

Lake Okeechobee
Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force
Meeting Proceedings

The following individuals attended the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force meeting 5th of December 2019 at the Lee County Hyacinth Control District Office, Lehigh Acres, FL.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Jon Lane
Chelsea Bohaty
Jessica Fair
Ian Markovich
Brigida Sanchez

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Alyssa Jordan
Brendon Hession
Daniela Alviz
Danielle Kirkland
Beacham Furse
Dan Roberts (Phone)

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

Robert Campbell
Darrel Bagiotti
Alex Onisko
Francois Laroche

Other Attendees

Jason Cull, Lee County Hyacinth Control District
Colin Lewis, Lee County Hyacinth Control District
Ernesto Lasso de la Vega, Lee County Hyacinth Control District
Kevin Watts, Lee County Hyacinth Control District
David Hoel, Lee County Hyacinth Control District
Linda Defee, AVC
James Boggs, Helena
Keith Mangus, AAM
Jerry Renney, AAM
PJ Myers, AAM
James Leary, University of Florida (Phone)
Paul Gray, Audubon (Phone)

Call to Order

Jessica Fair called to order the meeting at 10:08 am. Roll call was taken.

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

Brendon Hession from FWC gave the interagency flight report update. The Monkey Box area split between Zone 4 & 5 has the majority of the vegetation in it. Cold weather maybe be helping, with keeping the same average of vegetation as last month's numbers. Floating vegetation on the lake has gone from 400 acres in July to 3400 acres as of November/December.

LCHCD

Collin Lewis from LCHCD presented about the application of UAV's for surveying, mapping, and treating difficult to access areas in their system. They're currently working through FAA regulations to get exemptions to spray out pesticides from the UAV's. They can also use the drone for water sample collection. Kevin Watts mentioned that they have a very proactive approach towards public opinion when it comes to using pesticides and application processes. This was the same presentation that was given at FAPMS a few months back. They had the asset present for a demo after the meeting had adjourned. A discussion was brought up about where the industry is at for use of such technology and public opinion. It was stated that there would have to be language change on labels and research would have to be done before we got to a point where this would be a possible application method.

Ernesto Lasso de la Vega from LCHCD spoke about their water quality collection process and issues they deal with. They're reasonably for the Caloosahatchee from the Franklin lock to Moore Haven. They look for nitrogen, phosphorus, and chlorophylls monthly. Readings can be found on the water atlas website. There is a seasonality affect with respect to their readings of chlorophylls. When you have high flow of discharges there is very little chlorophylls. Lower water flows is a direct cause for higher algae production and presence in the system. Needs the flushing of the system so there isn't residence building up at place such as the Franklin lock. Most nutrients loading for this system is from Moore Haven to Labelle.

FWC

1100 acres treated since October. FWC didn't receive a bid for their harvesting project in the Monkey Box area. Lower lake levels will make it difficult to get harvesters into the area. They're weighing their options now on whether to try that again or look elsewhere for other beneficial or potential sites, such as tin House Cove or behind Kings Bar. Kings Bar has deeper waters about 3-3.5 feet deep right now and Tin House Cove would be more about stakeholders wants/needs, requesting they used harvester to control invasive in the area that has delicate SAV present.

Alyssa Jordan spoke about prepping for low water projects if the lake levels reach the threshold. Planning a volunteer-help planting of pondweed near Clewiston, plants will be taken from a donor site nearby.

Dan Roberts spoke about the snail kite herbicide project. 400 acres were treated for the snail kite research project and another 400 acres on Kings Bar were treated and hopefully will be able to burn this mid to late February. First burn meeting was held 12/4 for Lake O, which highlighted some priority areas for treatment. Looking towards January or February for the start of burning. FWC will take lead burn projects from Harney Pond to the Northeast and the SFWMD will focus on the Southwest to West marsh and possibly focusing on the islands. There will be further meetings to discuss this process. Justin Nolte (SFWMD) and Dan Roberts (FWC) are the POC for all burning projects on the lake.

SFWMD

Darrel Bagiotti spoke about the SAV numbers for the lake, 2018 had approximately 5200 and in 2019 there was approximately 28,000 acres, mostly is from the presence of *Chara sp.* in the south and southwest margins of the lake right around Clewiston and *Vallisneria* is the most common vascular SAV found, however *Hydrilla* was also noted in the same area of mixed in vegetation.

Not pertaining to Lake O but Darrel Bagiotti gave a quick update about their harvesting project on Lake Kissimmee. Project was started Oct 22 and till the end of November the crew had 21 days, total cost of \$105,000 and they covered 110 acres (not necessarily what they harvested). They were targeting floating vegetation but it was mixed in with a lot of *Nuphar sp.*, majority of the areas had hyacinth density of 80-90%. This site had close disposal (spoil islands) unlike what we having to deal with on Lake Okeechobee.

Alex Onisko spoke about the *Luziola subintegra* issue on the lake. In the past this species had been kept at management levels and has only spread to one location in Miami Dade and one area along the St. Johns River and is still considered to be in the early detection and rapid response stage. Recently there has been an explosion of *Luziola* on the lake somewhere above 1000 acres and near areas such as Indian Prairie, Chancey Bay, and the south end of the lake. The SFWMD has spent a great deal of resources to keep that plant in check in the past and do not want to see that go to waste and the species to spread. FWC mentioned that there were spike rush, floating

plants and natives mixed within the *Luziola. Melaleuca* treatments will be on hold due to the low lake levels that restrict access. There are a few large trees scattered throughout the lake and a few small patches that need attention. Also mentioned that in the spring time SFWMD will start up their Okeechobee Gourd surveys again.

USACE

Jon Lane presented a graph that goes back to '87 showing every aerial flight since then and the amount of vegetation on the lake. 2015 was another high year but no one seemed to know why the lake got to 4000 acres at this time of year. Beacham (FWC) brought up that 3500 acres in the fall months is abnormal and unprecedented. 2009 had similar number in Sept-Nov but several aerial applications were done to knock that back. More seed being produced now than most of the time before.

Jon Lane then spoke about the Lake Okeechobee periodic scientific review, which represented projections for future lake levels based off today's levels. 6 months out NOAA is predicting average rainfall. The lake is at the lowest it's been in the last ten years for right now. Projected to get potentially as low as 11'.

Jessica Fair spoke about and presented rough data from the USACE harvesting project out on Lake O. They were using shallow water harvesters. In the effective time (11hrs) they had worked that week (3 days) they were able to harvest 22% of an acre and in that area harvested the by catch was 15 mosquito fish, 5 killifish, 2 frogs, 10 snails, and 6 crawfish.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:11pm. The date for the next interagency meeting will be announced at a later date.

Attachments

Agenda

Flight reports

Presentation by Ernesto Lasso de la Vega; Water collection along Caloosahatchee

Presentation by Colin Lewis; Drone usage

Presentation by Jessica Fair; Harvesting in Monkey Box

Presentation by Jon Lane; Floating vegetation on Lake O based on flights since '87