

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION
RECREATION ISSUES WORKSHOP, Thursday, February 21, 2007
5:00-8:00 P.M., Westgate River Ranch Lodge
3600 River Ranch Boulevard, River Ranch, FL 33867**

MEETING SUMMARY

This is a summary of the WRAC Recreation Issues Workshop on February 21, 2008, at River Ranch, FL. It has been posted on <http://my.sfwmd.gov/wrac>.

Action:

- **Participants agreed without objection to move the Chandler Slough proposal on to the WRAC and the SFWMD Governing Board.**

Item 1: David Lithgow, Chair, WRAC Recreation Issues, invited participants to the table, welcomed everyone and asked people to introduce themselves.

Rick Smith, SFWMD WRAC Facilitator, explained the purpose and function of the WRAC and the WRAC Issues Workshops. He directed attention to a handout explaining the WRAC Priority Plan and the section on Recreation Issues.

Larry Nutter, Naples Pathway Coalition, briefly described the “River of Grass Greenway” concept and handed out a brochure on the proposed pathway from Naples to Miami.

Item 2: Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Workgroup Update: Steve Coughlin, Director, Div. of Land Stewardship, SFWMD:

Steve Coughlin provided an update on the results of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes facilitated stakeholders workgroup. Intent was to convene a representative group of 18 people representing recreational user groups, environmental groups, landowners, and agencies and develop consensus recommendations. Six meetings from February to October 2007 were held and final reports were provided in January, 2008.

The group set a high standard for achieving full consensus: In the absence of full consensus, a super-majority of 75% would be required for approval of recommendations. Full consensus was not achieved; however agreement was reached on the following:

- The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) should create a wildlife management or similar area designation
- Designate hiking and kayaking trails
- Prohibit harvest of antlerless deer
- Open East Shore and West Shore for small game, turkey and hog hunting.
- Hog dogs and retrievers allowed; deer dogs prohibited.

Next steps: SFWMD Management review of results.

Discussion:

- Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen's Association (KRVSA) representative said the Chain of Lakes stakeholder group was stacked against the sportsmen and that the vote sheet on the final report was incorrect and should show "3 for; 10 against; and 4 abstentions". KRVSA needs to be represented on any decision making group going forward.
- Costs to operate the facilitated stakeholder's group were estimated at \$50-75,000 with no consensus. This is a waste of taxpayer's dollars. Requested SFWMD not do this again.
- South Florida Sportsmen's Association representative urged moving forward with adding Chandler Slough to the Kissimmee Public Use Area and said that landowners were over represented on the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes public use stakeholder's group. Also stated that the deck was stacked against the sportsmen and the exercise was a waste of time.
- A representative of the Gardner Hunt Club disagreed and said it was not a total waste of time. There were areas of good agreement.
- A representative of the Everglades Coordinating Council said it is important to preserve cultural values such as the "Gladesmen Culture". Sportsmen and women push for and support multiple use, but not to exclusion of the historic and cultural uses. In certain areas, kayakers and canoeists have advocated exclusion of airboats.

Item 3: Kissimmee River Restoration Update - David Colangelo, Sr. Env. Scientist, Kissimmee Div., SFWMD:

David Colangelo provided a summary of Kissimmee River Restoration status. Phase IVA complete and now open to the public. Phase IVB will begin June 2008 to backfill four more miles of river. The area is expected to be closed to public access because of construction, starting in Fall, 2008. Istokpoga/S-67 boat ramp expected to be completed by January 2009. Area will be closed until complete; and, S-68 work will require closure until November, 2008.

Discussion:

- Phase IV-A Backfilling Project: What about public access to the area – if the project is completed why is the "Closed to Public Access" sign still there? SFWMD Response: Will to check on that and get back with group.
- Question about C-37 dredging. SFWMD Response: two years ago contractor shut down area to complete project. Concerned about access from southeast corner of Lake Hatchineha. Question about "U" shaped weir and location. Question about taking out S65C. Response: yes it will be removed.
- Concerns about prescribed burning on the restored river floodplain – need to do it. Response: Kissimmee and Land Stewardship divisions will work together on this.
- Concerns about percentage of submerged aquatic vegetation on lakes Kissimmee/Cypress/Toho. Concern that lakes are barren and there is too much spraying.

- Concern about amount of area closed due to construction, especially re: KICCO management area. SFWMD Response: this area had been on again, off again for construction; issue was mitigation area for flood protection levee. Plan is to close only about 40-60 acres. The rest will be open to public access.
- Chair: Need presentation on hydrology of the restored river. Concerned about availability of water for the restored river and floodplain marshes.

Item 4: Lake Kissimmee Boat Ramp, Chandler Slough Public Use, and Recreation Updates – Dan Cotter, Sr. Planner, Div. of Land Stewardship, SFWMD:

Dan Cotter updated the group about the status of the above items.

- Lake Kissimmee Boat Ramp: Conceptual plan presented to the public on January 16, 2006. Polk County will begin public meetings about operation of the Boat Ramp facility on 2/28/08. The SFWMD has allocated \$1 million in FY 2008 funds to complete the boat ramp and design is underway. Letter received by SFWMD from Polk County stating County intent to open the boat ramp 24/7 and allow firearms within boat ramp area.
- Public Use Plan for Chandler Slough presented to stakeholders on July 21, 2007. Recommendations incorporated into plan including a 100 yard no hunting zone near adjacent private properties with residences. Approximately 3,700+ acres of Chandler Slough (east of the C-38, south of US 98) are proposed to be added to the Kissimmee River Public Use Area. This proposal would request the FWCC to incorporate Chandler Slough into the Public Use Area, and will be presented to the WRAC on March 6 and the SFWMD Governing Board on March 13.
- Public access and parking facilities will be provided. Provisions have been made for hiking, airboating, and hunting, and preserving cattle leases.
- Allapattah Flats in Martin County will have new access points provided that will improve access and use.
- SFWMD has proposed designated primitive camp sites in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes.
- A parking area and trailhead to connect to an existing boardwalk, is being constructed in Bird Rookery Swamp in Collier County.

Discussion:

- Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen's Association (KRVSA) representative stated that:
 - the organization wants guaranteed access to the Shady Oakes Boat Ramp 24 hours/day/7 days/week, 365 days/year; and wants language added to the existing agreement with Polk County (executed in May 2007) to guarantee this level of access;
 - asked about selection of primitive camp sites and requested that other existing sites used by the public be designated;

- Need to work with FWCC now to get the prohibition of hunting antlerless deer in place before the next season begins.
- FWCC representative thanked SFWMD for boat ramp and will ask Polk County to support 24/7 access. Said language in Polk County letter reerving right to change rules in the future, if necessary based on conditions, would be standard for any land management agency.
- Participants agreed without objection to move the Chandler Slough proposal on to the WRAC and the SFWMD Governing Board.
 - Comment that the airboat trail at Chandler Slough is too small. SFWMD response: once restoration work is completed, the area will be re-evaluated for airboat use.
 - Comment supporting the 100 yard safety zone. Questions about the safety zone and how it impacts area residences. Suggestion made and accepted by SFWMD to go out with sportsmen and landowners and look at the areas in question.
 - Florida Trail Association thanked SFWMD for including a section of the Florida Trail in the Chandler Slough area.
 - KRVSA has suggested building storm shelters to provide cover for recreational users during thunder storms and safe airboat crossings in Gardner-Cobb Marsh. If SFWMD will provide the materials, KRVSA will provide the labor. KRVSA will provide GPS coordinates of proposed locations.
 - United Waterfowlers representatives requested longer waterfowl hunting season on Allapattah. Understood it would be the same as on other Wildlife Management Areas. FWCC Response: will review that issue.
 - Comments from several people concerned about walk-in access only at Allapattah Wildlife Management Area on Cottage Road, except during hunting season. SFWMD Response: considering a camp by permit program where campers with a permit could access the area by vehicle.
 - Everglades Coordinating Council representative suggested a clause be added to the Shady Oaks Boat Ramp agreement that the new site replaces a previously existing site that was open to the public 24/7/365 days/year.
 - Private landowner commented that the SFWMD should not designate camping sites where no restroom facilities are provided. The existing sites are a mess and are being very badly trashed by the public. Was a member of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Stakeholders group. Wants to reduce conflict between equestrians, hikers, hunter, campers, etc. As the area develops, recreational uses of the Chain of Lakes will increase. Appreciates the SFWMD approach to be pro-active about these issues.

Item 5: Recreation Planning Update – Jerry Krenz, Sr. Planner, Div. of Land Stewardship:

- Alligator hunting: Mr. Krenz said SFWMD proposed the same alligator hunting program as in 2007: STA-1, West, 100 permits and STA-5, 50 permits. Participants supported working with the FWCC to assess the

number of harvest permits, supported increasing the number of permits and supported proposing to the SFWMD Governing Board in April, the same or greater number of permits for STA-1, West and STA-5.

- He said the 2007 waterfowl hunting season was very successful. SFWMD and the FWCC are planning for the 2008 season. Details will be presented at the April WRAC Recreation Issues Workshop meeting.
- He explained a new 6-month trial program of bank fishing (catch and release) at STA-1, East, on the levees adjacent to the public access/parking facility on SR 80. The area would be opened to catch and release bank fishing from Friday through Monday each week from sun up to sun down. Intent is to try to open the area to coincide with the opening of the public access facility on SR 80 west of West Palm Beach. The SFWMD will monitor the fishing activities and review the program in six months. Boats (motorized or non-motorized) are prohibited. A contractor will mow and remove litter.
- Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) "Master Recreation Plan": work continues on developing the Master Recreation Plan. There will be public meetings in April and May. Draft expected by December 2008.
- Developing plans for overlook and bird viewing platform as part of Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project in Miami-Dade county.
- Harold A. Campbell Public Access Site at STA-3/4 was just dedicated and is now open. Motorized boats are allowed to fish the perimeter canals. A public access site at STA-1, West is expected to be opened by mid-June, 2008.

Future Meetings:

- **April 14, 2008 at SFWMD, Building B1 Auditorium, West Palm Beach, FL, from 5-8:00 p.m.**
- **June 16, 2008, Lower West Coast Service Center, 2301 MacGregor Blvd., Ft. Myers, FL, 5-8:00 p.m.**
- **August 11, 2008 at SFWMD, Building B1 Auditorium, West Palm Beach, 5-8:00 p.m.**
- **October 13, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, place to be announced, 5-8 p.m.**
- **December 15, 2008, Building B-1 Auditorium, West Palm Beach, FL, 5-8:00 p.m.**

Meeting Adjourned at 7:20 p.m.