

Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force Meeting Proceedings

The following individuals attended the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force meeting 4th of February at USACE South Florida Operations Office (SFOO) in Clewiston, FL.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Jon Lane
Chelsea Bohaty
Jessica Fair
Ian Markovich

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Alyssa Jordan
Brendon Hession
Danielle Kirkland (Phone)
Beacham Furse
Mason Smith
Matt Phillips (Phone)

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

Robert Campbell
Alex Onisko
Francois Laroche
Kaitlyn Quincy

Other Attendees

PJ Myers, AAM
Kurt Ramsey, AAM
Chad Edmund, AAM
Saluador Medira, AVC
Paul Gray, Audubon (Phone)
Jason Cull, Lee County Hyacinth Control District
Colin Lewis, Lee County Hyacinth Control District

Call to Order

Jessica Fair called to order the meeting at 10:04 am. Roll was not taken but a sign in sheet was used.

The Corps of Engineers shall chair, and actively solicit participation in the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force. The Task Force members will represent State of Florida agencies (including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the South Florida Water Management District), State Universities, the Corps of Engineers, and other Federal agencies. The Task Force will serve in an advisory capacity, providing multi-disciplinary technical and scientific data from which the Corps' aquatic plant management strategy, methodology, and research planning and operational efforts will evolve. The focus of the aquatic plant effort will be to benefit the overall ecological health of Lake Okeechobee.

Interagency Flight Report

There was no update from the December flight numbers since the January flight has been grounded by President Trump visiting the West Palm area. The February flight had been scheduled for after the meeting.

FWC

Same treatments in Monkey Box, Chancey Bay, and the southern end. There will be a retreatment of Eagle Bay. Mechanical harvesting in Harney Pond, close to 20 loads so far. 8 loads the first day, 4 the two following days, and now they have two boats working. The polygon goes north from Harney Pond for about a mile. Hopeful to get Dyess Ditch as a possible disposal site.

Mason Smith (new to the meeting) gave an update and introduction to the FWC project to make a Lake Management plan for Okeechobee. The process is set to kick off later this month with public listening session/ meetings in Okeechobee, West Palm Beach, and Clewiston. All meeting will be from 6-8 pm on the 2/18, 2/20, and 2/26 respectfully. The idea behind the plan is to take a bigger approach to lake management and help guide managers in to the future with stakeholder and partner input. It projected to be a 2 year time line. Tactics to help this happen will be public meetings, learn from other plans, stakeholder workshops, interviews of

businesses and partner organizations, develop human dimension surveys next fall to get snow bird point of view as well, and focus group to give feedback on a draft plan. Finished product should be around the end of 2021.

Will be charge of burning in northern marsh. SFWMD is in charge of Western and potentially Southern marsh burning projects. FWC is in the process of buying a new torch. Finish fire line around snail kit treatment area around Indian Prairie. IP is the hopeful first burn site where chemical treatments has occurred as well as the inner marsh. Kings Bar was sprayed and will be burned as well. More areas to come depending on weather. AHRES group did a volunteer pondweed planting out in West Wall from Clewiston. Planted 350 springs. Ramen and a couple of guides were present. They're looking for more volunteers and support for another planting. Low water projects are on hold due to lake level. Work is being done on Core island reshaping project for planting. It has very steep sides, something they learned since the formation of other islands in the lake. There is a berm forming in the marsh there so working on ideas on how to remove or destroy the newly forming berm from hurricane action and high water.

SFWMD

Alex from SFWMD asked about the status of *Luziola* treatment on the lake. Still haven't gotten permission to treat the infestation from higher ups and local biologist have noticed some *Luziola* in other parts of the northern marsh. Hoping to get permission soon to treat it. A comment was made that a distinction between floating plants and other highly invasive plants needs to be made so that things like this don't occur and able to spread rapidly. Justin will be bossing burns on Lake O for the SFWMD. He is working on getting permits for burning some of the higher prairies. Waiting on proper weather conditions. Alex is still accepting Melaleuca points in the marsh. Alex is also looking for Brazilian pepper in the marsh, please send points or shape files. Getting ready for the Okeechobee gourde surveys in April, mostly in the south end between Rita and Pelican Bay.

USACE

Jon Lane spoke about the position analysis report for water managers. It comes out about once a month. Rainfall has been low overall but about average, for the next month it projected to be a little more rain. Next six month would be above average rainfall predictions. We could get down to 12' in June, which is lower than normal

but projected to be problematic. Snail kit nesting has seen a decline on the lake but hopeful to come back with continued habitat improvement. There has been noticed two peaks of nesting, one in spring and one in fall. A lot of nest were destroyed by Hurricane Irma.

Jessica “Skippy” Fair with Robert Campbell brought up the idea of having designated disposal sites through a multi-agency agreement. DEP is very specific on who can use the islands. Issues with traditional harvesters where talked about with regards to access, loss of beneficial, vegetation, and disposal. Representatives from participating agencies will hopefully work in conjunction to discern potential disposal sites around the lake and in different zones of the lake before the next meeting. Hopeful to have set disposal sites within a mile from a harvesting location. Email looking for sites was sent out to the list serve, looking for potential sites.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:03 pm. The date for the next interagency meeting will be announced at a later date.

Attachments

Agenda

Flight reports

Lake Management Plan – Mason Smith (FWC)