**St. Marys River Management Committee**

  68 Kingsland Dr., Suite B ATTN: SMRMC

 Folkston, GA 31537-2872

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

**May 3, 2021**

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its noticed meeting on May 3, 2021, via a Microsoft TEAMS due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Committee members in attendance by county:

**Baker –**  Commissioner James Croft, Ed Barber, Danny Norton

**Camden** **–** Commissioner Ben Casey,John Myers,Elizabeth King, Rick Frey, Jay Smith

**Charlton** – Commissioner James Everett, Merrill Varn, Chip Campbell

**Nassau** **–**    Keith Tindall, Dean Woehrle

**Non-voting Members** **–** Geoffrey Sample

**Others Present** – Laurie Fowler, Kat Christie, Josh Rewis

A quorum was present.

**Presentation (Interim reports UGA Law Practicum)**

**Buffer, River Corridor, and E&S Regulations at State and Local Level- Kat Christie**

In Georgia, water quality regulations of the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Act and the Mountain and River Corridor Protection Act are carried out by GA-EPD or a certified local issuing authority. In Florida, water quality is centralized in the Environmental Resources Permit process and is carried out by the FL-DEP and the Water Management Districts. At the county level in Georgia, Camden county has adopted several stricter regulations and has both St. Marys and Satilla River Overlays as well as a Coastal Marshland Protection Ordinance. Charlton enforces only the minimal standards required by the state. In Florida, Nassau County enforces a St. Marys Overlay as well as Wetland Protection Ordinance. Baker County has Wetland Protection Ordinance and several protected habitats within the watershed though none bordering the river.

Kat reviewed how to navigate her report and collapse sections if the reader was only interested in specific sections. Because of screensharing issues, she was not able to share the table of contents and several comparative tables she had produced. Those will be available in the final report. She is still working on the recommendation section and will submit the completed paper next week.

Rick Frey asked Kat to clarify how she was defining river corridor versus watershed in her presentation. Kat explain that the watershed was the natural boundaries of water that flowed into a specific waterbody, in this case the St. Marys. If talking about the St. Marys River, the watershed would include all the tributaries. River corridor and buffer were artificial designations specified in regulations or plans and were usually a certain distance from the edge of the waterbody. In the case of the St. Marys all were mainstem only. Kat said that in her report, river corridors were concerned with flow and buffers with water quality.

**Septic Tank Regulations at the State and Local Level- Josh Rewis**

The septic regulations in Florida and Georgia are similar though in Florida the oversight of the systems are in the process of being switched from the Department of Health to the Department of Environmental Protection to reflect their concern for potential to contaminate the state’s waters. Georgia continues to enforce septic regulations by DOH. Currently both states enforce regulations at the time of installation or addition of a bedroom. Neither state enforces maintenance unless there is failure. One interesting difference in state regulations, in Florida, contamination of rising groundwater is not considered a system failure whereas in Georgia it is.

In both states, counties have the prerogative for responding to local concerns about water quality of rivers and streams. In Florida, the Big Bend Water Authority was able to secure funding in 2020 to plan and install an expansion of their sewer system thereby eliminating 145 septic systems along the Steinhatchee River. In Douglas County Georgia certain homes in the Dog River Basin are required to pump their septic tanks every five years. The Dog River is the primary drinking water source and is impaired for fecal coliform. In the St. Marys River Watershed, both Charlton and Camden counties require septic inspections with changes in the name on utilities, electric in Charlton and solid waste disposal in Camden.

Both states have access to USEPA monies channeled through the Clean State Water Quality Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and grants from section 319 (h) of the Clean Water Act. Florida appropriates additional state funding. 319 grants fund a variety of non-point source programs including septic upgrade and replacement. The CWSRF provides grants and low-interest loans to local governments to plan, design, and build or upgrade wastewater, stormwater, and nonpoint source pollution prevention projects. In Florida, the Non-Point Source Management Program also administers the **State Water-quality Assistance (SWAG) Grants**. In Georgia, EPD administers the CWSRF and the 319 grant programs. Currently the only project in the St. Marys River Watershed is in Camden County where 319 monies are being used to correct septic problems in the Horsepen and Temple Creek tributaries of the St. Marys.

There was discussion of the implications of the Mountain and River Corridor Protection Act and of the differences in setbacks from the river in the various counties. Dean pointed out that in rural Nassau county, installation of septic tanks was often handled by individual landowners because the permits were considered optional and if a landowner wanted a permit they had to drive to Yulee.

After the reports, Laurie Fowler pointed that these were interim reports and that students will complete and submit their projects next week. She will then have a law student review the work and add a stormwater section over the summer. He should have the project completed in July.

**Call to Order and Housekeeping**

Following the presentations, the meeting was called to order at 7:39pm.  The May agenda and April minutes were approved as amended.   The treasurer delivered the report via email and it was taken as a point of information.

**Old Business**

***Land Use (including public access)***

**Baker County Boat Ramp** – The contract has been signed and work should begin soon. The Board of Commissioners is beginning discussions on improvement for access and amenities at the Shoals Park.

***Water Quality***

**Horsepen/Temple Creek 319** – There are 33 households signed up for the program, which must be completed by October 2022. There is enough funding to replacement about 24 systems. Thus far 19 systems have been inspected; of those 11 needed to have either the drainfield or the drainfield and septic tank replaced. Eight systems were good or could be repaired during inspection. Of the 11 systems needing replacement two have been completed and two more have been started.

**NPDES permits**- There was nothing listed in St. Marys River Basin in Georgia. No report for Florida.

***Water Quantity (Flooding and Water Removal)***

**Nassau and Charlton County Stormwater**- Nassau County Stormwater Task Force, led by Nassau County Stormwater Engineer Katie Peay, met April 28th to discuss revisions to ordinance 99-17. Merrill Varn attended the meeting. Stormwater infrastructure generally targets efficient stormwater removal and relies on detention/retention ponds as means for settling out sediments and other pollutants. While there are some regulations pertaining to silt in stormwater, there is no reference to other water quality parameters including fecal coliform and petroleum products. The only regulatory recourse is if there is a complaint or if someone is caught dumping waste in a storm drain.

Merrill asked if there had been any septic subdivisions permitted recently. Katie said they had just permitted a 100 units subdivision. Merrill pointed out the need for proper maintenance and water quality monitoring to keep contamination from reaching the tributaries and rivers and asked if the county planned to do any water quality testing or had mapped the stormwater ditches and outfalls so they could be tested by a third party. Katie said that the county did not plan to do water quality testing but that ditches could be mapped using their 2007 LiDAR data and she would check on it. Merrill asked for clarification on how Engineering Services determined volume sensitive sites for discharges. Katie said that it was a pre post comparison based on no increase in 25-year discharge volume for developed conditions. The county wanted to require that stormwater systems be designed to accommodate 10-year storms but was not able to because it would require oversized culverts. Merrill asked how the county required compliance from individual lots. Katie said if there was a problem a non-compliance order would be issued and if the landowner(s) did not handle the restoration, the county would perform the repairs and levy a special tax on the next cycle.

There is no update on the Charlton project.

**Georgia Water Council** – the Suwanee-Satilla Council met April 15th Chip Campbell and Elizabeth King attended. The council reported on results of water availability and population modeling. Of interest was a projected 50% increase in population without a shortfall in water availability using current sources. Agriculture uses 75% of the water in the Suwanee-Satilla Region; the lack of shortfall was due to downward trend in per capita usage (ie increases in efficiency) across sectors, including agriculture. The Water Council did not mention the letter sent by the committee but did thank Elizabeth and Chip for attending.

***Federal, State and Local Regulations and County Comprehensive Plans***

**Update on No-Wake Zone Signage Nassau County**- At the April 14 Nassau County Board of Commissioners Meeting, Dean Woehrle requested that the county waive the application fees for the no-wake zones at three locations on the river across from Traders Hill and Camp Pinckney boat ramps and along the sandbar near Traders Hill. The Commissioners voted to waive the fees. John Myers will look for the copy of the application.

**Letters of support for reclassification of St. Marys River as recreation-primary contact (swimming) in GAEPD 2019 Triennial Review of Designated Uses**- John reported that Camden had approved a resolution in support of the reclassification and thanked Ben Casey for his work on contacting other board members. Merrill and Chip reported that Charlton county had approved a resolution in support of redesignation. The committee will await direction from the Riverkeeper before pursuing any additional resolutions from NPDES permit holders or Florida counties.

**Governing Documents-** Interlocal Agreement discussion. The Committee discussed changes from Charlton County, St. Johns River Water Management District and committee members. The changes were merged and the document re-typed to eliminate formatting problems. Chip suggested replacing the word possible with the word feasible. John Myers will make changes to the introductory section to show that the document is an amendment. We will review one last time in June with the goal of presenting it to the counties for their consideration at their June meetings, presenting any revisions at their July meetings, and possibly approving the final document at their August meetings. Once new Interlocal Agreement is in place, the Committee will file for a tax number and begin revision of the by-laws.

***Annual Reports to Boards of Commissioners***

Dean presented the Annual Report to Nassau County Board of Commissioners April 14.

**New Business**

***Request for statement on Twin Pines Mine***

Chip presented a statement to be placed on the website:

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC) is a quasi-governmental advisory council formed by an interlocal agreement of two Georgia (Camden and Charlton) and two Florida counties (Baker and Nassau) to facilitate the conservation and wise use of the St. Marys River. To that end, SMRMC engaged with the local communities as well as county and state governments to develop the St. Marys River Management Plan, which we now work to implement.

SMRMC is charged to act in good faith as an agent of due diligence on behalf of local governments and communities. As such, committee meetings serve as a public forum for the discussion of issues potentially impacting the river and its stakeholders, including such things as regulatory concerns, land use practices, and economic development projects. Current and continuing discussions include projects to address coliform bacteria contaminations, changes in Clean Water Act wetland definitions, and proposed industrial developments, including large-scale urban mixed-use projects, coal ash disposal in Chesser Island landfill and titanium dioxide sand mining operations.

Please send any edits to Shelley; the statement will be reviewed again at the June meeting.

**Partner Reports**

***Riverkeeper***

Chip reported there were 250 volunteers for the River CleanUp April 24th; they picked up 8 tons of trash and 45 larger items such as tires, carpets, and mattresses. Chip remarked that the Charlton sites all seemed much cleaner than they had when we started the event; he felt it was having an impact. John extended a thank you to Keep Nassau Beautiful for their continued assistance.

The second phase of the Living Shoreline was installed May 1. Students from the UNF Coastal and Marine Biology Program and volunteers from SMRK added 70 recycled crab traps filled with oysters to the traps that were installed in 2019 along the Amelia River just upstream of Fernandina Beach Old Town area.

***UGA***- No update (see presentation)

***SJRWMD***

Geoff Sample reported that the update to the North Florid Water Supply Plan will be ready in the near future.

***EPD*** – No update

**County Reports**

Baker- No update (see Land Use and Administrative)

Nassau- No update (see Water Quantity, Regulations)

Camden- There should be news concerning the Spaceport facility in the next few months. (Also see Water Quality)

Charlton- No update

**Administrative**

***Membership***

Baker County appointed Danny Norton as a new representative on the Committee and reappointed Ed Barber to another term. This brings the total non-commissioner membership to 13; the quorum to conduct business is now 8.

***Covid response***

The committee decided to begin meeting in person again starting in August barring any changes in the pandemic. Several members voiced difficulties signing into teams meetings and a number of people were unhappy with the voice and image quality. Elizabeth King will host the June and July meetings via Zoom. Starting in August, eight people must attend the meeting in person but provided a physical quorum is maintained, additional members may attend remotely. We will investigate costs for remote meeting if necessary.

***File Storage***

Shelley needs to migrate the committee files from her computer to the cloud. LFC Hosting, our hosting service, offers unlimited storage via their Weebly service for $144/year. iCloud costs $3/month ($36/year) for 200gb and $8/month ($96/year) for 2tb. Google Essentials is also $8/month ($96/year) and includes use of google meets. Elizabeth said that she had experienced problems with Weebly with other organizations. Ben Casey asked that we be sure all users could access the information that they needed and said there might need to be different levels of use. Shelley will determine how much storage is needed. Merrill and Shelley will investigate levels and ease of access by all potential users (admin, members, general public) for all options.

**Public Comments**

None

The meeting was adjourned at 8:33pm.

The next committee meeting is scheduled for June 7, 2021 via Zoom\*\*