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From: Linda L. Weseman

Subject: Request to Create a Springs Protection Zone on the Lower Ichetucknee River

Current recreational use by motorized vessels on the lower half of the Ichetucknee spring run is resulting in shoreline erosion and turbidity that is detrimental to the overall health of the spring run. These issues are primarily and predominantly caused by motorboats and personal watercrafts (PWCs). It is recommended that the Commission establish a Springs Protection Zone that creates a no wake zone on the Ichetucknee from the boundary of Ichetucknee Springs State Park to the confluence at the Santa Fe River, the "lower Ichetucknee". It is additionally recommended that personal watercrafts, PWCs, be restricted from operating on this section of the Ichetucknee spring run.

The purpose of establishing a no wake zone on the lower Ichetucknee is to reduce shoreline turbidity and erosion, stabilize the sediment on the river bottom and shoreline, and promote macrophyte photosynthesis to reestablish a healthy and diverse aquatic plant ecosystem. This action would provide remediation of a spring run suffering degradation due to motorboat and PWC disturbance and damage. It would also serve to reduce the risk of injuries to protected West Indian Manatees, turtles, including the imperiled Suwannee Cooter, fish, and other wildlife. Establishing a no wake zone will additionally decrease the risk of hazardous interactions between motorboats and tubers, paddle craft, snorkelers, and swimmers, including the risk of injury or death.

There is an urgent need for the restriction of PWCs on the bottom half of the spring run to provide for human safety, while minimizing the adverse effects of turbidity and erosion. Typical operation of PWCs at high speeds in the shallow, narrow run presents a significant threat to the safety of swimmers, tubers, and paddlers – the predominant users of the spring run in both the upper protected segment within Ichetucknee Springs State Park, and the lower unprotected segment. Furthermore, the operation of jet propulsion engines in shallow water, even at minimum speeds, creates shoreline turbidity and erosion. The dramatically increased weekend and holiday use of PWCs on the lower Ichetucknee in combination with wakes created by motorized vessels of all types, are the primary and predominant cause of shoreline turbidity and erosion negatively impacting the spring run ecosystem, denuding it submerged vegetation, and threatening its most prominent inhabitant, the manatee.