



St. Marys River Management Committee

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St. Marys River Management Committee

2010 Annual Report

To the County Commissioners:

Please accept this document as the committee's required annual report.

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) is a quasi-governmental advisory panel established by interlocal agreement between Baker and Nassau counties in Florida and Camden and Charlton counties in Georgia. The committee is comprised of five voting representatives from each county appointed by the county's Board of Commissioners: two riverfront landowners (or representatives if land owned by a corporation), two at-large members, and one county commissioner. Representatives of Georgia and Florida state agencies serve as non-voting advisors.

Summary of 2010 Committee Activity

Activity in 2010 focused on four major areas: public outreach, water quality (including Septic Think Tank Task Force), county level planning, and state and federal regulations impacting the river.

Public Outreach The Annual River Cleanup is currently our major outreach effort. On March 20, 2010, over 1000 volunteers collected an estimated 34 tons of trash along the banks of the river in the four-county area. White Oak Plantation, in Yulee, FL, hosted about half of the volunteers at a cookout after the cleanup. Because of substantial fund-raising by member Dean Woehrle, and generous in-kind donations from the community, the cleanup paid for itself. At the evaluation meeting following the cleanup, SMRMC members suggested holding cookouts at more than one location so that more volunteers could attend. Members also felt that the educational sturgeon touch tanks brought by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had been a great addition. Following the March cleanup, a subcommittee to assist with planning was set up. At the December meeting, the role of this subcommittee was expanded to include all interaction with the general public; one member from each county was assigned to the subcommittee.

In May, the Baker County Future Farmers of America gave a TV-style presentation on wetlands and wetland conservation to the committee.

Water Quality Georgia has identified four pollutant loadings for which portions of the St. Marys River exceed allowable levels, as a fishable river. These four are: dissolved oxygen, fecal coliform, mercury and arsenic. Of these, mercury contamination is a regional issue and beyond the purview of the SMRMC; likewise, arsenic is a small point-source industrial dump-site under strict oversight. Though the committee

The St. Marys River Management Committee is an intergovernmental entity of elected and appointed members from the four counties fronting the river: Charlton and Camden, GA., and Nassau and Baker, FL.

The committee advises the four county commissions and provides a public forum on issues concerning the St. Marys.

stays abreast of developments with the mercury and arsenic contamination, it focuses its efforts on fecal coliform and dissolved oxygen.

To this end, the Septic Think Tank Task Force completed their collection of data on the comparative state and local regulations and practices governing on-site sewage disposal in the four-county area. The group decided to wait until early 2011 to do any analytical work since the newly-elected Florida Legislature might change portions of the inspection regulations passed in 2009. Dr. Laurie Fowler, with the University of Georgia's River Basin Center, continued to seek funding to gather baseline data on fecal coliform levels in the river and its tributaries and for a non-point source pollution guidebook.

The University of Florida Conservation Clinic also continued work on water quality issues. Graduate students Hollie Hall, Susannah Blair, and Anna Cathey organized a Water Quality Technical Meeting to gather input from all the state and federal agencies working on the St. Marys River. Representatives from Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GEPD), and United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) attended. As a result of the March 3, 2010, meeting, the SMRMC formed a subcommittee to collect water quality information from the state agencies biannually and disseminate a summary report to the four counties. The agencies provided raw data to the subcommittee in September but as yet have not provided any summary reports. The agency representatives said that one additional upstream site per county could be added to the current monitoring sites; the subcommittee recommended Spanish Creek, Horsepen/Catfish Creek, South Prong of the St. Marys River, and Cabbage Creek.

At the 2010 Technical Meeting, the EPA also agreed to recommend to their Standards, Monitoring, and TMDL Branch that they undertake a project to review past dissolved oxygen studies and elucidate the underlying causes of the apparent anomaly. The project passed through the budgeting process and should begin in the spring of 2011.

The subcommittee is organizing a second Water Quality Technical Meeting for March 3, 2011, which will focus on fecal coliform.

Land Use and Planning Charlton County committee members attended all public meetings for the 20-year Charlton County Comprehensive Plan to be sure that objectives of the river management plan (e.g. septic setback, flood zone setback, low-impact industrial development) were included and cited for lands along the main stem and its tributaries. Septic tank inspection was not included in the plan.

At the August meeting there was a discussion about the new Soggy Bottom Mud Pit. The cleared area is about .5 miles from the river but there may be motocross trails near the river or its tributaries. Steve Nance, the Charlton County Administrator, and Mitchell Crawford, a Charlton County Commissioner, said that the county was "on top of" the situation and would keep the SMRMC informed.

Nassau County Planning Director, Walter Fufidio, attended the June meeting of the committee to seek input on the Nassau County 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Again the committee sought to be sure that septic setbacks and inspections and flood zone setbacks along the river were included in the plan. The county decided not to include septic inspections.

In January, Tricia Reynolds, the Planning and Government Services Director with the Coastal Regional Commission (CRC), attended the SMRMC meeting to discuss ways that the CRC and the SMRMC could cooperate. She said that the commission had model ordinances that the committee might wish to share with the county commissions.

Following presentations by, and intense questioning of, the Coastal Regional Commission and Northeast Florida Regional Council, the committee agreed to nominate the St. Marys River as a "Regionally Important

Resource” for the state of Georgia. The designation is a planning tool, rather than a permitting tool. The river already has an equivalent designation in Florida.

Each year the Georgia Planning Association rewards local communities and Regional Commissions for their work to make Georgia a better place to live. The 2010 “Grassroots Initiative Award” for a small community was given to the SMRMC in light of the innovation and transferability of the committee’s effective and sustainable management model.

The SMRMC discussed how to improve interaction with the four counties and decided that the current annual meeting during the holidays was not achieving its desired goal of providing a forum for interaction with the county commissioners, attorneys, planners, and health department officials. Since the Water Quality subcommittee was already actively involved with county health officials via the Septic Think Tank, the committee decided to form a Land Use and Planning Subcommittee, composed of one person from each county to maintain closer contact with the county commissioners and planning departments.

State and Federal Regulations Georgia EPD began drafting a state Water Plan in 2009. Though not officially on the Regional Water Council, SMRMC members continued to attend and make public comment at the Coastal (Camden) and Suwannee-Satilla (Charlton) Regional Water Council meetings. The draft of the water plan will be available for public comment in mid-2011. In the plan, the St. Marys River basin does not show any water deficit through the year 2030; however, several other areas of the state do. SMRMC voiced concerns at both water council meetings about the potential for interbasin transfers from the St. Marys River to other areas of the state. The plan also addresses the various water quality infractions along the river.

Florida is also eyeing the St. Marys River as an alternative water source. Because the state of Florida has identified northeast Florida as having a potential water deficit in 2030, the SJRWMD has been required to submit a plan for making up the deficit that was identified. The St. Marys River is currently identified as a potential alternative water source. The SMRMC sent a letter voicing concern, as did several of the county and city governments. A similar letter from the Southern Environmental Law Center was also shared with the committee.

Janet Price, Manager of Land and Water Resources with Rayonier Inc., gave a presentation to the SMRMC about the EPA’s proposed numeric nutrient criteria for flowing waters and lakes within the state of Florida. She said that objections to the proposed criteria stem not only from feeling that they are too restrictive but also from the fact that it is impossible to apply a single standard to the state’s varied water bodies. SMRMC members did not feel that they had the background to comment on the standards themselves but did send a letter of concern reminding the EPA that the St. Marys River is a transboundary river and that criteria for Florida would have interstate impacts.

During flood stage, riverbank residents sustain significant property damage due to boat traffic in their yards. During the flood in 2004, the four counties approved emergency plans to deny access to the river; however, the U.S. Coast Guard said that the denial was not legal. Austin Moretz of the University of Florida Conservation Law Clinic researched the comparative boat wake regulations in Georgia and Florida and the procedures necessary for establishing special flood stage rules. He will continue working on this project in 2011. Anna Cathey, also from the Conservation Clinic, presented a summary of her research on soft streambank stabilization practices. Her PowerPoint program could be shared with the counties if they are interested.

In 2009, Adam Darrow, of the Conservation Clinic, researched the comparative “Sunshine Laws” of the two states and drafted a Protocol for Open Meetings, which contained the most restrictive language from each state. The protocol was distributed to the four county attorneys for comment in December 2009 and approved by the SMRMC in March 2010.

In December, a subcommittee was formed to focus on the state and federal regulatory issues.

Administrative Melinda Granlund was hired by the committee at the beginning of 2010 to provide administrative and clerical assistance to the committee.

Baker County Board of Commissioners appointed Kevin Shell, Greg Sheppard, and Mike Griffis as representatives to the committee during 2010. As of December 31, 2010, Camden County had a vacant position (for a landowner) on the committee. As a result of recent elections, Camden County will also need to designate a new county commissioner to attend meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Dean Woehrle

Chip Campbell

Dean Woehrle
Florida Co-Chair SMRMC

Chip Campbell
Georgia Co-Chair SMRMC

2010 Budget Information

In 2010, the St. Marys River Management Committee received \$500.00 from each of the four counties (Baker, Nassau, Camden and Charlton) in support of the committee's activities. The committee also received a \$1,500 grant from Rayonier to help the committee in support of its annual river cleanup event, as well as \$3900 in donations from various sponsors for the river cleanup. Expenditures during 2010 included: approximately \$5660 for the annual river cleanup; \$2255 for the committee's administrative assistant, \$119 for the committee's web site fees, and \$150 for lunch provided to Water Quality Technical Meeting attendees.