

MONTICELLO NEWS

143rd Year No. 1

Wednesday, January 5, 2011

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Long-Awaited Reclaimed Water Project Completed

LAZARO ALEMAN
ECB Publishing
Senior Staff Writer

Some five years after city officials approved the project (two of the years were spent battling the state for the issuance of the appropriate permitting, according to the city's consultant engineer), the last component of a \$2.2 million sewer system upgrade is finally in place.

We're talking about the long awaited reclaimed or reuse water project that pumps effluent from the city's sewage treatment plant to Simpson Nursery for reuse as irrigation water.

"We're actually now sending water to Simpson's pond," engineer Joe Miller, of George & Associates Consulting Engineers Inc., reported to the Monticello City Council on Tuesday evening, Dec.

Please See *Water Project* Page 3A

Water Project

Cont. From Page 1

7, adding that the project should be completed within the week.

An outgrowth of a state initiative that several years ago encouraged the use of alternative and cost-effective water sources — and largely financed by public funds — the reuse water project benefits the city, Simpson Nursery and the environment.

Specifically, the reuse project allows effluent from the city's sewage treatment plant to be piped to Simpson Nursery, which uses the treated water to irrigate its plants and trees. The city, meanwhile, saves thousands of dollars in discharge testing fees and stops discharging the effluent into the wetlands. And the environment benefits from reduced groundwater consumption and reduced water

withdrawals during droughts.

As Miller explained it, the city previously pumped the effluent into a manmade or constructed wetlands, where it was further purified by soil filtration before ultimately being discharged into jurisdictional wetlands that fed into the Aucilla River.

The new system bypasses the constructed wetlands and pumps the effluent directly into ponds that Simpson can access, with one of the ponds designated a wet-weather pond capable of holding a five-day supply of effluent, in the event that rainstorms make irrigation superfluous.

The first phase of the multimillion project, accomplished early in 2009, involved a \$1 million expenditure to

replace the treatment plant's head-works, which function to remove the floatable objects and other solids that enter the facility in the waste stream. Typically, the head-works include grinders, screens, screening compactors and grit removal systems. The head-works also serve to ensure that the effluent leaving the plant meets the applicable environmental standards.

Funding for the project came from the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), which contributed \$1,500,000; the Florida Department of Agriculture Consumer Services, which contributed \$150,000; the Legislature, which kicked in \$500,000; and the City of Monticello, which contributed \$50,000.

Jan. 6, 2011

The Levy County Journal

Biologists claim local manatees not in jeopardy

By Terry Witt
Staff Writer

The mammals for which Manatee Springs State Park was named decades ago didn't pay a visit to the spring in August, September and October of this year, and during December's super cold snap, few of those that visited ventured into the warm waters of the spring boil.

Biologists for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission say they are not worried about manatees staying away from the spring boil during the cold weather. They haven't seen any cold-stressed animals in this area of Florida.

"The manatees don't always like to swim against the flow," said Carol Knox, biological administrator for FWC in the manatee program. At Manatee Springs, she said manatees like to bed down against an earthen shelf near the mouth of the spring.

"They still get the warmer spring water, but it's not in the current," she said.

Manatee Springs Park Manager Sally Lieb said water levels are low in the spring run and manatees are not seen as often in the spring run and spring boil when the water is low, but she said they can still access the spring boil.

Lieb said they might be coming into the spring at night, but she is not there every night to check.

"When they are there and actively working against that endless current you hear the breathing, and on full moons you can see them in the moonlight," Lieb wrote in an e-mail. "I have not seen them or heard them up in the spring during the past several months when I checked at night. However, I don't spend the whole night there either. We have seen them in the main spring in the early morning during past winters over the years, but again, the level at those times was usually higher than we're seeing now."

Manatees are an endangered species. They are warm-blooded and nurse their young. They need the warm water of springs to survive cold weather. Springs produce 72 degree water all year long. Manatees

breathe air. They must push their nose out of the water to pull in air.

Manatee Springs is a powerful and productive spring. The spring has been producing an average of 94 million gallons of water per day since 2002. It is a first magnitude spring. A first magnitude spring must produce a minimum of 64.6 million gallons daily to be considered first magnitude.

Water levels in the spring run are low because the Suwannee River is flowing at near record low levels. In the recorded history of the river dating back to the 1930s, the Suwannee River has been this low only 5 percent of the time. Manatee Springs empties into the river. When the river is high it acts like a dam, pushing against the spring, slowing the flow and raising water levels in the spring, according to Megan Wetherington, hydrologist with the Suwannee River Water Management District. That damming effect disappears when river levels are low.

"When the river is as low as it is now, there's nothing pushing against the spring water as it comes out," she said.

The Suwannee River is entirely spring fed at this point, due to lack of rainfall, according to Wetherington. Groundwater is providing the entire flow of the river. Groundwater emerges from the Floridan Aquifer and spews out of spring vents like the one at Manatee and flow to the river.

Manatee Springs has become a magnet for divers and diving schools. Divers use the spring boil and a spring opening known as Catfish Hotel for diving. The diving goes on all year long. During the period from February 2009 through November 2010, an average of 227 divers per month used the spring boil and Catfish Hotel. The number of divers doesn't slow during the winter months when manatees use the spring run and boil as a warm water sanctuary.

Ron Mezich, a biological scientist for FWC, doesn't think the divers are discouraging manatees from entering the spring boil. Mizich agrees with Knox that the animals prefer to be at the mouth of the river. He notes they have found no manatees suffering from cold stress in this area of Florida.

"If we thought there was an issue, we would discuss it with the park," he said.

Manatees from page 1

Robert Bonde, a manatee researcher with the United States Geological Survey for more than 3 decades and author of a recent book "The Florida Manatee - the Conservation and Biology" said manatees and diving regulators don't mix. He said manatees shy away from diving regulator noise and the bubbles they produce.

"Certainly that would drive them away," he said.

He said divers have been banned from 3 Sisters Spring at Kings Bay in Crystal River because manatees use the spring as a warm water refuge.

But Bonde said the low water levels at Manatee Springs could also be the reason manatees are not entering the spring run or the spring boil. He said manatees are not risk takers. If they feel their lives might be in danger by entering the spring, they will choose to remain at the mouth.

"I think it may be the low water. They may not feel comfortable coming in," he said.

The state is planning to deepen the spring run at Fanning Spring to make access easier for manatees.

see *Manatees* on page 8

SRWMD issues water shortage advisory for this area

A Phase I Water Shortage Advisory was issued by the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) governing board Dec. 14 and will remain in effect until further notice.

SRWMD covers all of Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor and Union counties, and portions of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Jefferson, Levy and Putnam counties.

The advisory calls on all residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial users to voluntarily reduce both indoor and outdoor water use through conservation measures.

The district already has a landscape irrigation rule in place that limits lawn and landscape water-

ing to one day per week during fall and winter and two days per week during spring and summer. The rule took effect in January of this year and applies to all residents within the district. It is permanent, long-term, and requires mandatory landscape irrigation conservation year-round.

The Phase I Advisory, on the other hand, is issued in response to moderate or severe drought conditions and remains in effect only as long as needed. The advisory calls upon all residents to voluntarily implement indoor and outdoor conservation measures in addition to those required by the year-round landscape irrigation rule.

Once drought conditions improve and groundwater and sur-

facewater levels rebound, the governing board may cancel the Phase I Advisory. Should conditions worsen, however, the governing board may declare a Phase II Advisory, which imposes mandatory water-use restrictions.

Water shortage advisories are issued by SRWMD in accordance with Florida Statutes and the Florida Administrative Code, which give them authority to implement water shortage plans.

According to the National Weather Service, the Suwannee River basin is experiencing an extreme drought.

Megan Wetherington, a senior professional engineer at SRWMD, said groundwater and surfacewater levels continue to worsen throughout the district

due to below-average monthly rainfall.

"River levels are extremely low and groundwater levels have fallen steadily since the summer," she said.

In November, flows for the Suwannee River and its tributaries fell below the fifth percentile for the period of record, meaning more than 95 percent of the time since the 1930s they were higher for this time of year than they are currently.

Average groundwater levels fell to the 33rd percentile in No-

vember, based on records beginning in 1978.

Total rain for October and November was 1.33 inches, the lowest since 2001 and the eighth lowest since 1932. Gauges at Usher Tower (near Chiefland) and Starke reported no rainfall in October, making it the driest October on record in those areas.

Wetherington said long-term forecasts call for drier than normal conditions throughout winter and spring.

See WATER page 4A

WATER

Continued from Page 2A

"With La Nina expected to persist at least through spring, the district may be in for dry conditions for quite some time," she said.

District officials are stressing the need for conservation until conditions improve.

The district offers the following water-saving tips:

- Fix leaky faucets and toilets, which can waste up to 100 gallons per day.
- Replace older fixtures and appliances with low-flow, water-saving models.

- Turn off the tap while brushing teeth, shaving, or washing dishes.

- Water lawns and landscapes only one day per week and not between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

- Use Florida-Friendly Landscaping™.

- Equip hoses with automatic shutoff nozzles.

- Wash vehicles infrequently and only on porous surfaces.

- Use a broom or blower—not a hose—to clean sidewalks, driveways, parking areas.

- Take shorter showers; staying under five minutes can save 1,000 gallons per month.

- Don't use the toilet as a waste basket.

Lake City Reporter

Wednesday, January 12, 2011

www.lakecityreporter.com

Vol. 136, No. 304 ■ 75 cents

Tubing issue catches TIP by surprise

But group chairman says it would be major topic of discussion.

By C.J. RISAK
crisak@lakecityreporter.com

The agenda for Thursday's The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP) meeting was actually established a day before the Ichetucknee River and tubing became an issue.

That's why it isn't part of the agenda. But TIP chairman Joel Foreman anticipates it will be a major topic of discussion at the meeting, which starts at 9 a.m. at the City Hall Council Chambers.

"The bottom line is, the first time we heard of it was when we heard last Thursday that it was on the county commission's agenda," Foreman said of the tubing problem. "So we don't have a position because we haven't been involved in the process."

"The bottom line is, the first time we heard of it was when we heard last Thursday that it was on the county commission's agenda."

Joel Foreman
Chairman
The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP)

The path chosen by this action group, whose ultimate aim is to restore the north Ichetucknee — which they believe has been severely damaged by tubing —

was to get the county commission to approve a resolution presented by Jim Stevenson, a former chief naturalist with the Florida State Parks Association. The object of

the resolution: to ban tubing at the north end of the Ichetucknee. The resolution could not be binding, since the river is under state control, but it was hoped it would add weight to the group's request at the state level.

The commission, however, refused to support the resolution, citing a lack of scientific documentation. They did agree to send a letter asking the

TUBING *continued on 3A*

TUBING: Publicity might draw crowd at meeting

Continued From Page 1A

Florida Department of Environmental Protection to address the issue.

Asked if his group had talked with any members of TIP — whose mission statement is "to promote the environmental and economic well being of the Ichetucknee Springshed through locally-led, voluntary, incentive-based programs" — Stevenson replied, "We had not. We had talked to some (TIP) members, but we were anxious to proceed with this. We were just trying to do this as quickly as we could."

However, bypassing TIP meant not discussing the issue with many of the people who are part of the city's and county's infrastructure. And that, Foreman thought, may have created some skepticism among the commissioners.

"It's a little bit confusing about the resolution

process," Foreman said. "Everybody they would want to talk to would be sitting at this (TIP) table. And yet, no one heard about it until last Thursday morning."

"It's true we're not a formal administrative body. But I don't know why we were left out of the loop on this. It's a little weird for us, uncomfortable for us."

Stevenson, who lives in Tallahassee, said he will not be at Thursday's meeting. He insisted that not talking with TIP members was not an intentional act, just one based on expedience. He added the action group he represents will continue to work toward closing the north end of the Ichetucknee to tubing, on a permanent basis. Tubing, a major source of entertainment on the river in the warmer months, will be restricted to start from the middle section of the river.

Stevenson said they would still like DEP to act before the heavy part of the tubing season begins, traditionally Memorial Day weekend.

"That's what I'm hoping for," Stevenson said. "DEP has the authority. They're the ones who have to act."

"We're moving forward. We're hoping the DEP acts on it. It's in their hands now."

Foreman figures this issue and its recent publicity will draw a crowd to Thursday's public meeting. "I fully expect to be there folks who are upset (the resolution) didn't get passed," he said, adding he didn't think it was a decision that could be rushed into. "We have to look at all sides, both the conservation and the preservation, and find a solution that's good for everyone."

"If we're talking about banning tubing forever, that's something the public

needs to have an impact on. This needs to be a deliberate-type thing."

Wetlands may win protection from development

By Lou Elliot Jones
editor@chieflandcitizen.com

A 458-acre parcel of land straddling State Road 24 by the No. 4 bridge in Cedar Key that is designated as environmentally sensitive and was proposed for development in 2004 — a plan opposed by Cedar Key environmental and seafood industry interests — may never again face a threat of development.

The Dennis Andrews family, which owns the land as part of an 897-acre holding, is being offered for a permanent conservation easement purchase by the Suwannee River Water Management District. The action would permanently protect the land from development while allowing the family to continue its ownership and use, includ-

ing Dennis Andrews' residence on the portion west of the highway.

"I think this is great," said Mayor Pat O'Neal on Monday when asked about the possible arrangement for the site that is 63-percent water and wetlands. He said the protection is necessary for the island community's vital clamming and oyster industry. Terry Demott, senior land resource coordinator for the water district, confirmed on Tuesday that the district is in negotiations to purchase the easement but he does not expect final approval on the deal until May.

Governing Board Member Heath Davis of Cedar Key,

Wetlands continued on page 1

Wetlands continued from page 1

a founding chair of the Cedar Key Aquaculture Association and owner of Heath Davis Crabbing Co. made the motion at an Oct. 12, 2010 meeting to pursue the purchase. Davis who is a Cedar Key City Commissioner is also vice-president of Drummond Community Bank in Cedar Key.

Demott said there is no asking price for the easement, but he said in a September memo that the owners are seeking appraised value for the easement. They are Dennis and Kelby Andrews, who operate Andrews Land & Timber in Chiefland.

In 2004, Dennis Andrews proposed a cluster-style development of 37 home sites in four compact neighborhoods with private access roads. The Levy County Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code had designated the land as environmentally sensitive and it was zoned Forestry/Rural Residential, a classification that calls for low density development.

The Andrews development proposal called for counting the wetlands acreage in the density formulation, although there was some question about state requirements that it could not be used, according to minutes of the Levy County Planning Commission.

After a November 2004 Planning Commission meeting Rob Corbitt, Levy County building official, said the land parcel possibly had significant archaeological value, including a fort from the Second Seminole War and an abandoned dump site whose exact location was unknown. Corbitt said the development staff recommended 13 conditions be met for the development to proceed.

Even though Leslie Sturmer, the University of Florida Shellfish Aquaculture Extension Agent; Sue Colson, then

Cedar Key mayor and now city commissioner; Mike Hodges of the Cedar Key Aquaculture Association and Rick Cook of the Cedar Key Oyster Association, expressed reservations about the development and its impact on water quality, the plan was recommended for approval by a 3-2 vote and sent to the Levy County Board of Commissioners.

The following month, the Levy County Board of Commissioners approved the Andrews preliminary development plan with the conditions recommended by the staff, including one that limited the density to one home per 20 acres of land — water and wetlands could not be counted in the density.

The District's conservation easement is a perpetual agreement that restricts its use and any alteration. Since the Oct. 12 vote by the District Governing Board, the District staff has been researching the title, procuring appraisal reviews, market value recommendations and opened negotiations with the owners.

In his September assessment, Demott said the land is adjacent to Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve and the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. "The primary management



PHOTO BY ADA LANG

objective would be to maintain a buffer around the marsh areas next to the Gulf of Mexico," he wrote. He also wrote that the land is in the Flood Hazard Zone — the 100-year flood plain — and it totally within the storm surge velocity zone of the Gulf.

The land is included in the District's Florida Forever Work Plan. The Florida Forever program, which has already purchased over 2.4 million acres for conservation and recreation, is a state program to buy lands that need protection or for the enjoyment of residents.

SRWMD commends environmental group for organizing cleanup of Suwannee River

The Suwannee River Water Management District Governing Board on Tuesday passed a resolution commending Current Problems, an environmental group, for organizing an event to clean up the Suwannee River.

The organization enlisted volunteers to clean the entire Suwannee River within Florida through

the Great Suwannee River Cleanup from October through December 2010. Area volunteers collected more than 29,000 pounds of trash and debris in and along the river.

"This is the biggest project we've ever undertaken," said Current Problems Executive Director Fritz Olson. "We received lots of enthusi-

asm and participation from numerous groups and volunteers."

Nearly 600 volunteers helped to restore the natural beauty and health of the Suwannee River.

"The District commends Current Problems and all who contributed to the Great Suwannee River Cleanup for their efforts to protect and maintain

one of our most important natural resources," said District Executive Director David Still.

Current Problems conducts cleanup efforts for Northeast Florida's rivers, lakes, springs and creeks. For more information about the group call Fritz Olson at 352-264-6827 or visit www.currentproblems.org.

An amazing first: entire Suwannee River, from Georgia to ocean, gets cleaned up in one shot

By Emily Fuggetta
For The Herald

Thanks to an army of volunteer garbage grabbers, visitors to the Suwannee River are now less likely to stub their toes on nearly 15 tons of trash.

Between September and early December, 576 volunteers pulled car seats, refrigerators and other debris from the river between the Florida-Georgia line and the river's end at the Gulf of Mexico.

This was the first time the entire river had been cleaned up in one try.

Current Problems, a Gainesville nonprofit devoted to cleaning up North Florida waters, organized the project at the request of Edwin McCook, a land management specialist for Suwannee River

Water Management District.

McCook, who served for about a decade on the Suwannee County Chamber of Commerce before taking his job about 10 years ago with the management district, said the river is an important part of local tourism, and keeping it free of debris is a necessity.

"The Suwannee River is one of the crown jewels of our area," McCook said. "We need to keep it clean."

Fritzi Olson, director of Current Problems, made it her personal mission to gather volunteers.

"I got the word out however I could," she said, sending notices to malls and local papers, putting up posters, e-mailing everyone she could think of and contacting

local television stations.

"I felt very strongly that the cleanup should be done by people local to the area in which they were working," she said.

While volunteers from Gainesville played an important role in the cleanup, she said, the group didn't want to rely on Gainesville workers to bear the whole workload.

"People know their part of the river best," Olson said. "It gave them more of a feeling of ownership of the river."

Volunteers poured in from all over North Florida, including Boy Scout troops, local divers and conservation groups like the North Florida Springs Alliance.

Some worked long hours, she said, from 8 or 9 a.m. until

evening, and some completed their portions of the cleanup in a few hours.

Kelly Jessop, president of the North Florida Springs Alliance, participated in cleanup efforts at Troy Springs State Park in O'Brien. He said the volunteers in his group, including kayakers and about 50 UF freshmen fulfilling their community service requirements, pulled more than 1,000 pounds of trash from the water.

"I don't think anyone had any complaints," Jessop said. "It was really rewarding."

Olson said Current Problems hopes to make the event an annual tradition, and McCook called it a success.

"It was incredible," he said. "It far exceeded my expectations."

Tallahassee Democrat

Saturday, January 15, 2011

■ JEFFERSON COUNTY

**Forum Jan. 27 on
water-use permits:**

The Friends of the Wacissa and Protectors of Wacissa River Springs coalition will co-sponsor a Community Awareness Forum on Jan. 27. The event will be held 6-8 p.m. at the Chaires Community Center, 4768 Chaires Cross Road. A representative from the Suwannee River Water Management District will discuss Florida's water-use permit process. Also, coalition members will provide a panel presentation of the alliance's advocacy work to safeguard Jefferson County's Wacissa River and springs system. The coalition opposes water extraction for commercial water bottling from the Wacissa River springs. An international water-bottling company is exploring the possibility of pursuing water extraction from the Wacissa River springs. For more information, visit www.savethewacissa.com.

■ Democrat staff reports

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2011

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"This is the biggest project we've ever undertaken," said Current Problems Executive Director Fritzi Olson. "We received lots of enthusiasm and

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Nearly 600 volunteers helped to restore the natural beauty and health of the Suwannee River.

The local effort commenced in Branford.

"The District commends Current Problems and all who contributed to the Great Suwannee River Cleanup for their efforts to protect and maintain one of our most important natural resources," said District Executive Director David Still.

Current Problems conducts cleanup efforts for Northeast Florida's rivers, lakes, springs and creeks. For more information about the group call Fritzi Olson at 352-264-6827 or visit www.currentproblems.org.

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Continued From Page 1A

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SEE WATER, PAGE 5A

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READERS' PAGE

SPEAKING OUT

What about Florida's water future?

The sooner we start asking the big questions, the closer we may come to saving our springs.

By **Lucinda Faulkner Merritt**
Special to The Sun

I've been thinking about Florida's water issues again and, in particular, the fate of those springs that are our own unique, sparkling jewels: Silver, Ichetucknee, Manatee, Wekiva, and so many more; 700 in all, the largest concentration of fresh-water springs in the world.

Put that much crystal-clear water together in one place, and the springs long ago would have been named a World Heritage Site or at the very least, a national park. But because they are scattered, held by a mix of public and private owners, and because the state of Florida is reluctant to enforce or even enact regulations that would help preserve these gems, it seems that task falls to all the rest of us.

As I've watched and welcomed the expanding dialogue about Florida's water issues, I've realized something else.

Just as we can't expect the government to step in and prevent the springs from being loved to death, polluted, or pumped dry, so we cannot expect science to provide all the answers to our water



CAGLE CARTOONS

problems.

I'm not saying we don't need science; we do. It's just that I think the kind of effort that is going to be required to save our springs can only be successful if we advance the dialogue beyond the seemingly endless scientific arguments that surface at every public meeting, and start asking some of the bigger moral and ethical questions that this issue demands.

Science, after all, was not developed to solve every human dilemma, only to explain the workings of the natural world. To solve the really big problems, I am convinced that we need to bring into play ethics, morality, empathy and compassion.

If we first recognize that each of us needs clean water to survive, and that each of us is capable of contributing to the fouling and diminishment of that water, then I think we can begin to ask some of the bigger questions that might be helpful.

What are our responsibilities as individuals, neighbors, communities, and businesses with regard to;

- Keeping our water free of pollutants?
- Conserving water when we can?
- Keeping our septic tanks in good working order?
- Changing the way we fertilize our plants?
- Making the switch from manicured lawns that need lots of water to alternatives

such as native plant gardens that need less?

■ Buying sturdy water bottles and getting our drinking water from the tap?

■ Speaking out about our role in saving our water and our springs to family, friends, and acquaintances in our neighborhoods, churches, workplaces and schools?

And can we even come to collective agreement about the answers to these questions in an environment that seems to polarize us at every turn?

Florida's new governor seems intent on relegating a lot of the state's "anti-business" regulations to the dustbin. I worry about how this will affect our water quality, and how it will affect all those businesses that depend on water-based recreational tourism, all those other businesses that use Florida's natural environment as a recruiting tool for their employees, and all the rest of us who can't think of anything better than a cool dip in the springs on a hot summer day.

For people who are interested, I recommend the new book "Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril" edited by Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson.

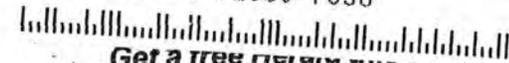
I think the sooner we start asking the big questions, the closer we may come to saving our springs. I offer these thoughts in the hope that they may start a ripple effect.

Lucinda Faulkner Merritt lives in Fort White

The North Florida HERALD

High Springs, Florida • Two Sections

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Thursday, January 27, 2011

Bottled water plant may have a buyer

HIGH SPRINGS – The High Springs area received some good news earlier this week when Coca Cola confirmed that it is in talks with somebody to buy the bottled water plant on Poe Springs Road.

Officials with Coca Cola had announced that if the plant wasn't sold by the summer, the plant would be closed.

But the plant could get sold. Coca Cola won't release the name of who it is negotiating with but the talks are currently underway, according to Charlie Sutlive, a spokesperson for the Coca Cola company.

In the past few months, three

investors contacted *The Herald*, with two saying they were interested in the plant and had the \$30 million they believe is the asking price.

The third investor appears to be in the mode of trying to raise the money among a consortium of investors.

All three investors who contacted *The Herald* said they had



Coca-Cola had announced that if a buyer wasn't found for the bottled water plant on Poe Springs Road by summer, the plant would be closed.

plans to use the plant for something other than simply bottling water but would not elaborate.

The plant in High Springs used to employ nearly 200

people and was open 24 hours a day.

The plant is now down to several dozen employees, and according to the Suwannee River

Water Management District, the plant has cut its water intake almost in half in the past year.

The plant is allowed to withdraw up to 1.2 million gallons a day of water but was averaging only 133,000 gallons a day this year, down from an average of 250,000 gallons a day in 2009.

The economy is not to blame for the plant's situation, said Susan Stribling, a spokesperson for Coca-Cola Refreshments.

She said the Coca-Cola company is moving away from bottling spring water and will instead focus on bottling purified water, which is generally city water that has been filtered in many ways.



1/28/2011 12:03:00 AM

The Ichetucknee Partnership attempting to head off environmental restrictions with voluntary measures

By Karl Burkhardt

Joel Foreman, Chairman of The Ichetucknee Partnership, is taking the group's message to the business community. He began Thursday at noon at the Rotary Club meeting.

"You're going to have a new face around town and hopefully, it will pay dividends for us," Foreman said. The TIP mascot, Bellamy Beaver, is being used as a logo on educational materials to reach out to children the same way Smokey Bear reaches out to children about forest fires.

The Rotary Club has made a commitment to help fund the cost of a Bellamy Beaver costume, which will be like the mascot costumes used by college sports teams.

"We are working together to promote the environmental and economic wellbeing of the Ichetucknee Springshed through programs that are locally led, voluntary and incentive based," Foreman said.

"If we don't do things voluntarily now, it is probable, not possible, but probable that we will be forced to do them involuntarily in the future. We are trying to be proactive and do the things we need to do, to avoid what some of us might consider pretty onerous regulatory restrictions."



Bellamy Beaver will be a living, walking (but not talking) mascot for The Ichetucknee Partnership.

Foreman noted that Rotary was one of the founding partners of The Ichetucknee Partnership, organized through the Chamber of commerce three years ago. TIP includes the City of Lake City, Columbia County, the Suwannee River Water Management District and the Suwannee River Partnership.

“We have been able to bring in some sharp folks in to familiarize us with the science so when somebody asks me about the nitrate levels in the river, we can have an intelligent discussion about it. And, just so you know, right now we are about three the desired level. That’s got to come down if we are going to avoid regulatory restrictions.”

During the first three years, TIP promoted research and monitoring, best management practices (BMP), things that relate to agriculture.

“Our primary mission for the next three years is probably going to be education and outreach,” he said. “Conservation really starts with the individual, it starts at home.

“Our education programs have been really strong, particularly in Fort White. Every child who goes through Fort White Schools knows principles of conservation, understands what their water use is doing to that river that is so vital to our community.

“We also have a program at Richardson Middle School where we bring kids out of science class and take them out in the field and show them how environmental science works. We leave those kids with a real strong understanding and a little bit of passion for protecting that river.”

Because nearly all governmental funding has dried up, TIP is shifting its focus on “sweat equity” programs, education and outreach.

The school programs will continue, at least for another year. They cost about \$50,000 a year for field trips, equipment and materials.

When the costume arrives, Bellamy Beaver will be accompanied by a TIP member at a variety of events, including the County Fair and environmental programs.

Foreman is working on a process where one of the member organizations – probably the Chamber of Commerce – will accept donations to pay for the costume.



Joel Foreman tells Rotary Club members that TIP will focus on education and outreach programs. (LakeCityJournal.com photo)