



**AGRICULTURAL AND GREEN INDUSTRY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, December 3, 2024 – 10:00 AM**

MINUTES

Committee Members Present

Eric Muecke, City of Tampa Parks & Recreation Dept.
Dennis Carlton, Jr., FL Cattlemen's Association
Michael Matteson, FL Citrus Mutual
Curt Williams, FL Farm Bureau Federation
Morgan Blommel, FL Farm Bureau Federation (alt)
John Holzaepfel, FL Forestry Association (alt)
Alan Jones, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association
Mikayla Rogers, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association (alt)
Andy Neiswender, FL Golf Course Superintendent's Assoc.
Brienne Reichenbach, FL Strawberry Growers Assoc. (alt)
Simon Bollin, Hillsborough Co. Extension Service
Travis Council, Turfgrass Producers of FL

Staff Members

Brian Szenay
Dave Kramer
Dayton Buxton
Eryn Worthington
Jennifer McDaniel
Jeremy McKay
Kaitlyn Maze
Ken Griner
Kristi Bono
Mandi Rice
Michelle Hopkins
Michelle Weaver
Robyn Felix
Tom Hyle

Board Administrative Support

Virginia Singer
Barbara Matrone

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The Agricultural and Green Industry Advisory Committee (AGIAC) of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) met for its regular meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 3, 2024.

Chair Alan Jones called the meeting to order, and attendance was called.

2. Additions and Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Approval of the September 10, 2024 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the September 10, 2024 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Environmental Resource Permitting Updates to Stormwater Design and Operation Regulations

Mr. Dave Kramer, Environmental Resource Permit Bureau Chief, provided updates to stormwater design and operation regulations. In 2020, Senate Bill 712 directed the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and water management districts to update the rules for the

environmental resource permit (ERP) stormwater design operation regulations specifically to increase the removal of nutrients from stormwater. The effort is supposed to consider and address low-impact design best management practices (BMPs) to increase the removal of nutrients from stormwater. In June of 2024, the governor signed Senate Bill 740, so it was ratified and updated the rules which also included additional amendments introduced by the Legislature.

In November 2020, two public outreach meetings were held by FDEP to establish a technical advisory committee (TAC) which consisted of experts from all industries. From December 2020 to November 2021, FDEP held 13 TAC meetings. From May to December 2022, FDEP held four rule development workshops. In January 2023, water management districts held rule development workshops. In March of 2023, FDEP held a rule adoption hearing. As a result, the ERP applicant's handbooks, volumes one and two, were updated.

Mr. Kramer discussed several of the grandfathered activities that effectively exempt a number of different types of activities from having to meet the new rule criteria. He then discussed the performance standard requirements for stormwater management systems which will address treatment performance requirements, require elevated treatment performance for discharges to Outstanding Florida Waters and provide for alternative performance standards for redevelopment.

The stormwater quality treatment evaluations will require evaluation of pre-and post-development hydrology and nutrient loading, establishing the required treatment efficiency, selecting the BMPs for stormwater treatment, calculating treatment train nutrient reduction, utilizing alternative designs, applying compensatory treatment, and utilizing regional stormwater management systems. New amendments include providing stormwater management system Operation and Maintenance plans, developing cost estimates, demonstrating financial capability, conducting and reporting inspections on increased frequency and requiring inspection training for others that are not registered professionals.

Dam safety requirements include providing dam system information during the permitting review, establishing a downstream hazard potential classification for new projects, preparing an emergency action plan for high hazard or significant hazard dams, and providing condition assessment reports for high hazard or significant hazard dams.

Mr. Kramer concluded by discussing the implementation timeline requirements and stated that projects or activities that will receive a permit application that is deemed complete on or before December 28, 2025, shall be effectively exempt from the amendments to these rules. In addition, for the Department of Transportation the water quality performance criteria will not apply to public transportation projects that have completed a project development and environment study prior to June 28, 2026.

Chair Jones asked Mr. Kramer if he would provide some examples of green stormwater design. Mr. Kramer mentioned pervious pavements, green roofs, bio-retention systems, stormwater reuse, and manufacturers of BMPs or marketing of very specialized filter systems. Chair Jones also asked if drinking water reservoirs were classified as an impaired waterway. Mr. Kramer responded that it would likely be treated at the minimum treatment requirement and the total phosphorus reduction would have to be 80% and the total nitrogen would have to be 55%.

Mr. Simon Bollin asked if there was any discussion when they developed the rules on the operation and management for existing stormwater structures. Mr. Kramer responded yes, there was a lot of discussion at the beginning, and the TAC considered how to address aged infrastructure and aged stormwater management systems that exist in the landscape that may or may not have been maintained for many years. There was a lot of negotiation and prioritization on how the rule should apply. Mr. Bollin also asked how broad the dam definition is. Mr. Kramer responded that there are very specific thresholds and dimensional criteria that will define what a dam is.

6. ePermitting Modernization Update

Ms. Jennifer McDaniel, Business Analyst, provided an overview of the District's ePermitting modernization project. The mission is to implement a new online ePermitting system that will be mobile friendly, faster, compatible with multiple browsers, and easy to search and navigate. The vision is to have an efficient and effective permitting experience for all users, including consultants, the public and regulatory staff. The current project status for internal and external features includes environmental resource permit (ERP) internal and external submittals, eCompliance submittals, ERP search, ad hoc reports, condition automation, letter process, special conditions during review, permit type changes during review, timeclocks, system issuance and denials.

The project began in July 2019 and focused on the environment set up activities' development which is the very foundation of the project. By the second quarter of 2021, the focus was on development of the ERP module and incremental releases by permit types. One month before going live, they started outreach and training, and the registration process will be provided for both internal and external users. Appropriate training is being provided for both the Information Technology Bureau and the ePermitting help desk to be ready to provide support to users. As of July 2024, they went live with all permit types which are to be followed by compliance, water use, and well construction permit modules development.

A few of the project achievements include easier navigation, a decrease in the number of steps for application entry, ability to use tablets and cell phones for application entry, enhanced document upload, and the ability to pay online using a credit card.

Ms. McDaniel highlighted the project team consisting of subject matter experts, the development team, the system administrator team, consultants, and the project management board and praised them for their dedication to the project. She concluded by providing a short demonstration of the ePermitting system.

Chair Jones asked how long is expected to receive a response back after an application has been submitted. Mr. Kramer responded that they have set goals to issue permits within six months but that they really try not to have applications in house pushing a year or more.

7. Communications Plans for Northern Counties FARMS and Mini-FARMS

Ms. Carole Estes, FARMS Program Manager, presented the District's promotional efforts for the FARMS program in the northern planning region. The FARMS program is a cost-share reimbursement program designed to incentivize growers to adopt best management practices that conserve groundwater and/or improve water quality. All types and sizes of agricultural producers located within the District can participate, and there is also a Mini-FARMS program for smaller operations. Eligible projects that reduce groundwater use or improve water quality may receive up to 50% reimbursement for eligible project costs. Projects that do both may be eligible for up to 75% of project costs.

Growers can apply all year round as they are continually accepting and evaluating applications for FARMS projects. Growers get to decide on the most appropriate project for their operation and then they manage, operate and maintain the project. FARMS staff will help with selecting the best ways to improve water use, navigating the regulatory process and submitting for the reimbursement of eligible expenses. Common project types include alternative water supply, conservation and nutrient reduction or retention. Examples of eligible expenses would be surface water or tailwater irrigation pumps and filters, mainline to connect to an existing irrigation system, water control structures, automatic irrigation controls, soil moisture sensors, weather stations and fertigation systems.

The FARMS program began in 2003 and has completed over 250 projects. FARMS projects that are still in operation save more than 25 million gallons of water per day, and that helps reduce the demand for groundwater, which is a limited resource in the District. Historically, promotion and FARMS projects have been concentrated on the southern planning region, but now more of the focus is being placed on the northern planning region with hopes to expand the reach of the FARMS program and build on the successes already achieved. They will continue to promote FARMS District wide, but this

fiscal year they are hoping to increase our projects in the northern planning region. They are partnering with the District's Communications team on a campaign to raise awareness of the FARMS program in the northern region.

The goal of the campaign is to reduce groundwater withdrawals and nutrient loading in the District's northern planning region through the FARMS Program. The objective is to receive at least three FARMS project applications in the northern planning region by the end of FY2025 and receive approval from the Governing Board to fund the projects. They are also looking to attract growers who are interested in partnering with the District on projects that meet the FARMS program's requirements, goal and objectives.

Advertising space was purchased from Florida Farm & Family magazine. A FARMS ad was placed in the winter edition and a short story about the FARMS program is on the magazine's webpage for 90 days. The magazine is distributed to nearly 130,000 readers throughout Florida.

FARMS staff hosted a booth at this year's Florida Farm Bureau Federation's (FFBF) annual state meeting in Miramar from October 30 through November 1 to connect directly with farmers and agricultural vendors to promote the FARMS program. They were scheduled to attend the Citrus and Hernando FFBF annual meeting on October 8, but it was postponed and will need to be rescheduled due to the hurricane. They are also researching association meetings or tradeshow to engage with commodity groups of popular crops in the northern region, such as peanuts, hay, melons, nursery and sod.

There are also plans to produce a new video in-house about a FARMS project in operation. Hopefully hearing from a grower about their hands-on experience with FARMS will encourage other growers to participate. The video will be shared through various means with a call to action for growers to visit their FARMS webpage for more information. The video will also be shared through the FARMS email group and with an article about the communication efforts with all District staff. With nearly 600 employees spread throughout the District staff are a great way to help spread the word about the FARMS program. A mailer will also be designed and sent out to District water use permittees in the northern region.

The following promotional efforts are underway to attract more growers in the Northern Region to the program. Advertising space was purchased in the winter edition of the Florida Farm & Family magazine, which reaches 130,000 readers and a story is running about the program on the magazine's webpage. FARMS staff hosted a booth at the Florida Farm Bureau Federation's annual state meeting in Miramar from October 30 through November 1 to connect directly with farmers and agricultural vendors. There are also plans to produce a FARMS video about a project in operation. The video along with an article will be shared to stakeholders through various means with a call to action for growers to visit the FARMS webpage for more information. Staff also plan to design and send an informational mailer to District water use permittees and coordinate with media on a FARMS question and answer session and project site tour. Targeted Facebook advertisements will also be part of promotional efforts.

8. Development of Agenda Topics

None.

9. Announcements and Other Business

Chair Jones encouraged committee members to join the meetings in person and added that the Teams option would still also be available for those who could not attend in person. Ms. Virginia Singer announced that on March 7 a tour is being planned to the Green Swamp. District staff will provide an overview of the conservation lands program, land use changes, agency coordination, natural systems restoration and maintenance and the regional significance of the Green Swamp. She will be emailing a save-the-date and will provide more details as they become available.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10: 51 a.m.