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To ensure the health of the Ichetucknee River System, the newly formed Ichetucknee Alliance calls for a minimum flow of 350 cfs on the Ichetucknee River, a TMDL of nitrates of no more than 0.05 mg/L, and for all water stakeholders in the Ichetucknee Springshed to make good faith efforts to find new ways to conserve water and reduce water pollution.

ICHETUCKNEE ALLIANCE CALLS FOR RESTORATION OF THE SPRINGS & RIVER

Many of us who have spent our entire lives in North Florida still remember with joy our first introduction to the clear cobalt waters of Ichetucknee Springs and the Ichetucknee River. Many others were drawn here by the unique, breathtaking beauty of the Ichetucknee and other area springs. For many, including those who have experienced the Christian rite of baptism in the Ichetucknee, these are sacred waters.

Long-time river watchers have been alarmed for years by mounting evidence of threats to the quality and quantity of the Ichetucknee's waters. The shading of the river from cobalt toward green, the loss of natural vegetation such as undulating eelgrass, the increasing algal growth and decreasing flow levels—all these changes worried many of us, yet they were gradual enough that we let them pass with an occasional sad shake of the head and a comment or two, "remembering when."

Thankfully, there have been some among us who were wise enough to seek hard scientific evidence of these threats and to educate the rest of us. A prime example was the Ichetucknee Springs Working Group, organized in 1995. The Working Group was successful for 16 years in raising public awareness about the decline in quality and quantity of the Ichetucknee's waters, but was defunded by the state in 2011.

Others have continued the critical yet unheralded work of sound scientific investigation in efforts to identify and quantify the threats to the Ichetucknee and to propose science-based, pragmatic, "do-able" solutions. A prime example may be found in *Ichetucknee Springs and River: A Restoration Action Plan*, prepared by the non-profit Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute and available on our website at:

<http://ichetuckneealliance.org/plan/>

In the spring of 2013, a group of concerned North Floridians—many of whom have been involved and educated for years in issues related to our springs—came together to form the non-profit

Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc., as a voice for this precious crown jewel of our region's natural heritage. The Alliance is guided by the straightforward vision of "a healthy Ichetucknee River System that is preserved and protected for future generations."

Thanks to rigorous scientific studies completed in the past 20 years, we now know in measurable terms what it will take to achieve that vision:

- A minimum flow on the Ichetucknee River of not less than 350 cubic feet per second (cfs) or 224 million gallons a day (MGD), the historic average flow of the Ichetucknee—a reversal of the approximate 25% net reduction in flow rates which the U.S. Geological Survey has shown is attributable to causes other than declining rainfall.
- Restoration of the Ichetucknee's natural, healthy nitrate level of no more than 0.05 milligrams per liter (mg/L), as Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). This value compares with the river's most recently measured level of 0.78 mg/L, which is more than twice the level set by Florida's Department of Environmental Protection as minimally acceptable (0.35 mg/L). As an Outstanding Florida Water since 1984, the Ichetucknee deserves better than "minimally acceptable" and should be restored to, and maintained at, its historic, pristine state.

The first of these goals, setting minimum flows and levels (MFLs) for the river, falls squarely within the statutory authority of the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD). **To ensure the health of the Ichetucknee River System, the Ichetucknee Alliance calls upon the SRWMD to set the minimum flow at no less than the river's historic average flow of 350 cfs.**

The second goal requires sharp reduction of nutrient pollution throughout the springshed that feeds the springs and rivers, and will be accomplished with the broad-based cooperation of everyone who lives and does business in the springshed—private property owners, agricultural operations, businesses, and state and local governmental entities. **To ensure the health of the Ichetucknee River System, the Ichetucknee Alliance calls upon all these stakeholders to work together in good faith to find new ways to conserve water and to reduce pollution that enters our waters.**

We have no illusions about the challenges we face in accomplishing our vision. The present degraded state of the Ichetucknee did not occur overnight and will not be remedied overnight, but we refuse to shake our heads and mutter about the "good old days" any longer.

The Ichetucknee Springs and River can be restored and preserved for our children, grandchildren and succeeding generations. We owe it to them to begin this effort and to see it through. The Ichetucknee Alliance will be a sensible, civil, persistent and unyielding voice for our river. We welcome others who care about the springs and river to join us.

For more information, see "Contacts" above or visit ichetuckneealliance.org.

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