

St. Johns American Heritage River Navigator News

The St. Johns River
An American Heritage River

Volume 1, Issue 3

St. Johns River Trail, Blueway, and Greenway Focus of Meetings

Once the interest of a small segment of communities, trails, greenways and blueways are now receiving national attention as focal points of recreation, resource protection and economic development that maintains quality of life. Along the St. Johns River, interest in the recreation and low impact development benefits of



trails and blueways is taking center stage.

A meeting on October 31, 2002 co-hosted by the AHRI and FDEP's Office of Greenways and Trails at the Visitor's Center, Cross Florida

Greenway near Palatka, drew 28 trail and blueway professionals from the river's watershed to discuss the potential of designating a St. Johns River Trail.

Among those present were trail planners and designers from 9 of the 11 counties directly bordering the St. Johns River, and representatives of the FDOT, the East Coast Greenway, SJRWMD, NEFRPC, ECFRPC, OGT and National Park Service. Attendees discussed funding needs, the status of trail and blueway development in their areas, and needs and opportunities to engage the public in planning.

Many counties have completed trails masterplans as

a way to ensure that citizens will have opportunities for nearby recreation and quiet reflection along greenways, as the region becomes ever more crowded and developed. This was the first meeting designed to foster cooperation on trail, greenway and blueway projects among counties and interested agencies in northeast Florida.

Results of this and a second meeting held December 16 will be used during the St. Johns River Summit, January 13-14, 2003, to enlist public involvement in the development of a St. Johns River Trail or System along and on the river in the next several years.



St. Johns River at J.P. Hall Nature Preserve

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Steering Committee Meets at SJRWMD Headquarters

The St. Johns AHRI Steering Committee meeting was held in Palatka on December 6. Of greatest interest was the proposal presented by Clay Henderson of the Subcommittee on Bylaws and Non-Profit Status, which advocated the formation of an NGO, perhaps named the St.

Johns River Alliance, and filing the necessary papers to become a non-profit corporation. The proposal was approved by those present. Transition to an NGO will begin taking place at the next meeting during which the Steering Committee will become the Board of Direc-

tors. In the mean time, the Subcommittee, comprised of Nancy Maddox, Barbara Meyer, Brad Thoburn, Pat Northey, Vivian Garfein and Clay Henderson, will write bylaws establishing terms of service, defining roles and

(See Steering Committee p.2)

Funding Sought/Received

During a December 14 meeting of OGT's Acquisitions and Restoration Committee, St. Johns County's Blueway proposal for Florida Forever funding was placed on the A-list for purchase. The 28,000+ acres in the proposal border the river or are within sight of it for the most part. During his presentation to the ARC, Jim Muller, consultant for St. Johns County, emphasized that the St. Johns is an American Heritage River. Don Beatty and Anne Keller of the AHRI also gave supporting testimony for the project. Purchase of this property will contribute to the watershed-wide effort to develop a St. Johns River Trail if purchased.

A Watershed Assistance Grant proposal was submitted by the River Navigator for support of the River Summit was not funded.

Because Governor Bush directed FDEP to select only projects involving SWIM water bodies, the Upper Basin did not submit a proposal for EPA's Watershed Initiative which had to be approved by the State prior to its being sent on to Washington, DC. SJRWMD submitted a proposal for the



St. Johns River near Deland

Watershed Initiative to fund a phosphorus BMP study that did make it to Washington.

The USEPA has indicated that it intends to provide up to \$4,000 for environmental education and outreach as part of Riverfest, and \$5,000 for support of the PBS video now being filmed along the St. Johns River. This video, "The River Runs North", will feature information on environmental issues, history, culture and commercial activities along the river. Eagle Productions plans to continue shooting through May 2003 so that Riverfest events can be included in the video.

Advisory Committee Updates

The Lower Basin Advisory Committee met in Palatka on November 22. County Commissioner and Basin Co-Chair Nancy Harris reported that the septic tank phase out project is underway but going slowly. She also indicated that the Palatka Waterfront Restoration study will begin as soon as the city receives its EDA grant to hire a planning firm.

The City of Palatka, led by Vice-Mayor Mary Lawson Brown, continues to work on the purchase of a riverboat that would serve as a ferry between Palatka,

Welaka, Crescent City and other communities along the St. Johns River. Federal funds (\$300,000) were awarded this year to cover half of the purchase price of a vessel large enough to transport travelers among the cities or to ecotourism destinations, through the assistance of Congresswoman Corrine Brown

The boat could also host business con-



Six Mile Creek

ferences, environmental education classes and other local events.

Middle Basin Chair Pat Northey and incoming County Councilman Bill Long flew the Middle Basin in a sheriff's helicopter, accompanied by Nancy Maddox of Volusia County and River Navigator Anne Keller. The goal was to familiarize Mr. Long with the River.

Upper Basin Advisory Committee members continue to plan for Riverfest activities that they will host in May. No meeting is currently scheduled.

Steering Committee (Continued from Page 1)

describing how basin advisory committees will relate to the Board. The Board will have several new representatives, such as the Northeast and East Central Florida Regional Planning Councils, the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails and at least one corporate interest.

Sally Yozell, Vice President of Battelle,

Inc., made a presentation to the Committee about the Corporate Wetlands Restoration Program. AHRI can access this non-profit group to provide funds or assistance with a variety of river/estuarine ecological studies, dam removal or restoration projects. They provide matching funds for federally funded projects and thereby make possible some projects that otherwise

would not have enough funding. CWRP is an outgrowth of Coastal America, an Initiative that fosters cooperation among federal agencies on coastal issues.

Updates were also provided on the Keystone Projects process which has begun. Agency representatives at Washington, DC headquarters are beginning to form teams to help shepherd our projects toward assistance and funding via programs in progress.

AHRI Playing Key Role in the St. Johns River Summit

The St. Johns AHRI organized Day 1 of the St. Johns River Summit (January 13, 2003), which will focus on the development and benefits of trails, greenways and blueways. The City of Jacksonville, FDEP and SJRWMD encouraged the involvement of the St. Johns AHRI in the planning of the Summit because of its watershed-wide organization and continued involvement with the river.

While it may not be obvious to the casual user of greenways and trails, these recreation areas help to preserve and protect the health of rivers, in addition to providing recreation opportunities and economic development.

These facts and others will be focal

points on the first day of the River Summit. The luncheon Keynote Speaker will be Chris Brown, Chief of the National Designations Division of the National Park Service in Washington, DC. Chris has had many years of experience related to trails planning and implementation including the Appalachian Trail, as part of that organization, and American Rivers which is one of our leading river conservation organizations.

Following the Keynote speech, we will have three breakout sessions, each presented twice. These include: Multiply Your Benefits with Trails, Blueways and Greenways; Trail Mix—How'd



Manatees piling up at Blue Springs

They Do That?; and Implementation of the St. Johns River Trail.

Please register for this free two-day meeting by calling 904-630-2709. This will ensure that you get meals. We need your participation in this great river-wide discussion about the St. Johns.

AHRI Riverfest 2003 News—Music, Fishing and Tall Ships

Riverfest has a new logo, and will now include an art festival produced by Joe Sabatini of Mount Dora's Europa Gallery during the first ever Tall Ships event in Jacksonville, May 16-18, 2003. The Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra is working on a plan to present several new concerts as part of Riverfest beginning May 10. This year, the concerts would take place in Jacksonville. However, Executive Director Alan Hopper would like to hold concerts upstream at smaller communities in 2004 if he can locate grant funds.

The outreach strategy is in development following the release of a memo announcing Riverfest sent to the areas Convention and Visitor's Bureaus in September. A December 17 teleconference with interested citizens and CVB representatives focused on increasing public awareness of the event, including sending information home with school children.

The City of Palatka requested that Riverfest begin on May 2 rather than May 10. During the teleconference on December 17, the request was approved. This will allow the City to include its



Riverfest Logo Designed by the NEFRPC

sesquicentennial events and the Mug Race, the oldest and largest river-based sailing regatta in the nation, in our celebration. Please join the continuing discussion by teleconference on January 3. For more information, contact Anne Keller (see below).

Basin Contacts

Contacts: Upper Basin—Brevard County Commissioner Sue Carlson @ 321-633-2044; Middle Basin—Volusia County Councilwoman Pat Northey @ 386-736-5920, ext. 5247; Lower Basin—Putnam County Commissioner Nancy Harris @ 386-698-2776; Anne Keller, River Navigator @ 904-396-9141, cell—561-818-6119, keller. anne@epa.gov.

The *St. Johns American Heritage*

River Initiative is a community-based effort to improve and protect the river, support economic development and preserve cultural/heritage sites. Basin committees need participants, ideas and energy. Each Basin Advisory Committee identifies its own environmental, economic, cultural or historical projects to be completed as part of the St. Johns AHRI Strategic plan.

Assistant for AHRI Moves On

Kyia Tiffany, recently hired by the SJRWMD via a grant from the USEPA to provide office support for the AHRI, will be taking a permanent position with the District beginning this month. We thank her for her help and wish her the best of luck in the future. The position will be filled shortly.

The St. Johns River An American Heritage River

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The St. Johns River was designated an American Heritage River by the President in 1998. Local, State and Federal groups signed an agreement on cooperation following that designation, and the first River Navigator was selected in 1999.

The St. Johns AHR is focused on protecting cultural/heritage sites, environmental protection, and developing economic opportunities along the river.

Three Basin Advisory Committees are comprised of local citizens and elected officials who then represent their area on the Steering Committee, chaired by Mayor John Delaney of Jacksonville, the early proponent of the designation.



Speakers Available

A number of people who are actively involved in the St. Johns American Heritage River Initiative are available to speak to nature groups, tourist development or chamber of commerce meetings, students or other gatherings where community topics are discussed.

We have naturalists, cultural and heritage experts, folks involved with greenways and trails, water quality experts and writers who would be happy to talk with you about the AHRI, the St. Johns River and many other subjects. Please contact the River Navigator or your Basin Advisory Committee chair (See "Basin Advisory Chair Contacts", p. 3) for more information.

St. Johns River Facts

The Timucua Indians or their ancestors inhabited the northeast Florida and south-

east Georgia area for hundreds or thousands of years before European explorers



found their way to what is now Florida. They hunted and gathered food or cultivated crops depending on what was available in the area, or how fertile the soil was. These Native

People left burial mounds and other remnants of their culture along the St. Johns River and on its islands. While French explorers were interested in learning about the Timucua, the Spaniards who followed used these Native Americans as laborers and workers. The Timucua culture was eventually eliminated from the area due to assimilation into European society, disease or battles with soldiers.

After the Timucua people were gone, the Seminole Indians—Creeks from what is now Alabama and Georgia—moved into the area and the Timucua culture was lost.

The Timucuan State and National Park along the northeastern end of the St. Johns River bears the name of these long gone people. The park has historians who can tell you more about the history of the Timucua people.

Upcoming Meetings

St. Johns River Summit—January 13-14, 2003; Prime Osborn Center, Jacksonville. Call: 904-630-2709 to register. Free registration.

Riverfest Telecon—January 3, 2:00 p.m. Call Amanda Loach (904-279-0885) for call-in number.

Steering Committee—February 7, 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the Upper Basin, location to be determined.