

Caloosahatchee River Citizen's Association

RIVERWATCH

www.caloosahatchee.org

Autumn 2002

Caloosahatchee Regional Park Plan Revised!

Public Participation Pays off! Last fall the Lee County Parks & Recreation Department developed plans for the Caloosahatchee Regional Park to place a fishing pier and boat docking facility in the old Caloosahatchee oxbow which is part of the park's 6,700 linear feet of shoreline. RiverWatch members and participants in our river cruises objected to the plans with constructive ideas for better, more sustainable alternatives.

We are pleased to report that in August of this year the Lee County Parks & Recreation Department shared its revised plan for the park. The revised plan has moved both structures out of the oxbow, with the boat dock relocated to the eastern end of the park, co-located with the existing canoe/kayak launch area. This move provides the added benefit of a wave break, protecting the launch area from disruptive boat wakes and the shoreline from the erosive effects of wakes. The relocation of this presumed heavy use area closer to the campground also eliminates wetland impacts which were proposed for a walkway through wetlands.

The proactive effort of members writing letters and attending a public meeting to share their concerns and the willingness of the County to listen to constructive citizen input has forged a better plan for this important public recreation area. Public participation really does pay off!

Don't Dump It Campaign Update

Nearly 1,000 storm drains in Lee County have been marked with placards or stencils so far this year, and materials are available at no charge to any individuals or groups who would like to adopt storm drains. The placards alert passers-by to the fact that the storm drains empty directly into the river, and let everyone know that whatever goes into the drains ends up in our river! For more information about our Don't Dump It campaign, please contact Susan Brookman at sbrookperson@earthlink.net or call (239)694-7572.



FUN ON THE RIVER – KAYAK DEMO DERBY

Sunday, October 13th at Northshore Park on the Caloosahatchee from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Test-paddle (free!) a variety of kayaks Cool Door Prizes Paddling Games
Kayak clinic topics include: kayak fishing, choosing the right kayak, kayak touring, paddling techniques, race prep, and more!

Held in conjunction with the MIDPOINT PADDLE SPRINT KAYAK RACE
4 mile or 10 mile -- checkin 9:00 a.m., start-10:00 a.m.

For more information: Derby info: Andy 947-9066 Race info: Nancy 461-7445
Hosted by Lee County Parks & Recreation, SWFLA Paddling Club & former CAPTIVA CLASSIC organizing committee

Caloosahatchee Oxbows & Riverlore

Riverboat Cruises

Join us for a trip back in time through the historic oxbows of the old Caloosahatchee estuary. These guided trips include Cracker tales of the area's history and pioneers who settled this basin at the turn of the century as well as a first hand look at the ecology, habitat and wildlife of the oxbows and Cross Florida Ship Channel. Guides include RiverWatch members Rae Ann Wessel, a professional aquatic ecologist, and third generation cracker self-proclaimed "river rat" Charles Edgar Foster, who was born and raised on the banks of Caloosahatchee.

Space on these cruises is limited to 45 participants. Advance reservations and ticket purchase are required. Make your reservation by calling (239)694-3850, then mail a check to CRCA in care of Marina 31, 16991 SR 31, Fort Myers, FL 33905.

Proceeds of these cruises benefit restoration of the oxbows on the Caloosahatchee River to enhance water quality, habitat function and biological diversity.

Saturday, October 5th from 8:45 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

This cruise is being sponsored in part by the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program in celebration of National Estuaries Day. The cruise will leave from Marina 31, on SR 31 off SR 80 east of Fort Myers, 2.5 miles east of I-75. The fee is \$15 per person.

Saturday, November 9th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
and

Saturday, November 30th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
These cruises leave from WP Franklin Lock & Dam Park on Old Olga Road, off SR 80, 6 1/2 miles East of I-75. The fee is \$20 per person.



Want to Learn More About the Caloosahatchee Watershed?

The University of Florida Extension Service offers classes on Florida's freshwater wetlands – rivers, lakes, marshes and swamps, and our estuarine systems as part of the Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP). The program is designed for any adult interested in learning more about Florida's ecosystems and particularly for ecotour guides, volunteer naturalists and teachers. Each non-credit course is 40 hours of classroom presentations and guided field trips with a student project required for graduation, no exams.

The program goals are to promote increased awareness and appreciation of Florida's unique environmental resources and to develop interpretation skills. Training topics include concepts of ecosystem processes, investigation of key plants and wildlife, environmental ethics and role of humans in shaping Florida's environment. There are instructors at the Hendry County Extension Service Office and Glades Botanical Garden in LaBelle and at Manatee World and the Calusa Nature Center in Fort Myers.

For additional information visit www.masternaturalist.org, contact Pete Quasius at FMNP@CalusaNature.com, or call (239)275-3435.



Join RiverWatch for the sixth annual River Ride bicycle ride on Sunday, November 17th. The ride will start and finish at Caloosahatchee Regional Park near Alva and traverse country roads to Port LaBelle and back.

Routes of 15, 30, 40, and 62 miles will be marked, and the flat course means cyclists of all abilities will be able to enjoy the event! Rest stops will be manned and stocked with refreshments at various points along the course, and a support vehicle will travel the course to assist cyclists with mechanical problems.

Please visit our web site at www.caloosahatchee.org or call (239)694-3850 (Marina 31) for more information.

The Caloosahatchee Coalition *Rae Ann Wessel*

The Caloosahatchee is part of a Federal waterway which provides a navigational channel from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean via the Okeechobee waterway. This waterway was conceived to provide for flood control by draining water away from the low-lying surrounding lands, and it was also designated as the Cross Florida Ship Channel to provide a “shortcut” for boat traffic between the Mississippi River and eastern seaboard. This service of the waterway as a shortcut across the peninsula was one of the deciding factors for President Nixon in 1971 to finally put to rest the ill-conceived Cross-Florida Barge Canal proposed for Citrus and Levy Counties to the north.

The system today faces many challenges, including competing demands for water by municipalities on the east and west coasts, agriculture, commercial and recreational boating activities and the natural aquatic system and estuary. Although the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP), which includes the Caloosahatchee, is said to be the largest environmental restoration project ever undertaken, it does not include funding for restoration of the river’s natural system or navigational maintenance of the channel or lock & dam structures.

It was with this background that a partnership of stakeholders concerned about the health and viability of the Caloosahatchee and Okeechobee waterway was formed to address numerous issues of critical concern which are not included nor addressed through CERP and Southwest Florida Feasibility Study (SWFFS) planning efforts. The *Caloosahatchee Coalition* includes a broad cross section of community interests including the Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association (RiverWatch), Southwest Florida Watershed Council (SWFWC), West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND), Florida Marine Industry Association, Florida Sea Grant and Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC).

In March of this year, the Lee County Board of Commissioners agreed to serve as a local sponsor for U.S. Army Corps of Engineer project funding under the 1135 program. This program addresses maintenance of Federal Work projects such as the Okeechobee Waterway. On September 26th the Coalition formally requested that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commit funds and technical assistance to undertake all five projects listed below. We’ll keep you posted on our progress!

1. Condition of the Waterway and Infrastructure

- ◆ Survey federal channel depths, identify and remove shoaled areas based on the waterway project controlling depth of 8 ft with the Lake level at 12.56 ft above sea level
- ◆ Design a restoration plan for reestablishing and maintaining design depths in navigable channel
- ◆ Survey, map and assess current condition of federal right-of-way easements and publicly-owned lands
- ◆ Assess condition and adequacy of lock structures and pumping stations
- ◆ Insure funding for routine maintenance and modernization for Franklin, Ortona, Moore Haven, Port Mayaca and St. Lucie Locks to meet present/future boat traffic and water supply needs
- ◆ Determine operational safety and environmental resource concerns and implement corrective measures

2. Protection and Management of Historic Caloosahatchee Channel

- ◆ Survey and assess the condition of original meander and oxbow water bodies cut off from the main channel by the Federal Waterway project
- ◆ Prepare restoration plans and provide funds to restore river oxbows and littoral habitats
- ◆ Determine minimum flow, level and timing regimes for Lake discharges to maintain riverine and estuarine habitats

3. Develop Integrated Waterway Management Plan

- ◆ Strengthen and formalize Waterway Coalition by establishing a working group to review and update project needs on a regular basis
- ◆ Assist Coalition develop management strategies and promote future infrastructure needs
- ◆ Review and recommend public access locations to promote eco-tourism and sustainable waterway use

4. Economic Impact of the Waterway Transportation System and Value as an Eco-Tourism Attraction

- ◆ Inventory boating facilities

- ◆ survey and determine waterway users
- ◆ identify and quantify the current impacts of the Waterway on local and regional economies
- ◆ estimate the local and regional economic impacts of increased Waterway traffic

5. Public Education to Promote Stewardship of the Waterway

- ◆ Develop and distribute informational materials to provide an historical overview of the Waterway, illustrate current waterway features and promote stewardship and eco-tourism
- ◆ Assist with funding of guided, regional, historic and ecological boat tours to schools and the general public to promote understanding of navigational, environmental, cultural & recreational resources

RiverWatch is pleased to recognize the following businesses that are serving as sponsors of our newsletter and web site:



Caloosahatchee River Fly Fishing Guide

Capt. Pete Quasius

Time's Fly'n Charters

Email: PQuasius@msn.com Coastal Marine/Manatee World
Phone: 239-693-0063 5605 Palm Beach Blvd. (FL 80E)
Fax: 239-693-5629 Exit 141 East from I-75
Mobile: 239-940-5894 Fort Myers, FL 33905

In Our Next Newsletter...

There are *lots* of governmental and public initiatives underway concerning the Caloosahatchee. Next month, we'll report on:

- * the effort to establish a water reservation for the Caloosahatchee (see www.swfwc.org)
- * the Impaired Waters List for the Caloosahatchee Basin (see www.dep.state.fl.us/water/tmdl/cycle.htm)
- * the new Charlotte Harbor/Caloosahatchee Restoration Coordination Team
- * the Minimum Flows and Levels Rule for the Caloosahatchee (see www.sfwmd.gov/org/wsd/mfl/calmfl/index.html)

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