

**APPROVED
MEETING SUMMARY
Environmental Advisory Committee
Southwest Florida Water Management District
July 10, 2018**

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) of the Southwest Florida Water Management District convened for a regular meeting at 1:30 p.m., July 10, 2018 at the Tampa Service Office, 7601 US Highway 301 North, Tampa, Florida 33637.

Committee Members Present

Ed Sherwood, Tampa Bay Estuary Program
Mark Alderson, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program
Paul Crowell, Keystone Civic Association
Allain Hale, Environmental Confederation of SW Florida
Jennifer Hecker, Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program
Mike Burton, Manatee Chamber of Commerce
Alan Bailey, Florida Trail Association – Suncoast & Heartland Chapters
Dwayne Carlton, Ocala/Marion County, Chamber & Economic Partnership

Governing Board Member Present

Michelle Williamson

Staff Members Present

Caroline McKnight, Facilitator
Jennette Seachrist
JP Marchand
Ken Frink
Mike Bartlett
Lois Sorensen
Michael Molligan

Recording Secretary

Kelly Page

A list of others present who signed the attendance roster is filed in the permanent records of the District. Approved summaries from previous meetings can be found on the District's website at WaterMatters.org.

The numbers preceding the items below correspond to the order of presentation.

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Vice Chair Allain Hale called the meeting to order, welcomed members, staff, and interested persons and asked for member introductions.

2. Additions and Deletions to the Agenda

There were no additions or deletions.

3. Approval of the January 9, 2018 Meeting Summary

The committee approved the January 9, 2018 meeting minutes unanimously.

4. Public Comments

There were no public comments presented.

5. Septic to Sewer

Ms. Jennette Seachrist, Resource Management division director, presented the District's initiative to address septic and package plant conversion projects as well the proposed controls associated with these projects. Ms. Seachrist explained there are five first-magnitude springs within the District. In the Weeki Wachee priority focus area (PFA), there are approximately 35,000 septic tanks, which contribute to 44 percent of the nitrogen load to the Weeki Wachee spring system. The Governing Board agreed to prioritize and help provide funding for septic conversion projects within the identified PFAs.

Ms. Seachrist explained that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) adopted the PFAs along with the Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) for each of the first-magnitude springs on June 29, 2018. Areas within the identified PFAs must follow the rule that no new conventional septic tanks will be allowed on lots less than one acre. In addition, all existing conventional septic tanks must be eliminated or retrofitted within a 20-year time frame. Homeowners can install a conventional septic system only if the local government plans to sewer that area within five years, at which time the septic tank must be removed. If there are no plans to sewer in this time frame, homeowners can only install advanced nitrogen reducing systems.

Ms. Seachrist said the District will provide funding to assist homeowners and local utilities, however, there will be controls in place to ensure District dollars are being used efficiently. Some of the controls include:

- Project must be located within a PFA
- Must be funded by DEP at least 50 percent, with the remainder shared between the District and the cooperator
- The cooperator must have ordinances that require connection to an available sewerage system and prevent construction of septic systems on lots of less than 1 acre within the PFAs, unless the new system includes enhanced treatment of nitrogen, or unless sewer connection will be available within 5 years.
- Cooperative funding agreement conditions that will have repayment conditions if cooperator is not in compliance with the ordinances
- The District will fund master plans at a 50-50 cost-share rate with the cooperator for fiscal year 2019, which will help prioritize septic projects

For fiscal year 2019, the District has approved six projects for cooperative funding, totaling \$72 million. Half of this would be funded by DEP, with the District and cooperator splitting the remaining 50 percent. These projects have been submitted to DEP and are currently being evaluated. Notice of Award for springs projects should be announced in August.

Members asked what an advanced nitrogen reducing system is, and Ms. Seachrist responded that she does not have specifications for the new systems, but they do have additional treatment to reduce nitrogen. She added that the Department of Health (DOH) is tasked with establishing and regulating the nitrogen reducing septic tank guidelines. Ms. Seachrist offered a DOH contact to provide this information.

Members asked how the ordinances are being received by local governments. Ms. Seachrist explained there has been concern on implementation and costs, and she reminded the committee the District's role is to provide cooperative funding to qualifying cooperators.

Mr. Dwayne Carlton mentioned residents in Ocala love the cooperative funding opportunity offered by St. John's River Water Management District.

Members asked about wastewater treatment system byproducts and if additional treatment is required for PFAs. Ms. Seachrist explained that in addition to the septic rules, there are also additional wastewater requirements for the plants, which focus on nitrogen reduction. Ms. Seachrist explained that DEP oversees the water quality requirements for wastewater treatment plants as well as underground injection. Members requested a representative from DEP present on water quality requirements for reusing reclaimed water at a future meeting.

6. SWUCA Recovery – Five-Year Assessment

Mr. JP Marchand, Water Resource bureau chief, provided a brief summary of the Southern Water Use Caution Area (SWUCA) recovery strategy, and informed the committee of the progress on each of the

four goals associated with the recovery strategy. He explained that the District identified the SWUCA in response to a significant decline in groundwater withdrawals and established a recovery strategy through 2025 to increase groundwater levels. Since recovery began in 2007, there have been steady declines in groundwater use.

Mr. Marchand explained the four goals of this strategy include: (1) restore minimum levels to priority lakes in Ridge lakes area, (2) restore minimum flows in the Upper Peace River, (3) reduce the rate of saltwater intrusion along the coast, and (4) ensure sufficient water supplies for existing and projected beneficial uses. The purpose of the assessments is to ensure the four goals stay on track in achieving recovery, and they are assessed every five years.

The first five-year assessment (2007-2011) resulted in progress restoring minimum flows to the Upper Peace River as well as ensuring sufficient water supply. However, the other two goals lacked sufficient progress, thus the District met with stakeholders to develop a strategy in restoring minimum lake levels to priority lakes and reduce the saltwater intrusion. As a result of stakeholder input, the Governing Board approved additional tactics to reach SWUCA recovery goals.

The second five-year assessment (2012-2016) reflected 12 of the 28 priority lakes meeting minimum lake levels, with another 14 getting closer to minimum levels. The Upper Peace River levels have increased; however, the minimum flow levels have not been met consistently. The Lake Hancock project, which is used to store additional water to release into the Upper Peace River during the dry season, is expected to assist in achieving this goal. Mr. Marchand explained there are ongoing recharge projects aimed at reducing the rate of saltwater intrusion within the SWUCA, and water supplies continue to be sufficient.

Members asked what the impact of rising sea levels is in the SWUCA, and Mr. Marchand explained the saltwater intrusion model will analyze this and assess the benefits of recharging fresh water along the coast. He added that the District is working with DEP as they regulate underground injections.

Members asked why two of the lake levels are not improving, and Mr. Marchand responded that Lake Star levels had been reevaluated and the data collected from Lake Bonnie was insufficient.

Members asked how long the District monitors MFLs in the Upper Peace River to assess whether additional projects should be incorporated into the recovery strategy. Mr. Marchand explained the District will monitor the impacts of the Lake Hancock project for five years, and two of those five have been completed.

Members asked whether the reduction in phosphate mining has an effect on water use, and Mr. Marchand replied in the affirmative.

Members asked when the future water demand model will be available, and Mr. Marchand estimated between 12 and 18 months.

7. Surplus Lands Criteria

Mr. Ken Frink, Operations, Lands and Resource Monitoring division director, presented the history of the District's lands program as well as the statute that allows the District to hold land to preserve and protect it. The District currently owns 450,000 acres, with 100,000 of those in private ownership but protected under a conservation easement.

Mr. Frink explained the benefit of having a surplus lands program is to eliminate unnecessary parcels, (often smaller parcels that are included in a larger land acquisition or land that is difficult to manage) in exchange for lands that are more environmentally critical. For example, since 2013, the District has sold

more than 1,500 acres in surplus lands (1,200 of those acres have a conservation easement) and has acquired \$8 million in revenue. This money will be spent on acquiring more land, such as the lands recently purchased along the Myakka and Rainbow Rivers, in order to protect and preserve from future destruction.

Mr. Frink explained the process in determining surplus lands, which includes a high-level search and review of unnecessary District-owned parcels. This process includes District staff review, followed by stakeholder input, and sometimes public meetings. Mr. Frink demonstrated the online tool that provides layers of detailed information of each District-owned parcel, which includes purchase price, land categories, projects noted, etc.

Members asked if the District reaches out to the stakeholders before listing on the open market, and Mr. Frink explained that potential properties are discussed with stakeholders before it goes to the Governing Board for listing consideration.

Members requested information on how lands are evaluated, as they suggest it might help them provide more constructive input on surplus lands.

8. Winter Haven Chain of Lakes

Mr. Mike Bartlett, Structure Operations manager, presented an overview of the northern Winter Haven Chain of Lakes as well as the structure guidelines and public engagement involved in vetting the guidelines. Mr. Bartlett described these water control structures as water conservation structures, which were designed for recreational purposes. These structures are now remotely controlled, which allows the District to assist in flood control.

The purpose of the operational guidelines is to include the ability to aid in minimizing flooding while also maximizing recreation on the lakes and maximizing storage on the lakes. These guidelines were drafted for consistency as well as for public notification. Mr. Bartlett explained the guidelines were up for review this past year, and the District held a planning meeting with local governments and partners as well as two public workshops in order to collect feedback. The overall reactions to these meetings were positive; residents were pleased to be informed about how the lakes are regulated.

Members asked if the District plans to upgrade the structure or if they will be maintained at their current state, and Mr. Bartlett explained that, aside from the berms possibly being retrofitted, the structures are primarily in maintenance mode.

Members asked if the excess water could be moved to the Southern Water Use Caution Area. In response, Mr. Bartlett explained that, as a rule, the District does not move water, unless there is an event that requires it. Another committee member explained there are environmental concerns with transferring from one watershed to another.

9. Hydrologic Conditions

Ms. Lois Sorensen, Demand Management program manager, updated the committee on the District's current hydrologic conditions. March received less than half of the rainfall expected, however, April brought normal to above normal rainfall, followed by almost three times the expected rainfall in May.

As of July 4th, the northern part of the District is at the 80th percentile in groundwater levels. Surface water on the Withlacoochee River is up to the 83rd percentile. The central counties are at the 80th percentile. The Hillsborough River surface water is at the 96th percentile. The Peace River is at the 87th percentile. The Alafia River is at the 100th percentile, which means there is some flooding in various locations.

Ms. Sorensen explained that overall, conditions remain elevated. The tropical forecast indicates lower than previously predicted activity. Rainfall is expected to be normal but is dependent upon tropical activity. Rainfall during the winter months is expected to be above normal.

Members asked if the rivers are currently at 80 to 100 percent, should there be concerns of flooding if another heavy rainfall comes through, and Ms. Sorensen replied in the affirmative.

10. Legislative Update

Mr. Michael Molligan, Employee and External Relations division director, provided an update on the process and outcome of the recent legislative session. He informed the committee of the two bills proposed by the District that were passed:

- House Bill 703, which is an expedited process for sale of surplus lands. This will streamline the process to sell small parcels of surplus land.
- House Bill 705, which is a public records exemption with lands for sale. This is a temporary exemption, which allows some documents like appraisals to be exempt up to two weeks before the Governing Board is going to act on the sale.

Also, there were seven Governing Board confirmations approved by the Senate. In addition, two Governing Board members were recently reappointed by the Governor.

Members asked what the District's legislative priorities are for the upcoming session, and Mr. Molligan explained that the District usually responds to requests for information regarding water resource related bills

11. Topics for Next Meeting

Ms. Caroline McKnight, Board and Executive Services manager, informed the committee there is a presentation on stream restoration projects scheduled for the October meeting.

Members requested a discussion with DEP on reclaimed water treatment, water quality, and/or recharge for the next meeting. Members also requested a presentation from each of the three estuary programs.

12. Announcements and Other Business

Ms. McKnight announced the fiscal year 2019 calendar will be approved in August and will be sent out once approved.

13. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.