

Rainbow River Conservation, Inc.

Summer Newsletter 2012

RRC continues to work diligently to protect the Rainbow River and its associated wildlife.

Annual Events

RRC participated in Boomtown Days April 21-22 with its river education booth. Rain storms cut short the display both days. The Annual River Cleanup was held May 19 with approximately 150 participants. Because of the low water conditions some boats had to launch from KP Hole but the low water exposed some old objects submerged in the river which were retrieved by some ambitious kayakers. Prizes donated by local merchants were awarded in such categories as the oldest and youngest participants, and the largest and most unusual items retrieved. As usual, everyone had a good time at the picnic in Rio Vista Park. We can thank Jerry Rogers for organizing this very successful event.

River Conditions

For the past six weeks we have been blessed with much needed rainfall. The river is up and flowing better. This is not to say that we are returning to “normal” since pumping from the recharge basin still leaves us on a long decline in river flow. We are suffering the same long term effect as Silver Springs and withdrawal requests such as the Adena Springs Ranch 13.2 mgd may eventually spell the end of our springs and rivers as we know them.

River Restoration Plan

We know that the Rainbow River has been suffering from excessive nutrient loading due to fertilizer use and sewage disposal. Under budget restrictions put in place by Gov. Scott the FDEP terminated funding for development of a Rainbow River Restoration Plan. This past legislative session Sen. Dennis Jones made a special request that \$60,000 be allocated to the continuation of the restoration plan. The Legislative Budget Committee approved the request but Tax Watch labeled it as a “turkey” and Gov. Scott vetoed it. Meanwhile, RRC submitted a proposal to the Felburn Foundation for support of the plan development and received a grant of \$15,000. In turn, RRC has contracted with Dr. Robert Knight, President of Wetland Solutions, to work on the plan.



Tracy Colson collecting tire during river cleanup

Recreation/Vegetation Study

For some time we have noted a loss of native vegetation in the river. This past year SWFWMD and FDEP have sponsored a University of Florida study to monitor recreation and collect and examine floating vegetation on the river. It remains for the UF investigators to analyze this data to scientifically determine any correlation between the recreation activities and the loss of vegetation. The results of this study should be available by September and may assist in the development of the River Restoration Plan.



Installation of river monitoring video camera

Rainbow River Ranch

In early June we received another iteration of the Bert Harris lawsuit settlement agreement between the Rainbow River Ranch developer and the City of Dunnellon. This iteration was essentially no different than previous proposals except that the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (Gov. Scott's replacement of the Department of Consumer Affairs) agreed to endorse it. The DEO did, however, invite RRC representatives to a meeting July 31st to listen to our input. As of this writing, it is not clear what we can accomplish. We do know, however, that the proposed settlement agreement as it stands promises to be harmful to the river and its wildlife.



Summer river recreation

River Magic Moments

If you get on the Rainbow River early before the crowds, there can be some magical moments. Otters will be playing, wood ducks will be squiring 7 or 8 young ducklings in the marsh grass, or a coal black common gallinule chick will be peeping to call its mother. Be quiet, listen and look as you glide slowly on the water and nature's surprises and drama will happen in front of you. Sandra Marraffino had this experience recently when she watched a double crested cormorant fight with a large gar for several minutes before consuming its morning meal. Fortunately, she had her camera in the kayak and got the pictures shown below.



Double crested cormorant eating a gar on the Rainbow River - photo Sandra Marraffino

If we keep the water pure, the vegetation healthy, and natural communities intact for the birds, fish, turtles and otters, we will continue be able to see these magical moments. Enjoy the river but treat it kindly.