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## State awards \$1.8 million to Rainbow River Restoration Project

By Sean Arnold Riverland News  
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Art Jones scoops out muck at the City of Dunnellon beach at Chaplin A. Dinkins III Memorial Park.  
Sean Arnold / Riverland News

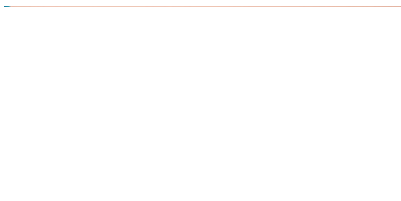


Jones

A pilot project to remove muck and invasive plants in the lower Rainbow River was awarded a \$1.8 million grant in the latest Florida budget signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis on June 15.

The Rainbow River Restoration Project was launched by Art Jones and his nonprofit, One Rake at a Time, Inc., to vacuum and scoop large mats of algae and invasive hydrilla and plant native eelgrass in the hopes that the eelgrass beds can outcompete the hydrilla and eliminate the need to deploy herbicides.

Jones said the grant will fund the completion of a survey to determine the scope of the muck in the lower 25 acres of the river. It will also contribute to the design of a work plan to remove the muck and debris and the water testing process. He said the survey is 80 percent finished and is due to be completed within the next month. The survey is required for additional government assistance in the five-year project.



Jones' organization implemented a similar project at King's Bay in Crystal River. He's contracting with the same aquatic restoration firm, Sea & Shoreline, LLC.

"They have a proven track record and the equipment to do the job," Jones said. "They're Florida-based and employ local residents who're qualified.

"The other big bonus is that they have their own certified nursery that grows eelgrass plants that we can use, so they're underwater farmers. These people know what they're doing."

Jones said the river has been declining since at least the time when phosphate mining descended into the area. "People have just taken from the river, leaving whatever mess they made for others to clean up," he said. "It's time to give back."

Springs watch dogs such as the Florida Springs Council report that most of the river's deterioration is due to increased nitrate concentration from agricultural runoff. Jones said even if the sources of the problem were fixed tomorrow, the muck would remain. "Those things will help in the future and are in process now, but it will take years to accomplish," he said. "We need to start cleaning up the river now, at the same time – a two-prong approach.

"This grant, while not a magic wand, is at least a start."

Jones hosts monthly meetings on the Rainbow River Restoration Project at Holy Faith Episcopal in Dunnellon. Visit [OneakeataTime.org](https://www.oneakeata.org) to learn more about the restoration project and volunteering opportunities.