

Rainbow River Conservation, Inc.

Winter Newsletter 2020

Annual Members Meeting

RRC held its annual meeting November 16th at the Rainbow Rivers Club. Approximately 90 attendees were first entertained by Herb Reichelt, Mike Rausch, and Gordon and Connie Hart with some good old time country music highlighting the Rainbow River. Burt Eno, Mary Ann Ermatinger, Herb Reichelt and Thor Siegfried were re-elected to the Board of Directors. President Burt Eno, Vice-President Jerry Rogers, Secretary Louise Kenny and Treasurer Gretchen Martin were re-elected to their offices. Next RRC meeting will be January 20th.

Power point presentations of 2019 RRC activities were provided. Gordon Hart featured the 4th graders education program, Jerry Rogers reviewed the wood duck box program and the annual river cleanup, Paul Marraffino discussed new parks and trails initiatives, and Bill Vibbert described the monthly Rainbow River assessment and fish survey programs.

The keynote speaker was Ryan Smart, Executive Director of the Florida Springs Council. He discussed the inadequacy of proposed Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) to meet the requirements of the Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act to reduce nitrates in our springs and rivers.



Ryan Smart describes BMAP shortcomings

Fourth Graders Education Program

The sixth annual 4th graders environmental education program was held at Rainbow Springs State Park November 12th to 14th. RRC and FORS members administered the program under the leadership of Jon Brainard and Nathan Whitt to 120 students. Not only do the students get to do hands-on experiments but they participate in pre and post tests administered by their teachers before and after their trip to the park.

Wood Duck Box Numbering

We reported in our Fall Newsletter that RRC had received a small grant from Duke Energy to install numbers on wood duck boxes along the Rainbow River to assist EMT responses to emergencies occurring on the river. Paul Marraffino led this effort and you will now see numbers attached to the boxes. A table of sign numbers with latitude and longitude and an aerial map have been delivered to the Dunnellon Police Department and Marion County Fire Rescue.



Bill Vibbert & Brooks Martin install box number

In early December a small RRC work crew headed by Jerry Rogers and assisted by Aquatic Preserve Manager Jeff Sowards refurbished the duck boxes. Jerry reported nearly 100% duckling productivity again last year. An

added advantage of the duck box numbering is to remind the ducks which box is theirs when they return next year.



Ongoing Litigation

Last June we participated in an administrative hearing pertaining to our challenge of the flawed Rainbow River minimum flow rule proposed by SWFWMD. In September RRC and SWFWMD each provided the judge with their proposed recommended orders. We have yet to hear the judge's decision.

We have previously reported that RRC joined several other environmental organizations last year in challenging inadequate BMAPs proposed by the FDEP for a number of springs and rivers. In particular, the required nitrate reduction of the Rainbow River is 82% and the proposed actions in the Rainbow BMAP can only provide a small fraction of this reduction. The administrative hearing pertaining to this challenge took place in November and the respective proposed recommended orders are now being prepared for submission to the judge.

In 2014 Florida Constitution Amendment 1 was passed by a 75% plurality. It was intended to set aside 1/3 of real estate doc stamp taxes to fund state purchase of conservation lands. The FDEP has instead diverted the money to support maintenance of existing state lands and various other non-related programs. Florida Defenders of the Environment has led a lawsuit to redirect the money to its intended purpose but was recently rebuffed by an appellate court ruling. Whether or not this dispute will reach the Florida Supreme Court remains to be seen.

Nine Island Cove

The Nine Island Cove property consists of 49 acres on the west side of Dunnellon. RRC and the Dunnellon City Council have discussed this property in recent times and have recognized it as environmentally sensitive and unsuitable for development. Paul Marraffino worked with the city to some extent and determined that its value as a park would be enhanced if it could be added to the Florida Forever "A List" as a boundary extension to the Rainbow River Corridor Project. He wrote a Florida Forever proposal and requested the city to endorse it as a no-cost proposal. The City Council needed additional time to evaluate budget impact. RRC will work with Dunnellon to resolve questions and resubmit the application in 2020. We feel that the subject property could be obtained through grants.



View of Nine Island Cove area

Pending Legislation

Last year Senator Debbie Mayfield proposed SB 1758 (Clean Waterways Act) which was meant to strengthen the Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act and reduce nitrates in our waterways. It addressed several pollutant sources including agriculture. It didn't get far before the Ag lobby objected and any restrictions on Ag practices were struck from the bill. The whole bill then died in the Appropriations Committee. This year Senator Mayfield is trying again in SB 712 but, this time, she is not even trying to advance any restrictions on agricultural practices. We suggest that you go to the Florida Senate website, scroll to her name, and send her an email stating your opinion on her bill.

Senator Rob Bradley is proposing SB 386 which moves the lower Withlacoochee River from SWFWMD jurisdiction to the Suwanee River WMD jurisdiction. This is for political purposes and flies in the face of the natural hydrologic boundaries. Such segregation of the Withlacoochee River is sure to be detrimental to projects which must address the whole of the Withlacoochee River and its tributaries (like the Rainbow). We suggest that you go to Senator Bradley's name on the Florida Senate site and email him your opinion on this bill.