



**SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
AGRICULTURAL & GREEN INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2026 – 10:00 AM
MINUTES**

Committee Members

Eric Muecke – City of Tampa Parks & Recreation Department
Jake Fojtik – FL Farm Bureau Federation
Morgan Blommel – FL Farm Bureau Federation (alternate)
John Vogel – FL Forestry Association
Alan Jones – FL Fruit & Vegetable Association (chair)
Mikayla Rogers – FL Fruit & Vegetable Association (alternate)
Sal Chillura – FL Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association
Kenneth Parker – FL Strawberry Growers Association
David Boozer – FL Tropical Fish Farms Association
Mark Kann – FI Turfgrass Association
Simon Bollin – UF/IFAS Extension Service – Hillsborough County
Joe Walsh – Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District
Andy Jorgensen – On Top of the World Utilities
Travis Council – Turfgrass Producers of FL
Sarah Spatola – Turfgrass Producers of FL (alternate)
Don Rainey – UF Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences Extension

Governing Board Liaison

Dustin Rowland

Interested Parties

Vanessa Bauzo-Deleon, FDACS
Michaela Mulligan, Tampa Bay Times

Administrative Support

Virginia Singer
Barbara Matrone

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The Agricultural & 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 9, 2026, via Microsoft Teams.

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

Governing Board Liaison Dustin Rowland welcomed the committee.

2. Additions and Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Approval of December 2, 2025 & March 27, 2026, Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the draft minutes from the December 2, 2025 meeting, and the March 27, 2026, tour. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Hydrologic Conditions Update

Casie Cutman, Hydrologic Data Analyst, provided an update on current hydrologic conditions. She reported that the District's eight-month dry season had ended and that May produced a rainfall surplus that had not been seen since last May. She noted that June began drier than normal, and the District's 12-month rainfall total remains below average. In May, the District received 5.2 inches of rainfall, reflecting a 1.5-inch surplus compared to the historical average of 3.7 inches.

The 12-month rainfall distribution from June 2025 to May 2026 averaged 41.2 inches, representing an 11.4-inch deficit compared to the historic average of 52.6 inches. For the dry season total (October 2025 – May 2026) the District received 15.5 inches of rainfall representing a 6.1-inch deficit compared to the historic average of 21.6 inches. A graph illustrating the 12-month rainfall departure from average showed multiple periods of surplus or deficit rainfall since 1998. The 12-month period ending in May 2026 reflected an 11.4-inch deficit, compared to 4.3-inch surplus during the same period ending in May 2025.

Ms. Cutman then reviewed recent groundwater levels across 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. She also presented eight-week mean discharge trends for the Withlacoochee, Hillsborough, Alafia and Peace rivers, and then discussed recent public supply volumes for the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority and the Tampa Bay area.

Ms. Cutman concluded with a review of the near-term climate forecast, including seasonal outlooks for temperature and precipitation for the period of June through August 2026. According to the Climate Prediction Center, there is a 40 to 50% chance of higher-than-normal temperatures and an equal chance of above or below normal precipitation across the District through August. The extended precipitation outlook from July through November shows equal chances of above or below normal rainfall, followed by an increased likelihood of above-normal precipitation from fall through winter extending into February.

6. Overview of the District's Land Program

Ellen Morrison, Land Resources Bureau Chief, provided an overview of the District's land program. The District has been acquiring land for conservation and project purposes since 1964, and that land ownership is essential to fulfilling the District's mission of protecting water resources, minimizing food risks and ensuring the public's water needs are met. The District currently owns approximately 460,000 acres of land in both fee and less than fee interests.

Ms. Morrison described the structure and the responsibilities of the Land Resources Bureau. The Bureau is composed of two sections: Real Estate Services and Land Management. Real Estate Services oversees the District's land acquisitions for conservation and project needs, surplus land sales, internal and external land use requests, and management of the District's cooperative agreements. The Land Management section is responsible for management of the District's lands including prescribed fire, forest management, natural systems restoration, invasive species control and recreation.

Ms. Morrison provided additional details on land use and real estate responsibilities. She highlighted the volume and variety of external land use requests as well as the internal land use requests. She noted that Chapters 259 and 373, Florida Statutes, direct the District to manage and maintain its lands in a manner that conserves and protects natural systems and water

resources while also providing appropriate public access. The Land Management section achieves its statutory responsibilities through five program areas: prescribe fire, forest management, natural systems restoration, invasive species control and land use and management plans. Ms. Morrison then provided further detail on each of these program areas, outlining their roles in supporting the District's statutory responsibilities and overall land management objectives. She concluded with an overview of the District's recreation program. She highlighted the amenities available across District-managed lands and noted that an estimated two million people visit these properties annually.

Mr. Joe Walsh asked if feral hog swine fencing was used as a management tool on District lands. Ms. Morrison responded that fencing is not typically used; instead, the District relies on trapping and hunting to manage feral hog populations. Mr. Walsh also asked about the balance between conservation easements and fee-simple ownership within the District's land acquisition model, as well as what future land acquisition efforts may look like. Ms. Morrison responded that it is a balance, and it is dependent on each individual property.

Chair Jones asked whether there is any collaboration between adjacent property owners and the District regarding prescribed fires. Ms. Morrison responded that due to liability concerns, the District does not conduct prescribed burns on private property. However, she noted that the District does work with adjacent landowners to communicate planned activities and determine what coordination may be needed along shared boundaries.

7. 2026 Freeze Event

April Breton, Water Use Permit Bureau Chief, presented on the 2026 freeze event. She began by giving background history from the 2010 freeze event, during which temperatures dropped below 34 degrees for 11 consecutive days, resulting in over 750 well complaints, approximately 140 sinkholes, and over \$8 million in damages. Following that event, the District evaluated its strategies and coordinated with agricultural and community stakeholders to establish the Dover/Plant City Water Use Caution Area (DPCWUCA), which covers 259 square miles.

The DPCWUCA established restrictions on new Upper Floridan Aquifer withdrawals used for crop protection, updating well-construction standards, and required pump depths of at least 100 feet north of I-4 and 142 feet below land surface south of I-4. The District also developed a tool to better assign well pumping responsibility to water use permittees, ensuring residents adversely impacted during cold protection events receive appropriate mitigation. In addition, the District enhanced its "real-time" groundwater monitoring capabilities by installing automatic meter-reading devices on all cold protection withdrawal points.

Ms. Breton then reviewed the complaint allocation process. She explained that the District developed a volume-based methodology to equitably assign responsibility among permittees, based on their cumulative impacts within the area. Each permit is allocated a proportional share of responsibility tied to the total amount of groundwater authorized, with those shares generated through the District's allocation model.

She then provided an overview of the 2026 freeze event, noting that the District was currently in a modified Phase II water shortage. Due to ongoing dry conditions, aquifer levels were approximately 12 feet lower going into the 2026 frost/freeze event compared to January 2010. The District experienced five nights of below-freezing temperatures within a week, along with one night of pumping in mid-January. Aquifer levels dropped to 2.5 feet and may have been lower due to a data recording error. The District received approximately 288 dry well complaints. All water use permitting staff assisted with calls. The majority of the complaints were resolved promptly, with remaining delays due to limited availability of well drillers.

Moving forward, the District will focus on improving the speed of the Well Mitigation Allocation Assessment (WMAA) tool as well as the reliability of the automatic meter readers (AMR). Ms. Breton noted that issues sometimes arise when responsibility for complaint investigation and mitigation associated with leased properties is not established in advance. In these cases, the District defaults to holding the permittee responsible. She also explained that wells not meeting the stipulations of their Well Construction Permit (WCP) are ineligible for investigation and mitigation. Additionally, the current \$1,500 reimbursement for pre-complaint repairs has not been updated since the rules were adopted in 2011.

Ms. Breton concluded by reviewing permit conditions related to mitigation during crop establishment. She stated that the District sends annual reminder letters to permittees outlining their mitigation responsibilities. Prior to freeze events, the District also issues press releases alerting residents to potential freezing temperatures and advising permittees to turn off pumps to help reduce dry-well complaints.

Mr. Simon Bollin asked how many dry-well complaints were attributed to residents rather than the agricultural community. Ms. Breton responded that residents are not contributing to the issue; rather, the dry-well complaints occur when the groundwater levels drop rapidly in the area during freeze-protection pumping.

Mr. Don Rainey asked whether, in terms of encouraging behavior changes related to allocation, the District provides education to permittees who exceed their allocation, specifically regarding technologies such as soil moisture sensors that could help reduce dry-well impacts. Ms. Breton responded that the District could explore opportunities for additional outreach. She noted that she reviewed recent data and did not find any permittees who exceeded their maximum daily quantities during the event. Mr. Rainey also asked about the average acre-foot allocation provided to producers. Ms. Breton stated that she would gather that information and follow up.

Mr. Walsh asked for clarification regarding wells that do not meet well construction permit stipulations. Ms. Breton explained that even if a well is older and does not meet current construction standards, it may still be eligible for a complaint investigation if it was functioning properly before groundwater levels dropped. However, if the permittee's investigation finds that the well failure is due to another issue, unrelated to water-level decline, then the permittee is not responsible for mitigation of that well. Mr. Walsh also asked if permittees receive reimbursement for their investigations. Ms. Breton stated they do not. Mr. Walsh then requested a new stakeholder engagement effort to clarify how the system works. Ms. Breton confirmed they will be doing that as they move forward.

Discussion ensued.

8. Water Shortage Orders

Krista Smith, Staff Hydrologist, provided an update on current water shortage orders. She referenced the authority under Section 373.246(3), Florida Statutes, which provides that, in accordance with the water shortage plan, the Governing Board may impose such restrictions as may be necessary to protect the water resources of the area from serious harm and to restore them to their previous condition. The plan requires the District to assign a water shortage phase based upon consideration of the following factors: drought indicators and drought condition levels, current regional lake levels, public supply storage status, precipitation outlook and availability of alternative water supply.

Ms. Smith summarized the four water shortage phases:

- Phase I – the moderate alert to prepare for possible worsening conditions.
- Phase II – the severe water shortage where prudent actions to assure only reasonable water uses are occurring.
- Phase III – the extreme water shortage to minimize nonessential water use.
- Phase IV – the critical water shortage is a temporary suspension of nonessential water use.

She then discussed Districtwide conditions for the northern, central and southern regions as of June 1, 2026, along with public supply storage levels for Tampa Bay Water's C.W. Bill Young Reservoir.

She reported that the modified Phase III phase has been in effect since April 3, 2026. Users should continue to test irrigation systems for leaks and inefficiencies. Cleaning and maintenance of irrigation systems are allowed on the restricted day with an attendant on site in the area being tested. Irrigation systems may routinely be operated for such purposes no more than once per week, and the total run time for each zone shall not exceed 10 minutes during the test.

Ms. Smith concluded her presentation by discussing recommended actions for users during a water shortage and noted that the District will contact permittees as necessary to ensure that the required actions of the water shortage order are being implemented.

Mr. Rainey asked for clarification on restrictions related to reclaimed water use, and the use of surface and groundwater for golf courses. Ms. Smith explained that if a site uses only reclaimed water and stores it in a lined pond, then it is not subject to water-shortage restrictions. However, if the site uses an unlined pond and supplements with groundwater or surface water, then it must follow water-shortage watering hours and restrictions. Mr. Rainey asked whether the same rules apply to large sports complexes. Ms. Smith responded that it depends on whether the facility has a water use permit and on the specific nature of the water use.

Mr. Sal Chillura asked about whether any rules apply to commercial properties and what the irrigation time frame is for larger properties, specifically those over one acre with multiple irrigation zones. Ms. Smith explained that properties larger than one acre may irrigate during both allowable watering windows. Ms. Breton added if those two windows are still insufficient, the property owner may apply for a variance.

9. Development of Agenda Topics

Mr. Bollin noted that Hillsborough County was considering an expansion of the urban service boundary in both the I-4 corridor and the Ruskin areas and was interested to see if the District had evaluated potential impacts on the water table, water access and overall water use, and whether any studies are planned.

Chair Jones asked for an update on Minimum Flows and Levels associated with the most impacted area of the Southern Water Use Caution Area.

Mr. Mark Kann requested a research overview highlighting the District's current projects, ongoing initiatives, and potential areas for collaboration with other industries, specifically opportunities to advance technology related to drought-tolerant turf grasses. He emphasized the value of demonstrating a collaborative effort between the University of South Florida and the District. Mr. Jay Hoecker stated that the University of Florida has conducted a literature review for the District of Drought Tolerant Turf Species that will be presented at a future advisory committee meeting.

10. Announcements and Other Business

None.

11. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:16 a.m.