



### **Difficult Times**

Unfortunately, the Coronavirus continues to haunt us. Rainbow River Conservation called off this year's annual river cleanup and we have not held a formal Board of Directors meeting since February. We have, nevertheless, dealt somewhat informally with issues which have arisen and which may have a major impact on the Rainbow River. This newsletter is meant to summarize those issues and elicit action where needed to protect our special river and its environment.

### **Minimum Flow Rule**

We discussed in our Spring newsletter that we challenged SWFWMD's setting of a minimum flow for the Rainbow River because the modeling done in their analysis misrepresents the actual pumping extraction from the rain recharge basin by a factor of ten. The model predicts that the average annual flow in the river is reduced by only about 2% due to pumping when, in fact, a long term water mass balance study performed by the Florida Springs Institute shows that the average annual flow has dropped by 20%. This argument was made in an Administrative Court hearing last year but, because the judge had no comprehension of the science of this matter, he deferred to the defendant. Thus, SWFWMD can continue handing out permits to the large water users while the Rainbow River suffers a continuing loss of flow. This matter is more fully discussed on [RainbowRiverConservation.com](http://RainbowRiverConservation.com).

### **Basin Management Action Plan**

Also in our Spring newsletter we discussed the fact that RRC had joined with several other springs protection organizations to challenge FDEP's inadequate BMAPs designed to reduce the nitrate pollution of a number of water bodies. A 7-day Administrative Court hearing was held last November with the petitioners pointing out FDEP's lack of consideration of some major nitrate contributors, lack of programs to effect nitrate reductions, over-estimating of program nitrate reductions, and lack of funding to carry out nitrate reduction programs. We are still waiting for the judge's decision in this matter. Meanwhile, in the 2020 state legislative session, SB 712 Clean Waterways Act was passed and signed by the governor. This bill addressed water pollution problems and offered programs and funding to alleviate some sources of ground water pollution such as elimination of septic tanks in favor of central sewer facilities. It did not, however, address farm practices pertaining to fertilizers and animal wastes which are the major nitrate sources polluting the Rainbow River. Meanwhile, the Rainbow River continues to suffer from algae growth and loss of fish habitat and food sources. More information pertaining to the BMAP matter can be found on [RainbowRiverConservation.com](http://RainbowRiverConservation.com).



Spirogyra Algae covering Eelgrass near headwaters

## River Traffic

Each year we have addressed the rapidly increasing traffic on the Rainbow River, especially in the form of tubing from May through September. This year the major river inlets and outlets were closed due to the Coronavirus until Memorial Day weekend. Starting May 23<sup>rd</sup> there was an onslaught of tubers each weekend being transported from multiple sites to KP Hole. There were motor vehicle traffic jams entering the state tuber run and state park, and hundreds of cars parked at the Sunoco station, along the east shoulder of US 41, and in the Winn-Dixie parking lot. Finally, on July 2<sup>nd</sup> Marion County issued a decree to stop commercial transport of tubers to KP Hole and this gave some relief to the river this past weekend. One thing that is not generally recognized by the tubers and those who transport them is the lasting damage they cause to the river flora and the fish and wildlife dependent upon this native aquatic foliage. There is an absolute need for a Rainbow River capacity study and a management plan with commensurate enforcement.



Congestion at Blue Run of Dunnellon Park take out ramp



Out of control parking on US 41 right of way was the start of river congestion on the Rainbow River with no social distancing

## Gissy/Westgate Resort Plan

Last November James Gissy, V-P of Westgate Resorts, and Geoff Goetz, also a representative of Westgate Resorts, presented a plan to the Dunnellon City Council to convert 90 acres of the Rainbow River Ranch abutting  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of the Rainbow River into an entertainment complex. The plan calls for a hotel, a lodge, an activity center, dozens of camping and glamping sites, 250 RV sites, and 20 rail car abodes as well as numerous other entertainment venues. It also calls for two new docks on the river with a long connecting boardwalk between them, and a parking lot capable of holding several hundred cars for staging transport of tubers and kayakers to upper parts of the river. All of this would require the City to approve changing land use and zoning from Agriculture to Commercial uses.

We do not see where this plan would benefit the City of Dunnellon and it would certainly exacerbate the problems of the Rainbow River. Mr. Gissy said in his November presentation that he would not proceed with this development if people did not want it, yet he had already applied to the City for his comp plan amendment more than a year before that remark. We are fearful that the City will grant his expedited request, without necessary traffic, environmental, geologic, utility, and financial impact studies, and while the public is handicapped in their objections due to the Coronavirus. Thus, we have engaged the Florida Springs Council, a consortium of 50 environmental organizations similar to RRC, to help us combat the exaggerated and misleading claims of the Gissy/Westgate proposal and to defeat this ill-conceived development. You can go to [DontRuinRainbow.org](http://DontRuinRainbow.org) for more information and suggestions as to how you can help. You may also write to the newspapers at the following addresses: [editor@riverlandnews.com](mailto:editor@riverlandnews.com), [osbletters@starbanner.com](mailto:osbletters@starbanner.com), and [letters@chronicleonline.com](mailto:letters@chronicleonline.com).