



St. Marys River Management Committee 2005 Annual Report

To the County Commissioners:

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC) is a quasi-governmental advisory panel established by interlocal agreement between Baker and Nassau counties, Florida, and Camden and Charlton counties, Georgia. The committee is comprised of four voting representatives from each county, two St. Marys riverfront landowners and two at-large members, appointed by their county commissions, as well as a commissioner from each county. Representatives of Georgia and Florida state agencies serve in non-voting, advisory roles. Tasked by the county commissioners to develop a community-based and locally implemented plan for protecting public interests in the extraordinary scenic, scientific and water quality values of the St. Marys River in ways that protect private property and economic interests, the SMRMC developed a river management plan. Reviewed in public workshops, the St. Marys River Management Plan was ratified by the four counties in the winter of 2000.

Executive Summary

In early 2005, the committee amended its by-laws to clarify some ambiguous language and to facilitate quorum requirements.

In 2005, the St Marys River Management Committee continued to work upon **implementation of the priority strategies** detailed in the river management plan. These strategies include the establishment of consistent septic system setbacks along the river and addressing a range of issues related to the differing jurisdictions of an interstate river. The latter were the subject of a well-attended Bank-To-Bank workshop held in October of 2003, which generated several action items upon which the SMRMC has continued work in 2005. Considerable reciprocity exists in Florida-Georgia fish and wildlife regulations, but inconsistencies in boating regulations (e.g. operator age requirements and wake zones) remain.

Input from the SMRMC is increasingly sought by state agencies responsible for watershed management and water quality protection, such as Florida Department of Environmental Protection, St. Johns River Water Management District, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources. In July, committee members attended a presentation on Florida's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program. Also in July, committee representatives and St. Johns River Water Management District staff hosted a St. Marys River outing for Congressman Ander Crenshaw's staff. At the request of community citizens and committee representatives, the committee sought and obtained clarifications of county issues, including a Baker County wastewater plant, septic tank criteria for a Charlton County riverfront subdivision, and changes to Nassau County's wetland and waterway setback criteria.

The committee was regularly presented with **river sampling data** by Paula Staples, Watershed Action Volunteers coordinator (WAV).

Sampling data from GA DNR to verify impairment of two St. Marys tributary streams identified as "Impaired" by GA DNR-EPD, Cooner Branch and Horsepen Creek, showed improvement from previous data, probably due to higher average water levels in 2005.

In 2004, SMRMC obtained a \$2,700 **U.S. Boat Foundation grant** for litter abatement signage. In 2005, these signs were placed at several public and semi-public river accesses in all four counties. The SMRMC received significant support for this project from its advisory partners. The Nature Conservancy's Trish Gramajo drafted the grant request for the committee and St. Johns River Water Management District provided valuable assistance in designing the signs.

SMRMC's major annual public event, the **St. Marys River Celebration**, was held Saturday, March 19. Coordinated by SMRMC vice-chair and Nassau County representative Dean Woehrle, 550 volunteers collected 52,000 pounds of trash from the St. Marys River. White Oak Plantation hosted a post-cleanup luncheon for the participants.

Also in March 2005, the SMRMC made a request to the **St. Johns River Water Management District** for funding and/or assistance with various projects, including stormwater planning efforts for Baker and Nassau Counties, land acquisition along the St. Marys River, and water quality and biological data collection. As a result of the request, the water management district allocated \$100,000 in its Fiscal Year 05-06 budget for stormwater master planning efforts for Nassau and Baker Counties.

Baker County hosted in the committee's May meeting at their new 1,600-acre **St. Marys River Shoals Park**. County officials requested the committee's assistance in the development of the site, which includes 2 miles of river frontage. Nels Parson of the St. Johns River Water Management District has participated in project meetings and served as a liaison between the county and committee.

In August, Baker County commissioners passed an ordinance consistent with **SMRMC's recommended conservation overlay** for riverfront properties: 2-acre minimum lot size on riverfront lots, minimum 100 ft. setback of septic systems from the waterfront, and minimum 150 ft. lot width along the riverfront. These recommendations are consistent with the standards on the Georgia side of the river, and consistent riverfront standards are a priority strategy of the river management plan ratified by the counties. In the interests of maximum protection of private property rights and economic interests, SMRMC supports this as a minimal standard rather than an optimal standard, as much larger tracts associated with traditional land uses such as silviculture and agriculture are considered optimal for the maintenance of the river's current high values. SMRMC's considerable review of the scientific data strongly supports the recommended overlay as the minimal standard necessary to protect the water quality of rivers like the St. Marys: tannic "blackwater" streams with low dissolved oxygen, low nutrients and very low capacity for absorbing and assimilating additional excess nutrients, such as silt from runoff.

SMRMC continued publication of its public outreach media, a newsletter, **POSM (Patrons of the St. Marys River)**, and website, www.stmarysriver.org. The production values of both have been significantly enhanced with the assistance of St. Johns River Water Management District's publications department, and SMRMC deeply appreciates the District's valuable contributions to its community outreach and educational efforts.

SMRMC made a **presentation to the Projects and Land Committee of the St. Johns River Water Management District** in November, followed by a reception at White Oak Plantation. Kraig McLane of the District provided valuable support as a facilitator.

Discussions continued about the proposed river education center. A subcommittee is studying two options for the center's location.

White Oak Plantation hosted a **year-end holiday dinner** for the St. Marys River Management Committee and county commissioners.

Respectfully submitted,

Chip Campbell
Chair, St. Marys River Management Committee