

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

MINUTES OF MEETING
Oct. 4, 2006

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its regularly scheduled meeting on Oct. 4, 2006, at the Farm Bureau 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

Co-chairman Dean Woehrle called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m. The minutes from the September meeting were distributed but a vote was not held due to the lack of a quorum. Treasurer Winifred Stephenson presented the treasurer's report. The main account has a balance of \$9,653.34, and the management plan account has a balance of \$526.50. There were no expenditures since the previous report. Again, committee members were unable to approve the report due to the lack of a quorum.

GEORGIA WATER CONSERVATION PLAN

Committee member Merrill Varn led discussion of the committee's response to the Georgia Statewide Water Planning (GSWP) effort. Georgia lawmakers in 2004 mandated that the state develop a set of goals, policies and practices to conserve the quantity and quality of state waters. The state was tasked with formulating the plan, and the Fanning Institute was chosen to gather input from citizens. Varn said the committee was not specifically invited to comment because the Fanning Institute had never heard of it.

The state has been divided into eight watersheds, and Basin Advisory Committees (BAC) were chosen from a range of interest groups within each watershed. The St. Marys River is in the Satilla/Suwannee/St. Marys Advisory Committee's purview.

Committee members discussed two of the four topics — minimizing withdrawals and maximizing returns — and will discuss the remaining topics at its November meeting. Varn will be drafting a response on behalf of the SMRMC to provide written comments to the Fanning Institute and the state.

From the committee's discussion:

- Camden and Charlton counties have no water conservation plan, while water utilities in Nassau and Baker counties are subject to St. Johns River Water Management District consumptive permitting criteria that require water conservation strategies under state law. Also, property owners in the SJRWMD, with few exceptions, are required to follow the Lawn and Landscape Irrigation Rule, which limits irrigation to no more than two days per week and only before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m.
- Only in Baker County is surface water (river or stream) withdrawn within the four counties of the SMRMC.

- Interbasin groundwater transfers are generally an unwelcome concept. Such water transfers have been discussed at length in Florida, primarily due to a report released by the Governor's Council of 100 a couple of years ago. There also have been discussions in Georgia regarding sending water from south Georgia to Atlanta.
- There was no knowledge of discussion about replacing water withdrawals with rainwater or reuse in Georgia. Water managers in Florida promote the use of reclaimed water, saying that phasing out wastewater discharges to surface waters will help reduce nutrient pollution to rivers, offset future water supply needs and provide for long-term growth. Using reclaimed water saves fresh drinkable water for use in homes and businesses, reduces the need to transport water from other places and postpones the need to construct new drinking water facilities. Likewise, it offsets costs of wastewater treatment and provides a safe, environmentally responsible alternative to wastewater disposal, meaning less waste will be discharged in area waterways such as the St. Marys River.
- Regarding reclaimed (gray) water, Nassau County does reuse some wastewater on area recreational facilities. In Camden County, the Dover Bluff development will have access to reclaimed water.
- Education and outreach programs about beneficial reuse and water conservation are available in Nassau and Baker counties through the water management district. The SMRMC itself is an outreach program, as well as having various outreach tools such as the Patrons of the St. Marys (POSM) newsletter.
- The committee agreed that best management practices to promote conservation are somewhat beneficial, but the most effective method would be mandatory compliance, though it would be unpopular. A more palatable approach would be a combination of education and incentives in conjunction with voluntary compliance.
- Given the present and future pressures on the river, the group discussed revisiting the River Management Plan to address surface water withdrawals.
- Committee members were asked to contact local departments of health for information about the number of septic tanks in use in each of the four counties.
- Per its work to gain septic tank setbacks in each of the four counties, the committee generally agreed that poorly maintained septic systems and those that are poorly located (inappropriate soils, water tables, etc.) have a negative impact on adjacent waters. There are some areas where septic systems should be prohibited.
- Septic systems are monitored in Charlton and Camden counties when there is a change of property ownership.
- Committee members said that counties did not have comprehensive plans to expand central sewer in Charlton or Camden counties, but rather, expansion tends to be driven by demand. The city of Folkston expands where residents are willing to pay for it. However, residents are not required to hook up to central sewer even if it expands into their neighborhoods — septic tanks are permitted in areas served by central sewer systems.
- The committee agreed that a copy of the River Management Plan should be provided to the Fanning Institute. The committee also agreed that the SMRMC should be included as a stakeholder group as Georgia's discussion goes forward.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Jim Harris, program manager with Georgia DNR's Environmental Protection Division, said that Rob McDowell has been named watershed manager for the Satilla/Suwanee/St. Marys/Ochlockonee basin. He is currently regional planner/coordinator for the Flint River Plan.
- The November meeting will take place at the Farm Bureau office because the Nassau County Building will be used for Election Day activities.
- The committee agreed to again ask to hold its annual Christmas holiday party at White Oak Plantation. Georgia Co-chairman Jim Wildes will check on the availability of the facility.
- Florida Co-chairman Dean Woehrle appointed committee members Chip Campbell, Merrill Varn and Russell Barber to serve as the nominating committee for the slate of officers for 2007.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.