

# APPROVED

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING

### RECREATION AD HOC COMMITTEE

#### GOVERNING BOARD SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

TAMPA, FLORIDA

MAY 30, 2013

The Governing Board Recreation Ad Hoc Committee of the Southwest Florida Water Management District met at 9:30 a.m. on May 30, 2013, at the District's Tampa Service Office, 7601 Highway 301 North, Tampa, FL 33637. The following persons were present:

#### Committee Members Present

Randy Maggard, Chair  
Wendy Griffin  
George Mann

#### Committee Member(s) Absent

Bryan Beswick

#### Staff Members Present

Robert Beltran, Assistant Executive Director  
Michael Holtkamp, Operations, Maintenance & Construction  
Division Director  
Cara Martin, Board & Executive Services Manager  
Joseph Quinn, Land Management Section Manager  
Carmen Sanders, Land Use & Protection Supervisor  
Will VanGelder, Land Management Supervisor  
Cheryl Hill, Land Program Coordinator

#### Administrative Support

Teri Hudson, Senior Administrative Assistant

A list of others present who signed the attendance roster is filed in the permanent records of the District.

#### 1. Call to Order/Opening Remarks

Chair Maggard called the meeting to order. He noted that this meeting is being recorded, and members of the public should ensure they have signed the attendance sheet and filled out a blue speaker card if they wish to address the Committee.

Joseph Quinn, Land Management Section Manager stated the establishment of the Governing Board's Recreation Ad Hoc Committee affords an opportunity to take a fresh look at the District's recreation program and this first meeting is to review a proposed process and provide guidance to staff in evaluating the District's provision of recreational opportunities.

#### 2. District Recreation Overview

Carmen Sanders, Land Use & Protection Supervisor, stated she will discuss why the District provides recreation, the type of recreation, the development process of the current recreation program, partner-managed recreation verses District-managed recreation, and discuss a proposed evaluation process. The District provides recreation because it is statutorily required to, lands purchased with funds such as Florida Forever must have a recreation component, and the District believes recreation connects people to the lands. When people recreate on these lands they become responsible stewards and support conservation efforts. The type of recreation the District provides is a resource-based recreation which is defined as recreation activities conducted in the natural environment that cannot be easily duplicated by man such as fishing, hiking, biking, horseback riding, birding, hunting, camping, and wildlife viewing/nature study. Generally this type of recreation is provided by federal and state governments because we acquire large tracts of lands to

protect the natural resources. The District, whenever possible, tries to partner with state and local governments to protect water resources and to fulfill recreation initiatives. These partnerships have resulted in 3 city parks, 18 county parks, 5 state parks, 3 state forests, 13 Wildlife Management Areas, and 1 National Wildlife Refuge covering approximately 98,000 acres of District lands. The District generally defers to the partners to decide the recreation that is appropriate for these areas. The District helps to protect and manage over 449,000 acres of land; of that 105,500 acres are less-than-fee protected, 20,500 acres are not suitable or yet available, 98,000 acres are managed by partners, which leaves 225,000 acres managed solely by the District that can be evaluated.

2a. **How Recreation is Developed**

Ms. Sanders described how District recreation has historically been determined. There are policies and procedures that provide guidance on the planning process. When a property is purchased, staff review logical access points, existing trail networks including trail width and surface, and zones based on habitat sensitivity to determine which areas need more protection and which areas are appropriate for recreation. Then a supply and demand analysis is done by reviewing the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), government comprehensive plans, and historical recreation uses of the land, to determine the unmet recreational needs within the region. This information is compiled into a draft Land Use and Management Plan (LUMP) that is posted on the District's website and presented at public meetings to solicit public input. The draft LUMP is then presented to the Governing Board for approval. Once approved, it becomes the LUMP for that property for ten years.

Ms. Sanders provided additional detail on the SCORP which is updated every five years and is the State's official document regarding outdoor recreation planning. Its purpose is to outline a five-year policy plan and establish a framework for statewide outdoor recreation planning. It solicits extensive input from recreation providers and participants, and includes the Florida Outdoor Recreation Inventory (FORI) as well as outdoor recreation participation surveys. In 2011 an in-depth Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey was conducted that explores recreational trends in Florida, offers quantitative and qualitative insight on recreation demands of residents and tourists in Florida, and is a major element in determining level of service which is important because it allows providers the ability to determine recreation supply relative to demand.

2b. **District-Managed Recreation**

This process has resulted in the District's recreation program that covers approximately 225,000 acres of lands and consists of 472 miles of trails, 9 primitive campgrounds, 10 backcountry campsites and 12 equestrian campgrounds. Recreation uses include hiking, biking, horseback riding, birding, hunting, picnicking, camping, fishing and nature study/wildlife viewing. Recreation managed by the District does not include playgrounds, potable water, electricity, trash service, flushable toilets or dump stations, which keeps costs to a minimum.

3. **Proposed Evaluation Process**

Ms. Sanders stated the proposed evaluation process entails dividing the District's property into four planning regions: Northern, Tampa Bay, Heartland, and Southern, then use the data from the SCORP's participation survey and FORI to create a level of service per activity per region. Then that level of service will be compared to the statewide level of service to evaluate recreational needs. Staff is seeking public comment and the Committee's approval for this process.

Ms. Sanders stated that with the Committee's approval, staff will conduct a website survey on the use of District lands including which lands are used and the activities conducted on those lands. Those preliminary findings and the District's proposed recommendations will be posted on the District's website and will be presented at four public information meetings to solicit public input. These compiled results will then be brought back to this committee.

Chair Maggard reiterated, and Ms. Sanders confirmed, that staff is going to look at 225,000 acres of District land in the four regions, compare what we do statewide to see where we stand for the recreational uses the District provides; then hold four public input meetings throughout the four regions for public input; then the Committee will meet again to discuss the outcome.

Mr. Mann asked if we are planning to bring our partners into this process if it is determined there is a demand or specific need for a particular activity that is not being met. Ms. Sanders responded that there is no formal process in place to bring our partners back into the process at this time.

In response to Ms. Griffin's question regarding survey specifics, Ms. Sanders stated the survey will be on the District's website and provided at the four public information meetings. Mr. Mann reinforced the need to make sure this survey is available to as many interested parties as possible. Mr. Quinn stated that staff will be working with Communications staff in the Public Affairs Bureau to get the word out to the widest audience.

#### 4. **Public Comments**

Ms. Katy Roberts, Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS), commented that lands continue to be open for multiple public uses; that we not provide specialty uses such as BMX riders, all-terrain vehicles, hunters or zip line uses; and make sure the natural resources are protected especially the water.

Ms. Candace Arnold, FNPS, suggested using a QR code that can be scanned with a Smartphone for immediate access to our survey at the District kiosks. She also stated the Native Plant Society will get the word out regarding the survey and post it on their Facebook page and newsletter.

Mr. Brad Rimby, Chassahowitzka resident, commented that District lands were purchased primarily for conservation purposes and not all recreational activities are compatible with that mission such as off-road vehicles. Mr. Rimby advised Committee members and District staff to be aware of liability issues when considering recreational opportunities. He pointed out the hunting incident that occurred at Flying Eagle and introduced a copy of the police report into the record.

Ms. Gail Parsons, Sierra Club, state their members are avid users of District lands and cherish the recreational opportunities offered.

Mr. Dan Duerr, Cool Weather Hikers, encouraged the committee to keep hiking as a valid and important land use.

Mr. Kevin Love, representing himself, stated he managed District lands for 35 years and has been through this process before. He requested an opportunity to provide additional comments to staff beyond this meeting and acknowledged the staff working on this project as very capable and professional. He is concerned about using SCORP as basis for analysis and encouraged all to read SCORP carefully, especially the level of service

component. He feels that most of the regions that cover the District fall below the mean in SCORP and may never get to the mean based on population. Mr. Love also encouraged Committee members and staff to make sure the results of this process is compatible with protecting the natural systems and water resources.

Mr. Jack Phethean, South Creek Equestrian Club, encouraged the District to continue with their policy of focusing on providing primitive recreational activities. He wanted to discourage the constructing of any additional amenities on the properties. He feels that what the District has done in the past with parking areas and trails is what we should continue to focus on. He encouraged the District to keep our lands natural and he thanked staff for providing volunteer opportunities which his organization has participated in numerous times.

Mr. Dennis Dutcher, President of United Water Fowlers of Florida, thanked the District for doing this evaluation. He stated his organization encourages concurrent use of recreational lands. He encouraged the District to continue to cultivate recreational meetings and strive for opportunities to meet with other water management districts and stakeholders.

Mr. Andy Scaglione, Tampa, stated he appreciates the passive uses of our lands such as hiking, biking and camping, and encouraged staff to beware of some uses that are incompatible with others depending on the surrounding land. He used the hunting evaluation of Cypress Creek as an example.

Mr. Joel Jackson, former Parks & Recreational Planner for Hillsborough County and City of Tampa, encouraged staff not to use the state guidelines (the SCORP), or use to a lesser degree. He feels that each site should be evaluated for what it has to offer. Mr. Jackson encouraged environmental education for older generations. He stated possibly offering more visitor centers as a tool to help the public gain a greater appreciation for our lands. He also encouraged fighting exotic invasives on these properties.

#### 5. **Committee Discussion**

Chair Maggard stated he liked the process proposed by staff. In reference to SCORP, he stated it is one tool of many that will be used in this process and not a deciding factor for him. He feels this process is an opportunity to see if we are missing something. Our job is water, but we do have state mandates and feel responsible that we take care of the lands the best way we can.

Mr. Mann said he appreciates staff's information and the public that addressed the Committee today. He said he is concerned that we obtain good and meaningful data. He said he would like to know, if possible, how many visitors use the facilities that are not year-round residents; as we would not want to miss out on the opportunity to gain their input. With the aging population we should look at providing accommodations that may encourage more use. Mr. Mann requested staff make sure to interface with all associations and interested parties.

Ms. Griffin stated staff should take one last look at SCORP to see if there is anything we need to modify or identify before we do the survey. Ms. Griffin said she enjoyed hearing from the public how much they use and enjoy our lands. She would also encourage more educational opportunities.

Ms. Griffin moved, seconded by Mr. Mann, to proceed with the evaluation as outlined by staff, with the caveat that staff take one last look at the SCORP and make modifications if necessary. Motion carried unanimously.

6. **Next Steps**

Mr. Quinn stated the next step is to initiate this process by looking at the SCORP, scheduling the public information meetings, and finalizing our communication plan, while being as transparent as possible to keep everyone in the loop throughout the entirety of the process. Our website and kiosks will be used in our communication efforts and the Committee will be notified if additional meetings are needed.

Chair Maggard reiterated that communication is imperative and staff should take the time necessary to ensure we obtain as much input as possible.

Ms. Griffin requested staff provide contact information for the public to provide additional comments or questions from this meeting.

Mr. Mann encouraged the public in attendance to bring the word back to their respective entities to visit our website and provide input.

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.