

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
DIVISION OF RECREATION AND PARKS
OFFICE OF PARK PLANNING**



**Ichetucknee Springs
State Park**

**PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS
AND COMMENTS**

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block ...

Itchetucknee River

 You forwarded this message on Thu 12/10/2020 10:25 AM

 Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Tue 12/9/2025 10:22 AM

PK

Pierce Kelley <pierce.kelley@yahoo.com>

Thu 12/10/2020 10:22 AM

To: Degagne, Demi

    ...

I live close to the itchetucknee River and I am a frequent user. I was a volunteer Ranger until the concessionaire came in, which brought about much change. I am very interested to learn more about what changes are proposed Specifically, I am wondering if there is a proposal to close the river at the end of the Park. I hope not.... Thank you! Robert Kelley

Sent from my iPhone

[Reply](#) | [Forward](#)

⏪ Reply all ⌵ 🗑 Delete 🚫 Junk 🚫 Block ⋮

RE: Ichetucknee Public Email Received Green Category

① Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Sat 12/13/2025 5:43 PM

AD

Alsentzer, Daniel

Mon 12/14/2020 5:43 PM

To: Joe Fletcher <jsfl7bj52@gmail.com>

Cc: Cutshaw, Steven; Degagne, Demi



You are welcome. Also, if you are registered for the meeting, I hope you noticed the meeting time correction via an automated email.

For complicated reasons, the virtual meeting platform displayed the meeting facilitator's access time. The actual public meeting time had always been for 9:00 am.

Just wanted to add clarity in case that's useful. Feel free to share that with anyone else in your community.

Best,
Daniel

From: Joe Fletcher <jsfl7bj52@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 5:39 PM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>

Cc: Cutshaw, Steven <Steven.Cutshaw@dep.state.fl.us>; Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>

Subject: Re: Ichetucknee Public Email Received

Thank you for your response.

On Mon, Dec 14, 2020, 9:20 AM Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us> wrote:

Good morning, Joe

Paddlers can and will be able to paddle the entire Ichetucknee River from the north launch to the southernmost takeout just north of the US 27 bridge. Paddlers may navigate even further depending on their interests and logistical means.

It should be noted that during the summer months, the portion of the river between the midpoint and southernmost park takeout will typically be busy with tubing. As before, paddlers will simply be advised to be mindful of other user types, especially tubes that are less swiftly mobile on the water.

Thanks for sending your question. Please let us know if we can offer additional information.

Regards,
Daniel




From: Joe Fletcher <jsfl7bj52@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 12, 2020 1:17 PM
To: Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject:

Do the paddlers get to go all the way down
To the last take out at 27brige it do they get out some where at damper landing and what about the
out wode inventors..?

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block ...

Fw: Ichetucknee Springs State Park public meeting Green Category

 Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Sun 12/14/2025 7:50 AM



Degagne, Demi

Tue 12/15/2020 7:50 AM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel

Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Allbritton, Joel; Cutshaw, Steven



PUBLIC EMAIL RECEIVED

From: Cindy Preston <flortana@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 5:02 PM

To: Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>

Subject: Ichetucknee Springs State Park public meeting

My Question is what scientific data do you have in 7 months that has overturned over 40 years of scientific studies. The North Ichetucknee has been at a balance of recreation and resource, with the use of carrying capacities since the early 1980's.

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block ...

Fw: 100 Kayak restriction on Ichetucknee Green Category

 Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Sun 12/14/2025 7:53 AM



Degagne, Demi

Tue 12/15/2020 7:53 AM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel

Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Allbritton, Joel



PUBLIC EMAIL RECEIVED

From: Pat Murphy <southofyou_98@yahoo.com>

Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 7:35 PM

To: Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>

Subject: 100 Kayak restriction on Ichetucknee

Hi. My question concerns kayaking limitations.

Will the 100 slots be shared 50/50 between the public and Paddling Adventures? Or will Paddling Adventures have a monopoly? Will the Paddling Adventures reservation system make it impossible for other kayakers to access the north? What criteria was used to determine 100 kayakers? What is the normal daily number of kayakers during September-May?

Thank you

Patricia Burke

Sent from my iPhone

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)

[↩ Reply all](#) [✕](#) [🗑 Delete](#) [🚫 Junk](#) [🚫 Block](#) [⋮](#)

Fw: Question for Ichetucknee Springs state park public meeting

Green Category

📄 Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Sun 12/14/2025 8:37 AM



Degagne, Demi

Tue 12/15/2020 8:37 AM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel

Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Allbritton, Joel; Cutshaw, Steven



From: Cindy Preston <flortana@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 8:30 AM

To: Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>

Subject: Question for Ichetucknee Springs state park public meeting

What scientific study was done to support the closing of tubing from the north entrance, and where can I find it online.

Thank's Retired Ichetucknee Springs park ranger

Ron Preston

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)

[↶ Reply all](#) [✕](#) [🗑 Delete](#) [🚫 Junk](#) [Block](#) [⋮](#)

Fw: What happened to public meeting? Green Category

ⓘ Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Sun 12/14/2025 10:56 AM



Degagne, Demi

Tue 12/15/2020 10:56 AM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel

Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Allbritton, Joel; Cutshaw, Steven



ICHETUCKNEE PUBLIC EMAIL RECEIVED

From: Lawrence Rockwood <radical.history.tour@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 10:52 AM

To: Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>

Subject: What happened to public meeting?

Do have to contact the Nestlie Corporation to take part in this meeting?

Signed citizens who want to take part and can't

If the issue is with tubing the Park Report is nonsense.

1. The grass is not endangered in the region.
2. Tubes v kayaks as nothing to do with the algae.

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)

[↶ Reply all](#) [✕](#) [🗑 Delete](#) [🚫 Junk](#) [Block](#) [⋮](#)

Fw: Ichetucknee SAV Green Category

🕒 Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Tue 12/16/2025 7:30 AM



Degagne, Demi

Thu 12/17/2020 7:30 AM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel

Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Cutshaw, Steven



PUBLIC EMAIL RECEIVED

From: Kristin Rubin <rubinka2591@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 16, 2020 5:00 PM
To: Degagne, Demi <Demi.Degagne@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject: Ichetucknee SAV

Hi,

I live on the Santa Fe River and know the overuse really spells abuse to the River, so I wholeheartedly agree with the mindset to lose the numbers per day and the area that is most damaged getting the relief.

That being said, I would like to know how and if those that are interested in coming will be informed of the changes and educated to the science publicly by media of every avenue and opportunity.

Best,
Kristin Rubin
Our Santa Fe River Board Member
305-582-3800

Sent from my iPad

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

FW: Ichetucknee

 Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Wed 12/17/2025 11:31 AM

AD

Alsentzer, Daniel

Fri 12/18/2020 11:31 AM

To: Degagne, Demi

Management Solutions 2 - Ic...

18 KB

From: Jim Stevenson <florida_springs@comcast.net>
Sent: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 10:41 AM
To: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>
Cc: Maxwell, Clifton <Clifton.Maxwell@FloridaDEP.gov>
Subject: Ichetucknee

Daniel:

Sorry about my confusion with this system. I was only able to hear the last 15 minutes of the meeting. Good work with the meeting.

The attached document may be of interest that I drafted during my last attempt to have this modification implemented in February 2018. I will provide a similar up dated version prior to the ARC meeting.

Thanks

Jim

562-5716

[Reply](#) | [Forward](#)

Recreational Management of the Ichetucknee River

Restoration of the Ichetucknee is consistent with the Governor's emphasis on restoring Florida Springs.

Management Objectives:

- To restore the native aquatic plants in the upper river.
- To retain clear, blue water clarity.
- To maintain a serene experience in the Headspring use area.
- To increase birds and other wildlife.

Visitor Uncertainty of Tubing the Upper River:

Situations when the upper river is closed:

- During floods, which average once every two years for 7 days duration.
- During extreme low water caused by drought.
- When the 750-person carrying capacity is reached.
- When fallen trees block the river.

Visitors are accustomed to proceeding to mid-point when the upper river is closed.

Current Problems:

- Cloudy, turbid water caused by wading and swimming.
- Barren spring run and damaged submerged plants caused by wading.
- Reduced photosynthesis caused by turbidity.
- Tuber congestion at Headspring use area disrupts tranquil state park experience for other visitors.
- Potential accidents during vehicle shuttles. (one death and injuries)
- Potential vandalism of cultural resources sites bordering the east side of the upper river.

Solutions:

- Close upper river to tubing and swimming beginning January 1, 2019.
- Increase capacity at mid-point dock to 3,000 beginning 2019.

Benefits:

- Heal damage from trampling and restore the ecology of the upper river.
- Increase birds and other wildlife on the upper river.
- Perpetuate clear, blue, water clarity.
- Provide a tranquil state park experience at the Headspring use area.

- Provide a passive atmosphere for local community activities such as church socials, school classes, and family reunions.
- Enhance and increase kayaking and canoeing.
- Maintain current park revenue and attendance.
- Only need to tie tubes on cars at the last two remaining vendors on CR 238.
- Eliminate potential vehicle accidents during vehicle shuttles. (one death and injuries).
- Enhance protection of significant cultural sites along the east side of the upper river including: Spanish mission, Timucuan village, railroad trestle, Ichetucknee post office, grist mill, blacksmith, and store.
- Staff will be available for visitor services and management of the river.
- Consistent with state parks mission--balancing recreation and preservation.
- Enjoy the opportunity to experience peace and solitude of a pristine spring run.
- It is time to separate the circus from the church.

Advocates: (businesses, NGOs)

- Ichetucknee Alliance
- Florida Paddling Inc.
- Florida Paddling Trails Association
- Aardvark's Florida Kayak Company
- Adventure Outpost LLC
- Florida Springs Institute
- Apalachee Audubon
- Wild Florida Adventures
- River Rise Resort
- Santa Fe Canoe Outpost

February 22, 2019

↩ Reply all ∨ 🗑 Delete 🚫 Junk Block ⋮

FW: ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE/comments re: ISSP management plan changes

ⓘ Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Wed 12/17/2025 11:31 AM

AD

Alsentzer, Daniel

Fri 12/18/2020 11:31 AM

To: Degagne, Demi



IA to FPS re ISSP mgmt plan ...

432 KB

From: Alsentzer, Daniel

Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 5:11 PM

To: Cutshaw, Steven <Steven.Cutshaw@dep.state.fl.us>; Small, Parks <Parks.Small@FloridaDEP.gov>; Maxwell, Clifton <Clifton.Maxwell@FloridaDEP.gov>; Tennille, Kimberlee <Kimberlee.Tennille@FloridaDEP.gov>; Parenteau, Craig <Craig.Parenteau@dep.state.fl.us>; Pearson, Daniel <Daniel.Pearson@dep.state.fl.us>; Owen, Richard <Richard.Owen@dep.state.fl.us>

Cc: Housel, Christine <Christine.Housel@dep.state.fl.us>; Maldonado, Tyler

<Tyler.Maldonado@dep.state.fl.us>; Nichols, Harrison <Harrison.Nichols@FloridaDEP.gov>

Subject: FW: ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE/comments re: ISSP management plan changes

FYI, please see attached.

From: Lu Merritt <ichetuckneealliance@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 5:01 PM

To: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>

Cc: John D. Jopling <John.jopling@dellgraham.com>

Subject: ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE/comments re: ISSP management plan changes

Hi Daniel, the Alliance's comments about the proposed changes are attached. If there is another address I should send this to, please let me know. Thanks, and thanks for all you are doing to facilitate tomorrow's meeting.

Best regards,

Lu

Lucinda Faulkner Merritt
Staff Assistant/Communications Coordinator
Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc.
386-454-0415
ichetuckneealliance@gmail.com
<http://ichetuckneealliance.org/>

When you drink water, remember the spring. -Chinese proverb

Reply | Forward

Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc.

P. O. Box 945 • High Springs, Florida 32655-0945 • 386-454-0415
ichetuckneealliance@gmail.com

DATE: December 14, 2020

TO: Daniel Alsentzer, Planning Manager
Ichetucknee Springs State Park
daniel.alsentzer@floridadep.gov

FROM: John D. Jopling, President
Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc.
John.jopling@dellgraham.com 

SUBJECT: Supporting Management Changes at Ichetucknee Springs State Park

The Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc., is a federally recognized 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit organization. Our mission is to restore, protect and preserve the Ichetucknee River and its associated springs and ecosystems as well as the Floridan aquifer that feeds the river and springs.

The Alliance is strongly in favor of the recommended management change to eliminate tubing on the Upper Ichetucknee River within Ichetucknee Springs State Park because we believe this is one of the best ways we can thank the Ichetucknee for all it has done for us. We also recognize that much more needs to be done by other state agencies and groups to conserve water and limit pollution, and that those things are outside of the Florida Park Service's control.

We humans have had a rich, reciprocal relationship with the Ichetucknee for thousands of years, and the springs and river have been very generous with us throughout this time. A primary source of sustenance for indigenous people in the years before European contact, the Ichetucknee has served us as a friend, a muse, a teacher, a healer, a social center and an economic engine for the surrounding communities. The Ichetucknee has given us thousands of hours of enjoyment and has poured millions of dollars into our local economy.

Now, scientists have demonstrated that human use is damaging this priceless natural system. Scientists have also told us that of all the spring systems in the State of Florida, the Ichetucknee may be the easiest to restore to health. It is time for us to say "Thank you" to the Ichetucknee by reducing our impacts, which will help this natural system begin to recover, regenerate, and restore itself.

In addition to serving as a formal acknowledgement of our reciprocal relationship with the Ichetucknee, eliminating tubing from the upper part of the river would:

- Encourage the restoration, preservation and protection of underwater ecosystems in the river and spring runs.
- Improve water clarity for the benefit of visitors as well as underwater biota.
- Maintain a stable economic impact by resulting in no net loss of the numbers of people who could tube the Ichetucknee.
- Create a better year-round experience for canoers, kayakers and stand-up paddleboarders.
- Encourage restoration of the historically popular uses of the headspring area for social and cultural activities.

If I can provide additional information in support of this recommended change, please let me know.

JDJ/lfm

From: Pat Murphy <southofyou_98@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 4:14 PM
To: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject: Ichetucknee Kayaker Management Plan

Dear Mr Alsentzer
Thank you for today's online meeting.

About me - I have been a member of the Friends of Ichetucknee Springs State Park (FISSP) for many years and was on their Board as Secretary for the last 3 years. I live very close to the Park and love nature, which brought me to the FISSP group. I have attended almost every FISSP meeting for the past 5 years which includes management by Mebane Ogden and Robert Soderholm.

I resigned my position as Secretary just 3 weeks ago. I explained my resignation to my co-board members as a lack of personal time, and, in part, to Robert Soderholm's disdain for and unwillingness to work with some of the local community.

At the October 2020 meeting, Bob spoke to the FISSP Board "off the record" about the upcoming management plan changes, meaning I couldn't put his comments into our meeting minutes.

During his explanation of the changes, he was asked how many kayakers use the north daily? His response was 200-300, which contradicts the number of "less than 100" provided in today's meeting. He told us he would no longer allow outside kayak vendors, like the 2 nearby campgrounds, to bring in kayakers. He was gleeful about it and stated that those vendors "should have worked" with him and, because they didn't, they wouldn't be allowed into the Park.

My concern is the limit of 100 kayakers may not be supportive of the real need. A limit of 200 may be more realistic and may create less friction with people who come to the Park specifically for that purpose. An additional 100 kayakers per day would have very little impact on the river and can only help to lessen the objections. It would lessen the fears that Paddling Adventures wants a monopoly, squeezing-out private citizens. If less than 100 is the true number, then there would be no additional impact on the river at all.

I'm afraid Bob's personal feelings about kayakers and vendors may effect his agreement with a lower daily kayak capacity. He has disliked kayakers since "some kayaker complained to the State" about his handling of the gate at the south take-out.

Bob said today that the kayak numbers have quadrupled in recent years. This is due to 2 things: Paddling Adventures setting-up a kayak rental pavilion at the north, and the State's recent tourism advertising of the Florida springs. What is the sense in spending advertising dollars, if people are unable to enjoy what brings them here?

I agree and am in favor of stopping tubing from the north.

I have no opinion on whether the outside kayak vendors should be allowed to continue, I just wanted you to be aware that banning them has been Bob's desire for some time.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate the opportunity to submit my comments.

Patricia Burke
Branford, Florida
305-431-7073

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

Fw: Proposed Closing of the Ichetucknee Springs State Park North Launch to Tubing

F FLStateParkPlanning
Mon 12/21/2020 7:56 AM
To: Alsentzer, Daniel
Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Cutshaw, Steven



PUBLIC EMAIL RECEIVED

From: Cathy Nagler <catrinko@yahoo.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 19, 2020 11:48 AM
To: FLStateParkPlanning <FLStateParkPlanning@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject: Proposed Closing of the Ichetucknee Springs State Park North Launch to Tubing

It is my pleasure to address this issue. It is something that I believe should have been addressed and decided upon sooner. However, with the North Launch closed to tubing this past season, it seems this is an appropriate time to address this issue.

For the most part, it seems visitors were fine with tubing only from the south end during this past 2020 tubing season which set the precedent for keeping the North Launch closed. All seemed to go smoothly. It was a good trial run for how well this would work.

The upper part of the river/spring run is the most fragile portion with aquatic vegetation acting as a purifier for the water. This portion provides more diverse aquatic vegetation and aquatic fresh water life dependent upon it than the lower half of the river. It also is more shallow than the lower half of the river in the park and therefore many visitors, ignoring the posted signs, walk on the bottom as well as holding onto the eel grass, thus causing it to be pulled out. This causes more of an impact on this fragile portion.

This upper end can be properly enjoyed for all its beauty and diversity by canoe or kayak or SUP with no or extremely low impact on vegetation and aquatic life. The lower half is much deeper and narrower affording pleasurable tubing with much less impact. The logistics of transporting visitors from one end of the park to the other would also be alleviated. Restricting the daily number of watercraft on the upper end would be very important for both logistics, pleasure, and low impact.

Vendors outside the park at the North end have adjusted to the North end being closed to tubing over the past season so this should not be a big issue. They can still rent out watercraft. Paddling Adventures has been renting watercraft and tubes inside the park for several years now. They can continue to rent watercraft at the North end and rent tubes at the lower (South) end.

With the previously allowed 750 people daily on the river at the North end removed and added to the South end number of 2250 per day, bringing it up to 3,000, vendors should not be adversely impacted by the change.

 Reply all   Delete  Junk  Block 

Fw: Supporting Management Changes at Ichetucknee Springs State Park

F FLStateParkPlanning
Mon 12/21/2020 7:56 AM
To: Alsentzer, Daniel
Cc: Maldonado, Tyler; Cutshaw, Steven



PUBLIC EMAIL RECEIVED

From: Ernie <enywein@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2020 10:19 PM
To: FLStateParkPlanning <FLStateParkPlanning@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject: Supporting Management Changes at Ichetucknee Springs State Park

I am strongly in favor of the recommended management change to eliminate tubing on the Upper Ichetucknee River.

I am encouraged by the improvement in the submerged aquatic vegetation we're seeing after a year-long pause in tubing down the upper river. I'm hoping that the plan to not open the upper river back up to tubes and feet will be perpetual so we can restore the long term health of the river ecosystem.

I know there are a lot of people that do now understand the science you have presented so well that are opposed to this change. I've been loving the Ichetucknee since I first tubed there in 1969. You are doing the right thing! Please stay strong!

Thank you very much,

Ernie

↩ Reply all ▾ 🗑 Delete 🚫 Junk 🚫 Block ⋮

Fw: ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE/Lake City Reporter editorial and Ichetucknee Alliance's response

ⓘ Label: 5 Year Delete and Allow Recovery (5 years) Expires: Sat 1/3/2026 12:16 PM



Degagne, Demi

Mon 1/4/2021 12:16 PM

To: Degagne, Demi



LCR Ich Tube editorial 12-19-...
149 KB

IA Op-Ed Tubing Letterhead ...
53 KB

2 attachments (202 KB) Download all Save all to OneDrive - Florida Department of Environmental Protection

From: Lu Merritt <ichetuckneealliance@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2020 12:15 PM
To: Maxwell, Clifton <Clifton.Maxwell@FloridaDEP.gov>; Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>; Jim Stevenson <florida_springs@comcast.net>; Albert Gregory <albertgregory1@gmail.com>
Cc: John D. Jopling <John.jopling@dellgraham.com>
Subject: ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE/Lake City Reporter editorial and Ichetucknee Alliance's response

I thought you might be interested in reading the Lake City Reporter's editorial about tubing on the Ichetucknee, if you haven't already seen it. The Alliance's response, which we just sent to the Reporter, is also attached FYI.

Thank you all for keeping the health of the Ichetucknee at the forefront of what you do.

Lu

Lucinda Faulkner Merritt
Staff Assistant/Communications Coordinator
Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc.
386-454-0415
ichetuckneealliance@gmail.com
<http://ichetuckneealliance.org/>

Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc.

P. O. Box 945 • High Springs, Florida 32655-0945 • 386-454-0415
ichetuckneealliance@gmail.com

DATE: December 22, 2020

TO: Todd Wilson, Publisher
Lake City Reporter
twilson@lakecityreporter.com

Jamie Wachter, Editor
Lake City Reporter
jwachter@cninewspapers.com

FROM: John D. Jopling, President
Ichetucknee Alliance
John.jopling@dellgraham.com
352-538-4154

SUBJECT: To Tube or Not To Tube the Upper Ichetucknee?

The Ichetucknee Alliance is an educational nonprofit dedicated to restoring, protecting and preserving the Ichetucknee River's ecosystems. We would fail in our educational mission if we did not respond to your editorial about tubing.

Since the middle of the last century, many factors have caused a decline in the health of the springs, river, and Floridan aquifer that make up the Ichetucknee River System. Those of us who remember the Ichetucknee of the 1950s and '60s recognize what science confirms—the Ichetucknee is sick.

In 2015, the Suwannee River Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection officially recognized the long-term loss of flow in the Ichetucknee by designating it as needing to be “in recovery.” Lost flow is caused by water use within North Central Florida and from as far away as Jacksonville and Brunswick, Georgia.

Pollution at the headspring—which comes from many sources including agricultural and urban fertilizers, septic tanks and animal waste—is higher than the state standard. This pollution, combined with loss of flow, contributes to algae growth in the Ichetucknee.

Even in the presence of warning signs posted by the Florida Park Service, tubers on the Upper Ichetucknee have trampled upon its health by destroying the submerged aquatic vegetation that is a critical part of this ecosystem.

The Ichetucknee is sick, and we humans are the cause of its disease. The actions that we take and that our state agencies permit—using too much water, failing to stop pollution at

the source, even tubing and walking on the bottom of the river—affect the springs and river, just as the health of the underlying Floridan aquifer affects our own health.

It also seems that your editorial writer has misunderstood the consistent positions taken by the Ichetucknee Alliance (and every other springs advocacy group we're aware of) regarding the relationship of nitrate levels and the natural aquatic plant life found in the Ichetucknee and other spring runs. We have never asserted that increased nitrate levels were causing excessive growth of these native aquatic plants. Rather, we know that increased nitrate levels have caused an explosion in the growth of the algae that has blackened so much of the Ichetucknee's natural plant life, and threatens their demise.

The loss of these native plants—whether through increased algal growth, or from too many tubers' feet —contributes to a vicious cycle of degradation, since it is the aquatic plants' uptake of nitrates that keeps the nitrate level from soaring even higher. Thus, when we “advocate for grass” we are advocating for the health of the river system itself.

The Alliance believes that we need to create new ways of living with water because human health and our economy are connected to the aquifer, springs and river in a web of relationships. Within that web, our actions have serious consequences. The multi-pronged problems that plague the Ichetucknee require multi-pronged solutions from state agencies and from all of us as individuals. The same actions that we took yesterday are actions we can choose to change tomorrow.

By redistributing tubing from the headspring to the midpoint, the Florida Park Service has taken one modest, balanced action to restore, protect and preserve the Ichetucknee River System. We must look to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to protect water quality and to the Suwannee River Water Management District to protect water quantity or flow.

Perhaps the most important reason that the Alliance supports the redistribution of tubing is that this is one easy action we can take to try to ensure that the Ichetucknee will still be here for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.

JDJ/lfm

OUR OPINION State, DEP need middle-ground plan on Ichetucknee tubes

Never doubt the State of Florida's ability to have pinpoint accuracy when it comes to killing a mosquito with a sledgehammer. The departments that make up state government have plenty of practice. Another overkill example was unveiled Tuesday by the Department of Environmental Protection in regards to the tube floating regulations proposed for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.

State officials want to ban all tube floating on the north end of the river — the shallow end — from the spring head to the midpoint for an undetermined amount of time. They want the tube float ban to go in effect in May, then be added to the DEP's monitoring plan for the next 10 years.

Why? State monitors testified during a public hearing Monday the covid lockdown allowed submerged grasses and other aquatic plants to recover like no other time since 1989, since the park was closed for several weeks and, most likely, the pandemic concern led to smaller crowds on the river once it opened for full-length floating, as it has for many years, between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

That recovery led the state experts to believe if they banned tubers on the shallow end of the river, thus leaving this plant life undisturbed by people getting out of their tubes and churning up the root systems and the sandy bottom of the river bed, the aquatic plants would grow back steadily.

We will not dispute the fact that people get out of their tubes and churn the sand by walking in the shallow waters. And, they uproot some aquatic vegetation. But, the state admits they saw a magnificent comeback during the covid hiatus, which was several weeks, plus a lower census of floaters during the summer months.

There are many other options rather than an all-out ban on floating the length of the river, but DEP never offered anything but the most extreme measure. And, the environmental groups lodged in southern Columbia County and Alachua County are singing harmony with the state.

How about this? If several weeks made a difference, change the full-length float season from July 4 through Labor Day, rather than beginning in late May. If that's not enough, reduce the number of daily entries to the north entrance to the park at the springhead.

Through the decades, we have worked with many individuals involved with protecting Ichetucknee and our other sacred rivers and they are all good, well-intentioned people. In different settings, we also have heard these same people complain that nitrogen levels in the water are too high and that's causing too much grass and aquatic plant life to explode and that's choking out this aquatic animal or that one. This has been discussed at the same state level in the recent past. Now, we're advocating for grass?

Another option for the state to reduce the traffic on the full-length of the river is to raise the price of per-person admission. Raise it to \$10 or \$20 per person. That will turn a lot of us away. That's not a favorable solution, but it is an option.

By forcing everyone to float from the midpoint downstream, the state is suggestion allowing 3,000 tubers per day on that stretch of the river. That number seems high.

That gives us a visual of turning the slow and meandering Ichetucknee into a bumper-tube traffic jam similar to some of the popular privately-owned spring runs nearby. That's not the Ichetucknee experience.

State officials, environmental officials and DEP do not really want to hear any more public input. The matter is scheduled to be bounced around a couple more times, but given a final vote in late spring.

We must protect and preserve the Ichetucknee now and for future generations, but this must be done smartly. There are several ways, as we outlined, to relax the pressure on aquatic plants, compromise the float schedule calendar and keep the river open for full-length floating. The best way to make sure someone cares about the future of the Ichetucknee River is to make sure they experience all its grandeur.

Lake City Reporter

Serving Columbia County Since 1874

The Lake City Reporter is published with pride for residents of Columbia and surrounding counties by Community Newspapers Inc.

We believe strong newspapers build strong communities — "Newspapers get things done!" Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers.

This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity and hard work.

Todd Wilson, Publisher
Jamie Wachter, Editor

Dink NeSmith, President
Tom Wood, Chairman

LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the Editor should be typed or neatly written and double spaced. Letters will be edited for length and libel. Letters must be signed and include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification. Letters and guest columns are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Lake City Reporter.

BY MAIL: Letters, P.O. Box 1709, Lake City, FL 32056; or drop off at 180 E. Duval St. downtown.
BY FAX: (386) 752-9400.
BY EMAIL: jwachter@lakecityreporter.com

APR 19 2020 12:20



Annual Toy Party, drive part of Lake City

Elks show spirit with timeless event

The Lake City Elks Lodge Toy Party and the drive that leads up to it are a foundational part of this community's fine history. Once again, Elks Lodge members will give of themselves and spend a portion of their Christmas Eve serving our community and a few hundred less-fortunate children through the annual toy party.

The event begins at 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve with children and their parents or guardians asked to line up at the lakeside entrance to the Elks Lodge. Safety protocols and social distancing measures will be in place.

The event is Lake City's oldest continual holiday charity event, dating back more than 80 years. No one knows for sure just when the event started, but it has been held every year without a miss. In fact, everyone at the Lodge has been saying more than 80 years for long enough that it may be closer to 90 years by now.

One thing is certain, the event certainly dates back to the early days of Lake City, when only the downtown streets were paved and the approaches were still dirt. But the Elks were in place and good deeds were being done to help those less fortunate.

George Brannon has been the toy drive and party chairman for the past few years. And, while not old himself, Brannon said he remembers the Elks Lodge event going



Todd Wilson
twilson@lakecityreporter.com

on his entire life, seeing his father work with help organizing it. It's just something the Lake City Elks Lodge has always done. It's a part of Lake City.

Brannon said as long as he has something to do with it, the Lodge

will continue the tradition. There are very few growing communities like ours that can say they have held onto such a rich tradition of giving back to the community. It's a small pocket of charity work, but the outreach that is provided by civic groups, business partners in town and dozens of individuals and all of the Elks locally is truly an amazing thing.

It's a small pocket of charity work, but the outreach that is provided by civic groups, business partners in town and dozens of individuals and all of the Elks locally is truly an amazing thing.

The stories about the Elks Christmas Eve event have been passed down through the generations, lending to the "magic" that no one can actually remember when it started, since there are no records available at the Lodge to indicate the first year of the toy party for children.

To put it in perspective, two prominent community citizens we lost in the past year, James Montgomery and Herbert Darby, both had stories about the event, remembering the prominent adults of our community and their parents being heavily involved in the event as far back as their childhood memories could reach.

Mr. Mont was 86 when he passed last December. Mr. Darby was 101 when he left us in April.

So the event is an essential part of our community's fabric. It has become the focal point of many smaller group's charity giving so the Elks can help more children in our community.

The Lake City Elks Lodge members do great work in assisting our community's less-fortunate children. They rally support from other organizations, businesses and individuals in our community and it's heartwarming to see. The group shares the holiday spirit in its trust and most selfless form.

■ Todd Wilson is publisher of the Lake City Reporter.

Stolen car, Christmas angels

Editor's note: This is a classic Morris Williams column that we publish every year about this time. Hope you enjoyed seeing it again it as much as we did.

I came upon a midnight clear, a raw, windy night in Jacksonville, that my car was stolen.

Having your car stolen anytime is a bad deal but when it happens in a big city late on a bitterly cold night leaving you stranded and all alone, it is much worse. When it happens in a dark, unfamiliar area and you don't have access to a telephone, that just adds to the anger and frustration.

I saw no ready answers to my most immediate questions that bleak night. How can I get out of this windy, freezing weather? How can I get back home to Lake City tonight? I saw lots of Christmas



Morris Williams
hmorriswilliams@gmail.com

decorations at homes all around me but there were no good tidings of great joy that I could find that miserable, cold night. Or so I thought. Then, lo and behold, the first of three human angels miraculously entered my life.

The first angel

I knew this much for sure. If

I knocked on anyone's door that late at night, they would ignore me — or, at best, talk to me through their locked door and tell me to go someplace else for help. Who could blame them? But, no, the first human angel, a retired woman living alone, answered the door, listened to my story, and, miracle of miracles, invited me inside to "get out of the cold."

She then provided me with a phone and helped me call the police. Then she helped me arrange a rental car so I could drive home. She even made steaming hot coffee for me while I waited, and wouldn't take the money I offered her for her help. An angel, indeed!

The second angel

Remember that rental car I men-

WILLIAMS continued on 5A

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please continue sharing multiple viewpoints

To the Editor:

I appreciate your sharing of different views in the Lake City Reporter. I have been a subscriber to your paper for 40 years.

When I read Tuesday's Letter to the Editor, "LCR should reflect community's conservative values," I was surprised that the writer seems to believe that only Conservatives need to be represented in your paper. If she has been "subjected to

a number of ideologues masquerading as columnists from liberal rags in liberal blue cities and states" maybe she needs to read another newspaper.

The article, "Biden seems ready to try and unite," perhaps got her fired up but I saw it realizing we are a red county and state, as an effort to express hope that the terrible division in our country may eventually end. (By the way, that article was from the Dallas Morning News,

a very red state.)

My values are like many of my conservative neighbors. I love God, America, support the police (I taught several of them), and I try to do unto others as I want them to do for me.

Please continue to represent all views in the Lake City Reporter. It's the right thing to do.

Diane Perry
Lake City