

Caloosahatchee River Interagency Coordination Meeting

January 29, 2015
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 sixth and final 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. The purpose of this meeting was to take stock of feedback from the December 2, 2015, Community Forum, discuss future plans for moving priority projects forward, and address ongoing plans for stakeholder engagement.

II. Action Items

For the Consensus Building Institute (CBI):

- Collect and incorporate feedback on the Final Report and October meeting summary; work with SFWMD to distribute the Final Report to interested stakeholders.

For the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD):

- Arrange briefing for the Interagency team with groups engaged in prioritizing local projects (e.g., the St. Lucie Issues Team and similar groups).

For Phil Flood, Kurt Harclerode, James Evans, and other interested agency representatives:

- Update the “Caloosahatchee Estuaries Initiative” document and distribute to the Implementers group for comment. Include a target date for convening the group.

For Lee County:

- Draft short summaries for the other top priority projects
- Make the format for short project summaries available to other Implementers.
- Add language to the project summaries indicating broad support from the Implementers group.

For all core group agencies:

- Provide feedback on the October meeting summary.
- Provide feedback on Final Report by February 6.
- Continue efforts to educate key decision-makers on priority projects.

III. Topics Discussed and Decided

The meeting focused on the following topics:

- A debrief of the December 2014 Community Forum;
- Next steps for moving priority projects forward;
- Options for ongoing stakeholder engagement;
- The make-up and structure of a multi-stakeholder group to rank local projects in the Caloosahatchee watershed region; and
- Feedback on the CBI Visioning Process Final Report.

Each of these issues is addressed in turn below.

December 2014 Community Forum debrief

Participants felt the December Community Forum generated a productive dialogue, noting that the broad (if not universal) stakeholder agreement on the top priority projects will help build support and foster progress. They also expressed appreciation for the District's support for the effort, and they noted the importance of continuing to educate stakeholders on the need for water storage projects.

The facilitator, Bennett Brooks from CBI, noted that the one major change to the project priorities list that emerged from the Community Forum involved moving the water quality project related to the C-43 reservoir into the immediate priorities category.

Next steps for moving priority projects forward

Participants discussed various ways to carry forward the momentum coming out of the December Community Forum. They made the following observations and suggestions:

- The short project summaries produced by Lee County are helpful as a quick reference during meetings with legislators, staffers and others involved in setting funding priorities.
- It would be helpful to have similar project summaries for all six top priority projects, including the C-43 water quality project, Babcock Ranch, and Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods.
- It would also be helpful to have this kind of information available for smaller projects.
- Lee County is willing to share the project summary template with its implementing agency partners.

- It would be helpful to put a “regional stamp” on the project summaries. This could be accomplished by adding a simple statement to each summary indicating that the project is supported by the interagency working group, and/or that it emerged from the Caloosahatchee Visioning Process as a priority project.
- The idea of adding each entity’s logo to the project summaries was considered and rejected by the group for a number of reasons, including (1) a desire to see Lee County maintain some ownership over the documents, (2) interest in not adding too much “clutter” to the summaries, and (3) a recognition that each agency has varying constraints on how it is permitted to work with legislators.
- The implementers are currently engaged in a substantial amount of outreach, and want to “keep pushing” what they have already been doing. No new unified outreach efforts were identified.

Options for ongoing stakeholder engagement

Participants took part in a substantial dialogue about the future of the Implementers group and options for ongoing stakeholder engagement. In framing the conversation, Mr. Brooks noted that stakeholders at the December Community Forum voiced several goals related to ongoing engagement efforts, including a desire for continued opportunities for the broader community to be briefed on and provide input on regional developments, and interest in exploring the merits of forming a new regional group to prioritize among local projects. There is also interest among a subset of stakeholders, he noted, to engage in dialogue on more difficult policy and programmatic issues.

Participants made the following observations during their discussion:

- The Community Forums are an effective venue for briefing the broader set of stakeholders on project progress. They provide an opportunity for the Implementers to listen and receive input on overall direction and specific topics. The Implementers broadly recommended that the Forums be held periodically through the year.
- There is substantial interest in convening a new group to rank local projects, but the details need to be worked out. One option is to transition the Implementers group into this new body, potentially with some additional non-governmental members and a revised structure and process. (See section below for more discussion on this topic.)
- It is difficult to effectively engage the relevant broader policy and programmatic issues within the Caloosahatchee watershed region alone because they necessitate engaging a wider set of players and interests. These issues may be addressed more effectively through alternative forums that extend beyond the Caloosahatchee region, such as the Water Resources Advisory Commission.

Group for ranking local projects

Participants agreed on the goal of establishing a multi-interest group to rank local projects. They had an extended discussion on the ideal composition of any new entity and the scope of the issues it should address. Participants made the following suggestions:

- The focus of the new entity, should it be formed, should be on ranking local projects, not engaging broader policy or programmatic issues.
- The new entity should evaluate projects in an impartial manner according to the benefits they will bring to the region. The intent of this approach is to consider local needs and projects within a regional context. One way to encourage shared ownership and need is to require project proponents to have matching funding. Another is to have clear and consistent criteria for assessing projects.
- There should be careful thinking around membership in the new entity. The group discussed the merits of a government agency-only group versus one that is more broadly inclusive of other regional stakeholders. Participants suggested that they should carefully consider the costs and benefits of various models, such as a group that includes NGOs as voting members, a group that contains only government/public entities, and a group that contains a limited group of voting members and a larger group of non-voting members. Mr. Brooks suggested that regardless of the approach the Implementers decide to take on this issue, they should establish a clear set of criteria for membership.
- Implementers suggested several considerations in response to the draft “Caloosahatchee Estuary Initiative,” which provided some initial thoughts on the possible composition and structure of a new entity. Specific suggestions included:
 - The name of the new entity should reflect the fact that it will involve interior communities beyond the area of the Caloosahatchee estuary, and that it will focus on projects (and not policy).
 - The membership should be broadened to ensure that it includes municipalities. To the extent non-governmental entities are included, participation should be broadened to include sufficient representatives from various sectors, such as agriculture, NGOs, and both urban and rural communities.

Phil Flood, Kurt Harclerode, James Evans, and others who are interested will work to hone this approach.

- The new entity could have a research component and should be open to funding research projects. It could also push for the development and use of performance metrics to inform project prioritization discussions.
- There is some interest in having the smaller interagency group continue to meet even after the new entity is created, to make sure that the new structure is effective and generating needed outcomes. At the same time, meeting participants agreed, the smaller interagency group should only continue to meet

if it has a clear purpose for doing so. To accomplish both these goals, the group discussed the possibility of establishing a smaller, governmental agency-only “steering committee” to guide the process.

- To help the group decide on the composition and structure of the new entity, it was recommended they meet with representatives of the St. Lucie Issues Team and other similar groups to take stock of lessons learned and better understand the tradeoffs associated with different approaches. The District will arrange meetings with these group members in the near future.

Feedback on the CBI Visioning Process Final Report

Participants expressed appreciation for CBI’s efforts to draft and distribute a draft Final Report on the Caloosahatchee Visioning Process. Participants noted that the report will be an effective tool for demonstrating the extent of stakeholder support and help them in their efforts to obtain support for priority projects.

Mr. Brooks requested that participants send any suggested edits on the draft to CBI and the SFWMD by February 6. Mr. Brooks noted that after CBI incorporates participants’ comments, either CBI or the SFWMD will distribute a final report to the broader set of interested stakeholders. Stakeholders will be asked to inform CBI if there are any significant errors or omissions.

Participants also mentioned the possibility of CBI making a presentation to stakeholders on the Final Report. Mr. Brooks expressed openness to the idea, but suggested that any such presentation should be paired with a discussion of future stakeholder engagement efforts within the region.

III. Adjournment

The parties concluded their discussions and adjourned the meeting at 12:00 PM.

Appendix A – Attendance

Name	Organization
Beth Alvi	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Julie Neurohr	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Sara Davis	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Bonnie Wolff-Pelaez	Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Phil Aiuto	Charlotte County
Carl Spirio	Florida Department of Transportation, District One
Connie Jarvis	City of Cape Coral
James Evans	City of Sanibel
Vince Miller	City of Fort Myers
Kurt Harclerode	Lee County
Missie Barletto	Glades County
Roland Ottolini	Lee County
Phil Flood	South Florida Water Management District
Dan DeLisi	South Florida Water Management District
Steve Sentes	South Florida Water Management District
Lesley Bertolotti	South Florida Water Management District
<i>Process support:</i>	
Bennett Brooks	Consensus Building Institute
Toby Berkman	Consensus Building Institute