

St. Marys River Management Committee Minutes  
March 4, 2024

**Attendees:**

Baker- Danny Norton (FL Chair), Ed Barber

Nassau-

Camden- Ben Casey (Commissioner) Scott Brazell, Rick Frey, Jay Smith

Charlton- James Everett (Commissioner), Chip Campbell (GA Chair), Merrill Varn (Secretary),  
Russell Barber

Other- Emily Floore (Riverkeeper, by phone), Jenny Sweat (by phone)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM. A quorum was present.

The Agenda was approved.

The Minutes from the February meeting were approved with the addition of Jay Smith to the list of attendees.

The Treasurer emailed that the balance as of February 29, 2024 was \$9691.04 and that Nassau and Charlton had paid their dues.

**Land Use**

Baker-

- Boat Ramp - no news
- Shoals Park- closed due to flooding.

Nassau- no news

Camden-

- Blue Bridge- no news
- Temple Creek- no news
- Raydient- Rick Frey sent the applicable language from the Camden wetland code to the City of St. Marys but has not received a reply. Emily Floore added that the new planner was swamped in revision of the city's RV Ordinance.

Charlton-

- Camp Pinckney land- The County Attorney has made the changes to the deed and forwarded it to Alexander Land Co.
- Old River Landing- Merrill Varn asked Hampton Raulerson, Charlton County Administrator, about the status of the access at Old River Landing. He said that currently it was used infrequently but he was encouraging the commissioners not to sell riverfront property. It has regular garbage pick up and law enforcement patrol but is not a safe place to leave a vehicle.

## **Water Quality**

NPDES permits- No new or renewing permits were introduced for Camden and Charlton County Georgia.

The City of Folkston received the additional \$6.2 million GEFA loan (including \$1 million forgiveness) to supplement the \$6 million remaining of APRA funds to construct the new POTW for the city. They are rebidding the project and will have news late this Fall.

Spanish Creek (Clay Branch 319 Grant)- A total of 38 people signed up to have their tanks pumped. There is only money for 25-29 tanks. The DPH Environmental Health Specialist recommended omitting homes that had been pumped recently and had no issues. Homeland hosted a Field Day, February 24, to demonstrate a septic pumping to participants and provide a notary for signing property affidavits and general releases for pumping. 17 participants and 18 additional residents attended the event. The city is tracking down participants who did not attend the Field Day so that all paperwork is completed before tank pumping begins in April.

Septic Think Tank- no news

E&S spreadsheet- After a good deal of discussion about the inevitable impact of residential development on the river, it was decided that Merrill would send Scott Brazell the Taveras and Miami-Dade fertilizer ordinances and Ed Barber would read over the BMPs sent to him by IFAS contacts. Merrill discussed the possibility of a fertilizer ordinance in Charlton with Hampton who said that the current board would not see that it was necessary until there was a problem. Scott asked why fertilizer was not included in the Charlton environmental ordinances. Merrill said that fertilizer was in the Camden Stormwater Ordinance and Charlton did not have a Stormwater Ordinance. Scott reminded her that the Camden County Attorney had said the Camden code is what is required by the state. Merrill will ask Hampton.

On the Florida side, the counties need to add a 25ft construction buffer along the river. Rather than adding it to the Environmental Code, Ed said he will talk with James Croft about the possibility of getting the buffer into the county building code.

Deep Creek Impairment (WBID 2196)- The Riverkeeper is regularly sampling at the 121 Deep Creek Bridge near the cemetery. The samples are tested for *E. coli*. Testing in 2019 showed high enough *E. coli* numbers to put the small creek on the Florida 303 list of impaired waters. If SMRK testing shows high *E. coli* numbers, Merrill will contact Michael Godwin, Nassau/Baker Co Environmental Health Manager.

FL TMDL Planning- Ed Barber has a meeting with Kevin O'Donnell (FDEP) and others March 12.

Georgia EPD Comprehensive Nutrient Permitting- GEPD released the updated Strategy for Phosphorus. Merrill noted that rivers releasing water to states that already had numeric nutrients would be the last ones to be tackled. There is a public meeting on April 4 but we could

not find a deadline for written comments. Merrill will draft a letter for consideration at the April 1 SMRMC meeting. Ed said that he would ask Kevin O'Donnell how FDEP will work across boundaries when the St. Marys regularly tests high for Phosphorus given the lack of statewide nutrient regulation in Georgia. Chip pointed out that the committee should work to keep the interaction cooperative rather than accusatory.

### **Water Quantity**

#### Stormwater Management/Resiliency-

- Baker- no news
- Nassau- no news
- Camden- John Myers contacted Ashby Worley who confirmed that the Camden Resiliency Plan was not scheduled for revision until current priority projects are completed. She said that several projects had been funded or were in the grant process.
- Charlton- Merrill discussed the possibility of asking Charlton County to apply for a Coastal Incentive Grant to build vulnerability and stormwater infrastructure layers for the new county webmaps. The purpose would be to identify flood prone areas in hazard zones B and C which currently have no building regulations. Ed said that Baker county also had issues with people building in flood prone locations and then challenging the county. Nassau County has added a requirement that new buildings must be higher than adjacent roads.
- City Stormwater rehab- no updates

Georgia Water Councils- not scheduled to meet in the next month

### **Regulatory/Comp Plans**

Nassau County No Wake Zone-

Fishing Tournament/ Wanton Waste Regulations FL-

State Legislation- The committee discussed the Georgia attempts to redefine navigability.

According to Georgia Outdoor News:

Georgia law currently says, "the term 'navigable steam' means a stream which is capable of transporting boats loaded with freight in the regular course of trade either for the whole or a part of the year. The mere rafting of timber or the transporting of wood in small boats shall not make a stream navigable." The law also says "the rights of the owner of lands which are adjacent to navigable streams extend to the low-water mark in the bed of the stream." For non-navigable streams, the landowner's rights extend to the centerline of the stream bed with exclusive fishing rights, or if they own property on both sides of the waterway, the entire stream bed."

Chip pointed out that the issue was that Georgia was one of few states where landowners could purchase the land under the river in an attempt to control the use of the creek or river. There is such a case in Flint County that has the potential to affect the rest of the state.

### **Administrative**

New Admin- Jenny Sweat, a contact of Chip Campbell's, listened in on the meeting to see if she was interested in the position.

Annual Report- The report was emailed to all counties in January. John Myers presented to Camden Feb 8. Ed will ask if he can present the Annual Report rather than having it on the Baker consent agenda.

### **New Business**

County Projects- Members were asked to think about a worthwhile project for the funds leftover from administrative fees. The project could be either a single project that profited all counties or multiple projects in each county.

Twin Pines- The revised Mining Land Use Plan and draft EPD permit are released with an April 6, 2024 deadline for public comment. The committee recognized that few of its suggestions had been heeded and voted to send the same letter as before with updated edits and requesting that the committee be added to the list of entities receiving sampling reports from Twin Pines including the ones on Boone Creek. Scott, Ed, and Merrill will make the edits. The committee also approved sending a letter to all four boards of county commissioners saying that the committee sent a comment letter in February 2023 and is following up with another in March including a request to be added to the list of entities receiving the Twin Pines reports. The letter will also say that the committee will keep the counties abreast of any impacts or impairments but if the county wants the original data, they will need to submit a separate comment letter to EPD. Chip will draft and send the letters.

### **Partner Reports**

SJRWMD- None

Riverkeeper- no additional report

### **Committee Member Reports**

None

### **Public Comment**

Merrill shared Vivian Ritsma's obituary. She was a previous long time member of the committee who died March 3. Members signed a card for Keith Tindall.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:07pm

Next Meeting April 1, 2024 Callahan Fire Department