



Vol. 22, No. 1

Spring, 2019

<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

Message From the President

What is meant by the word Spring?

- A. The season after Winter and before Summer in which new vegetation begins to appear, and birds begin to build nests along the banks of the Homosassa River and,
- B. To move or jump suddenly upward or forward.

Both of these definitions have a special meaning for members of the Homosassa River Alliance.

During the Spring of the year as our members travel from the headwaters of our river to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico, they are filled with wonder and astonishment at the beauty and qualities of the river – its waters, wildlife, waterfowl and fisheries. It is no wonder that it has been said, “we must protect our river not only for ourselves, but for our children, grandchildren and those yet unborn”. The scenes along the river never fail to renew our efforts to protect and improve on what nature has provided for all to enjoy.

The River Alliance is springing forward at this time. Our membership continues to grow slowly but steadily. The formation of focus areas and teams within the Alliance has renewed efforts to enhance the mission of the Alliance through Education, Outreach, Membership, Fundraising, Law Enforcement, Water Quality, Spring Flow and Scallop Shell Disposal.

Our new canopy and banner was used at our booth when we participated in the Homosassa Seafood Festival this past November and in March at the Old Homosassa Shrimpapalooza. Newly designed T-shirts were a hit with everyone attending these events.

Speakers have made presentations at our meetings which included upcoming sewer projects for Old Homosassa. County commissioner, Ron Kitchen, brought us up to date on the growth and progress of the county. Look for articles in this newsletter giving more information about these events.

I hope to see present and new members at our future meetings. The Alliance will continue to spring forward with your help, making a difference by continuing to be **The Voice of The River.**

*Frank Kapocsi, President
Save the Homosassa River Alliance*

SPOTTED SEA TROUT

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) recently posted a regulation change on its website which states:

Starting Feb. 22-May 10, recreational anglers will no longer be able to harvest spotted/speckled seatrout over 20 inches total length when fishing in state or federal waters from the Pasco-Hernando county line south to Gordon Pass in Collier County. This is a proactive change to conserve spotted seatrout impacted by the prolonged red tide in southwest Florida. While these species need additional time to recover, the red tide that was impacting southwest Florida has subsided.

It is important to note that commercial fishers are allowed to catch up to 150 spotted seatrout per day. Recreational fishers are allowed 5 per day. We think the spotted seatrout needs additional protection. Should this fish be considered a commercial fish? You can give your input on this at MyMarine@MyFWC.com or phone 850-487-0554.

ROD AND REEL FISHING

So where is the line in the river that cuts you off from fishing with anything other than a rod and reel? After going through many channels, it was determined that this "line" is anything East of Bird Island.

GIGGERS

Lt. Jones of the FWC notified President Kopocsi that giggers have been spotted in the Blue Waters of the Homosassa. Watch for these activities

and document this. Believe it or not, the officer said that cameras have been placed in the Blue Water vicinity and they are hooked up to their phones. They may not be able to get here or address the problem immediately but they can document it. He asked for our help in passing the word. To report an incident call 1-888-404-3922.

SCALLOP SIGNS

There should be close to 90 scallop signs on the river at the beginning of the next scallop season. Please remember to encourage others who scallop to deposit their shells in their private garbage pails or out in the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico.



**Homosassa River Alliance
P.O. Box 124
Homosassa, FL 34487
Board of Directors**

Frank Kapocsi, President
Steve Minguay, Vice President
Iris Rose, Secretary
Rosey Rendueles, Treasurer

Gordon Colvin Terry Green
Jake Jacobs Patricia Kapocsi
Brad Rimbey

Contacts:
Board Issues: Frank Kapocsi,
fnpkap@aol.com

Newsletter: Iris Rose 628-7481
IBROSEFLA@tampabay.rr.com



**MARK YOUR
CALENDARS!**

ANNUAL PICNIC

**Where: Bluebird Springs
When: Thursday, April 11,
2019
Time: 4:00 p.m.**

**Please join us and enjoy an
afternoon of friendship and
fun. Bring a dish to share.
Drinks will be provided.**

New officers will be installed.



DIVER DOWN FLAGS

The River Alliance will be purchasing 25 Diver Down Flags for the upcoming scallop season. Bob Kane, owner of the Homosassa Ace Hardware, is donating another 25. We are waiting to hear if Captain Schuster of the FWC can get approval from Tallahassee to accept these flags. If so, we will present

them to him at one of our meetings so he can distribute them, along with our No Dumping Scallop Shells Brochures at the boat ramp this coming scalloping season. Thank you Bob Kane!!

**SEWER SYSTEM COMING TO
THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE
RIVER**

Mr. Ken Cheek, Director of Water Resources, Citrus County, was the speaker at the River Alliance December meeting. He emphasized the need for sewer project. The purpose of the project is to take septic systems and package plants off-line and collect the waste and convey it to the County plant in Lecanto. This is necessary to reduce nitrogen input to the river. Reducing the nitrogen will help reduce the growth of Lyngbya and other nuisance algae. There is a 10 year plan for installing sewers. It is:

- Garcia Point –(bids in for this area)
- Downtown West
- Downtown East
- Downtown North
- Homosassa Park
- Rooks (Mason Creek Road)
- Homosassa Retreat
- Mason Creek, Cedars
- Homosassa Phase 5 (The Blue Water)
(Blue Water Forest/Springcove Dr.

Realistically, Mr. Cheek said that 10 years is very optimistic at the rate they are getting money from the State. Total estimated cost is 50 million dollars. We need state funds to cover costs of this magnitude.

There was a lot of concern about the Blue Water being the final phase. Those present felt that the homes closest

to the spring should be at the top of the list. In answer to this, Mr. Cheek brought reference to a meeting held a few years ago. At this meeting, residents from the Blue Water area were opposed to what they thought was going to be an exorbitant cost of hooking up to sewers. These citizens mentioned that there was talk “out there” that the state had money available for springs projects and was going to provide the funds. They were adamant about not hooking up due to this information which turned out to be incorrect. Thus, the Blue Water phase was moved by the BOCC to the end of the list as a result of that meeting. Mr. Cheek said that the first 3 projects are “set in stone” and cannot be changed. He suggested that the residents in the Blue Water area approach the BOCC and express their concerns.

ENTER RON KITCHEN

County Commissioner Ron Kitchen was our guest speaker at the February meeting and was bombarded with questions about – you guessed it – the Blue Water being in last place on the 10 year plan. He verified that the first three projects cannot change. However, he suggested that residents approach the BOCC – in large numbers - to express this concern. Resident input is crucial. The county is continuously working and seeking funds for projects. Right now there are two members of government – Senator Simpson and Representative Massullo – who are listening and working to improve the water situation. He suggested that they be emailed (see p. 6 for their email addresses). They can help in the county’s effort in its grant fund requests. If additional funds are awarded, perhaps they could be used to

complete projects side by side. All it takes is money.

So, write to your senator and representative, go to BOCC meetings – **in large groups** – and tell them how you feel about getting sewers in the Blue Water area. Let them know how strongly you feel about getting the Blue Water off septic to help clean up our beautiful river. The Homosassa River Restoration Group is working hard to get funding to clean up the Blue Water and we know septic systems are part of the problem.



BOAT RAMP FEES

The Board of County Commissioners voted to require that a fee will be charged when anyone uses a public boat ramp in Citrus County waters. The fees were set at \$10/day or \$50 annually. Residents and visitors alike will have to pay. It will include every county owned ramp. If a vehicle occupies a parking space, that vehicle will need a pass. The details remain a work in progress; the county has yet to work out the final logistics. They are not yet sure how monies will be collected – perhaps kiosks – and how it will be enforced. They will work their way into the final result.

Stay tuned....

**HOMOSASSA RIVER ALLIANCE AT
THE COUNTY SCIENCE FAIR**

Phyllis Colvin

The Homosassa River Alliance participated in judging at the 2019 Citrus Regional Science and Engineering Fair on January 29. More than 1,900 students completed projects and the top 250 projects were chosen for the final judging. Gordon Colvin, Dr. Jane Perrin and Karen Johnstone - members of the River Alliance - participated in the judging. In particular, they were searching for projects relevant to our mission statement which is to restore and protect our water systems.

There were two winners at the Senior level: Sierra Creasy, a student at the Academy of Environmental Science, won for her project titled “Mighty Mangroves.” Noor Esoo, of Lecanto High School, also triumphed with her work on “Power Plant of Biodiversity.” At the Middle School level, Austin Edwards of Crystal River Middle School wowed the judges with his project, “Declining Discharge Dilemma.” Not to be outdone, Thomas William Krug of Inverness Elementary School showed excellence with his project on “The Effect of Oil Spills on Aquatic Plants.”

Gordon Colvin, a member of our Board of Directors, represented our organization at the District Assembly Presentation at Lecanto High School on the evening of January 31; which was attended by hundreds of community residents, parents and officials. Just before announcing our winners on stage, Gordon spoke briefly to the audience about our Alliance; highlighting the Alliance’s mission and goals to increase community awareness about our group.

The four winners will be featured guests at the Thursday, March 14 meeting of the River Alliance, in a ceremony that will allow attending Alliance members to view their projects and congratulate these future stewards of our environment. Our organization plans to continue this tradition of Science Fair participation in the future.



Gordon Colvin and Dr. Jane Perrin interview students about their projects

**PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS
ANNOUNCES THE LAUNCH OF NEW
EFFORTS TO PROTECT, RESTORE
OYSTER AND SEAGRASS HABITATS**

On March 6th, the Pew Charitable Trusts announced a new initiative for the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The announcement stated, “... we are excited to join partners in a new body of work focused on protecting and restoring valuable and vulnerable oyster and seagrass habitats at the edges of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico.” This exciting new program may present important opportunities to improve the long-term health of our Nature Coast estuaries and near-shore Gulf ecosystem. We very much look forward to hearing more about the project and pursuing partnership opportunities with Pew. The full text of the announcement is at: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2019/03/05/pew->

[launches-efforts-to-protect-restore-oyster-and-seagrass-habitats.](#)

Check it out - very interesting info

HOMOSASSA RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT(HRRP)

Just a few words on where the restoration project stands at this point. Everything tends to move at a slow rate in the political world and that can be very frustrating to many of us. Although we have come a long way from our November 2016 beginning, and have yet to put divers in the water, progress is being made. HRRP has received conceptual approval for the first 25 acres of river and canals and only awaits a decision on the worksite to receive final approval. The initial funding slated for last summer is still delayed but there is hope for positive news very soon and a request for additional funding for the 2019-2020 budget year has already been submitted.

A couple of questions that are continually asked is why is HRRP cleaning and replanting before removing the nitrates from the water and will the restoration succeed if we do not. As for the first question the simple response is that the cleaning (vacuuming) is done to remove years of accumulated muck in order to find a good stable base to plant in. Secondly, even if all of the septic systems within the watershed were converted to sewer tomorrow and all home owners immediately cut their use of fertilizer, there is a very good possibility of high levels of nitrates coming out of our springs for years if not decades. And that's if we magically and instantly removed all of the sources of nitrates entering the groundwater.

Homosassa & Chassahowitzka MFLs Revisited

Removing the nitrates is vital and MUST be addressed for the long-term health of our springs; high levels of nitrates will be a concern for years to come. As far as the second question, Save Crystal River has proven that if installed correctly and then given a chance to become established, grasses will not only thrive but fight new growth of Lyngbya. Initial plant beds are now spreading throughout Kings Bay naturally and the grass beds continue to expand.

The degradation of our Springs did not occur overnight. Restoration is complicated and will take a multifaceted approach. It is imperative that we begin all efforts as soon as possible. Our current political leadership has stated that environmental improvements are a priority but it is up to all of us to make sure that substantive changes are actually implemented. Let them know how you feel.

Email your State Senator and Representative:
Sen. Wilton Simpson at simpson.wilton.web@flsenate.gov
Rep. Ralph Massullo at Ralph.Massullo@myfloridahouse.gov
Steve Minguy, President
Homosassa River Restoration Project Inc

NOTICE:

Doug Leeper from Southwest Florida Water Management will be our guest speaker at the May 9th River Alliance Meeting. Topic will be water withdrawals (MFLs) from our rivers. Time: 7 p.m. at the Old Homosassa Civic Club.

Brad W. Rimbey

Florida law (373.042) requires Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to set Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) for all water bodies within the District. MFLs are intended to prevent “significant harm” to ecosystems via human related (anthropogenic) water uses. SWFWMD has adopted a policy which defines “significant harm” as any anthropogenic flow or water level reduction which causes a 15% loss of the affected ecosystem. The unilateral application of 15% harm as “significant harm” has repeatedly been questioned by SWFWMD's peer review panels.

Both Homosassa and Chassahowitzka were designated as Outstanding Florida Waters in 1993. Additionally, both of these coastal rivers were designated as Outstanding Florida Springs in 2016. These designations were intended to protect these waters from permanent degradation via anthropogenic activities. SWFWMD's current proposed MFLs continue to ignore these protective designations as they have opined a 15% degradation of these supposedly protected waters as acceptable.

In 2013, SWFWMD's Governing Board (GB) adopted MFLs which would allow only a 3% natural flow reduction for the Homosassa and Chassahowitzka Rivers. The Homosassa MFL was set at 3% based on predicted salinity changes in the Homosassa over 20 years. The Chassahowitzka MFL was based on maintaining a manatee thermal refuge at the eastern boundary of the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge. For Chassahowitzka, SWFWMD's GB rejected staff's MFL recommended 9% natural flow reduction and adopted a 3% flow reduction to match Homosassa's MFL. SWFWMD 's GB applied common sense over SWFWMD staff's “science based“ recommended MFLs.

In 2013, SWFWMD staff opined that approximately 1% of the natural flow had been taken from both the Homosassa and Chassahowitzka due to anthropogenic water extractions in these springs-sheds. SWFWMD's GB instructed staff to gather additional data to support their flow reduction recommendations within six years. Little has been done in that regard.

Six years have now passed and SWFWMD has released its draft peer review MFL reports. In the 2019 MFL peer review draft reports for Homosassa and Chassahowitzka, SWFWMD now opines that 1.9% of the natural flow has been taken from Homosassa and 1.4 % has been taken from Chassahowitzka. SWFWMD further predicts that only 3% of Homosassa's natural flow will be taken by 2035 and 2% will be taken from Chassahowitzka by 2035. Therefore, they conclude that no limit to future groundwater withdrawals from these spring-sheds is required for the next two decades.

The latest Homosassa and Chassahowitzka MFLs are focused on snook thermal refuge habitat. These water bodies are at northern range of snook habitat and snook could not exist here if not for the winter thermal refuge of our springs. If snook habitat is so important, how does it make sense to reduce spring flow via these MFLs? Are snook an endangered/threatened species like manatees?

As groundwater pumping and sea level rise continues to increase, the salinity of our spring-fed coastal rivers increases. Sea level rise is a worldwide occurrence and there is little we can do locally to avert this. However, we can and should do something to reduce groundwater pumping that adds to the destruction of our coastal springs.

SWFWMD's peer review panel is currently discussing the draft reports. These drafts can be found on SWFWMD's website <https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/projects/mfl/documents-and-reports>. All SWFWMD documents on this matter are available to the public as required by Florida public records law. You can also follow the peer review conversation at <https://swfwmd.discussion.community/?forum=708493> .