

Fade to Brown

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Drought impacts yet another Levy spring

By Mark Scohier, Staff writer

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Bronson Blue Springs has lost its sparkle.



Mark Scohier

Levy County Parks and Recreation Director Matt Weldon stands on a sandbar Tuesday morning that used to be submerged by spring water.

«Severe drought, according to Suwannee River Water Management District Engineer Meagan Wetherington, has caused the spring to quit flowing. And recent rains, though not enough to recharge the aquifer, have caused water from nearby swamps, heavy with tannins, to flow into the spring, staining it muddy brown.

"It's in sad shape," said Levy County Parks and Recreation Director Matt Weldon on Tuesday. "It's the lowest it's ever been. Nobody we've talked to, old-timer wise, has ever seen it this low."

Weldon, standing on a drought-exposed sandbar at the spring, said Bronson Blue usually keeps flowing, even in times of drought. "You know it's bad times when this one's low."

The spring, which brings in about \$20,000 a year from swimmers, has dropped 10 inches just in the last week, he said.

Wetherington said Tuesday that water levels in the Bronson area are as low as they were in 2002, a time when Levy County set records for low levels. And levels are continuing to fall, she said.

Blue Springs, which partially feeds the Waccasassa River, is generally classified by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as a 3rd magnitude spring, pumping between 1 and 10 cubic feet of cool, clear water every second.

Weldon said the spring will not be open until flow is restored.

The Bronson area, and much of Levy County, is suffering from a 20-inch rainfall deficit for the last 12 months, Wetherington said. Compare that with record flooding the county saw in 2010, which racked up a 25-inch surplus. "That's a difference of a year's worth of rain," she said.

Wetherington said conditions for Blue Springs, just like the rest of the springs in the Tri-County Area, are not likely to improve in the next several months. The rains that typically come in April, May and June tend to do little for aquifer recharge, she said. Heavy downpours tend to "sheet" across the land before the water has a chance to seep into the ground. The area needs slow, steady rain.

"So, definitely feast or famine for Levy County."



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This photo shows Blue Springs in March 2011.

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