

Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force Meeting Proceedings

The following individuals attended the Lake Okeechobee Aquatic Plant Management Interagency Task Force meeting on Wednesday, 20 August 2014 at the USACE South Florida Operations Office; Clewiston, FL.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

David Lattuca

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Dave Eggeman

Tyler Beck

Corey Lee

Alyssa Jordan

Susanna Toledo (Phone)

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

Mike Bodle

Francois Laroche

Other Attendees

Kurt Ramsey, AAM

Jerry Renney, AAM

Lyn Gettys, UF

Carl Dellatorre, UF

Phillip Roland, Mayor of Clewiston

Mary Ann Martin, Roland Martin's Marina

Raymond Iglesias, Roland Martin's Marina

Paul Grey, Audubon Florida (Phone)

1. Public Comment Period

Raymond Iglesias requested an update on the boat trail widening/improvement operation on Lake Okeechobee. Mike Bodle informed the group that after the most recent reconnaissance flight and the Task Force approved recommendations for additional boat trail improvement work, the task should be completed by the end of August, 2014. Bodle spoke on behalf of the delays, and concluded that there are enough funds in SFWMD budget to finish the remaining boat trail work. Bodle also stated that when the remaining trails are completed, concurrently, additional "touch up" work may be conducted on the previously treated trails. Mary Ann Martin questioned how long the boat trail improvement/widening would last. Mike Bodle explained that with his previous experiences with boat trail enhancement projects on Lake Okeechobee, the improvements should last years.

Mary Ann Martin spoke to the group about approaching tourism/recreation season on Lake Okeechobee, and the swell in anticipated public use. She confirmed that there is several fishing

tournaments lined up, and she expects an eventful season because large amounts of people are inquiring about tourism opportunities on Lake Okeechobee.

Raymond Inglesias wanted clarification on which agency is overseeing the treatment operations of invasive species on Lake Okeechobee, because of previous discussions of treating invasive plants in the Industrial Canal in Clewiston. Dave Eggeman stated that FWC could fund the treatment of invasive plants in the Industrial Canal, but access to the canal is the greatest challenge.

Mary Ann Martin asked how FWC's funding for removal of invasive species on Lake Okeechobee is generated. Dave Eggeman stated that the majority of FWC's capital for invasive species management is put into the agencies trust fund through Florida's Documentary Stamp Tax. "Doc Stamps" also help fund FWC's aquatic habitat restoration efforts on Lake Okeechobee. This discussion led into Mayor Roland asking if restoration efforts have taking place on the south end of Lake Okeechobee. Dave Eggeman informed Mayor Roland that the most previous restoration efforts which took place on the southern portion of Lake Okeechobee occurred during the 2007 drought. Mike Bodle added that improvements have been accomplished with the Town of Belle Glade to develop access for the Torrey Island road, in order to improve recreational opportunities, and aquatic plant management practices to increase fishing opportunities around Torrey Island's piers. Bodle also mentioned SFWMD's habitat improvement management with the continuation of treating monotypic parcels of cattail (*Typha* sp.) near the southern islands of Lake Okeechobee (Attachment #1). Alyssa Jordan informed the group of future habitat improvement & tree planting work that FWC will conduct in conjunction with the dredging of Old Moore Haven Canal. Mary Ann Martin asked the group about controlled burning on Lake Okeechobee, as a practice of habitat improvement. Mike Bodle discussed the draft burn plan for the Lake, and gave several reasons why controlled burning is not currently scheduled.

Mayor Roland questioned the group about who owns the boat ramp basin area in Clewiston. The group was unsure at the current time, but agreed to help find out the correct ownership. Mayor Roland also had questions/concerns regarding the operations of the Clewiston Lock. David Lattuca agreed to pass on his concern to the Chief of Operations at the USACE South Florida Operations Office.

2. Applied Aquatic Management (AAM) Status Report

Dave Eggeman reported that 12-15 applicators have treated approximately 796 acres of target plants since the last interagency meeting (16 July 2014) on Lake Okeechobee. 29 acres of Torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*) were treated on Lake Okeechobee. There was also 191 acres of floating invasive plants treated on Lake Hicpochee.

3. Aerial Survey Report of Floating Vegetation

Aerial survey of Lake Okeechobee occurred on 08 July 2014 with flight participants Mike Bodle, Brent Bachelder, Kurt Ramsey, and David Lattuca, observing an average of 750 acres of target plants (increased from 650 on 01 July 2014). The majority of the target plants (126.25 acres, 17%) were located in Ritta Island (Attachment #2). It was agreed between the flight participants

that 75% of the floating plants located from the flight was Water Lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*), compared to Water Hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*).

4. USACE

Current lake level is 14.35 (msl) as of 20 August 2014, as compared to 14.07 (msl) as of 16 July 2014. David Lattuca announced that 5 Aquatic Plant Control survey reports were completed and transferred to FWC's invasive species managers. A joint survey was conducted with Kurt Ramsey (AAM) in the areas of Eagle Bay Island and King' Bar, to help with the management of floating invasive plants with the elimination of "no spray" buffer zones. David Lattuca reminded the group that any Lake Okeechobee projects/ success stories/ publications should be shared with him, so that the Lake Okeechobee aquatic plant management interagency task force website (<http://www.floridainvasives.org/okeechobee/>) can be updated accordingly. David Lattuca reported to the group that the bi-weekly treatment schedule was distributed to the bait shops and marinas that encircle Lake Okeechobee, and overall the public's disposition is encouraging. David Lattuca questioned the group about the potential use of an aerial application to target the larger pockets of Water Lettuce within areas of the marsh, in order to decrease the quantity of invasive plants which are being estimated during the interagency survey flights. The group established that targeting the pockets of invasive plants would be beneficial to the upcoming waterfowl season in the fall. Dave Eggeman agreed that it is worth further discussing, and the group will use the next survey flight to map and record the pockets of invasive species that are located throughout Lake Okeechobee's marsh.

5. FWC

Dave Eggeman reported that 12-15 applicators have treated approximately 796 acres of target plants since the last interagency meeting (16 July 2014) on Lake Okeechobee. 29 acres of torpedograss (*Panicum repens*) were treated on Lake Okeechobee. There was also 191 acres of floating invasive plants treated on Lake Hicpochee.

Alyssa Jordan discussed FWC's completed 2,000 acre aerial herbicide treatment in Lake Okeechobee. 1,500 acres were of torpedograss, and 500 acres were of cattail. Treatment polygons were developed through a combination of aerial and ground based mapping. Some polygons represented on the map were not completely dominated by target species. The table provided target species cover and acreage estimates for those polygons. The objective of the treatment was to improve fish and wildlife habitat through: the reduction of large monotypic stands of invasive torpedograss, maintenance of previous *Phragmites* sp. control areas, and maintenance of FWC organic sediment removal sites (Attachment #3).

Alyssa Jordan discussed FWC's forthcoming tree planting (300+ trees) operation, which will occur on FWC's islands in the northwest marsh priority area of Lake Okeechobee. Also in the spring of 2015, FWC will be conducting a fringe planting of 1800 Cypress (*Cupressaceae* sp.) trees, on Lake Okeechobee for habitat restoration efforts.

Tyler Beck with FWC is the Snail Kite Coordinator for Lake Okeechobee, and he informed the group that Nest "O JUL N64" continues to be the only active nest with an associated activity buffer on Lake Okeechobee.

6. SFWMD

Mike Bodle discussed the interagency flight which occurred on 08 July 2014. Bonnie Wolf-Pelaez from Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services was a passenger along with Mike Bodle, and they conducted a survey of Upper Fisheating Creek. The intention of the survey was to record the impacts of invasive floating vegetation in the draining ditches and other connecting water bodies of Upper Fisheating Creek, and to discuss the possible treatments in that area of operation. The group discussed the possibility of treatments in Upper Fisheating Creek, but agreed that the area is located too far from public access and Lake Okeechobee to warrant a treatment. Mike Bodle and Kurt Ramsey informed the group that invasive floating plant treatments via airboat applicators have been completed in Fisheating Creek. Mike Bodle discussed SFWMD's ongoing *Luziola subintegra* treatments in Fisheating Bay on Lake Okeechobee. Currently, there are two AAM applicator boats controlling *Luziola*. Mike Bodle discussed the 2000 acres of cattail and torpedograss that was treated by an aerial application. He informed the group that there are remaining *Melaleuca quinquenervia* trees that need to be treated within the western marsh of Lake Okeechobee. Mike Bodle described the drafted Lake Okeechobee prescribed burn plan, and informed the group that Steve Smith with the SFWMD is the lead for that agency. Mike Bodle informed the group that in FY15, when SFWMD's budget is restored, habitat and trail improvements will be conducted in the southern portion of Lake Okeechobee. Future SFWMD FY15 work plans will be discussed with the task force. There is an established federal noxious weed that has been established in Henry Creek marsh area (*Saccharum spontaneum*) which will be treated by SFWMD.

7. Other/Old Business

Lynn Gettys, PhD, Assistant Professor of the Aquatic and Wetland Plant Science University of Florida Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center, discussed her continued work with IPM for water hyacinth control. Currently, the testing is in the mesocosm stage.

Lyn Gettys introduced her graduate student, Carl Dellatore, who is conducting research on herbicide applications on various aquatic invasive species.

Lyn Gettys informed the group that the State of Florida has listed four new noxious weeds: *Nymphoides cristata*, *Nymphoides peltata*, *Ardisia crenata*, & *Ligustrum sinense*. These listings will be discussed in the next issue of FAPMS *Aquatics* magazine.

*** Next Interagency **Flight** is currently scheduled for 05 August 2014.

***Next Interagency **Meeting** is not currently scheduled.

Attachment #1



500 acres cattail – Aerial treatment to finish boat trail improvements along West Wall/Moonshine Bay (20 acres) and make more southern habitat/recreation openings (480 acres) in the Bay Bottom Belle Glade to South Bay area.

Attachment #2

Lake Okeechobee Interagency Flight

Date 8/5/2014

Lake Elevation 14.07

Summary of Estimates

<i>Area of Lake</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>SFWMD</i>	<i>AAM</i>	<i>FWC1</i>	<i>USACE</i>
1. Torrey & Kreamer	66.25	9%	65	75	75	50
2. Ritta	126.25	17%	130	100	200	75
3. East Wall - Coot Bay	97.50	13%	75	75	200	40
4. West Wall - Whidden	65.00	9%	65	75	75	45
5. Fisheating Bay	41.25	6%	45	20	75	25
6. Harney - Indian Prairie	25.00	3%	30	25	20	25
7. Indian P. - Kissimmee	37.50	5%	40	25	40	45
8. King's Bar	76.25	10%	80	75	100	50
9. Kissimmee - Taylor Cr.	95.00	13%	30	100	150	100
10. Taylor Cr. - Chancey	120.00	16%	180	50	150	100
TOTALS	750.00	100%	740	620	1085	555

Participants: SFWMD, Mike Bodle
AAM, Kurt Ramsey
FWC1, Brent Bachelder
USACE, David Lattuca

Attachment #3

