



Minutes

WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION Recreational Issues Meeting

March 14, 2016, 5:00 PM
Okeechobee Service Center
3800 NW 16th Boulevard, Suite A
Okeechobee, FL 34972

1. Welcome, Opening Remarks and Purpose of Meeting - Newton Cook, Chairman

Chairman Cook called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. A roundtable introduction was conducted.

2. Recreation Discussion, Updates, and Future Meeting Topics

Future Possible Meeting Topics

Building Floating Turtle Islands in Conservation Area 2 was requested to be added as a future discussion item. Attendee stated that the Conservation Area 2 water schedule is higher than in the past and due to a high water elevation, turtles are no longer breeding and are easier targets for predators. Stakeholders have a guest speaker they would like to invite to the next Recreation Issues Meeting to discuss this issue. If supported, the Florida Sportsman's Conservation Association would like to build these floating turtle islands as a joint project with the District.

Update:

Steve Coughlin, Section Administrator for the Land Stewardship Section gave an update on the Corbett levee turnouts. Steve stated that the contract is expected to be awarded next week, followed by a preconstruction meeting in April resulting in issuance of a notice to proceed. During this time, the road will remain open to the public. The project completion date is expected in July 2016.

3. Expansion of the Stormwater Treatment Hunting Program – Jerry Krenz, Sr. Planner, Land Stewardship Section, Field Operations and Land Management Division

Jerry Krenz the Senior Planner of the Land Stewardship Section gave an overview of the Expansion of the Stormwater Treatment Hunting Program.

Mr. Krenz emphasized that the staff work at the STAs and the waterfowl hunting would be closely coordinated to assure that staff can continue to complete their typical Friday work. The STAs or cells used may change in the future, similar to how we currently make hunting season adjustments to accommodate project needs. The two hunting areas chosen were STA 1W and 3/4 as they best minimize impacts to common routes to pump stations, water quality permit compliance sampling sites and other public uses. These hunts will be managed by FWC and will be conducted in the same manner as the other STA waterfowl hunts. Mr. Krenz also stated that a season of Fridays could bring an approximate 4320 additional waterfowl hunting opportunities.

Comments

All appreciated the additional hunting opportunities, remembering when the number of opportunities were only 500. Participants were pleased to see the waterfowl hunting opportunities in the STAs increase to the thousands.

Mr. Cook stated that there would be future discussions on STA hunting. For the interested parties, it was highly recommended that STA hunters attend these meetings and follow these discussions closely. These meetings could include proposals related to potential permit changes.

4. Overview of the Florida Cracker Trail Association (FCTA) – Suzanne Park, Trail Boss, Florida Cracker Trail Association

Suzanne Park, Trail Boss, Florida Cracker Trail Association, provided an overview of the Florida Cracker Trail Association in addition to actual Florida Cracker Trail Facts. Ms. Park proudly stated that Florida is one of the largest producers of cattle. Educational aspects of the Florida Cracker Trail Association was shared. Ms. Park invited everyone to participate in the Fort Pierce Terminus - A parade throughout the streets of downtown Fort Pierce.

Comments

History is very important to the State and a suggestion was made for a documentary for public television. Ms. Park stated that 2017 will mark their 30 year anniversary and welcomed suggestions. Mr. Cook stated that the cattle industry here in Florida is very important and the continuation of Florida's history should be sustained. Mr. Cook invited the Florida Cracker Trail Association to return in December.

Inquiry was made regarding rides taking place on private or public lands. Ms. Park replied that rides take place on both private and public lands including the District's Hickory Hammock Management Area.

5. Kissimmee River Restoration Project Update – Dave Colangelo, Principal Federal Policy Analyst, Everglades Policy and Coordination Division.

Dave Colangelo, Principal Federal Policy Analyst gave an update of the Kissimmee River Restoration Project including a construction update that comprised of a project overview, restoration evaluation, and recent construction update including that the S-65C structure would be removed sometime next year.

Comments

Mr. Cook inquired about mimicking the flow and hydration of the marsh. He stated that water and burning must go together to achieve restoration and a natural marsh.

Inquiry was made of the test sites located near Kissimmee River. Discussion ensued on the location of these sites and information on how to access this information online using DBHydro database on the District website was offered. Floodplain backfill was discussed along with vegetation currently growing in the marsh. Construction is expected to be completed by 2020 with monitoring, adjustments to flows, and restoration evaluation being performed through 2025.

An inquiry was made regarding the drop in water levels at WCA-3. This information was not available and will be provided at a later date.

6. Overview of Waterfowl Hunting Technical Assistance Group and Update on Python Challenge™ - Wes Seitz, Public Hunting Areas Biologist, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission

During the overview, Mr. Seitz, outlined the participation criteria in addition to providing statistics obtained from the Python Challenge TM. There were over 1,066 registered participants and in-person training was held for the participants. The results, 106 snakes in total were removed from the Everglades the longest being 15 feet. 23 Pythons were taken from participating SFWMD lands.

Following, was an update on the Waterfowl Quota Permitting TAG. Mr. Seitz mentioned that three public meetings were held: Daytona Beach, Melbourne Beach and in West Palm Beach. Information and suggestions from these meetings will be considered while developing the recommendations for change. Several options were discussed along with the next step of the process which is for the FWC internal Waterfowl Permitting Team to meet and discuss feedback, develop a recommendation package to present to Division Leaders, the public, and the FWC Commission. If approved, changes to the rules, policy and permitting will be adopted during the 2016-17 hunting season.

Subsequently, Mr. Seitz provided an update to the STA Alligator Post-Hunt Meeting which was held on March 2, 2016. Mr. Seitz stated that participation at the meeting were from stakeholders, regional sportsman representatives, FWC staff, and the SFWMD. Topics of the March 2nd meeting were the announcement of credit card requirement to apply for alligator hunts, relocation of check station STA1 West, request for additional alligator hunt days in STAs, adjustment to alligator hunt schedule, preference points for alligator hunt permits, and expansion of the youth and wounded warrior STA alligator hunt program..

Comments:

Participants thanked the District for the land use. Discussion ensued on the Python Challenge and the awareness this program brings to the problem. Noted, no snakes were taken from the Everglades National Park. Statement was made on the prospect of a biological method for removing pythons from the ecosystem. Additional discussion ensued about allowing snakes to be taken throughout the year. Mr. Seitz stated that the

current hunting seasons allows for the harvesting of snakes during the most productive part of the year.

Comments were made on STAs and congestion around check stations. A district representative encouraged participants to submit additional comments regarding results of the FWC Waterfowl Quota Permitting TAG meetings. While public meetings have concluded, comments making a difference will be shared and added as additional intent.

Inquiry was made on the number of duplicate permits. As it stands now, chances are very low for obtaining multiple permits. Participants stated that a program that does not restrict hunters and their opportunities will only be supported.

Mr. Krenz explained that as the representative of SFWMD he could still add comments to the TAG if additional concerns were heard at this meeting. He further explained that SFWMD had supported random draw choices that provided several draws closer to the dates of the hunts. SFWMD also supported the introduction of computerized random draws for the standby permits and the continued FWC field redistribution of permits using a field lottery when additional opportunities were available beyond the computerized standby draw. No additional comments were heard to be forwarded to FWC.

Mr. Cook stated that the STA 1W Expansion will be another venue. It will be approximately 4-5 years before hunting will take place.

Mr. Krenz confirmed with stakeholders that they approve of the proposed 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3 option changing how the three hunt periods are administered on the STAs during the annual alligator harvest season. This information will be conveyed to FWC. Also discussed was additionally allowing Sunday nights for alligator hunting only on the three opening weekends. This will be discussed internally to evaluate the possibility incorporating the additional Sunday hunting periods from 5 pm until midnight.

Inquiry on the C-23 Canal hunting: Hunting on a right-of-way is not permissible and many restrictions are currently in place. The questions was restated to boundary restrictions and which permit applies if you have permits from dual counties. A FWC law enforcement officer will address the question with information brought back to the WRAC RIM participants.

7. Public Use Update - Dan Cotter, Section Leader, Land Stewardship Section, Field Operations and Land Management Division

Dan Cotter, Section Leader in the Land Stewardship Section, Field Operations and Land Management Division gave an update on the Public Use. Mr. Cotter introduced the DuPuis Management Area Volunteer Marking Project geared for Saturday, April 23rd at 8:30 a.m. He also updated the group on other volunteer projects and that a Special Use License will be required for camping at the DuPuis equestrian campground beginning in July, and the Allapattah proposal of new trail use for equestrian, hiking and biking. Another volunteer effort that was addressed was the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes

proposed shelter location. The Loxahatchee Road Boat Ramp, located in the southern part of Palm Beach County, was discussed and the request to address the erosion at the parking area. The parking area and where you back into the ramp is underwater during certain times of the year. This area will be evaluated during the dry season to see if the elevation of the area can be raised. An update of this parking area project will be brought back to the group. The Kissimmee River Chandler Slough, Chandler slough parking trailhead and camping area off Hwy 98 temporarily closed due to KR Construction.

Comments:

A participant from the Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen's Association thanked District staff for working with KRVSA on the coordination of the proposed Lake Kissimmee volunteer shelter project.

Other business:

There was an inquiry regarding the construction of the S46 structure just north of Indiantown Road, and whether public access was being developed for fishing. The timeline was not available at this meeting and the access route is still being addressed.

Inquiry was made regarding a locked gate at the C18 adjacent to the Corbett Management Area and whether the gate would be open to allow use of an existing boat ramp. District Staff will look into this and get back to the attendee.

The next WRAC Meeting is scheduled for April 7th. The next WRAC RIM meeting will be held at the South Florida Water Management District's headquarters in West Palm Beach in the B-1 auditorium on June 13th.

8. Adjourn 7:40 P.m.