

**Myakka River Management Coordinating Council
Nature Center
Oscar Scherer State Park
1843 S. Tamiami Trail
Osprey, Florida**

**April 8, 2005
9:30 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.**

Jonathan Miller called the meeting to order 9:30 A.M..

FL Department of Transportation Update – Frank Meares

The Myakka River bridge deck replacement and widening is currently under construction.

Frank clarified that State Road 72 will not encroach on Myakka River State Park for stormwater retention. The roadway will be built with steeper slopes which minimize the need to expand laterally. Highway runoff will be filtered using a sand filter, and the bridge reconstruction will include a wildlife crossing. The plans for SR 72 are 60% complete.

Future widening of I-75 data collection is in progress, and will have a minimum of six lanes in the future.

Questions and answers followed.

Update on the Water Planning Alliance and Myakka Conference Summary – Susan Hochuli

Susan Hochuli reported that the Myakka River Watershed Conference was a success. The Conference was held on February 14, 2005, and involved 18-20 different agencies. Agency participation ranged from formal presentations to financial support. Many topics were addressed during the conference, for example, historical changes in the Watershed from agricultural to other land uses, hydrological changes, biological changes and water quality changes. At the conclusion of the conference knowledge and data gaps were identified. Susan distributed a summary of the knowledge gaps list compiled from the conference. Conference technical papers will be available on a CD, and provided to those who would like to upload it to their website.

Jono asked about the alignment on the Water Transmission Project. Susan answered that the project is still very preliminary. There are conceptual routes that included affecting the Myakka River State Park. They are currently in negotiation with consultants. Nothing has been decided about the route and how it may affect the park.

Thanks were given to those involved in the conference, such as Dr. Jelks whose family foundation helped sponsor the conference, as did the Friends of Myakka, and many cities and counties in the region.

Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program Update – Maran Hilgendorf

Two years ago the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program provided funding to support the work of MRMCC. The Council decided to use the funds for a workshop on exotic plants, and also the development of a website. Maran informed the council that under this funding the website will be serviced through March 2006; however, continuation of the website will have to be discussed in the near future. She suggested one solution could be simply applying for another micro-grant from CHNEP.

CHNEP has been working on its FY2006 workplan, which is their budget for the upcoming year. They anticipate that research/restoration grants, micro-grants, and public outreach grants will continue to be available. Myakka River State Park was recently awarded a \$3,000 public outreach grant to reprint one of their brochures.

Sarasota County's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program Update – Belinda Perry

Since December, Sarasota County has acquired 420 acres within the Myakka River Watershed, called Churchill Ranch. The ranch is located on the NE side of the Deer Prairie Creek Priority site. During the next quarter, the county expects to close on the 502-acre Blackburn Ranch.

Myakka River State Park was acquired in the 1930s at a cost of 17 cents per acre. Today's cost for the Churchill Ranch was a little over \$17,000 per acre, and the Blackburn Ranch will be about \$18,500 per acre. As real estate costs escalate Belinda made a point that it poses a bigger challenge for the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program to acquire lands at a reasonable cost; it is imperative that they acquire as many of the identified sites as possible, quickly.

Resource management update of county land included:

- The county prescribed burned 3,600 acres within the Myakka River Watershed, mostly on the Carlton Reserve, however more needs to be done. As they move into the growing season more burns are expected to be accomplished.
- Americorps are working to remove Melaleuca, as a cooperative project on the Longino Ranch Conservation Easement.
- Roller-chopping adjacent to Deer Prairie Slough on the Carlton Reserve has been contracted.
- There is on going treatment and removal of invasive exotic plants like climbing fern, cogon grass and Brazilian pepper.

The county is applying for state funding (FCT grants) to stretch their finances. Discussion followed.

Sarasota County's Public Use Plan – Eric Sutton

The county is working on getting support for land protection after the year 2019. The county is coordinating two projects: (1) Public Use Project, and (2) Communication Project.

- (1) Public Use Project – A team will assess points of interest, points of disturbance, and lay out the areas for public using GPS and GIS technology to map areas for limited and active land uses.
- (2) Communication Project - Phase 2 will be contracted, and will allow for communication through a singular voice to campaign for natural Sarasota. By September, a document in the genre of a journal or magazine will be produced to peak community interest and involvement. Sponsors are being sought for this document.

Sarasota County's Protection Zone Update and other Myakka Watershed Code Enforcement Actions – Howard Berna

Four active dock permit applications are being processed for the river, two boat docks and two kayak launches.

Three code enforcement actions are underway for vegetation clearing within the Myakka River Protection Zone. A year ago the county produced a brochure called *Protecting the Myakka River*. It has become clear that language in the first edition of the brochure has been misinterpreted and a 2nd edition is currently in the process of being printed. It will be distributed to riverfront owners to hopefully prevent further vegetation removal violations.

Sarasota County and SWFWMD have approved restoration plans for Howard Creek (dredged by Oakford), which needs the final approval from landowners prior to commencing with the restoration work.

Deer Prairie Creek Salinity Barrier/Weir Pros and Cons of Removal – Mike Jones, Sarasota County.

The Deer Prairie Creek Dam was built in 1950 for cattle ranching. Mike Jones described Deer Prairie Creek area, shared aerial photography, and presented the pros and cons for the dam removal.

An education center has been proposed for the Deer Prairie Creek site. Jono asked if other sites were being considered and Mike answered that others are under consideration.

Jono suggested that the list of pros and cons be categorized by functions.

Further questions can be addressed to Mike Jones (941) 650-9926.

Update on the City of Venice's 10-acre Myakka River Park Proposal – Don Caillouette

The City of Venice plans to name the new park the Venice-Myakka River Park.

Tom Moralee asked about the boat ramp and the capacity of boaters it will allow on the river. Don explained that the ramp is for a canoe's only. The capacity is limited by available parking (35). The plans are on the city's website and the Florida Park Service has a copy of the CD. Chris Becker stated that at the last December's MRMCC meeting plans of parking lot, and canoe launch were displayed. The launch is similar to a dock, rather than a boat ramp.

Southwest Florida Water Management District Update – Dianne Davies

The Minimum Flows and Levels for the Lower Myakka River has been moved to 2006. The draft MFL for the Upper Myakka River should be available in May, with peer review in June. No recovery strategy is proposed. Fish sampling for the study is being done in May, and benthic fauna information is due by April.

Mote Marine's Salinity and Water Quality draft report is due in October with its peer review in November. A rule is due for adoption in 2006.

The *District Water Management Plan* is updated every five years and is being updated this year. The new draft is available for public viewing on the website: www.watermatters.org. Public comments can be made through April and there is a link on the website for comments. On April 12, a public meeting was planned at Tampa Temple Terrace City Hall. The Sarasota Service Office held its meeting on April 5. The plan is scheduled to be adopted in May by the Governing Board and DEP. The District Water Management Plan is a comprehensive plan for the entire district, and not specific to geographic areas.

Southwest Florida National Cemetery – Dr. Richard Swier, LTC, USA (Ret.)

Dr. Richard Swier explained why a national cemetery is needed in Sarasota County. Florida has the second largest veteran population in the United States, second only to California. If demographics hold, Florida will pass California in veterans population by the year 2020. Florida National Cemetery, in Bushnell, FL is the third most active national cemetery under the National Cemetery Administration. They are burying around 7,000 veterans a year, or 35-40 burials a day. The peak of WWII veteran deaths are expected in 2008. The criterion for opening a cemetery is based on the veteran

population within a 75-mile radius of a national cemetery site. The Sarasota County area, has over 406,000 veterans within a 75-mile radius.

Sarasota County, by law was scheduled to have a cemetery built in the year 2020. Representative Katherine Harris, Representative Chris Smith (former Chair of the Governing Administration Committee in the House), and former Senator Bob Graham (former Vice-Chair and Minority Member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee), added Sarasota to the law to establish six new National Cemeteries in the United States. On November 11, 2003 President Bush signed it into law. The Joint House/Senate version said the six cemeteries would be established by the year 2007. They are hoping to finish in 2008/2009.

In 2004 we, had two site visits by Bob Holbrook from the National Cemetery Administration. A total of 24 pieces of property were visited as potential sites for a national cemetery. Those 24 sites were in five different counties, Sarasota, Manatee, De Soto, Charlotte and Highlands. Sites need 550 acres for in-ground burial. The top three sites selected were in Sarasota County: Hawkins Ranch, which is on Clark Rd. about five miles east of I-75, and two sites along Fruitville, the Myakka Ranch, and the Hi Hat Ranch.

Dr. Swier introduced Billy Murphy, Director of Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. Bob Holbrook was also introduced as the Director, over construction processes. Bill oversaw the opening of the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery.

The process of opening a national cemetery is long. In March they began the environmental assessment process required by federal law. The environmental assessment is being done by Mac Tech Engineering Corporation. Design takes between six to nine months. Construction takes between 18-24 months. After construction, staff is hired, equipment planned, operations set, work plans drawn, action plans made, public relations established, and contracts made for mowing and fertilizing. The target date for Sarasota's new cemetery is 2009. Billy will oversee this process.

A question is asked; Will the city or the county have an opportunity to vote? Billy answers that it has already been approved by Congress and the President of the United States.

Jono asked which of these three sites are in the Myakka River Basin. Chris Becker answers, all three. Rich Swier continued describing the sites: (1) off of Fruitville Rd., (2) north of Fruitville Rd., (3) south of Fruitville Rd. about six miles east of I-75; Myakka Ranch and Hi Hat Ranch, on Clark Rd. about six miles east is Hawkins Ranch on SR 72.

Jono asked if they had to stay out of wetlands. Rich answered yes; they have to follow federal guidelines for environmental protection and mitigation. They must be very careful on how land is selected, and where the water table is. Rich asked the council to think of this new cemetery as a National shrine like Arlington National Cemetery. The cemeteries try to create a park-like atmosphere, while keeping the land in its natural state

as much as possible. The County, the State and the Southwest Florida Water Management District will review developing the cemetery.

Mike asks if the process will pump the water table down. Bill responds that they will do site testing. They will actually dig graves to see the water table. At Florida National Cemetery is the only National Cemetery that only goes down five feet. They have six by ten gravesites and bury side-by-side. A lot of cemeteries they bury on top of each other.

Suzanne asked if there is a criterion for site selection; is there a criterion either for or against choosing agricultural or disturbed sites over natural sites? All three sites are all agricultural Rich answers. If the land had been used for agricultural purposes it helps the NCA. Once the environmental assessment is complete they will know about groundwater, environmentally sensitive lands, any listed species, and archeological and historical sites. That will help them to rank the sites in order of 1 to 3. After ranking the negotiation process begins. The environmental assessment will be between six and twelve months long.

Jeff Thirlwal, wanted to know when Florida's State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) would be able to be involved due to archeological concerns with cemetery sites. Rich responds that Ed Carlos is the project manager (202) 565-4151 for the Sarasota environmental assessment and he would be able address that.

Diane suggests that the VA look into management practice regarding fertilizer applications for the cemetery. Diane said that the ranches are probably not intensive agricultural land and have not been churned up adequately. They will need to have an integrated pest management plan. Billy responds that the VA will abide by all federal, state and county laws, and practices environmentally friendly pest management.

Belinda Perry offered during the environmental assessment stage to contact Sarasota County Division of Natural Resources for help in providing local knowledge. Rich suggested calling Ed Carlos to offer him their assistance.

Jono states that the parcels are larger than the minimum land the cemetery requires and asks if the property is being sold as a total land parcel or being broken into the desired 550 acres? Rich responds by saying that it is a part of the negotiation process and a part of the criteria when considering the land sites. Jono suggested the possibility that the VA partner with the county or district to purchase more land (environmentally sensitive land) that the cemetery could not use for burial. It could aid to buffer and compliment what the county is already accomplished.

Myakka Wild and Scenic Trails Map – Diana Donaghy

SWFWMD awarded the Friends of Myakka \$5,000 to produce a Myakka Wild and Scenic Trail Map. The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program also gave \$2,000 through its Public outreach grants.

Two meetings have been held, to gather stakeholders input, these included land managers, private landowners, kayakers, hikers, fisherman and birders to give suggestions for the trail map.

Laurel Rhoades, a volunteer, will be contacting natural areas managers to acquire specific information, including GIS maps and aerials. The first phase of the project will be to produce a two-sided color map, 27 X 31 inches, with gray-scale aerials overlaid with colored trails and special features.

Diana said the map's purpose is to be a comprehensive guide that highlights all of the recreational opportunities available on public use lands. The map will include all existing trails location, how to reach the trails, and who to contact for permitting.

Questions or comments will be addressed by Paula Benschhoff at (941) 361-6512 or the email address is biology@myakkariver.com. Paula is the Park Service Specialist for Myakka River State Park.

Myakka River Biologist Report – Chris Becker

Chris distributed copies of his biologist report (see report attached).

Chris reported that one boat dock permit would be issued soon and since December he issued the permit for the Venetian Golf and River Club canoe launch and nature trails. Plans for the club were available at the meeting for anyone who wanted to see. The plans show the placement of the canoe launch and the details of the nature trails.

Tom Moralee asked if the Florida Park Service permits on Curry Creek. Chris responded that FPS's jurisdiction is the main river channel and the contiguous wetland areas that run along the main river channel. Tributaries and canals are not part of the jurisdiction. Sarasota County should have reviewed permits on Curry Creek.

Terry Green asked about the water level reported on the biologist report and Chris answered that he took measurements from the gauge at Chuck Downs' Dam. Chris also uses the USGS website for water levels and weather conditions in the park.

The topic of unsightly retired water gauges was brought to Chris's attention. Chris responded that he took pictures of the sites and sent them to USGS for their records. He thought the sampling locations were built and used in the eighties to gather low flow data. During the next river inspection, Chris and Amy will take more pictures and ask the USGS to remove the inactive gauge.

Tom Moralee expressed concern about three agencies having monitoring devices on the river. He asked if there is one source used or one set of numbers that a layperson can get information from? Chris responded that Sarasota County has a water atlas website that would be the best place to check. Chris explained that the stations are often a partnership

between agencies and that he would check with John Ryan who works with the water atlas to answer Tom.

Marlene expressed concern about the new gauge by her house. It is unsightly and asked for it to be camouflaged. Belinda Perry said that she would take care of it.

MRMCC Business

Roll was called and it was determined there was a quorum.

The first item was the minutes from the October 8, 2004 and the December 3, 2004 meetings. **Don Caillouette moved to accept the October minutes. Terry Green seconded and the motion was passed.** Dianne Davies had some corrections for the October minutes. **The proposed changes were accepted and the October Minutes were adopted.**

Don Caillouette motioned to accept the December 3, 2005 minutes and Terry Green seconded. The December Minutes were adopted, no changes were made.

Other Agenda Items

- **Bill Byle** – After a recent conversation with Chris Becker, Bill wanted to clarify about the threat that the phosphate industry poses to the Myakka River Basin. There is a large amount of unmined land in the Myakka River Basin at Pine Level. The reason he wanted to mention this to this council is that there is going to be some changes necessary to make sure the same thing doesn't happen to Pine Level that has happened at other mine sites.

For instance, back in June a permit was issued to CF Industries by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to mine 9,000 acres between Horse Creek and the Peace River. To issue the permit all stop signs were run by the ACE. They didn't look at essential fish habitat, secondary and cumulative impacts nor Florida panther concerns. The ACE has figured out how to circumvent all of these processes to issue a permit.

Bill stressed that the Myakka River Basin was not considered as panther habitat. If the MRMCC thinks that the basin has future panther habitat, being proactive is imperative especially when mining is concerned.

Jono asks for an update on Pine level. Bill answers.

- Ernie Estevez stated that after five years the Myakka Conservancy finally acquired the Beecher Property. They will be developing the Management Plan this year. Jono comments on the importance of acquiring land because of the increase of property values.

Future Agenda Items

- Jono wanted to recognize Chris Becker for his service and get a better introduction to John Chassey and Amy Emmert.
- Greg requests an update on Flatford Swamp conditions - Dianne Davies is asked to give an update.
- CHNEP starting its process of updating its operating guidelines for the next five years and would like to get input from MRMCC - Moran Hilgendorf
- Upper Myakka River Minimum Flow and Levels review by SWFWMD
- Amend or comment on the trail map for MRSP from Diana Donaghy or Paula Benschoff.
- Tom Moralee wants to look at recreational carrying capacity for watercraft on the river
- Jono brought up that the MRMCC has been asking for cumulative effects, area wide, of the phosphate industry. Bill suggested Ralph Montgomery could address this.
- Bill suggested for the council to send a letter to the ACE to express concern that the corps' secondary and cumulative impact analysis are not adequate. Jono asks for Bill or Greg or anyone interested to draft something that the council could look at, amend and send out for the next council meeting.

There were no objections to the next meeting dates of August 12 2005 and December 9, 2005.

Marlene Guffey moved for adjournment and Maran Hilgendorf seconded. The meeting was dismissed at 10:55 AM.

Members in Attendance

Ernie Estevez
 Frank Meares
 Greg Nowaski
 Suzanne Cooper
 Don Caillouette
 Maran Hilgendorf
 Dianne Davies

Jeff Thirlwall
 Eric Sutton
 Belinda Perry
 Terry Green
 Marlene Guffey
 Tom Moralee
 Bill Byle

Jono Miller
Greg Blanchard
David Crawford

Dr. Mary Jelks
William R. Smith

Others in Attendance

Diana Donaghy
Michael Jones
Herman White
Terry Briggs
Susan Hochuli
Bill Hutchinson
Chris Becker
John Chassey
Ken Alvarez

Howard Berna
Richard Swier
Jamie Scudera
Jon Kramer
Ed Freeman
Bill Murphy
Amy Emmert
Judy Meents