



Brevard County Airboat Association “A Conservation Service”

P.O. BOX 192
Melbourne, FL 32902



MeetingDate: 1st Wednesday Each Month

Place: SR192 2.25 Miles West of I-95

Time: 7:30 PM

Pres: Walt Lorraine 321-259-5156

V.P.: Tina Crowl

Treas: Jim Rosasco 321-298-4545

Sec: Scott Smith 321-508-7959 or ssmith45@cfl.rrcom

A B O U T U S

The Brevard County Airboat Association is a Non-Profit Organization designed to provide a vital conservation service here in Brevard County. Our club currently consists of 148 single members and 15 Family memberships. We meet on the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 PM at our Association Owned Clubhouse Located on State Road 192 approx. 2.25 miles West of I-95 on the South Side of the road on the Sweetwater Canal. We pay an annual dues of \$50.00 with a one time \$25.00 building improvement assessment to help maintain our club owned building and boat ramps. Family Memberships are currently \$75.00. We put out a free newsletter for our members every month. There is “*Members Only Parking*” on the south side of the road. There are two “*Members Only Boat Ramps*” we maintain; an Airboat ramp and a kicker boat ramp adjacent to each other for easy access to the St. John’s River. We provide a trash dumpster at the ramp location for the courtesy of all the people enjoying that local waterway.

A B R I E F H I S T O R Y

The Brevard County Airboat & Power Boat Assoc. was founded in 1960 by Ernest Murphy & 11 enthusiastic young airboat operators who loved to hunt, fish and enjoy the beautiful natural surroundings of the Upper & Middle ST. Johns River Basin had to offer. This association was based on a couple of sound & simple principles; honesty, ethical sportsmanship and a real need to help conserve Florida’s natural resources.

One of the first challenges this newly formed club addressed was the prohibition of frog gigging and running trot lines in the St. John’s River beginning just north of S.R. 192 just West of Melbourne north to SR 46. For twenty years this was prohibited in that area mostly due to a few prominent citizens who had hunting cabins along that stretch of the St. John’s River as well as the Cattlemen and large land owners. Our club worked hard for 6-7 years to battle the prejudice against air boaters thought of as mostly outlaws, poachers and cattle rustlers. Many commission meetings, letter campaigns to officials and petitions were the order of the day to restore the right to use this public waterway and the associated lands by all sportsmen. The ban

was finally lifted in 1968 amid much protest from “the powers that be”. In 1961 there was a proposal to the State Legislature that would have prohibited any air or power boats from any waters on the St. John’s besides the actual lake waters in all of Brevard County. That proposal was from the Cattlemen’s Assoc. Attorney and the Brevard Circuit Court Clerk. More letters, meetings and petitions later that proposal was defeated.

During the drought of 1961-62, the water was dropping precariously low in the St. John’s River and it was our club that petitioned the Brevard County Commission to solicit the Central & Southern Florida Flood Control District (the FCD the precursor to the St. John’s Water Management District SJWMD.) Our members were more familiar with the swamp than the officials and took them and the press on tours of the St. Johns to show the water level drop and how levees and pumps by the cattle ranchers and agricultural interest were diverting water from the river for their personal gain and how serious this problem had become. The city of Melbourne had to install a temporary dam just North of Lake Washington and install two artesian wells pumping two million gallons a day to provide enough water to cover the intake pumps to supply water to South Brevard. Up until this time, all the tax money for flood control from Brevard County was used in South Florida for projects there. Many more letters to officials and petitions followed for flood control in what was then considered as The St. John’s River Valley. In May of 1963 our club was called on to assist in fixing the temporary dam where water had broken through and around the dam. It was with the help of our club volunteers and our ability to use our airboats to get the approx. 1,200 sandbags across Lake Washington and over to the dam saving an otherwise 45 minutes per trip that helped secure the dam for south Brevard’s drinking water sustainability.

The first Airboat Races in the Central Florida area were sponsored by our club on Sunday, June 11, 1967. This was initially a lap race. About 2,000 people attended. The first place winner was Ivan Gibson with a 125 horse power engine on a Grasshopper hull. For quite some time airboat races were held frequently and an annual Airboat Rodeo was held with as many as 6,000 people lining SR 192 to watch.

Sometime between May & June of 1963 the Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission solicited our club for volunteers and the use of our airboats to help perform a fish kill in 11 miles and 70 acres of water in Canal 40 with a gill paralyzing poison safe to humans to eliminate the trash fish like gar and mudfish. At that time the water was so low in canal 40 it was cut off from Lake Hell N Blazes. Then after the killing of the hyacinths they asked our help again to replenish it by restocking it with 6 inch long game fish. In 1966 we were again asked to release 50,000 two inch long bass into Lake Hell N Blazes.

In the mid 1960’s we were called upon by the United States Special Forces to show them the attributes of airboats and their capabilities in marshy waters. Capt. Tom Hendricks of the unit stated that our marsh area was similar to the Vietnam Delta and these “High speed, hop over anything little boats” were used to great satisfaction of the Special Forces Troops. The boats proved to be “highly successful and very advantageous in undertaking reconnaissance and various herding operations”. We were also solicited by the Civil Defense to become a part of their team for rescue and associated duties of which we were more than happy to help and become a part of that program. In April of 1968 we were asked for our help in the search for a missing boy. Members of our club helped search a 50 square mile area from Lake Harney to Lake Marion. In 1971 we provided our services to the Game Commission to help raise a sunken airboat of theirs and restored it to working order. We also removed dangerous debris from an old Navy Dive Bomber from an area in Three Forks that was causing a navigational hazard due to low water at the time.

In November of 1969 our Pres. Bill Backus became the V. P. of the newly formed (and now defunct precursor to the FAA) the Florida State Airboat Assoc. With the help from them and our own efforts many legislations against airboaters and sportsmen were defeated and public

lands previously off limits to us became available. One such area was Wolf Creek just south and west of Lake Winder. And in March of 1971 there was a proposal to put the regulation of airboats under the jurisdiction of the Game & Fish Commission and with their help we petitioned against that and it was defeated.

In March of 1978 airboat noise again became a problem to an area on Lake Poinsett and the banning of airboats was proposed. Our club along with other concerned air boaters attended meetings and asked for the chance to police the problem ourselves. Once again we diverted ordinances and possible legislation against airboat usage. In 2009 we successfully regained airboat access to many areas south of 192 closed last year to hunting areas misinterpreted from "airboat access prohibited" to "no access during hunting season only". The latter was the proper interpretation that we ourselves in coordination with the SJRWMD requested to prevent access during hunting season when air boaters were driving past hunters stands and blinds disturbing the hunt, but wanted it to be available for our use during non-hunting season for recreation.

CURRENTLY, as our membership roster has increased over the past forty years, so too has the population of our area. The constant influx of more persons has caused a growing encroachment to the lands bordering the St. Johns marshes, flood plains, creeks and basins. As more people move to our area they inevitably use the public waterways, lands and resources sometimes straining them beyond containable limits. Some examples of this is the recent explosion the past few years in new developments. We'll lose more & more prime hunting, fishing and recreational land each year if it's left unchecked and unchallenged. The Upper St. Johns River is a main source of filtering out undesired chemicals from run-off from farms, developments and contaminated rainwater. This natural filtering process by the swamps aquatic plants provides fresh water for drinking, fish, fowl and game. Already our population increase demands for more fresh water along with declining rainfall amounts has prompted the St. Johns Water Management District to regulate the irrigation of lawns to just two days a week and only before 10AM or after 4PM. Another ongoing burden to our land and waterways is by careless and inconsiderate people disposing of their trash and waste products into our public lands. The clean-up of this trash each year by various district authorities takes much needed monies away from other important areas of conservation.

Our association believes we can make a difference. We still promote Airboat Races when we can but land for these races has been harder to find due to low water and our participating landowner's increasing liability costs.

Our conservation practices include our Annual Neil Ridenour Swamp Clean-up and we have been pro-active with the SJRWMD to help promote safety in the marsh by actively cleaning overgrown blind corners and trails as well as keeping campsites & trails clean. We also sponsor fishing tournaments for "trash" fish to help promote game fish survival. Other efforts include public awareness such as our participation every year in the Melbourne Christmas Parade and charitable contributions such as a toy collection and a food drive for needy persons every year. Donations to local charities vary from year to year but in the past they went to organizations such as volunteer ambulance squads, the Florida Children's Home, The Haven House for battered women, Cops for Kids, Florida Wildlife Federation, Simon Youth Fund, Candle Lighter's of Brevard, The H.O.P.E. Foundation, Save the St. John's and our annual participation in the Duck's Unlimited Youth Duck Hunt. We are also proud members of the National Rifle Assoc. (NRA). Through the efforts of our club we might just be able to help save these lands & waterways for our children & grand children to enjoy.