

St. Marys River Management Committee Minutes

July 8, 2024

Attendees:

Baker - Ed Barber, Danny Norton (FL Chair)

Nassau - Paul Lore, Keith Tindall

Camden - Rick Frey, John Myers, Jay Smith

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

Other - Claire Feazel (Admin), Emily Floore (by phone)

- The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. A quorum was present.
- The July Agenda was approved.
- Minutes from the May Meeting and the June Meeting Report were approved.

Old Business/Reports

Land Use (including public access)

Baker -

- Boat Ramp - The boat ramp was closed June 1 for 45 days to allow for renovations. Work continues and the boat ramp is anticipated to open at the end of July.
- Shoals Park- The county continues to rotate the timber at Shoals Park.

Nassau -

- Waterfront plans for land currently used as parking lots C and D have been approved and include a small band shell and a landscaped park in addition to parking. The boat ramp will remain open.
- There is a proposal to convert the old Atlantic Seafood Building to a small shop and have the larger restaurant on the old Brett's site.
- Alachua St stormwater rehab is now three times the initial cost.
- The boutique hotel plans at the waterfront end of Alachua St are on hold until the stormwater renovations are complete.
- There is significant opposition to the RYAM proposal for the addition of bioethanol refining equipment at the Gum St plant.
- The condos on the Amelia Baptist Church property are on hold.
- There is a proposal for a 140-180 unit housing development at the corner of Pine St. and Henry Smith Rd. in Hilliard. It would be on city sewer. Emily Floore said that area is in the Nassau River basin. Keith Tindall will check with the city on the status of the grant to expand the current treatment facility.
- Nassau County Conservation Land Acquisition and Management (CLAM) is seeking state Florida Forever funding for their Atlantic to Okefenokee project along the St. Marys River. They plan to augment land acquisition by encouraging conservation easements.

Camden -

- Blue Bridge- no update Temple Creek- no update
- Raydient- Members need to review the permit application Raydient submitted to USACE so that when EPD permit application is made a comment letter can be submitted. The public comment period for USACE permit application has closed. Of concern is whether the retention/detention ponds will prevent displaced water from reaching the river, what mitigation is required and whether the plan complies with Camden County wetland protection code and priorities set forth in their resiliency plan.

Charlton -

- Camp Pinckney Alexander Land has deeded approximately 2 acres of land surrounding the Camp Pinckney boat ramp to Charlton County. The county is now able to undertake improvements and pursue DNR partnership to replace the boat ramp.

Water Quality

- NPDES permits- EPD issued the draft permit to Plug Power for groundwater withdrawal of 1.1MGD from each of two wells in the Floridan aquifer for the purpose of cooling water, and processing water for a hydrogen power facility. The committee decided previously that a comment letter was not necessary for the withdrawal permit because it is in the East River and not the St. Marys River basin.
- Spanish Creek (Clay Branch Project)- Six of approximately 26 septic tanks have been pumped. One of the six was a failed system, the other five were functioning. One of the five had a downspout emptying onto the tank. The homeowner was informed that a diverter needed to be installed. Pumping has been halted until rainfall returns to more normal patterns and SMRK has several consecutive months of *E. coli* data from flowing water at Homeland Park Rd Bridge. The next sample is planned for mid-July. A volunteer recruiting dinner was held June 22. It did not attract significant new volunteers; the committee will regroup and discuss other recruiting methods. The Q4 report is due in early August.
- Septic Think Tank- Emily said that *E.coli* numbers were starting to rise at Deep Creek Bridge. She will send the GPS coordinates and sample results to Merrill who will forward them to Mike Godwin, Environmental Health Director for Nassau County.
- E&S spreadsheet
 - 25' construction buffer along waterbodies (Baker)- no update
 - N/P- Merrill Varn discussed Florida regulations with Tim Hiers, White Oak Plantation Golf Superintendent, and did some initial research on ways that Charlton and Camden County could work to reduce the runoff of N/P from turf into the river. In Florida, there is strict regulation of use of phosphorus fertilizers. There is additional regulation (Rule 5E-1.000 3(2) requiring that guidance about prudent application use be printed on bags of turf fertilizer. Many counties have also passed fertilizer ordinances requiring that application follow the suggestions printed on bags and further requiring blackout dates, most commonly June-September, with a goal of reducing pollution of waterways. Tim thinks that blackouts during the growing season are misdirected since that is the time of year that runoff is the least likely. He thinks that a better way would be to regulate the type and amount of nitrogen applied. White Oak uses nitrogen that requires microbial action. The Columbia Co ordinance blacks out application only during tropical storm and hurricane watches and warnings.

Georgia prohibits any local government from regulating labeling, packaging, sale, distribution, and application of fertilizer. The state has regulations for everything except application. Georgia law does not ban local governments from educating citizens about prudent use of fertilizers. A 2007 article by Katie Sheehan (University

of Georgia River Basin Center) suggested that point of sale education was the most effective. Tim also said there is some research that indicates that the most likely way for chemicals to reach waterways is attached to soil particles. Local governments may enact erosion and sedimentation ordinances.

Both states have BMP manuals for agricultural and athletic field (including golf courses) use of fertilizer. Florida's manuals are considerably more detailed.

Tim has asked Bryan Unruh, Associate Center Director IFAS West Florida Research and Education Center, to call with prioritized bullet points for point-of-sale education.

- FL TMDL Planning- Emily said that in discussions with DEP, they had suggested the possibility of setting a TMDL for *E. coli* for the St. Marys River when they considered the lower St. Johns River. The lower St. Johns is the next WBID to be considered. The committee would like to know whether a TMDL will be set, whether or not DEP deems the current *E. coli* level acceptable and if there are any downsides to having a large assimilative capacity made public, such as being a destination for effluent shipment.
- Georgia EPD Comprehensive Nutrient Permitting- no update.

Water Quantity

- Four County Stormwater
 - Camden County - Continued discussions and prioritizing plans - with Nature Conservancy projects. The Resiliency Operations Center is anticipated to open soon.
 - Charlton County- The county is talking with University of Georgia Institute for Resilient Infrastructure Systems (UGA-IRIS) about specifics of the model proposed in the recently submitted Riverkeeper National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (see under Riverkeeper report) to discern whether it will be sufficiently detailed to provide the same data as the county's proposed Coastal Incentive Grant for producing vulnerability and infrastructure layers for their digital map. The county may postpone their application for the Coastal Incentive Grant.
- City Stormwater rehab - Reports targeted for September
- Georgia Water Councils - no updates

Regulatory/Comp Plans

- Nassau County No Wake Zone- Progress continues. Language needs to be in resolution format. Continuing to work with local officials
- Fishing Tournament/ Wanton Waste Regulations FL- No update.

Administrative

- Nassau Annual Report- Paul Lore confirmed that the Annual Report was accepted as part of the Nassau County BOCC consent agenda; he will ask for the date.

County Projects

- Boating Safety/Water Quality signs at Boat Ramps- need to design

New Business

None

Partner Reports

- SJRWMD- None
- St. Marys Riverkeeper
 - Twin Pines- The National Park Service is using their privilege of federal reserved water rights to ask for a determination by the state of Georgia and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service of how much water is necessary to operate the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge. If EPD issues the permit before the determination is made, the National Park Service has the right to sue EPD.
 - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant- SMRK has partnered with University of Georgia Institute for Resilient Infrastructure Systems and Anthropocene Alliance to submit a \$715,000 grant to fund a basin-wide Resiliency Plan based on a flood forecasting model for multiple climate scenarios. The project will also produce a prioritized list of 1-10 nature-based solutions that will benefit the Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon in the St. Marys River. Core technical advisory partners are National Marine Fisheries Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Georgia Sentinel Landscape, Jacksonville University, and St. Marys River Management Committee.
 - Redesignation- EPD is considering redesignating the St. Marys River from Moniac Bridge to the mouth of the Little St. Marys River as recreational. Currently it is designated as fishing in some segments and recreational in others. The major implication of the redesignation is that the same numeric criteria for E. coli (126 colonies/100ml geometric mean) will be required year-round rather than only from May to October. This change will make the designations in both Georgia and Florida the same.

Committee Member Reports

None

Public Comments

None

Adjournment

Meeting Adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Next Meeting August 5, 2024 Callahan Fire Department.