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<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

Message From the President

I would like to take this opportunity to give a special shout out and thank you to all of our members. We appreciate members who:

- live out of state and cannot attend our meetings,
- can only attend our meetings on rare occasions,
- attend our meetings some of the time,
- attend every meeting,
- follow the Alliance on our Facebook page or website.

No matter which category you are in, I ASSURE YOU that your membership is extremely important to the future path and success of the Alliance. Your membership dues, donations and efforts have once again allowed the Alliance to pursue our goals of protecting the future health of the river and its fragile environment.

Our Educational Committee now provides financial scholarships to High School, Middle School and Elementary School students who excel in environmental studies and projects. Along with scholarships, the Alliance supported the Homosassa Fishing Guides Association, Hook, Book and Thinker seminars which focuses on grade school students, teaching them about the river environment and providing them with a hands-on fishing experience.

Our efforts to educate recreational scallopers on the proper way to dispose of their empty scallop shells continues to be one of our most successful and impactful projects. Each year we see the reward of this effort with fewer and fewer shells being dumped into our outstanding waterways.

As in the past, we will continue to explore ways to support our local Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission officials. Our meetings now feature guest speakers with expertise in all areas affecting our river and surrounding waters such as spring flows, sea grass beds, scallop life cycles and harvest, local fisheries, law enforcement and government actions.

We are working with and supporting the Pew Charities Trusts' efforts to create a new aquatic preserve, spanning the coast of Citrus, Hernando and Pasco Counties. This preserve will provide additional protection to one of the finest and most lush seagrass beds in the nation (see p. 3). I am also excited about the progress of the Homosassa River Restoration Project which will soon begin its efforts to clean the bottom of our river and

then re-establish submerged aquatic grass beds which will restore oxygen into the waters of the river, attracting river life of all kinds (see p. 7).

The face of our riverfront continues to evolve, with improvements to the current boat ramp at MacRae's and the renovation and addition of a Florida Cracker Restaurant at the site of Riverside Resort. Growth and development will continue to have an impact on our river. It is the goal of the Alliance that this growth be managed for the benefit of our outstanding waterway.

*Frank Kapocsi, President
Save the Homosassa River Alliance*

CATCHING UP ON RIVER ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES

Gordon Colvin

MINIMUM FLOWS AND LEVELS

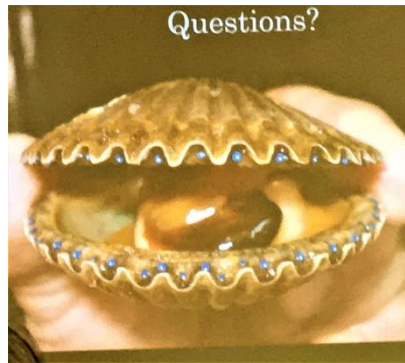
At our November meeting, President Frank Kapocsi thanked the many members who attended the Southwest Florida Water Management District meeting in Spring Hill to express our concerns to Board Members regarding the proposed changes in the water flow rates from the waters feeding our springs. All of the many public speakers (except one) were against the change; but at the end, the Board voted unanimously to allow the decrease in water flow. There was lively discussion about possible future actions. A letter to our Governor was among the approved responses.

HOMOSASSA SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

Thanks to all community members who stopped by to say hello at the River Alliance booth at the Homosassa Seafood Festival. There were a number of new member sign-ups, generous donations, and many attractive River Alliance t-shirts went home with our supporters. Alliance members staffed the booth on both days and were able to disseminate lots of information about the organization and its missions and projects.



Gordon Colvin and Frank Kapocsi manning the Booth at the Festival.



QUESTIONS ABOUT SCALLOPS?

The Homosassa Civic Club was rocking during our December meeting as River Alliance members and community guests packed the house to hear the much-anticipated national expert on scallops and shellfish speak about our valuable scallop resource. Dr. Ryan Gandy took center stage and presented an informative, fascinating presentation about the bay scallop. Using pictures, maps, charts and graphs, he described the life cycle of the scallop, its distribution, and his department's research into scallop abundance along the Florida West Coast and Panhandle; especially focusing on Citrus County. One of the charts illustrated how scallop abundance has fluctuated since 2000, and the many causes of scallop population fluctuation. The attendees were very impressed to hear the extent of the efforts to monitor spawning success, abundance of adult scallops, and the extent of catch via thousands of interviews at boat ramps and airplane flyovers to count boats while scalloping, and many other methods. There are 11 locations on the West Coast of Florida to count and measure scallops. He stressed the critical importance of our local seagrasses, salinity and predators on the survival of the scallops.

He drew laughter from the audience when he described the scallop as “the potato chip of the sea” because everything else in the water loves to eat them! There were many lively questions and discussion. Dr. Gandy received a commemorative award from the River Alliance's president, Frank Kapocsi and Gordon Colvin in recognition of his service to the Alliance and our community.

AQUATIC PRESERVE - SEAGRASSES

Attendees at the Homosassa River Alliance meeting in January were treated to another interesting agenda as they heard two smashing presentations. First, we heard Cameron Jaggard of the Pew Charitable Trusts Foundation, who is working on a bill to create a “Nature Coast Aquatic Preserve” in the waters off our immediate coast. This bill, sponsored by State Representative Ralph Massullo and State Senator Ben Albritton, would finally give us the status that had skipped our area when the Aquatic Preserve Act of 1975 was implemented. Mr. Jaggard gave us some valuable insights into the importance of the seagrasses to our river and its surrounding ecosystem. He spoke about the Nature Coast, especially Homosassa and Crystal River into the Big Bend, as being a “special place” because of our seagrasses, found primarily in the United States along

our shores in our tri-county area, and in South Florida Bay. The fact that these seagrasses are here in abundance and so limited elsewhere make our coast a “premier location” for scalloping. He described how these seagrasses brought about a special way of life in our community which separates us from other Florida locations such as Fort Lauderdale and the Miami area. So it is our special responsibility to take care of it to preserve our local culture and way of life. Mr. Jaggard noted how seagrass is vulnerable to boat propellers scarring the grass bottoms, which take up to a decade to recover. This is made worse by the growth in the number of boats and their operators who carelessly rip up the bottom with their anchors and props. And without the grass, as we learned last month from Dr. Gandy, the scallops and other aquatic life will not have the habitat they need to spawn and thrive. A spirited discussion session followed the presentation. Mr. Jaggard received a commemorative award from the River Alliance’s president, Frank Kaposi in recognition of his service.

SCALLOP SHELL DISPOSAL – GIRL SCOUT PROJECT



The second guest speaker was Natalia Donaldson, who won the Girl Scout Gold Award for her Scallop Awareness Project and booklet. She spoke at length about ways to discard scallop shells, and how people might be able to use them. She discussed her research and findings in detail, and the members followed up with some questions and further discussion. It was so gratifying to see a budding environmentalist in action!

CITRUS COUNTY SCIENCE FAIR, WINNERS CHOSEN FOR AWARDS

Phyllis Colvin

Gordon Colvin and Kathy Giewont represented the Alliance as they judged a wonderful variety of projects and exhibits at the Citrus County Science and Engineering Fair. The competition was held at the Citrus County Auditorium. Two high school students were selected as winners, along with an excellent middle school winner.

They have been invited to present their projects and collect their \$100 awards at the March meeting, to be held on Thursday, March 12 at 7 p.m. at the Civic Club in Old Homosassa.



Tricia Fowler, the new manager of the Homosassa Wildlife State Park was our guest speaker at the February meeting. Ms. Fowler updated us on the programs and purposes of the Park. Tricia is a Homosassa native who was educated at the University of South Florida, was a zookeeper at Lowry Park Zoo, (now Zoo Tampa) and then joined the Wildlife Park as a park ranger. She worked her way up to her new appointment as Manager of the Park. She described the park’s mission as a true refuge for native Florida wildlife, as opposed to a “zoo”. A major part of the operation is rehabilitation of wildlife and returning animals to the wild whenever possible. The Park accepts animals from many organizations like Sea World, Zoo Tampa and others who need the rehabilitation skills and space the Wildlife Park offers. They have done over 60 bear cub rescues during her time at the park and a new habitat is almost complete for the latest newbie, a rehabbed bear cub named Maximus. Very exciting! She also spoke about alligator, bird-of-prey and manatee habitat updates, including manatee cams at the fishbowl, accessibility improvements and hurricane-proofing. Tricia got a big round of applause and members felt that the Wildlife Park is in excellent hands with a bright future ahead. Our President, Frank Kaposi, presented her with an Alliance commemorative Award in recognition of her tireless efforts on behalf of our River and its wildlife.

BOOK, LINE AND THINKERS

At this same meeting, we were all treated to a demonstration from Captain Mike Baize and his brother, Juin, about an innovative program they are spearheading for the Homosassa Guides Association called “Book, Line and Thinkers,” featuring hands-on exhibits and educational field trips for local elementary students. Captain Baize, a former teacher, brings topics to life the kids and coordinates his topics to the State Test curriculum. A highlight demonstration of the thundering clouds, rain this scientific students.



of the talk was the Water cycle, complete with and magic tricks, which brings phenomenon to life for these

HOMOSASSA RIVER ALLIANCE JOINS SWFWMD ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) recently invited the Homosassa River Alliance to join its Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC). SWFWMD established this committee to provide input into the District's programs and activities, including regulatory programs, rule revisions, water conservation activities, water resource planning, water resource and supply development projects, research and other water resource management projects that relate to the environment.

Our Role in the EAC

EAC members serve as liaisons with the District, maintaining communication with members of their organizations and conveying input from the organization to the EAC. In addition, the EAC acts as an education extension of the District by helping to disseminate information and by advising and assisting the District in education programs and projects. A function of the EAC is to provide two-way communication between the District and the environmental community. The River Alliance members Gordon Colvin (EAC member) and Steve Minguy (alternate member) will represent us at the EAC meetings, which are held quarterly.

Our First Meeting

Gordon Colvin attended the first EAC meeting of 2020 on January 14. The agenda included a report on the SWFWMD Governing Board's recent workshop presented by Mandi Rice, Assistant Executive Director and Homosassa resident. The workshop report included an overview of the large and complex number of programs SWFWMD is responsible for and current priority initiative.

Overview

- Septic-to-sewer conversions – a priority for the District's northern area.
- Weeki Wachee Natural System Carrying Capacity Study, High numbers of canoeists and kayakers may be "loving the river to death". (Trampling of shoreline habitats and water quality damage).
- Study may lead to management actions designed to limit use of the river in the future.

REAL TIME SPRINGS MONITORING

Current programs are in place to monitor water flows and water quality in the Homosassa Springs and other Nature Coast springs to transmit data to SWFWMD in real time. That is so important to really ascertain how water reduction affects springs flows. There are monitoring stations on the rivers which record data for pH, depth, salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, specific conductance, turbidity and chlorophyll. The data is available to public viewing at:

<https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/projects/springs/homosassa/dashboard>.

ANNUAL PICNIC
THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2020
4:00 P.M.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR AN AFTERNOON OF FRIENDSHIP AND FUN.
BRING A DISH TO SHARE. DRINKS WILL BE PROVIDED.
NEW OFFICERS WILL BE INSTALLED.

**NOTE: THE PICNIC WILL BE HELD AT THE OLD HOMOSASSA
CIVIC CLUB.**

Homosassa River Restoration Project

At this time it appears as if restoration will begin at the beginning of April 2020. HRRP has reached agreements with two landowners which will allow us use of their properties for a work-site. We have also been in discussions with the Homosassa Wildlife Park (a corridor through park property is needed to reach the work site) and hope to have that finalized shortly. All of the paperwork with the primary contractor, Sea and Shoreline, is also complete and we are expecting final permit approval (pending work site approval) from both DEP and Army Corp any day now.

The funds that have already been granted will establish the work-site and complete restoration of the east side of Fishbowl Drive as well as areas alongside state park lands on the west side of the road. Members of the HRRP board traveled to Tallahassee this year, as we have for the past several, to lobby for enough additional funding in 2020 to complete all of the area adjacent to the park as well as the entire Blue Water Loop canal. Permitting for the next section of river and canals is scheduled to begin this year.

Homosassa River Restoration Project Inc. was formed and began the process of securing funding for the

project in November 2016. It has taken a lot of time, money, and effort to reach this point but restoration is finally about to begin. All funds from the FDEP must be spent on river restoration. HRRP, the 501c3 organization responsible for running the operation, must operate independently and although we are entirely volunteer there are still expenses which we incur. We all benefit from a clean, clear, healthy river. If you can assist us please consider donating. Homosassa River Restoration Project Inc, P.O. Box 591 Homosassa Springs, Florida 34447

Steve Minguy
President HRRP

Homosassa River Alliance
P.O. Box 124
Homosassa, FL 34487

Board of Directors

Frank Kapocsi, President
Steve Minguy, Vice President
Iris Rose, Secretary
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