

Lake Okeechobee
Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force
Meeting Proceedings

The following individuals attended the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force meeting 25th January 2022 at the USACE South Florida Operations Office, Clewiston FL.

Attendance:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Jessica Fair

Ian Markovich

Jake Edwards

Jon Lane

Chelsea Bohaty

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission

Beacham Furse

Christy Soldo

Steven Jones

Barron Moody

Ed Harris

Sarah Paladino

Danielle Kirkland

Matt Phillips

Lee County Hyacinth Control District

Lee Martin

South Florida Water Management District

Jacob Thayer

Linda Yair

Alex Onisko

Francois Larouche

Florida Department of Environmental
Protection

Nia Wellendorf's

Industry and NGO stakeholders:

Linda Defede, Aquatic Vegetation Control

James Boggs, Helena Agri-Enterprises

Keith Mangus, Applied Aquatics Management

Paul Grey, Audubon Florida

Meeting called to order at 10:01 by Jessica Fair

Presentations:

Jessica Fair, USACE

Ms. Fair noted that interagency flight on Jan 6th detected approximately 414 acres of floating aquatic plants on Lake Okeechobee at a water level of 15.4'. There are hopes that lake levels will decrease allowing for increased ease of operations. While most zones look good, two hot spots of Observation Shoal and Indian Prairie harvesting zone were present. With recent hires, Ms. Fair expects the helicopter estimates to be more consistent. She further noted the present state of young hyacinth increasing.

Ed Harris IPM, FWC

Mr. Harris discussed the contractors for FWC have treated approximately 420 acres of floating invasive plants. Additionally, one applicator was dedicated solely to EDRR control of *Luziola s.*, having controlled up 40 acres at that time.

Additionally, Mr. Harris notes that no immediate action is underway for the nutrient reduction project occurring near Indian Prairie. Setbacks have occurred in obtaining the permits necessary for the operation, in addition to setbacks of acquiring necessary equipment. Work is slated to begin by February 1st. All mobilization will be conveyed to relevant stakeholders. Jessica Fair recommended Ben Sperry be looped in as well.

Christy Soldo AHRES, FWC

Ms. Soldo was updating on behalf of Alyssa Jordan. She discussed FWC's plan to burn approximately 1200 acres of treated cattails. Areas targeted are Dycess and Moonshine Bay areas. In April, another treatment of cattails is expected to occur. This will see a helicopter applying a mixture of Imazamox herbicide.

FWC further intends to treat approximately 1500 acres of torpedo grass in the Northwest Marsh area with a boom truck. Ideally, lake levels below 14 feet are necessary for this treatment. Ms. Soldo notes that wading birds have been positively responsive to work in that area. Jessica Fair noted how she hopes this will increase submerged aquatic vegetation in that area.

Jacob Thayer:

Mr. Thayer conveyed that SFWMD will be surveying and treating melaleuca throughout southwest Lake Okeechobee. He further hopes to resume burning in Moore Haven Marsh and Curry Island if lake levels fall below 13 feet. Additionally, he is working on creating a statement of work for mechanical harvesting.

Francois Laroche sought information about FWC needs for burning. Ms. Soldo noted they intend for both planned fires to happen on the same day, needing a fleet of one helicopter, three crowd control boats, five airboats and one patrol boat.

Jessica Fair, USACE

Ms. Fair inquired about status of snail kites on Lake Okeechobee. FWC noted surveys underway for nesting. FWC additionally noted that a remarkably early fledge was observed in the Payne's Prairie area of northern Florida.

Providing an update, Ms. Fair noted 460 acres of invasive floating plants were treated from West Wall to Pelican Bay. This was accomplished by two contractors, while also being augmented by two USACE spray boats from Palatka. Their effort allowed for 80 acres of treatment in East and West Wall areas. They were pulled of the water before a fishing tournament. This area was a priority, as previous years treatments are prevented by presence of snail kites.

Ms. Fair further elaborated on an underway trial of testing penoxsulam treatments with a 2,4-D herbicide as a control. Both 4 and 5.6 oz treatments of penoxsulam were not showing as favorable results as desired. FWC inquired about selectivity and cost. Several members discussed advantages and disadvantages associated with selectivity and costs of different herbicides. FWC members stressed selectivity is paramount, when compared to costs. Mr. Laroche contends that conversation should also be focused on putting less active ingredients into water.

Additionally, Ms. Fair inquired about agency representatives for Interagency flyer. FWC and SFWMD confirmed who will be contributing.

Open Comment:

Jon Lane, USACE

Mr. Lane inquired about the status of clown knifefish on Lake Okeechobee, expressing profound concern. Barron Moody from FWC relayed that a haul seine commercial fisher retrieved one from the open water on Lake Okeechobee. Additional knifefish have been retrieved from the Dynamite hole area. FWC will continue to monitor exotic fish on lake.

Jessica Fair, USACE

Ms. Fair expressed desire to improve fishing tournament coordination. FWC is working on streamlining process. FWC further advised only appropriate diligence into managing treatments around tournament schedules. They further noted how individuals can exploit process to hamper spray operations. Ms. Fair replied that treatment suspensions for tournaments are good will gestures, not legal guarantees.

No Public Comments