

6 February 2011

Silver Glen Springs Issues – Meeting Minutes

On February 6, 2011 two governmental representatives met with members of the Black Water Yacht Club (BWYC) and local area concerned citizens at Williams Landing Restaurant located in Astor, Florida to discuss the installation of a rope barricade across the Silver Glen Springs waterway by government officials. The governmental representatives in attendance were:

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Mike Herrin's opening statement and comments made during the meeting:

1. Mike has been in his current position since August 2010. He relocated from Montana.
2. To his knowledge, Mike indicated there are absolutely no governmental intentions to close off Silver Glen Springs waterway from boaters, now or in the future.
3. Mike does not believe in "exclusive use" of water or land by the Juniper Hunt Club.
4. Mike indicated that Silver Glen Springs is a "critical habitat" that is controlled by the Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC).
5. There are currently some surveying and archeology studies being performed to determine the long range plans for the Silver Glen Springs Park.
6. Mike works directly with the Silver Glen Springs concessionaires on the running of the Park and their relationship with boaters. He will be discussing our concerns and issues with the concessionaire staff. He will also look into possible solutions to our problems with the park and access for boaters to visit the park for the use of restrooms and to purchase items at the concession stand.

Carl Petrick's opening statement and comments made during the meeting:

7. Around 1990 a Pandion Study was done at Silver Glen Springs to study the vegetation, erosion, water condition, etc. Another study was done in 2003 and again around March 2008. All studies indicated little has changed in vegetation growth, soil erosion and water condition over the past 13 years. However it was noted that soil erosion along the waterway banks has been a problem for the Park.

8. In December 2010, the Corp of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency obtained the permit to install a rope and piling barricade in its current position, spanning across the Silver Glen waterway. The current permit is in effect from November 1st – March 31st. Neither Carl nor Mike was sure how long the permit was effective, but they thought somewhere between 1 – 3 years. The purpose of the barricade is to allow time for vegetation growth during the winter months and to provide a temporary winter safe haven for manatees as a test case. There have been 5 manatees in the spring so far this winter.
9. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission will be providing and installing some new buoys within the next couple of weeks to meet both US FWC and US Corp of Engineers requirements.
10. There are current anchoring laws that control how long boats may remain anchored in the Silver Glen run and other Florida waterways before they are required to be moved. Local law enforcement will begin taking action soon on boats that are long term parked or abandoned. Carl was not sure how long they are allowed to park their boats continuously before they must move. He thought it might be about a week or two.
11. There are no plans to restrict boating into the Silver Glen waterway run.
12. There are numerous agencies that control the confines of Silver Glen Springs Park, the waterway and the land under the waterway. Those agencies are the US Forest Service, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission (FFWC), and the US Army Corp of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the State of Florida (for the submerged land under the water).
13. The enforcement of the rope barricade is a shared responsibility between the US Forest Service, local County and State law enforcement agencies and the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission (FFWC).
14. Ms. Susan Matthews is Carl's supervisor within the US Forest Service.

There was a question and answer period chaired by Vic Gustin, BWYC member, with responses from Mr. Carl Petrick & Mr. Mike Herrin.

15. Question: Who filed for the permit to rope off across the Silver Glen run waterway?
Answer: Carl Petrick - The US Forest Service filed for permit and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the US Corp of Engineers approved the permit application. The Forest Service received the approved permit in December 2010 at which time they installed the rope and piling barrier.
16. Question: Was any type of public advertisement or public notice given to the public for their reaction or response?
Answer: Carl Petrick - No. Public notice was not given before or after the permitting process.

17. Question: Is the permit a one-time permit or is it automatically renewable?
Answer: Carl Petrick & Mike Herrin - Neither Mike nor Carl were sure of how long the permit was in effect. They believe it is a renewable permit good for 1 to 3 years, but weren't quite sure. They indicated they would provide BWYC with a copy of the "approved" permit and its supporting documents.
18. Question: Did the Army Corp of Engineers give approval to the permit?
Answer: Carl Petrick - Yes, they gave approval.
19. Question: Was Alexander Springs, Juniper Springs or Salt Springs, which are less used boating areas, considered as a possible location for this restricted area or for manatee refuge?
Answer: Carl Petrick - Not really. The primary purpose of the roping off of the Silver Glen Springs waterway is to enhance vegetation growth during the winter months. This permit is a test case to see if the vegetation growth increased if left undisturbed over the winter months. The use of this area as a manatee refuge is just an added benefit to the program, to see if the manatees would make use of Silver Glen as a haven during cold weather.
20. Question: How many manatees have been observed using Silver Glen Springs?
Answer: Carl Petrick – Five manatees have been observed so far this winter.
21. Question: Who legally enforces the barrier?
Answer: Carl Petrick - The enforcement of the rope barricade is a shared responsibility between the US Forest Service, local County and State law enforcement agencies and the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission (FFWC).
22. Question: What are the consequences if someone goes over the barrier?
Answer: Carl Petrick & Mike Herrin – Neither Carl nor Mike was sure of the legal repercussions to anyone violating the barrier. The local Sheriffs or the FWC enforcement authorities may have a better idea.
23. Question: Explain the difference between the Silver Glen Park and the waterway as far as the US Forest Service is concerned.
Answer: Carl Petrick & Mike Herrin - The US Forest Service has concurrent jurisdiction to manage the land area but now has a new responsibility role to manage the water. The springs, water, grasses, trees are being managed by both the US Forest Service and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

24. Question: If the buoy line move is temporary or seasonal, why wasn't it clearly marked like other waterways, i.e. – “closed for some reason from 11/30 – 3/31?”

Answer: Carl Petrick – Carl will check into the signage question. Carl did indicate that the FWC recommended “standardized” buoys that will be installed in the next couple of weeks.

25. Question: Who is responsible for setting up the date, time and location of meetings concerning Silver Glen Springs? BWYC has requested to be included in any meetings or agendas associated to Silver Glen Springs.

Answer: Carl Petrick – Carl Petrick, Carl's immediate supervisor Ms. Susan Matthews, the US Forest Service and Dept of Environmental Protection (DEP).

26. Question: Was any study conducted that recommended the blocking off of the waterway?

Answer: Carl Petrick – No current or new study was known. Only the original Pandion Study of 1990 and the validation study done by the US Forest Service in March 2008.

27. There was quite a bit of discussion about a particular female Silver Glen Spring Park attendant that has been extremely hostile toward boaters in general. There have been numerous conflicts with her on allowing boaters access to toilet facilities and in some cases access to EMS services. It was noted that boaters are very open to creating a better relationship between the Silver Glen Springs Park Service and boaters. Mr. Herrin indicated he would get involved in trying to get these type of issues resolved and would be willing to work with boaters on creating a better environment for all parties.

End of open discussions.