

Caloosahatchee River Community Forum Interagency Coordination Meeting Summary

October 7, 2014
Lower West Coast Service Center
2301 McGregor Boulevard
Fort Myers, FL 33901

Attendees: A list of meeting attendees can be found in Appendix A.

I. Overview

This document summarizes the fifth interagency coordination meeting held between the key government parties (the “Implementers”) involved in implementation efforts to improve the Caloosahatchee River’s health related to both water quality and quantity. This meeting served primarily to push forward with efforts to develop a list of priority projects for recommended implementation and to plan for a second Community Forum.

II. Action Items

For the Consensus Building Institute:

- Revise the agenda for the December Community Forum.
- Create a draft meeting summary for the October 7 Implementers Team meeting.

All Interagency Team members:

- Review and submit any additions to the “funding sources” document.
- Review the September Interagency Team meeting summary.
- Send in any additional rationales in support of the priority projects.

For Phil Flood:

- * Update the list of priority projects based on the Implementers Team discussion.

The second Community Forum will be held during the first or second week of December. An Interagency Team meeting will likely be held soon after the Community Forum to review public input and revise, as needed, the list of priority projects.

III. Introductions, Agenda Review, and September Meeting Summary Confirmation

Mr. Bennett Brooks, facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), opened the meeting and welcomed participants. Meeting attendees introduced themselves, and a list of meeting attendees can be found in Appendix A. In addition, Mr. Brooks reviewed the meeting agenda and the goals for the meeting and asked participants to send any comments they have on the draft meeting summary from the September Interagency meeting to either CBI or to Mr. Phil Flood, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). Mr. Flood also noted that SFWMD will be posting meeting summaries from prior Interagency meetings and from the first Community Forum online on the District’s website.

IV. Project Evaluation and Prioritization

Mr. Bennett Brooks, CBI, noted that the Interagency team had categorized potential projects by their level of “ripeness” (that is, how ready they are for implementation) in the previous Interagency meeting held September 2.

Mr. Brooks also noted that the Evaluation Criteria developed by the Interagency team for the projects has been undergoing revision throughout the project prioritization process. An addition made after the September Interagency meeting was to include measures to assist with calculating cost-benefit ratios of projects, including pounds of nutrient-removal per dollar and acre-feet of storage gained per dollar. In addition, Interagency team members provided the following comments on the draft Evaluation Criteria:

- An Interagency team member inquired whether the new definition of “waters of the US” under the Clean Water Act would impact any potential projects that the Interagency team would want to prioritize for funding. In response, other team members explained that the process of defining “waters of the US” would take a long time to conclude and would therefore be beyond the scope of the Interagency project prioritization process.
- An Interagency team member suggested that projects that are more theoretical and not yet ready for implementation in the near-term should not be prioritized for funding.

Following a discussion among Interagency team members, Mr. Phil Flood, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), stated that he would remove the word “draft” from the Evaluation Criteria document, thereby finalizing the Evaluation Criteria.

Mr. Flood explained that there are significant data limitations to the cost-benefit information that he tried to include in the draft Evaluation Criteria, namely pounds of nutrient-removal per dollar and acre-feet of storage gained per dollar, in that fewer than twenty projects out of the entire list of more than fifty potential projects have the data available to calculate one or the other measure of cost-benefit. In light of the limitations on available data around cost-benefit analysis, the Interagency team opted to move forward with prioritizing projects based on other relevant criteria.

Tier 1, Immediate (or “Ready to implement”) projects

Interagency team members reviewed and both confirmed and articulated the rationale for each of the projects listed as “Regional Priorities, Set to Fund” – that is, those projects that are most ripe for funding and implementation based on the various criteria. Based on its discussion, the team confirmed the following top four priorities and associated rationales:

- C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir Project:
 - Cornerstone project for the region.
 - This project will help to meet optimum flows to the estuary.

- Received strong public support at the community forum.
- The land is already acquired and the project has state and federal authorizations already in place.
- C-43 Water Quality Treatment and Demonstration Project (BOMA):
 - The land is already acquired.
 - The project would be a partnership between the South Florida Water Management District and Lee County.
 - Some money has already been approved to move forward with the project.
 - Is intended to complement the C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir Project because that project is more storage-oriented and BOMA would provide complementary water quality services.
- Lake Hicpochee North Hydrologic Enhancement Project:
 - Funding for the first phase of the project is in place. The next phase would involve another 2,400 acres of storage.
 - Presents opportunities for linkages with the Nicodemus Slough project.
 - Presents multiple benefits, including storage, nutrient removal, habitat restoration, flood control, and water recharge.
 - Resources have already been expended towards the project.
 - Utilizes existing landforms in an effort to reestablish natural flows and hydrology.
- Babcock Ranch Preserve Water Storage Project:
 - Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACs) is planning to fund the design phase.
 - Project would reduce stormwater runoff to the Caloosahatchee from a local basin.
 - The project is very cost-effective.
 - Necessary lands are in public ownership.
 - Would provide shallow water storage and groundwater recharge, habitat enhancement, and flood control.
 - Presents potential linkages with projects by Hendry County and County Line Drainage District.

Regarding SR 29 Improvements: After confirming that the Florida Department of Transportation will be fully funding this project, the Interagency Team opted to move this project to the list of “ongoing projects” while keeping in mind linkages that other projects could make with it.

The Interagency Team decided to prioritize these “Regional Priority Projects” (minus the SR 29 Improvements project, which is removed from this list) in the following order:

1. C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir Project
2. Lake Hicpochee North Hydrologic Enhancement Project
3. C-43 Water Quality Treatment and Demonstration Project (BOMA)
4. Babcock Ranch Preserve Water Storage Project

Tier 2, Near-term (or “Farm team”) projects

The Interagency Team also considered which projects to prioritize among a “tier two” of projects that require additional information, detail, or scoping work prior to implementation. Team members underscored the importance of these near-term priorities, as continued progress on each of these will ensure the region has another suite of “shovel-ready” projects in the near future. Team member discussion centered on the following:

- West Caloosahatchee Water Quality Treatment Area (C-43 reservoir site):
 - Interagency Team members described this project as a high priority due to its significant potential impact but noted that SFWMD will need to flesh out the project design in terms of reviewing the property and making a plan for how to use it and estimating costs associated with necessary land improvements.
- Lake Hicpochee South Project:
 - Interagency Team members described this project as a high priority but noted that the project would likely require rescoping and may require land acquisition to make it feasible.
- Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative:
 - An Interagency Team member suggested that the impact of this project would be smaller and more locally-oriented than some of the other projects on this list and that, therefore, it should not be a high priority.
- Recyclable Water Containment Areas Project:
 - An Interagency Team member suggested that this project would be better classified as a best management practice (BMP) than a discrete project that would require legislative funding.

Based on the discussion, the Interagency Team decided to designate two projects as near-term priorities:

- West Caloosahatchee Water Quality Treatment Area (C-43 reservoir site)
- Lake Hicpochee South Project.

Tier 3, “Very Conceptual” projects

Although the Interagency Team briefly discussed these projects, they agreed that they largely consist of “needs” that need to be filled, in terms of storage or water quality, rather than concrete projects that merely need further development or scoping. The Team recommended that this list – plus the projects no longer considered to be ready to designate as near-term regional priorities (Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods, Carlos Waterway Conveyance, Lee-Charlotte Hydrologic Improvements and Recyclable Water Containment Areas Project) – be organized together for consideration in future prioritization discussions.

Restoration Projects

The Interagency Team noted that restoration-related projects, which include tape grass planting and oxbow restoration, are important but differ from the other projects considered in that they are more likely to secure grant funding from governmental and non-governmental sources. A Team member suggested that SFWMD could fund research or monitoring efforts to help support these sorts of projects. Another Team member, however, countered that storage projects should be a higher priority than these sorts of environmental projects in the near-term because a drought can easily wipe out investments and potential benefits tied to projects such as tape grass plantings and oyster bed placement. The Interagency Team recommended that these projects continue to be listed separately.

Local Projects

Noting that it would be very difficult to prioritize among local projects without conducting a credible cost-benefit analysis (for which the data are not available), the Interagency Team opted not to prioritize among these projects nor try to group them into potential funding packages.

Instead, the Interagency Team decided for now to maintain a list of local projects, without prioritization. As well, they suggested that the South Florida Water Management District implement a program to recognize local jurisdictions that implement projects to improve the Caloosahatchee Estuary, similar to how the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs (DACS) recognizes farmers and ranchers who employ the Agency's best management practices through the CARES program.

Additionally, participants discussed the merits of creating a structure similar to the Local Issues Team used for St. Lucie and Loxahatchee Estuaries to identify local priority projects and then, as possible, secure and award state funding to those projects. More discussion is needed to flesh out this idea, and Team members are interested in hearing stakeholder feedback to this idea at the next Community Forum. (See discussion below).

V. Implementation Measures

Meeting participants discussed a variety of topics regarding the implementation of their project prioritization, including funding opportunities, outreach to elected officials, and strategies to build stakeholder support.

Funding Opportunities

Mr. Phil Flood, SFWMD, briefly introduced a list of funding sources that SFWMD compiled. He asked other meeting participants to look over the list and contact him if they have other sources or opportunities that should be added to the list.

An Interagency Team member noted that it would be important to focus on the actual funders (as opposed to pass-through entities) when developing a funding strategy. For example, one participant said, federal appropriations come from the US Congress, even

if they are passed through the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Outreach to Local Elected Officials

The Interagency Team discussed the contours of having local elected officials invited to, and participating in, the second Community Forum. Team members suggested that having elected officials present at the meeting, particularly for the discussion about regional priorities, could help to familiarize them with the effort to build coordinated support for funding priorities for restoring the Caloosahatchee Estuary. Meeting participants also noted that elected officials could also be invited to speak at the Forum. Finally, Team members recommended conducting targeted, personalized outreach to elected officials to secure their attendance at the Community Forum as well as the need to brief them in advance of the event about the purpose of the forum, the proposed regional priority projects, etc.

Building Stakeholder Support

Interagency team members discussed the following ideas for building stakeholder support for coordinated action around securing funding for priority projects, both at the upcoming Community Forum and beyond that event:

- The Interagency Team supported the idea of creating one- to two-page write-ups for each of the top four “Tier 1, Ready to Implement” priority projects. Participants noted that many County Commissioners are looking for priority projects to support and that these projects could become part of each agency’s and local community’s priority list.
- The Interagency Team supported the idea of conducting a limited number of briefings to select NGOs, environmental advocates, and other influential stakeholders in advance of the Community Forum. These briefings would reiterate the bounded scope of the Interagency prioritization process, explain the difference between local and regional projects, and introduce the priority projects proposed by the Interagency Team. Representatives from SFWMD, local governments including Lee County, and the facilitation team from the Consensus Building Institute would conduct these outreach activities.
- Meeting participants discussed the possible formation of a body to establish and support priority projects on an ongoing basis, akin to the Issues Teams active for the St. Lucie and Loxahatchee Estuaries. This body could be sponsored by the South Florida Water Management District, and any local governments that would want to participate in the decision-making mechanism of the body could do so. An Interagency Team member noted that all projects considered by the St. Lucie Issues Team require 50 percent matching funding from local governments, and so these are the bodies that are pitching projects to the Issues Team. Meeting participants suggested that many participants of the Community Forum could be interested in bringing the Issues Team approach to the Caloosahatchee Estuary as it would provide a mechanism to seek funding for local projects. In addition, one participant said, the Issues Team approach encourages stakeholders to discuss projects collaboratively and thereby builds broader

support for region-wide water management initiatives. Team members expressed interest in seeking stakeholder feedback on this concept at the upcoming Community Forum.

VI. Second Community Forum

Interagency Team members discussed how to frame the work that they have done at the Community Forum. Key points centered on the following:

- Based on their discussion, they recommended presenting and soliciting stakeholder input on the results of their prioritization process to-date. Team members underscored the importance of structuring the dialogue in a way to ensure the import and potential impact of stakeholder feedback on the draft prioritization.
- Meeting participants also agreed that the difference between regional projects and local projects should be articulated at the Community Forum.
- Regarding local projects, Interagency Team members recommended seeking stakeholder input on (1) strategies for building support for regional priorities and (2) their interest in an Issues Team-like approach. Meeting participants did not see merit in asking stakeholders to prioritize among local projects (given the lack of cost/benefit data).

Meeting participants agreed that the outreach conducted for the first Community Forum successfully informed and brought in the target stakeholders. They recommended that the District use a similar approach for the upcoming Community Forum, likely to be held during the first or second week of December. Another Implementers Team meeting will likely be held some time after the Community Forum to review stakeholder feedback and finalize its recommended list of priority projects.

VII. Adjournment

The parties concluded their discussions and adjourned the meeting at 12:20 PM.

Appendix A – Attendance

Name	Organization
Connie Jarvis	City of Cape Coral
Vince Miller	City of Fort Myers
Michael Boyle	City of LaBelle
James Evans	City of Sanibel
Bonnie Wolff-Pelaez	Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Jon Iglehart	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Julie Neurohr	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Carl Spirio	Florida Department of Transportation (District One)
Kelly O’Nan	Hendry County
Kurt Harclerode	Lee County
Phil Flood	South Florida Water Management District
Mitch Hutchcraft	South Florida Water Management District
Steve Sentes	South Florida Water Management District
Keith Laakkonen	Town of Fort Myers Beach
<i>Process support:</i>	
Bennett Brooks	Consensus Building Institute
Tushar Kansal	Consensus Building Institute