

Lyngbya cleanup project kicks off

By Abdon Sidibe

Monday, September 14, 2015 at 8:50 pm

CRYSTAL RIVER — A community group's quest to rid the canals around King's Bay of noxious Lyngbya got underway Monday.



Matthew Beck

The effort to cleanup Lyngbya from the canals around King's Bay started Monday. Gator Dredging is in charge of mechanical removal of Lyngbya from the waters surrounding the bay.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gave its OK Friday to a permit allowing Save Crystal River Inc. to commence a pilot project in two of the residential canal areas in the bay.

Gator Dredging, along with Sea & Shoreline, will handle the vacuum and restoration work, which will include the planting of "rock star" eelgrass. The grass, which was developed by researchers at the University of Florida, will be used as a countermeasure to any future regrowth of the filamentous and destructive algae called Lyngbya.

Officials with the nonprofit group said the eelgrass will be in cages for a year to protect the budding plants from hungry manatees and give them time to develop enough to regrow. The pilot project area is going to be 3.4 acres.

"The Corps of Engineers and Department of Environmental Protection did an outstanding job getting us the permit," Lisa Moore, president of the Save Crystal River said.

"I think they understood the limitations we are facing trying to get this done before the start of manatee season (Nov. 15)," Moore said.

She said her group is excited about getting started on the \$1.6 million project and, barring any unforeseen problems, said Gator Dredging promises to have it done in eight weeks.

Officials with the group engaged various community groups, politicians and governmental entities in their effort to seek funding from the Florida Legislature and make the project a reality. They succeeded, and funding for the project survived Gov. Rick Scott's veto pen. Moore said she hopes funding for the cleanup project will become a recurring grant, especially after the group reports its findings at the conclusion of the just-started project.

"Our only goal is to clean up the bay, and we have set a goal that the bay should be fully restored by 2023, which is the 100th anniversary of Crystal River becoming a city," Moore said.

One of the biggest legislative supporters of the cleanup effort is Sen. Charlie Dean, R-Inverness, who played host to the community group's delegations to Tallahassee.

"As an advocate of cleaning up King's Bay, I am excited to see Save Crystal River has started to receive the funding the Legislature appropriated. When important water projects such as this are funded, it is critical work begins as soon as possible," Dean said.

Chris Anastasiou, head of the Southwest Florida Water Management District's springs restoration team, said he is glad see SCR is moving ahead with its plans in the bay.

"This a good example of a public/private partnership that is going to produce very positive results," Anastasiou said. "Save Crystal River has keyed in on that dynamic, and it looks like they will begin to clean up the canals of the bay and we at the district will focus mostly on the main part of the bay."

Gator Dredging, the main contractor for the project, specializes in these sort of cleanups and said it will model the canal cleanup here after a successful cleanup in Stevenson Creek, near Clearwater.

The goals of the pilot project are three-pronged: removal of Lyngbya and muck, restoration by planting eelgrass and maintenance work for the duration.

"Our hope is this would become a model of how these cleanups are done to help restore our imperiled waters," Moore said.

Contact Chronicle reporter A.B. Sidibe at 352-564-2925 or asidibe@chronicleonline.com.