

Wekiva River stars in film about its 'legacy or loss'

□ A documentary will point out the damage that development, erosion and algae are inflicting.

By Robert Perez

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Bill Belleville and Bob Giguere hope to condense into one hour what it took nature thousands of years to create and man less than 200 years to endanger.

The men have pooled their talent as filmmakers and storytellers to produce a documentary about the Wekiva River they hope will lure people into a world of natural beauty and scientific discovery.

They also want *Wekiva: Legacy or Loss?* to sound a warning.

On paper, the Wekiva River is one of the best-protected rivers, yet it remains in danger of being ruined. Despite the 12-year-old Wekiva River Protection Act, erosion, development and algae are threatening the Wekiva and its tributaries, said Belleville, an environmental writer and filmmaker from Sanford.

"We want to show the true uniqueness of the river and what a treasure it is," he said. "Everybody thinks it's OK because of all these protections, but it's not OK"

The documentary is scheduled to air in November on WMFE-Channel 24.

Despite the threat of encroaching urbanization, the Wekiva River remains a lush getaway. Its clear waters meander through thick vegetation from its spring-fed source in Orange County, flowing north through Semi-

Please see **WEKIVA, C-5**



DENNIS WALL/THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

filming. Sound man Scot Whitney and cameraman Andy Pacheco work with ambrian Foundation members Colin Hobbs (left) and Terrence Tysall.

Springs' flow dwindles as aquifer is tapped

WEKIVA from C-1

nole County, meeting up with tributaries such as the Little Wekiva River and Black Springs Run before emptying into the St. Johns River northwest of Sanford.

Belleville hopes *Wekiva: Legacy or Loss?* will help Floridians connect with the river and make them more likely to protect it. More than 200,000 people visit the river each year, but few know the ecological marvels that lie just below its surface and beyond its banks.

"We want to be a portal, a way to begin to show folks what we have," he said. "We want them to be aware of the fragile nature of the river and how unique it is.

"Everybody thinks the Wekiva will always be there. But if the springs run out and the algae continue to expand, it won't exist. We're at a crossroads, and that's what we're trying to bring home to the people."

The Wekiva River is fed by springs that pump out millions of gallons of water daily, but the flow from those springs is decreasing as more and more development taps into the aquifer.

"We're taking out too much water from the aquifer and paving over areas where water can seep back in," he said. "There were significant decreases in flow, from 10 to 20 percent, and that was before the drought. It is projected that in the next 20 years, that could be re-

duced by 50 to 60 percent."

Non-native plants, fish and animals are becoming more prevalent as well. Rhesus monkeys, Amazon armored catfish, reared sliders — the official name of pet store turtles — plus hyacinth and hydrilla can be found in the river and its 300-square-mile basin, he said.

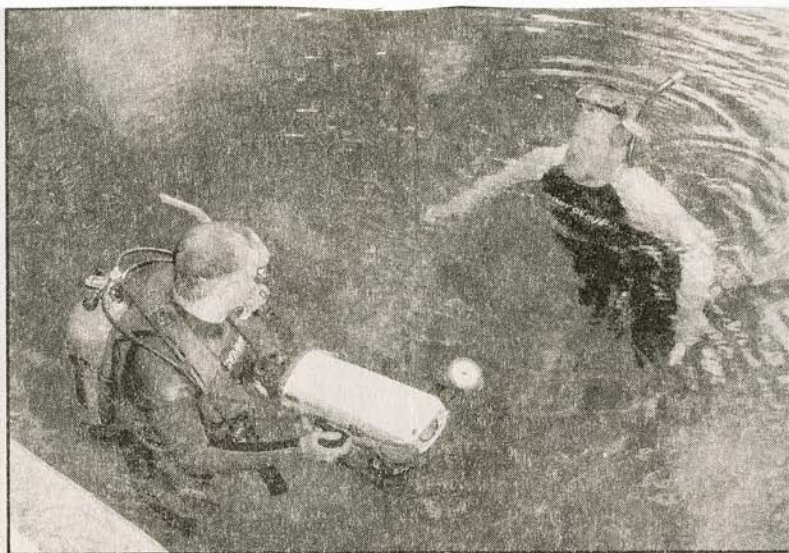
So far, Belleville and Giguere have collected more than 30 hours of footage on, along, in and under the river, including inside the underwater caves.

"We're trying to take this documentary to another dimension," Belleville said. "Most river documentaries are from the river up. We want to do it from the sky down."

Belleville and Giguere followed Department of Environmental Protection biologists as they tracked Florida black bears. They chronicled the discovery of four aquatic snails previously unknown to science and found only along the river. They dived with members of the Cambrian Society as they mapped the springs that feed the river.

"We were hoping we would find some new things," Belleville said. "We just didn't know how much we would find."

The hourlong documentary is being produced by WMFE in cooperation with BBG Productions, Rollins College, the University of Central Florida and the Friends of the Wekiva River Inc.



DENNIS WALL/THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

On location. Bob Giguere and Bill Belleville (right) prepare to shoot a scene at Wekiwa Springs State Park for their river documentary.

“*Everybody thinks the Wekiva will always be there. But if the springs run out and the algae continue to expand, it won't exist.*”

— Bill Belleville

The public television station received a \$62,800 grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to produce the documentary about land usage and its environmental impact on the river.

Giguere, who is an Emmy-win-

ning executive producer at WMFE, and Belleville have teamed up in the past to create award-winning documentaries. The pair produced *Conch Cowboys*, a documentary about Florida's queen conch. They also produced *In Search of Xanadu*, which retraced the journeys of naturalist William Bartram along the St. Johns River.

After the November premiere, the documentary will be made available to state educators. Information about ordering a copy of the program and developing a curriculum on it will be posted on a Web site maintained by the Friends of the Wekiva at: <http://members.aol.com/fowr>

The Friends of the Wekiva will maintain the Web site for three years.