

**Myakka River Management Coordinating Council
SWFWMD Sarasota Service Office
6750 Fruitville Road
Sarasota, Florida 34240
April 8, 2016
9:35 A.M. – 12:58 P.M.**

MINUTES

The meeting began at 9:35 A.M. with Jono Miller presiding. This meeting was advertised in the Herald Tribune on Friday, March 25, 2016.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jono Miller - Sierra Club	Greg Blanchard – Manatee County
Diana Donaghy- FDEP/FPS	Linda Wilson - ECOSWF
Elizabeth Wong – City of North Port	Barbara Hines – ManaSota - 88
Tom Mallett - Myakka State Forest	Mike Chouinard - Homeowner
Tara Poulton – SWFWMD	Jim Beever – SWFRPC
Gillian Carney - City of Venice	Paul Thomas - FFWCC
Maya Burke – Tampa Bay RPC	Howard Berna – SCNR
Corky Pezzati – SCLWV	Vivianne Cross - FDOT

INTERESTED PARTIES

Kevin Kemp – FFWCC	Allain Hale – ECOSWF
Chris Oliver - FDEP/FPS	Bob Clark – Venice Area Audubon
Lee Amos – CFGC	Nadine Hallenbeck - FDEP/FPS
Chris Becker - FDEP/FPS	Mike Solum – Sarasota County Parks
Juliette Jones - Friends of WMS	Mike Sosadeeter – Sarasota County Parks
Wade Matthews – Sarasota Audubon	Chuck Johnston – 2 J Farms
Bob Whitford - SANCA	

BUSINESS MEETING:

- **Call to Order and Roll Call was made.**
- **Public Comments: None**
- **Additions to Agenda: None**
- **Approval of Meeting Minutes: Greg Blanchard Moved to accept; Diana Donaghy seconded. The Minutes were adopted unanimously.**

OLD BUSINESS:

Jono advised that he drafted a letter of appreciation to Judy Meents and passed the letter around to have members of the Council sign it.

NEW BUSINESS:

Updates:

Howard Berna – Sarasota County Update:

Howard advised that the Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan update kicked off February. The review of the Environmental Systems element is ongoing through April. The main focus of the update is to make the language current with policies and information are being updated that were included in past versions of the Comprehensive Plan. References are being updated, and the organization of the chapters is being improved to make it easier to use and read. In the new the Comprehensive Plan version some of the policies in the previous version with multi-layers are being broken out so it appears that there are more environmental policies, but in reality there is not a significant amount of change in that regard. Policies that make more sense individually are being separated instead of staying combined. The section of the Comprehensive Plan called the Principles for Evaluating Development Proposals in Natural Habitats has remained almost the same as the previous version. A big change that has come in for this cycle is the county is putting in a new section pertaining to sea level rise and there are new policies presented in that document. The Comprehensive Plan is being broken down into two parts. Part I will be the policies, goals and objectives of the county and Part II will be the background supporting information. Howard then offered to provide the environmental sections Volume I and II of the Comprehensive Plan for any members to view and noted an upcoming meeting in April. Howard encouraged members to attend the meeting or email planner@scgov.net with questions. There is no set date for going to Board of County Commissioners on the Comprehensive Plan but they are anticipating June 2016. Howard does not think there are any significant changes that effect the Myakka River in a negative way.

Jono made the suggestion to add the Myakka Wild and Scenic River (MWSR) Management Plan since the Charlotte Harbor Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) and the Sarasota Bay Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan are included. Howard advised that he made the suggestion to only reference to the CCMPs but not include the actual plans. Jono suggested someone make a motion to address that.

Elizabeth Wong – City of North Port Update:

Elizabeth began by announcing the grand opening of several floating kayak launches. The floating launches can fluctuate with the water levels. This is phase one of a many phase project. Blue Ridge Park, McKibbin Park and Butler Park are the launches that have been opened so far. There is another launch at the Auxiliary Coast Guard Station at Chancellor where you can also launch from.

In the interest of becoming greener, pervious concrete is being added for parking along two blocks in the City of North Port for businesses.

Bob Clark asked if anyone knows of any plans to connect Price Boulevard in North Port to Center Road in Venice. Elizabeth advised that there are no plans for that.

Gillian Carney – City of Venice Update:

Gillian provided a brief PowerPoint with maps on current developments in the Myakka River Watershed including Venice Golf and River Club which is 1377 units total for that development, 275 to build out. The Woods of Venice is 265 units. The latter is rezoned but has not yet submitted a preliminary plan. There are no developments planned for the MRPZ zone.

Gillian also described the City's ongoing green programs which included a street sweeping program which sweeps 4 times per week throughout the year. In 2014 this program removed 472 lbs. of Nitrogen and 302 lbs. of Phosphorous. They have adopted the Sarasota County fertilizer ordinance. The City has a pet waste ordinance and an active education campaign for stormwater with presentations for homeowners throughout the city. Gillian advised that they are always looking for more places to reach out to so if anyone has any contacts within an HOA please let them know that they are willing to come out and talk with them.

Tom Mallett – Florida Forest Service (FFS) Update:

Tom started by advising that the Water Management District wetland restoration project is completed and will slow drainage off the property. The exotic treatment program for Brazilian Pepper is continuing, restoring areas to natural forest conditions that pre date the ranch days in accordance with the Management Plan. This year FFS has already burned 1600 acres including some area near the MWSR.

Juliette Jones asked about the impact of the treatment of the Brazilian Pepper and its effect on the bee population.

Tom advised there are bee keepers on their liaison committee and they come to meetings and advise them on their management practices.

Brief discussion continued regarding bees, honey production, the treatment of the Brazilian Pepper, other exotic species, herbicides, and feral hogs.

Diana Donaghy – Myakka River State Park (MRSP) Update:

Diana started with the trapping of the feral hogs and issues getting to the areas for trapping, due to extended flooding. 1,100 acres have been burned this year. The Park plans on burning 9,000 to 10,000 acres, so with it drying up they will be able to get more burning done. Recently the Park received funding for multiple contract projects including roller chopping, restoration mowing and exotics, plant control and snag removal.

The MRSP Unit Management Plan Public Workshop and Advisory Group meeting should be held sometime in June or July 2016. (**Editor's note:** Date is still to be determined, waiting on a consultant to be selected to run these meetings.)

Discussion continued regarding the importance of snags and the part they play in the ecosystem.

Chris Oliver – Myakka Wild & Scenic River (MWSR) Program update:

The MWSR Program has transferred permit authority to South District Regulatory Office in Fort Myers. Regarding natural resources issues; there are less reports of blatant non-compliance of posted speeds between Laurel Road and Myakka River State Park. Nesting is ongoing and ramping up at the Myakka Rookery, in mid-march the small island had at least 183 birds including 123 wood stork and 56 great egret.

The Myakka Rookery is a FWC designated Critical Wildlife Area (CWA). There are around 20 in the whole state.

- FWC imperiled species staff posted a CWA sign on the island in March, with hopes it would educate recreational users and reduce human disturbance.
- FWC staff intend on requesting “re-establishment” of the CWA this fall. Re-establishment is the term used for the modification of the existing CWA boundary. In this case, the plan is to create a small in-water buffer (about 50 feet) to advise boaters of the breeding area, delineate a setback, and allow LE to enforce if necessary.

The Council may consider a position on the “re-establishment” of the Myakka CWA. FWC anticipates discussing several CWAs at the June FWC Commission Meeting and may request the re-establishment at their November meeting.

Discussion followed regarding the activity on the rookery and its importance to the ecosystem.

BREAK from 10:45 to 11:00 a.m.

Motions:

Linda Wilson made a motion to send a letter to the Sarasota County Commission with a copy to the planning staff stay the use of ponds or lakes for open space requirement in the hamlets located in the Myakka River Watershed until an analysis is completed and determination is made on the impacts to the watershed from turning pasture lands into lakes.

Barbara Hines Seconded the Motion.

Discussion of Motion:

Linda continued saying that they would like to stop the use of ponds and lakes for open space until the impact on the watershed has been analyzed.

Elizabeth stated that she could not support this at this time. The city of North Port allows the use of ponds and surrounding green areas as open space. She continued that this has large ramifications on the cost of development.

Discussion continued regarding open space generally and potential impacts of the use of ponds or lakes for open space including potential impacts to hydrology and wildlife

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Motion failed. Four in favor, five against. Greg Blanchard, Jim Beever, Gillian Carney and Tara Poulton abstained.

Diana Donaghy made a motion to request a reference to the MWSR Management Plan be included in the Sarasota Comprehensive Plan update appendix.

Maya Burke Seconded the Motion. The Motion passed. Elizabeth Wong abstained.

Barbara Hines made a motion that the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (MRMCC) inform the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that the Council opposes the down listing of the Manatee from Endangered to Threatened.

Linda Wilson Seconded the Motion. The Motion passed. Tara Poulton, Greg Blanchard, Paul Thomas abstained.

Jim Beever made a motion that the MRMCC support the reestablishment and expansion for the protection of the wood stork rookery on the Myakka River.

Diana Donaghy Seconded the Motion. Motion passed unanimously.

PRESENTATIONS:

Lee Amos – Update of Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (CFGC) projects:

Lee advised that for the past three years the CFGC has been working to protect four large ranches in the Myakka River Watershed. These four ranches are still on the Florida Forever priority list in the less than fee category. There is still the possibility for funding although it probably will not be this year. He encouraged the Council and the public to comment to the legislature on this issue.

Shep's Island Ranch is not moving forward. The land owners decided to not pursue a land conservation easement at this time. The CFGC is pursuing funding through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act for Murphy Marsh this year. Triangle Ranch will hopefully be closing this year. Orange Hammock Ranch is very large and will take a lot of funding.

Wade Matthews asked if the \$27 million for Orange Hammock Ranch is a realistic figure.

Lee advised that it was, and it is about 5,700 acres.

Jim Beever asked if it would be a conservation easement or a fee simple.

Lee replied that if Florida Forever purchased it would be a conservation easement but if the county or SWFWMD came forward it would be a combination.

Mike Solum, Mike Sosadeeter & Bob Whitford – Senator Bob Johnson’s Landing (SBJL) and Pilot Rowing Program (RPR)

Mike Solum from Sarasota County Parks, Recreation & Natural Resources (SCPRNR) stated that he would be the point person on the project.

Mike Sosadeeter, of SCPRNR, gave an overview of SBJL acquisition and site. The concept was to enter through an existing access point off of U.S. 41 to a parking area with picnic shelters and a canoe launch to get people out to the river. SCPRNR has plans to put a boardwalk through a wetland area so people can have access to the rest of the park. There will be a rowing storage facility with a floating dock. There will also be a trail with additional picnic shelters. They are in the process of acquiring additional funding to complete the project. Construction drawings are approximately 50% complete. On May 25, 2016 staff will be going back to the Board to get approval for additional funding. The construction completion date is set for roughly November 2017.

The rowing aspect was taken out of the main project to get it permitted and installed in the next four to six months. The idea will be that visiting rowing teams would come and use this site as a training site prior to the 2017 World Championships at Nathan Benderson Park (NBP) and for an additional time after that staff will be analyzing how well it works for visiting rowing teams.

Mike Sosadeeter noted a floating dock will be installed but it will be in sections so it could be taken in and out.

Allain Hale asked what part of the river the rowers will be using from there.

Mike Sosadeeter responded they will be heading south.

Bob Clark pointed out that the rowers will pass the Myakka Rookery that was previously discussed.

Bob Whitford, the director of operations from SANCA, stated the County Commission has asked them to look at opportunities for visiting teams to come to the area to help train prior to the event and to also look at the return on investment of the visiting teams from the north that they currently operate at NBP and at Fort Hamer in Manatee County. Both projects have been very successful. In other areas of the country where the temperature drops the teams that usually practice there need other areas for practice. This would fall between January and March. Several teams already use Fort Hamer and NBP including Harvard, Yale, Columbia and the high schools from Canada. The US Olympic team in preparation for the Olympic trials trained at NBP. The Canadian kayaking/canoe team is currently training there.

Bob noted two types of rowing activities for the site. First type, recreational, local user who would use single shell. They would bring the shell in on top their vehicles much like a kayak. Second is a coordinated program which has typically been 16-40 athletes that

come down to train in formation with a coach and a safety launch (boat) with 3 or 4 eight man shells.

There would be two separate training times, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Bob commented on the fact that rowing is unlike some other sports where the land is scarred after use. The water is self-healing and after the shells are gone there is no evidence they were ever there to begin with.

As far as the Rookery is concerned, they have dealt with this situation in the past. Both at NBP and in California. The impact would be only at certain times of the year and be very minimal. The boats will continue to go about five miles from the launch site and return. The time between launch and removal is about two hours. There is a safety boat that follows the shells in case of an emergency. The safety boats leave no wake.

Jim asked how the safety boat is powered and where it will be put in.

Bob replied it will be put in at the landing and it is powered with a 20 horse power gasoline outboard motor.

Mike replied that they (safety boats) would be the ones (motorized boats) allowed.

Jim asked if there will be electronic megaphone/bullhorns used to communicate with the rowers.

Bob replied that power microphones are used in the boats for the coxswain. It creates less of a noise than using the megaphones. The microphone system is built into the boat.

Lee Amos asked if the sound that goes to the rowers in in their ears or a speaker in the boat.

Bob replied it would be in one of three speakers in the boat at the feet of the rowers.

Barbara Hines commented on a personal experience with noise from a rowing training event adding, in her opinion, Senator Bob Johnson would not find this use to be compatible with the river being Wild & Scenic.

Bob responded that currently they have a very active community of HOAs near NBP and if they make too much noise they are notified. They actively use the waterway less than 330 feet away from the residents. They do not do things like pound on boats to keep rhythm. They set themselves up directionally with the microphone to not disturb people as much as possible.

Paul Thomas asked how big the boats are.

Bob responded that they are up to 60 feet long.

Paul asked how many boats would be out on the river at any given time.

Bob responded that about 10 to 12, which would be broken down into groups of three or four.

Paul commented that he feels there will be a significant amount of user conflict with the public use of the river. He also asked how wide the boats are.

Bob responded that the boats, with the oars in the water, are 18 feet wide. He also commented we have some pictures, we have tested area. It is a public waterway and boats are very maneuverable.

Paul noted March as a peak fishing season, asked about an angler set up in a spot to fish here comes a 60 foot boat.

Bob responded that stated that they are the ones that will move out of the way of others using the same area. And added that no one would be anchored in the channel.

Paul reiterated that there will be conflicts.

Bob Clark stated the wild and scenic (designation) only applies to a few places. It is a special place. Why they are not looking at more appropriate places for this activity? Other than the wild & scenic river, it seems totally inappropriate.

Allain noted he use to row and was concerned about groups going fast and monopolizing the river.

Bob Whitford disagreed and added that the boats (rowing shells) typically travel about six to seven miles per hour.

Jono asked staff to describe the expenses for the park. What would the \$520,000 in fiscal year 2016 and the \$1,180,000 in fiscal year 2018 would be used for?

Mike advised that they would like to move 2018 up so they can combine the phases. Phase I was without the restroom and Phase II was going to be with the restroom. They are trying to do it all in one phase now and move the money up to mobilize and do the construction all at once. They are also in need of additional funding to complete the project.

Jono asked what part of the two proposed expenditures is to develop the park as it was a few years ago and what percent deals with facilitating the rowing.

Mike answered that the rowing would cost \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Jono asked if that would be funded from SANCA.

Mike replied it would not be.

Jono noted that when this came to the County's Parks & Recreation Council we were told there would be a pilot program. There would be follow up with a report that described successes and issues with stake holders.

Mike stated that they still intend to do that. The teams will not arrive until January 2017 and they are trying to get the dock in before then to test this out.

Jono responded that we have until January 2017 to design the pilot program and figure out what questions need to be asked. He asked if they were confident that this program would be feasible in this area of the river and the county will not be embarrassed by any issue that makes the river problematic to use.

Bob replied that he is confident. He was been in it for 35 years.

Jono clarified that an issue of concern is the County encouraging visitors to use the site during periods when there are low tides and the possibly of visitors having a negative experience.

Bob stated they studied this and they have looked into other locations in the area and the Myakka River would accommodate all of their needs.

Chris asked if anyone had done any large groups on the Myakka during these January low tide periods. That while others had mentioned a channel in this conversation, there is no dredged or defined channel. Adding that the County's Comprehensive Plan states that in this use area, "the controlling water depth within the river is generally 2 feet and shallower as measured at mean low water".

Mike Chouinard asked what the draw of these vessels is.

(The typical draft in operation is 18 inches.)

Paul asked how many stakeholder group meetings they had with local anglers or other user groups.

Bob stated that there were two he has been a part of, while he was not sure if local anglers were represented, they were county-wide public meetings.

Paul asked what the projected economic impact was of bringing rowing to Sarasota County

Bob replied that he does not have an exact number but knows that it has been very significant.

Tom Mallett asked how far down the river they would travel.

Bob replied it would be anywhere from three to six miles and then back. Our investigation found this area to be very similar to the Manatee River at Fort Hamer where they head out to the I-75 Bridge, on good days they can go further to U.S.41.

Lee noted the impact from current recreational use and asked about the increased usage effecting the wood stork colony which is already down by 70%.

Mike Solum responded that some rookeries in the inter-coastal are acclimated to boat activity, but advised that he and Chris Oliver have been reviewing this.

Jono asked how the coaches communicate with the coxswains

Bob replied that the coaches do use a megaphone.

Chris asked for clarification with previous mention of microphone system.

Bob responded that the coaches (on the safety boats) use a megaphone to communicate with the rowers.

Diana asked about the potential danger or conflict with manatees.

Bob replied that the boats are elevated and the coaches are standing so they will be able to see into the water.

Diana advised that the river is very tannic and it is difficult to see manatees.

Bob advised that anything that breaks the surface, the coaches would be able to see. They are using a low impact boat as compared to a pontoon boat that you would normally see. The safety boats only draw about 10 inches of water due to modifications they have made to the boats.

Elizabeth asked what the narrowest spot in the (SBJL) channel when entering the river and how wide is the area around the Rookery with the rookery exclusion zone?

Bob showed her on the projection of the map of the Myakka River.

Elizabeth commented that it would be about 80% of the channel width and Bob confirmed this was correct. Elizabeth asked if by the Rookery and the proposed exclusion zone if that would be possible.

Chris stated that it depends on the tides and the depth and the draft of the boat. Because of the sand bars on the left side it is about 220 feet across or more like 400-450 depending on where it is measured from the west side.

Mike Solum commented that one of the things the county has been doing at their boat launch areas is putting up more educational signage. They have talked with SANCA, and through the pilot project, are making sure that they understand the river, that there is a Rookery and that it is not a clear channel.

Bob added that if there are noise exclusions in certain areas that would be very easy for them to work with as well.

Paul commented that it sound like the pilot program is starting very close to when the actual competition is occurring and if the pilot program is a bust what would the back-up plan be?

Bob replied that they will go back to their other facilities. Bob added that they get along with fisherman and sailors on all of the other waterways they use.

Jono asked about the status of the investigations to acquire the property on the south side of 41.

Mike replied that they are still investigating that.

Jono if the acquisition of that property would affect the rowing operation at SBJL.

Mike does not see it having any affect. He also clarified that they are not putting in a motorized boat launch.

Jono thanked them for coming out and talking to the Council.

Bob advised that if anyone is interested, he would be happy to take them to Fort Hamer or NBP and show them the current operations.

Election of Officers:

Chris Oliver read Article 7 of the Bylaws.

Diana Donaghy nominated Jono Miller to continue as Chairman. Linda Wilson seconded. The Motion passed as there were no other nominations for Chairman.

Linda Wilson nominated Jim Beever to continue as Vice Chairman. Jim commented that he is willing to serve as long as the Regional Planning Council continues to exist.
Barbara Hines seconded. The Motion passed as there were no other nominations for Vice Chairman.

Jono Miller – Myakka Wild & Scenic River Management Plan review (continued):
Section 4.7 (Objectives and Actions were shown on a Power Point projection)

4.7 - Coordinate and collaborate the management of extensive public lands in the Myakka Watershed towards common goals and objectives. Focus should be on

watershed restoration and management of key wildlife species such as wood storks, future Panther expansion, Snook and Meadowlarks.

Jono suggested an addition “*to hold an annual meeting or conference with Myakka Land and Water Resource Managers to exchange information on current practices, challenges and coordinate future projects.*”

After additional discussion, action 4.7 was purposed to read:

4.7 - Coordinate and collaborate the management of extensive public lands in the Myakka Watershed towards common goals and objectives. Focus should be on watershed restoration and management of key wildlife species (e.g. wood storks, Florida panthers, snook, Meadowlarks, etc.) To hold an annual meeting or conference with Myakka Land and Water Resource Managers to exchange information on current practices, challenges and coordinate future projects. Participants shall include but not be limited to public lands managers, non-profits, and landowners with conservation easements. This would include the state park and also ranchers with conservation easements. One goal would be establishment of a repository of coordinated maps and plans.

Jono noted that action 4.8 was already accomplished.

5.1 – Continue to ensure through comprehensive plans, land development regulations and/or appropriate ordinances that urban and suburban land uses are minimized within the river area, wild and scenic protection zone, and the watershed.

Jono suggested to add *staff and council members will monitor proposed changes in comprehensive plans, land development regulations and proposed ordinances for Sarasota County, the City of Venice and North Port.* This would empower both staff and individual council members to track proposed changes in these documents.

Discussion regarding action 5.2 was considered fine as written with no suggested improvements.

5.3 Encourage that land development review and approval consider sea-level rise, subsequent landward migration of wetlands, and resultant need for an upland buffer.

Jono suggested to change the language to: *DEO, DRP and the water management district, the applicable regional planning councils and local governments should encourage the land development review and approval of process. Consider sea-level rise and subsequent land migration of wetlands and resultant need for an upland buffer.*

Jim Beever would like to add that they should utilize the regional climate change vulnerability assessment which exists to guide them as to what sea level rise is to be expected within the Myakka watershed and they can also anticipate that they should undertake a climate change adaptation plan for the Myakka River Basin.

Brief discussion followed and it was determined the Council would continue revision of this element at the next meeting.

Diana asked if the Council could wait until the next meeting or will it be too late to make a motion about the rowing.

Discussion followed and some members voiced their concerns that the rowing program is not compatible with the river's Wild and Scenic designation and it is not an appropriate use of the river.

Jono discussed an email with Carolyn Brown (SCRPNR). He focused the need to get a definitive answer of what the pilot program will actually consist of. He suggested that everyone at the meeting who has a concern regarding the rowing program go back to the Audubon, ECOSWF and other entities and advise them of what is going on with the rowing program prior to the Council's next meeting. He also suggested that the council should take the time and go through the Comprehensive Plan and the Management Plan so a motion could be constructed that includes specific citations about where the PRP was contrary to these guidance documents.

Chris gave a brief update on the status of new Council nominees. He noted that during the February 2015 meeting several nominations were made for potential new members to the Council. Most applications have been received but one. After receiving that the process will then be moved forward.

Chris mentioned that agricultural interest and any other business interest or homeowner's association that might need representation should be considered.

Future Agenda Items: Review of written details of PRP at SBJL.

Next Meeting Date: Next meeting to be linked to release of MRSP Draft UMP.

The meeting ended at 12:58 p.m.