

**Myakka River Management Coordinating Council
Lemon Bay Park
570 Bay Park Blvd.
Englewood, Florida 34223**

**February 17, 2012
9:00 A.M. – 12:05 P.M.**

MINUTES

The meeting began at 9:00 A.M. with Jono Miller presiding. This meeting was advertised in the Herald Tribune on Friday, February 3, 2012.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jono Miller - Sierra Club
Susan Hochuli - PRMRWSA
Ed Flowers - DOF
Becky Ayech - ECOSWF
Allain Hale - ECOSWF
Mike Chouinard - Homeowner
Elizabeth Wong - City of North Port
Belinda Perry - Sarasota County

Marlene Guffey - Homeowner
Mary Jelks - Friends of Myakka
Maran Hilgendorf - CHNEP
Peggy Morgan - FDEP
Suzanne Lex - DCA
Maya Burke - SWFWMD
Betsy Roberts - Manasota 88
Mark Schulz - FDOT

INTERESTED PARTIES

Jessica Ritter - SC Parks & Rec.
Judy Meents - FPS
Natalie Cole - FPS
Tara Spieler - KCA
Crystal Clark - KCA
Kim Heuberger - SC Parks & Rec.
George Tatge - SC Parks & Rec.
Rob LeDue - SC Parks & Rec.
Brie Ondercin - SC Parks & Rec.

Jon Robinson - MRSP
Corky Pezzati - League of Women
Voters
Edwin Santana - FDOT/Metric Eng.
Richard Howard - FDOT/Atkins
Crystal Gorman - FDOT
Brooke Botterill - FDOT
Matt Osterhout - SC Parks & Rec.

BUSINESS MEETING:

- **Call to Order, Roll Call and introductions were made.**
- **There were no public comments.**
- **Chair and Vice-Chair Elections.**
Jono Miller and Tom Williams were elected as Chair and Vice Chair.
- **Additions to the Agenda.**
Jono added the Herschel Vineyard letter to the Agenda and Becky Ayech asked to talk about the Florida Water Coalition.

- **Revision and Approval of the Meeting Minutes from September, 2011 Council Meeting.**

Betsy Roberts moved adoption of the Minutes. Maran Hilgendorf seconded with a minor change on the last page. The word Council needs to be changed to CHNEP. The Minutes were adopted.

OLD BUSINESS: NONE

NEW BUSINESS:

Natalie Cole – Biologist Report:

The Myakka Wild & Scenic Plan has been approved by the Secretary of DEP. Natalie read a letter from Herschel Vineyard thanking this Council for updating the Plan.

The recommendation to switch the permitting aspect of the Myakka River Wild & Scenic program over to DEP Regulatory is not being pursued at this time. Natalie has not heard anything further.

Natalie has not issued any permits since September. Only one incident occurred in the beginning of February. Someone posted a sign on one of the Slow Speed/Minimum Wake pilings which read “eat more man-o-tee”. It was reported to Park Police and US Coast Guard and she removed it.

Exotic plant treatment on the river is ongoing. Natalie has been working this winter treating peppers (especially north of Snook Haven).

Maran Hilgendorf – Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program:

They are in the process of updating their 2008 plan which is available on their website. Maran asked people to submit comments by early April.

Maran brought copies of their latest newsletter drawing attention to the last page, the Water Atlas. Very many people are providing information to the website. She suggested it might be good to have a future presentation about this.

She brought copies of their 2012 Calendar. All images are donated and the deadline for images for the next calendar is July 14, 2012. Each person can submit up to 3 images which will be posted on their website for the public to help select them. The calendar will be distributed in October.

In 2005 they created their children’s book to teach children about the watershed. She specifically thanked Dr. Mary Jelks of the Jelks Foundation for her generous donation. The CHNEP just distributed 20,000 copies through seven school districts. The books are not available to the public since their entire budget goes to free distribution to the children. She asked that anyone who has contacts of

homeschooling groups and private schools to provide this information. The Lee County school district created a 16-video series to accompany this book.

CHNEP just finished a new set of videos on the sea life in our estuaries which featured 18 different experts from this area. All the videos are now on You Tube. WGCU Public Media created the videos for them and their will be showing them throughout town. She will be making a higher quality DVD that she will bring to the next Council meeting.

Clyde Butcher donated a picture of the Myakka River just after Tropical Storm Gabriel came through. They are available to the parks as well as she can bring more to the next meeting.

Questions and answers followed.

Maya Burke – Southwest Florida Water Management District Update:

Status on Surplus Lands Assessment Program – The Governing Board Subcommittee for the southern portion of the district is scheduled for March 7th at 10:00 A.M. at the Sarasota County Administration Building, 1660 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota.

Staff has met with subject matter expert's team including engineers, ecologists, planners, etc. They evaluated 11 properties from Manatee County south. The majority of the potential surplus properties were in Manatee County. They included the South Fork tract (Little Manatee River Watershed), Gilly Creek Tract (Myakka Watershed), Upper Myakka-Flatford Swamp Tract, Frog Creek (Tampa Bay/Terra Ceia area), Coker Praire (Myakka River Watershed) and the Hueber Tract (Tampa Bay/Terra Ceia area).

In Sarasota County they evaluated Schewe and Sarasota Surplus Office; in Charlotte County: the Prairie Shell Creek Property; in Desoto County: Deep Creek; in Highlands County: Jack Creek.

The staff recommendation for the March 7th meeting has been finalized and all of the staff recommendation forms and the packet information for the meeting will be available on their website February 22. You will be able to see summary of staff recommendations and give testimony.

Questions and answers followed.

Elizabeth Wong – City of North Port, Warm Mineral Springs Update:

The City of North Port and Sarasota County have jointly bought Warm Mineral Springs (81 acres) which discharges into Myakka River.

Three meetings were held in late January/early February to help decide what the county and city should do with the spring. There was also a survey posted on the

website which was closed Friday 17th where you can enter what you would like done with the spring.

The top three choices so far are:

- 1.) Preservation/conservation for water integrity, conservation efforts or preserving the artifacts in the spring
- 2.) Services in Operation such as resident discounts, health and wellness programs and café/food service.
- 3.) Economic development from ecotourism, a conference center, and more restaurants
- 4.) Recreation and Education including as hiking & biking trails, special events and swimming

Next steps: Consultant will prepare a conceptual plan and March 1st is the update to Advisory Board in Sarasota County. The North Port Parks and Rec. Advisory Board will be updated on March 15th. Then there will be a joint meeting on March 20th between North Port Commission and Sarasota County Commission.

Questions and discussion occurred. Elizabeth spoke about the water quality at the spring. Discussion occurred regarding artifacts at Warm Mineral Springs.

Susan Hochuli – Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Update:

The Water Transmission Project was completed last summer which included a micro-tunneling process to install a pipeline under the Myakka River and through the city of Venice's Myakka River Park at the east end of Laurel Road. Currently, they are working on the recovery of the wetlands that were temporarily impacted.

Questions and answers followed.

PRMRWSA supplies drinking water to their member governments which include Charlotte County, Desoto County, the City of North Port, Sarasota County and at some point in the future, Manatee County. For planning purposes they identify sources that could be available for water supply. Flatford Swamp is one of those supply sources that's been identified as well as the Donna Bay Watershed. These options are on the table, but from a utility standpoint the request for water has dropped.

More questions and answers followed.

Becky Ayech – ECOSWF:

Becky gave an update on the Florida Water Coalition Project she has been involved with. She presented a board and spoke about the many slime problems in our

waterways because of high levels of P and N in the water. The Florida Water Coalition has not had much luck of getting the Department of Environmental Protection to clean up water in the state of Florida, but in an effort to continue their campaign Becky had yellow post cards to President Obama that she encouraged everyone to sign and mail. The post card stated:

Florida's water pollution is a national disgrace. River, streams and lakes are contaminated by sewage, fertilizer and manure. Dangerous, toxic algae runs tourists away from beaches and sends them to emergency rooms. Commercial and recreational fisheries are devastated and property values plummet.

The US Protection Agency has proposed a standard to clean up Florida's waterways. Now it appears Florida's weaker standards will be approved instead. The problem is the state's plan does not crack down on polluters until the waterways are already in miserable shape. Florida needs enforceable Federal limits that will protect Florida's waters from turning to toxic, green slime. The EPA must take control of this issue once and for all.

There is a bill in Congress asks that the Florida Standards be adopted regardless of what they are.

Questions and answers followed.

It was discussed that DEP is developing numeric standards rather than just narrative standards.

PRESENTATIONS:

Sarasota County Parks & Recreation Staff – Public River Access Sites and Future Improvements:

Brie Ondercin – Properties from I-75 to U.S. 41:

The properties were acquired either through the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program, through the Neighborhood Park Lands Property Acquisition Program or through other means. Florida Communities Trust (FCT) has been a contributor to helping them purchase properties. The properties open to the public are: 1) Sleeping Turtles Preserve South - 213 acres located at the North River Rd. exit. It is part of a seven property purchase that was acquired during 2000 which are FCT parcels. It is on the Myakka River, but does not have river access as it has high banks on the west side. The property itself does have a borrow pit, fishing is allowed, hiking, boating opportunities.

2) Snook Haven and the Snook Haven Addition - 5 ½ acres, concession, river tours, boat ramp, launch, open to the public.

3) Jelks Preserve - 614 acres, 8 miles of trails, river access, 2 landing spots for kayakers and canoes to picnic or go hiking.

- 4) B & B Holdings - adjacent to Jelks, not open to the public because it does not have recreational opportunities.
- 5) Deer Prairie Creek Preserve - 6,439 acres on the east side of the river comprised of 4 different parcels acquired 2002-2004 and jointly owned and co-managed with SWFMD,. It has 70 miles of trails, 9 miles of equestrian trails, kayak landing at the north end. The southern entrance has a kayak launch, pond for fishing and handicapped access, picnic facilities, and portable restrooms.
- 6) Across from Deer Prairie Creek at U.S. 41 is a 7-acre parcel which was acquired through the Neighborhood Park Lands program in 2009. It has a creek or canal that flows west of the river and there are numerous abandoned facilities as well as wetlands.

Questions and answers followed.

George Tatge – Snook Haven and Snook Haven Addition:

The addition was 2.9 acres. Snook Haven was originally about 2.5 acres making approximately 5 ½ acres. They have struggled with public access at Snook Haven as there is competition between the restaurant and general public for access to the river. During their acquisition of Snook Haven property they met with DEP for permitting to improve the public water facilities on the property. When the addition became available they stopped the permitting process since the new property had an existing boat ramp. The concept is to move the operation of the boat ramp to the addition. Conceptually the ramp at Snook Haven will be used for emergency access only. The public would use the other ramp on the newly acquired property and parking would be provided. The County is also looking to improve public access for fishing along the shoreline to help minimize erosion.

Other plans include improving the restrooms facilities at Snook Haven. This would entail bringing a water and sewer line down Old Venice Avenue from River Road. They are also in the process of engaging an architect/engineer to repurpose some of the old cottages there for restrooms. The West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCID) is helping them fund some of the restroom facilities. They are still going through the permitting process.

They still have yet to determine the existing home's highest and best use on the new property, but they are looking for ideas.

Questions and answers followed.

Jessica Ritter – U.S. 41/ Myakka River Site:

The Myakka River/Tamiami Trail site is 7 acres that fronts U.S. 41 and the Myakka River. There is a navigable creek on the north side of the property, some wetlands, existing launch along the Myakka River, some native vegetation, but primarily nuisance exotic trees which they hope to remove.

There were several residential structures on the site when it was purchased which have been removed. One existing structure still remaining close to the river and may be usable.

Presently they are looking at the following recreational opportunities: canoe and kayak access, ADA launch into the navigable creek, and kayak landing on the existing ramp. Other considerations include nature trails and board walks, picnic areas, pervious parking, educational and interpretive signage and habitat restoration.

The proposed next steps are to get the public input. They are planning a public meeting scheduled in April possibly at Taylor Ranch. A submission process will also be opened for the park name for this new park.

Their next Advisory Board meeting is on March 1st. The public meeting will be in April and will focus more detail on the Snook Haven Addition and the Myakka/41 site. Then they will come back to their Park's Advisory and Recreational Council May 3rd which is a joint meeting with the ESOC board. They would anticipate bringing a presentation to their Sarasota County Commission some time this summer. At the same time they hope to be giving them a recommended name for the Myakka/41 site. If the board approves staff would implement some improvements in a phased approach.

Questions and answers occurred regarding hogs.

Break from 11:06 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

Edwin Santana – FDOT, I-75 Project Update:

The project northern portion of the project goes from just north of the Bridge at River Rd to north of S.R. 681 for a length of 9 miles. They are widening I-75, adding lanes toward the median, going from 4 lanes to 6. The project also includes realignment of I-75 and the widening of Laurel Road, Jacaranda and River Rd. They are on schedule to finish the project this summer.

Questions and answers followed.

Richard Howard – FDOT, I-75 Sumter Blvd. to River Rd.

The existing facility is 4 travel lanes with 8-ft inside shoulder (4 feet of which is paved) and 12-foot outside shoulder (10 feet of which is paved). The improvements consist of resurfacing the four lanes as well as adding an additional 12-foot lane to the inside along with a 12-foot shoulder in both directions. This will result in a 6 lane section from Sumter to River Rd. which is approximately 9 miles. All bridges will accommodate the 6-lane construction being proposed with the exception of the Deer Prairie Creek Bridge which needs to be widened. Widening the Deer Prairie Creek Bridge will also accommodate the future 8-lane project which is in the very distant future. Additionally the bridge at Ponce De

Leon where the interstate goes underneath will have a vertical clearance issue with the proposed construction. The standard vertical clearance is 16 ½ ft. One alternative is to lower I-75 underneath it or possibly raise Ponce De Leon Bridge. They could get a variance which is very economical.

They are at the very early stages of design which is expected to be completed in March of 2014. The construction for the project is programmed for 2020. There are indications that they do not need to purchase any additional right-of-ways for this project which may facilitate the advancement of the 2020 date by freeing up time and funds.

Tara Spieler – Wetland and storm water issues of the Sumter to River Rd. Project:

The project crosses the SWFWMD conservation lands and also crosses through some Sarasota County owned land. There are 20 different basins and 3 different ponds for each basin. All the ponds are within the DOT right-of-way which eliminated having to buy property. Currently there are 3 to 4 acres of wetland impacts. All the cross drains will also be widened to accommodate the additional travel lanes. All the ponds are designed for 8 lanes. Wherever possible they will preserve trees in the median where there are no storm water ponds.

Discussion occurred regarding invasive species. The standard is that DOT does not plant the ponds but lets vegetation recruit naturally. One could write a letter to the DOT if they were concerned about the lack of planting. Natalie sent out contact Richard (Mose) Howard's contact info to the members.

There will be cable barriers and guard rails installed to prevent wildlife from entering onto the highway. More questions followed regarding birds and wildlife crossing to the ponds in the median. Fencing is provided but it was discussed that it might not be enough and that DOT should look into obtaining more.

Jono summarized: On the outside of the right-of-way there will be a fence and the exact design and confirmation is yet to be determined. The function is to minimize wildlife coming in. Between the innermost lane and the pond there will be a cable barrier with 40 to 50 feet of grass before you get to the pond.

Next Meeting Date: June

It was decided to use Doodle website for members to select a Friday in June.

Future Agenda Items:

- Follow up with Sarasota County on recreational opportunities along the river.
- Water Atlas presentation.
- Missed reports from last meeting.
- Flatford Swamp update.
- NEP public conferences

Becky Ayech moved to add the Sarasota County League of Women Voters back on the membership list and Betsy Roberts seconded. The motion passed. Jono will draft a letter that will need to be approved by the Director.

Betsy Roberts moved to adjourn. Ed Flowers seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 P.M.