

St. Marys River Management Committee
Minutes June 6, 2022

Attendees:

Baker: Ed Barber, Danny Norton (FL chair), James Croft

Nassau: Kieth Tindall

Camden: Rick Frey, John Myers

Charlton: Merrill Varn (secretary), Chip Campbell (GA chair)

Other: Courtney Balling (admin), Douglas Conkey (SJWMD), Paul Lore (Nassau applicant), Alice Vick (GA EPD), Christy Highsmith (Nassau resident/ observer)

Housekeeping:

Meeting was called to order at 7:09 pm. The July agenda was approved, as were the June minutes. The balance of the SMRMC account remains the same, at \$8593.43.

Old Business

Land Use (including public access)

- Baker County boat ramp, Shoals Park
 - No updates. Bids have come in beyond the scope of the budget and they're still working on updating plans to fit the budget.
- Camden County, Blue Bridge access
 - Waiting on a court date (likely Sep-Oct) wherein a judge will sign the property over to the state.
- Camp Pinckney land
 - We finally made contact with the alexander land company.
- Trader's Hill
 - Trader's is having an issue with their septic drainfield because people are driving over it and a repair permit has been obtained

Water Quality

- Temple/Horsepen/Mallet Creek 319 (Phase 3)
 - Phase 3 (final phase) of grant. Repaired/replaced systems remains at 18, but they are supposed to start 3-4 additional this Wednesday the 13th. WQ monitoring continues.
- NPDES permits
 - Nothing new in Camden or Charlton.
- Spanish Creek (Clay Branch project)
 - We should know by the 15th if the grant proposal was accepted.
- Septic Think Tank
 - The meeting was held on June 11. All four county EH managers attended. Great meeting, very engaged. We updated the state spreadsheet and collected additional data on pumpouts and costs but spent most of the 3 hours discussing potential county level projects.
 - All four attendees said that it was worth pursuing having a certified

functioning septic tank for a home to be sold. But it was not likely that BOCC would approve required periodic pumpouts for tanks within the 100ft overlay. In Georgia certifying a system requires a full septic inspection (ie pumpout followed by integrity inspection as used already by Camden County for change of name on solid waste fee). There is no similar program in Florida. It was pointed out that failed systems at unoccupied homes could not be detected unless tanks were loaded with water.

- County level projects included financial assistance for low income homeowners, “Septic Do’s and Don’ts” flyers in each county, HOA group rates for pumping, and private septic utilities for HOA’s
- River Corridor/ Land Use/E&S Think Tank
 - UGA environmental law practicum report says that Georgia focuses on defining buffers and regulating sediment (not nutrients), but needs to add ecological and nearby project parameters to permits (e.g. endangered species, wetlands). Florida focuses on detailed permitting of numerous parameters but ignores an overarching functional buffer.
 - Conversation with Scott- Nitrogen and Sediments are the biggest problem and buffers are key to controlling sediments. We need to have an operational phase (not just construction phase) undisturbed buffer rule in GA (similar to Florida) He suggests looking at the Jekyll Island Project where 1.5ft veg height was used as starter. Georgia allows buffers to be mowed to whatever height desired. Golf Courses are a major source of nitrogen. Buffers will help control nutrient runoff but we also need to regulate the amount of inorganic nitrogen that is applied. It should be max 10%, not 30% as it is now. We also need to know how far nitrates runoff over bare ground vs vegetated and how much surface vs subsurface runoff occurs.
 - Courtney is about to start monitoring subsurface N movement at Wormsloe Plantation, and we may want to facilitate duplicating the methods at some golf courses within SM river corridor (osprey cove and white oak)
 - Conversation with Cole Conn- Sediment is most important in GA. GA also has no operation phase buffer except in special flood zones. FL has an operation phase buffer but enforcement is not consistent county to county. Outside special flood zones, there are a lot of infractions (at least in smaller counties). Also, variances are liberally extended if the site is outside special flood zones. It’s really hit and miss county by county. Ag and silviculture exemptions are major issues in both states. Both states need to enforce BMPs, especially for Ag because the soil is exposed for a larger percentage of time. States should require that runoff not reach public rights of way. In FL, if someone has a bonafide Ag operation letter they can change in elevation, etc. You need a permit but they are given out liberally. Military bases- golf courses are used as wastewater spray fields with little supervision or regulation. In FL, golf courses now have the same exemptions as Ag for fertilizers and pesticides (they are exempt from any local regs that are stricter than state regs). In both FL and GA, when doing flood damage assessments, Conn said there were numerous exposed/floating/destroyed septic tanks and drain fields.

- GAEPD is beginning to work on a comprehensive Nutrient Permitting Strategy to update total Phosphorus and add total Nitrogen at point source discharges (NPDES permitted discharges). This is in addition to the current discharge permits in the 6 largest public lakes and some associated upstream segments. There doesn't seem to be anything happening on non-point sources (eg golf courses and ag fields). There is a stakeholder meeting August 17 th (virtual option). Merrill, Chip, and Rick will likely attend.
- Prior to August 17 meeting, Courtney will organize a meeting between Merrill, Rick, and Chip to decide how to tackle populating the spreadsheet

Water Quantity

- Four County Stormwater Management
 - Nassau stormwater ordinance introduced 2-14-2022, enacted 3-14-2022 (with change of swimming pools from impervious to pervious surface), enforced 5-1-2022. The county has also hired a junior stormwater engineer.
 - Chalton - CGR has completed the topo layer for Charlton County. The county is working with them to remove houses and trees from the layer but keep ditches and ponds.
- Georgia Water Councils
 - Coastal Georgia Regional Water Council
 - Coastal Water Council will have a joint meeting with Savannah and Upper Ogeechee July 12 10-2pm. Merrill will try to attend part.
 - Suwanee Satilla Regional Water Council
 - Suwanee Satilla met June. There were updates to population, water usage and availability, and pollutant assimilation models. Several members said that the recent influx of citrus growers from California into southern Georgia may increase water usage. EPD pointed out that small watersheds such as the St. Marys would not be appropriate locations for citrus. There was also a speaker from Florida who discussed the history of their nitrogen regulatory program. EPD announced seed grant application dates.

Regulation/Comp Plans

- Nassau County - No Wake Zone applications
 - Nassau County got the application to the state. Approval is a slow process, so we probably won't see any results this year.
- Charlton County - 100ft overlay
 - Charlton Ordinance clean up should be completed by the end of this quarter. They are working with Elizabeth Backe, the Planning Director for Southern Georgia Regional Council, to remove trout stream and coastal marshland ordinances and add wetland, water recharge, and river corridor ordinances. This should bring Charlton County into agreement with SMRMC cross boundary overlay goals.

Administrative

- Wildlight Presentation
 - Chip stressed to Dan again that we need answers to our original questions before we invite them to speak. Courtney will resend the questions to Ed, who will tighten them up. Then we will resend to Dan.
- Nassau Applicants
 - Keith will follow up with Paul Lore and Bill Cochran. Courtney will resend their contact info.

New Business

- SJWMD water use estimates
 - Courtney will send out this data to the committee so that they can review it. We need to send a letter ASAP, and we will use the letter that has already been approved by the committee. Courtney will find it and send it out.
- Digitizing of files in Charlton Co Annex
 - Charlton County storage facility where we store our old minutes is being taken over by 911 center. The county has asked us to digitize what we can and thereby reduce our storage needs.
 - A motion was made for \$60 expenditure to pay Courtney 4hrs to help with filtering records (3 hrs) and proposing \$ amount (1 hr) to digitize and file old minutes and other records that can go on google drive.
 - Motion was approved by committee
- GA EPD Comprehensive Nutrient Permitting Strategy
 - Already covered

Partner Reports

Riverkeeper- Twin Pines, Redesignation
SJRWMD/GDNR

Committee Member County Reports

Public Comment

Adjournment 9:20 pm

Next Meeting – **August 1, 2022**