AGRICULTURAL AND GREEN INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2025 – 10:00 AM

MINUTES

Committee Members Present
Miriam Brown, City of Tampa Parks & Recreation Dept. (alt)
Ryan Gill, FL Cattlemen's Association (alt)
Curt Williams, FL Farm Bureau Federation
Morgan Blommel, FL Farm Bureau Federation (alt)
Jay Vogel, FL Forestry Association
Alan Jones, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association
Mikayla Rogers, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association (alt)
Andy Neiswender, FL Golf Course Superintendent's Assoc.
Gail Huff, FL Irrigation Society
Sal Chillura, FL Nursery, Growers & Landscape Assoc.
Kenneth Parker, FL Strawberry Growers Assoc. (alt)
David Boozer, FL Tropical Fish Farms Assoc.
Simon Bollin, Hillsborough County Extension Service
Joe Walsh, Hillsborough Soil & Water Conservation Dist.
Andy Jorgensen, On Top of the World Utilities
Travis Council, Turfgrass Producers of FL
Betsy McGill, Turfgrass Producers of FL (alt)
Don Rainey, University of Florida/IFAS

Interested Parties
Kerry Kates, Orange County Utilities
Jessica Ferris, FDACS
Vanessa Bauzo-Deleon, FDACS
Ellen Cruz, FDACS
Matt Warren, FDACS
Kathy Eckdahl, Hillsborough Soil & Water Conservation Dist.

Staff Members
Adrienne Vining
Brian Starford
Brian Szenay
Carole Estes
Cassidy Hampton
Jay Hoecker
Jeremy McKay
Kristi Bono
Michelle Weaver
Patience Harper
Robyn Felix
Ryan Pearson
Steve DeSmith
Taylor Greenan

Board Administrative Support
Virginia Singer
Barbara Matrone

Governing Board Liaison
Dustin Rowland

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, June 10, 2025.

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

   Governing Board Liaison Dustin Rowland welcomed the committee.

2. **Additions and Deletions to the Agenda**
   None.

3. **Approval of the December 3, 2024 and March 7, 2025 Meeting Minutes**
   A motion was made to approve the minutes from the December 3, 2024 and March 7, 2025 meetings. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Public Comments**

Dr. Joe Walsh with the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District introduced himself and discussed his organization's interest in the committee.

5. **Hydrologic Conditions Update**

Mr. Steve DeSmith, Senior Professional Geologist, provided a hydrologic conditions update. For the month of March, the District experienced normal rainfall in the northern region and below normal rainfall in the central and southern regions. The District normally averages about 3.2 inches of rainfall in March, but this year only received 1.6 inches, which was a 1.6-inch rainfall deficit. Looking at the month of April, the District experienced below normal rainfall. The District normally averages about 2.6 inches of rainfall, but this past April only received 0.6 inches, which was a 2.0-inch deficit.

Mr. DeSmith showed a figure of the 12-month rainfall distribution from May 2024 through April 2025. The District normally averages about 52.7 inches of rainfall for the 12-month period, but data indicate the rainfall totals were 53.4 inches, which was a 0.7-inch surplus. The surplus was due mainly to the heavy rainfall from multiple tropical storms received from June through September of last year. A graph of the 12-month cumulative rainfall was presented, showing multiple 12-month periods of surplus or deficit rainfall since 1998. The 12-month period ending April 2025 showed a 0.7-inch surplus. Last April, the District had a 4.3-inch deficit, so conditions did improve over the last 12 months.

The provisional rainfall distribution for the month of May indicates that the District received above average rainfall. The typical average is 3.6 inches, but this year the total reached 5.3 inches, which was a 1.7-inch surplus.

Mr. DeSmith then discussed recent groundwater levels in the northern, central, and southern counties, as well as surface water levels in the Northern Lakes, Tampa Bay Lakes, Polk Upland Lakes, and Lake Wales Ridge Lakes regions. He showed another set of graphs and discussed the eight-week mean discharge of the Withlacoochee, Hillsborough, Alafia, and Peace rivers. He also discussed public supply levels for the City of Tampa's Hillsborough River Reservoir, public supply volumes for the C.W. Bill Young Regional Reservoir, and the water quantities stored in the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority's reservoir and aquifer storage and recovery wellfield.

Mr. DeSmith then discussed the Near-Term Climate Forecast and showed seasonal outlooks for temperature and precipitation for June 2025 to August 2025. The Climate Prediction Center is predicting above normal rainfall and above normal temperatures for the three-month period. For the extended climate forecast, they are also predicting above normal rainfall Districtwide through October of this year. We are currently in tropical storm season which runs from June through November. The National Hurricane Center is predicting for the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season, above normal hurricane activity with 13-19 named storms, 6-10 hurricanes, and of those, 3-5 major hurricanes.

Mr. DeSmith concluded by discussing the tropical weather outlook. In June hurricane and tropical disturbances usually generate somewhere in the Gulf or the western Caribbean or the eastern coast of the U.S., but as of right now, there is no tropical cyclone activity in the Gulf, and none is expected in the next seven days.

Mr. Don Rainey asked if there was any way to correlate water conservation efforts that the District has been involved with in the past 10 years. Mr. DeSmith responded that the District has a Demand Management section that would be happy to discuss the District's conservation efforts.

6. **Public Draft 2025 Regional Water Supply Plan**

Ms. Cassidy Hampton, Environmental Project Manager, provided an overview of the public draft 2025 Regional Water Supply Plan (RWSP). Regional water supply planning is required by section 373.709, F.S. and is also included within the District's Strategic Plan. A RWSP assesses projected water demands and potential sources of water to meet those demands and is required where water sources are not adequate to supply existing and future uses, as well as sustain water resources and related natural systems. The District currently publishes a RWSP for all four planning regions.

The RWSP is updated and published every five years and covers a 20-year planning period. The 2025 RWSP covers the time period from 2025 through 2045, while the prior 2020 RWSP covered 2020 through 2040. There are five key components included in the RWSP which include resource protection criteria, demand estimates and projections, evaluation of water sources, water supply and resource development projects, and overview of funding mechanisms.

The process for developing the RWSP began in 2023 with the development of demand projections. Throughout late 2023 to early 2024, we brought these draft demand figures to each of the advisory committees for feedback. In addition, project options were solicited for meeting demands from local governments and utilities for potential inclusion in the RWSP. The draft plan was presented to the District's Governing Board at its May meeting, and the public review and comment period kicked off last week, with the draft 2025 RWSP currently available on the District's website. Comments and feedback received will be reviewed and considered for potential incorporation into the draft RWSP.

The RWSP includes resource protection criteria, which details the primary strategies employed by the District to protect water resources. These include minimum flows and levels, water use caution areas (WUCAs), prevention and recovery strategies, and reservations. Currently, a large portion of the District is covered by WUCAs including the northern Tampa Bay, Dover Plant City, and the southern WUCAs. A portion of the District is also within the Central Florida Water Initiative Planning Area, which is a joint planning effort between the District, St. John's River Water Management District, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

After detailing resource protection criteria, projected demands are then calculated over the planning horizon. Demands are projected for five water use sectors including public supply, agriculture, industrial/commercial and mining/dewatering, power generation, and landscape/recreation. These projections use the best available data from a variety of different sources.

Ms. Hampton discussed the demand projections over the planning period by water use category and by planning region. She then explained that a variety of sources were evaluated to meet those demands over the next 20 years. These sources include fresh groundwater, brackish groundwater, reclaimed water, water conservation, surface water, stormwater, and seawater. Also evaluated was storage capacity, such as aquifer storage and recovery and reservoirs. She then discussed water supply and resource development projects, including both potential project options and District-funded projects that are already under development.

She then gave an overview of the funding mechanisms which are key to developing these project options, again mentioning several projects are already under development with District cooperative funding. Several of these projects also are receiving state funding through the water supply and water resource development grant program.

Ms. Hampton concluded by discussing the 2025 RWSP findings. Using a combination of alternative water sources, water conservation measures and fresh groundwater, the 2025 RWSP finds that water supply demands for all use sectors can be met through 2045, while protecting and restoring natural systems. Within the Northern Planning Region, demands may continue to be met with traditional groundwater sources on a regional scale; however, alternative sources may be needed to supplement traditional sources and meet demands in specific high-growth areas. Regionally, the need for groundwater supplies can be reduced through the use of available reclaimed water and implementation of comprehensive conservation measures.

Mr. Curt Williams asked if the District considered the conversion of fallow citrus land into different agricultural commodities to ensure that the demand was not shrinking for agriculture long-term, and if there is still room for future agricultural growth. Ms. Hampton responded that it was considered and incorporated Florida Statewide Agricultural Irrigation Demand (FSAID) projections for the demand calculations and as well as changes in crop types.

Chair Jones asked for an explanation for agricultural water quantities associated with farms that have converted to solar farms. Ms. Hampton responded that she would have to consult District staff who worked on compiling those demand projections to see if they could provide any insight. Ms. Carole Estes responded that if there is a particular piece of property that is no longer going to be growing, they can work with District's Water Use Permitting Bureau to retire that amount. She added that sometimes other crops are grown underneath the solar panels, which is particularly occurring in the District's southern region. Regarding old citrus groves, Ms. Estes noted they have been seeing this land converted to sod farms, as well as strawberry farms which are moving from the Plant City area into Polk County away from population. Ms. Estes added that the FSAID, and therefore the RWSP, considers the District's water use permitting database to reference what is being grown and how much water is required for those crops.

Discussion ensued, and it was indicated that additional follow-up with District Water Use Permitting staff would be needed.

7. <u>Water Reuse in Agriculture</u>

Mr. Kerry Kates, Orange County Utilities Deputy Director and WaterReuse Florida President, provided an overview of agriculture reuse within the state of Florida. Statistically, Florida is the national leader in reusing water by both volume and per capita. The current numbers from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) showed that Florida reuses 900 million gallons a day and approximately 55% of total domestic wastewater flow generated in the state for reuse. FDEP's Reuse Inventory report shows that agriculture irrigation uses 6%, groundwater recharge uses 8%, industrial uses 12%, wetlands use 14%, and public access areas use 60%, with approximately 1,864 acres being used for edible crops and 14,465 acres being used for other crops.

In terms of reuse and water supply planning, 70 percent of the state has some form of water use restriction criteria. Approximately 900 people per day move into the state of Florida, which puts a lot of pressure on our water resources. Reuse has an important role to play as we move forward to ensure that we can provide sustainable water supplies. Based on the District's Strategic Plan there is a goal of reaching 75% of reuse utilization by 2040.

Florida is no stranger to agriculture reuse as farms have been reusing water for various crops for decades. The CONSERV II project was the largest of its kind where Orange County and the city of Orlando came together with a solution to provide water via a distribution center to local citrus growers. A decreasing trend has also been noticed in agricultural water reuse, particularly in those that are utilized to produce edible crops. Some of the challenges for agricultural reuse are food safety, public perception, contractual language, lack of infrastructure, and parameters in pH and chlorides.

The National Water Reuse Action Plan (WRAP) was developed in February 2020 by the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal, state, and local water leaders. The Unites States Department of Agriculture is a partner, along with many other organizations, and supports the adoption of potable and non-potable reuse.

Potable reuse is drinking water sourced from reclaimed water that is highly treated to beyond-drinking water standards utilizing proven and advanced treatment technology. The two forms of potable reuse are direct potable reuse, the immediate introduction of treated potable reuse water into the drinking water supply, and indirect potable reuse, the discharge of treated potable reuse water directly into an environmental buffer, such as a reservoir or aquifer. Potable reuse has been safely and successfully utilized in the U.S. and around the world for decades. FDEP has been working on stringent potable reuse regulations since 2020 and has recently adopted statewide rules in February 2025.

Mr. Kates discussed Florida's potable reuse journey and several of the demonstration facilities in Polk County and Plant City. Many states have some type of existing guidelines that allow for permitting of potable reuse projects on a case-by-case basis. Potable reuse projects are currently being piloted across the country with some preparation to scale to full production.

Mr. Kates concluded by discussing why we use potable reuse. Public supply and agriculture are the two largest water users. Agriculture's options are limited in what the industry can do from a water supply standpoint. We need implementable and effective solutions, and it is one of several tools that can be utilized, when and where appropriate, to ensure that we have a sustainable water supply. It has been used for a very long time, and it has been vetted and will continue to play a very important role moving forward.

8. Agricultural Cooperative Regional Water Quality Elements (ACE)

Ms. Jessica Ferris, FDACS, provided an overview of the Agricultural Cooperative Regional Water Quality Elements (ACE) program. The purpose of the Agricultural Regional Project Program (ARPP) is to address nonpoint source pollution from agricultural operations by reducing nutrient loading and enhancing water quality and quantity on a regional scale. The ACE legislative requirement in Section 403.067(7)(e), F.S., in collaboration with DEP and FDACS agricultural producers, must develop cooperative regional water quality improvement element projects which would be incorporated into the basin management action plan (BMAP) areas where agriculture contributes at least 20 percent of nutrient discharges or additional measures as determined by DEP to meet those total maximum daily load (TMDL) goals.

The vision for the ARPP is the vehicle by which FDACS plans to meet ACE requirements. Key target outcomes include measurable nutrient reductions, water conservation, direct support for BMAPs and TMDL goals, and enhanced agricultural and environmental sustainability while protecting Florida's water resources.

Each stakeholder has a role in sharing the program's success. FDACS takes the lead by engaging producers, developing projects and coordinating the funding with the industry. FDEP oversees water quality outcomes within BMAPs and integrates environmental monitoring. Water management districts collaborate with FDACs and FDEP on project selection and evaluation. The agricultural producers implement applicable projects that provide regional water storage treatment, as determined by FDACs and FDEP.

Ms. Ferris discussed the ARPP project selection criteria and the application system scoring using a points system prioritizing projects by water quality and improvement potential, nutrient reductions, cost benefit, water quantity, project readiness to proceed and data collection. Additional considerations will include innovation and sustainability, collaboration and partnerships, and the availability of matching funds. The inclusion of project type as a selection criterion ensures that the program prioritizes projects with the greatest potential to achieve the program's objectives which are specifically nutrient reduction, water quality enhancement, and regional environmental sustainability.

Ms. Ferris then discussed the evaluation process, which begins with the initial review of proposals. Those that meet the minimum eligibility requirements provide a virtual project presentation to those eligible applicants. A selection committee ranks each proposal using selection criteria rubric. The projects selected out of that review will be recommended to leadership for approval. The award notice will go out and the department will notify the selected grantees. Contract execution is expected to occur early 2026.

Ms. Ferris concluded by discussing the ongoing projects and innovations and highlighted some of the key challenges such as engaging producers, managing varied regional waterbody conditions and ensuring projects meet both performance and cost benefit criteria. She also mentioned opportunities for local expertise, fostering partnerships and adapting innovative technologies to regional needs.

9. Development of Agenda Topics

Chair Jones mentioned that he would like to discuss a future field trip opportunity with Kerry Kates.

10. Announcements and Other Business

None.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:47 a.m.