



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Mary Rawl, President, (239) 849-0964
Marti Daltry, Public Affairs, (239) 997-0673

RIVERWATCH ANNOUNCES
“STATE OF RIVER” PRESS CONFERENCE

FORT MYERS - In advance of Earth Day and National River Cleanup Week, the groups partnering in Southwest Florida to engage the public and policy makers on River issues will be holding a Press Conference on the banks of the Caloosahatchee in Centennial Park., Fort Myers on Wednesday, April 19, 2006. Starting at 11:30am, brief presentations by several groups will highlight their efforts, followed by a question and answer session for the press and the public. Assembled at this session will be a variety of groups engaged in River issues and each will focus on their efforts on behalf of the River.

Groups expected to participate in the Press conference:

- Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association
- Conservancy of Southwest Florida
- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
- Audubon of Southwest Florida
- Sierra Club, Calusa Group
- Save Our Creeks

In addition, speakers from other organizations related to the Caloosahatchee, such as Lake Okeechobee and the St Lucie River area, may be participating. A full list of the participants will be available at the press conference. It is also anticipated that area leaders will be on hand to address the issues.

Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association (Riverwatch)
PO Box 1165, Ft. Myers, FL 33902
PO Box 2199 LaBelle, FL 33975
Tel: 863-674-5727 Efax: 561-828-8458
crca.caloosahatchee.org

“We hope to make this an annual event”, said Mary Rawl, President of the Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association (CRCA), also known locally as RiverWatch. “In addition, we plan to give the members of the public some *ACTION ITEMS*, specific actions on specific decisions that will be made in the coming year.” During the past year, RiverWatch has observed the steady decline of the River and has sounded the alarm to local residents. As the Caloosahatchee's health continued to decline with the advent of severe algal blooms and the resulting fish kills, RiverWatch decided to nominate the Caloosahatchee River as one of America's ten most endangered rivers through the American Rivers organization.

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida has graded the Caloosahatchee as part of its “Estuaries Report Card for Southwest Florida”. The impaired River and its watershed were analyzed for habitat and water quality and the results will be discussed by the Conservancy staff. Jennifer Hecker, Natural Resource Policy Manager for the Conservancy and the report's author said, “It is ultimately intended that this report will be the beginning of many fruitful discussions and actions that will lead to greater protection of Southwest Florida's water-based resources.”

The Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) created a Marine Laboratory to collect data about the marine environment surrounding our islands, guided by a desire to ensure that the ecological well being of the lower Caloosahatchee and its estuaries would be scientifically monitored, realizing that watershed management and regulatory decisions will control the fate of these waters and their inhabitants. According to Executive Director Erick Lindblad, “Our initial and ongoing studies indicate trends that cause great concern for the health of our surrounding waters.” Ongoing SCCF studies include critical habitat loss and the impacts on the fish populations.

Efforts by these and other groups hope to bring the necessary attention to the Caloosahatchee for effective short-term and long-term policy changes needed for the River's benefit.

For more information, please see the RiverWatch website at crca.caloosahatchee.org

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