



ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

TUESDAY, July 9, 2024 – 10:00 AM

2379 BROAD STREET, BROOKSVILLE, FLORIDA 34604

MINUTES

Committee Members Present

Jennifer Hecker – Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Partnership
Becky Aych – Environmental Confederation of SW Florida
Cathleen Castor – Manatee Chamber of Commerce – alternate
Dave Tomasko – Sarasota Bay Estuary Program
Gordon Colvin – Save the Homosassa River Alliance
Sid Flannery – Sierra Club – Tampa Bay Group
Mary Willa Matz – Sierra Club – Tampa Bay Group - alternate
Ed Sherwood – Tampa Bay Estuary Program

Staff Members

Bob Thompson
Chris Zajac
Emma DeAbreu
Jennette Seachrist
Jennifer McDaniel
Jeremy McKay
Jerry Harding
Katherine Munson
Kristina Deak
Mandi Rice
Michelle Weaver
Ryan Pearson

Board Administrative Support

Virginia Singer
Barbara Matrone

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) met for its regular meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, July 9, 2024, via Microsoft Teams.

Chair Dave Tomasko called the meeting to order, and attendance was called.

2. Additions and Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Approval of the April 9, 2024 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the April 9, 2024, meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. ePermitting Modernization Project Overview

Ms. Jennifer McDaniel, Business Analyst, provided an overview of the District's ePermitting system. 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.

Features completed to date include 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.

Ms. McDaniel stated that the project began in July 2019 and focused on the environment set up activities' development. By the second quarter of 2021, the focus was on development of the ERP module and incremental releases by permit types. Outreach and training will be provided for both internal and external users one month before going live with the ERP module, which is planned to occur before the end of 2024. The compliance, water use and well construction permit modules will be developed next.

A few of the project highlights 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.

Ms. Becky Ayech asked how the public reviews the permit application and how the District handles requests for information on permits. Ms. McDaniel responded that once you have completed the application, there is a link at the top of the screen where all submittals are stored. There is also a link to search for permits.

6. Districtwide Water Conservation Efforts

Ms. Katherine Munson, Lead Communications Coordinator, provided a brief summary of the FY2023 (FY23) Water Conservation Summary Report and highlighted the Districtwide efforts. The District is a leader in water conservation with the lowest per capita in the state of Florida. Over the past several years the District has developed an annual Water Conservation Summary Report to help capture all of the conservation efforts that take place across multiple bureaus and divisions.

Water conservation is one of the 12 strategic initiatives in the District's Strategic Plan with the goal of enhancing efficiencies in all water-use sectors to ensure beneficial use. Conservation is generally one of the most cost-effective tools used to maintain our current water resources and to delay the need for more expensive alternative water supplies. This is the sixth year that the Water Conservation Summary Report has been produced. The report is broken down into six key areas: cost-share funding, utilities services, water conservation initiative, education and outreach, regulation, and research.

There are four cost-share programs at the District that provide funding for water conservation projects. Those programs include the Cooperative Funding Initiative (CFI), the Water Incentives Supporting Efficiency (WISE) program, the Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems (FARMS) program and the Mini-FARMS program. In FY23, the CFI program funded five water conservation projects, such as toilet rebates and irrigation evaluations, at a cost of \$330,750 and an estimated savings of about 82,000 gallons per day (gpd). The WISE program funded 12 projects at a cost of nearly \$135,000 and an estimated water savings of about 76,000 gpd. The FARMS program funded two conservation related projects at a cost of about \$144,000 and an estimated water savings of 112,700 gpd, and the Mini-FARMS program funded 38 conservation-related projects at a cost of about \$187,600 and an estimated water savings greater than 373,500 gpd.

The District has a Utilities Services group that assists public water suppliers in increasing system efficiency and reducing system losses. District staff are available to provide leak detection surveys, water audit guidance and evaluation, meter accuracy testing and flushing reduction assistance. District staff performed four leak detection surveys in FY23, where they identified 17 leaks with a potential estimated water savings of nearly 15,000 gpd and conducted water audits to 16 utilities. The Mobile Irrigation Laboratory is a cooperative program that is funded by the District and operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. The program evaluates agricultural irrigation system efficiencies on a voluntary and confidential basis and also helps educate growers on new technologies. In FY23 the Mobile Irrigation Laboratory identified measures to save 52 million gallons annually. The District also offers a Water Conservation Project Cost Model that calculates the effectiveness of water conservation programs.

The District's Water Conservation Initiative began in FY2017 and is an ongoing, multidivisional effort to work collaboratively with utilities. District staff meet with utilities to evaluate their conservation efforts, provide assistance and encourage utilities to take advantage of the District's conservation programs and services. The WISE program and the Conservation Education Program are two programs that were developed as a direct result of feedback the Water Conservation Initiative Team received from public supply utilities. Projects may be implemented by small utilities, hospitals, schools, prisons, homeowners' associations, golf courses, hotels, and other commercial users. Approved applicants are eligible to receive up to \$20,000 per project. In FY23, WISE funded 10 projects at a District cost of nearly \$135,000 and estimated water savings of about 76,000 gpd. FY23 was the fourth year of the Conservation Education Program, which provides support for educational projects that enhance existing efforts to increase residents' knowledge and behaviors that lead to water conservation.

The District promotes conservation through a variety of education and outreach programs which includes the Florida Water Star (FWS) program. FWS is a voluntary water conservation certification program for new residential and commercial construction and existing home renovation. The program encourages water efficiency in appliances, plumbing fixtures, irrigation systems and landscapes, as well as water quality benefits from best management practices (BMP) in landscapes. An average FWS homeowner with outdoor irrigation can save up to 48,000 gallons of water each year. Through the CFI, the District offered FWS rebates in the amount of \$1,000 per home in partnership with Tampa Bay Water and Polk County. District staff have also had great success working with local municipalities to incorporate FWS certification and criteria into local building codes. To date, 17 municipalities have incorporated FWS into local building codes, encompassing more than 58,000 homes at build out with an estimated savings of over 2.7 billion gallons of water annually.

In addition to FWS, the District promotes the Florida-Friendly Landscaping program, which was created by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) to educate residents about landscape and irrigation principles that save water and protect water quality. The District reaches the public with water conservation messaging using traditional news and social media and provides free publications that are available for order or download on the District's website. The District also provides funding to school districts within the region to help support water conservation, including field trips, teacher trainings, classroom project supplies and Splash! school grants. In FY24, the District also launched the Water 101 campaign for residents and communities, which provides a one-stop shop of water conservation tips and resources for those audiences.

The District utilizes its regulatory programs to establish effective conservation practices including water use permit conditions, water conservation plans, year-round water conservation measures, and water shortage plan and orders. Finally, the District provides annual funding to the UF/IFAS primarily for research projects involving agricultural BMPs, including water conservation. In FY23, the District funded four research projects that involved water conservation, at a cost of about \$286,000.

7. Advisory Committee Survey Results

Ms. Virginia Singer, Board and Executive Services Manager, provided the results of the 2024 Advisory Committee Engagement Survey. There are four advisory committees: the Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC), Industrial Advisory Committee, Public Supply Advisory Committee, and the Agricultural and Green Industry Advisory Committee. Each committee is made up of various organizations that support the industries they represent. This is the third survey that has been conducted over the past decade. The previous surveys were completed in 2014 and 2020.

This survey was conducted from March 25 through April 5, 2024. There were 48 surveys submitted by all four committees resulting in a 74% response rate. Results showed that 11 members of the EAC took the survey, which made up 23% of the overall responses. To gauge satisfaction and agreement, a series of questions were asked. Looking at the overall survey results for all four committees, the average satisfaction rate of very satisfied and satisfied for all statements was 84%. This rating has stayed about the same from previous years' results of 83% in 2014 and 85% in 2020. The average agreement rating of strongly agree and agree for all statements was 76%. It was 66% in 2014 and 80% in 2020, so the number falls in the middle.

The EAC has a good mix of experience among its members with 27% reporting that they have been on the committee for more than five years, 45% have been on the committee one to three years, and 18% have been on the committee for less than one year. In terms of meeting logistics, 60% said they preferred to meet four times a year as opposed to two, three, or five times a year; 55% said they preferred having hybrid meetings, and 50% said they would like to have one of the meetings each year be a tour of a site or operation.

Ms. Singer discussed EAC members satisfaction ratings to statements in the survey compared to the previous surveys. Results showed that the average rate of very satisfied and satisfied are as follows: topics presented, and the quality of the presentations is 82%; timeliness of the presentations is 64%; the role the committee plays in the overall function of the District is 55%.

Ms. Singer then discussed the EAC members' agreement ratings to statements in the survey. Results showed that the average rate of strongly agree and agree are as follows: the District values the feedback provided by the committee is 64%; committee feedback is used by the Governing Board to shape policies is 30%; committee feedback is used by the District to shape policies and practices is 70%; members regularly share information they receive at committee meetings with the industries they represent is 70%; the makeup of the committee provides appropriate representation is 82%. On the final two questions, most members either strongly agreed or agreed that meetings are valuable for members as well as their organization.

Ms. Singer concluded by stating that they did receive some good open-ended feedback for topics that committee members would like to see at future meetings.

8. Development of Agenda Topics

Mr. Ed Sherwood requested a hydrologic conditions update.

A motion was made by Mr. Sid Flannery to request a presentation to be given in October about the technical approach taken to establish minimum flows and levels for the upper Peace River. Ms. Ayech seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Based on a suggestion from Ms. Jennifer Hecker, a motion was made by Mr. Flannery to request a presentation to be given about the comprehensive approach to overall water use and minimum flows in the Peace River Basin, including transfers from Shell Creek, and how they mesh to provide for water supply and to protect the ecology of the river. Ms. Ayech seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Ms. Ayech to request a presentation to be given in October about the Regional Observation and Monitor-well Program and what is done with the information gathered. Ms. Jennifer Hecker seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Mr. Flannery also requested a presentation on the Sunshine Law and how the committee complies. Ms. Singer responded that the topic was already listed tentatively for the October meeting.

9. Announcements and Other Business

None.

10. Adjournment

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