



**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)
RECREATION ISSUES WORKSHOP MEETING**

MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2010, 05:00 PM

Osceola County Extension Service, University of Florida, Institute of Food and
Agricultural Sciences
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL

MEETING MINUTES

1. Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Introductions - David Lithgow, Recreation Issues Chair Lithgow:

Chair Lithgow welcomed everyone and introduced Mr. Jerry Montgomery, SFWMD Governing Board Member.

Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Montgomery.

Introductions around the table.

Ground rules by Rick Smith (SFWMD)

Steve Coughlin introduced Lt. George Wilson and Investigator Daryl Amerson, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

2. Recreation Discussion, Updates and Future Meeting Topics - Chair Lithgow and Group:

Steve Coughlin, (SFWMD): The Reedy Creek closure that has been in effect for a few years because of nesting Wood storks was lifted today and signs have been removed from the channel. The Wood storks have not nested there for quite some time.

FWC Officers were asked to provide an update on the dog shooting incident at Johnson Island.

FWC Investigator Daryl Amerson provided an update about the incident at the McKinney ranch near Johnson Island, as follows: On December 20, 2009, Mr. and Mrs. John McKinney were walking in their improved pasture with their dog about 20 yards ahead. The pasture is a cleared area with little chance of mistaking a dog for a hog or other game animal. As they were walking they heard gunfire and the dog was killed. They observed two people dressed in camouflage running away, one toward Johnson Island and the other toward the Disney Wilderness

Preserve. County Sheriff's deputies and FWC Officers responded but could find no persons or evidence. Investigator Amerson asked the group for assistance in solving the case. He provided contact information and said the FWC enforces the rules on SFWMD lands so that everyone can recreate safely. This incident adversely affects everyone. It was a senseless act and should not have happened.

Danny Brantley, President, Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen's Association (KRVSA): Talked to the FWC officer (Kevin Sweat) who first responded. Officer Sweat said the dog was black and could have resembled a hog.

Chair Lithgow: If the dog was on private property that negates whether it was a dog or a hog: this should not have happened – private property rights must be respected. In addition to sharing information with the investigation we need to make a point through our publications that it will not be tolerated. We have worked too hard and do not want to lose recreation access to public lands.

Bishop Wright – Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association will work on a reward program to report criminal activity.

Earl Stidham: Osceola County Airboat Association will address this at meeting in April.

Jerry Montgomery, SFWMD Governing Board: Encouraged by this response. Supports recreational access and use of SFWMD lands, but equally supports private property rights. If we work together we can resolve this incident. If it was a mistake they should have come forward. As a Governing Board member I vote on these issues and want to continue supporting you, but we need to resolve this and appreciate your help and cooperation.

Francis Howell Cole: Other recreational uses need to be included on the agenda. On April 10 there will be a kayaking event in the Upper Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. We need to advertise these kinds of events. Future meetings should address other recreation uses.

Chair Lithgow said we will post the event on the SFWMD website and perhaps do a press release. Will also make sure the agenda includes specific items to be discussed.

Bishop Wright: Asked that information about leases on sovereign lands be presented at a future meeting to better understanding how the leases work. Would like appropriate staff at FDEP to address it. Would like to start with leases in the Kissimmee Basin to Lake Okeechobee.

John Storms, Broward Halftrack and Airboat Association: Requested vehicular access to the L-67 A & C levees and the L-28 levee for python hunting; airboats

can only go so far because of rocks.

Steve Coughlin (SFWMD): Have a meeting scheduled with FWC, to discuss regulated vehicle access for use during python hunting.

Theresa Woody: Requested future agenda item regarding local government permitting issues for development of recreational access and parking areas on SFWMD lands.

Rick Smith (SFWMD): Will check with SFWMD Office of Counsel and place an item on the agenda for discussion.

Jeff Briesinger: Hunting coyotes is approved by FWC only during general gun season. If this is an exotic species in Florida why limit hunting?

Chair Lithgow: It is under consideration. FWC instituted a study group on coyotes. Because top predators such as the red wolf are gone, there is scientific opinion that they are beneficial to the ecosystem.

Jeff Breisinger: Asked why FWC does not allow alligator hunting in the marsh, and said there appears to be confusion on the part of FWC officers about where camping is or is not allowed on SFWMD lands.

Chair Lithgow: It is an FWC issue, need to know the area. We will ask FWC about this.

Danny Brantley: Need meeting with FWC to resolve these and other issues such as hunter harassment.

Jeff Breisinger: Asked when airboat crossings on the marsh will be completed and why cattails in Lake Toho where Snail kites nest were sprayed by SFWMD.

Chair Lithgow: FWC is concerned with the spray program and Snail kite habitat impacts. There is a multi-agency meeting tomorrow regarding this.

Newton Cook: Meeting will be held at the SFWMD St Cloud Field Station. All the right people will be there.

Danny Brantley: At the end of the last meeting Rick Smith indicated my issues would be placed on the agenda. I called Mr. Smith when the agenda for this meeting was published and after discussing this, was not called back.

Rick Smith (SFWMD): Following the last meeting, these issues were discussed by Mr. Brantley with SFWMD Deputy Executive Director for Operations and Maintenance George Horne, Department Director Dan Thayer and Division Director Steve Coughlin. Work is being done on the issues and because of that a

specific items was not placed on the agenda. SFWMD staff provided an update during the presentations and Mr. Coughlin explained status of the Reedy Creek access issue at the beginning of this meeting.

Danny Brantley: None of these issues have been resolved. Regarding the fence on sovereign lands, SFWMD is doing a survey on South Fork Ranch, but was a survey not done when the land was bought?

Steve Coughlin (SFWMD): A survey was completed identifying the high water line at the time of acquisition. SFWMD is contracting an additional survey to identify the ordinary water line in relation to the fence.

Holly Walter (SFWMD): The reservation states a fence can be built 100 yards from the present line. The new survey began today and will be completed in two months, as stated in recent correspondence to Mr. Brantley.

Danny Brantley: Stated that illegal signs have been posted in Lake Hatchineha marking the boundaries of the management area and that all signs posted in wetlands must be permitted by FWC, and GPS coordinates provided. Many signs are nailed to trees, which is illegal.

Lt. George Wilson, FWC: There are other regulations that provide exceptions for posting boundaries for management practices.

Steve Coughlin (SFWMD): We will coordinate with FWC and respond in writing.

Danny Brantley: Asked if there were any agency licensed hog trappers working in the Kissimmee Chain of Lake at present? FWC: No.

3. Public Use Project Updates - Dan Cotter, (SFWMD), Planning Supervisor, Land Stewardship Div., Vegetation and Land Management Dept., Operations and Maintenance, SFWMD:

Istokpoga Boat Ramp:

Fred Davis: Asked if camping would be permitted.

Dan Cotter, (SFWMD): Primitive camping permitted through issuance of a special use license.

Lake Kissimmee – boat ramp currently under construction:

Earl Stidham, Osceola County Airboat Association: Thanked SFWMD for the airboat ramps.

Newton Cook: Very important ramp to all. Thank you

Gardener-Cobb Airboat Crossings: Design work being completed. Will go to construction within two months.

Public Use Shelters

Danny Brantley: Asked for the GPS coordinates and was advised SFWMD staff will obtain the coordinates.

Blueway Initiative

Bishop Wright: Suggested adding a motorized vessel person to this new committee to avoid conflicts and was advised by SFWMD staff that all participants are welcome to participate in developing the Blueway.

Danny Brantley: Announced that April 10 is the 24th Annual Kissimmee River Valley Airboat Association Lake clean up and there will be much traffic on the lake. Marion Creek is a good canoe/kayak launch site and there is no airboat traffic because of a low bridge. Middle Island is owned by SFWMD and is great for canoes/kayaks. Building a shelter there would be good.

Fred Davis: Pleased to see the SFWMD moving ahead with the Blueway and recommended avoiding placement of camp sites adjacent to airboat ramps because of potential noise at night when campers are sleeping.

Hungryland Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA)

Chair Lithgow: Timing?

Steve Coughlin and Dan Cotter, (SFWMD): Adding the 9-Gems and Culpepper tracts to the FWC managed Hungryland WEA will require agreement from Martin County Commission (acquisition partner of these tracts). SFWMD staff are working on this with Martin County staff and expect to have the tracts incorporated this fall.

Newton Cook: Need a report via email or website posting – this area is very important to everyone.

Bishop Wright: Asked about plans to add additional access points such as Indiantown Road. SFWMD staff indicated there is an existing access point in place. Additional access points need to be coordinated with FWC, property managers of this area.

Vacant Lands C-23/24 Small Game Hunting Areas:

Newton Cook: Requested the area be control burned, citrus be removed and a future agenda item be added to discuss expanding to other than small game. Stated the area supports a good deer population and large game hunting could be added with little expense.

Steve Coughlin (SFWMD): Indicated that some leases are being terminated in the area and that remaining citrus trees are being treated to control canker, etc. Staff will explore these suggestions.

John Storms: Asked about plans to open up the old "Multi-Turf" area to activities such as dove hunting (EAA Reservoir Phase I). SFWMD staff stated the area had

been under construction and is no longer suitable for hunting.

Reedy Creek Access:

Danny Brantley: Said that Reedy Creek is constricted with fallen trees, and asked if there are plans to clear the channel and whether access is permitted to the cypress areas. SFWMD staff advised that there are no current plans to clear or dredge the channel.

Bishop Wright: Stressed the need to have appropriate signs in the channel to ensure everyone understands where they can and can't go.

Chair Lithgow: Commented that the reason SFWMD reopened the creek is because the Wood storks are not nesting in the previously designated sanctuary and asked why the permit requirement to operate on the adjacent property is still in effect. SFWMD staff responded that the area was closed by Rule 40E-7 and that the permit condition cannot be removed until the rule is changed through formal rulemaking.

Steve Coughlin (SFWMD): Asked those interested in the signage issues to meet after adjournment to review maps; and, asked if anyone wanted to inspect the creek and adjacent areas with the SFWMD land managers. Several participants agreed.

4. Recreation Planning Updates - Jerry Krenz, Senior Planner, Land Stewardship Div., Vegetation and Land Management Dept., Operations and Maintenance, SFWMD:

STA Duck and Alligator Hunting Update for 2010-11:

Newton Cook: SFWMD Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) have great public relations value for the District. It is the top Waterfowling marshes in the USA. This year over 10,000 waterfowl hunting opportunities were provided. Thank you – it is really appreciated.

Rick Smith (SFWMD): Bird watching tours on the STAs are also creating interest. The U.S. EPA's proposed numeric nutrient criteria might affect the STAs. Increasing fishing opportunities on the STAs may depend on the EPA nutrient criteria.

Chair Lithgow: Thanked the SFWMD staff and FWC for increasing the number of waterfowl permits on the STAs. Random drawing this year will increase participation. It also creates more public support for the purchase of lands.

Chair Lithgow: Said that opening additional STAs to alligator hunting will require SFWMD Governing Board approval and he will recommend increasing the numbers in his report to WRAC.

Steve Coughlin (SFWMD): Re: The need for additional educational signs and on-line information regarding the purpose and function of the STAs was discussed at

the last WRAC meeting. Staff is preparing an educational package and asked the FWC to provide a link to the SFWMD on-line tutorial from the FWC hunting permit website. Asked Chair Lithgow to also discuss with the WRAC on April 8.

Planning Rocky Glades, FWC Small Game Hunting Area for 2010-2011:

Bishop Wright: Asked why python hunting by the public in the Rocky Glades was not currently permitted. SFWMD is working with FWC Wildlife Services to study pythons in the area.

CERP Master Recreation Plan (MRP) Update:

Teresa Woody: What is the status of the CERP Master Recreation Plan?
Jerry Krenz (SFWMD): Plan is being edited to incorporate public comments and is condensing it for easier reading. The Ethnographic Study summary is a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers document and the USACE will decide whether to include it in the MRP or make it a separate document.

General Comments:

Fred Davis: Thanked SFWMD for supporting the Florida Trails "Ocean-to-Lake Hike. This weekend is National Trail Day on Lake Pierce – everyone is invited. Please visit the Florida Trails Association web site for more information.

Rick Smith (SFWMD): Asked if the group would be interested in an update on the Everglades National Park Management Plan?

Chair Lithgow agreed to have an update at the June meeting. The SFWMD should have a position regarding the plan.

Bishop Wright thanked the SFWMD for the public and recreational access projects.

5. Adjourn – 7:15 p.m.; Reedy Creek Access meeting followed adjournment.