

## Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Troy Spring State Park

### Advisory Group Meeting Report

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The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans (UMP) for Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Troy Spring State Park was held in the city of Fort White at the Fort White Community Center on Thursday, March 30, 2017 at 9:00 AM.

Commissioner Bobby Sasnett represented the Holmes County Board of County Commissioners. Ronald Williams, Ricky Gamble, and Earnest Jones, Lamar Moseley, Steve Walker, Trisha Haight, Melissa Harris, Jimmy Norris, and Vi Johnson were not in attendance. Bob Knight represented the Ichetucknee Alliance. Al Clements represented the Florida Speleological Society. Jason O'Donoughue submitted written comments for the Division of Historical Resources in advance of the meeting. All other appointed advisory group members were present.

Attending Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) staff members were Clifton Maxwell, Brian Fugate, Craig Parenteau, Rick Owen, Dan Pearson, Robert Soderholm, Justin Tiseth, Sam Cole, William Register, Amy Conyers, Jennifer Miller, and Daniel Alsentzer.

Mr. Alsentzer began the meeting by explaining the purpose of the advisory group and reviewing the meeting agenda. He provided a brief overview of the DRP's planning process and summarized public comments received during the public hearing as well as the written comments received from members not in attendance. Mr. Alsentzer then asked each member of the advisory group to express his or her comments on the draft plans. After all comments were shared, Mr. Alsentzer described next steps for drafting the plans and the meeting was adjourned.

#### **Summary of Advisory Group Comments**

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**Ginger Morgan** (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)) recommended using photographic documentation of fox squirrels to supplement written descriptions. Ms. Morgan inquired about fire return intervals; why the entirety of the park's fire-type acreage is not included under the ten-year objective. District staff explained that not all areas identified with a desired future condition of upland mixed woodland and upland pine are burnable at this time due to hardwood invasion, and would accordingly need additional restoration measures before successfully carrying fire. Ms. Morgan recommended adding an explanation of this factor to the fire management program section. She recommended that the DRP project future conditions to allow for adaptive management, especially as methodologies are subject to change over the 10-year period. Ms. Morgan noted the title status of the Ichetucknee siltsnail and inquired about the proper common name for the short-tailed snake. She recommended adding brown-headed nuthatch and Santa Fe crayfish to the park's monitored species list. Ms. Morgan noted that seasonally high visitation on the Ichetucknee River results in high turbidity and trampling of submerged aquatic vegetation. She encouraged the DRP to further evaluate the carrying capacity, drawing distinctions between high and low water conditions, especially in the grassy flats area.

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**Doug Longshore** (Florida Forest Service (FFS)) inquired whether the Ichetucknee Trace parcels are managed as separate units from Ichetucknee Springs State Park. DRP staff explained that Ichetucknee Trace is a separate park unit and provided a brief overview of its purpose and access. Mr. Longshore stated that the proposed resource management goals and objectives for both Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring are appropriate for the existing and desired future conditions and consistent with best management practices.

**Al Clements** (Florida Speleological Society) appreciated that the DRP has recently opened Blue Hole to year-round access for both swimming and diving user groups, but advised that diving access may be challenging during busy swimming visitation. Mr. Clements commented that graffiti has occasionally been carved into limestone by scuba and free divers, but that conservation/leave no trace principles are being emphasized in open water scuba training. He noted that cavern and cave dive training programs have long educated on the sensitivity of karst features. Mr. Clements affirmed the revenue benefits of requiring additional fees for diving access. He commented on the volume of litter that formerly characterized the access areas at Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring prior to state acquisitions. He appreciated the opportunity for a representative of the cave diving community to attend the advisory group meeting for both Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring state parks.

**Michael Stine** (North Florida Springs Alliance) reminded the advisory group that this citizen support organization (CSO) no longer includes Ichetucknee Springs State Park, but that he and members of the CSO are highly familiar with the park. He commended the plan, but referenced the water quality and quantity issues in the Ichetucknee Springs system. Mr. Stine elaborated on the rapid recovery of troglobite populations as observed in the cave fauna surveys. He noted that the CSO volunteers have been successful in efforts to remove graffiti from the park's caves. Mr. Stine encouraged instituting an additional access fee for divers at Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring and stated that such a fee would not discourage use and would considerably raise revenue. Mr. Stine suggested that the population of Hobbs cave amphipod may be greater than estimated but is difficult to confirm. He stated that reductions of flow level and pollution are of equal concern at Troy Spring as at Ichetucknee Springs.

**Trini Johannesen** (Friends of Ichetucknee Springs State Park) emphasized the importance of community and educational outreach in park programming. She commended the draft plan for proposing additional programs of this type and encouraged collaboration with area schools. She noted that Columbia County has integrated springs protection into academic curricula. Ms. Johannesen offered the support of the CSO in interpretive/educational outreach.

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**Loye Barnard** (adjacent landowner, Ichetucknee Springs) stated that the Ichetucknee Springs State Park offers remarkable recreational and interpretive values in its natural condition and that minimal development is a virtue. She encouraged keeping a small footprint for future land use planning. Ms. Barnard stated that she is also a visitor of Troy Spring and encouraged watershed considerations when developing use areas around the basin. She stated that impervious pavement is hydrologically problematic and visually unattractive.

**Jacqui Sulek** (Four Rivers Audubon Society) noted from comments voiced during the public hearing that the UMPs are focused on lands within existing park boundaries, not the broader region. She urged managing agencies and local government jurisdictions to cooperate on reduction of offsite impacts. Ms. Sulek described observations of brown algae and the lack of river grass. She commented that turbid water conditions result from large numbers of visitors entering the river within short intervals. Ms. Sulek additionally noted that establishing minimum flow levels (MFL) does not serve to mitigate existing ecological damages. She advised that the presence or lack of manatees in the Ichetucknee River should influence MFL. She noted that loss of vegetation is partly the result of trampling, which most often occurs during low water periods, and the diminished resilience of aquatic plant species is attributable to consistently lower water supply. Ms. Sulek commented that the most significant threats to the resources in Florida's springs parks result from outside sources. She encouraged strengthening the language in the plans to call for community and inter-agency cooperation. Ms. Sulek offered the assistance of the Audubon chapter in developing interpretation of bird species at both Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring state parks. Regarding, the proposed boat mooring sites along the edge of the Suwannee River boundary at Troy Spring, Ms. Sulek stated that it would promote overnight use.

**Bob Knight** (Ichetucknee Alliance) commented that the plans for both parks include clear and detailed descriptions of their respective resources. Mr. Knight described the causal relationships between groundwater uptake, terrestrial nitrate and phosphate applications. He stated that the Ichetucknee River contains twice the allowable levels of nitrogen. He cited University of Florida studies indicating that low flow in the Ichetucknee River is a factor in algae growth. He stated that water velocity decreases with reduced average flow. Mr. Knight commented that the Ichetucknee River has experienced a loss of plant species diversity. He urged DEP to coordinate with the Suwannee River Water Management District regarding the Basin Management Action Plans (BMAP) to reduce offsite impacts to the springs parks. Regarding park operations, Mr. Knight commended the DRP for its internal management of Ichetucknee Springs State Park, but encouraged further studies to refine the park's ecological and recreational carrying capacity. Mr. Knight commented that nutrient content at Troy Spring is high and that most of its nitrogen content is received from agricultural run-off. He stated that a Middle Suwannee River watershed management plan is being developed.

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**William Stasiewicz** (Florida Paddling Trails Association) commented that public access changes at Ichetucknee Springs State Park have not been convenient for paddlers and encouraged the DRP to consider paddling launch and landing facilities. Mr. Stasiewicz stated that there is a need for a formal paddling launch at Troy Spring with an accessible footpath leading to the launch point. He advised that some vegetation clearing may be required for a launch access. Mr. Stasiewicz stated that the park and local agencies should encourage visitation of the springs and river by paddling versus motorized watercraft. He noted the convenience of visiting Troy Spring as its location is particularly accessible from the Suwannee River and suggested that launching from the park would allow visitors to experience other springs within the vicinity.

**Eva Bolton** (Lafayette County 4-H) stated that she was appointed as a representative of recreational/educational user groups for Troy Springs, but also has family heritage related to Ichetucknee Springs as she is a direct descendent of the Dampiers. Ms. Bolton commented on the significant cultural history of Ichetucknee Springs. Ms. Bolton recognized the agricultural economic tradition and character of the greater springshed region and would like to work with the local community to introduce more of a conservation element, especially through the 4-H organization for which she is an instructor. Ms. Bolton inquired about the feasibility of offering reduced fees or park passes in exchange for volunteering or infrastructural donations to the parks. She encouraged finding ways to revitalize sense of personal investment in Troy Spring State Park among Lafayette County residents.

**Paula Vann** (Columbia County Tourist Development Council (TDC)) stated that the role of the TDC is to market the county's resources to encourage visitation. She stated that marketing is a form of education and can be developed specifically to broadly inform potential visitors about resources in the parks. Ms. Vann commented that the TDC has engaged in outreach in Fort White and offered to assist with park signage and marketing. She discussed the potential to emphasize ecologically responsible tourism.

**Edwin McCook** (Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD)) had no comments regarding land management for either Ichetucknee Springs or Troy Spring state parks. He encouraged linking the O'Leno and Suwannee River Greenway and enhancing access to Ichetucknee Springs by the shared-use path. Mr. McCook stated that he has coordinated legislative tours of the Ichetucknee River. He noted the positive responses he has observed on these tours. Mr. McCook discussed the optimum boundary as proposed in the Troy Spring UMP. He stated the SRWMD is currently working on access easements for equestrian use in the adjacent Troy Spring Conservation Area and has other acquisitions within the Troy Spring vicinity to consider.

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**Andy Jackson** (Suwannee County Soil and Water Conservation District) stated that he is a lifelong Suwannee County resident and is highly familiar with the Ichetucknee, Santa Fe, and Suwannee rivers and regional watershed. He stated that having an agricultural background, he knows that the farming community strives to reduce impacts to the watershed. Mr. Jackson encouraged a cooperative approach to solving the springs protection issues and stated that youth will be critical to finding solutions.

### Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

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**Jason O'Donoghue** (Division of Historical Resources (DHR)) identified discrepancies between cultural resource records listed in the Ichetucknee Springs State Park RMC and Florida Master Site File (FMSF), including Wayside Park, Dampier's Landing, Ichetucknee Railroad Crossing, and the McCormick Pole Barn. He noted that the Paleoindian period in Florida spans 11,500–9,500 B.C. and the Archaic period 9,500–1,500 B.C. and recommended revisions to a site description in the plan. Mr. O'Donoghue advised that eight surveys have taken place on or adjacent to the park since 2001. He concurred that a geoarchaeological assessment of the Ichetucknee Head Spring would be beneficial to guide restoration and avoid unnecessary impacts. He stated that Public Lands Archaeology has the specialized staff and a springs specialist who are available to assist, as are personnel from DHR's Underwater Archaeology program. He recommended additional treatment to stabilize the dugout canoe on display at the Ichetucknee Education and Exhibit Center. Mr. O'Donoghue also provided comments on the Troy Spring UMP. He advised that the CARL Archaeological Survey Investigations of 1996 were not exhaustive and examined only a small portion of the park. He offered that staff from DHR's Public Lands Archaeology program are available to conduct a preliminary cultural resources survey and provide management recommendations. He concurred that the disposition of the Madison "creates a valuable opportunity for interpretation of the site and the region's cultural history" and encouraged continuing efforts to educate visitors about the sensitivity of the Madison shipwreck. He recommended additional interpretive signage outlining the significance of the Madison and its protection under Florida law. He recommended that in addition to photo documentation, the DRP should record the dimensions of the vessel to track changes in exposure, erosion, or degradation.

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#### Summary of Public Comments

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**Jim Stevenson** discussed the balance between preservation and recreation and provided background on the management of visitor use in Florida state parks. He stated that he is unaware of any historical basis for the name "Saylor" Sink as prior to state acquisition in 2002, the Ichetucknee Springs Basin Working Group renamed this feature "Ichetucknee" Sink to raise public awareness about its relationship to Ichetucknee Springs. He recommended revising the name in the Ichetucknee Springs UMP. Mr. Stevenson stated that secondary use that should be restricted to former agricultural fields of planted pines and urged that oversight of contractors by the park manager and park biologist is required to ensure the highest level of sensitivity. Regarding the three power line easements across the Ichetucknee River, Mr. Stevenson encouraged that cutting of vegetation should be limited adjacent to the river to screen the cleared easements from view. He stated that this matter was negotiated by the state park director in 1971. Mr. Stevenson stated that the Ichetucknee Headspring had a long tradition of quiet local use, including baptisms, family reunions, and picnics, but that high visitation following the park's opening as a park, reduced the serene character of the spring site. He recommended drawing visitor use downstream of the Headspring, such that tubers would enter at the midpoint. He stated that increased canoe and kayak concession rentals for use on the upper river would enhance revenue and reduce shuttling visitors from the south use area to the north use area to retrieve vehicles and also reduce the risk of accidents on adjacent county roads. Mr. Stevenson encouraged construction of a large picnic pavilion near the restroom and existing parking at the north use area to improve accommodation of group activities. He recommended careful attention to placement of the pavilion to not diminish the viewshed toward the Headspring.

**Brack Barker** commented that more consistent enforcement of park rules is needed. Mr. Barker recommended that access for paddlers be improved during tubing season. He recommended that the riparian zone, including up to 100 yards inland, along the river be designated an archaeological zone to increase protection from intrusive activities, citing the Mission site as an example of the importance of cultural resource protection due to the shallow depth that the church was found.

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#### Staff Recommendations

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- Language in the Imperiled Species section of the Ichetucknee Springs State Park UMP was revised to include current designations and monitoring protocols for brown-headed nuthatch, Santa Fe crayfish, Suwannee cooter, and Florida gopher frog.
- Reference to successful volunteer efforts to remove defacement of karst in the Blue Hole cavern was added to the Natural Communities section for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.
- Explanations of water level monitoring and visitor access guidelines for low water conditions were added to the Land Use Component for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.
- Operational and existing facilities descriptions were revised to reflect current usage in the Land Use Component for Ichetucknee Springs State Park.
- Descriptions of historic structures and archaeological sites were updated to reflect the most current cultural resource records for both Ichetucknee Springs and Troy Spring state parks.
- Language was added to the Cultural Resource Management section of the Troy Spring State Park UMP to call for additional monitoring and interpretation of the Madison archaeological site. The DRP will continue to work with DHR to ensure that artifacts are preserved and curated according to best practices.
- Additional revisions were made throughout the documents to address editorial corrections, consistency of spelling and notations, and other minor corrections.

#### Notes on Composition of the Advisory Group

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**Florida Statutes Chapter 259.032 Paragraph 10(b)** establishes a requirement that all state land management plans for properties greater than 160 acres will be reviewed by an advisory group:

“Individual management plans required by s. 253.034(5), for parcels over 160 acres, shall be developed with input from an advisory group. Members of this advisory group shall include, at a minimum, representatives of the lead land managing agency, co-managing entities, local private property owners, the appropriate soil and water conservation district, a local conservation organization, and a local elected official.”

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Advisory groups that are composed in compliance with these requirements complete the review of State park management plans. Additional members may be appointed to the groups, such as a representative of the park's Citizen Support Organization (if one exists), representatives of the recreational activities that exist in or are planned for the park, or representatives of any agency with an ownership interest in the property. Special issues or conditions that require a broader representation for adequate review of the management plan may require the appointment of additional members. The DRP's intent in making these appointments is to create a group that represents a balanced cross-section of the park's stakeholders. Decisions on appointments are made on a case-by-case basis by Division of Recreation and Parks staff.