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## Win-win move relocates Homosassa River Restoration Project; removes derelict trailers

By Buster Thompson Chronicle Reporter  
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A worker with Sea & Shoreline demolishes one of the last remaining manufactured homes Monday, March 14, at the former Sportsman Cove RV park along the Homosassa River. The land, once cleared, will be a base of operation for the Homosassa River Restoration Project, which is working to improve the river's water quality.

Photos by Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

A win-win strategy is in motion to give the rehabilitation of the Homosassa River better footing, and also rid a former riverfront RV park of its derelict trailers.



Sea & Shoreline, LLC crews contracted by the nonprofit Homosassa River Restoration Project Inc. (HRRP) recently demolished roughly a dozen unlivable mobile homes at Sportsman Cove off of Fishbowl Drive, near the Homosassa water tower.



Property along the Homosassa River is cleared Monday, March 14, to make way for a base from where Sea & Shoreline will operate the Homosassa River Restoration Project. The property had fallen into a state of disrepair, and Sea & Shoreline agreed to clear the lot in exchange for a worksite.

Photos by Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Workers tore down the last trailer Monday, March 14, and hope to clear the 10-acre site of remaining debris within the next two weeks, depending on their hauler's availability.

In exchange for the demolition, the property owner agreed to let the HRRP on their land so the organization can set up its final base of operations and finish restoring 46.19 acres of the river by 2025, from its headspring to south of the Halls River Road bridge.

"He had heard about our project," HRRP Board President Steve Minguy said of the landowner's representative, "and thought this would be a great fit for us to have a new worksite to help the river, and to help the owner with some of the trailers he was having an issue with with Citrus

County.”

“He’s happy, we’re happy, and this is going to be the future of the project, this site,” added Mark Mekelburg, a Sea & Shoreline superintendent. “It was effort and teamwork to get stuff done, and this is the ticket for the future of the project.”

Sea & Shoreline barges and divers are slated to go in the river April 1 to start vacuuming out layers of accumulated muck and detrital materials from its depths, which will then be planted with lush and sustainable eelgrass to help bolster marine habitats.

Whatever’s removed from the river is piped back to Sea & Shoreline’s on-land filtration site before clean water is pumped back into the river.

HRRP has used Sea & Shoreline’s method since 2020, when it launched the first phase of cleanup in canals and coves between Fishbowl Drive and Spring Cove Road.

Sea & Shoreline rented private land behind the Bella Oasis Hotel off of U.S. 19 to house its filtration devices, including large and porous Geotube bags river water seeps through after it’s treated for microscopic contaminants.



Steve Minguy, board president of the Homosassa River Restoration Project, stands with his wife, Cyndi Minguy, at the former Sportsman Cove RV park along the Homosassa River.

Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor/File photo



Homosassa River Restoration Project

During 2020 and 2021 from the site along the highway, the HRRP has restored a total 13.56 acres of the river, planted almost 74,500 eelgrasses, and reopened 21 spring vents.

However, Sea & Shoreline's access to the water from upriver has been limited, requiring its workers to rely on a long network of pipes running down Pepper Creek and into the Homosassa River.

Entering the river closer to its headsprings, where many boaters gather, also put Sea & Shoreline's in-water crews in close and sometimes dangerous contact with vessels.

"We've had some pretty close calls here," Mekelburg said, "boaters traveling over divers in six feet of water. We don't want anyone to get hurt."



Being at Sportsman Cove gives Sea & Shoreline direct and safer access to the water, keeping costs down for the HRRP.



Both sides of a canal leading to the Homosassa River are being cleared for use to help facilitate a water-quality project.

“Moving downstream, this was great,” Minguy said. “The less distance Sea & Shoreline has to pump, then the cheaper it is per square foot for us to get things done so it works for us.”

According to prior reports, power to the Sportsman Cove RV park was shut off in October 2015 after Citrus County’s building department cited several instances of illegal wiring between its mobile homes, along with electrical repairs being done by unlicensed electricians or without permits.

Florida Department of Health officials also refused to renew the park’s license to operate because of septic issues.



County spokeswoman Veronica Kampschroer told the Chronicle on Thursday the building department's open code cases for the property "are all pertaining to the existing unsafe structures."

"If those structures were to be demolished," Kampschroer said, "that would satisfy the open code cases as of today."

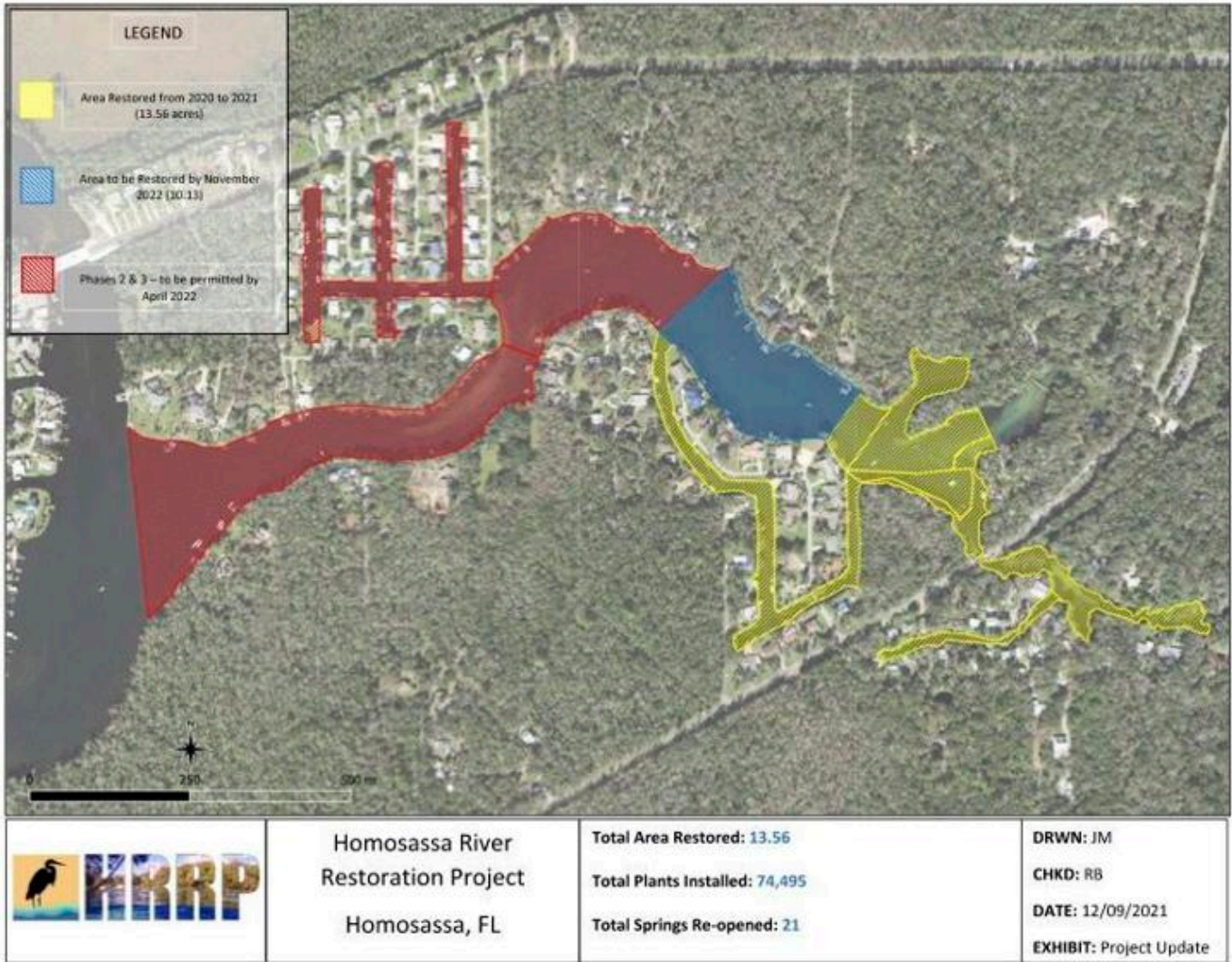


A large excavator from Sea & Shoreline removes part of a manufactured home Monday, March 14, in Old Homosassa.

From its new location, Sea & Shoreline is hoping to complete the HRRP's remaining 10.13 acres of its first cleanup phase by November.

Mekelburg said Sea & Shoreline and the property owner have an agreement in place to last until January 2025, and are working to extend it to 2027 "just in case."





This is the status of the Homosassa River Restoration Project as of December 2021.

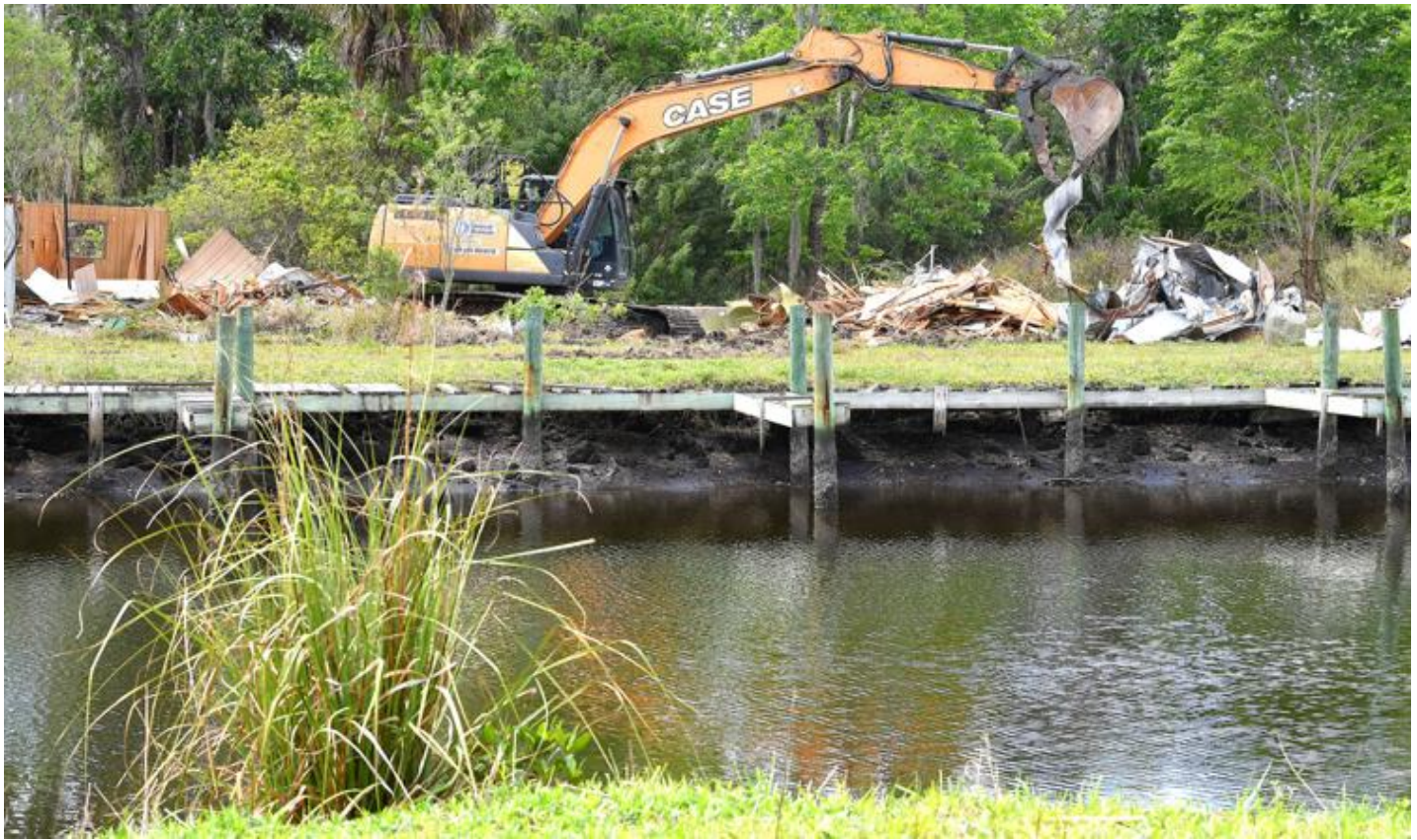
Homosassa River Restoration Project

Sea & Shoreline also has other uses in mind for its Bella Oasis site but if those plans don't happen, the company will revert the land to manage stormwater, per its owner's wishes.

HRRP officials also look like they secured funding to finish the last 22.5 acres of their project's remaining two phases, which the nonprofit hopes to have permitted by April to start work as soon as possible.

"We have the money," Minguy said, "it's just a matter of Sea & Shoreline having the crews, and the weather cooperating."





Sea & Shoreline workers demolish a manufactured home on property in Old Homosassa Monday, March 14, to make room for their equipment that will be used in the Homosassa River Restoration Project.

Photos by Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Florida lawmakers in their March 14 pass of the 2022 state budget allocated \$10 million toward the Homosassa River Restoration Project, but Gov. Ron DeSantis could still veto the line item.

Minguy said he “can’t stop smiling” about how the HRRP has grown from a grassroots campaign started in 2016.

“It’s very exciting for us,” he said. “It seemed like it took forever, and the fact that we’re here now is amazing.”

Community support is crucial to the success of the HRRP, especially when it’s board is asking legislators for money.

“Without that support, we can afford to get those permits,” Minguy said. “When the community’s behind you, then the state’s more willing to fund your project.”





Homosassa River Restoration Project

Contributions to the HRRP go toward the nonprofit's administrative, permitting and operating costs, while state funding is dedicated to the river's restoration.

For more information about the HRRP and how to donate, visit [homosassariverrestorationproject.com](https://homosassariverrestorationproject.com).

Have a question about the project itself? Call either Mekelburg at 352-231-1077 or Minguy at 407-832-1598. Project updates are also posted on HRRP's Facebook page, [tinyurl.com/4bv5atxs](https://www.facebook.com/HRRP).

Mekelburg and Minguy asked the public to stay informed about the project and its latest status so they know either where not to boat or what not to disturb, like Sea & Shoreline's underwater pipes and cages protecting young eelgrasses.

“Be aware of our barges and divers in the waters,” Mekelburg said. “We’re here because we care about the water, we care about the quality of the water, and, in turn, we care about the people going out on the water.”

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**MORE INFORMATION**



Nonprofit Spotlight: The Homosassa River Restoration Project

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