

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Myakka River has been a rich, diverse, and important ecosystem since shortly after the subsiding seas exposed peninsular Florida and the Myakka River valley at the end of the Pleistocene Period, approximately 10,000 years ago. The Myakka River and its watershed possess abundant natural resources, which vary from headwaters to river mouth and from river channel to the basin boundaries. The southerly location of the Myakka River within the southwest portion of the State of Florida, the near-subtropical to temperate climate, and the high annual rainfall contribute to the development of a complex association of flora and fauna.

Early man's dependence on vegetation and fish and wildlife resources attracted him to the river, and present-day man continues to be attracted to the river, less for subsistence, but more for recreation and an appreciation for the natural environment.

In the mid-1970's, county planners recognized the river's resource values (e.g., the only river in Sarasota County, freshwater and nutrient transport to Charlotte Harbor, habitat and hydrologic cycle functions) in preparing APOXSEE, Sarasota County's Comprehensive Plan. In addition, previous efforts by groups such as the Myakka River Coalition have brought attention to the Myakka River. An environmental study was conducted on the river system by this group in the late 1970's.

In November, 1978, Congress authorized the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS) to study the Myakka River and determine its potential for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Public meetings or workshops were held locally in January 1979, April 1980, and September 1980 to disseminate information and obtain input from local elected officials, representatives of various governmental agencies, land owners, environmental interests, and other interested citizens. Press releases and study updates were developed and distributed in July 1979 and September 1981. The NPS prepared a Draft Wild and Scenic River Study/Environmental Assessment in September 1983. Based upon comments received by various federal, state, regional and local agencies, quasipublic

agencies, and conservation and private organizations, a Final Wild and Scenic River Study, was prepared in July 1984.

The final study proposed:

- The 12 miles of the Myakka River within the Myakka River State Park be included as a state-administered component of the National Wild and Scenic River System.
- The State of Florida continue its current management practices, protecting the natural and cultural qualities of the designated segment of the Myakka River within the Myakka River State Park.
- Additional segments of the Myakka River be designated as components of the National System if state and local initiatives to provide permanent protection for the river corridor are implemented and subsequent application for designation is made to the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to Section 2(a)(ii) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
- A Myakka River Commission be established to coordinate efforts to conserve the Myakka River area.

In response to local level citizen support, the Florida legislature designated the corridor of land surrounding and beneath a 34-mile segment of the Myakka River between river mile 7.5 (the Sarasota/Charlotte County line) and river mile 41.5 (County Road 780) a Florida Wild and Scenic River in 1985. The Myakka River Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act (see Appendix A) provided for the permanent preservation, management, and administration of the designated segment of the Myakka River by development of a plan to be jointly developed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (Council). The Act also established the Council to provide interagency and intergovernmental coordination in the management of the river. The Council was composed of one representative from the Department of Environmental Regulation (DER), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (FGFWFC), the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Department of Forestry of the Department of Agriculture and Conservation Services, Division of Historical Resources of the Department of State, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC), Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD),

Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC), Manatee County, Sarasota County, Charlotte County, City of Sarasota, City of North Port, agricultural interests, and environmental organizations, as well as any others deemed advisable by the Department.

The Act also authorized the Department to adopt rules and a permitting program to regulate activities within the river area which may have an adverse impact on resource values as adopted by the Council. The plan, as required by the Act, must provide for:

1. Permanent protection and enhancement of the ecological, fish and wildlife, and recreational values within the river area, primary emphasis being given to protecting agricultural, aesthetic, scenic, historic, archaeological, and scientific features.
2. Continuation of land uses and developments on private lands within the river area which are in existence on January 1, 1986.
3. Periodic studies to determine the quantity and mixture of recreation and other public uses that can be permitted without adverse impact on the resource values of the river area.
4. Regulation, control, and distribution of public access where necessary to protect and enhance the resource values of the river area.
5. Consideration of need for basic facilities to absorb user impact on the river area, including necessary toilet or refuse containers, but, if found to be necessary, located to minimize their intrusive impact.
6. Restriction of motorized travel by land vehicle or boat where necessary to protect the resource values in the river area.
7. Agricultural and forestry practices similar in nature to those presently in the river area on January 1, 1986.
8. Resource management practices for the protection, conservation, rehabilitation, or enhancement of river area resource values.
9. Monitoring of existing water quality.
10. Continuance of existing drainage and water management practices, unless such existing practices will adversely affect, degrade, or diminish existing water quality or existing resource values in the river area, and allowance of new water resource management

practices that will not have an adverse impact on resource values in the river area.

11. Review and regulation of all activities conducted or proposed to be conducted within the river area that will or may have an adverse impact on any of the resource values in the river area as provided in this Act.

The Act also provides that the management plan may include any other provisions deemed necessary or advisable by DNR for the permanent protection of the river.

1.2 PLANNING AUTHORITY

The authority to develop a plan for the management, administration, and protection of the designated segment of the Myakka River as a Florida Wild and Scenic River was established under Section 258.501, Florida Statutes, the Myakka River Wild and Scenic Designation and Preservation Act. Development of the plan included public meetings and participation by numerous local, regional, and state agencies and private organizations, particularly the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council. Three plan presentation and public comment meetings were held for landowners, environmental groups, civic organizations, elected officials and their staffs, and other interested parties on September 8, 9, and 11, 1989, respectively. Two general public meetings were also held on September 11 and 12, 1989, to provide further opportunity for the public to comment and give input to DNR and the Council on the draft management plan. Four of the meetings were held during other-than-normal working hours. The comments provided by the public to DNR and the Council were summarized in the form of a written report and submitted for consideration by the Council and DNR in developing a final draft management plan. The final draft plan was submitted for consideration and approval in a public hearing by the Governor and Cabinet sitting as the Executive Board of DNR.

1.3 PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The plan was developed jointly by DNR, Division of Recreation and Parks (Division), and the Council, with assistance from a consultant contracted with DNR, Hunter Services, Inc. The consultants conducted a thorough data collection effort, including a computerized literature search, field

investigations, interviews, and a recreational use survey. Resource values were identified by the Council and included specific economic, scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or ecological features. These resource values were then assigned to work groups, comprised of council members and appropriate resource value experts from the public and private sectors. Issues, problems, and priority concerns were identified by work groups for each resource value. Subsequently, guiding principles, objectives, and actions were developed to address the issues, problems and priority concerns. The principles, objectives, and actions form the basis and direction for the river management program. Initial drafts of the management plan were distributed for review by Council members and other interested persons and organizations.

1.4 CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

Section 2.0 provides a detailed description and assessment of the river area, river viewshed, surface and subsurface geological characteristics, watershed, water resources, plant communities, fish and wildlife, archaeological and historical resources, land use patterns and regulations, and land ownership in the river area and watershed. Section 3.0 addresses the existing access and recreational use characteristics along the river. Section 4.0 identifies resource values, issues, and problems as identified by the Council and work groups. Section 5.0 identifies the general management principles and includes an overview of the river management program involving the river area, a proposed wild and scenic protection zone, and the Myakka River watershed. Section 5.0 also includes the specific objectives and actions which are the focus of the management program and a discussion of the need for a recreational use carrying capacity. Section 6.0 discusses the implementation and coordination activities, plan review and amendment, and areas for legislature consideration.