



Minutes
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION
Monthly Meeting

March 03, 2016, 9:00 AM
 District Headquarters - B-1 Auditorium
 3301 Gun Club Road
 West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Douglas Yoder	Alternate for Bill Johnson	Present	
Samantha Whitcraft	Alternate for John Lamkin	Absent	
D. Albrey Arrington	Utility	Present	
Jeff Ward	Alternate for Barbara Miedema	Absent	
Shelley Vana	Local Government	Present	
Douglas Bournique	Agriculture	Present	
Bob Ulevich	Alternate for Doug Bournique	Present	
Chuck Collins	FWC / Statewide	Absent	
Harry Cronin	Alternate for Jim Reynolds	Absent	
Jeff Scott	NRCS / Federal	Absent	
Vincent Encomio	Alternate for Mark Perry	Absent	
Jim Reynolds	Utility	Present	
Kurt Harclerode	Alternate for Pam Keyes	Present	
Michael Harford	Local Government	Absent	
Mark Perry	Environmental	Present	
James Humble	Agriculture	Present	
William "Chad" Kennedy	FDEP	Present	
John T. Lamkin	NOAA / Federal	Absent	
Joan Lawrence	US DOI / Federal	Present	
Barbara Miedema	Agriculture	Present	
Linda McCarthy	Alternate for Bubba Wade	Present	
Kimberly Lawrence	Alternate for Michael Harford	Absent	
Newton Cook	Public Interest	Present	
Don Fox	Alternate for Chuck Collins	Absent	
Mary Ann Martin	Public Interest	Present	
Bevin Beaudet	Alternate for Shelley Vana	Absent	
Brian L. Wheeler	Utility	Absent	
Joe Capra	Business	Present	
Bud Howard	Alternate for Albrey Arrington	Absent	
Michael Collins	Public Interest	Present	

Mark Dombroski	Alternate for Newton Cook	Absent	
Medora Krome	Alternate for James Humble	Absent	
James Erskine	Miccosukee Tribe	Present	
John Lesman	Business	Present	
Ashley Tripp	Alternate for Mary Ann Martin	Absent	
Maelo Reyes	Alternate for Jeff Schmidt	Absent	
Rich Budell	Alternate for W. Ray Scott	Absent	
Wovoka Tommie	Seminole Tribe	Absent	
Malcolm "Bubba" Wade	Agriculture	Present	
Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch	Alternate for Joe Capra	Absent	
Neale Montgomery	Business	Present	
Harry Raucher	Utility	Present	
Pat Martin	Alternate for Harry Raucher	Present	
Joshua Kellam	Business	Absent	
Lance R. Bennett	Business	Absent	
Erin Deady	Environmental	Present	
Adam Gelber	Public Interest	Present	
Jason Liechty	Alternate for Kristin Jacobs	Present	
Tom Jones	Agriculture	Absent	
Mike Sweeney	Alternate for Brian Wheeler	Absent	
Pam Keyes	Utility	Absent	
Jenny Conner Nelms	Environmental	Absent	
Nancy Payton	Environmental	Present	
W. Scott Ray	FDACS / Statewide	Present	
Karson Turner	Local Government	Absent	
Jamie Poulos	Alternate for Lance Bennett	Absent	
Shannon Estenoz	US DOI / Federal	Present	
Tabitha Cale	Environmental	Present	
Jill Hoog	Business	Present	
Ernie Marks	State Government	Excused	
James J. Moran	Chairman	Present	
Kevin Powers	Vice-Chairman	Present	

1. Call to Order - James J. Moran, WRAC Chairman

Mr. Moran called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM and welcomed Lee County Commissioner Brian Hamman along with Ernie Marks, the District's new Director for Everglades and Policy Coordination. Mr. Moran announced John Mitnik was appointed Division Director of Operations, Engineering and Construction; and, introduced Yvette Bonilla who will serve as the new WRAC Coordinator. Mr. Moran also welcomed Vice-Chair Kevin Powers to the meeting.

Commissioner Hamman commented on the releases from Lake Okeechobee and its effect on the ecology and tourist season in Lee County.

2. WRAC Member Issues

Newton Cook reminded members that the next WRAC Recreational Issues Meeting was scheduled for March 14th at the District's Okeechobee Service Center.

Joe Capra stated the District and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) did a great job in dealing with the recent heavy rainfalls. Mr. Capra also acknowledged staff for effectively communicating with the press and the public. Mr. Capra stated that both federal and state funding was needed to move projects forward.

Albrey Arrington advised that waters discharged from Lake Okeechobee were not toxic in the way that was being connoted and the issue was too much freshwater in a saltwater environment.

Jill Hoog agreed with Mr. Arrington's comments and stated the need for a more clear explanation to the public of what was occurring in the Lake. Mr. Moran replied this was in progress.

Mark Generales would like to see more information distributed to the press and public.

James Erskine thanked state and federal agencies, as well as the elected leadership of the Miccosukee Tribe, for the ability and fast action to open G-333 and move water out of WCA 3. Mr. Erskine also expressed the need to further discuss the constraints in the system.

Shelley Vana appreciated that consideration was given to residents in the western communities.

Nancy Payton requested that a District Governing Board or WRAC meeting be held in Southwest Florida. To this, Mr. Moran replied that the Governing Board was scheduled to meet in Ft. Myers in June and WRAC was scheduled to meet on the west coast in November. The location of the WRAC November meeting is to be determined.

Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Jennifer Reynolds announced the USACE would reduce flows to 4,000 csf to the west and 1,800 csf to the east.

Jason Liechty appreciated the opportunity to present at a past meeting on the C-51 Canal on behalf of Broward County.

Tabitha Cale appreciated the interagency coordination during this past emergency and mentioned the importance of continued monitoring of nutrient levels in Lake Okeechobee and the need for additional water storage. Ms. Cale also mentioned the District recently released the annual wading bird report which showed nesting to be at an average level but that small wading bird nesting had declined.

Kurt Harclerode stated the media misrepresented the water conditions of Lake Okeechobee and that while an influx of fresh water was a shock to the system it was not closing beaches along Florida's west coast as was being reported. Mr. Harclerode appreciated the District's messaging and distribution of facts as well as the interagency collaboration in moving water south.

Bubba Wade stated that LTC Reynolds answered why maximum releases had occurred; however, the question remained as to what releases looked like in the upcoming months.

Mary Ann Martin reported that Lake Okeechobee was not polluted and that fishing conditions were good.

Mark Perry agreed with the comments by fellow WRAC members that the Lake was not toxic; appreciated the Governor's action in moving water south; and, stated that regulation discharge levels needed to be reviewed in order to spare the estuaries.

Doug Yoder stated there were ongoing issues with salt blooms at the Florida Power & Light cooling canals at Turkey Point. The westward movement of this hyper saline bloom had accelerated to a threatening point to the southernmost wellfield; thereby, threatening water and/or electrical supply.

Chad Kennedy welcomed Ernie Marks to the District and appreciated the smooth transition that Mr. Marks had provided.

Barron Moody encouraged the members to continue to push for solutions to high water issues.

Neale Montgomery looks forward to the June Governing Board meeting in Ft. Myers and thanked Governing Board Member Rick Barber and Phil Flood for attending the City of Bonita Springs meeting and announcing that construction had begun for the South Crew project.

Public Comment

Gary Ritter, Florida Farm Bureau, requested further discussion and flexibility in the regulation schedule for water storage in the Upper Chain of Lakes so as to minimize impacts to Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries. To this, Shelley Vana asked that this be discussed at a future WRAC meeting; and, Mary Ann Martin agreed that constructing a reservoir north of the Lake was an ideal solution.

3. 2016 Dry Season Operations Update:

John Mitnik, Division Director, Operations Engineering & Construction Division and LTC Reynolds provided an update on the 2016 Dry Season conditions. Mr. Mitnik presented a comparison of rainfall distribution from June 2014 to February 2016 and stated that November 2015 to January 2016 had been the wettest dry season since 1932 and that nearly all basins within the district were at 200% or more above average. Lake Okeechobee water elevation was at 15.89 NGVD; and, while canals south of the Lake had capacity to hold water there was no capacity to move water through the Water Conservation Area (WCA) due to high water levels.

Mr. Mitnik discussed the El Niño event; factors to consider in operating the system; utilizing the Lower East Coast Canal Conveyance system to move water to tide; and,

the Emergency Deviation granted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its focus on the southern portion of the system.

WRAC Member Comment

Upon question from Mr. Collins, Mr. Mitnik stated there were two trigger wells for S-199 and S-200 and those structures would cease pumping operations once water levels were above a certain criteria. Additionally, Mr. Mitnik stated the C-4 detention basin was being used to store water from the WCA and an Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) well, that had been constructed under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Pilot Project, had been reactivated to help move water out of WCA-1 through the S-39 in order to store water underground.

In response to a question from Mr. Wade regarding if the expectation for the area south of the Lake was to reduce the water levels in the WCAs to allow for the storage of water from the Lake, LTC Reynolds stated it was dependent on the weather and other factors but that the intent was to drop the WCA levels to - and not below - its regulation schedule and then maintain the level by moving water south.

LTC Reynolds commended District staff on the exceptional job being done in operating the system.

Additionally, LTC Reynolds stated that in preparation for the upcoming hurricane season the ideal Lake level on June 1st would be 12.5 feet. However, in projecting forward and by maintaining releases within the LORS schedule, the Lake may realistically be at 14 feet or a little higher, depending on rain.

In response to questions from Mr. Harclerode regarding the announcement of the 4,000 csf reduction in flows to the west and 1,800 csf to the east, and moving water south through the S-12 structures, LTC Reynolds stated the points of measure were the S-77 structure and the St. Lucie lock and that additional flows may continue. As to the S-12 structures, LTC Reynolds stated there were four S-12 structures, A, B, C, and D. Generally, Structures 12-A and B were closed from November to July. The intent of closing these structures was to prevent excessive water from moving from those structures directly south to the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow habitat and to provide an opportunity for the birds to have a dry nesting season. While Structures 12-C and D were open, water that could be pushed through these structures was significantly less than what could be discharged to the estuaries due to the distance and number of structures from Lake Okeechobee. LTC Reynolds also stated that adding additional water to the Sparrow habitat would worsen a dire situation.

Ms. Estenoz thanked Commissioner Bergeron and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for their leadership role in raising the canal level.

Responding to a question from Ms. Miedema, Mr. Mitnik stated the duration of the emergency deviation granted by the USACE to implement the operations was for a period of 90 days with an additional 90 days for recovery.

Mr. Arrington suggested collaborating with utilities who have deep injection well capacity

to pull water off of points where harmful discharges occurred.

Upon question from Mr. Perry as to the delay in lowering the water level back in September or October in anticipation of the El Nino, Mr. Mitnik stated that operations had been in accordance with Increment One and management measures had not reached the Increment One action line which is higher than the regulation schedule line. To this, LTC Reynold added that forecasters could not predict where the rain from El Nino was actually going to fall and that decisions were made based on the scientific data available.

Mr. Moran stated that consideration of violations to Appendix A of the Consent Decree should be given when moving water south.

Public Comment

Paul Gray, Audubon Florida, commented on the safety of the Herbert Hoover Dike and Lake Okeechobee water management.

Bob Ulevich commented on managing the system.

4. Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (ERTP) Update: Donna George, Civil Engineer, US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District

LTC Reynolds provided the background and timeline of the Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (ERTP); explained that reinitiation was due to the incidental take reinitiation trigger that exceeded the 2014 range wide survey where the number of Cape Sable Seaside Sparrows fell below the threshold for reinitiation; and, described the USACE's regulatory relationship with FWC in securing the Biological Opinion needed to operate the system.

WRAC Member Comment

In response to a question from Mr. Collins regarding if the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow was a subspecies of the Seaside Sparrow, LTC Reynolds stated that other sparrows have similar habitat requirements. To this, Mr. Collins replied that there was not a clear path to the point where the ecosystem was restored and managed without the constraints of a single species management.

Mr. Capra and Ms. Estenoz discussed the connection between restoration of the ecosystem and protecting endangered species.

Mr. Collins clarified an earlier comment by stating the bird was not bad for restoration and that managing a national park as a wetland was not the way to restoration.

Ms. Cale stated the need to disseminate information to the public of the great work the District was doing; questioned what the species ecological indicators were; and, mentioned the necessity of funding studies and monitoring. Ms. Cale also requested that at a future meeting a presentation be provided on the monitoring of Florida's wildlife

and plants. To this, Mr. Moran stated that due to budget cuts and a 25% staff reduction, monitoring and a presentation may not be possible but that staff would look into it.

Mr. Wade commented on the public's misconception that a solution was to send the water south, build more storage in the EAA, and that problems were caused by farmers. Instead, the focus should be to store water to the north, east and west of the Lake, and to educate the public on the facts.

5. Kissimmee River Restoration Current Construction Features - Lawrence Glenn, Section Administrator, Lake & River Ecosystems Section

Lawrence Glenn provided an overview of the current construction features of the Kissimmee River Restoration, including project goals and responsibilities of the USACE and District. Mr. Glenn stated that the last four restoration contracts would be completed by 2020 at which time the new headwaters regulation schedule would be implemented to provide the flows needed to sustain the river.

WRAC Member Comment

Responding to a question from Mr. Capra regarding why not store water to the north of the lake in the existing canal system that was now being filled, Mr. Glenn stated that water was being moved to the floodplain for storage and this, along with the project, provided approximately 130,000 acre feet of storage.

Mr. Cook stated this was a great project but that land management was critical. Mr. Cook also commented on the need for controlled burning in portions of the restored land.

Upon question from Mr. Wade, Mr. Glenn replied the 130,000 acre feet of storage was included in the 800,000 acre feet mentioned in the Northern Everglades plan. To this, Mr. Wade asked that a presentation be made at a future meeting of what the acre feet storage number north of the lake was and if this was short of the figure in the Northern Everglades plan.

Ms. Cale stated that mimicking historic hydrologic patterns was going to be critical; and, wading birds had used this habitat for foraging but nesting had not increased in this region. The expectation was that nesting would increase once the historic hydrologic pattern was restored.

In response to a question from Mr. Moody, Mr. Glenn stated the floodplain was wet because it had been a wet dry season and if the recession rate goes too quickly there would not be drying pools for the wading birds to feed. Alternatively, there would be a reversal that would disperse the prey if it was drawn down and then filled back up.

Mr. Arrington commended the District on a great project and asked Mr. Glenn to discuss the recession rates. Mr. Glenn stated the project was currently in an interim hydrology, the project was not complete, and all of the features in the upper basin had not yet been completed in order to implement the headwater schedule. This would occur in the year

2020, when inflows per climate would be mimicked as to how the system operated historically.

Mr. Generales and Ms. Estenoz stated the need to educate the public on this project.

LTC Reynolds remarked that the USACE was working closely with FWC on the recession rates in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes to prevent the collapse of snail kite nests that existed on the lakes, and that it was a challenge trying to balance the competing demands of endangered species.

Ms. Vana proposed coordinating efforts with the Tourist Development Council to educate the public on the ecosystem restoration the District was doing. To this, Mr. Moran stated that getting the news out to the public might influence the media to tell the true story.

Public Comment

JP Sasser, One Florida Foundation, commented on the effects of development and the population on the environment, and the environmental benefits provided by the EAA and agriculture to wildlife.

6. Staff Reports

None

7. General Public Comment

None

8. Adjourn

Mr. Moran adjourned the meeting at 12:09 PM.