

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

MINUTES OF MEETING
January 5, 2009

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its regularly scheduled meeting on January 5, 2009, at the Nassau County Building in Callahan, Florida. Committee members and visitors in attendance are listed on a separate sheet. A quorum of members was not present.

Call to Order

Committee co-chairman Dean Woehrle called the meeting to order at 7:10 P.M.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's report indicated our balance remains \$7,830.76, with no activity this month. Management plan account remains \$536.50. Treasurer's report was accepted.

Coastal Incentive Grants

Kelly O'Rourke from Georgia DNR presented information on coastal incentive grants, less than or equal to \$50,000, a local government funding opportunity, with a deadline of January 28. Funds distributed for improving water quality. Chip Campbell asked about the possibility of applying for help with the county park at Traders Hill. Kelly stated that a local resolution needed to be passed for the grant.

St. Marys River Outstanding Florida Water (OFW) Petition and Transboundary Watershed Cooperation Project

Original speaker Laurie Fowler was not present. Tom Ankersen, professor from the University of Florida Conservation Law Clinic, took her place. He reported on seeking funds from EPA for a septic flyover, and the possibility of using students to look at different low-impact methods of storm water runoff management. Students would examine existing ordinances in Georgia. Funding would be through a Clean Water Act , Section 319 grant. One possibility is the use of ultraviolet technology to detect septic tank overflow. Chip Campbell noted that our management plan included a mandate to improve septic management on the river. Geoffrey Sample, SJRWMD, noted that the District is planning a series of workshops on low-impact development techniques. Discussion ensued on various specific trouble areas along the St. Marys, including the dissolved oxygen "sag" below Browntown, Macclenny's total maximum daily load, Horsepen Creek, and Cooner Creek.

Alice Vick, Georgia DNR, stated that there was ordinance development to protect water quality through infrastructure improvements – drainage, parking lots, etc. Jeannie Butler, Georgia DNR , is coordinating storm water.

Nassau County Commissioner Walter Boatright asked if we had a benchmark. The federal Clean Water Act was cited.

Tom Ankersen then brought up the final draft of a petition for the St. Marys River to become an Outstanding Florida Water (OFW), circulated to members by email before this meeting. The petition needs to be filed, and then public meetings held to gather input. Dean Woehrle solicited questions. Chip Campbell asked first, what difference OFW status would make on silviculture practices, and second, what restrictions, if any, would OFW put on pipes in the river, and then docks.

Ankersen responded that OFW creates an anti-degradation standard to waters in the river, based on the past two years of data. OFW is a Class III water. For point-source pollution (pipeline), there can be no lowering of ambient water quality, and no mixing zone is allowed. For silviculture, the 35-foot waterfront setback becomes a 200-foot setback. For docks, the 1,000 square-foot exemption becomes a 500 square-foot exemption. Storm water limits will probably be superseded by a new rule in Florida which will call for 0% degradation post construction. Existing discharges can be grandfathered in.

Mike Bell from Rayonier asked about pulp mill effluent. Discussion ensued about where to draw the boundaries of the OFW – possibly excluding the lower estuary to avoid the effluent issue. Mike Bell pointed out that the restrictions that the OFW status puts on development could hamper “hurricane evacuation plans” and that the committee should “thoroughly vet the disadvantages which might occur.” Chip reasserted the committee's mandate: to keep the river water quality clean. Others pointed out that the Suwannee and Perdido Rivers, existing OFW rivers, have not been hampered.

John November, UF law student, presented in some detail the BMP's of silviculture under OFW status, and the possible use of special management zones, primary and secondary zones, and exceptions. The inclusion or exclusion of tributaries was also discussed. Phil Wornicke with the Forestry Division pointed out that as much as 6,000 acres of pine forest could be impacted by increased setbacks under OFW. Chip Campbell pointed out that land use practices directly impact water quality, and that the committee is focused on the future, and needs a full suite of tools to keep the river from degrading. Bell mentioned the Matanzas River's “special plan” which accommodates future development in Flagler County.

Discussion took place regarding the St. Marys as a border river. If the St Marys becomes an OFW in Florida, EPA mandates that Georgia also meet those standards along the river. Ankersen pointed out that an OFW designation enhances chances of Florida Forever purchases along the river, thus creating more ecotourism. Dan Roach stated that the river is amply protected by existing regulations. Bell and Joe feel the OFW program is too restrictive, and that the exact ramifications of the OFW status need to be clearly defined. The meeting ended with general agreement to continue the item to next month, examining all the possibilities, including exact definition of OFW, whether to include tributaries and the lower river, and the inclusion of other strategies to protect the river.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 P.M.