



RRC continues in its efforts to protect the Rainbow River and its environment through conservation, education, advocacy and stewardship. Following is an update since our last newsletter.

Membership Renewal

Your membership in RRC is much appreciated. The greater our number, the greater our voice in advocating for the Rainbow River and our water resources in general. **If you have not already renewed your membership for 2011, please do so now.** It is only \$15 for individuals or a family and it is tax deductible.

Annual Meeting

RRC had a very enjoyable and informative annual members meeting November 13th at the Rainbow Rivers Club. The meeting started with Herb Reichelt and Jon Semmes strumming and singing songs celebrating the beauty of our natural environment while underwater Rainbow River video scenes were played on a screen. Elections were held with the result of Burt Eno, Jerry Rogers, Gretchen Martin and Jeff Selvaggio being re-elected as president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary, respectively. Pres. Eno gave an overview of RRC activities while Dr. Lee Niblock, Marion County Administrator, related several cooperative efforts between RRC and the county resulting in protection of the river and its environment.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Robert Knight, Director of the Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute and President of Wetland Solutions, Inc. His presentation was entitled "Rainbow Springs – A Springs Health Report Card" which represented results of scientific studies on Rainbow Springs and the Rainbow River. He assigned grades for several health categories ranging from C- for fish biomass to A+ for water clarity. However, he gave grades of D+ for springs recharge and F for nitrate levels. This means that Rainbow Springs and the Rainbow River are suffering from too much water extraction from its recharge basin and too much of an influx of nitrates from fertilizers and sewage. Unless these latter effects can be substantially reduced the river will die and its wildlife will disappear.

Sandra Marraffino, Florida Audubon member and author of the successful proposal to place the Rainbow River on the list of Great Florida Birding Trails, gave a very entertaining presentation entitled "Lake Rousseau – A Haven for Florida Wading Birds". On evening kayak trips on the lake during

breeding season Sandra and friends saw more than 5000 birds return to nest at dusk. They observed eight "listed" species of birds frequenting the lake, five of which nest there.



Ibis rookery on Lake Rousseau

River Vegetation

In the spring of 2010 a SWFWMD education grant helped produce a 10-minute video that exhibited the importance of the native vegetation in the Rainbow River and precautions that must be taken to preserve it. Using underwater photography the DVD shows the dependence of aquatic life on the existence of the native vegetation and the recreation precautions that need to be taken not to destroy the vegetation. To educate recreational users of the river, a *Protect Florida Springs* grant was received to acquire and donate to the Rainbow Springs State Park three 32 inch flat screen monitors to show the video at the three river entry points in the state park. The funds for this grant were gathered from a special fund accumulated through the sale of *Protect Florida Springs* automobile license plates.



Restoration Plan

Because of the high levels of nitrates entering the Rainbow River the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has classified it as an “impaired water body”. Accordingly, FDEP has issued a 3-year contract to Pandion Systems of Gainesville to develop a restoration plan for the river. The Rainbow Springs Basin Working Group, consisting of stakeholders and scientists, is proceeding to develop this plan. The Group will identify problems such as high nitrates, low recharge rates, vegetation destruction, algae formation, and others and attempt to devise restoration strategies. The RSBWG meetings are open to the public. Email pcolverson@pandionsystems.com to get on a notice list.

RRC Litigation

As explained in past newsletters RRC is involved in litigation because of the proposed settlement agreement of the Bert Harris lawsuit brought by the owner of the Rainbow River Ranch against the City of Dunnellon. We view the proposed development agreement as potentially quite harmful to the Rainbow River and its wildlife. Because the agreement is a violation of the city’s comprehensive plan and Florida Statute 163, the Florida Department of Community Affairs, RRC and 15 individuals moved to intervene in the Bert Harris lawsuit. The circuit judge has now ordered intervention. Court filings can be found under Litigation on our website at www.RainbowRiverConservation.com. Recent member contributions amounting to \$8540 have been made to our litigation fund.



Belted Kingfisher. female

Enjoy the Rainbow River but be cautious how you treat it.