

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Basin Board Land Resources Committee and Land Use Stakeholders Joint Meeting Agenda Southwest Florida Water Management District

Lecanto Government Center

July 14, 2010

The Basin Board Land Resources Committee and Land Use Stakeholders of the Southwest Florida Water Management District met jointly at the Lecanto Government Center, located in Lecanto. The following persons were present:

Board Members

Albert Joerger, Chair
Devon Higginbotham, Committee Member
Rich Matassa, Committee Member
Kelly Rice, Committee Member

Stakeholders

Mike Blanton, Disabled Sportsman
Jason Burton, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Don Coyner, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Paul Daniel, Field Trail Hunters
Dennis Dutcher, United Waterfowlers
Casey Elkins, United Hunters of Florida
Chuck Echenique, Florida Big Game Hunters
Al Grubman, TOO FAR, Inc.
Jim Watkins, Sunshine State Horse Council

Staff Members

Eric Sutton
Mary Barnwell
Terri Behling
Joel DeAngelis
Stephanie Green
Cheryl Hill
Colleen Kruk
Kevin Love
Will Miller
Amy Poxson
Carmen Sanders

Call to Order – Chair Joerger called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m.

1. **Welcome and Introductions** – Chair Joerger welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that the meeting would first begin with the Basin Board Land Resources Committee business items and then move on to the joint meeting with the Stakeholders group.
2. **December 1, 2009 and March 16, 2010 Meeting Minutes** – Following consideration, Ms. Higginbotham moved, seconded by Mr. Matassa to approve the December 1, 2009 and March 16, 2010 meeting minutes. Motion carried unanimously.
3. **Fiscal Year 2011 Meeting Dates** - The Committee accepted the following meeting dates for FY2011:

| Date | Time | Location |
|-------------------|-----------|--|
| November 18, 2010 | 1:00 p.m. | SWFWMD, Tampa Service Office |
| March 15, 2011 | 1:00 p.m. | Polk Co. Administration Building, Bartow |
| July 12, 2011 | 1:00 p.m. | SWFWMD, Brooksville Headquarters |

4. **Land Use and Management Plans** – Mr. Miller stated that the District develops land use and management plans for each significant project areas pursuant to Florida Statutes and District policies and procedures. The plans cover management goals and objectives for a ten-year period. Staff has recently completed draft plans for the Potts, Flying Eagle and Hálpata Tastanaki Preserves which are in Citrus (Flying Eagle and Potts) and Marion (Hálpata Tastanaki) Counties. As part of the plan development process, two public meetings were held on July 8, and 12, 2010 to gather input and share information with the public.

The Plans propose no significant changes to the management or recreational use of Flying Eagle and Hálpata Tastanaki. The only significant change proposed at Potts Preserve is increased hunting. The plan provides that property west of the north/south dike road be removed from the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and become part of the state zonal seasons as set by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). By doing this, it will increase the number of days that the property is open to hunting.

The plans are currently in-house for further review based on the comments received at the public meetings. Once the initial drafts have been developed, they will be posted for public review and comment at www.WaterMatters.org/Landuse. The plans are scheduled for presentation to the Withlacoochee River Basin and District Governing Boards in October. [Staff Note: The plans have not yet been presented to the Board and are being reformatted. No changes have been made relative to the uses and management.]

5. **Overview of Breakout Session** – Mr. Sutton explained that the purpose of the Basin Board Land Resources Committee is to discuss issues and strategies. The stakeholders group was created at the suggestion of a Governing Board member to provide an interface to discuss issues with interested parties and gain feedback. Topics brought forward for discussion by the group are intended to generate feedback that will help develop sound strategies and initiatives. Based on similar roles of the stakeholder group and the Committee, the chair of the Committee decided to have the two groups meet jointly for a year.
 - A. **Hunting** – Mr. Echenique, Florida Big Game Hunters and United Waterfowlers, gave a brief overview of what they would like to see happen with hunting on District lands. He stated that the District has 54 tracts spanning 16 counties, encompassing more than 380,000 acres. Of those 54 tracts, 10 allow regular hunting through the FWC's regular and quota hunt programs. These 10 tracts consist of approximately 143,000 acres and two tracts are by Special Opportunity Permit. One tract requires a no quota hunt permit and the rest are open to hunting less than a third of the hunting season.

Mr. Echenique discussed hunter safety, family, personal and educational benefits of hunting.

The group proposed opening 35 additional properties to hunting that would encompass more than 169,000 acres of available land for concurrent use within the District. A list of these lands and proposed hunts were supplied to staff for evaluation.

Mr. Miller reviewed *An Assessment of Public Hunting Opportunities on Southwest Florida Water Management District Lands* (No Net Loss Report), which was presented to the Governing Board in 2006 and explains the criteria and analysis that determines which

District lands are most suitable for hunting. The District administers its hunting program with several partners that include FWC, National Turkey Federation, Wheelin' Sportsman, Outdoors Without Limits and American Disability Adventurers. Current hunting opportunities consist of 10 wildlife management areas partnering with FWC that encompass approximately 135,000 acres and special hunts (disabled and youth) with various partners that include 22,700 acres.

Mr. Miller reviewed some of the criteria the District uses in evaluating a piece of property for hunting.

- Habitat composition and condition
- Intensity of public use
- Limitations posed by current uses and infrastructure (e.g., reservoirs, well heads, treatments plants, natural gas pipelines, etc.) are highly protected since September 11, 2001
- Adjoining lands uses that (e.g., high density population areas such as subdivisions and schools)
- Ecological constraints/compatibility with protecting natural resources
- Regional public hunting (i.e., other hunting opportunities that are available within a 20 to 30 mile radius)

Several District lands have management partnerships and restrictions. Examples include deed restrictions, bird sanctuaries, city ordinances, etc. that do not allow hunting. The District would like to move forward by engaging those interested parties, management partners and stakeholder groups in discussions to evaluate what opportunities may exist.

Mr. Miller posed the question to the group as to whether they felt the criteria the District uses to evaluate the lands are valid. Mr. Echenique stated that he felt the duplication of opportunities was something that was not an issue. It should be viewed as giving the users more opportunities. Mr. Grubman stated that what his group is looking for is increased access but not at the exclusion of others. Duplication of uses is not a factor on access to uses on other lands. Ms. Higginbotham believes the criteria should not be the focus but that the fine filter should be. Mr. Matassa believes that hunting should be introduced in some areas where populations are high. Mr. Blanton stated that his concern is the over-harvesting of areas where the populations don't allow a pristine hunting experience. Mr. Rice agrees with Mr. Blanton but suggested there may be opportunities available and wondered if we could partner with FWC. Mr. Dutcher stated that he felt small game opportunities have not been addressed and that is what is needed. Mr. Joerger asked if the no net loss of hunting lands was set by a specific date and if the District adds acreage, does that create a liability for the State. Mr. Coyner said that it does not create a liability, that the baseline was created with the legislative mandate so any additional opportunities are above and beyond it.

Mr. Sutton requested that Mr. Love and Mr. Miller review and evaluate the proposal addressed by Mr. Echenique. Staff stated that they would develop a working group to provide feedback as the overview and analysis moved forward. Anyone interested in participating should contact staff so they can be notified and included.

- B. **Recreation Monitoring** – Mr. Love stated that at the December 2009 meeting, the Committee suggested that staff research best practices, evaluate alternatives and recommend a framework for a recreation use monitoring program on District conservation lands.

Four components were established as the framework and include the program foundation, recreation zones, linear corridors and resource monitoring.

- Program foundation – involves setting and meeting standards and ensuring opportunities and amenities are aligned and appropriate. This means making sure the components that are currently in place are accurate, appropriate and in-line with the District's mission, policies, procedures and statutes. Messaging will be clear and aligned with plans so that users' expectations will be met. This also includes inventorying amenities and infrastructure on District lands making sure they are at an acceptable level. Sub-standard areas will be documented and brought up to standard.
- Recreation zones – specific sites where people congregate.
- Recreation monitoring – monitoring of use band to maintain quality and standards of amenities in recreation zones. This requires a large amount of information on the scope, scale and intensity of uses on District lands.
- Linear corridors – monitor use and maintain quality standards of trails and roads.
- Resource monitoring – monitor use trends of road, trail and fireline networks, and response of selected indicator species. Technology is in place to monitor and analyze landscape integrity and affects of uses on the land but requires the response of selected indicator species. A measure that would be used to determine the landscape integrity is fragmentation sensitive focal species.

Mr. Watkins asked if it was possible to use volunteers for recording data. Mr. Love stated that it was possible and that users on the ground are extremely useful. Mr. Echenique asked if this monitoring system is being used to deny access right now. Mr. Love stated that it is not happening now. Mr. Joerger asked what the average person is using the properties for. That information has not been determined yet; however, Mr. Love stated, the Starkey and Lower Hillsborough parks have the most use year-round because they are in heavily urbanized areas. Mr. Coyner added that all agencies are dealing with this and have been asked to develop carrying capacities on lands. The difficult part of that is determining what triggers limiting capacity. Mr. Daniel commended the District on trying to balance the needs and wants of all the public along with maintaining the management of the water resources.

- C. **Multiple Use Analysis** – Ms. Green gave a brief overview of the progress made in reviewing the potential for revenue generating uses on District lands. She stated that the analysis is in the final stages and that staff is currently working on the report.

Staff was asked to review and evaluate the District's current multiple-use management strategy to determine if the potential for revenue generation on District lands is being

maximized. Staff determined the status of current revenue generating uses and conducted a review of current literature and research, and a GIS-based analysis of available land base. A list was compiled of possible revenue generating use activities and staff designed and utilized a coarse filter analysis to test that list. For each use that was suggested for additional review, staff conducted a literature review.

Results for the expansion of current revenue generating uses concluded that the District's policies and procedures accurately reflect the current constraints and limitations. GIS-based land base analysis identified 448 acres of unoccupied, available land exists, however, that acreage is divided among many sites. Therefore, the conclusion is that revenue generating uses currently being conducted on District lands are at capacity.

Four new revenue generating uses were reviewed and they included carbon credits/sequestration; woody biomass harvesting; ecotourism; and communication tower leases. It was determined that due to current limitations and constraints, no new revenue generating uses exist that can be feasibly implemented at this time.

The review also determined that the District is currently maximizing the potential for revenue generating uses on its lands under the current limitations and constraints.

Mr. Rice voiced strong concern that these lands were purchased for their environmental value and that they should be protected, especially if revenue-generating uses will compete with the private sector. Mr. Matassa also expressed concern with competing with the private sector.

6. **Conclusion and Discussion** – Both Mr. Sutton and Mr. Joerger thanked everyone for coming and participating in the meeting and discussion. Mr. Echenique invited District staff to attend one of the Deer Management Technical Advisory Committee meetings with FWC that are held monthly.
7. **November 18, 2010 Meeting Topics** – Items mentioned for discussion at the next meeting included the Florida Forever Work Plan; land acquisition policy; ecosystem services; surplus lands; and the future meeting format.
8. **Adjournment** – There being no further business or announcements to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.