



GOVERNING BOARD WORKSHOP
TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025
7601 U.S. HIGHWAY 301 NORTH, TAMPA, FLORIDA 33617
(813) 985-7481

Board Members Present

Michelle Williamson, Chair
John Mitten, Vice Chair
Jack Bispham, Secretary
Ashley Bell Barnett, Treasurer
Ed Armstrong, Member
Kelly Rice, Member
John Hall, Member
Dustin Rowland, Member*
James Holton, Member
Robert Stern, Member
Nancy H. Watkins, Member
Josh Gamblin, Member

*Attended via Electronic Media

Staff Members

Brian J. Armstrong, Executive Director
Amanda Rice, Assistant Executive Director
Chris Tumminia, General Counsel
Brian Werthmiller, Inspector General
Jennette Seachrist, Division Director
Michelle Hopkins, Division Director
Brian Starford, Division Director
Brandon Baldwin, Division Director
Michelle Weaver, Division Director

Board Administrative Support

Virginia Singer, Manager
Lori Manuel, Administrative Coordinator

Introduction – Chair Michelle Williamson

The Governing Board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) held a public workshop on March 25 at 10:20 a.m., at the Tampa Office located at 7601 U.S. Highway 301 North, Tampa, Florida 33617. This workshop was held to discuss the 2024 hurricane season and flood-related topics. The public was given an opportunity to provide feedback. No Board action occurred during this workshop. An attendance roster is archived in the District's permanent records. Approved minutes from this workshop can be found on the District's website at WaterMatters.org.

Hurricane Season

Mr. Dave Dickens, General Services Bureau Chief, presented an overview of the District's emergency responses for hurricane season. This included preparedness activities, recovery and mitigation efforts. He outlined the District practices for emergency preparedness, including updating plans, conducting exercises and coordination with outside agencies. Mr. Dickens provided an overview of the 2024 hurricane season and associated flooding events. He also summarized the District's public outreach efforts. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Surface Water Hydrology

Dr. Mark Fulkerson, P.E., Ph.D., Chief Professional Engineer, presented an overview of the surface hydrology within District boundaries. This included lakes, estuaries, wetlands and major rivers. He explained the hydrologic cycle that occurs during a rain event. He provided charts which outlined the expected average monthly rainfall for 2024 and what was actually received.

Dr. Fulkerson explained that the rainfall received for July, August, September and October was greater than expected as were the impacts associated with it. He explained the science used to determine design storm totals for 25-year, 100-year and 500-year storms. Dr. Fulkerson explained that the 100-year storm is used in the District's Watershed Management Program (WMP) to assist in identifying potential flooding concerns. He stated the District has completed 139 watershed studies and currently has 34 ongoing. Dr. Fulkerson stated that in the 1980s, the Florida Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) identified floodplains using the best technology at the time. He explained that technologies have improved and provided an example of a current topographical overlay of the FEMA floodplain map. This topographical map displayed additional flood risk areas. Dr. Fulkerson provided an overview of the 2024 Florida hurricanes and identified the areas that were impacted and the amount of rainfall received.

Dr. Fulkerson addressed the 100-year floodplain and land elevation information relating to the Ridge Manor, Zephyrhills and Lake Thonotosassa areas. He also referenced the Lake Shangri-La area. Dr. Fulkerson stated that flooding is a natural phenomenon that can occur at any time. He provided a photo example of a home that experienced extreme flooding in 1933 and did not experience it again until 2024. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Structure Operations

Mr. Patrick Casey, Lead Structure Controls Analyst, presented an overview of District structures. He explained that the structures provide flood protection, manage lake water levels under normal conditions and prevent saltwater intrusion into lakes and streams. Mr. Casey explained the District operates two types of water control structures: flood protection and water conservation. He provided examples of each. He summarized operational goals and explained the criteria used to operate structures. The criteria are available on the District's website. Mr. Casey provided an overview of activities associated with structures prior to storms, during storms, and post-storms. He provided an analysis regarding Lake Thonotosassa and explained why the lowering of this lake was not viable prior to Hurricane Milton. Mr. Casey highlighted activities performed during the 2024 hurricane season. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Canal Maintenance

Mr. Chris Tumminia, General Counsel, presented information regarding maintenance responsibilities associated with both privately- and publicly owned canals and drainage systems. He referenced the agencies involved in maintenance requirements. Mr. Tumminia summarized the regulatory requirements at the state level, regional levels and special districts. He outlined exceptions and provided examples. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Environmental Resource Permitting

Mr. David Kramer, P.E., Environmental Resource Permitting (ERP) Bureau Chief, presented an overview of the ERP process. He explained that the stormwater regulation program began in 1984. Mr. Kramer summarized what activities require an ERP and when and what type of stormwater ponds are required. He explained the criteria that is used when determining an open basin versus a closed basin. An Open Basin stormwater pond is designed to limit the rate of discharge to predevelopment 25-year/24-hour levels. A Closed Basin stormwater pond is designed to limit the volume of discharge to predevelopment 100-year/24-hour levels. He explained that a 100-year return period has an exceedance probability of one in 100, or a 1.0 percent chance of occurring each year. Mr. Kramer provided the example of Lake Shangri-La as a closed basin system. He explained that the rainfall received from Hurricane Milton well exceeded the closed basin criteria that ERP projects upstream of the lake were designed to handle. The average expected rainfall is 52-54 inches, however, some of the basins most impacted exceeded 80 inches. Mr. Kramer explained how a 100-year flood level is determined and regulatory standards associated. He provided an overview of the requirements associated with operation and maintenance of stormwater ponds. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Future Initiatives

Mr. Scott Letasi, P.E., PMP., Engineering and Project Management Bureau Chief, presented a timeline of past, present and future District structure capital improvement projects and the Level of Service (LOS) associated with each. He explained that in addition to working with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) to evaluate the LOS for Lake Tarpon Outfall, staff are evaluating the LOS of all District structures. He stated that at the April Board meeting, staff will be presenting an overview of a new tool that will be used to assist with real-time flood forecasting. He provided an overview of this tool.

Mr. Letasi stated the District is still in the recovery and mitigation phase from 2024 storm events and summarized those projects. He reminded the Board of funding that was approved in January to assess and repair any damage and remove debris at Flint Creek and Peace Creek Canal. Mr. Letasi informed the Board of grants that have been requested and awarded to assist with storm debris removal. Mr. Letasi provided an overview of future flood protection projects. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Summary – Amanda Rice

Ms. Amanda Rice, P.E., Assistant Executive Director, summarized the information that was presented.

Public Comments

Chair Williamson stated that anyone wishing to address the Governing Board should complete and submit a "Request to Speak" card. She stated that comments would be limited to three minutes per speaker, and when appropriate, exceptions to the three-minute limit may be granted by the Chair. Chair Williamson requested that several individuals wishing to speak on the same topic designate a spokesperson.

Ms. Nicole Aldahonda-Ramirez spoke regarding flooding she experienced from Lake Bonny. She mentioned a lack of renewal for a permit associated with Lake Bonny. Mr. Chris Tumminia stated Ms. Aldahonda-Ramirez may be referring to the permit issued for construction, not the operation and maintenance. Ms. Michelle Hopkins, Regulation Director, confirmed this and provided information regarding other permits that have been issued. Mr. Armstrong reminded the Board of the issuance of Emergency Orders that authorizes municipalities and counties to respond appropriately once an emergency is declared. Ms. Hopkins stated that the permit issued provides authorization to pump but does not require it. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Mr. Bill Baker asked if dredging of any of the lakes would assist in mitigating some flooding concerns. Ms. Hopkins stated that dredging of a lake would address water quality but would not alleviate any flooding issues. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Ms. Courtney Kraft asked if there was any assistance available regarding the water contamination as a result of the flooding. Mr. Armstrong explained that domestic waste treatment plants are regulated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Board Member Nancy Watkins asked that staff communicate with the City of Lakeland to clarify their authority to pump. Discussion ensued and staff responded to questions.

Mr. Tom Battaglia spoke regarding flooding associated with Lake Bonny and the importance of having experienced staff operating pumps.

Ms. Colleen Betzer submitted a request to speak card but declined to speak.

Ms. Pamela Smith submitted a request to speak card but was no longer in attendance.

Mr. David Ballard Geddis, Jr., spoke regarding impervious surfaces and making adjustments to homes to assist in preventing flooding.

Conclusion and Adjournment – Chair Williamson

Chair Williamson thanked everyone who attended and stated the District will continue to work with the City of Lakeland regarding the operating schedules for lake structures. She reiterated the important services and conservation efforts the District provides in partnership with other agencies and municipalities. Chair Williamson encouraged everyone to contact their congressperson to express support for the federal grant funding that was mentioned in Mr. Letasi's presentation.

Chair Williamson asked if there were any other items for discussion. None were presented.

The workshop was adjourned at 1:12 p.m.