

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

MINUTES OF MEETING
July 7, 2008

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its regularly scheduled meeting on July 7, 2008, 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 present.

Call to Order

Committee co-chairman Chip Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:14 P.M. The Treasurer's report was not available. Minutes from the June, 2008 meeting were not available.

Report on Land and Water Conservation in Nassau County

Trish Gramajo of the Nature Conservancy (TNC) gave a report on efforts being made to promote land and water conservation in Nassau County. She explained that the Florida Forever program sets aside \$300 million annually to serve diverse land protection needs – this money is made available from collected documentary stamp fees. While Nassau County presently has some preserved natural areas, more notably the recently acquired Four Creeks State Forest, the county is below its Level of Service for parks and open space (as dictated by their comprehensive plan) and could benefit by raising local dollars to match with state and federal funding sources for preserving the county's natural assets. Nassau County's two largest industries rely heavily on healthy natural areas and so preserving these assets makes sense for the county's quality of life and its economy.

Many Florida counties have invested in preserving their natural assets and allowed for their electorate to vote via a county wide referendum on whether the county should issue bond dollars, payable from ad valorem taxes in order to create a dedicated source of local funds for preserving their natural assets. Counties like Flagler, Volusia, Alachua and Duval are just a few in north Florida that have done this and developed very successful land and water conservation programs that resulted in increased property values and creating a workplace environment in which companies would like to relocate to, maintaining clean rivers and drinking water sources, preserving fish and wildlife habitat, and providing recreational amenities for the community's benefit and enjoyment. Allowing for the county voters to decide the matter ensures residents are willing to make this investment and many times, and allows for stakeholder input to get factored into the county's land/water preservation and recreational development process.

In addition, preserving these natural assets deters future degradation that is much more expensive to restore in the future as made evident by the costly \$700 million St. Johns River needs identified by the River Accord for the Lower St. Johns basin alone. The Nature Conservancy will work with other partners such as the Trust for Public Lands and a handful of county organizations to ask the county to consider a referendum that would allow for Nassau County

residents to vote on whether they support a bond program that would preserve key water resources in the county such as the St. Marys and Nassau rivers.

Old business

Alice Vick reported that the St. Marys River might qualify for the Georgia state designation “Wild and Scenic River.” She further stated that the designation “Outstanding Natural Resource Waterway” was not applicable, as the waterway must pass through public lands, for the latter designation.

Merrill Varn commented on the Greenprint for Camden County’s failure to address the septic issue in regards to the St. Marys River. She will prepare a letter to the county to this effect.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 P.M.