



**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
(SFWMD)  
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)  
Lake Okeechobee Committee Meeting**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2009, 09:00 AM

Martin/St. Lucie Service Center

780 SE Indian Street

Stuart, FL

**MEETING SUMMARY**

Member and Alternates Present:

<b>Douglas Bournique</b>	<b>Duke Clem</b>
<b>Newton Cook</b>	<b>Don Fox</b>
<b>Paul (Ph.D.) Gray</b>	<b>Ted Guy</b>
<b>Kurt Harclerode</b>	<b>William "Chad" Kennedy</b>
<b>Mary Ann Martin</b>	<b>Linda McCarthy</b>
<b>Barbara Miedema</b>	<b>Paul Millar</b>
<b>Charles Shinn</b>	<b>Bob Southern</b>
<b>Melissa Meeker</b>	<b>John Winfree</b>
<b>Tina Bond</b>	<b>Susan Kaynor</b>

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

- Welcome and Introductions
- Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area Update
- Member Issues
- Water Conditions Summary
- Lake Okeechobee Status, Lake Ecology Update and Lake Okeechobee Burn Plan Revisions

**Item 1: Welcome: Ms. Melissa Meeker, Chair, WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee:** Ms. Meeker welcomed everyone and introduced John Marshall and Marshall Foundation summer interns. She mentioned that handouts on Dispersed Alternative Water Storage and Northern Everglades Update have been provided to members and the public and will be discussed in more detail at the September 30 meeting in Okeechobee.

## **Item 2: Lakeside Ranch STA Update – Mark Long, SFWMD:**

### **Discussion:**

- Estimated phosphorous load reduction? SFWMD: Estimate 25 metric tonnes/year load reduction.
- Does SFWMD own all the land and will the District be credited; and, will USACE share cost of construction?
- Chair: SFWMD was “fast-tracking” this one and we are committed to completing it. If we can get credit, we’ll do so. SFWMD: It is part of Master Agreement with USACE, which has not yet been signed.
- Brady Ranch STA is to the east. Have not yet begun design for that one.
- Trend in reduction of project cost estimates? SFWMD: Compartments B and C cost estimates were lower. Not sure we’ll get same reduction for pump station construction. Earth moving costs likely to be lower.
- Chair: Phase II funding for Lakeside Ranch STA is in the SFWMD 5-year budget plan. If we can get to it we will.
- Question about whether same cost reductions will occur for C-44 project.

## **Item 3: Member Issues:**

- Miccosukee Tribe is near completion of construction on a project to re-hydrate 9,000 acres under agreement with SFWMD. Should be done by end of month.
- Agricultural interests in the EAA are hoping for a good wet season but still in the water shortage management zone. Need to begin the Adaptive Protocols WRAC Issues workshops. SFWMD: Working with senior staff on this. Had hoped to begin in July; not sure if the first meeting will be July or August.
- End of Water Year 2009 report on phosphorous discharges in the EAA: 68% reduction.
- Had recent meeting with FDEP, USACE, Palm Beach and Martin counties and SFWMD on North Palm Beach CERP project. Good results: have scheduled first Project Delivery Team meeting for next week.
- USDA Farm Bill, Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP): have good news that will avoid need to do complex partnership agreement on grazing rights pilot projects. Rules not yet announced by USDA but progress is good.

## **Item 4: Water Conditions Report – Susan Sylvester, SFWMD:**

### **Discussion:**

- Member concerned about water in the Industrial Canal flowing back into Lake Okeechobee during high rainfall events. SFWMD: During the high rainfall events, the farmers turn on their pumps and if the lake level is low enough, water will gravity flow back to the lake.
- Trigger levels for releases by USACE? SFWMD: They are following new regulation schedule but have not discussed long term strategy for releases.
- Chair: Base flows begin at about 13’ but they can discharge prior to that – do we compare long-term rainfall data and 50% projected info in our weekly calls? SFWMD: Yes. USACE is learning how to implement the new schedule

but have not discussed long-term strategy. Question then is who is making the decision? They could choose to release water at 12' and then there would be releases when not needed.

- This is why we need to develop adaptive protocols. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule, 2008 (LORS, 2008) states that while in the Beneficial Use Sub-Band (9.7' to 13') SFWMD allocates water to users. This may include releases for water supply and environmental needs, using SFWMD "Adaptive Protocols". The Adaptive Protocols don't exist for the LORS, 2008 Beneficial Use Sub-Band.
- Chair: Recommend this committee make suggestions about what should be addressed in the Adaptive Protocols Issues Workshops. SFWMD needs to 1). Continue to participate in the weekly phone conferences regarding discharges from the lake; and 2). Develop adaptive protocols for LORS, 2008.
- Committee Recommendations for Adaptive Protocols Issues Workshops: See Action,
- Chair: Sometimes the performance targets limit the scope of what we need to do. In the St. Lucie estuary for example, there are impacts on the near shore environment as well as on oysters. Fishermen would like to see less volume released in the pulses.
- SFWMD: We are monitoring responses of fish and wildlife.
- SFWMD: Important to complete the adaptive protocols for the LORS, 2008 EIS. Use work completed to date; don't recreate the wheel.
- Operation of S77 and S-308 – St. Lucie structures: SFWMD: USACE interpreting new schedule operations so have closed the S77 and S-308 at 11'. Allowing the St. Lucie Canal to come up to 14'. We have asked that they not release water to the St. Lucie Estuary and fortunately they have not. On the Caloosahatchee side, there is sufficient local basin runoff for environmental needs so no discharges have been made from Lake Okeechobee.
- SFWMD: We don't know what USACE will do when the lake reaches 12.6' – the elevation that would trigger releases. Problem is any releases would be on top of local basin runoff.
- Chair: The Kissimmee releases? SFWMD: Have a tailwater issue on the Kissimmee system which is being worked on.
- Any indication from USACE about how late in the season 12'6" is going to be the trigger number? SFWMD: That is a straight line in the LORS, 2008, so it will be the trigger. Last year releases were made above that line.
- Last year was a bad year for agriculture.
- Public Comment:
  - Lake looks very good in the 11' to 12' range, with apple snails appearing in some areas. Should be considered in discussion of adaptive protocols.
  - Modeling for apple snails was considered in the earlier version of the adaptive protocols. SFWMD: All resource areas were looked at.

- SFWMD: At present 6" on the Lake will bring it up 6" very quickly; and, any rainfall in the Kissimmee Basin will come to the lake because the Kissimmee floodplain is full now.
- USACE: Need to understand status of Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation.
- Chair: Do understand but asking USACE to be flexible and help us meet other needs as well.
- Agriculture lost battle on LORS, 2008. Modeling for operating lake at 1' lower than the previous schedule (WSE) showed increased frequency of water shortages and greater intensity. The LORS, 2008 was to be an interim schedule, but the modeling done for the EIS did not model releases while in the Beneficial Use Band. Now the rules for operation in the EIS are not being followed – a conflict with the compromise reached to enable lake to be operated at 1' lower. We were told there would be permanent forward pumps. Temporary pumps can only deliver 55% of the needs and then goes directly to Phase III; there are no other phases. EAA agriculture lost \$100 million last year due to drought impacts. We appreciate the opportunity to work to establish protocols that will work for the estuaries, the lake and water users.
- Recommended in past that SFWMD construct channels from outflow structures to water body when lake is at lower levels – would be cheaper than permanent pumps. SFWMD: There are problems with that approach.
- Biggest challenge is balancing all of the parts and meeting the demands.

**Item 5: Lake Okeechobee Status and Ecological Update – Paul McCormick and Chuck Hanlon, SFWMD:**

**Discussion:**

- Question about whether Snail kites eat both native and non-native apple snails? SFWMD: Initial research shows adults eat both. Harder for young to eat non-native snails.
- Re: Lake Okeechobee Controlled Burning Plans:
  - Division of Forestry rules require controlled burns be extinguished before dark on day of burn. Asking burn units be divided into smaller units.
  - Marshall Foundation has planted many trees on Torrey Island – can controlled burns be done to reduce understory fuel loads? SFWMD: Exotic vegetation is being treated; currently have no plans to burn that area. Before any burns are done, we will do a site evaluation.
  - Will burn plan be incorporated into a USACE EIS and will controlled burning be a shared responsibility with USACE and SFWMD? SFWMD: Not sure, will get back with an answer. State of Florida owns submerged bottom of lake and is responsible for controlled burns.
- Chair: Need ideas to staff for agenda items.
- Need more information about plans for C-44. Need to make formal presentation to Martin County Commission.

**ACTION: Committee Members present made the following recommendations for Adaptive Protocols Issues Workshops:**

- Continue to follow the EIS (SFWMD allocates water for various uses in sub-band for base flows and environmental releases). SFWMD has responsibility for allocating water while in this sub-band and should be active in making recommendations.
- Try to maintain as much water in the lake as possible so it can be available in the dry season.
- Leave temporary forward pumps in place as long as possible.
- Begin with the 2003 Adaptive Protocols document to see how it can be modified to LORS, 2008. Address questions about how to operate within the different bands so there is predictability.
- Review Pages 77-78, Section 3, EIS, LORS, 2008 – Good flow chart on adaptive protocols.
- These only addressed environmental releases so need to develop water supply release protocols.
- Include USACE Water Managers in this process.
- Provide updated information on status of Herbert Hoover Dike repairs.
- Provide updated information on needs of water users in the Lake Okeechobee Service Area.

**FUTURE PRESENTATIONS:**

- Ten Mile Creek Reservoir Update – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- Adaptive Protocols
- Northern Everglades Update (including Dispersed Alternative Water Storage)

**Next Meeting:** September 30, Okeechobee, FL

The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.