

# RIVERWATCH NEWSLETTER

Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association (CRCA)

CRCA Info-line 433-4636 (x2722)

June, 1997

Editors: John Capece & Susan Beckman



## A Close Encounter of an Otter Kind

by  
Steve Brookman

Gluupp! A sharp inhalation of breath behind me made me realize I was not alone. I was up to my knees in the cool amber water of Telegraph Creek, attempting to rid at least part of my property of the exotic, invasive, and all too persistent Brazilian pepper tree. A large disheveled leather fern separated me from whatever was in the water. Alligators don't gluupp, do they?

Peering through the shaggy fronds of the fern I was relieved to see not the grinning face of a gator but the sleek torpedo shape of a swimming otter. It was an American River Otter, *Lutra canadensis*, doing otter stuff. It would effortlessly slice through the water, then in one fluid motion slide up and around a fern on the opposite bank just a few feet away, then glide back into the water again. It repeated this slippery cycle several times. Then without a good bye or even so much as a gluupp, it was gone.

Was it playing? Hunting? With otters it's hard to tell. But observing the antics of this one had brought a smile to my face. I was happy for the opportunity to have viewed one so close and in its own environment.

Otters are watery cousins of the weasel, growing to 4 feet in length. Their adaptations to the aquatic environment include a dense layer of underfur that repels water, webbing on all four feet, a flattened tail for swimming, and flaps of skin that cover the nostril and ear openings to keep water out when they dive.

American River Otters were once widespread, ranging from Alaska to Florida. Now due to hunting,

pollution and habitat loss, they are rare or nonexistent in most of the country. While otters can be found in most of Florida's fresh water and estuarine habitats, a sighting is relegated to a special occurrence.

Jim Beaver, Biological Scientist with the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, reports that the status and health of the Florida River Otter population is unknown because of a lack of studies. There is no funding to conduct any otter surveys either, and without appropriate data, they can not be considered as a protected species. He further states that otters are very susceptible to road kill and habitat loss. These creatures put themselves in harm's way when migrating between aquatic habitats that have been separated by roadways.

Jim notes that otters can coexist with humans as long as the natural riparian shoreline is maintained, not seawalled or otherwise hardened. He has observed otters building and using "slides" on homeowner's waterfront lots.

Due to their playfulness, otters are one of the most popular creatures at zoos and aquariums. While a joy to watch, they are the nemesis of many a curator and caretaker. Their resourcefulness and intelligence, not to mention very sharp teeth and claws, make designing a habitat that is truly otter proof a formidable challenge.

Protecting their natural habitat and improving water quality will help ensure that visiting a well designed otter display won't be the only way to view one of these magnificent, joyful creatures. Observing an otter playing its trade in the wild is a sight to be treasured, and an indication that at least part of an ecosystem is functioning properly.

### Inside

The Florida Yard	pg. 2
CRCA Online	pg. 3
Riverwatch Folks-Phone Home	pg. 3
"Snookered" Cartoon	pg. 3
Caloosahatchee Regional Park	pg. 4
Historic Marker Tour Project	pg. 4
Manatee Rescue	pg. 4
Logo a go-go	pg. 5
Welcome New Members	pg. 6

# The Florida Yard

What is a Florida yard? It is a place where we try to grow green vegetation in the sand. With a little water and fertilizer a green oasis can be seen throughout our neighborhoods. These expanses of manicured lawns are now the dominant landscapes in most of our communities. This type of landscaping requires a greater awareness on the part of the homeowner even if you don't live directly on the water.

Stormwater runoff is the reason. Rain falls on yards, roads and parking lots, then washes into streams and bays, carrying pollutants like fertilizers, pesticides, soil and petroleum products. Scientists have discovered that fertilizers and pesticides from residential areas are serious threats to the health of coastal waters. When runoff contains nitrogen from fertilizers, algae in the Caloosahatchee River and our bays can become so abundant that seagrasses are smothered, oxygen is depleted and fish kills may result.

In the Sarasota Bay watershed, fertilizer runoff from residential areas is estimated to be responsible for one-third of the excess nitrogen that is polluting the bay.

Only by each of us taking responsibility for the way our yards are maintained can we improve the quality of the Caloosahatchee River and the bay. The following are tips that can be put into practice by everyone.

- \* Reduce erosion by mulching, or planting ground cover over exposed soil in heavily trafficked areas, flower beds, and shaded areas. Re-sod bare patches of lawn. Mulch keeps water from running off your lawn or garden. Water that does run off, will be cleaner.

- \* Terrace with bricks, rocks, or landscaping timbers to reduce erosion on steep slopes.

- \* Do not pile, rake, or blow leaves or grass clippings into the streets. They will wash into streams or lakes, then decay and become a source of pollution.

- \* Let gutters and drain spouts guide runoff from your roof to the lawn or garden, and not to the paved driveway or parking lot.

- \* Limit paved areas around your home. For driveways and walks, consider flagstones or pavements that allow water to soak into the ground. Or, use gravel or crushed shell.

- \* Create a pond, swale or berm to hold excess storm water, then landscape it with native plants.

- \* If you live along the waterfront, protect the natural slope of the shoreline. If a shoreline must be hardened, instead of a seawall, use rip rap (a retaining wall made with large rocks or clean concrete rubble that breaks the force of the waves). (Warning: Be sure to obtain the necessary permits or approvals from state and local governments).

- \* Regrade a damaged shoreline to its original slope and revegetate with native plants.

- \* To filter runoff, maintain a healthy fringe of native plants at the edge of your waterway. If you mow or trim the vegetation, cut as little as possible and don't place the clippings in or near the water.

- \* Remove exotic plants. These include water hyacinth, hydrilla, Australian pine, Brazilian pepper, Chinese tallow, melaleuca (pump trees), some honeysuckles, and many others. Ask for assistance from water management districts, and work with your neighbors and your county agricultural extension agent.

- \* Design docks to allow light to reach the water and penetrate to the aquatic grasses that hold the sediment and shelter aquatic animals.



For more information about making your yard environmentally friendly, call your County Extension Office and request University of Florida - IFAS Bulletin 295 "Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook" or visit the FYN homepage at [WWW.IMOK.UFL.EDU/FYN/](http://WWW.IMOK.UFL.EDU/FYN/)

# CRCA ONLINE

In the near future, the CRCA will be using the Internet to better inform and serve our members. The Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida, of which CRCA is a member organization, is providing the following services to CRCA: a micro-site that is part of the master ECOSWF web site which will allow CRCA to present basic contact information, meeting schedules, mission statement and significant projects to all interested parties on the Internet; online discussion list that will enable any member on the list to send mail to the whole group; and a master calendar of events for the six county region.

The site is partially complete and we encourage members to visit the site and sign up for the online discussion list. The web address will be [www.hawk.net/ecoswf](http://www.hawk.net/ecoswf). You can e-mail questions to [webmaster@hawk.net](mailto:webmaster@hawk.net).

## RiverWatch Folks Phone Home

### CRCA Information Line 433-4636 Ext. 2722

We have a phone information service with the "Information Network" here in Ft. Myers which will provide you with up to date details on Riverwatch and other regional river oriented activities.

We are working to become more efficient in its use and hope it will be a useful tool for members and the general public.

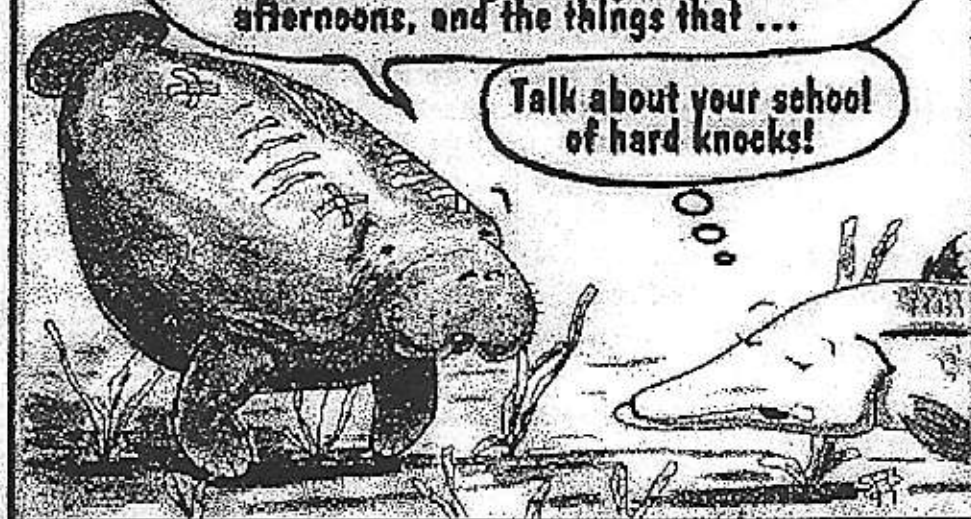
If you have any questions or suggestions regarding the phone information system, please call Erick Lindblad at 472-2329.

## SMOOKERED

by Steve Bruchman

It's not just the things that go bump in the night, it's the things that go bump in the mornings, and the things that go bump at noon, and the things that go bump in the afternoons, and the things that ...

Talk about your school of hard knocks!



## Ferry Issues Meeting, July 2

Recent news coverage of a new high speed ferry coming to downtown Ft. Myers sparked concern among some CRCA members. In order to address these concerns and explain their operation, the management of Buquebus and City representatives, have agreed to meet with CRCA. All interested members are encouraged to attend the meeting on July 2, at 6pm at the Ft Myers Chamber of Commerce, 2310 Edwards Drive, Ft. Myers.



# Caloosahatchee

## Regional Park Project:

### July 16 & 19

The Caloosahatchee Regional Park is under construction! The park, located along North River Road (S.R. 78) in eastern Lee County, encompasses over 700 acres with 6700 linear feet of shoreline along the river. The park will include trails for horse riding and hiking and picnic areas. The waterfront includes one of the oxbows surveyed last year in our study.

The park, scheduled to be open by next year, is in need of volunteers to help rescue native seedling plants and clear, poison and chip exotic brazilian pepper which currently dominates the shoreline.

In response to a call for volunteers the Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association Board of Directors agreed to adopt the park as an ongoing project. Volunteers will be needed to dig up plants, cut and poison exotics and eventually replant the cleared areas. In addition, interested volunteers can sign up to be trained to guide walks through the park.

To kick off our sponsorship of the park two events have been planned for July. On Wednesday, July 16 and Saturday, July 19 volunteers will gather at the park to dig up plants which will be potted and used to re-landscape the park after construction is complete and cut and poison pepper along the river. Plan to meet at 8 am and work until noon. Bring gloves, shovels, hat and bug spray. If you have questions call and leave a message on our infoline, 433-4636 x 2722.

## Historic Marker Tour Project

### *History buffs, here's your chance*

The CRCA Riverwatch Historic Marker Tour project has been awarded a grant by the Greater Ft. Myers Chamber of Commerce! The project includes development of a boater's guide designed to highlight historic facts and locations along the Caloosahatchee. Plans include an on-line site for access to historic information about the river and watershed and a

collectable book with photographs accompanying the documented history and folklore.

One exciting feature of the project is the collection of oral histories from long time residents who have knowledge and experience with the river. Oral histories record individuals memories and folklore as it has been handed down from generations dating back to the civil war period. This kind of unique information will preserve forever the folklore, history and legends of pioneering families and individuals and help us to build an understanding of what the river used to be and the people who have contributed to the communities we know today.

Volunteers are needed to participate in all aspects of this project from research to identify oral history candidates, dates & events and tape transcription to fundraising/grant writing to tracking down photographs and writing. Anyone interested in participating should leave a name & number on our infoline, 433-4636 x 2722. Become part of the legacy.

## Manatee Rescue

by  
Stephen R. Sullivan

Two manatees were reintroduced to the Caloosahatchee on May 27, 1997. New Bob and Lucky Frank were rescued in the vicinity of the WP Franklin Lock by US Army Corps of Engineer and DEP personnel.

New Bob was rescued on January 1, 1993 as a 110 lb. abandoned calf. Lucky Frank, who was suffering from cold stress, was rescued on February 29, 1996 weighing 477 lb. Both manatees were rehabilitated at Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa.

At the time of their release both manatees were fully recovered. New Bob weighed in at over 1152 lbs. and Lucky Frank tipped the scales at 772 lbs. The manatees were released together with the hope that Lucky Frank, who has experience in the wild, will help New Bob, who has almost no wild experience, adjust to his new environment.

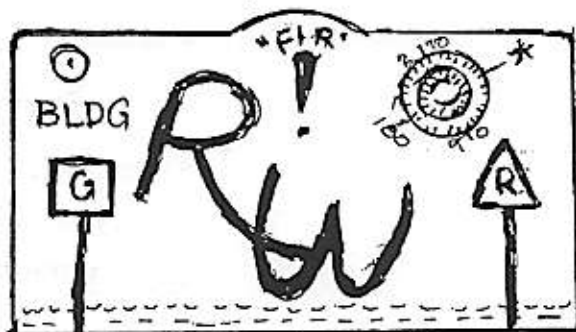
New Bob has been fitted with a radio collar and early tracking reports and visual confirmation from WP Franklin Lock and Dam personnel have him at the Franklin Lock, almost the exact location where he was rescued.

DEP will continue to track New Bob and plan a recapture in 4-12 weeks to check on his condition and progress.

# Logo a go-go

Coca-Cola, Pepsi, AT&T are all world-renowned companies. What have they got that we don't got, eh? A logo, for starters. Here's your chance to vote for the logo that you would like to see represent the Caloosahatchee River Citizen's Association (RiverWatch). Remember this logo should look good on T-shirts as well as on letterhead. Please phone in your vote and tell us which THREE-LOGOS you think are best. You can vote by calling our recorder at: 941-433-4636 ext. 2722 or at our Web site at: [www.Hawk.net/ecoswf](http://www.Hawk.net/ecoswf). Thanks for your support.

Logo A



Logo B

Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association

**RIVER  
WATCH**

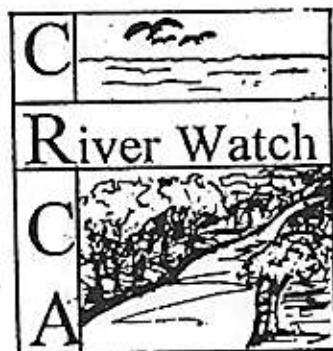


*Riverwatch*

Logo C



Logo D



Logo E

**RIVER  
WATCH**

Logo F

Logo G

**CALOOSAHATCHEE  
RIVER  
WATCH**

Logo H



Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association

**RIVERWATCH**

Logo I

Cast your vote for the new CRCA  
logo Call 433-4636 ext 2722

# Welcome New Members

We are pleased to welcome our new and renewing members:

Name:	Membership Category:
Yoder Brothers	Corporate
Eric Lindblad	Friend
Dan & Linda Mattos	Family
Bob & Edie Slayton	Family
Derek Wolfe	Individual
Robin Krivanek	Individual
Stephen Sullivan	Individual
Rana H. Ross	Individual
Dorothy Bukauski	Individual

Caloosahatchee River Citizens  
Association  
CRCA Info-line 433-4636 (x2722)

## CRCA Officers

President:	Rae Ann Scholle
Vice President:	Steve Boutelle
Secretary:	Jim Haggart
Treasurer:	Bill McGrath

## CRCA Directors

Rob Andrys	Susan Beckman
Pam Porter	John Cassani
Peggy Hellenbach	Butch Jones
Keith Kibbey	Erick Lindblad
Win Everham	Mike McCartney
Laura O'Brien	T.C. Porter
Walter Stephens, Jr	Laura Wewerka

## CRCA Committee Chairs

Technical:	J. Capece - W. Everham
Community Forum:	J. Cassani
Membership:	P. Hellenbach
Projects & Events:	L. O'Brien - P. Porter
Public Affairs:	J. Haggart - J. Cassani
Speakers Bureau	T.C. Porter

## RIVERWATCH

Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association  
P.O. Box 1165  
Ft. Myers, FL 33902

**CALOOSAHATCHEE**  
**RIVER**  
Citizens Association

Southwest Florida Research and Education Center  
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Immokalee, FL 34142

Rob Andrys  
23031 Tuckahoe Road  
Alva, FL 33920

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