

RIVERWATCH

CRCA Info-Line (941)433-4636 ext. 2722 www.caloosahatchee.org Winter 2000/2001

A Letter from Our President Rob Andrys

It seems this whole year has been devoted to giving input to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) regarding its actions, inaction, proposed budget cuts and proposed rule changes. There is no single entity that affects the health of the Caloosahatchee River more than the SFWMD. Its decisions regarding the amount of water released into the River at any given time can mean life or death to inhabitants of the estuary and to the livelihoods of the people who depend on it for a living.

Representatives of RiverWatch attended numerous meetings in 2000 where we have been educated about the difficult task of balancing the needs of the River with the needs of agriculture, Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, municipal water supplies and flood protection. We have been made to understand that this is a man-made situation, but is really controlled by Mother Nature and the rain or lack thereof in establishing how much water there is to go around.

Water is the lifeblood of Florida, and this water is now being redistributed to comply with the Everglades Restoration Act. A new rule will be established in January whereby the SFWMD will establish criteria for the Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) of water leaving the Franklin Locks (S-79) for use by the River's estuary during dry conditions. We have objected to the draft rule as initially written and as it has been revised.

Let me illustrate the great importance of this new rule to the River's viability. Last February when no water crossed over the Franklin Locks for 28 days, the salinity of the estuary was raised to such a level that over 400 acres of freshwater grasses were killed; this constitutes 'significant harm' as defined by the SFWMD. We are currently facing the same situation; since Oc-

tober 27th there has been little to no flow recorded crossing the locks. Again the salinity of the estuary is at such high levels that it is threatening to kill the estuarine grasses within the same calendar year, yet only on November 27th were water restrictions set in place.

The MFL rule as currently proposed by the SFWMD would give priority to the River's estuary regarding needed minimum flows only after the estuary grasses have incurred "significant harm" three years in a row. It does not take into account a scenario of damage every other year, nor does it recognize the effects of two die-offs in the same year. Further, the rules consider harm only during the months of November through March; they do not include April, our driest month, or May, another dry month.

RiverWatch has recommended two alternatives to the proposed definition of significant harm. The alternatives are as quoted. "Significant harm would occur when average monthly flow at the Franklin Locks (S-79) drops below 300 cubic feet per second during any month between November to May of any year." "Significant harm occurs when average monthly flow at S-79 drops below 300 cfs any month of the year for two consecutive years."

There is also another troubling issue, that of shared adversity during times of drought. We all benefit from the River during the good times and we all need to share in the adversity during the dry times.

In my opinion, if one group or components of the system shoulders an inequitable load, then it opens the whole process up to litigation. I believe the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie River systems are not being given equal footing in the rule-making process; they have been and are expected to take an increasingly large part of the adversity of too much water or too lit-

tle water. This situation is being exasperated rapidly as more land is drained and developed for citrus or residential developments, which are moderate to heavy water users.

We must recognize the limits of the water resource, or be willing to sacrifice the estuary to constant damage, and thus eventual collapse.

Residential developments by far use the most water per acre, likewise, unlimited citrus production threatens the whole industry to increasingly restrictive water allocations, reducing yields and pushing cost/benefit ratios to unprofitable levels.

We are all in this together. Call or write the South Florida Water Management District to express your opinion to give our estuary an equal place in MFL rule-making.

Thoughts on Membership

David Robson

Hello from your Membership Committee Chair (of a committee of one, RiverWatch is a lean operation)! I have been working to organize our membership information and scratching my head to figure out how we can simplify, simplify, simplify. Currently, there are seventy-four members of RiverWatch who have paid dues since January 1, 1999. Forty-four members dues expired during 2000 — only 30 members have paid dues since January 1, 2000.

The Board of Directors of RiverWatch believe that it would be best to set dues on a calendar year basis, rather than have memberships expire throughout the year. All members who paid full dues after June 1, 2000 will be extended to January 1, 2002.

Please visit our website, www.caloosahatchee.org, go to “Join CRCA”, and fill in the blanks. If you do not have internet access, please complete the form below and return it to us with your membership dues. I strongly urge you to provide your email address information on the form. RiverWatch will only use your email address to notify you of upcoming events and current news concerning the Caloosahatchee River.

South Florida Water Management District Information:

Web Site: www.sfwmd.gov

MFL Documents: www.sfwmd.gov/org/pld/proj/mfl/calosahatchee.html

Address: 3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, Florida 33416-4680

Phone: 1-800-432-2045 (Florida Only)

Is It Time to Renew Your Membership?

If so, please take a moment to fill out this form and then return it to us with your check. If not, pass this form on to a friend and ask them to join! As you know, the Caloosahatchee River Citizen's Association (RiverWatch) needs your continued support to make sure that good things occur on our river.

Name: _____ **Street Address:** _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____ **Fax:** _____ **Email:** _____

Membership Level:

Student \$5 _____ Individual \$10 _____ Family \$20 _____ Friend \$50 _____ Guardian \$100
Sponsor/Corporate \$250 _____ Protector \$500 _____ Champion \$1,000

Volunteer Interests:

Clerical _____ Technical _____ Membership _____ Education _____

Projects and Events _____ Publicity/Communication _____

Please complete this form and send it with your check to: CRCA, Box 1165, Fort Myers, FL 33902

Caloosahatchee Oxbow Research Project

Rae Ann Wessel

Those of you who have been RiverWatch members for a while will remember the efforts begun in 1996 to study, document, characterize and classify the oxbows of the Caloosahatchee. The oxbows are the remnant bends of the original river, which were bisected by the channelization, leaving semi circle shaped water bodies on either side of the channel.

Having completed the first phase of the study in 1997, we were excited to have been awarded funding from the Center for Environmental Studies to begin Phase II of the study in 1999. However, we had only just begun the data collection for Phase II of the study when politics interfered. The reorganization of the South Florida Water Management District resulted in the closing of the Tarpon Bay Environmental Lab and along with it the funding for the study.

But we will not be held back from this important mission! Daring scientists and anxious volunteers have kept the dream alive and we are now working on a plan to restart the project in 2001. The study will involve field data collection and documentation of oxbows to get a comprehensive snapshot of their status and function with regard to aquatic habitat, water quality, wildlife, sediments and vegetative diversity. Our objective is to work toward solutions, which may need to be customized for individual oxbows, to restore their health, beauty and the natural history that they represent.

We are looking for volunteers to assist with data collection and partners who can offer shallow draft boats and/or some time weekdays or weekends. This would be a great Eagle Scout or science project for the right individuals. If you are interested in getting involved, helping out or have time or equipment to donate, please contact our web site at www.caloosahatchee.org or call our voice mail at 433-4636 x 2722.

Bye, Bye Buquebus

Jim Haggart

RiverWatch has been monitoring the progress (or lack thereof) of the "Buquebus" project since Fort Myers Mayor Bruce Grady first announced it several years ago. The project called for high speed, jet-propelled ferries to carry passengers and autos between downtown Fort Myers and Key West.

The impact of these ships on the River has been a major concern to RiverWatch because of their threat to boater safety, the potential damage to marine habitat and wildlife including manatees, the aggravation of existing turbidity problems in the River, and the potential water pollution from fueling operations at the Fort Myers docks.

For years the only news about Buquebus was of continuing delays in the construction of the Key West terminal and of the ships themselves. Finally, in late October, the Fort Myers *News-Press* reported that the project had collapsed, when Caterpillar Financial Services, Inc. withdrew from a joint venture that had been formed to take over Buquebus operations.

Caterpillar's decision to scrap the project apparently was made on economic and financial grounds, that didn't take into consideration our concerns about the health and safety of the River.

As this article is written, there are rumors that an effort is underway in Key West to revive the project. RiverWatch will continue to monitor it closely, and will insist that our concerns about the health and safety of the River are addressed before it is allowed to go forward.

Congratulations to Boy Scout Brian Thompson, who stenciled over 120 storm drains in the industrial park of Cape Coral! Brian completed this task as his community project and received his Eagle Scout award on November 26th. RiverWatch supplied the metal plaques and glue for this project, along with a map of storm drains.

Caloosahatchee River Citizen's Association

Officers::

President	Rob Andrys
Secretary	David Robson
Treasurer	Steve Boutelle

Directors:

Steve Brookman	Susan Brookman
Anita Buff	Mike Buff
Derek Burr	Kim Fikoski
Keith Kibbey	Russ Ringland

We held our fourth annual River Ride bicycle ride on Sunday November 21st. The ride started at Caloosahatchee Regional Park near Alva and took country roads to Port LaBelle and back. Over seventy participants rode routes of 17, 28, 40, and 62 miles. We had great weather and food for the third straight year. Caloosahatchee Regional Park provided an excellent place for the start and a wonderful place to relax after the ride. Our thanks go to Ride Director Keith Kibbey and all the volunteers and sponsors who helped to make this event such a great fund raiser and friend maker for RiverWatch!

*Happy
New Year!*

RiverWatch

Caloosahatchee River Citizen's Association
Box 1165
Fort Myers, FL 33902