The River and Waterfront of Old Homosassa is much the same as coastal Florida in its pioneer days.

Today "The River" is my home. I am enchanted by the daily changing of the tide, the voices of the ever-moving wind, the grace of the birds, and the scheduled rounds of the feeding dolphin. I point in sheer delight at the arrival of the new osprey chicks every spring. I have named the Great Blue Heron and the feathery White Egret that predictably share my morning coffee on the dock.

I miss the manatee, the white pelican and others when they leave every year. I know when the trout move in and the blue crabs move out that the seasons have changed and will change again.

I watch the family boaters and fishermen return from a day of fun. Then shrimp boats start gliding out to the Gulf of Mexico for another night's work. And I wonder in amazement at the miracle of our common interests, "The River".

Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park is at the headwaters of the Homosassa River that flows nine miles west to the Gulf of Mexico. A 45-foot deep, first-magnitude, natural spring is the centerpiece of the park and pumps millions of gallons of water every hour.

The park serves as a rehabilitation center and refuge for endangered West Indian manatees that have been orphaned or injured in the wild and also for manatees that have been born in captivity. Visitors to the Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park can stroll along unspoiled nature trails and also see deer, bear, bobcats, otters, cougars and many varieties of birds at close range. As many as 34 different species of fish have been identified in the spring.

PHOTO BY: KAYLEIGH POLLERT

HOMOSASSA SPRINGS and RIVER

Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park
4150 S. Suncoast Boulevard
Homosassa, FL 34446
352-628-2311

Homosassa River Alliance
P.O. Box 124
Homosassa, FL 34487

Southwest Florida Water Management District
2379 Broad Street
Brooksville, FL 34604-6899
WaterMatters.org

This brochure was developed jointly by the Homosassa River Alliance, Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Funding for the project is through a Community Education Grant from the Coastal Rivers Basin of the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

FAST FACTS

- Florida has one of the largest concentrations of freshwater springs on Earth. Our springs originate from the Floridan aquifer, an underground freshwater reservoir that also supplies our drinking water.

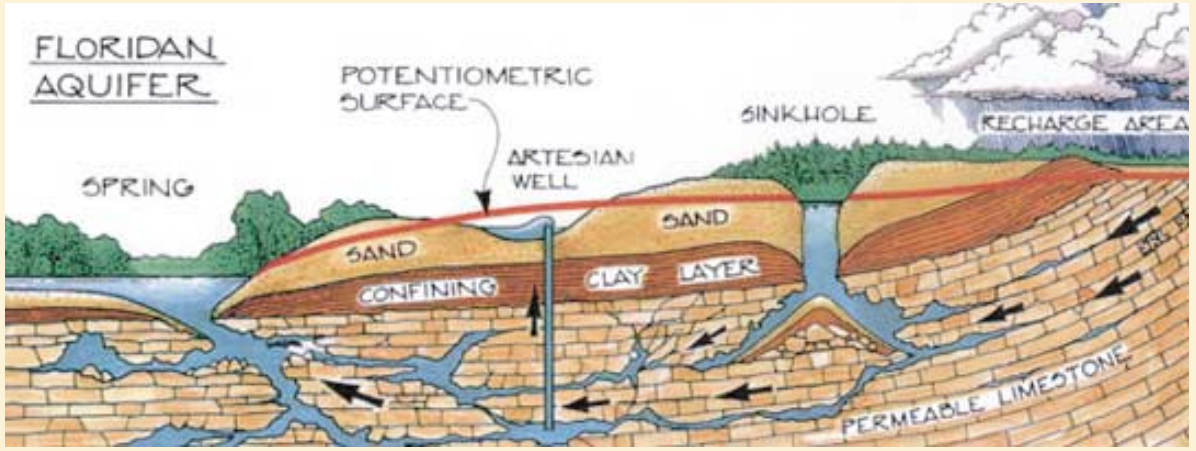
- Our springs provide a snapshot of the condition of our ground water. The water flow, quality and temperature make them excellent indicators of trends in our drinking water supply.

- Our spring-fed rivers serve as critical habitat for numerous fish and animal species. The endangered manatee and many saltwater fish depend on the springs for life-sustaining, warm refuge during the winter.

- The fresh water from the rivers and salt water from the Gulf of Mexico mix in the estuaries to form essential fish habitat for many of the more than a thousand species of fish that inhabit the gulf. Redfish, sea trout, snook and many species of snapper spend a significant part of their lives in these estuaries.

- A spring is only as healthy as its recharge area. Activities within the spring recharge basins affect the quality and quantity of ground water, causing adverse effects in the springs, rivers and ecosystems. Protection efforts must begin before the polluted water reaches the springs and rivers.

- The Citrus County coastal estuaries are known to be among the most productive in Florida. The mixing of fresh water and salt water provides a vital nursery ground for marine life, and the pristine water quality provides ideal living conditions for its inhabitants. This coastal area is attractive to



From the book, *The Springs of Florida*, by Doug Stamm, copyright ©1994. Used by permission of the artist, Steve Leatherberry, and the publisher, Pineapple Press, Inc.

- Salt water is heavier than fresh water. The two will usually stay separate in the aquifer with the fresh water on top of the salt water. Where too much fresh water is removed from the aquifer, there is a likelihood of saltwater intrusion.

- In the Everglades the Floridan aquifer is 1,200 feet beneath the surface. In Citrus County the Floridan Aquifer is at the ground's surface.

- The aquifer is replenished in a natural process called recharge. Recharge occurs when the water seeps through soil down into the aquifer.

- The aquifer is primarily made of limestone. The limestone acts like a sponge to hold water. The holes in the rock allow water to flow freely through it.

- Rocks that make up the aquifer are easily dissolved by acidic rainwater. When this occurs, large cave systems form, leading to sinkholes.

- Throughout Florida, the Floridan aquifer has an average thickness of 1,000 feet and has been estimated to be 3,500 feet thick in some places. But, in Citrus County the Floridan aquifer is only 200- to 300-feet thick.

- Florida has three major types of aquifers. The deepest is the Floridan, the second is the intermediate and the shallowest is the surficial. In much of Florida, the Floridan aquifer is deep beneath the surface and protected by a thick layer of confining clay. Not so in Citrus County where the Floridan aquifer is generally unconfined, unprotected and near the surface. Here pollutants can easily pass through to the sand and limestone surface to reach the Floridan aquifer.

Let's Protect Our Coastal Springs, Rivers and Estuaries

The Coastal Rivers are magical, winding pathways that originate from a series of freshwater springs and travel a few miles to the Gulf of Mexico. They meander, mostly at a depth of only a few feet, through miles of saw grass and wooded areas. Here is where the coastal springs quietly share the secrets of the aquifer with the world. The amazing mosaic of life that flourishes in the rivers and estuaries in this area are like none other in the world.

These rivers, now designated as Outstanding Florida Waterways, have been utilized and enjoyed since the earliest settlers entered Florida. In 1846, David Levy Yulee established the first settlement along the Homosassa River with a 5,000-acre plantation and sugar mill. Portions of the mill remain today as testimony of a community that has evolved from a sugar export post to a commercial fishing port to a resort town that attracts the easy-going recreational fishing crowd.

PHOTO BY: VICKI VILLANOVA

PHOTO BY: JARED MILLER

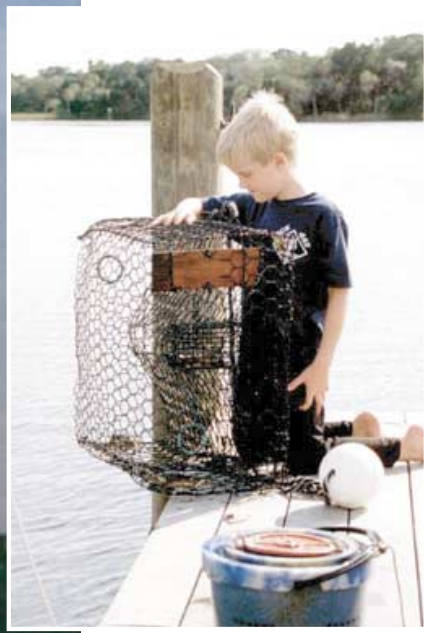


PHOTO BY: HEIDI MILLER

Because the freshwater Floridan aquifer actually rises to the surface in this area, this is considered the most environmentally sensitive coastal land in Florida. Locally, the quality of life and economy are directly linked to this water resource. Protecting these waters will help ensure the ecologic, recreational, commercial and aesthetic values of this coastal region.

To Protect the Water, We Must First Protect the Land

Citrus County residents have formed several grassroots organizations, such as the Homosassa River Alliance, to improve conditions along the coastal springs and rivers. As clear as the water seems today, long-time residents complain that the quality is not as good as it was a decade ago. Years of water studies bear that out. Our coastal rivers show a steady rise in nitrate levels. And the more the population grows, the more we can expect the levels to rise.

PHOTO BY: LINDA LEE

PHOTO BY: ROCKY CONOVER

PHOTO BY: CINDY BRIESKE

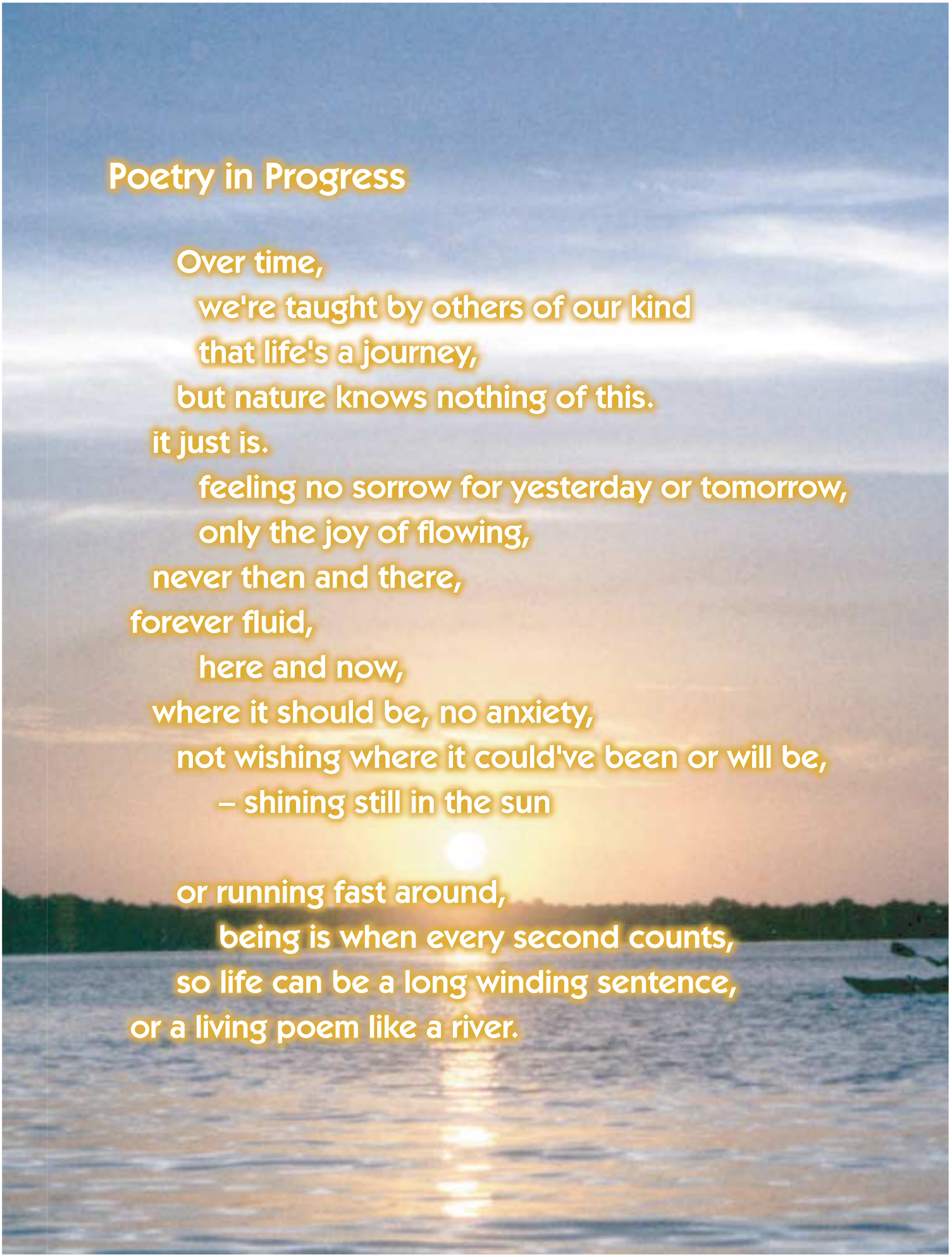
Nitrates are among the major pollutants that threaten our waters. Nitrate comes from fertilizer and human and animal wastes. Nitrate and other pollutants are picked up by storm water as it flows over lawns, gardens, roads, pastures, agricultural fields and golf courses. Polluted storm water can flow into sinkholes or quickly work its way through the soil to reach the aquifer. Nitrate can also leach into the aquifer from septic tanks and wastewater spray fields.

Phosphates from household detergents, heavy metal from manufacturing processes and gasoline additives (MTBE) also add to the water pollution.

To protect the coastal springs and rivers we must:

- Support the Citrus County Commission in implementing land-use decisions that protect the springs and aquifer.
- Perform regular maintenance on septic tanks.
- Minimize fertilizer and pesticide use, especially near the springs and rivers.
- Select slow-release fertilizers and do not fertilize when heavy rainfall is forecast.
- Never dump anything into sinkholes. Sinkholes are direct connections to the aquifer.
- Capture storm water in retention ponds, berms or swales. The goal is simple — capture the first one inch of rainfall and let it filter through the soil.

Conservation and preservation of our water resources is vital to the future of our springs, rivers and estuaries. We can and must adopt personal habits and practices that will help. Ultimately, the responsibility for the future rests with each and every one of us.

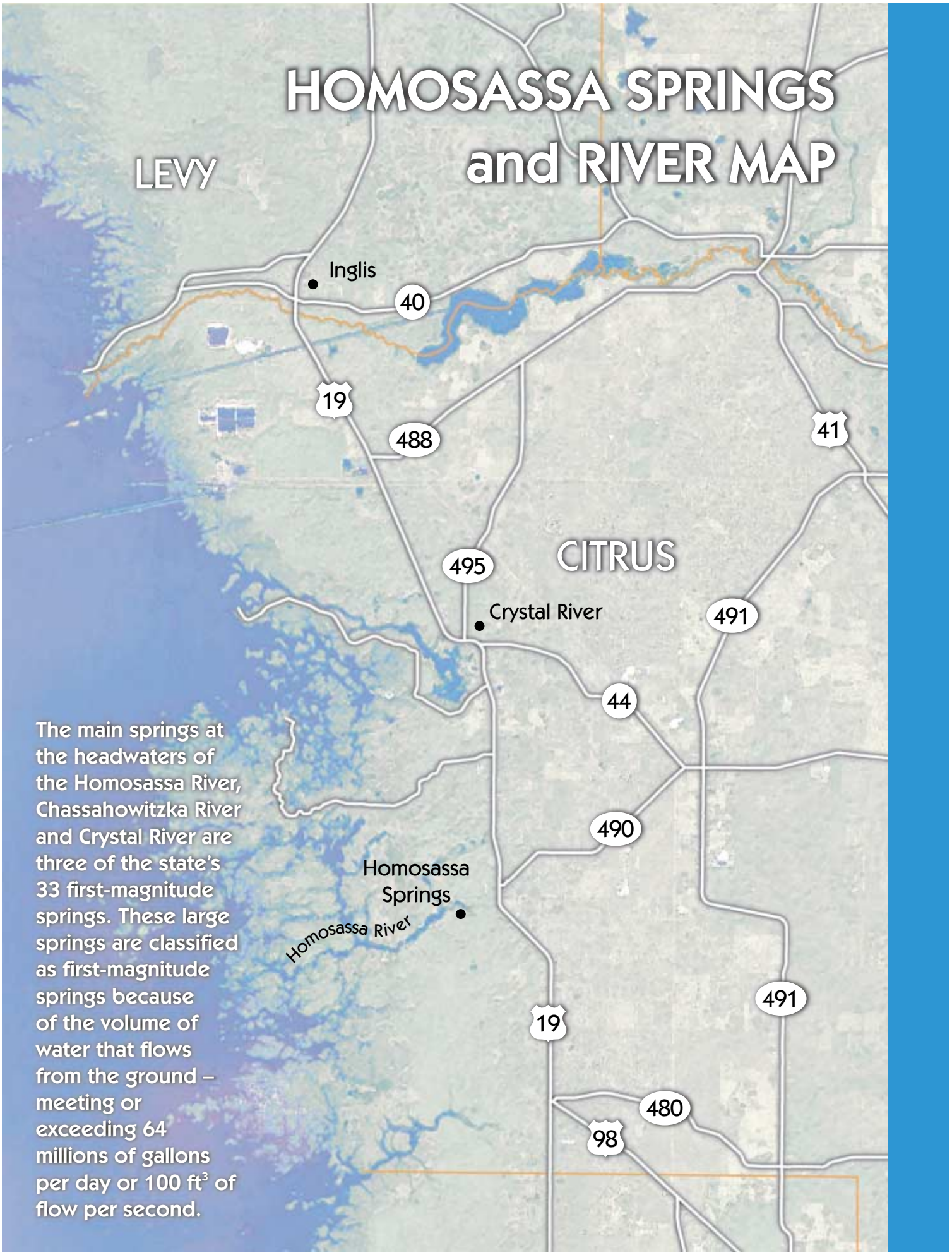


Poetry in Progress

Over time,
we're taught by others of our kind
that life's a journey,
but nature knows nothing of this.
it just is.
feeling no sorrow for yesterday or tomorrow,
only the joy of flowing,
never then and there,
forever fluid,
here and now,
where it should be, no anxiety,
not wishing where it could've been or will be,
– shining still in the sun

or running fast around,
being is when every second counts,
so life can be a long winding sentence,
or a living poem like a river.

HOMOSASSA SPRINGS and RIVER MAP



The main springs at the headwaters of the Homosassa River, Chassahowitzka River and Crystal River are three of the state's 33 first-magnitude springs. These large springs are classified as first-magnitude springs because of the volume of water that flows from the ground – meeting or exceeding 64 millions of gallons per day or 100 ft^3 of flow per second.