

# St. Marys River Management Committee

Post Office Box 251 • Folkston, GA 31537

St. Marys River Management Committee

## 2012 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: one county Commissioner and four appointed members (two riverfront landowners or representatives of corporations with riverfront property and two at-large members). One representative from the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and one representative from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) serve as non-voting members. All meetings are open to the general public with notice provided on the Committee's website: [www.saintmarysriver.org](http://www.saintmarysriver.org).

### Summary of 2012 Committee Activity

Activity in 2012 focused on four major areas: land use and planning, public outreach, water quality, and water quantity (including many state and federal permits and regulations). Each of these focus areas has a subcommittee of three to four appointed members who track the issues between monthly meetings.

Land Use and Planning Subcommittee – The subcommittee continued to monitor development along the river.

In Camden County, the city of St. Marys has several commercial projects underway and under consideration including a marina on the North River and one planned on the St. Marys River. There is also discussion of using the old Gilman paper mill location for a barge port. The various residential projects of concern in Camden County are on hold due to the sluggish housing market.

Another concern in Camden County is the increasing number of derelict boats east of the I-95 bridge. It is thought that the poor economy, lack of enforcement of regulations, and unclear jurisdiction in a "border river" all contribute to the problem. St. Marys EarthKeepers and St. Marys Yacht Club organized several clean-up days to remove the more easily accessible boats. SMRMC sent letters describing the problem and asking for assistance to GDNR and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection with copies to the United States Coast Guard, the Army Corp of Engineers, SJRWMD, and Camden County

*The St. Marys River Management Committee is an intergovernmental entity of elected and appointed members from the four counties framing 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 River.*

sheriff's office. The city of St. Marys is creating a maritime district along the river in order to obtain the jurisdiction and enforcement authority to remove the vessels. For the coming fiscal year, the city has dedicated \$72,000 to riverfront improvement, including \$30,000 for removal of derelict vessels.

In Charlton County, the bank stabilization and dock improvements at the Trader's Hill Recreation Area that were funded by a grant to the recreation area from the Natural Resources Conservation Service are now completed. In December, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) property at Devil's Elbow (774 acres) near Trader's Hill Recreation Area was sold to Hilliard Avalon Farm LLC. The conservation easement is held in reserve in perpetuity by TNC. The easement allows construction of several buildings and clearings and one lake on specific areas of the property.

The Miocene Holdings tannin project (see description under Water Quantity Subcommittee) sparked concern amongst SMRMC members over the adequacy of state and local regulation of development threatening the river. Charlton county residents and elected officials are wrestling with ways to introduce management practices that will maintain the county's lifestyle and values without imposing undue restrictions on the current citizens. The subcommittee will continue to monitor and encourage development of best management practices and, if necessary, ordinances. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GEPD) has a number of sample documents that can be adapted for local use as best management practices or ordinances.

Nassau County received an almost 40-acre donation of riverbank marshland from the River Branch Foundation. The estuarine marsh property, which is a valuable wildlife nursery, filtration system and storm baffle will be managed by the county.

In November, Doug McDowell, a strategic planner with Nassau County, spoke to the committee about the state-approved East Nassau Community Planning Area Sector Plan, a large area that borders the St. Marys River. The sector plan is part of the county's 2030 Comprehensive Plan and provides for a maximum build out of 24,000 residential units. McDowell said that the landowner, TerraPointe LLC will begin construction on the southern end near the A1A and Interstate 95 intersection. The plan classifies the northern end of the property, which borders the river, as resort development. Because development setbacks are a major SMRMC concern, the subcommittee will continue to monitor the project.

Public Outreach Subcommittee – The March 17 River Cleanup and Celebration brought out over 800 volunteers and \$2,750 in donations. The volunteers retrieved about 54,000 pounds of trash along the river and its tributaries. The celebration hot dog roast at Trader's Hill, organized by Charlton County, drew a big crowd. Plans for 2013 include expansion of the celebration festival. SMRMC would like to collect and dispose of tires that have been thrown in the river. An additional \$1,500 will be needed to cover trailer rental and disposal of tires. Charlton County has agreed to pick up tires from two sites in each of the four counties and load the tires into the rented trailer. The city of Macclenny has agreed to dispose of all tires collected in Baker County. The 2013 Cleanup and Celebration will be March 16.

SMRMC notified Camden County and Georgia Department of Transportation about a large amount of construction and landscape trash along Scrubby Bluff Rd.

In April, St. Marys EarthKeepers created a new initiative called RiverWatch. The group is hosting a blog to keep the public informed about issues affecting the river and to encourage local citizens to be more interested and involved in protecting the river.

Other subcommittee activities included sending an SMRMC representative to Earth Day at Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge, creating a brochure about the committee for distribution at public events, and supplying digital information to Trader's Hill Recreation Area for their new kiosk.

Water Quality Subcommittee – The subcommittee continued to monitor septic system inspection legislation and other water quality issues considered by the Florida legislature; however, it devoted much of its efforts to the 319 grant for Horsepen/Temple Creek in Camden County. This tributary is listed as impaired for fecal coliform under the statewide water-quality monitoring program required by the federal Clean Water Act. The implementation plan for the tributary indicated that septic system effluent reaching the creek by way of county drainage ditches was a likely culprit causing the impairment.

In the grant, the University of Georgia River Basin Center (UGA-RBC) proposed to test the water quality, repair or replace the failed septic systems and then retest water quality to monitor the impact of remediation. The testing involved using DNA tracers to distinguish between the specific strains of bacteria common to the human intestinal tract and those found in animals. In March and May, UGA-RBC sampled numerous locations along Temple Creek and drainage ditches emptying into the creek. Extreme drought had left Horsepen Creek totally dry so they could not sample that creek. A creek-bed hike showed that county dredging of Temple Creek had blocked the intersection of Horsepen and Temple Creeks. One drainage ditch sample had high levels of human fecal bacteria, all of the remaining ditch and creek samples were extremely low.

In September, after a very wet summer, including extreme local flooding due to Tropical Storm Debby, UGA-RBC tested the locations a second time. All the ditch samples had extremely high levels of human fecal bacteria; in several cases the counts were as high as typical counts inside a septic tank. The creek samples were also higher. Aside from the one obviously failed system along the ditch sampled in the first round of testing, it appeared that the problem was simply widespread failure each time there was excess water.

In November, UGA-RBC and SMRMC co-hosted an educational meeting in the watershed to share the findings with the area residents and answer their questions. The Public Outreach and Land Use and Planning subcommittees assisted Water Quality subcommittee at the meeting. About 75 residents and county officials attended. Residents were very concerned about possible health hazards and well contamination. Approximately one-third of the households registered for a free septic inspection and pump-out to be paid for by the grant. Whatever funds remain will cover repairs to permanently failed systems. These should be completed in early 2013 after which post-tests will determine whether or not the project was successful in reducing contamination of the creek and the river.

UGA-RBC also met with the Charlton County Administrator and several members of the Board of Commissioners to discuss the possibility of applying for a series of grants to work on dissolved oxygen and fecal coliform impairments in Spanish Creek. Laurie Fowler with UGA-RBC told the Charlton County officials that the first step would be to apply for a grant to write an implementation plan.

SMRMC continued to cooperate with the St. Marys River Fisheries Restoration Project, a subunit of the Southeastern Aquatic Resources Partnership. The Atlantic white sturgeon has been listed as a federally threatened species, thereby placing additional strictures on handling the species. As a result the project has expanded their focus to include other anadromous fish such as striped bass and American shad.

Water Quantity Subcommittee – The subcommittee continued to monitor the Miocene Holdings permit applications to withdraw and discharge river water in southern Charlton County. SMRMC shared their concerns with U.S. Representative Jack Kingston (1<sup>st</sup> congressional district in southeast Georgia) when he was at Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge for a meeting. The latest information from Georgia Environmental Protection (GEPD) is that Miocene has withdrawn the application to withdraw river water for the tannin removal project but continues to withdraw water at subthreshold levels for irrigation purposes. GEPD determined that the current operation does not need a land application system permit because it withdraws less than 100,000 gallons a day from the St Marys River and the water being used to irrigate the grass and trees does not contain pollutants of concern. Southern Environmental Law Center will be reviewing all of the records on file with GEPD and will share their findings with SMRMC.

The effects of high rather than low water levels became the concern when tropical storm Debby dumped over 20" of rain in the Okefenokee Swamp between June 24 and 26 and the worst flooding in over 40 years ensued. Disaster relief funds were very different on the two sides of the river. There was federal money available to assist Florida residents because of the widespread impact of the storm on that state, however, in Georgia, no state or federal assistance was available because of the localized nature of the flooding.

In July, SMRMC began discussions with various federal agencies about the possibility of installing several staff gauges along the most flood prone areas of the river so that the water levels could be more accurately monitored and predicted. In August, a representative from the National Weather Service (NWS) spoke to the SMRMC about procedures that had been followed and various options for adding gauges. He described several gauge but said that better prediction would require a prohibitively expensive river forecast model. Sites for future gauges need to be accessible from public roads and not on bridges spanning two states. NWS hosted several additional meetings to discuss the options and cost-sharing. The Charlton County Administrator attends the meetings and will keep the subcommittee informed.

Two sand mining companies, E. R. Jahna Industries, Inc. (ERJI) and Oldcastle Southern (Oldcastle), requested zoning special exceptions from Baker County and submitted related consumptive use permit (CUP) applications to the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD). Initial requests for 2.2 and 2.8 mgd were to supply required water for their hydraulic sand mining operations. Both companies have been asked by SJRWMD to supply additional information for their CUP, and have temporarily withdrawn the zoning exceptions applications.

In June, a representative from the Bluegrass Materials Co. St. Marys Sand Company, located in St. George, GA, (BMC) presented a description of their new mining methods. He said that BMC has recently spent a good deal of time and money developing an environmentally responsible procedure to filter and treat mined sand. Their method requires less than 10,000 gallons to treat approximately two thousand tons of sand per day. BMC uses an existing lake for holding the water that is used to filter sand. BMC feels the amount of groundwater requested by the above proposals is excessive.

The committee sent a letter of concern to SJRWMD and recommended that because of the close proximity to Turkey Creek and the City of Macclenny well-field (assuming use calculated by the 1995 water drawdown model), Oldcastle should be requested to monitor the impacts to the existing Macclenny CUP and Turkey Creek flow rates.

In October, Oldcastle spoke to the committee about their proposal for mining coarse construction sand behind a Dupont mineral mining operation on a 436-acre parcel near the Trail Ridge Landfill. The Oldcastle project will remove sand down to bedrock (approximately 115 feet) on about 45% of the parcel. Three deep lakes will remain. The company is bonded and required to reclaim the remaining 55% of the property. Oldcastle will be required to have an Environmental Resource Permit, in addition to a CUP. Oldcastle's project will last approximately 50 years. During the first five years, Oldcastle will need a large amount of water to fill the holding lakes; they estimate about half the requested 2.8 million gallons each day. Once the lakes reach 10 acres, Oldcastle estimates their water use will drop because there will be enough water to recycle through the filtering process. Each day 40,000 gallons will be used to keep the sand moist enough for transportation and will not be recycled.

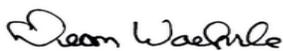
SMRMC has no information about the ERJI proposal.

Administrative The Nassau County Board of County Commissioners appointed Cory Black in 2012. Membership from Baker, Camden and Charlton counties remained the same as in 2011.

2012 Income and Expenses: In 2012 SMRMC received \$1,000.00 from the following counties, per the established Interlocal Agreement: Baker--\$500.00, Nassau--0, Camden--0, and Charlton--\$500.00. The Committee also received \$4,250.00 in grants and donations from various sponsors, including: Paul Schwend (\$250), Nassau FL Farm Bureau (\$500), James Edwards (\$500), Nassau Baptist (\$500), Nassau Soil & Water (\$500) and Keep Nassau Beautiful (\$500). The committee received in-kind contributions from Sand Hill Recycling and State Line Advanced Disposal (both contributed roll-off dumpsters for the river cleanup).

Total receipts for 2012 were \$5250. Expenditures totaled \$3873.91 including \$1384.00 for the annual river cleanup, \$2,416.80 for the administrative assistant (including costs for mileage), and \$73.11 for office supplies and postage. There was not adequate funding to add tire recycling to the river cleanup in 2012. The budget for 2013 is attached.

Respectfully Submitted,



Dean Woehrle  
Florida Co-Chair SMRMC, 2012



Chip Campbell  
Georgia Co-Chair SMRMC, 2012

**2013 APPROVED BUDGET**

ALLOCATED REVENUE:

Baker County, FL \$	500.00
Camden County, GA	\$1,500.00 (2011, 2012 delinquent)
Charlton County, GA	\$ 500.00
Nassau County, FL	\$1,000.00 (2012 delinquent)

**TOTAL \$3,500.00**

ANTICIPATED REVENUE:

Donations	\$1,500.00
Grant	\$1,500.00

**TOTAL \$3,000.00**

**TOTAL REVENUE.....\$6,500.00**

ALLOCATED EXPENSES:

Administrative Assistant	\$2,500.00
Office Expenses	\$100.00
Water Quality Technical Meeting Expenses	\$150.00

**TOTAL \$2,750.00**

ANTICIPATED EXPENSES:

River Celebration	\$1,500.00
Tire Cleanup Expenses	\$1,500.00

**TOTAL \$3,000.00**

**TOTAL EXPENSES.....\$5,750.00**

**12/03/12 CASH OH HAND: \$3,381.51**

**"HAP HARRIGAN" EXPENSE FUND \$ 506.50**