

River activist sets course to return to teaching

By [RACHEL SIMMONSEN](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, July 02, 2008

Almost six years after taking the title of Indian Riverkeeper, Kevin Stinnette is stepping down to focus full time on teaching.

"I have loved being the Indian Riverkeeper," said Stinnette, 53.

But he said he wants to devote his attention to a new job leading a marine science program at Forest Grove Middle School in Fort Pierce.

"It's just an exciting thing," Stinnette said. "And I think the Riverkeeper could use some fresh blood anyway."

The longtime river activist quit his job as technical coordinator at Forest Grove in 2002 to become the full-time executive director of the Indian Riverkeeper group, a part of the WaterKeeper Alliance that was started in New York in 1966. The alliance now has more than 170 water-keeper programs around the world.

"It's part detective, part scientist, part lawyer and part boat captain," Stinnette said of his position. His duties include patrolling the river and monitoring water quality levels in the Indian River Lagoon.

"He did a great service to get it going and start to really focus on the Indian River Lagoon," said Mark Perry, executive director of the Florida Oceanographic Society.

Stinnette said his group has accomplished much during the past six years, such as persuading state water managers in 2003 to store water from central Florida's Lake Tohopekaliga on private lands so it wouldn't further deluge Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

River activists have long blamed massive freshwater releases from Lake Okeechobee for harming fish, sea grass and oysters in the brackish St. Lucie and Indian rivers.

Stinnette said he also is proud that his group has served in the Rivers Coalition and has been one of the most ardent advocates of that group's litigation against federal water managers over Lake Okeechobee discharges.

"Kevin was always rattling the sabers," said Leon Abood, chairman of the Rivers Coalition, an alliance of civic, business and recreational groups aimed at cleaning up the Indian and St. Lucie rivers. "He always would take a very hard stand for the environment."

Stinnette said he won't be giving up his commitment to protecting the local environment. Aside from continuing to serve on the board of the Indian Riverkeeper group, Stinnette said his new job as a teacher in Forest Grove's Marine Oceanographic Academy Prep program will allow him to foster environmental activism in youngsters.

Stinnette, who is developing the program's curriculum now, plans to teach students about water quality, aquaculture and habitat restoration.

"It's an incredible project that's going to create a hands-on marine science curriculum for advanced students who have applied and really worked to get into the program," Stinnette said.

In the meantime, Indian Riverkeeper officials are looking for a new executive director. Interested candidates can e-mail keeper@indianriverkeeper.org.

The group is trying to get grants to pay a salary for the position, Stinnette said.

"It's not a job that pays a lot," he said. "You really have to have a love for it and the ability to live simply."