

**Recreational Carrying Capacity Subcommittee
SWFWMD Sarasota Service Office
6750 Fruitville Road
Sarasota, FL 34240
June 7, 2019
1:00 P. M. – 2:00 P.M.**

MINUTES

The meeting began at 1:00 P.M. with Jono Miller presiding. This meeting was advertised in the Herald Tribune on Friday, May 24, 2019.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jono Miller – Sierra Club
Jim Beever-SWFRP
Belinda Perry
Lucille Vaillancourt-Kreider-SCPR

Paul Thomas-FWC
Steven Schaefer-Friends of Myakka
Jean Blackburn
Nancy MacPhee

INTERESTED PARTIES

Chris Oliver – FDEP/FPS
Rebecca Armstrong-FPS/MRSP
Victor Dobrin

Nadine Hallenbeck – FDEP/FPS
Steve Giguere-FPS/MRSP

- **Call to Order and Roll Call was made.**

Jono asked that the meeting start with members talking about the connection to river and experience with recreation on the Myakka. Then review of conditions on the river and what is the legal basis a for recreation capacity study (RCC). Discuss what are the management objectives. Then what are best approaches, what are the needed components, to design a study that would work well on the Myakka.

The members introduced themselves and talked a little bit about their connection with the Myakka River.

Jono Miller introduced himself. He started going to Myakka River State Park in 1970. In the late 70s, Ken Alvarez, former lead district biologist, hired Jono and his wife, Julie to canoe the Myakka River to assess its potential as part of the state canoe trail system. There was a lot of water hyacinth blockages at that time so they determined it wouldn't be a good fit for that program. They also worked with a group checking to see if the Myakka River could be part of the federal wild and scenic program. It was determined it was not suitable for that program. Senator Bob Johnson, who owned property on the river, passed legislation to make the river part of the state's wild and scenic program. This was approved in Sarasota County but blocked in Manatee County and Charlotte County. This eliminated the use of private airboats on the river.

Jono has canoed the river in different areas for many years. In 1985, he joined the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council (MRMCC).

Jean Blackburn has been visiting since the 50s. She served on the board of the Friends of the Myakka for many years. She has volunteered in many different capacities, including the treatment of invasive exotic plants. She lives near the north entrance and enjoys taking her dogs for walks there. As an artist and photographer, the river has been the subject of her work.

Lucille Vaillancourt-Kreider works with Sarasota County Parks and Recreation. She is the beach and water access manager. She oversees three facilities that currently align with the river, Myakka River Park (in Venice), Senator Bob Johnson's Landing and Snook Haven Park. She has a goal to manage the usage of park facilities and river which includes coming up with a carrying capacity for both.

Paul Thomas is a senior fisheries biologist at FWC. He has been there for over 30 years and serves Hernando County to Lee County. He has been involved with the MRMCC since 1989. He plans to use his experience with planning recreational activities for Weeki Wachee in this subcommittee.

Belinda Perry has been involved in the Christmas Bird Count since 1976. She has seen the changes in recreation over that time. She was the former MRSP biologist from 1995-2002. She worked with Sarasota County in the 80s with the coastal zone and again later in 2000s involved in land management for County properties along the Myakka.

Nancy MacPhee has a background as a resource manager with Lee County. She was the developer of the Great Calusa Blue Way Trail and she helped found the Florida Paddling Trail. She is also on the board of directors for the Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism. This is a statewide organization offering education and certification to ecotour operators. They maintain a professional code of conduct for them. There are more certified ecotour operators in Sarasota County than any other county in Florida.

Steven Schaefer and his wife, Jean Blackburn, own cracker horses and enjoy riding them in the park. He has worked on exotic removal in MRSP. He also serves on the board of the Friends of Myakka River.

Jono asked Chris Oliver to review for the group the prior work on this is by the MRMCC.

Chris passed around a binder with documents summarizing prior work on the carrying capacity issue. He projected a time line of activities with highlighted comments below.

- From 1986-1990, there were various discussions regarding resource protection and general management plan development during MRMCC meetings – these identified a RCC as priority issue,
- The Myakka River Issues Surveys done by Dr. Estevez, the Florida River Assessment and at the proceedings of the Myakka River Workshop – these looked at existing access to the river and issues,

- The Myakka Wild & Scenic River (MWSR) Management plan was adopted in May 1990, after discussions/workshops/hearings,
- The Rule 16D-15 became effective July 22, 1991, now it is Rule 62D-15,
- On September 4, 1991, a memo from Steve Martin on the MRMCC subcommittee responsibilities included the following language:
 1. ensure permit agencies and stakeholders “prohibit new access points on the river and restrict proposed expansions of existing access until after a recreational carrying capacity is developed.”,
- There was a RCC workshop October 23, 1992. Notes from Ken Alvarez in 1992 included several elements. The MWSR was broken into four segments for study. The “social experience” should be examined by “mailing out a survey to residents”, also needed were “fishing success rates”, “interviews” at boat ramps, how many people go beyond MRSP boundary, how many come up from below? And a formal “determination of use”. Alvarez also notes that provisions in the (1990) MWSR MP state: Periodic user studies and public access control (p1-3), Social carrying capacity (p5-40); monitor for overcrowding, safety concerns and degradation of resources. Monitoring of recreational use (p5-42) to establish an accurate RCC. RCC will be reviewed on an annual basis. Monitor use, determine and enforce RCC.,
- At the meeting of the MRMCC on January 7, 1993, a subcommittee was approved. On January 13, 1993 the subcommittee (Terry Green, Jono Miller, and Terry Hingtgen) met and a questionnaire was developed.,
- A memo from Chris Becker on September 28, 2000 to the MRMCC noted an announcement for an “RCC Study Workshop” on October 11, 2000 to determine “the feasibility of determining” an RCC.,
- Notes from the RCC meeting on October 11, 2000 showed 10 people present. It noted areas of concern such as tour boats, canoe liveries and increasing development. The Antonini study was referenced as well. There were approximately 1,599 homes along the river.

Chris added that these memos indicated that there was a real push for an RCC study in 2000, and before that, but nothing happened, which appears to be a repeating trend on this issue. This is likely because it is complicated and expensive. The current one at Weeki Wachee is about 300K for 6 miles of that spring run. We have a similar situation with a lot of stakeholder groups, probably many will not agree with the final product or outcomes. The question before this group: is how do we create a study that fits, not a spring run with SAV (submerged aquatic vegetation), but the Myakka River with reptiles or whatever metric we find. It must be scientifically defensible and probably should be done by a third-party contractor.

Jim Beever added that each time a plan was suggested, no funding was available. Discussions of having volunteer groups complete the study took place but people were afraid volunteers would not be consistent, diligent or that they might come up with conclusions that would serve their own interests. Jim continued on components of an RCC study noting that it takes in to account damage to the resource and scaring away wildlife. There was an excellent study at Ding Darling and another on western rivers. Jim added that this is more a study about what people like, what

they want to see and what types of experiences they want to have on the river. It is more of a social carrying capacity study (SCC).

Chris clarified the SCC is a necessary component, but these prior memos and the management plan do indicate that another component in any study should take ecological values in to consideration, such as flushing of alligators.

Jim stated the US Fish & Wildlife Service has done their own flushing surveys that have done well. This is one of the reasons why Ding Darling has areas closed on certain days of the week to give the birds a rest from being flushed. Jim stated that an SCC is more of an opinion survey.

Paul Thomas argued there was more to it. It is a use survey and a tie in with the biology of the animals. At Weeki Wachee, they do not see reptiles anymore, they do not see the manatees behaving the same way. That is part of the experience. The reason there has been no funding for this in the past is because the social component was not recognized. We do now. That is why it is being looked at now.

Discussion moved on to the funding, Hernando County agreed to the Weeki Wachee study because the water management district agreed to put up some funding. It was suggested that if other groups are willing to fund the study for the Myakka, it might encourage other organizations to also provide funding. Another option proposed was partnering with the University of Florida and have graduate students perform the study.

Chris advised that part of this committee's job is to decide if the entire length of the river is going to be studied by a contractor or if it will be divided up into different sections and it will be surveyed by different groups. Part of the job is to determine what method would be most feasible to actually happen and what scope of work is the most defensible when we have public meetings. This scope of work will need to have some determinations, including the methodology and length of the river to study, but this group will need to add others that are appropriate elements. Should there be numeric capacities established or some other metric? That is exactly what these meeting are for. In the end we need a recommendation to go to the MRMCC.

Jono added that the group is looking for the components of a design for a study that would gain support from DEP, SWFWMD and the county. The study needs to be financially feasible, and yields results that people think would be useful.

Chris suggested that the subcommittee work on getting the study done for the whole river instead of trying to do it section by section.

Paul agreed with Chris. He mentioned that it would be helpful to set some parameters about what the group is looking for since there are so many different activities and users on the river.

Belinda Perry asked if doing a user survey would be the first step.

Jono answered that a user survey would be helpful if it is corroborated with observation.

Chris is going to add some literature on flushing to the library on the Council's website.

Jono requested that if any members have any literature that would be helpful to send it to Chris.

Jono stated that there are four dimensions to a carrying capacity study identified in the MWSR Management Plan. The first one is physical. There needs to physically be enough space for the number of users at a given time. The second one is ecological. This can be set related to the behavior of wildlife. The third one is facilities. There are only so many access points in certain areas. South of Route 41 there are fewer places to put a kayak or canoe in as opposed to areas inside the park. The last one is a social dynamic - what kinds of experiences are people looking for.

The group agreed that they would work on the area of the river within Sarasota County.

Paul suggested that the group establish why there is a need for a study.

Jono stated that the study is needed because the river is being negatively impacted now. He also explained that there is a legal requirement to complete the study because it is stated in the new management plan of Myakka River State Park.

Paul then suggested that the group identify what the user groups are and what potential impacts they could have on the resource.

Group discussion continued. See following list and photo capture of white board on the next page.

**The different user groups
the subcommittee came up with are:**

Kayakers/canoeists/paddleboarders
Hikers/birdwatchers
Tour boat operators
Recreational boaters
Cast netting
Photographers
Fossil hunters
Recreational/Commercial fishing
Crabbers
Horseback riders
Jet skis
Hunters
Wilderness experience
Geo caching
Residents

**The potential impacts the
subcommittee came up with are:**

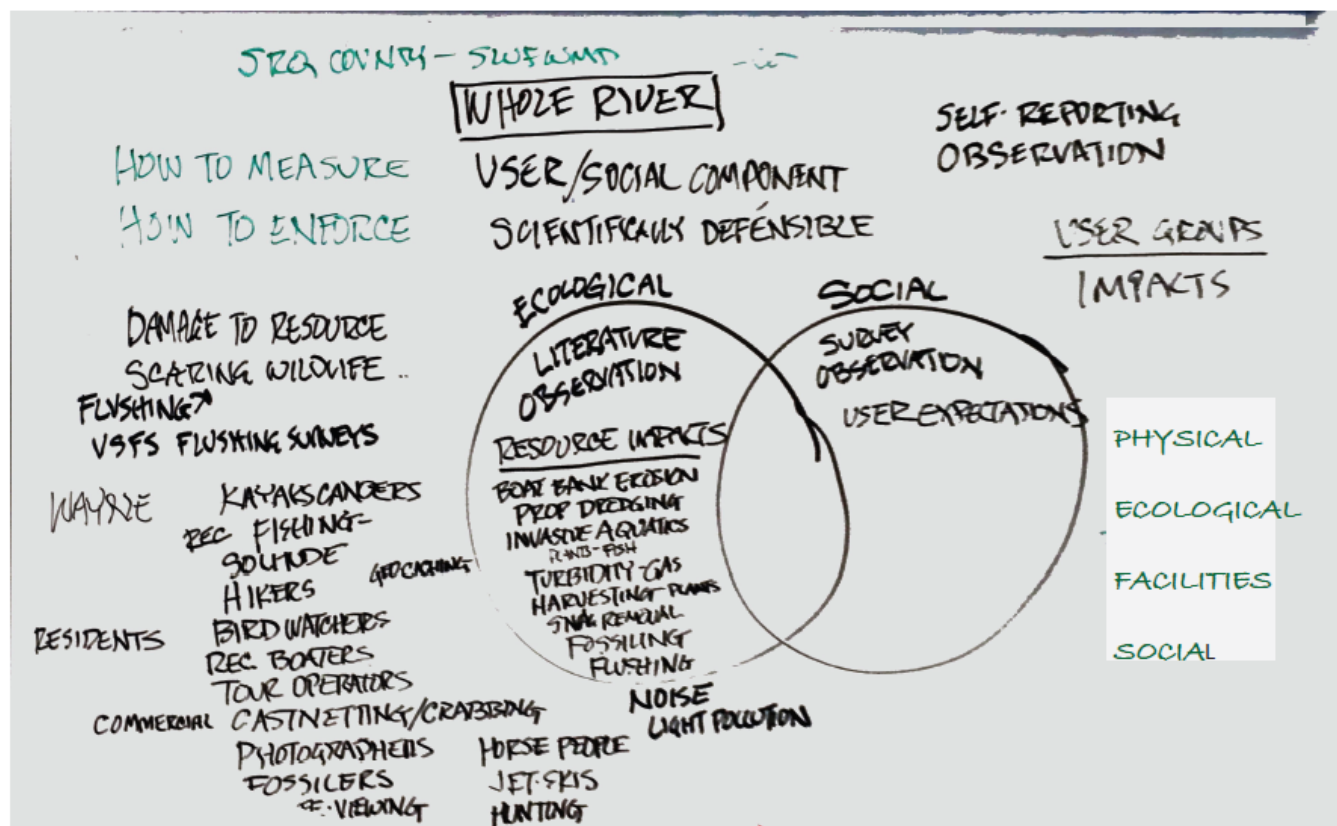
Bank erosion from boat wakes
Propeller dredging
Invasive aquatics (fish and plants)
Water quality
Turbidity (gas)
Harvesting plants/animals
Snag removal
Fossiling
Wildlife flushing
Noise
Light pollution

Chris mentioned that if anyone has any suggestions for new members to email him with those suggestions.

Jono asked Chris to let the group know when any documents or meeting notes are added to the website.

Chris briefly reviewed the Sunshine Law and reminded the group that discussions between appointed RCCS members about this subject cannot take place outside of a meeting.

The Meeting ended at 2:00 p.m.



Capture of diagram on white board from discussion during meeting