

**Lake Okeechobee
Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force
Meeting Proceedings**

The following individuals attended the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force meeting via Webex on March 23rd 2021.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Jessica Fair
Jon Lane
Chelsea Bohaty
Josh Bauer
Ian Markovich
Tyler Green

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Alyssa Jordon
Tyler Beck
Danielle Kirkland
Brendon Hession
Beacham Furse
Mason Smith

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

Kaitlyn Quincy
Francois Laroche
Alex Onisko

Lee County Hyacinth Control District (LCHCD)

Colin Lewis
Jason Cull
Lee Martin

Other Attendees

Paul Gray (Audubon)
Scott Jackson (Syngenta)
James Boggs (Helena)
Keith Mangus (AAM)
Ramon Iglesias (Hendry County Commissioner)
Vicki Garcia (USFWS)
Ben Sperry (UF)

Call to order

Jessica Fair called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

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 multidisciplinary 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.

Scientific Discussion

Topic of discussion was on the use of the selective herbicide ProcellaCOR during the winter months. FWC, SFWMD, and USACE were seeing incomplete treatments on water hyacinth after being treated with ProcellaCOR during the colder months this past winter. They got together and decided to postpone the use of ProcellaCOR until the weather started to warm up. Observations included hyacinth growing out of treatments and also an increase in daughter plants. Both FWC and USACE biologists think the frost was a major contributor in the efficacy of the treatment. Jessica Fair showed examples of areas on the lake that she was monitoring including an area in pelican bay and Cochran's pass. Both areas show hyacinth treated in January and monitored in January, February and March. The hyacinth browns slightly but starts to grow out of treatment. It was also observed that the "top" layer of hyacinth seemed to have died but the underneath layer including the root mass is what survived and produced daughter plants. Danielle (FWC) Discussed that they've asked UF to help study these affects but with the weather already warming up it could make it more difficult to do other study right away. Kaitlyn (SFWMD) also noticed this issue was occurring in lake Jackson. Currently, FWC USACE and SFWMD are not sure exactly when they will start reusing ProcellaCOR in their management toolbox but it will depend on the weather warming up.

Interagency Flight Report

Brendon (FWC) gave the run down on the interagency flight reports over the past couple months. In January we were seeing about 491 acres on the lake followed by February with 387 acres an this month with a slight increase to 591 acres. For the last 3-4 months most of the acreage has been centered around zone 4 and the western marsh shoreline, and Indian prairie canal. The Indian prairie canal area is out of a treatment zone and is waiting for a harvesting project to start. This area has filled up quickly and is covering large areas of Vallisneria.

FWC (IPM)

Brendon gave the update for FWC IPM. They have treated approx. 372 acres on the lake in the last few months. AAM is currently working south of Indian prairie canal. Fishing tournaments kept contractors off the lake for a week but are now back. AVC is working with ARHS completing torpedo treatments in the marsh. In the next couple months they will also be working on luziola and scleria treatments. Brendon also gave an update on the status of azolla pinnata around the lake. The last time this species was treated was back in 2018-2019 and 340 acres were

treated between 2017-2019. Currently pinnata can be found in a couple locations including a section in Indian prairie and bird island. This species is currently an EDRR species. 2.5 acres was found in an area just outside of the Indian prairie canal and was treated. Bird island is currently in a spray moratorium and is under a research project for stakeholders. The azolla here is mixed in with hyacinth mats. The fear is that since this area is under a moratorium, this EDRR species cannot be controlled. Tyler Beck (FWC) wanted to know what herbicides are used to treat azolla. Brendon mentioned they've used Flumi but knows diquat can be used as well. He mentioned since this species is usually found intermixed with hyacinth, we may already be controlling it with being under maintenance control treating floating plants.

FWC (ARHS)

Alyssa Jordon gave ARHS update. Torpedo grass treatment is being completed in the northwest marsh. The past two years, ARHS has been completing broad cast treatment in this location. This year they will be completing spot treatments. This treatment should be completed within the next couple weeks. She mentioned that a lot of birds are using the areas once it was opened up and they hope to continue to be able to manage this area with this success.

Alyssa presented on Prescribed Fire and Herbicide – How and When Each Are Used. This presentation was to discuss why we use both forms of treatment on the lake and how we use them together. (Please refer to PowerPoint pdf.)

There is an upcoming burn April 2021 just south of the pierce canal that will be about 218 acres. There are snail kites nesting in the area but are currently not nesting in the burn unit. FWC is working closely with USFWS to monitor the nests. The burn will only take place if they are sure no negative impacts will come to the snail kite nests in the area. This may be the only burn that can take place this year because of the high-water levels but there is funding available if conditions improve.

FWC (Fisheries)

Mason Smith gave an update on the Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Management Plan for Lake Okeechobee. (Please see PowerPoint pdf.) So far, the management plan is about midway. Stakeholder input workshops were completed July- August 2020 and included 8 workshops with 39 individuals from various groups. Online surveys were also offered, and those surveys included things such as “How would you rate your satisfaction with the following current condition of lake Okeechobee, FWC’s current management of Lake Okeechobee.” Focus group meetings are planned for June- July 2021. These meetings will have between 5-12 individual stakeholders per meetings and will be able to look over and make suggestions on the management plan draft 1. Paul Gray is concerned about “how we use public opinion on developing a management plan”. He suggested getting these plans peer reviewed by an outside independent group of scientists to make sure the plans are correct and are scientifically based. Mason Smith agreed that was a great idea and thinks when the drafts go out to have them

reviewed on a scientific basis. Jessica also agreed with Paul about the scientific review. She also wondered how the stakeholders were being chosen for the review and focus groups. Mason actually said its hard to get many people to join. They are going to advertise the focus groups heavily, but attendance is surprisingly low. They will have a variety of people participating especially people that have long term use of the lake.

FWC (Snail Kite)

Tyler Beck discussed the current snail kite status on the lake. (please see PowerPoint) This year is close to 2018 levels and is looking to be the second highest nesting year on the lake. Kites are nesting wide spread throughout the Kissimmee chain, Istokpoga, St. Johns basin, and throughout lake Okeechobee. 2016 and 2018 are the best years but nests came late in the season. These nests mostly occurred in Moonshine bay. This year there's not a lot of activity in moonshine bay currently, they are spread out. They are hoping the kites will start nesting near the recently burned area in moonshine. There's a lot more nesting in the northern section of the lake including Kings bar, and Chancy bay then historically. The first nest this year was found in Kings bar. There's also nests found in Mctush cut and steamboat marsh. In the south western section of the lake there are nests found near Clewiston and up towards observation island. Vicky (USFWS) wanted Tyler touch on why Snail kites are nesting more on the lake this year than previous years. Kites did not nest on the lake in the last two years and lake levels were also low. Higher water levels are occurring in areas where snail kites like to nest. He also mentioned that low water levels are also extremely important for burning and opening habitat. He mentioned that kites need a variety of hydrologic conditions.

USACE

Skippy gave the update on USACE projects going on around the lake. USACE has been working with FWC and they have officially obtained and hooked up spray trackers on their treatment boats. Since the last interagency meeting in January USACE has completed three treatment areas including the south end treating 306.25 acres, west wall treating 170.25 acres and East wall. Currently acreage from the east wall treatment have not been finalized. USACE is now moving crews back to the south end of the lake between pelican bay and Rita island for a re treatment and to maintain maintenance control. Water levels are dropping, and hyacinth pups are starting to show up in many areas in the south end, but high concentrations are developing around Kreamer island near boy scout cut.

Public Comment

There was no public comment during the meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30am

