

St. Marys River Management Committee  
Minutes March 7, 2022

**Attendees:**

Baker - Ed Barber, James Croft

Nassau - Keith Tindall

Camden - Elizabeth King (Treasurer), Jay Smith, Rick Frey, John Meyers

Charlton - Merrill Varn (Secretary), Chip Campbell (GA Chair)

Other - Courtney Balling (Admin), Emily Floore (St. Marys Riverkeeper), Cori Hermle (FDACS), Stacey Simmons (FDACS), Alicia Harbritter (FDACS), Doug Conkey (SJRWMD), Alice Vick (GA DNR)

The meeting was convened at 7:05 pm for our speakers, but not yet called to order as a quorum was not present.

**Presentations:**

Cori Hermle, Stacey Simmons, Alicia Halbritter

Office of Agricultural Water Policy, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Cori Hermle Presentation:

- TMDL is federal level regulation
- Florida Watershed Restoration Act directs Florida DEP to adopt Basin Management Plans (which identify management strategies for TMDLs)
  - Includes a lot of stakeholder input
  - Reevaluated every 5 years
  - About a dozen BMAPs in FL right now
- FDACS oversees non-point source BMP's (not operations that require an NPDES, AFO, or CAFO)
- FDACS creates agricultural BMPs for both water quality and quantity
  - All are reviewed by DEP
  - Benefits include increased efficiencies in nutrient, irrigation, soil health, and water management
  - 10 adopted BMP manuals currently exist
  - FDACS field staff confirms BMP compliance with producers
- Producer options in BMAP areas
  - Enroll in BMP program
  - OR follow an FDEP prescribed water quality monitoring plan at producer's expense
  - Producers outside BMAP areas can voluntarily enroll
- No BMAP in Nassau County, tiny sliver in Baker County
- Nassau county is mostly grazing lands
  - Some enrollment in BMP program in Nassau, mostly in cow/calf operations
- Baker county is also mostly grazing land
  - Some enrollment in BMP's, also mostly cow/calf

Q&A:

- How often are BMP manuals updated?

- Mostly when trends or research changes. Used to be about 2-6 years, but now it's a dedicated every five years (or sooner if things change)
- How often are BMP's verified on farms?
  - Used to put producers in a ranking tier based on size, location, and production practices
  - After SB-712, they have to visit everyone every 2 years
- What is the state of aquaculture in the watershed (Florida side)?
  - Most are hybrid nursery/fish operations where water from fish ponds/tanks is used as fertilizer for hydroponic crops
  - Most ponds have liners, not clay lined
  - Ed Barber commented that Bright Farms in Rochelle IL had a multi-state recall of greens contaminated with *E. coli* from improperly processed reclaimed water. Cori answered that Florida's regulations for reclaimed water use on ag commodities was very strict
- Do golf courses come under agriculture?
  - No. They're covered under DEP by request of preference, as well as because they can use recently reclaimed water for irrigation. There's considerably more treatment and recordkeeping required when using reclaimed water on an ag commodity, it must be potable.

#### Stacey Simmons Presentation:

- Ag BMP's are for improving water quality while not sacrificing ag productivity
- Benefits of BMP program to farmers
  - Decreased impact to natural resources
  - Technical assistance
  - Presumption of compliance with water quality standards
  - Releases you from fines for damage for pollutants
  - Eligible for cost share
- Notice of Intent to implement BMPs (NOI)
  - Required to be included in BMP program
  - OAWP works with landowners to create them
  - NOI requires details about the farm, BMP's to be implemented, schedule for BMP implementation
    - Identifying landowner (or user) can be a challenge
- After BMP enrollment
  - Producers must implement and maintain BMPs
  - Producers are eligible for technical assistance and cost share funding
  - Record keeping is an important part of BMPs
- Senate Bill 712
  - FDACS must do site visits every two years
    - Must to check on BMPs and review all records
    - Records related to nutrient application must be retained by OAWP
- Available BMP funds for producers
  - State and federal cost share programs
    - BMAP areas are prioritized

#### Q&A (with Stacey and Alicia):

- What is a karst landscape and how does it affect BMP's?
  - These are areas underlain by limestone which is soluble in groundwater. As the limestone dissolves, Swiss cheese-like pockets remain. The area

tends to have sinkholes, caves, and underground streams. Karst topography is common in the central part of Florida from the Orlando area up through Tallahassee. Sludge spread on karst overburden seeps into groundwater and often contaminates the aquifer. Sludge has been transported to Baker County for disposal. Because of the skewed N/K ratio remediation is now required.

- How much BMP compliance is in Baker County? What type of BMPs are commonly used?
  - A little over 2200 parcels are greenbelted in the county. About 70% timber, 15% livestock, 15% pasture or hay (from the most updated aerial imagery). Maybe 10 working livestock operations are within 500ft of the river.
- How much poultry is in Baker now?
  - Alicia isn't aware of any full-time operation
- How about dairies?
  - Absolutely no dairies in Baker or Nassau County
- Alicia noted that ag patterns have changed a lot in the past five years with Tyson leaving the area. If GEPD is using 2017 data as a filter for ag land along river then it is not accurate. Ag now mostly hay/grazing. Current data being collected now but may not be available until late 2023 or early 2024. Emily added that the last triennial review was in 2019, and they were likely using 2017 data.

The meeting was called to order at 8:26. The March agenda was approved by the committee, as well as the February minutes. The treasurer reported that the account held a balance of \$7904.43 following fees paid by Charlton & Baker County (\$700 each, \$1400 total).

## **Old Business**

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

- Baker County boat ramp, Shoals Park
  - Phase 1 funding was \$394,130. Bids were made, but all proposals were well over budget. Staff is working with state to reduce cost
  - Phase 2 funding is \$36,214 for bathrooms and lighting
- Camden County, Blue Bridge access
  - On hold until space port is finished
- Charlton County Traders Hill Park renovations, Camp Pinckney land
  - Work at Traders Hill Park started on schedule
  - No update on Camp Pinckney land acquisition

### **Water Quality**

- Temple/Horsepen/Mallet Creek 319 (Phase 3)
  - An additional five tanks have been completed for a total of 14
  - Contractor is now catching up with other business and will return in a few months
- NPDES permits
  - Nothing in GA
- Spanish Creek (Clay Branch project)
  - Courtney and Merrill are writing grant. Meeting on March 9. Grant application due April 30th
- Management Plan Actions
  - Septic Think Tank

- Septic think tank spreadsheet sent to four county health departments. Charlton Co DPH said they were only enforcing 50ft setbacks instead of 100ft because DPH can't enforce from a comp plan. It must be an ordinance. Confirmed with EPD and with Carl Vinson Center lawyers

### **Water Quantity**

- Four County Stormwater Management
  - Camden Resiliency Plan (River Flooding)
    - Jay will reach out to Chuck to see when they start meeting
  - Nassau County Stormwater Management Plan revision passed with minor revision which is expected to be made by May or June
  - Charlton County still awaiting topo layer from UGA
- Georgia Water Councils
  - Coastal Georgia Regional Water Council
    - Met Feb 24 and will meet quarterly. End of year goal is to rethink visions for water usage. They want to explicitly address climate change. Also want to include education and outreach about goals.
  - Suwanee Satilla Regional Water Council
    - March 9. Merrill will try to attend after Homeland grant meeting.

### **Regulation/Comp Plans**

- Nassau County - No Wake Zone applications
  - Has cleared facilities, currently being rechecked by Amy Bell and then being sent back to legal
- Charlton County - 100ft overlay
  - No update

### **Administrative**

- Migration of Files to Cloud Storage access
  - Need limited public access and full committee access to Google Drive. Need approval from Ben Casey before starting this process though.
- Annual Report
  - Presented to Baker County in February. On Nassau County agenda for March 16

### **County Participation and Annual Contribution**

- Procedures for soliciting new members
  - Nassau County needs two at large members. Amy Bell has it on the agenda for the 16th to be approved and posted on their website
- Annual dues notifications
  - Elizabeth sent them out last month and two counties responded already (Charlton & Baker). Still need fees from Nassau & Camden
  - Nassau County hired Chris Lacambra as the new Director of Management and Budget and we may want to send the invoice to him directly. He suggested contacting Sabrina Robertson, the Public Information Officer for Nassau County.

### **New Business**

- Co-chair signatures
  - Still need Danny Norton's signature
- Letters of support for Homeland 319 grant application

- The letter of support was approved by the committee
- Discussion of April meeting (zoom or in person)
  - The next meeting will be held in person at the Callahan Fire Station

### **Partner Reports**

- Riverkeeper - Twin Pines, Redesignation
  - No Updates
- SJRWMD/GDNR
  - Doug Conkey From SJRWMD let us know that April is water conservation month in Florida and he will forward the proclamation template to us

### **Committee Member County Reports**

- No other business to report

### **Public Comment**

- None

The next meeting will be held April 4, 2022 at the Callahan Fire Station

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 pm