

Homosassa River Alliance

DRAFT: July 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:07 pm.

Opening Remarks: Frank thanked the many new members that have joined the Alliance and noted several members were not in attendance because they evacuated for Hurricane Elsa and had not yet returned. Special guests Detective Jeff Doctor and Captain John Novy of the Citrus County Sheriff's office were introduced.

Financial Report: Beginning balance was \$14,300 and ending balance was \$17,338.

Prior Meeting Minutes: A motion was made and seconded to forgo reading of the minutes.

Fund Raising: New scallop shell signs are available for purchase at a cost of \$75 each. Membership decals are also available for purchase from Rosey and they look great on cars and golf carts.

County Government Update: Randy Oliver, County Administrator, indicated the County Commissioners will be sending a letter to the U.S. Coast Guard to address safety issues at Hell's Gate.

The county attorney is working on an enforceable noise ordinance. She anticipates having it ready by fall.

On June 22, 2021, the County Commission unanimously endorsed making the Homosassa River a slow/idle speed zone from marker 2 to marker 7 including in front of Manatee Marine. The Citrus Chronicle subsequently conducted an online public poll resulting in 1,069 in favor of the reduced speed, 197 against, and 51 in favor of going faster. Members are encouraged to send letters and emails to FWC to support the action of the County Commission and endorse the reduced speed.

State Government Update: Governor DeSantis has proposed an ordinance to address anchoring in Florida Springs.

Crystal River: Three Sisters is dealing with environmental damage due to over-crowding. They have implemented rules to restrict the types of anchors that may be used and to prohibit walking on sea grass, tying boats to trees, littering, kicking up silt, disposable items, and alcohol. Federal wildlife service officers will be patrolling to enforce the rules and if they are not effective, they will then consider imposing limits on the number of visitors.

Septic to Sewer Project Update: The Spring Cove area has been moved from the bottom of the county's project list to the top due to community effort. The legislature allocated \$3.9 million for the project which is expected to be available in September. Date to start is TBD based on engineering project plan and the bid process.

Homosassa River Restoration Project: The clean-up in front of the wildlife park observation deck is complete. They are moving to Mitton Cove then the blue water canal. That will complete phase one of the project and they are hoping to finish it before manatee season.

River Haven: A issue was raised regarding the low bridge to River Haven community as a hazard for rental boats and visitors unfamiliar with the area. The community would like to put up warning signs to alert boaters of a low bridge ahead. The community may reach out to Mark Edwards, Aquatic Services with Citrus County to bring the matter to his attention.

Guest Speakers: Captain Novy and Detective Doctor acknowledged increased boaters on the Homosassa River especially in the blue water area. Staffing for the sheriff's department has been stable for the past 12 years and there are only 3 officers in marine services to cover Chassahowitzka, Homosassa, Crystal River, and Inverness. The sheriff will be requesting more resources in his budget proposal along with training for field sobriety testing.

Extra resources were made available for Memorial Day weekend resulting in 191 tickets and warnings. The sheriff's office has some lasers assigned to traffic, but they were utilized for a limited time on the river last year resulting in 10

warnings or citations. Call the sheriff's office at 352-726-1121 to report issues on the river so the data can be tracked. It will help support the sheriff's budget request for additional resources.

Crystal River passed a 'Quiet Zone' ordinance and the city purchased a \$2,000 decibel meter. Training was required for officers to use it. No anchor zones are also being pushed in the city and if FWC adopts it, then the sheriff's office can enforce it.

The sheriff's office is fostering better relationships with other agencies. Captain Novy is working in closer collaboration with the FWC and the Coast Guard. The sheriff also wrote a letter to Governor DeSantis regarding safety issues at Hell's Gate.

Future Meetings: The next meeting of the Homosassa River Alliance will be on 8/12/21 at 7 pm. FWC will provide our guest speaker at that meeting and we will present them with a new radar gun courtesy of a donation by member Brent Strange.

Commissioner Ron Kitchen is planned to speak at our October meeting.

Meeting minutes by Alecia Runyon.