

St. Marys River Management Committee
68 Kingsland Dr., Suite B ATTN: SMRMC
Folkston, GA 31537-2872

MINUTES OF MEETING
October 4, 2021

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its noticed meeting on September 13, 2021, via Zoom 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, Jay Smith

Charlton – Merrill Varn

Nassau – Dean Woerhle

Non-voting Members –

Others Present – Michael Godwin

A quorum was present.

Presentation

Nassau and Baker County Septic Programs - Michael Godwin

The main tool to prevent septic runoff from reaching surface waters is the permit and inspection process. For most surface waters there is a 75' setback for both the tank and the drainfield. Nassau County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) passed a local ordinance requiring a 100' setback from the St. Mary's River. Baker County has not passed the additional protection for the river. Florida requires a minimum 24" separation above the water table (For repairs the ESHWT can be 24", 12", or 6" based on the original date of septic install). Florida requires a ½ ac minimum usable lot area on properties platted after 1972.

Permits may be applied for in person, online, or fax. A certificate of occupancy is not granted until after the completed system is inspected and approved. Addition of bedrooms also triggers an inspection. Addition of garages, patios and the like do not trigger an inspection.

Environmental Health does not conduct inspections for existing systems that have had no change in use. They rely solely on a Complaint Notification Process and receive approximately 30 complaints annually. If the system is found to be out of compliance Environmental Health works with the homeowner to voluntarily repair or replace the system with approved permit before submitting it to legal office.

Environmental Health encourages proper maintenance of septic systems through brochures distributed during the permitting process, recommendations on their website, and through periodic notices posted by Emergency Management. Environmental Health Nassau/Baker does not have their own social media presence.

Higher concentrations of septic tanks such as multi-home developments have an additional layer of review in the form of a Development Review Committee of which Godwin is a member. They meet every Tuesday to review plans and plats in progress for developments.

The oversight of the Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal System administered by county Environmental Health was transferred from Department of Health to Department of Environmental Protection effective July 1, 2021. In Tallahassee some personnel moved offices but there was no change in personnel at the local level. Godwin said the transfer was on a five-year agreement basis and he did not anticipate any changes in regulations or procedures during the agreement period.

Godwin opened the floor for questions and discussion. The following is a summary of his answers and points made.

The average time between filing application and receiving notification is 5-12 workdays depending on the current workload. For Baker, the application is filed in Yulee and then goes back to the Baker County inspector, Terry Graham, for the site visit. Graham also performs inspections for western Nassau County. A decade ago, all applications had to be filed in person in Yulee. Homeowners repairing systems in the western part of the county, would replace their own systems rather than drive to Yulee to get the permit. Godwin suspected this was no longer common. Ed Barber added that he doubted illegal systems were common in Baker because of the strict building permit requirements added in the past 15 years. He added that the main problem was not the scattered systems on rural lots but instead the concentration of systems in multi-home developments that were too far from current city sewer lines to connect and instead relied on multiple individual systems.

A discussion of issues causing system failure ensued. Barber said that the concrete tanks themselves were rarely the problem, it was instead tree roots in the drainfield. Godwin added that it is also increasingly common for even very recently installed drainfields to fail. He explained that the high sandy land is taken, and the only lots left are on lower flatwood sites. Even with above ground drainfields, the water wicks up through the added sand and effluent is found ponding along the edge of one- and two-year-old fields. Varn added that failure to pump septic tanks for a variety of reasons was also a problem. She thought that a more reasonable schedule might result in better compliance. Godwin agreed that saturated tanks were a problem and said their recommendation was for pumping every 3-5 years depending on occupancy. He said that the Environmental Management social media system could be used for reminders.

Florida does not have the strict periodic inspection requirements that Georgia counties do. In Charlton County, systems must be inspected if there is a change in the name on the electric service. In Camden, the trigger is curbside trash pick-up. Inspection is not of the tank itself but instead includes identifying size/location of tank, probing drainfield, and looking for obvious signs of malfunction. Camden County also requires that the homeowner provide evidence of pumping within the past five years or get the tank pumped; Charlton County only requires inspection. Barber did not feel that the relatively cursory inspections were useful on a widespread basis unless tank malfunction was a known problem. He didn't think system malfunction was a problem in Florida.

Call to Order and Housekeeping

Following the presentation, the meeting was called to order at 740. The October agenda and September minutes were approved. The treasurer reported a checkbook balance of \$6540.43.

Old Business

Land Use (including public access)

Baker County Boat Ramp – The county continues to negotiate with the state and the contractor to pare down the project to something that both fits the contract and is affordable.

Camden County- no update on access at the Blue Bridge, Spaceport notification delayed until November
Charlton County Access Points- Charlton has the permit for the septic system at Traders Hill and is advertising the bids for electric, septic, and restroom renovations this week. The Charlton County BOCC will consider bids at their November meeting. There were no updates on other access points.

Water Quality

Horsepen/Temple Creek 319 – Jay Smith and John Myers had both been unable to reach Scott Brazell because he had been in the field all week. They said the ground has begun drying. Casey said that the county had been keeping an eye on the site so they could begin work as soon as possible. There may still be fewer tanks installed because of supply/price issues.

NPDES permits- Varn said that the permit for GDOT MS4 Permits was being rewritten but she didn't know if there were any such facilities in Charlton or Camden Counties. Neither had sufficient populations large enough to trigger MS4 regulations. She had emailed Alice Vick but had not received an answer.

Spanish Creek (Clay Branch)- A small working group has met once concerning renewing the Spanish Creek Clay Branch project. They will begin testing the drainage ditches that run along the railroad tracks on either side of Homeland and identify whether they discharge into Clay Branch. The group will meet again October 6th.

Water Quantity (Flooding and Water Removal)

Nassau and Charlton County Stormwater- no updates

Georgia Water Council – no update

Federal, State and Local Regulations and County Comprehensive Plans

Update on No-Wake Zone Nassau County- Dean Woehrle said that Mike Mullin said that the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners will need to approve the draft of the no wake zones because the language had to be changed to accommodate the no fee clause.

Camden Co. Resiliency Plan- Jay Smith was not able to get in touch with Chuck White and will provide a written quarterly report prior to the next meeting since the UGA presentation will take up a good portion of the allotted time.

Governing Documents- Camden and Charlton County BOCCs have both signed the revision of the interlocal agreement. It was mailed to Taco Pope in Nassau County last week. Dean said that Mike Mullin had not yet received it. Varn reminded the committee that the document needed to be signed by the middle of December so that the committee could file for an EIN number. Croft is planning to present the changes to the Baker County BOCC October 5. The date at the top of page 1 will need to be filled in. Note that the signature line split across two pages for Baker and Nassau Counties.

New Business

none

Partner Reports

Riverkeeper- Anna Laws' last day was September 30th. There was no representative present. Varn will request a written report for November since the UGA presentation will take up a good portion of the allotted time.

SJRWMD – Geoff Sample has taken a job as CRS coordinator for the City of Jacksonville. SJRWMD is currently interviewing for a Governmental Coordinator and will have a representative at the SMRMC November meeting.

EPD – no update

County Reports

No additional updates

Administrative

Covid response

Though cases are declining the rate of spread is still high and meetings will continue by zoom through November. An in-person meeting is tentatively scheduled for December. Jay Smith will work on a December 6th meeting at White Oak December 6th; this will be a joint meeting with SMRK and will provide for follow-up discussion beginning to outline who does what to move the two states and four counties toward consistent regulations affecting the water quality of the St. Marys River.

File Storage

Shelley was unable to attend the meeting but will provide her written report on file storage needs before the next meeting.

Public Comments

None

Merrill said that Laurie Fowler is tentatively scheduled to deliver the final report for the UGA project on November 1, 2021. The presentation will be to a joint zoom meeting of SMRMC and SMRK.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:01pm.

The next committee meeting is scheduled for November 1, 2021 via zoom**