



SPRINGS COAST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021 – 1:30 PM
2379 BROAD STREET, BROOKSVILLE, FLORIDA 34604
MINUTES

Committee Members Present

Michael Molligan, SWFWMD
Ken Frink, City of Crystal River
Jody Kirkman, Marion County
Jason Mickel, Pasco County
Kevin Coyne, FDEP
Will Fontaine, FGUA
Jason Wagman, FWC
Jessica Stempien, FDACS
Curt Williams, Agriculture
Suzy Folsom, Public Supply
Ilia Balcom, Industry
Alana Todd, Regional Planning Council
Larry Steed, State Parks
Dr. Mauricio Arias, Academia

Staff Members

Vivianna Bendixson
Frank Gargano
Danielle Rogers
Robin Speidel
Madison Trowbridge
Randy Smith
Virginia Singer
Lisa Laupert
Claire Stapley
Randy Emberg

Committee Administrative Support

Kelly Page

FDACS – Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
FDEP – Florida Department of Environmental Protection
SCMC – Springs Coast Management Committee
FGUA – Florida Governmental Utility Authority

FWC – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
SWFWMD – Southwest Florida Water Management District
SCSC – Springs Coast Steering Committee

1. Call to Order and Roll

The Springs Coast Management Committee of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) met for its regular meeting at 1:30 p.m., on May 26, 2021, via Microsoft Teams.

Mr. Michael Molligan, Employee and External Relations Director, called the meeting to order. Roll was called and a quorum was noted.

2. Action Item: Minutes Approval from February 24, 2021

A motion was made for approval of February 24, 2021 minutes. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

3. Public Input

None

4. Discussion: FY2022 Springs Funding Process Lessons Learned and Upcoming Tasks

Ms. Vivianna Bendixson, SWIM Program manager, provided a detailed timeline of projects for fiscal year (FY) 2022 as well as a breakdown of funding requests. She explained the projects

were approved by the Governing Board and submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) on May 7 for consideration. Ms. Bendixson said FDEP will hold a meeting on June 4 to collect public input on projects submitted by all water management districts.

Ms. Bendixson identified changes to two projects submitted for funding, Marion County (Q043) and Hernando County (WW09). She explained the Governing Board has extended funding to Marion County's septic conversion projects and package plant decommissioning within the full BMAP area for Rainbow Springs, but this did not affect ranking. Ms. Bendixson said Hernando County's project is splitting into two phases, 1a and 1b. Phase 1a is now identified as project WW09 and was submitted in alignment with calculations and metrics that were approved by this committee.

Ms. Bendixson discussed lessons learned from the FY22 process. She identified slight rearrangements to the application that will be available for review at the next meeting. Ms. Bendixson also mentioned FDEP added columns to the spreadsheet, which makes it a challenge to read. The solution will be to print it on multiple pages next year. The committee did not propose additional suggestions.

Ms. Bendixson discussed items for consideration and reminded the committee agricultural projects are eligible but have not yet requested Springs funding. Ms. Bendixson discussed Cooperative Funding Initiative (CFI) funding requests within the Rainbow Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) boundary.

Ms. Bendixson discussed the committee's upcoming tasks: approval for the evaluation process and ranking criteria and prioritization matrix, and proposed committee meeting dates for FY2022.

Mr. Angel Martin asked whether there are any plans once these projects are completed to look at the effects of completing the projects and whether they have met the planned reductions. Mr. Kevin Coyne, FDEP, explained FDEP will monitor this at the very least with BMAP updates to evaluate their impacts. He added FDEP intends to utilize other monitoring resources, such as the District's current sampling efforts. Mr. Martin asked whether additional input is provided from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) on the TMDLs as part of these programs. Mr. Coyne explained TMDLs are a state program, so USEPA, a federal program, provides funding but is not heavily involved in the BMAP Program.

Mr. Charles Lee identified legislation that gives recognition to the Florida Wildlife Corridor and suggested a lot of springsheds fall within this corridor. Mr. Lee mentioned these springsheds could partner with land acquisition projects.

5. Discussion: Rainbow River Technical Working Group Update

Dr. Madison Trowbridge, springs scientist, provided the Technical Working Group's (TWG) update on the Rainbow River quantifiable objectives. She explained water clarity for the Rainbow River is at 88 feet, below the target of greater than 100 feet, and nitrate concentrations in the headsprings are currently at 2.63 milligrams per liter, also not meeting its current target of less than 0.35 milligrams per liter. The river's water quantity is at 99 percent of natural flow, which is above its target of greater than 95 percent. Desirable submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is at 65 percent and invasive SAV is at 35 percent.

Mr. Lee suggested some environmental groups are in opposition of the minimum flow level (MFL) calculations, suggesting the baseline being set is already affected by groundwater withdrawals. Mr. Molligan appreciated Mr. Lee's comment and stated this MFL was challenged and litigated, and eventually supported through the courts.

Dr. Arias asked whether there is a direct relationship between the failed targets of water quality, nitrate concentration, and invasive aquatic vegetation within the river. Dr. Trowbridge explained there is some relationship, depending on which location within the river.

Mr. Curt Williams asked what percentage of groundwater withdrawals are affecting the MFL. Mr. Randy Smith explained establishing an MFL takes into account the impact of groundwater withdrawals outside of natural fluctuation from climatic changes. Current groundwater withdrawals are impacting natural river flows by about one percent.

6. Discussion: Technical Working Group Update

Dr. Trowbridge identified discussions that took place at the technical working group (TWG) meeting, which included potential refinements in targets as well as an update to the TWG timeline. The discussion on refinements included water clarity being used as an indicator rather than a target and splitting the SAV sampling segments into two or three river portions as opposed to one overall river calculation.

Mr. Lee asked whether the working group is looking at the clarity of the water moving downstream, referring to recreational activity. Dr. Trowbridge explained the TWG does not focus on the causes of water clarity differences, but rather what can be done to capture the changes. Mr. Lee suggested there be a task force to focus on the causes.

Mr. Molligan noted that the committee will have to decide whether to change water clarity from an objective to an indicator and how to segment the river.

Mr. Martin asked, in terms of natural systems, whether there has been any thought to break the river into five segments rather than three. Dr. Trowbridge explained it could be done but it becomes more complicated to determine boundaries based on data sets.

Mr. Lee suggested there are additional nutrients affecting different portions of the river, such as older homes with septic systems, surface runoff, and migrating water from the Withlacoochee River.

Mr. Molligan stated that this item would come back at the next committee meeting with a District staff recommendation regarding water clarity and SAV evaluations.

7. Discussion: Future Meeting Format

Mr. Molligan discussed meeting format options with the committee. After brief discussion, the committee agreed to meet virtual for the July meeting and hybrid once a Teams room becomes available at the District.

8. Open Discussion

None

9. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.