

**Southwest Florida Water Management District**  
**Hunting Evaluation Working Group**  
January 28, 2011, Meeting Notes

The Hunting Evaluation Working Group met at the Tampa Service Office located at 7601 US 301, Tampa, FL 33637. The following persons were present:

**Attendees**

Eddie Anderson, Hillsborough County Parks  
Mike Barker, Sarasota County Natural Resources  
Debbie Blanco, Sarasota County  
Ken Bradshaw, Hillsborough County  
Don Brown, Conservationist  
Jason Burton, FL Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Marcus Campion, Manatee County  
Jim Clayton, Florida Native Plant Society  
Anne Cox, Florida Native Plant Society  
Margaret Craig, Citizen  
Marcia Curl, Florida Native Plant Society  
Max Dersh, Manatee County  
Ross Dickerson, Hillsborough County  
Dennis Dutcher, United Waterfowlers (UWF)  
Victor Echaves, FL Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Chuck Echenique, Woods n' Waters (UWF)  
Phil Eicker, Citizen  
Casey Elkins, United Hunters of Florida  
Dave Feagles, Florida Native Plant Society  
Lisa Henningsen, Pasco County  
Richard Jones, Triple B Riding Club  
Eugene Kelly, The Nature Conservancy  
Daphne Lambright, Florida Native Plant Society

Jason LaRoche, Florida Native Plant Society  
Lucille Lane, Hernando Audubon  
Charles Lee, Audubon  
Lorraine Margeson, Audubon  
Brooke Martin, Florida Native Plant Society  
Johnny McLeod, Manatee County  
Jimmy Moreland, Hillsborough County  
Robert Naasko, Triple B Riding Club  
Kent Newcomb, Hillsborough County Parks  
Mike Penn, Division of Forestry  
Jack Phethean, South Creek Foxhounds  
Jennifer Roberts, Hillsborough County Parks  
Katy Roberts, Florida Native Plant Society  
Marian Ryan, Sierra Club  
Annie Schmidt, Florida Native Plant Society  
Jennifer Seney, Pasco Wildlife  
Jacob Stewart, Manatee County  
Sam Stone, PRMRWSA  
Dave Sumpter, Wildlands Conservation  
Phil Walters, Citizen

**Participating Staff**

Bruce Wirth, Deputy Executive Director  
Eric Sutton, Land Resources Director  
Will Miller, Land Use & Protection Manager

1. **Introductions and Opening Comments** – Bruce Wirth introduced himself and went around the room for group introductions.

Bruce explained that the Basin Board Land Resources Committee oversees land issues and requested that this group be organized to obtain a better understanding of how to proceed in evaluating the current hunting opportunities on District properties and to identify any additional opportunities.

2. **Review of Prior Meetings – Why We are Here** - Will Miller stated that the group would be asked to agree on the removal of some properties from the evaluation list due to obvious limitations. The group can then focus discussions on those properties that are under the sole ownership and management of the District.

The District properties to be evaluated have been grouped into three categories: lands the District has sole ownership and management of; lands the District has ownership/management partners; and lands currently under Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Wildlife Management Area (WMA) program hunting.

3. **Removal of Properties from Further Evaluation** - A preliminary evaluation was conducted to remove properties with obvious limitations. The following properties were suggested for removal:

- Hillsborough River Corridor – disjunct parcels
- Lake Tarpon Outfall Canal – County has a no firearms ordinance
- Lake Thonotosassa – waterbody and no District access
- Masaryktown Canal – linear water control structure
- Tampa Bay Estuarine Ecosystem- Frog Creek – surrounded on two sides by I-75 and small size
- Tampa Bypass Canal – linear water control structure, urban area and no prime hunting
- Tsala Apopka Canal – small size (3 acres)
- Wysong Project – small size (5 acres)

The consensus of the group was to remove these properties from further evaluation.

Manatee County representatives stated that there is a large population of alligators on the Tampa Bay Estuarine property (Terra Ceia/Frog Creek) and that the District may want to evaluate the area for alligator hunts. Staff agreed to leave this property for future evaluation.

4. **Evaluation Criteria** – Eric Sutton stated that the evaluation criteria established to review the properties consists of three categories: administrative/management; physical attributes; and public considerations. Each of these categories has sub-categories that the group will discuss and suggest issues that need to be considered.

- **Administrative/management**

- **FWC's ability to manage.** Chuck Echenique stated that it is really not for the group to discuss FWC's ability to manage, but that it is a discussion that should take place between the District and FWC.
- **Budget.** Charles Lee asked whether the group should really be going through this process before knowing if FWC will have funds available for the operational costs of the proposed hunts. Dennis Dutcher stated that a budget is not needed for what the group is doing right now, which is laying groundwork for possible additional hunts. It would be beneficial to evaluate these lands and the information could be used in the future or for other venues.

Annie Schmidt asked if this would require additional funds budgeted for the District's land managers' time; which Eric Sutton answered yes.

- **Adjoining land uses.** Jennifer Seney stated that the current density on the edge of the lands and the type of uses that exist there needs to be examined. Also, the future land use plans need to be reviewed, not necessarily to preclude a property but to limit the type of hunting that would be allowed. Local ordinances and rules should also be reviewed as it pertains to District lands.

- **Physical attributes**

- **Internal infrastructure.** Eric explained the internal infrastructure includes roads, trails, sufficient firelines, etc. Sam Stone stated that the costs to repair and maintain infrastructure must be taken into consideration. Marian Ryan added that the applicability of infrastructure for other uses needs to also be considered. Gene Kelly asked if vehicle access is currently prohibited on a piece of property, would that change if hunting is added? Eric Sutton stated that it would

- remain prohibited. It was also asked if buffer zones would require more infrastructure; to which Eric stated that it should be minimal. Charles Lee then asked that if no vehicles were allowed, would ATV use be permitted? Chuck Echenique explained that with the exception of state forests and disabled hunters, no vehicle access is allowed on any WMA unless it is on designated roads where they can park and hike in. Annie Schmidt asked if FWC would manage the infrastructure; to which Will Miller answered that the District manages the infrastructure. Lorraine Margeson asked if there would be new roads built. Bruce Wirth explained that no promises could be made whether they would or wouldn't build new roads. Ultimately it falls on policy makers (Governing Board). Dennis Dutcher explained that all properties have to have some type of road structure for management purposes and that the hunters are willing to use what already exists. They are not asking for anything new. Jennifer Seney stated that the possibility of increasing stress on current infrastructure could increase maintenance costs.
- Security challenges. Will Miller stated that properties with water supply pumping facilities, reservoirs, gas pipelines, etc. are considered sensitive areas that may not support hunting. Chuck Echenique asked if other uses were currently allowed on those areas and if so, hunting should not be considered any more of a threat. Discussion ensued as to the possibility of a hunting accident that would increase the risk. Also discussed was the type of ammunition used when in areas such as a well field or pumping station and the risk it would have on water quality. Lucille Lane asked if there would be signage notifying users of hunts to which Eric Sutton replied that it would be made clear that hunting is taking place.
  - Sufficient access. Will Miller explained that this meant whether people can get there. There could be some anomalies. Debbie Blanco stated that the Schewe tract in Sarasota County is a good example as the access road is a privately owned dirt road. Charles Lee also stated that hybrid land use on adjacent properties along with easement access could cause issues.
  - Sufficient acreage. Will Miller stated this would impact the quality of the hunts and would also help determine the type of hunts that would be permitted. Gene Kelly stated that the habitat has to be of sufficient size to support the species. Acreage of the entire intact habitat, whether it is within the publicly owned site or partially outside the publically owned site, will also affect the decision of the type of hunts and how much hunting would take place. Dennis Dutcher stated that on smaller sites the number of hunters could be limited. Charles Lee said that acreage is not the only thing that should be looked at, but the configuration is just as important. Anne Cox asked if by adding more acreage, would the areas currently open for hunting close? Eric Sutton explained that the purpose was to add areas and that the current hunting areas would remain open.
  - Resource management/ecological conditions. This will involve many entities conducting a thorough, broad review. Lorraine Margeson stated that an inventory of the flora and fauna would need to be conducted for each property. Bruce Wirth explained that these inventories have been conducted and the information is available in the land use and management plans. Gene Kelly stated that conservation values were the primary reasons why the lands were acquired and those values should not be compromised by other uses. The question was posed as to whether restoration activities would be compromised. Eric Sutton stated that the management plans would play a major role in determining where hunts might take place. Dave Sumpter reminded everyone that resource management is the primary concern and uses of the land need to be consistent and compatible. Charles Lee stated that staff also needed to keep in

- mind what the property was acquired for and may want to consider moving any property that was purchased for mitigation purposes to the partnership land list. Marianne Ryan also stated that any archeological resources should be protected. Carrying capacity also needs to be addressed in the analysis. Marcia Curl said that protective measures and signage need to be addressed in areas where bald eagle nests exist.
- Sustainability. Max Dersh stated that the possibility of spreading invasive exotics increases with the addition of more foot traffic. Bruce Wirth explained that if problems arise they will be addressed. Gene Kelly added that feral hogs need to be managed as exotics with no quotas or bag limits. Eric explained that staff has direction from the Board to implore multiple methods in an attempt to drastically reduce feral hog populations from District lands. Discussion then ensued regarding the hog trapping program at the District. Don Brown asked that the District look into Suwannee River Water Management District's program regarding donating the meat from trapped hogs to food banks.
  - Public considerations
    - Balancing demand. Chuck Echenique explained to the group that the hunters are not looking to take over an area and turn it into a WMA. What they want is more opportunities to be able to share the lands with other users. Communication needs to be clear and times and dates of hunts can be posted on signs, in local newspapers and websites. Administrative costs of education and communication should be considered. Charles Lee suggested that during the cooler months of the year, blocks of dates be set aside for each user group since these are the most popular months for all users. Richard Jones suggested rotation periods where weekends can rotate between hunting and equestrian use. Daphne Lambright also suggested rotating years allowing for a longer hunting season. Jennifer Seney asked that a regular monitoring program be imposed to gather data from the harvests.
    - Regional demand/adjacency. Will Miller stated that there is a large void in hunting in the southern areas of the District. Given that, should the southern areas be a priority? Another factor to consider would be whether there are existing hunting opportunities on surrounding lands. Charles Lee stated that filling a void is something that FWC should review as it could influence their planning. Dennis Dutcher stated that the easiest areas should be reviewed first, such as lands adjacent to a WMA where signage and infrastructure already exist.
5. Moving Forward - Eric Sutton stated that a meeting will be scheduled with FWC personnel to review individual sites for the possibility of additional hunting opportunities. After a list of proposed areas is made, this group will meet again to review and discuss that list. He emphasized that we are unsure how long this process will take but that it is a priority.
6. Adjourn – Meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.