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## Editorial | Homosassa River Restoration Project enters second phase

Mar 31, 2022

**THE ISSUE:** *Homosassa River cleanup relocates home base.*

**OUR OPINION:** *Forward thinking is a win-win for everyone.*

The Homosassa River Restoration Project (HRRP) has moved to its next level by gaining access to about 10 acres on the river near the water tower off Fishbowl Drive. This property will be used to store the invasive algae, *Lyngbya*, a nasty mess that has dominated the headsprings of the river bottom and its canals and tributaries over the past couple of decades.

An Army Corps of Engineers study noted that these algae mats can grow to several feet in thickness, thereby destroying eelgrass and other oxygen producing vegetation that are the foundation of the manatee diet. Eelgrass is, essentially, meat and potatoes to manatees.

However, the eelgrass was choked off by this algae which essentially put a death grip on the river. A concerned group of citizens got together, formed the HRRP, and hustled the halls of Tallahassee for about five years before funding was found for the first phase to vacuum the

algae from the canals and coves between Fishbowl Drive and West Spring Cove Road. Steve Minguy, the HRRP's president, said the group wouldn't be in existence if it hadn't bird-dogged Crystal River's King's Bay restoration efforts and seen their positive results. Sea and Shoreline – a Florida-based aquatic restoration company – was awarded the Crystal River project. They were also granted the contract for the HRRP efforts in the Homosassa River. Work began in April 2021 and divers were in the water vacuuming the Lyngbya until manatees returned in the Fall. Sea and Shoreline divers will begin suctioning around April 1st to start the second year of their cleanup efforts.

Vacuum tubes laid down in Pepper Creek last year sucked up the algae and deposited the blue-green mess in an area behind the Bella Oasis Motel on U.S. 19. Mountains of drying muck grew until that area was almost filled. Then the owner of a downtrodden RV park at Sportsman Cove agreed to donate land use for the next phase of the environmental restoration project. He granted usage of about 10 acres to facilitate storing the extracted Lyngbya. Around a dozen battered and unlivable RVs were removed around the middle of this month, and the remaining debris field is almost cleared. Minguy said the HRRP's vacuuming will only utilize a few of those acres but will still use the Oasis site for maintenance and continued cleanup of the original vacuumed area begun last year. Once dried, the mountains are carted off in dump trucks at no cost to the HRRP to farmland where the product can be recycled.

Sea and Shoreline is also tasked with planting eelgrass into the riverbed following the vacuuming process. Wire cages protect the tender roots from the manatees' munching habits until the rootstock can take growth. Minguy praised lawmakers for another environmental effort by killing House and Senate bills in Tallahassee this past session which would have permitted mitigation efforts allowing for destruction of wild seagrasses. He said that destroying eelgrasses only benefits developers, who – he continued – have a history of turning a blind eye to the restoration of the environment.

Meanwhile, biologists have boated down the Spring Cove canal where the project began, testing the waters and reviewing the vacuuming efforts from last year. Minguy stated the biologists got worked up at what they saw and told him they feel the canal will be a poster child for this and future environmental restoration projects.

We feel this locking of hands together – citizen groups like the HRRP supporting restoration efforts in our rivers to renovate the environment and lawmakers blocking legislation to kill off biologically necessary aquatic vegetation – is a win-win for all of us and the future of Florida's

## First Magnitude Springs, like the Homosassa River.