescue personnel and to require recreationists to view a safety film at public entry points before entering the river. RRC has suggested these measures in the past and does endorse these now.

Rainbow River Ranch (RRR)

Last year we discussed the fact that Minnesota developer Gerald Dodd had presented a proposal to the City of Dunnellon to upgrade his land use of 80 acres from Agricultural to Medium Density Residential in order to build 240 homes. Recently, the City Planning Commission unanimously recommended against that land use change and the City Council upheld their recommendation. That led to the purchase of Dodd's remaining parcels by investor Jim Gissy who had already purchased 57 acres on the west end of the RRR property. In the May 23rd issue of the Riverland News Gissy discussed his vision of turning his RRR holdings into a large "eco-friendly" resort making use of the Rainbow River as a center-piece of activity. RRC is concerned that recreational use of the river is now above capacity and any increase would damage its natural systems.



Rainbow River Minimum Flow Rule

In our Spring Newsletter we discussed the fact that SWFWMD established a Minimum Flow Rule for the Rainbow River that allows a 5% reduction of the flow to satisfy large scale water use permits. We pointed out that this rule is flawed because the District's hydrologic flow model substantially underestimates the amount of water being pumped from the spring shed. In their analysis the District also only considered one of ten prescribed environmental resource values and completely ignored the rapid algae growth in the river.

RRC made many attempts to discuss these rule shortfalls with the District but they rebuffed all of our efforts. Therefore, on May 14th we filed a petition with the State Division of Hearings to declare the Rule an invalid exercise of delegated legislative authority. Starting June 10th we had a 3-day hearing before a DOAH judge. Our case consisted of testimony elicited by our single attorney from four petitioners and three experts. The District's defense was presented by four in-house attorneys and three staff members.

It was disappointing to see that the District's attorneys were not the least bit interested in solving a serious ecological problem but rather were determined to win a legal challenge at any cost. We feel that our team did a good job of presenting our case and we hope that the judge was well apprised of our facts. We will not know the judge's decision until the latter part of August.



Hearing Room for Rainbow River MFL hearing

RRC Funding

The fight to save the Rainbow River is an expensive proposition. The Minimum Flow Rule challenge cost us approximately \$40,000. We have yet to pay for our participation in the multi-springs Basin Management Action Plan challenges brought by several cooperating environmental organizations. That challenge hearing is scheduled for September and is necessary because of the inadequacy of FDEP projects to reduce nitrate pollution to Florida springs. We ask that RRC members and others who may understand and appreciate our efforts to save our springs to make donations to RRC by check mailed to the address below or to donate on-line at www.floridaspringscouncil.org/donate and check the Rainbow River Conservation box to earmark your donation. You may also look us up at www.networkforgood.org/donate or one of their partners such as Facebook or GreatNonprofits at Rainbow River Conservation, Inc.