

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

MINUTES OF MEETING
February 2, 2009

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or committee) held its regularly scheduled meeting on February 2, 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 present. Thirty-eight visitors were present by head count.

Call to Order

Committee co-chairman Dean Woehrle called the meeting to order at 7:15 P.M. The Treasurer's report indicated \$8,281.76 in the main account, and \$526.50 in the management plan account. Minutes from the November 3, 2008 meeting were approved. It was moved and passed to keep the 2008 officers in place, at least for the time being, owing to the important issues facing the committee in the next few months.

2009 River Cleanup

Dean Woehrle announced that the river cleanup will be held the 3rd Saturday (3/21/09) in March. Site captains will remain in place from 2008, unless further notified, and lunch will follow at White Oak Plantation. Further information at the March meeting.

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

Chip Campbell introduced this topic, stating that it began as a cooperative project between the University of Florida (UF) and University of Georgia (UGA) law schools to help our management efforts, which began with our Management Plan, signed off on by all four counties in 2000-2001. Tom Ankersen (UF law school) handed out summaries of legal effects and impact on economic development of the Outstanding Florida Waters designation. In fact, work done by the UF law school on OFW designation for the St. Marys River is moot, since both Nassau and Baker Counties have chosen not to file the OFW petition. Discussion ensued regarding inclusion of the tributaries – the effect on silviculture vs. development of the land. Teresa Crawford queried whether we could “tweak” the OFW petition, or should we try to improve the Management Plan? Woehrle pointed out that the OFW petition requirements were essentially cast in stone, and could not be tweaked, whereas the Management Plan is a work in progress and could be modified.

Campbell stated that our goal was to promote cooperation between Georgia and Florida in “adaptive management” of the river, i.e., an interstate compact. “Adaptive management” has been defined as identifying problems and developing solutions based on the problems in that watershed (and determining whether those solutions are working). Woehrle stated that we need

to keep doing what we're already doing, as regards management of the river, i.e., on a local level.

John November, Susanna Blair, Lorenzo Benini, and Holly Hall, from the University of Florida graduate school, all involved in environmental studies were introduced, as was Laurie Fowler, an environmental lawyer from UGA. They will help the committee with our transboundary watershed cooperation efforts.

Fowler pointed out that septic tanks have been identified as a specific problem for this watershed, and suggested that we might apply adaptive management to this issue. Campbell pointed out that adaptive management must have actionable specifics. Steve Nance, Charlton County administrator, said he feels that the septic problem has been solved for new systems (through the committee's efforts to promote setbacks), and that the main problem exists for old, failed systems. He stated that the only time Charlton County inspects an existing system is when the property changes hands.

Nassau County Commissioner Walter J. Boatright said that Nassau County requires actual pumping of the tank and inspection when property changes hands; Nance said Charlton does not require pumping, but a visual inspection.

Ken Hase motioned that the committee request environmental health personnel from all four counties meet with the project group from UGA regarding septic tank issues. The motion passed after discussion.

Merrill Varn motioned that we ask the UF project group to review our Management Plan, utilizing local input, and make recommendations on how to improve the Plan, in lieu of the OFW petition. This motion passed after discussion.

Rob McDowell (Georgia EPD) reminded the committee that a comprehensive statewide water management plan is being worked on now (for Georgia). This plan will incorporate existing ideas (including, hopefully, our Management Plan).

George Varn expressed concerns about how we deal with non-point-source degradation of the watershed.

Winifred Stephenson expressed the hope that we end up with something workable

Heath Rauschenberger (USFWS) gave a brief report on the Atlantic sturgeon restoration program. He said this program will also benefit shad and striped bass in the river, by maintaining good water quality; this group will also do some water quality monitoring.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 P.M.