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## South Florida Water Management District

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### WATER RESOURCES ACCOUNTABILITY AND COLLABORATION PUBLIC FORUM MINUTES

March 25, 2021

10:00 AM

via Communications Media Technology

[www.SFWMD.gov](http://www.SFWMD.gov)

Moderator: Drew Bartlett, Executive Director

1. Welcome and introductions

Mr. Bartlett opened the meeting at approximately 10:00 AM and thanked attendees for participating. Mr. Bartlett announced Lake Okeechobee water levels at over 14.5' and stated the District, along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), had been working to safely lower lake levels in preparation for the wet season.

This item is recorded at:

<http://sfwmd.iqm2.com/Citizens/SplitView.aspx?Mode=Video&MeetingID=2055&Format=Agenda>

2. Video Overview of South Florida's Current Water Management System

Moving Water South to Everglades National Park video was played.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_OVTVF4N6s&t=7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_OVTVF4N6s&t=7s)

3. Primary Infrastructure Responsible for Moving Water from Lake Okeechobee to the Central Everglades (Water Conservation Areas) – Suelynn Kirkland, P.E., Office Chief – Water Management, Office of Operations

Ms. Kirkland provided an overview of the infrastructure south of Lake Okeechobee including structures, canals, Flow Equalization Basins, and Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) responsible for moving water south into the Central Everglades Water Conservation Areas (WCAs).

4. Historical Overview – Lawrence Glenn, Division Director of Water Resources

Mr. Glenn provided a historical overview of the Everglades Stormwater Treatment Areas.

5. Current Conditions in the Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) – Tracey Piccone, P.E., Chief Consulting Engineer

Ms. Piccone provided a status update on the Everglades STAs in the context of its current capacity to treat Lake Okeechobee Regulatory Releases. Ms. Piccone stated the focus would be on STAs south of Lake Okeechobee located in and adjacent to the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA).

6. Discussion by WRAC Public Forum Participants

In response to Mr. Gaston's inquiries regarding percentage of STAs on-line, optimal performance, and impacts to moving water, Ms. Piccone responded that a small percentage of acreage was currently considered healthy. Ms. Piccone added that vegetation work, including removal of exotics, was performed during the dry season and work was currently underway. Mr. Bartlett provided further details on flow ways. In response to Mr. Gaston's inquiry regarding the useful life of an STA, Ms. Piccone explained that STAs were very efficient at removing phosphorus from surface water as long as healthy vegetation was maintained throughout the entire flow path and care was given not to overload STAs. However, under current conditions, STAs were not healthy enough to produce the concentrations needed. Mr. Bartlett added that STA cells were refurbished periodically.

In response to Mr. Davis' inquiry regarding calculations, Ms. Piccone explained the new modeling concepts used. In response to Mr. Davis' inquiry on unused capacity and implementation of the Everglades Reservoir, Mr. Bartlett added that the District's modeling was based on availability and opportunity.

In response to Mr. Ritter's inquiry on cost of operating and maintaining STAs, Mr. Bartlett provided the cost of routine operating and maintenance. In addition, Mr. Bartlett added that there would be an increase in cost due to additional projects coming on-line within the next five years. Mr. Ritter inquired on the challenges of managing STAs north of Lake Okeechobee to which Mr. Glenn provided a detailed explanation. Mr. Ritter inquired on the possibility of using aquifer storage reservoirs (ASRs) to provide supplemental water to STAs, Mr. Bartlett stated this was being considered.

In response to Mr. Pinsky's inquiries regarding current state of the STAs, annual maintenance and budget to maintain the STAs, Mr. Bartlett provided details on challenges in meeting the Restoration Strategies 13 parts per billion (ppb) and spoke on the current work being done to enhance STAs. Ms. Piccone added that when the STAs originally came online they were meeting the criteria in place at that time. However, enhancements and new projects were needed to achieve the more stringent, water quality-based effluent limits (WQBELs). Ms. Piccone stated that refurbishment projects were underway. Mr. Pinsky inquired on the phosphorus loads, STA-5 /6 and STA-1E. Mr. Bartlett detailed the multiple basins and success factors.

Mr. Evans thanked the District for the presentations. In response to Mr. Evans' inquiries on operation and maintenance refurbishment costs and what percentage

was funded by EAA landowners in comparison to other tax payers throughout the District, Mr. Bartlett stated funding was approximately \$11 Million dollars through the Ag Privilege Tax, Everglades Construction Tax was approximately \$35-\$40 Million per year, and the remainder was from the Okeechobee Basin tax for an approximate total of \$160 Million dollars a year.

Ms. Whalen thanked presenters and commented on the importance of maintaining stormwater treatment areas; lake water exceedance and performance of STAs north of Lake Okeechobee. Ms. Whalen also commented on the successful performance seen at Lakeside Ranch and encouraged additional storage north of the lake.

Mr. Raybourn inquired on flow equalization basins, willow treatments and different tools used in the STAs but would follow-up with Ms. Piccone after the meeting.

Mr. Lanham commented on Best Management Practices (BMP), Lake Okeechobee's flow capacities, and of the importance for ASRs. In response to Mr. Lanham's inquiry regarding the frequency of vegetation assessments, Ms. Piccone stated that conditions were assessed monthly by helicopter, and daily by field and airboat crew. In response to Mr. Lanham's inquiry regarding the use of drones to access areas, Ms. Piccone stated the District used drones in a testing and research capacity.

Mr. LaPradd thanked the team for the presentation and voiced support for STA refurbishment efforts.

Following comments of storage in the EAA, Mr. Ritter informed participants that EAA Farmers grew rice and participated in Best Management Practices. Mr. Ritter explained that rice crops reduced subsidence thus providing more storage. Mr. Ritter added that EAA Farmers contributed at least 50%, if not more, of the cost for operation and maintenance.

Mr. Bartlett stated that storage projects were being built north, south, east and west of Lake Okeechobee which would help eliminate harmful discharges and provide water, where needed, in the dry season.

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7. Public Comment by:

Newton Cook  
Thomas MacVicar

8. Adjourn

Mr. Bartlett adjourned the meeting at approximately 12:30 PM.