

**St. Marys River Management Committee**  
P.O. Box 251 Folkston, Georgia 31537

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**June 6, 2005**

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its regularly scheduled meeting on June 6, 2005, at the Nassau County Building in Callahan, Fla. Committee members and visitors in attendance are listed on a separate sheet. A quorum of members was not present.

**Call to Order**

Chairman Chip Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m. The minutes from the May 2005 meeting were reviewed but were not approved due to lack of a quorum. Treasurer Winifred Stephenson was not in attendance so the treasurer's report was not presented.

**Wastewater Discharge**

Members reviewed and discussed two recent articles from *The Standard* newspaper, regarding the possible construction of a wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) in Baker County. Chairman Campbell clarified that the St. Marys River is not a designated Outstanding Florida Waterway (OFW), although the newspaper articles indicate as such. Dean Woehrle said he would like to pursue the idea of applying for the OFW designation for the river, and he is doing some research to see if that is possible, considering half of the river is in Georgia.

Committee member Merrill Varn asked what type of WWTP is being considered by Baker County. Woehrle said he doubts the county even knows at this point; they are doing preliminary studies to examine their options.

Woehrle expressed a concern about the pH balance of the treated effluent that could be discharged into the river. He explained that although the river's existing pH is very low, the pH of the treated discharge would be much higher, due to the "neutral" discharge requirements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The difference in the pH balance could have a detrimental impact on the river.

Committee member Vickie Samus said she agrees with the published statement from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) that there are other options for discharge of the effluent, such as reuse of the reclaimed water. She expressed concern that even one discharge accident could cause a large problem for the river, and also that the amount of discharge could ultimately raise water levels due to the increased density that a sewer system would bring to the area. Charlton County Administrator Steve Nance asked how wastewater is handled in Nassau County; Samus said JEA handles the wastewater for portions of the county and that she does not believe that any of it is discharged into the river.

There was discussion about the amount of long-term growth coming to Baker County. People are attracted to the river and to the short commute to Jacksonville for work.

Ed Davis, a resident of Baker County and first-time visitor to the SMRMC, expressed concern about eminent domain and the county's new St. Marys Shoals property. He said he lives on the river and fears that any proposed discharge will ruin the river. Davis said the developers are "pulling the strings" and have more money than the whole county at this point. He stated that the developers aren't from north Florida and aren't concerned with what they do to the natural resources here. Davis said the project is financially driven, and he's concerned the county commissioners won't stand up to the developers because of the vast amounts of money involved.

Melinda Granlund, with the St. Johns River Water Management District and SMRMC secretary, shared a comment from FDEP's Northeast District spokesperson, Jill Johnson, that obtaining a surface water discharge permit from the agency would be difficult and that the county should look into other discharge methods, including public access reuse and residential irrigation. Granlund also shared a comment from Baker County Manager Jason Griffis that the discharge issue has been "blown out of proportion and that no effluent will be discharged into the river."

Vickie Samus raised another concern, which was echoed by Chairman Campbell, about trying to build a WWTP on the Shoals property, which was purchased with public funds.

Merrill Varn reminded members that Baker County asked the committee for its help and comments at the May 2005 SMRMC meeting, which was held at the Shoals and hosted by the county. She recommended that the committee write a letter to the county commission, expressing its displeasure with a river discharge option. Because a quorum was not present to formally vote on the river discharge issue, the committee instead agreed to affirm the suggestion of writing a letter.

There was discussion about whether the proposed WWTP would be an agenda item at the next Baker County Commission meeting scheduled for June 7, 2005. Woehrle said he would attend the meeting and would share the committee's viewpoint at the meeting. Chairman Campbell directed Woehrle to ask, if possible, how the WWTP could be built on the property if it was acquired using funds from The Trust for Public Land.

Woehrle said Baker County is facing a huge growth problem, and they don't have the funds or roads to support it.

### **Conservation Overlay**

Chairman Campbell said that Charlton County has an ordinance that conforms to the committee's conservation overlay recommendations – two-acre minimum riverfront lots and 100-foot septic setbacks.

Dean Woehrle said he wants to approach the Baker County Commission about amending its ordinance to accept the committee's conservation overlay recommendations at its next commission meeting scheduled for June 7, 2005.

### **Welcome Center**

Dean Woehrle informed the committee that the abandoned welcome center was torn down by Nassau County, despite the efforts of several citizen activists to save the structure. Woehrle said the lease between the state and the county is still in effect.

Vickie Samus suggested that the committee write a letter to Nassau County Attorney Mike Mullin requesting that the property's ownership be transferred from the state to the county. She said such a transfer would save the county money because they wouldn't have to pay for the lease, which is currently \$300 a year.

### **Budget Request**

Melinda Granlund informed the committee that the St. Johns River Water Management District is reviewing the committee's request for stormwater funding in the fiscal year 2005-2006 District budget. She said the District is considering a possible funding package for Nassau and Baker counties to assist with stormwater master planning.

### **Miscellaneous**

Dean Woehrle said he has received several bills and one deposit related to the recent river cleanup. He will pay the bills and deposit the check, and will request reimbursement from the committee's treasurer when she returns from vacation.

Committee member Jim Wildes said there seems to be a large amount of trash in the river and asked members who might be associated with any Boy Scout troops or school groups to consider doing a service project to clean up the river. Woehrle said the part of the river around White Oak Plantation does not flush very well and that trash tends to build up in that area.

Committee member Vivian Ritsma proposed starting the regular monthly meetings earlier in the evening, possibly at 6 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. Members agreed that the topic would be on the next meeting agenda.

Vickie Samus said the Nassau County Commission recently passed an ordinance that states that county residents could only be appointed to one committee. Samus said that would affect Vivian Ritsma and herself.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.