



South Florida Water Management District

WATER RESOURCES ACCOUNTABILITY AND COLLABORATION PUBLIC FORUM MINUTES

May 28, 2020

10:00 AM

via Communications Media Technology

www.SFWMD.gov

1. Welcome

Call to Order - Drew Bartlett, Executive Director

Mr. Bartlett welcomed the participants.

2. Overview of the Impacts of Invasive Vegetation in South Florida – LeRoy Rodgers, STA and Invasive Species Section Leader

Enhancing the District's Vegetation Management Practices and Exploring Strategies to Reduce Herbicide Use - Francois Laroche, Vegetation Management Section Administrator

Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Laroche presented strategies and approaches to enhancing the District's vegetation management program. The vegetation management program sought to achieve maintenance control of invasive vegetation, exploring different approaches to exotic control, and to further reduce the overall herbicide dependency in response to public concerns.

This item is recorded at:

<http://sfwmd.iqm2.com/Citizens/SplitView.aspx?Mode=Video&MeetingID=2028&Format=Agenda>

3. WRAC Public Forum Discussion

Part I – comments provided by:

Gary Ritter, representing Florida Farm Bureau Federation, inquired on the various responsibilities and coordination between agencies and where boundaries stopped when it related to vegetation control. Mr. Ritter also commented on mechanical

harvesting and biomass. In response, Mr. Rodgers stated the District coordinated very closely with other agencies responsible for invasive species management. Mr. Laroche added that members of the Task Force represent State of Florida agencies including the South Florida Water Management District, State Universities, the Corps of Engineers, and other Federal agencies. The task force serves in an advisory capacity and provides technical and scientific data. The focus of the aquatic plant effort benefits the overall ecological health of Lake Okeechobee. Mr. Laroche stated that there has been more mechanical harvesting on the lake. Currently the biomass on spoil islands on the lake was coordinated with Department of Environmental Protection.

Richard Pinsky, representing Akerman, LLP, inquired on prescribed burns, accidental burns and how it balanced with the air quality controls that were in place. Mr. Rodgers responded that application of prescribed fire was complex when it came to invasive species control. Mr. Rodgers stated that invasive species such as melaleuca and Old-World climbing fern adapted to fire; and melaleuca released more seed after a burn while climbing fern became more aggressive after a burn. Mr. Rodgers added that application of fire must be done on a case by case basis depending on the species being treated.

Dr. Ryan Orgera, representing Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, commented on mechanical harvesting, limiting the use of chemical application, perception versus reality regarding health concerns with the use of chemical application, and the health and safety of employees applying the chemicals. Mr. Rodgers responded that the District's approach to using herbicides was done judiciously. The District only used herbicides approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and relied on the direction of academia and various agencies regulating the use of herbicides.

In response to Mr. Doug Gaston, representing Audubon Florida, regarding agency coordination, setting of standards, best practices, and uniformed coordination, Mr. Rodgers stated that practices for invasive plant management were communicated among various agencies throughout the state. Mr. Rodgers added that the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council and the Aquatic Plant Management Society were a few groups that have served as clearinghouses for information sharing which resulted in statewide management plans.

Inger Hansen, representing DEP, added that DEP was also involved in vegetation management through its Park Services and Aquatic Preserve. Further, DEP had a regulatory program that oversaw discharges of pollutants through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. The NPDES permit contained limits on what could be discharged; monitoring and reporting requirements; and other provisions to ensure the discharge did not impair water quality.

Referring to slide 29, entitled "Reduce Herbicide Use," Mr. Bartlett asked for clarification on the number of acre coverage demonstrated on the chart. Mr. Rodgers clarified that two acreage figures were used; one was the number of acres searched to remove invasive plants, and the second number represented acres treated with herbicide.

In response to Mr. Ritter's inquiry on science and nutrient loading, Mr. Rodgers stated science was available that showed the impacts of spraying and large amounts of

biomass entering large water bodies such as Lake Okeechobee. Further, the science available indicated how much quantity of nitrogen and phosphorus was returned to the system or prime sediment. Mr. Rodgers further explained that it was very important to maintain aquatic vegetation at low levels. In reference to fertilizer application along the levees, Mr. Rodgers stated the District did not practice the application of fertilizer along District levees.

In response to James Evans', representing the City of Sanibel, inquiry regarding cost benefits, Mr. Rodgers stated that mechanical versus herbicide treatment cost benefits had been done in small scales. The District was still working on the cost benefits of large-scale projects.

Part II - WRAC comments on Enhancing the District's Vegetation Management Practices and Exploring Strategies to Reduce Herbicide Use:

In response to Geoffrey Mullins', representing The Everglades Foundation, inquiry regarding Integrated Pest Management and the percentage of herbicide used, Mr. Laroche stated herbicide use was more than any other method in Integrated Pest Management practices. Mr. Laroche added that the District looked at all opportunities to use other methods other than herbicides for maintenance control and provided the melaleuca program as an example where hand pulling was used, further adding that methods other than herbicides were used when feasible. In response to Mr. Mullins inquiry on herbicide application to manage periphyton, Mr. Laroche stated this treatment was being looked at.

In response to Richard Pinsky's, from Akerman, LLP, question on the process and the agency that sets policy, Mr. Laroche stated there was not one agency overseeing land management; rather, this was done by jurisdiction and permit requirements. Mr. Laroche further commented that FWC was the lead agency which oversaw land management on state waters and the District supported these efforts.

Dr. Albrey Arrington representing the Loxahatchee River District, asked if herbicide application tracking data could be made available in real time or as expedient as possible. Dr. Arrington recommended that for future presentations pertaining to this topic, if staff would segregate terrestrial and aquatic components of the herbicide application stating there was quite a difference on the data application rates.

General comments provided by
James Evans, City of Sanibel
Gary Ritter, Florida Farm Bureau Federation
Dr. Ryan Orgera, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
Lee Hefty, Miami-Dade County
Benita Whalen, Dispersed Water, LLC comments read into record

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4. Public Comment:

Diane Perry, James Peters, Shower Pot
Newton Cook, United Water Fowlers of Florida, Inc.
Ramon Iglesia, Anglers for Lake Okeechobee
Mike Collins, Self

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5. Adjourn

Mr. Bartlett thanked the public and WRAC Public Forum Participants for their engagement and reminded everyone that the next WRAC meeting would be held on Thursday, August 27th.

The Forum adjourned at 12:50 PM.