

[https://www.chronicleonline.com/news/local/water-restoration-projects-underway-on-homosassa-river-kings-bay/article\\_886fe4a2-a8f4-11eb-a16c-8fdb5ffb2530.html](https://www.chronicleonline.com/news/local/water-restoration-projects-underway-on-homosassa-river-kings-bay/article_886fe4a2-a8f4-11eb-a16c-8fdb5ffb2530.html)

## Water restoration projects underway on Homosassa River, King's Bay

Buster Thompson Chronicle Reporter  
May 4, 2021



Sea & Shoreline site supervisor Travis Benavidez uses a PVC pipe to strike a water-filled bag that collects organic materials taken from the Hall's River in Homosassa. Striking the bag unclogs the porous material allowing water to escape while containing the organic materials collected from the river. The projects intends for native eelgrasses to grow and thrive.

Matthew Beck Photo Editor

Spring cleaning arrived for two of Citrus County's major water systems.

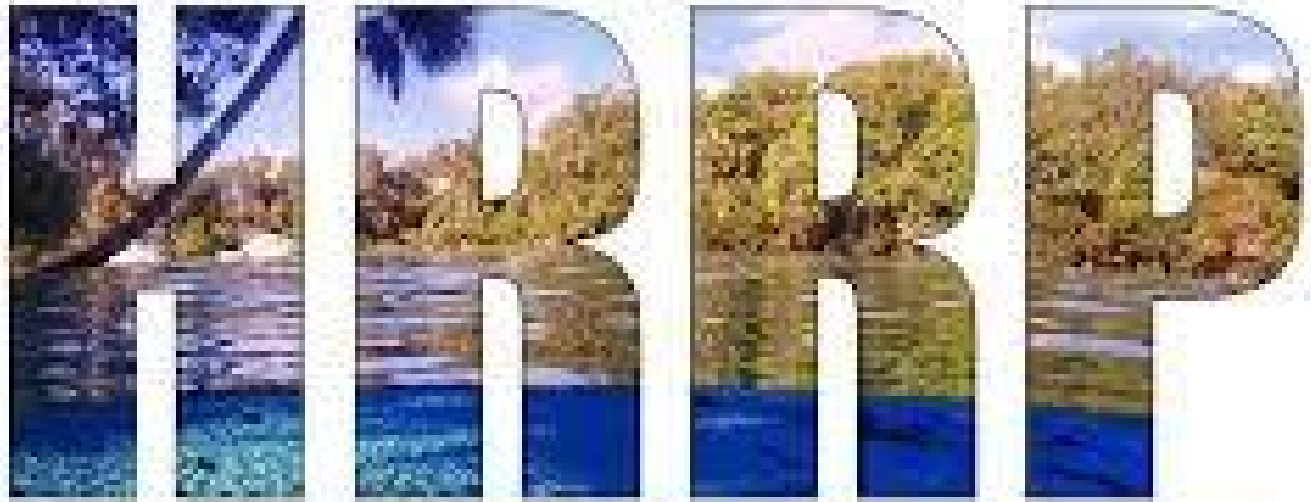
April 1 kicked off the annual and separate restoration endeavors on the Homosassa River and in King's Bay, Crystal River.

Both cleanups were born from the respective citizen efforts of grassroot groups Save Crystal River Inc. (SCR) and the Homosassa River Restoration Project Inc. (HRRP) to vacuum dredge their local waterways of muck before replanting sandy bottoms with natural eelgrass.



"We're really excited," SCR Board President Lisa Moore told the Chronicle. "Everything's going great."

"Things are going even better than we had hoped," added Steve Minguy, HRRP's board president. "It's progressing better than we had hoped."



## Homosassa River Restoration Project, Inc.

Homosassa River Restoration Project, Inc.

Winter Garden-based contractor Sea & Shoreline, LLC and its roughly 45 workers and divers were tasked with handling operations at the two restoration sites.

Sea & Shoreline has been in charge of both environmental endeavors since their individual inceptions; 2021 is the sixth year for SCR's project, and the second year for HRRP's.

"We're cranking back up again this year," said Howard Miller, Sea & Shoreline's vice president of sales. "We're rocking and rolling with larger staff than we've had."



Divers work under the surface of King's Bay Thursday, April 29, as organic material is sucked from the bottom of the bay into a device that will separate the material and return the water into the bay.

Matthew Beck Photo Editor

For information on HRRP, visit [homosassariverrestorationproject.com](http://homosassariverrestorationproject.com); SCR, [savecrystalriver.com](http://savecrystalriver.com).

SCR's and HRRP's future funding sources are also looking strong.

Florida senators and representatives voted this legislative session in their proposed budgets to appropriate \$4 million toward SCR's upcoming phases of its King's Bay Restoration Project.

Moore thanked local state legislators, Senate President Wilton Simpson and Rep. Ralph Massullo, for their "tremendous efforts and hard work" to fight for SCR's money.

Rep. Ralph Massullo, R-Lecanto, told the Chronicle he's been speaking with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) officials to secure \$4 million from the state's spring restoration fund.

"We've had good luck in the past," Massullo said about prior and similar funding asks to the FDEP. "I don't know how much we'll get from them; we may get more. ... It doesn't hurt to ask."

Simpson, R-Trilby, could not be reached for comment.

Representatives and senators respectively budgeted \$50 million and \$75 million this legislative session for the springs fund.



Planted "Rockstar" eelgrass on the restored bottom of King's Bay in Crystal River.  
Save Crystal River, Inc.

Joint legislative committees will form to draft a singular state budget for Gov. Ron DeSantis to review and adjust before it's sent back to the Legislature.

### **📄 After funding, permit hurdles, restoration project underway for Homosassa River**

After then-Gov. Rick Scott vetoed a \$350,000 allocation for it in 2016, HRRP members and donors fundraised \$75,000 to pay for project studies and permit fees.

Along with a \$2 million grant from 2019, state lawmakers during their 2020 session allocated \$1.5 million to launch the Homosassa River Restoration Project, which, has planted more than 11,000 native and sustainable seagrasses in canals east of Fishbowl Drive Bridge, Minguy said.



A map of the three-phased Homosassa River Restoration Project.

Sea & Shoreline

Minguy said he's confident the fruits of HRRP's labor have proven it worthy of more support to clean the river more to the west.

"I think we've proven it's a viable concept and that it works," he said. "We're spending taxpayer dollars effectively and efficiently, and we hope Tallahassee sees that as well."

Perfecting a method it's used for years and hopes to expand through Florida's coasts, Sea & Shoreline is on track to meet its yearly and ultimate deadlines.

"We're moving nice," Miller said, "and every year it gets a little more easier."

Sea & Shoreline barges and divers can only do in-water work outside of the local manatee-migration season, which runs from Nov. 15 to March 31.

### **Bay restoration project cleans another 8 acres, claims 220 reopened spring vents**

With 54 acres tallied as of April 1, Moore said, Save Crystal River's goal is to rehabilitate 90 acres of King's Bay before the city's 100th birthday on July 2, 2023.

Moore said SCR is also applying for grants to restore Hunter Springs Cove in Crystal River, and around the city's anticipated Riverwalk.

Due to a shortened cleanup period in 2020, a portion of HRRP's first of three phases to restore 46.19 acres in the Homosassa River by 2025 has been completed.

Similar to 2020, the King's Bay Restoration Project is based on and around Shatz Island off of Kings Bay Drive, while the restoration of the Homosassa River is headquartered on 3 rented acres behind the Bella Oasis Hotel off U.S. 19.



Save Crystal River's King's Bay Restoration Project site on Shatz Island in Crystal River, pictured in June 2020.

From a industrial pumping system on the sites, pipes snake out toward and into the bay and river to barges or divers sucking the water bottom clean of invasive algae and vegetation.

Miller thanked Sea & Shoreline's neighbors for accommodating its work, which sometimes goes underneath private docks or gets in the way of passing watercraft.

"People have been so gracious," he said. "Keep an eye out for us because we're out there."

Miller said complaints and concerns can be directed to him at 727-248-6644.

## 🕒 **Another year of cleaning King's Bay begins**

Whatever's removed from the Homosassa River and King's Bay travels back to the nearest pump site at a rate between 2,500 and 4,500 gallons a minute, and is filtered through a series of mechanical dewatering sieves to remove larger sediments.

Water's then pumped into fine-mesh Geotube bags, after its injected with microscopic polymers used to bond onto nitrogen and phosphorus particles — fuel for algae blooms.

## 📄 **SCR begins next steps of King's Bay Restoration Project**

Once the Geotube bags reach their maximum size — a typical height of 8 feet — clean water seeps from their tiny pores and into a lined trench flowing naturally back into the waterway, leaving the clumps of polymers and particles behind.

Afterward Sea & Shoreline plants thousands of its homegrown durable eelgrasses on the clear bottom to be maintained until they take a natural foothold to create new ecosystems.

"Seagrass saves sea life," Miller said, quoting his company's new slogan.

## 📄 **Annual manatee assessments show healthy herd**

Citing recent data from the U.S. Geological Survey, which conducts annual manatee health assessments in King's Bay, Miller said Sea & Shoreline's methods created a reliable food source for the marine mammal.

"Because of our project," he said, "we have the healthiest manatees anywhere."

Miller said Sea & Shoreline has been trying to get more restoration projects along Florida's east coast, where manatees have been dying from starvation.

"We're trying to work with the other side of the state to get some projects going," he said, "and get some seagrass growing as quickly as we can."




Contact Chronicle reporter Buster Thompson at 352-564-2916, [bthompson@chronicleonline.com](mailto:bthompson@chronicleonline.com) or visit [tinyurl.com/yxn2ahso](https://tinyurl.com/yxn2ahso) to see more of his stories.

MORE INFORMATION



Save Crystal River seeking more applicants for its responsible anchoring program



A meal fit for manatees

## BUSTER THOMPSON

Reporter