

St. Marys River Management Committee Reports

April 6, 2026

Attendees:

Baker - Danny Norton (FL Co-Chair)

Nassau - Commissioner Alyson McCullough

Camden - Commissioner Ben Casey, Chris Roland (virtual), Joshua Spruell, William Story

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

Other - Claire Feazel (SMRMC Admin), Cori Hermle (SJRWMD, Virtual)

- The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present
- The April agenda was approved with an addition under new business
- The February minutes were approved
- The March reports were accepted
- Treasurer's Report - \$11,578.40 (as March 2, 2026)

Old Business/Reports

Land Use (including public access)

Baker -

- Boat Ramp - Delay due to FEMA reimbursement and the Florida Forest Service \$380,000 grant - FFS extended grant period by 2.5 years - Demolition on-going - Contract has been let - No update for April
- Development Projects - Multiple projects within Baker County may impact the St. Marys River. Approximately 680 homes within the first two developments that would be on city sewer and city water - No update for April
 - Barber Point Development - old golf course - on 23A
 - Nehemiah Point - southernmost development on 23A - entrances and exits have been approved by Baker County Board of Commissioners
 - Mid Pointe Development - potentially for unincorporated Baker County
- Maple Set Recreation Area - Improvements at John M. Bethea State Forest, the upper most access point to the river - No update for April
- Reynolds Bridge - connection between northeast Baker County, Florida and southwest Charlton County, Georgia is currently closed. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has the \$8.5 million dollar rebuild is scheduled for 2028 on their Draft Tentative Five-Year Work Program - No update for March
- National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA)- Presentation scheduled for December 2 Board of Commissioners meeting - No update for April
 - Includes two public feedback sessions
 - Review of 2, 4, 7, and 11-mile kayak trails within Baker County on river from Moniac to Boy Scout Camp
 - Shoals Park - Considering the idea of a recreation development 7-mile kayak trail - Meeting in January - Funding available for kayak/canoe trail - No update for April

Nassau -

- On Island
 - Boutique Hotel - No update for April
 - Bioethanol plant - Concern with land use plan - \$6.6 million lawsuit filed against City of Fernandina Beach - City has until November to respond - No update for April

- Beach re-nourishment - No update for April
- Atlantic Seafood Property - Lessee vacated - building most likely to be demolished - No update for April
- Inland Fernandina Beach - Concern about stormwater management. New areas are flooding from lighter rain events - No update for April
- Waterfront Park - No movement on construction. Work began in the spring, but stopped during the summer - No update for April
- New Fishing Pier - Possible seawall and parking construction - in front of Alachua - No update for April
- Mainland
 - Townhouse Development - No update for April
 - New Race Track development west of I-95, near the Florida Welcome Center - approximately 600 acres - No update for April
 - BOCC continues to negotiate for future conservation easements. One property is approximately 1,400 acres

Camden -

- Blue Bridge - Mediation completed and working to complete the deed transfer
- Raydient Development - Taylor Morrison has begun construction on *Esplanade at St. Marys*, a residential subdivision and golf course - concern remains surrounding adequate water retention on site. It may be possible to obtain storm water plans - Anticipated to open around February/early 2026 - Golf Course will be complete before residential development - No update for April
- Temple Creek - Boardwalk complete - Interpretive Trail is under construction - No update for March

Charlton -

- Charlton Camp Pinckney County Park Boat Ramp - GA-DNR conducted a technical review in March 2025 and sent a letter to Charlton County identifying necessary improvements - Progress on this item is currently paused as discussions with the County continue
 - Potential concern with silt moving into the river from the existing ramp on the property
- Raydient - The Refuge, featuring 12 lots ranging from +/-20 to +/-45 acres along the St. Marys River, has been advertised as “coming soon” from Raydient Rural. This is near the Atlantic White Sturgeon protection area - No update for April

Water Quality

- NPDES - No new or renewed permits in Camden County or Charlton County that would impact the St. Marys River
- Spanish Creek 319 - An additional five septic tanks have been pumped out and one needs repair. There is continued testing needed to determine the specific cause of the high readings
- Septic Think Tank - Project is currently on hold, but there is still a need to do septic tank maintenance talks with any HOAs on both the Florida and Georgia sides of the river and its tributaries - No update for April
- E&S spreadsheet
 - Florida requires a 25' buffer for wetlands, but not for surface waters. The committee continues to work towards a 25' construction buffer for Florida; No update for April

- Nassau County has included a 50' buffer in the Visioning Exercise of the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update
 - Georgia does not have Nitrogen and Phosphorus (N/P) regulations; No update for April
 - Educational flyer for landscapers - Redistributed to local hardware stores in Camden and Charlton Counties in February
 - FL TMDL Planning - No update for April - Need to identify someone to take lead on this project. There is a need to identify the baseline for N/P
 - Georgia EPD Comprehensive Nutrient Permitting - No update for April
 - Folkston WasteWater Treatment Plant - No update for April - Pender Lloyd, Folkston City Manager, reported that construction has begun on the new system, which will increase capacity to 1.25 MGD. The project is scheduled for completion in December 2026, with some final installations potentially extending into the first two quarters of 2027. The current facility has a capacity of 1.0 MGD.
 - The GEO Group is in the process of converting the D. Ray James prison facility to expand ICE capacity, bringing the total population to approximately 2,800–3,000 individuals. When both the prison and ICE facility were previously at capacity (3,000), the city's treatment facility was processing 0.75 MGD - No update for April

Water Quantity

- Four County Stormwater
 - Baker County - Vulnerability study still in progress - Working with NEFL Regional Council - deadline extended to March 2026
 - Fara Ilami will make presentation at upcoming meeting (April/May)
 - Nassau County - Following 2023 Vulnerability Assessment County awarded funding for an Adaptation Action Plan - working with City of Fernandina Beach using the same consultant to prevent duplication of services - No update for April
 - Town of Hilliard - working on Vulnerability Study - No update for April
 - Camden County - County has begun work on stormwater grant, but waiting on progress update - No update for April
 - Charlton County - Vulnerability and Stormwater- EPD's Base Level Engineering Map is completed and is being uploaded to the online viewer. Updates are slowly being added to the St. Marys River Watershed
 - No update for April, but work in-progress by Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coastal Resources Division (CRD) and St. Marys Riverkeeper may help with Vulnerability Assessment
- City Stormwater rehab -
 - Folkston Stormwater improvements - No update for April
 - Macclenny - Nearing completion of Phase II and anticipate applying for Phase III - No update for April
- Georgia Water Councils - Suwannee-Satilla Water Council Meeting scheduled for May 6

Regulatory/Comp Plans

- Nassau County No Wake Zone - Currently on hold - No update for April
- Baker County Comprehensive Plan - Consultant still working on the plan - Public Engagement Charrette scheduled for March 9 - No update for April
- Nassau County Comprehensive Plan - Currently in progress - community visioning sessions have taken place throughout 2025 - No update for April

- Resiliency Plans - The Committee submitted comments on the Section 309 Assessment and 2026–2030 Strategy. The Coastal Resources Division (CRD) acknowledged receipt of the letter and reported that they are coordinating with Dewberry regarding Base Level Engineering (BLE) maps, as well as with FEMA concerning their mapping efforts. CRD also indicated they will remain in contact with the St. Marys Riverkeeper (SMRK) and the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NFRC) regarding their respective resiliency plans - No update for April

Administrative

- 2024 Annual Report
 - Presentation to Nassau County pending
- 2025 Annual Report - Presentations in February/March to County Commissions
 - Baker County - February 17, 2026
 - Camden County - February 17, 2026
 - Charlton County - March 5, 2026
 - Nassau County - February 23, 2026

County Projects

- Discussion of possible new project for 2026
 - Updates to ARC Story Map - Goal of adding new GIS layer to identify areas for possible conservation - Will need to engage third-party to assist with this effort

New Business

- Discussion of “Baker County Injection”/Water First North Florida Project
 - Currently a conceptual project, still in the investigation phases - If approved, it would most likely would not break ground until approximately 2040 - approximately \$1 billion project
 - Florida law requires the establishment of Minimum Flows and Water Levels (MFLs) to prevent significant harm to water bodies from groundwater withdrawals. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has proposed MFLs for the Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers, which are currently not being met, and is developing a recovery and prevention strategy.
 - Project is a collaborative effort between Florida DEP, St. Johns River Water Management District, and Suwanee River Water Management District. The project proposes using high-quality reclaimed water, further treated through a wetland filtration system, to recharge the Floridan Aquifer. It has been identified as a cost-effective and environmentally beneficial approach to help meet regional water needs and achieve compliance with MFLs.
 - The proposed project would utilize established treatment methods, including advanced treatment of reclaimed water, additional natural filtration through constructed wetlands, and ongoing water quality monitoring. The treated water is then used to recharge the Floridan Aquifer, supporting spring and river flows.
 - Perceived as Jacksonville wastewater pumped into the region, local governments across the area are receiving massive opposition to the project.
 - The Baker County Board of Commissioners has an item on their April 7, 2026 meeting agenda regarding sending a letter of opposition concerning the Water First North Florida Project.

Partner Reports

- St. Marys Riverkeeper (SMRK) - No update for April
- St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD)
 - All of northeast Florida remains under a Phase II Severe Water Shortage - A Phase II Severe Water Shortage has been declared due to ongoing dry conditions within Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Marion, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns Counties. Below-average rainfall, declining groundwater levels, and reduced river flows are contributing to water resource stress
 - Under a Phase II water shortage:
 - Landscape irrigation is limited to one day a week
 - Wasteful and unnecessary water use is prohibited
 - Residents, businesses, and property managers are encouraged to proactively plan for extended dry conditions and the potential for additional restrictions

Committee Member Reports

- Chip Campbell has permission to take people to the headwaters of the St. Marys River
 - Current dry conditions make it easier to reach
 - Soldier Camp Island is easily viewable from this area

Public Comments

None

Adjournment

Meeting Adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Next Meeting May 4, 2026 Callahan Fire Department