

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)
LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday, April 30, 2008, John Boy Auditorium
1200 W.C. Owens Avenue, Clewiston, FL, 9:00 a.m.**

MEETING SUMMARY

AGENDA CHANGES: Pursuant to Chapter 120, Florida Statutes, Chairman Wade, for good cause shown, changed the published agenda. Item 7 – LOSA Water Availability Rule Development was switched with the second Item 4 – Lake Ecology Update. Items were renumbered accordingly.

AGENDA ITEMS:

- Member Issues
- Legislative Update
- Water Conditions Summary
- Lake Okeechobee Service Area Water Availability Rule Update
- Lakes Okeechobee and Istokpoga Ecology Summary
- Lake Okeechobee River Watershed Protection Plan (and Analysis of WSE vs. LORS-2008 Regulation Schedules on Northern Everglades) Updates
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection Wastewater Residuals Rule Development Update
- Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area Update

Future Presentations:

- **St. Lucie Estuary: Low, Average, and Peak Flows**
- **Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) and Deep Injection Status**
- **Year Round Landscape Irrigation Rule**
- **Monitoring Program for the Northern Everglades**
- **Kissimmee Basin/Upper Chain of Lakes Issues Update**

Item 2: Member Issues:

- Before drainage, water from the Kissimmee Basin would take 8-9 months to reach Lake Okeechobee; now it flows much more quickly because of the lack of retention in natural wetlands. More retention is needed north of the lake. Need an update on Aquifer Storage and Recovery; particularly the problems with arsenic; and, need to look at discharge options to increase flows to the south.
- Okeechobee County has a deep injection well; research is needed on possible impacts on water resources.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is moving forward with reevaluation of real estate values in the C-43 Reservoir basin. Need to monitor the algae blooms on Lake Okeechobee.

- Need presentations to the committee on the proposed Year Round Landscape Irrigation and Statewide Stormwater Rules.

Item 3: Legislative Update - Rick Smith, WRAC Facilitator, briefed the committee about 2008 legislation and the budget for Fiscal Year 2009.

Discussion:

- Question about a proposed provision that would require two SFWMD Governing Board seats to be from Orange County? (Note: This did not pass).
- Florida Forever reauthorization: Florida Forever was reauthorized and funded at \$300 million for Fiscal Year 2009. Of that amount, the Florida Rural Land Stewardship program will be allocated \$10 million.
- Chair: asked whether the FDACS budget for Best Management Practices is being reduced? FDACS response: it will depend on how much less revenue is received from reduced documentary stamp tax proceeds.

Item 4: Water Conditions Summary: Cal Neidrauer, Chief Engineer, Operations Control Dept., SFWMD, briefed the committee about water conditions.

Item 5: Lake Okeechobee Service Area (LOSA) Water Availability Rule

Development Update: Chip Merriam, Dep. Exec. Dir., Water Resources, updated the committee about the status of rule development workshops on this issue.

Discussion:

- Issues needing continued work include:
 - Base condition water use: permits issued before “B-List” rules and unpermitted uses;
 - Retired permits for reallocation to new uses
 - Lake Okeechobee Minimum Flow and Level recovery plans
- Question if water no longer used for potable use would be available for reallocation? Yes
- Question about how proposed rules would impact changes in land use (e.g. from agricultural to residential or commercial)? SFWMD: As uses change from agricultural to residential, we would require an alternative water supply source. Changes from one type of agricultural use to another would not be required to go to alternative sources.
- Discussion about whether water from retired permits would stay in lake until Herbert Hoover Dike is repaired. SFWMD: will need to discuss these issues with the Governing Board. There will be another workshop before going to the WRAC and the Governing Board in June.
- Impacts on Kissimmee water resources? SFWMD: There are not likely to be any. Will provide update to this committee and WRAC about Kissimmee issues next month.
- Need better description/outline of issues and solutions proposed in draft rule.

- Shift of sources in Okeechobee County: would have to be discussed with SFWMD staff.
- Draft rule further supports need for C-43 Reservoir.

Item 6: Lakes Okeechobee and Istokpoga Ecology Update: Dave Unsell, Dir., Lake Okeechobee Div., provided an update on these topics.

Discussion:

- Submerged Aquatic Vegetation is coming back so hope is the lake level will rise gradually over the rainy season. SFWMD: 6"-1' per month would be idea.
- Torrey Island scrape down will produce another 2-300,000 cubic yards of muck. Growers or anyone else who needs the material should contact Dave Unsell, at SFWMD.

Item 7: River Watershed Protection Plan Updates:

1). Cal Neidrauer briefed the committee about an Analysis of the Effects of the "WSE" vs. LORS-2008 Lake Okeechobee Water Level Regulation Schedules on the Northern Everglades;

2). Temperince Morgan, Program Implementation Manager, Northern Everglades provided an update on the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan, and;

3). Mike Voich, Project Manager, provided an update on the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan.

Discussion:

1). WSE vs. LORS-2008 Regulation Schedule:

- SFWMD: There is a very small likelihood that the water storage features to be added through the Lake Okeechobee Technical Plan will be constructed before the LORS-2008 is transformed into a more permanent schedule. The LORS-2008 is planned to be in place for 5 years; the storage features are not likely to be constructed within the next five years.
- Question about analysis of the impacts of the two schedules. SFWMD: If you assume the new interim schedule and then design the size of the C-43 and C-44 reservoirs for the River Watershed Protection Plans, the analysis shows that the design of the reservoirs might be undersized. It is better to assume the WSE schedule (as has been done) and not underestimate the amount of storage needed.
- The C-44 Reservoir is intended to handle local basin runoff, not water from the Lake. And the St. Lucie Estuary does not need base flow discharges from the Lake. SFWMD: Intent is to not discharge lake water for base flow to the St. Lucie Estuary. SFWMD: Analysis assumed no environmental water releases from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie Estuary. The intent of the C-44 reservoir is to capture local runoff and release low flows to the St. Lucie estuary to benefit the salinity balance.

- Chair: Did the sensitivity run and analysis assume the Herbert Hoover Dike was repaired? SFWMD Response: No. Bottom line is that the River Watershed Protection Plans should assume WSE for modeling and designing new basin storage reservoirs since that assumption would not underestimate the amount of storage needed. This does not mean that the LORS-2008 should revert to the WSE Schedule, rather it is a prudent modeling assumption for the River Watershed Protection Plans.
- SFWMD: In addition, the sensitivity analysis shows that the LORS-2008 has unintended consequences for the River Watershed Protection Plans. Specifically, the base flow regulatory discharge provision of the LORS-2008 meets some of the estuary low flow needs. Thus the C-43 and C-44 basins do not bleed down enough to make storage capacity available for subsequent runoff events. The estuaries therefore receive increased impact from high discharge due to undiverted runoff.
- SFWMD: Need a new Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule that recognizes the future project features that will be on-line and that recognizes the storage provided. The development of the new regulation schedule will be done as part of the Systems Operations Manual (SOM) study.
- Work on the Systems Operations Manuals, as required by the Programmatic Regulations, is being initiated. Jim Vearil, USACE is the lead contact for the USACE and Lisa Cannon is the lead contact for the SFWMD.
- Need to be careful not to violate the Savings Clause when doing the Systems Operations Manuals.
- Chair: Record of Decision for the LORS-2008 will be final in 30 days. People need to understand that the on-going planning effort, the effort to draft a regulation schedule that recognizes the planned project features, increased storage; and, a repaired Herbert Hoover Dike, are not the same as the struggle last year over the design of a new lake regulation schedule that attempted to improve upon the "WSE" Schedule. The goal of the "WSE" Schedule was to manage the lake at between 13.5 and 15.5' and not let it go higher. The current interim LORS-2008 schedule is not good for navigation, recreation, the environment, or water supply. We'll have to live with this schedule until the new, more permanent, schedule is developed but higher water levels do not mean there will be ecological damage.
- The ideal schedule would be between 12 and 15'. The new schedule only gets you there about 27% of the time. The Northern Everglades Plan increases storage and will get you there much more of the time.

2). Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan Update – Temperince

Morgan: This is a brief update, but much work is being done. Plan is to bring substantive update next month which will address modeling and water quality results to include the base condition, Alternative 1, and other alternatives. We're looking at phosphorous and nitrogen runoff rates to the estuaries and will soon have a report on those rates based on land uses in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee basins.

Discussion:

- Because of the investments that will be made in the Caloosahatchee basin to improve water quality, need better assessment of the freshwater portion of the Caloosahatchee basin. Better research and monitoring is essential to guide those investment decisions so we get the best return on dollars spent. The SFWMD spends more on those programs in the other basins than in the Caloosahatchee basin.
SFWMD Response: Excellent point. We are identifying research and monitoring needs, existing monitoring, and any deficiencies; and, will propose methods to eliminate duplication and overlap.
- Chair: Good points and District needs to expand to all Northern Everglades basins. It is difficult to determine what will be needed when the Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) are put in place. SFWMD Staff: We are looking at all of the research and monitoring needs of the Northern Everglades basins. It will definitely hard to predict the impact of the TMDLs

3). St. Lucie Estuary River Watershed Protection Plan Update – Mike

Voich:

Discussion:

- Charles Dauray: Why is the planning for the St. Lucie Estuary plan further along than the Caloosahatchee? SFWMD Response: Because more data has been collected and more planning has been done on the Indian River Lagoon, South Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) project. In addition, the citrus industry has implemented "Best Management Practices" throughout the groves in the area.
- Mr. Dauray: We need to work to get the Caloosahatchee plan on equal footing.

Item 8: Vegetation Management Update: David Unsell, SFWMD, briefed the committee on the status of vegetation management efforts on Lake Okeechobee. Mr. Unsell said the new exotic specie "luziola" is being worked on, that water hyacinth is being controlled upstream of the lake and in the south around Clewiston; and, that torpedo grass treatments are continuing.

Discussion:

- Question about why more controlled burning could not be done within the dike. Response: primarily due to concerns that the fires might get out of control and would not be contained within the dike.
- Comment that better burn permits that would include burning during ideal wind conditions are needed.
- Chair: Need to let people know that the reason the public thinks no treatments are being done is because the contractors are back in the marshes working and are not readily seen.

Item 9: Florida Department of Environmental Protection(FDEP) Wastewater Residuals Rule Development Update – Tim Powell and Denise Watts, FDEP: Tim Powell presented an update about FDEP Rule 62-640, Florida Administrative Code rules and Denise Watts summarized changes to Florida Statutes made in Senate Bill 392.

Discussion:

- Question about status of surface water monitoring for impacts of residuals? Response: Need to check with Maurice Barker at FDEP in Tallahassee.
- Status of land application in places other than Okeechobee or St. Lucie areas? It is moving north.
- Comment that Palm Beach County is planning a biosolids pellet/fertilizer plant at the county solid waste facility.
- Question and comment about spills and hauling practices. Response: FDEP not having much success with FDOT about these issues. FDEP does not regulate haulers.
- Chair: Eventually it will become too expensive to haul and local governments will have to produce Class AA – which is bagged and sold for use as lawn and garden fertilizer (e.g. “Milorganite”).
- SB 392 made changes last year and required new language be added to the rules.
- Status of existing permits? They expire within five years. It will take five years to phase out land spreading of wastewater residuals.
- Comment that landfilling may be the best option, given the various tradeoffs that will be needed when land application is phased out.

Item 10: Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area Update - Mark Long, Project Manager, Everglades Restoration, SFWMD presented a summary of the status of the project.

Discussion:

- Question about whether the water elevation in the Rim Canal will change? Response: It will stay the same.
- Chair: What is the plan for Brady Ranch – will it handle as much water? Will it treat water? Will waterfowl hunting be allowed? Response: It is a smaller site than Lakeside Ranch and will handle a smaller, but proportional amount of water. Piping will be installed

under the railroad to move water from Lakeside Ranch to Brady Ranch and back. Brady Ranch will be designed as a Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) to remove phosphorous from the water. Hunting and other recreation uses will be evaluated.

- Impacts to eagles? Eagle nest rules will be followed (660' buffer) and any impacts from construction, flooding and initial operations will be evaluated.
- **Next Meeting:** Wednesday, May 28, West Palm Beach, B-1 Auditorium.
- **Future Meetings:** The Committee agreed to not meet on Wednesday, November 26, but to meet the day before the December WRAC meeting on either December 2 or 3 depending on when the WRAC meets.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.