

Summary Agenda

Southwest Florida Water Management District Basin Board Land Resources Committee

9:30 a.m.

December 1, 2009

Green Swamp West Meeting Facility
13645 Ranch Road
Dade City, Florida

1. **Call to Order**

Presenter: Albert Joerger, Chair

2. **July 13, 2009 Meeting Minutes**

Presenter: Albert Joerger, Chair

See Exhibit

3a. **Florida Forever Project Boundary Review**

In Fiscal Year 2008 staff undertook an initiative called the Land Acquisition Project Boundary Review, the goal of which was to update the acquisition projects contained in the District's Florida Forever Work Plan through a multi-disciplinary analysis of updated hydrologic, ecologic and land use data and internal and external collaboration and peer review. The final draft reports and acquisition maps are complete.

Staff will present background on the topic, a detailed summary of the review process and the final land acquisition maps that will be included in the 2010 Florida Forever Work Plan.

Presenter: Kevin Love, Land Manager

3b. **Multiple Use Status Report**

At its July 13, 2009 meeting the Basin Board Land Resources Committee requested staff to determine if the District is optimizing revenue producing multiple uses on its lands considering its constraints. Subsequently staff began a review of its current revenue-generating uses, as well as new uses not currently in place, to derive a short list of potential uses for further analysis. The results of the first-filter review were presented at the July committee meeting. At its December meeting staff will update the Committee on progress made to date on the analysis.

Presenter: Stephanie Green, Sr. Land Management Specialist

3c. **Future Role of Land Use Stakeholders**

The second land use stakeholders meeting was held on October 14 at the Green Swamp West meeting facility. The meeting included a presentation of progress on initiatives that were developed in part from input at the first stakeholder meeting. One of the initiatives discussed at length was increasing awareness of recreational opportunities along State Road 471, with a field trip to several sites in the region. The meeting concluded with a discussion on the future of the stakeholders group. Based on the discussion with the stakeholders, input from the Basin Board Land Resources Committee Chair, and discussion at the September Governing Board meeting, staff is recommending that the Basin Board Land Resources Committee meet jointly with the stakeholders for the scheduled 2010 dates.

Presenter: Eric Sutton, Land Resources Director

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4. **Information Items:** The items listed below are for the Committee's information. Formal presentations are not planned, but staff will be available to answer questions at the meeting if the Committee desires.
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4a. **Land Resources Fiscal Year 2009 Accomplishments**

- Land Acquisition: The District owns, or has an ownership interest in over 437,000 acres of land. During the past year, the District has acquired, or has under contract, over 6,396 acres within 46 parcels at a total cost to the District of approximately \$20.7 million. These acquisitions and contracts have increasingly relied upon well-developed partnerships including local, state and federal programs, garnering over \$18 million in FY2009. These projects range from conservation easements, to strategic inholdings, and additions to conservation projects. Of the total above, during FY2009 24 parcels, consisting 325 acres at a cost of \$9,451,920 were

completed in support of minimum flows and levels for the Upper Peace River. Of the 73 parcels (8,459 acres) necessary for the Lake Hancock Lake Level Modification Project, 51 parcels containing 8,189 acres (including 30 homes) have been acquired.

- Public Outreach and Recreation on District Lands: Based on research undertaken in FY2007, Land Resources and Communication staff have developed the “Get Outside!” campaign to promote watershed stewardship and sustainability through recreation on conservation lands using community-based social marketing tools. The new, more user-friendly Recreation web page, the revised Recreation Guide and Recreation At A Glance brochure were unveiled as part of the campaign kickoff. The Land Resources Department has implemented efforts to increase public comment and involvement in its land use decision-making process through the establishment of a stakeholders working group.
- District-wide Survey Support: During FY2009 the Survey Section provided support to District staff by processing 361 requests. The survey work varied in complexity and size, ranging from one to over 3,500 acres, including boundaries for land title and/or ordinary high water lines; easements, well sites and wetland delineation; collection of topographic data and establishment of vertical control in support of hydrologic monitoring; bathymetric mapping and hydrographic surveying in support of minimum flows and levels for lakes and rivers; recovery and development of historical survey data; board exhibits; database development; GIS layer updates; and legal description review/creation.
- Land Management and Restoration: Through prescribed burning, restoration, exotics control, resource monitoring, wildlife management and infrastructure maintenance, the District’s land management program employs a holistic, ecosystem approach to the management of District conservation lands. In FY2009, although prolonged drought conditions continued through the spring, periodic winter and spring rains helped moderate the effects of wildfire season. In all, 20 wildfires occurred totaling 1,400 acres. District staff worked closely with the Florida Division of Forestry to contain and suppress these fires; and while above the annual average in number of fires, the average size and intensity of the fires were nominal due to past prescribed burning fuel management efforts. Prescribed burning conditions were again less than optimal due to dry winter and spring conditions. Staff completed 19,000 acres of prescribed burns, short of the annual goal. One priority upland restoration project continued on the Gilley Creek Tract within the Edward W. Chance Reserve, representing 47 acres of scrub habitat. An additional 1,161 acres were mechanically treated to restore and enhance overgrown natural plant communities on 11 District land projects. The 500-acre Starkey Scrub Restoration Project was completed. This entailed the harvest of thickly overgrown sandpine to restore badly degraded scrub habitat while mitigating a severe wildfire hazard along the wildland-urban interface at the Starkey Wilderness Park. District staff coordinated with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Bok Tower to

conduct a *Chrysopsis floridana* (endangered Florida golden aster) reintroduction project on the Cordell Tract within the Little Manatee River Corridor. Significant exotic plant removal and animal control actions were conducted including treating several infestations of Old World climbing fern on southern region lands and continuing aerial reconnaissance surveys for additional infestations on District and other lands in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy. A new special feral hog hunt program was instituted on six District lands to increase control efforts while providing additional hunting opportunities on non-Wildlife Management Area (WMA) lands. The hunts, combined with enhanced contract trapping activities and annual WMA hunts resulted in 2,314 hogs removed from District lands on FY2009, a 250% increase over FY2008.

- Resource Monitoring: In FY2009, photo plot arrays were established on remaining southern region lands, essentially completing plot establishment District-wide Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) also completed community classification mapping of southern region lands, completing that multi-year project. Additionally, FNAI conducted a bird survey for raptors, wading birds and neo-tropical migrants in the Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve. In cooperation with District staff, partner agencies conducted several monitoring projects on District lands including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's update of Florida black bear surveys in the Weekiwachee Preserve and Chassahowitzka River properties; a University of Central Florida and Audubon Society sparrow banding project in the Weekiwachee Preserve, and FNAI gopher tortoise scoping project to refine conversion formulas for predicting tortoise numbers through burrow counts.
- Revenue Generation: Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, allows that lands owned by the District may be used for multiple purposes, including agriculture and silviculture activities. Through public/private ventures, Department staff generated approximately \$333,178 in revenue during FY2009 through sustainable multiple use management. Funds were derived from timber harvests, cattle and haying leases, and other license and lease revenues. During FY2009 the Land Resources Department undertook an initial analysis of current and potential revenue-producing opportunities on District lands to determine their compatibility with long-term management and use objectives. The report will be finalized during FY2010.
- Volunteer Program: In FY2009, the Department's volunteer program contributed over 5,800 hours of assistance from over 300 volunteers in order to meet its obligations; a 30 percent increase over FY2008 volunteer hours. Volunteers assisted with trail and campground maintenance, and debris collection and disposal at ten District properties. The Department also sponsored the fifth annual Volunteer Appreciation Day event at Green Swamp West on March 14, 2009. This event was attended by approximately 125 volunteers, board members and staff.

4b. **Land Resources Fiscal Year 2010 Goals**

- The work associated with the Upper Peace restoration will require continued allocation of resources for acquisition as part of the Lake Hancock Lake Level Modification project, including both voluntary acquisition and eminent domain proceedings for land needed to complete the project. Staff within multiple departments will need to continue close coordination in evaluating and negotiating potential interest in lands associated with other Upper Peace restoration projects. The upcoming year will see the lead in acquisition efforts shift from Land Resources to the Office of General Counsel for the Lake Level project.
- With continued uncertainty of the future of the real estate market, it will be important to weigh potential acquisitions against strategic guiding principles that place priority on inholdings, additions, core conservation areas, realistic landowner expectations and reducing costs through leveraging partner dollars. Staff will finalize the evaluation of the existing boundaries of projects through the project boundary review methodology and the results will be included in Florida Forever Work Plan.
- Land Resources staff will continue to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for recreation in collaboration with the Communications Department to facilitate messaging efforts in order to raise public awareness of the opportunities provided upon the District's lands. In anticipation of increasing use, a monitoring program to determine the use of three control areas, both before and after the messaging efforts, will be initiated. Additionally, staff will explore a partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission related to the *Go Outdoors* initiative. This initiative parallels many of the District's existing efforts in reconnecting the public with outdoor activities and raising awareness of the benefits of conservation lands through resource-based recreation. During FY2009 Land Resources staff will continue to participate in the inter-district recreation working group to improve consistency among the water management districts related to public access and use in accordance with recently adopted legislation. Staff will also be evaluating opportunities to increase the public input process for land use and recreation on District lands.
- The Get Outside! campaign will continue to be implemented with three major events having been scheduled at Serenova, Green Swamp East, and the Deep Creek Preserve, the development of a speakers presentation and attending special events that provide the opportunity to promote District lands and the opportunities they provide
- The extensive drought that has affected our region will continue to pose a serious challenge to our land management program. The effect is two-fold in that the conditions will limit prescribe burning opportunities, which in turn make it difficult

to reach a goal of prescribe burning 25,000 acres, and these conditions also create conditions for wildfires that require substantial staff time and resources.

- Upland invasive plants and animals continue to tax our staffing and technical resources as land management becomes more difficult and expensive. Investment in research will be an important element. Included are initiatives to increase effectiveness in feral hog control through annual hog hunts and implementation of other enhanced techniques. Increasing emphasis will be placed on annual mapping and control of Old World climbing fern.