

Lake Okeechobee
Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force
Meeting Proceedings

The following individuals attended the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force meeting 10 Oct 2018 at the USACE South Florida Operations Office Clewiston, Fl.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Jon Morton

Jon Lane

Chelsea Bohaty

Tyler Green

Jessica Fair

Gary Russ

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Susanna Toledo

Mariah McInnis

Steven Gornak

Alyssa Jordan

Tyler Beck

Dan Roberts

Don Fox

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

Francois Laroche

Steve Smith

Alex Onisko

Chuck Hanlon

Other Attendees

Scott Jackson, Syngenta

Keith Mangus, Applied Aquatic Management

Kurt Ramsey, Applied Aquatic Management

Linda Defee, Aquatic Vegetation Control

Elroy Timmer, Aquatic Vegetation Control

Jason Cull, Lee County Hyacinth Control District

Kevin Watts, Lee County Hyacinth Control District

Mary Ann Martin, Roland Martin Marina
Ramon Iglesias, Roland Martin Marina
Phillip Roland, City Commissionaire

Call to Order

Jon Morton called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Roll Call was taken. He mentioned the public comment period and invited the public to stay through the entire meeting and that there would be time to talk after the meeting individually. He mentioned that FWC and SFWMD have a couple projects directly related to habitat enhancement on the lake that will be discussed throughout the meeting. He invited the members of the public to stay and listen to those project proposals. Public comment period was opened.

Public Comment Period

Philip Roland is a city commissioner in Clewiston. He mentioned that he had been reading about the guy in Kissimmee, FL who talked about FWC and spraying and what it entails saying "everyone knows I'm against spraying. I've seen the lake when it had no spraying. I've watched and watched and we spray more and more, and I guess that's the control that you all want." "The fisherman don't want that," he said, "I do realize things will stock up but I realize also could unstock it." He also mentioned that he does not think people think it's possible to push the vegetation out. He talked about how healthy the lake was when he was a kid and also when he was 30 years old it was still healthy. He mentioned when we lost the pepper grass the lake turned bad. He wants to work on spraying. He talks about the biggest STA and how we need to manage it better. He understands that Irma brought a lot of the turbidity up. Expresses he is worried about the further of the lake and does not want it to be killed. Jon Morton mentioned we could talk to him after about those issues. Mary Ann Martin would like to see more burning around the lake and the berms be taken down. She says we need to be more active in the management of the lake. She discusses how people are not coming to the lake because of "fake news." She discusses how we are having "wonderful results from the tournaments." She also would like to lower water level limits. "We've got to get these grasses back," she said. Finally she discusses how a lot of people including herself depend on the lake for her lively hood and the lakes health influences that. Jon Morton tells her that some of the projects later in the meeting will address some of her issues. Citizen talks about what some commercial organizations are doing about the access phosphorous. He hands out a packet. He worked with the United States agriculture. He talked about how bacteria could work on lowering phosphorus and muck projection. "They reduce nitrogen phosphorus and organic sediment." He talks about the products they use. He talks about the food chain and how bacteria eats the phosphorous. He talks about a study performed for SFWMD started in 2016. Discusses how he uses a biozyme to reduce the muck and sediment. He discusses the cost of copper vs bio enzyme. He believes using a bio enzyme technique could be used on Lake Okeechobee. "Anybody can use it," he said, "it's used on almost every major golf course and reduces muck to sand." He continues to explain his product and talks about the graphs and photographs contained in the packet. Susanna Toledo mentioned she is trying to get funding to do a test plot. Citizen says he does not think it's an ideal situation because he likes

closed systems. "I like contained lakes, but it may be affective?" Mary Ann Martin wanted to know how it was applied and if it could work on the lake. He said you can put an incubator on a barge and disperse it. They discuss how it could be used on the lake. Jon Morton then closes the public comment

Status report on Program Activities FWC

Mariah McInnis reported that there was a significant jump in invasive aquatic vegetation approx. 1000 plus acres from last month to this month. She discusses it could be the hot weather. She has around 19-20 boats on the lake treating. She is thinking of looking into an aerial treatment since water fowl season is coming up Nov 15th. She discusses the last meeting we had was April 25th and since then have treated 7368 acres of floating plants. She is constantly treating upper Taylor creek. Susanna Toledo mentions this jump in vegetation is common around this time but that this year its worse because they were not able to do an aerial treatment because of the algae bloom. Jon Morton mentioned we will be getting back on a regular schedule for having these task force meetings. Mariah comments that the main important area for waterfowl season includes fish-eating bay, monkey box, and tin house cove. She says there is a conflict with some of these areas being treated because as waterfowl season ends, and bass tournament season begins. Susanna Toledo mentions there is a greater percentage of lettuce than water hyacinth. There was a continued discussion on what areas water fowl hunters were concerned about. Mariah mentions pelican bay was not an area they are interested in and that the islands were not mentioned at all in a previous meeting with FWC and the waterfowl organization.

USACE

Jon Lane introduces the new employees for USACE. Jon Morton talks about the terrestrial work being done around the base of the HHD, Harney pound and Indian prairie for the last 25 months. He mentions the start was at Taylor creek working clockwise around the HHD and are now at buck head canal. The crews will be at the Kissimmee River soon. Then there will be additional funding needed from Kissimmee through Eagle bay to Taylor creek. 2800 acres has been covered for treatments so far. Melaleuca and cogon grasses have been seen on the north end just south of Indian prairie. For terrestrial work, 80% has been on Brazilian pepper, and also they have treated lead tree, Australian pine, Indian rosewood, wild sugar cane, etc.

FWC

Copies of the proposals were handed out. Dan Roberts begins talking about the first out of three projects with FWC. The Northwest-marsh treatment area will be a berm shred project. The area is between Fox Island and ten house cove. Hurricane Irma uprooted vegetation and relocated it next to a historical berm. The berm cut off water flow to the adjacent marsh area. They propose to shred 70 acres of the berm. This will be an experimental project to see which shredding techniques and design will be most beneficial to break up the new berm area to allow flow to the back marsh. The main goal of this study is to shred the berm area so new native vegetation can come in and regrow while also exploring different shredding techniques. Two mechanical shredders will be used. Two flow ways will be cut out to see if wind and wave action will disburse it to prevent a dike. The shredding will occur twice. This is important to get rid of some

of the organic material from the bottom. Surveys will be conducted before and after. Sediment depths will be taken before and after shredding occurs. This project will hopefully be utilized in other areas to increase flow and decrease berm build up before this berm area gets too high.

Civilian- "Does this machine pick up the floating islands?" He was concerned that there is a lot of wildlife and native plants that utilizes these areas. He mentioned that during the winter time it might not be as bad for wildlife. He was also concerned about the use of chemicals. Dan Roberts replied that for this project there will not be any chemicals used. He continued to explain that this berm area for this project is not a solid structure yet. Steve Gornak mentions "the objective here is to remove a portion of this area before it creates a more permanent berm that's going to impound water in the marsh, which is going to change the hydrologic conditions of the marsh, which will change everything back in there." Steve continues to explain that if we don't do something to this area we will more than likely get the same outcome that happened in the 1990's, where a 14,000 acre marsh was blocked off from a berm that developed. "This is an experimental trial; to see if we can chop it up fine enough to allow wind and wave energy to get in there and move this stuff around." Civilian continues to discuss that he's seen the lake when it was at its healthiest but was concerned that when we started spraying it messed up the lake. Alyssa Jordon mentions that some of this berm area is underwater and explains that there will be less netting on these because of the amount of water on the berm. "Some of the berm will be inundated when we shred" The civilian again brings up the source of the problem is spraying. Alyssa Jordon replies "these areas were not formed by spraying." She continues to explain that Irma and high waters caused the buildup and since we have higher water levels with the levee around the lake, the area cannot oxidize and it begins to build up. Steve explains "it doesn't just affect the interior marsh through the hydrological conditions in the interior marsh but it also can affect what happens in front of that berm through scouring." Steven continues to explain the benefits of this project "eel grass is the first plant that comes back" Civilian is still concerned about the wildlife in the berm. Alyssa Jordon- "there is an overall benefit" The civilian asked about what they will do with the material once it goes on the barge FWC replies "it won't be on a barge" Steven continues to explain that wave and wind energy will be the driving force to remove the material. They explain that permits are not accessible to create islands. "Permitting for that cannot be done right now." Jon Lane asked if there can be any mitigation before the shredding process. FWC explains that the area is very inaccessible and even mapping was difficult. They also mentioned that the alligators actually nest on the other side of the berm so they should not be affected as much.

Dan Roberts begins to explain the second project which will occur on the south end, just north of Tori Island south of Kramer Island at the Burn out bridge area. The area is 134 acres and is dominated by cattail and bull rush. "60-70% cattail." The objective is to open the area to allow more flow to the back marsh area. "It is going to be a scattered flow way." "This is a habitat project and a flow way project." The goal is to help reestablish spike rush, pepper grass, coontail and some other submersed aquatics. "This is a four part project," he said. The first part starts on Monday and Tuesday (October 15th-16th). An Aerial treatment will be performed using Clearcast (imazamox) @ 32oz per acre with a 20 gallon per acre spray rate. Clearcast is real selective to the cattail. The first part of the project will take about 3 months for the cattail to brown out. The

second part of the project is to get a burn permit for the area. A vegetation survey will then be conducted. Spot treatments will be used after mainly for willows. A shredder will then be used on the residual cattail to increase flow movement. “And leave the bulrush alone”. There will be monthly monitoring. “We hope within 18 months native vegetation will move in there.” If after 18 months there is little movement of native vegetation moving in, a planting effort will begin. “To facilitate the re-colonization in the area.”

Alyssa Jordon begins talking about the last FWC proposed project, Dyess Ditch Marsh flow-way. “The project was started due to stake holders; anglers looking to open up a few areas that they felt could use improvement.” The project area is 238 acres. Two entrances (200ft wide each) open up to open water. The project will treat primarily cattails. They are hoping new species will start growing in this area including eel grass, and spike rush. “This area is just cattail.” They will first treat with clearcast, which is very selective to cattail. This project will increase the “edge effect” to anglers so they can fish along the edges. “Sail kites will also have areas they can nest.” In this area there is not much open water so this project will also benefit duck hunters. The stake holders felt more comfortable treating the cattail in the area than the lilies. 3 months after treatment, if permitting allows, the area will be burned. “So the cattail that we treated will not drop to the bottom.” Environmental surveys will be conducted including before and after photographs, DO, pH, nutrient abundance and turbidity. Civilian was concerned about the wildlife. Alyssa responded-“This is a slow acting herbicide so they will have time to move and with the fire they will have time to move as well.” The cattail in this area is so thick that it restricts habitat to animals. A civilian question about using spray smart was directed to Alyssa. She explained that cattail is different than floating aquatic plants and it’s important to perform this project now in the fall so in the winter the water levels will be lower when they burn. “You get a more complete burn.” A civilian asked about a project below burn out bridge and asked if that area was still clogged up. Mariah replied that there hasn’t been a particular project directed towards that area but they spray there to open up the vegetation. “We opened up any trails that were blocked off by any vegetation.” Steve Gornak mentions that the burn out bridge project is to reconnect south bay to pelican bay. Civilian also asked if 9 mile by west wall was open. Mariah and Susanna assured him that it was sprayed and it was falling out but they might need to go and spray again. FWC talks to the public and mentions that if there are particular areas that need more flow to go to them and let them know. Steve Gornak asked everyone if they were ok to move forward with the projects and if any changes needed to be made. Projects were approved. Additional questions and/or comments can be forwarded to:

Steve Gornak

steven.gornak@MyFWC.com

Alyssa Jordon

Alyssa.Jordan@MyFWC.com

Dan Roberts

jonathon.roberts@MyFWC.com

SFWMD

Alex Onisko presented their proposed projects with invasive management projects. The first project is on Observation Island. The treatment is a maintenance treatment to continue to treat the island for invasive species including Cogan grass, turkey berry, Brazilian pepper, lantana, ect. Brazilian pepper was the most sprayed invasive. The project is to be determined when it will start. The next project talks about the melaleuca control around the lake in the last year. She asks everyone to send location points if anyone finds melaleuca around the lake. 2,500 acres were treated 2017-2018. Dyess ditch was around 70% infested with melaleuca. The second project is about the endangered species, Okeechobee gourd. She described how to identify them and where they could grow. She asks that if any one finds the gourds to please take location points and contact her. Additional questions and/ or comments can be forward to:

Alex Onisko

aonisko@sfwmd.gov

New/Old Business

Tyler Beck Gave an update on the Snail Kit nesting. “The past year turned out to be a pretty good nesting year.” Tyler mentioned there were areas that contained nest that have not had nest in a long time including steamboat marsh. The north end of the lake had very little nests. This year has been the second most successful nesting year right behind 2016. “The majority of the nest were in the moonshine bay area” Tyler mentioned they would like to do a similar project like the one they did in moonshine bay. The areas talked about included southeast of moonshine bay or near S129. Treatment areas will be mapped out later this month.

Lake Okeechobee Burn Team

Steve Gornak would like to reconvene the burn team to try to get more burning on the lake. 9-10 areas have been identified as potential burn areas approx. 20,000 acres. There was grant from the forestry to do a burn on the lake. Tyler Beck asked for a list of priority areas that they would like to burn at the next interagency meeting. FWC will be setting up the burn team meeting. Steve asked the public to address areas they are interested in burning.

*** The next interagency **flight** is scheduled for November 7th

** The next interagency **meeting** will be scheduled in the near future

- Jon Morton recognized Mike Bodle as a valued member, botanist and resource for the interagency task force group and he will be greatly missed.

Adjournment

Jon Morton adjourned the Task Force meeting at 12:30 pm.

