

Ryan,

I received the notice you sent out in the mail the other day about the Coral Gables meeting to address the IFP. As you requested in the notice, I am voicing to you how I feel about the IFP in this email. Additionally, I will be present at the Coral Gables meeting with Harley, and he and I would like very much to present our views for the FHC at that time.

Simply put, I want to see us all (professionals and avocationals) come together to find common ground and develop a system that allows for illegals to be brought to justice more effectively. I don't know why the state is even considering abolishing IFP altogether without some replacement. That is like a smack in the face to a rich history of amateur-professional cooperation that has led to dozens of important discoveries and the generation of much archaeological knowledge. Over 9,000 artifacts have now been reported to IFP. Frankly, I was shocked a year and a half ago when sentiments to abolish IFP altogether arose in state politics, and in what seemed like overnight, anyone who collected artifacts in rivers was viewed negatively. I also took offense at one public meeting when a state park archaeologist lumped IFP contributors into a group containing looters.

I do not want the IFP abolished altogether without any replacement policy, rule, or permit system to take its place. I, personally, would like to see us develop a permit-based system formalized by the rule-making process (option #3). I and others would gladly pay yearly for the permit in order to generate revenue for the new program.

I think you know how I feel about the importance of amateur-professional cooperation in the field of Florida archaeology. That is, I believe that it is incredibly important. There is a rich and storied history of cooperation since before the advent of scuba diving (Simpson family 1920's), and of course, since scuba (Waller-Bullen-Dunbar, Serbousek-Dunbar-Webb, Hendrix-Purdy, Ohmes-Hemmings, and all IFP contributors to name a few). Barbara Purdy recently stated in a letter (about a year ago) "...we (professionals) wouldn't know zilch without the contributions of river divers and avocational archaeologists."

The most important point about the IFP issue is that all of us (both professionals and avocationals) stand together in our disgust of looters and any illegal activity having to do with the destruction of the archaeological record. And we want law enforcement to be able to stop it. We all want to contribute to science and help to preserve the state's archaeological heritage.

We river divers and avocational archaeologists strongly believe that the abolishment of the IFP altogether without some replacement system will close the door on important discoveries and damage a productive relationship that has developed between avocationals and professionals. We all want a system that punishes illegal diggers and looters. But we do not believe that the recovery of isolated artifacts in erosive rivers and their subsequent reporting and investigation (IFP), needs to be abolished to accomplish this.

The last point is that if the state abolishes IFP altogether...then the people that have always done the looting will continue to do the looting...without the possibility of input from law-abiding avocational archaeologists and river divers. All we will have really accomplished is closing the door on amateur-professional cooperation. The state would then stand no chance of obtaining valuable knowledge of artifact and site distributions in state rivers. An 80-year long productive era in Florida archaeology would then cease.

Let's find a way to bring looters to justice...but not at the expense of closing the door to amateur-professional cooperation. I know we can do it. Because we have to do it.

To put this in perspective...the greatest threat to Florida's archaeological heritage is rampant urban sprawl and development. That is what we all really need to be fighting against if we want any natural part of Florida to remain for future generations. As much as I hate looters, the actions of a few of these people pale in comparison to the destruction that unmanaged development causes...

The above is my opinion as a biological scientist, avocational archaeologist, and citizen of Florida. Thank you for your consideration.

Cheers,

Ryan

P.S. It was good seeing you the other day at the Wacissa...I'll see you on May 21st.

Ryan C. Means
Wildlife Biologist
Coastal Plains Institute and Land Conservancy
1313 Milton St.
Tallahassee, FL 32303
(850)-681-6208