

FINAL

HARRIS CHAIN OF LAKES RESTORATION COUNCIL

PUBLIC WORKSHOP SUMMARY

April 4, 2009

The April 2009 regular meeting of the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (Council) was scheduled as a public workshop to discuss lake restoration issues. The workshop was held at Lake Square Presbyterian Church, 10200 Morningside Drive, Leesburg, Florida at 9:00 AM on April 4, 2009.

Members Present

Hugh (Dave) Davis II, Chairman
Skip Goerner, Vice Chairman
Rick Powers, P.G., Secretary
Keith Farner
Robert Kaiser, P.E.
Richard Royal
Jon VanderLey

Members Absent

Don Nicholson
Edward M. Schlein, M.D.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dave Davis called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

An Invocation was given by Councilman Bob Kaiser, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

Chairman Davis called roll. Councilmen Don Nicholson and Ed Schlein were absent.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Davis called for a discussion of the revised January 9, 2009 meeting minutes. No further comments or edits were suggested and the minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

Chairman Davis called for a discussion of the March 6, 2009 meeting minutes. No comments or edits were suggested and the March minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

Discussion of the February 6, 2009 meeting summary was postponed until the May meeting of the Council.

5. PRESENTATIONS / ACTION ITEMS

Workshop to discuss future agendas of the Council regarding the directives of the Council's enabling statutes.

Chairman Davis provided opening remarks that included thanking those in attendance.

Dr. Daniel Canfield of the University of Florida / Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and Chairman of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to the Council provided direction to the workshop attendees as to the format of discussions. He explained that the attendees will divide into four separate groups and there will be one person recording (via laptop) and one Moderator in each group. The Moderators will limit individual discussion to two minutes and keep the conversations moving. Dr. Canfield said the groups will hold individual discussions of the issues which most concern them when it comes to restoration of the Harris Chain of Lakes (HCOL). He explained that each of the groups will also write their concerns on the large pads of paper provided and then prioritize the issues with the intent of determining the top three concerns of each group. Dr. Canfield closed his direction saying the groups will discuss the issues until 10:15 AM, and then following a short break the group issues will be discussed. The attendees then broke into four groups to hold their discussions at separate tables.

Following a short break at 10:15 AM, Dr. Canfield outlined the issues discussed by the individual groups:

Issues Discussed

Group 1

- Disagree with the shad harvesting because it is too expensive. Has not produced effects desired for the expenditure.
- The methods for restoration of the northshore at Lake Apopka take too long and are too expensive.
- Habitat restoration / Reconnect marshes to Lake Griffin (Between Lakes Griffin and Yale).
- Need to locate and improve spring flow where available within the HCOL.
- The St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) needs to establish Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) for the HCOL.
- The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) should address water quality violations of restoration projects.
- There needs to be a system of checks and balances or standards that SJRWMD can use to determine if objectives are being met. Everyone should be working toward the same goals of having enough water and good water quality.

Group 2

- Navigability in local canals is a problem.
- Dredging is needed in Lake Apopka to improve water quality.

- The SJRWMD is spending too much money on restoration of the northshore of Lake Apopka. The money could be spent on dredging.
- Boating access is critical and water should have recreational quality. Fishing and wildlife are important.
- There appears to be disagreement between the Council and the SJRWMD. Possibly better communication between the agencies involved with restoration would be beneficial.
- Lake Apopka could be dredged and the spoil material be deposited on the northshore.
- It was noted that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) disagrees with the SJRWMD methods at the northshore and has suspended the disking project [to reduce the levels of pesticides in the soil].
- One way to manage Lake Apopka is to develop a protected area with vegetation, however; due to the nature of the lake and its depth, it would be difficult to reestablish good plant communities.

Group 3

- Current restoration efforts appear to be temporary fixes to major problems. New management strategies need to be implemented.
- MFLs need to be established for the HCOL.
- There needs to be protection for springs in and near the HCOL, especially from (water bottling) entities that target these sources.
- The Lake Apopka Marsh Flow-way (LAMF) filters out particulates, but not dissolved phosphorus. The Lake Beauclair Nutrient Reduction Facility (NuRF) removes the dissolved phosphorus using alum treatment.
- Maintaining a healthy fishery is important to restoration.
- Education for lakefront owners is important, especially when it comes to fertilizer application.
- Having quality lakes improves/maintains the economy in Lake County.
- Lake levels are too low so boaters are unable to launch their boats.
- Tax dollars are limited and we need to make sure the money is being spent efficiently.

Group 4

- Lake Apopka and the issues/ sciences being used to solve problems
 - o Fishery has collapsed, work to improve the fisheries
 - o Return to a more natural system, or a more balance “predator / prey” system
 - o Examine what had (1930s, 1940s) - when considered healthy system (Lake Apopka)
 - o Dredging is needed and suspended sediments are decreasing available light. There is an issue with the flocculent layer.
 - o Will not get natural flow because the natural highs are not allowed to happen.
 - o Not dealing with a natural system anymore. Need to realize this and make management steps taking this into consideration. Researchers are not looking at the science.
- Stormwater runoff to the HCOL is an issue.

- Water levels are the biggest issue including [boating] access and water conveyance.
- Need a place for water to filter out naturally / Reconnection of marshes.
- Habitat is an issue.
- Explore alternatives to currently used methods to help the HCOL.
- Economy and tourism are important to the area.

The meeting had a lunch break from 11:45 AM until 12:45 PM. Afterwards a discussion was held on the priority of issues discussed by the four groups.

Group Priorities

Barbara Bess, Ex-officio member of the TAG to the Council outlined the Group 1 priorities:

Group 1

1. Clean Lake Apopka
 - Dredging
 - North Shore Restoration
 - Plant biomanipulation
 - Shad Harvesting
2. Water Levels
 - Set Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) -Apopka
 - MFLs-other lakes
 - Lake level based on conditions, not schedule
 - Locks under Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) control
 - Purpose of locks - Who's studying levels? Flooding (lakefront) result of poor drainage or water level?
3. Water Needs
 - Locate and clean out springs
 - Groundwater quality and quantity
 - Apply springs specific info to other springs
 - Urban sprawl and increasing demand for water
 - Water levels being affected by withdrawals
4. Restoration
 - Marsh habitat (Emeralda Marsh)
 - Artificial habitat (fisheries)
 - Ocklawaha
 - Double Run Swamp
5. SJRWMD
 - meeting goals?
 - culture
6. FDEP
 - Water Quality (WQ) violations
 - Restoration

David Howse of Restore Our Waterways (ROW) outlined the Group 2 priorities:

Group 2

1. Management Restoration of Lake Apopka
 - reconnection of the marsh
 - dredging
2. Water Quality (dredging)
3. Navigation/Access (dredging?)
 - Management of water levels
4. Manage fish and wildlife, also vegetation
5. Improve communication and education between and among public agencies involved

Councilman Richard Royal outlined the Group 3 priorities:

Group 3

1. Management
 - are we using the best methods?
 - Long-term results with short-term visible results
 - We need to be willing to change or accept alternative management strategies
 - Better clarity of expenditures
2. Water Levels
 - too much (flooding), too little (navigation, access, water levels)
 - Establish MFLs
3. Water Quality
 - Stormwater and Runoff
 - Sediment resuspension
 - Safety of consuming fish, swimming
4. Habitat Management improvement
 - fish, wildlife
 - restoration of marshes with connection to the lake
 - shoreline vegetation, planting removal and education
5. Navigation Hazards-debris in canals
6. Public Education

Councilman Jon VanderLey outlined the Group 4 priorities:

Group 4

These were the overall issues: they recommend dredging, reconnection of marshes, and improving fish habitats.

1. Water level regulation
2. Vegetation
3. Lake Apopka
4. Fisheries Issues
5. Dredging

6. Regulation of minimum flows
7. Reconnection of Marshes
8. Water Quality
9. Economy, Tourism
10. Quiet Enjoyment of Lakefront
11. Navigation
12. Citizen Involvement
13. Improve Communication
14. Science-based Objectives

General Discussion

Dr. Canfield initiated a general discussion of the issues outlined by the various groups saying that all of the groups expressed an interest in their resources. He said that although public education is important, there is currently no money available for that effort and it is not a charge of the Council under its supporting legislation. He suggested the Council should meet with the LCWA Board of Trustees and the SJRWMD Governing Board (Board) to discuss the restoration issues.

Vice (V.) Chairman Skip Goerner agreed with Dr. Canfield saying there should be better communication, but noted the SJRWMD is in disagreement with the findings of the Council as discussed in their Annual Report to the Legislature. Dr. Canfield reminded the Council it serves as advisor to the SJRWMD Board. V. Chairman Goerner said the Council needs to move forward with the work of restoration.

Dr. Canfield went on to explain that Chapter 373.468 Florida Statutes (F.S.) – The Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Program; provides for cooperation between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), FDEP, SJRWMD, and LCWA to assist the Council in its mission of lake restoration, and to review restoration plans and judge which are most sound and economically feasible. He suggested the Council should work more closely with the FWCC as provided in the legislation, to conduct a “demonstration restoration project” on the HCOL, outlined in 373.468 F.S.

Besides water quality, Dr. Canfield noted the three key issues the groups agreed on were improving habitat, restoring the marshes, and stocking fish. One of the meeting attendees believes that stocking fish is good for the local economy. Dr. Canfield explained that although the UF/IFAS has been relocating / stocking largemouth bass in the HCOL, it cannot continue forever; habitat improvement is needed as a long-term solution. He explained that when stocking first started, the question of the amount of economic activity stimulated by stocking was discussed. Dr. Canfield said based on non-local activity, economists have calculated the stocking brought in \$2.7 million annually to the local economy, however; some do not view stocking as restoration. He added; restoring habitat is the #1 way to improve fish populations.

V. Chairman Goerner said the FWCC is currently stocking Lake Apopka with sunshine bass in an effort to balance the predator / prey relationship, because the gizzard shad harvesting is not working.

Dr. Canfield suggested the Council could conduct a demonstration project to restore a marsh, working with the FWCC and possibly the NRCS [who has a 30-year agreement involving the NSRA]; to show that reconnecting the northshore marshes to the lake would be beneficial from the perspective of habitat. He said the project cannot focus primarily on phosphorus removal, but rather on providing beneficial habitat for fish and wildlife. The Council agreed that time/effort/money should be put into restoring areas of the marsh at Lake Apopka.

V. Chairman Goerner also suggested that Lake Griffin should be reconnected to the surrounding marshes, coupled with additional stocking. Dr. Canfield said this would not benefit other lakes in the Harris Chain, but suggested one thing that can be done to improve fish habitat in HCOL is to dredge the canals. He explained that after dredging the canals in Lake Griffin, they became the preferred locations for fish spawning. Dr. Canfield said that dredging canals so they provide access and navigability during periods of enhanced lake level fluctuations, will also provide good fish spawning habitat. He further suggested the Council look at canal dredging opportunities in the HCOL.

Dr. Canfield also noted that all of the groups expressed concerns about water levels, saying that lake level drawdowns improve habitat for plants. He said the timing of drawdowns is important and it has been determined at the Rodman Reservoir, the fluctuation should occur in the Fall.

When it comes to reconnecting Lake Griffin to the marshes, Dr. Canfield suggested that as its research demonstration project; the Council could work with the FWCC to reconnect the lake to the marshes at Lowrie Brown.

Dr. Canfield went on to discuss other habitat restoration projects the Council could consider on lakes Dora, Beauclair, Eustis, and Harris. He said that hydrilla could be used as fishing habitat, but there is still much debate as to whether it could be managed or controlled, so it didn't spread to the entire lake. He also suggested that artificial habitat could be created using limerock piles that are less than 0.25 acre in size. Dr. Canfield said this would create habitat where large fish can spawn and little fish would have refuge. He also noted that it would be beneficial for spawning habitat to have 10% of the lake's surface area and the issue of using hydrilla should be considered.

Council and Public Questions & Answers

Councilman Kaiser thanked the Florida LAKEWATCH volunteers who helped make the workshop a success. He invited them and all the attendees to go to the LCWA weekly meeting on Wednesdays, in addition to attending the monthly Council meetings on the first Friday of each month.

Dr. Canfield said that improved water quality involves more than just reducing phosphorus. He said it has been proven that only controlling phosphorus in shallow lakes does not work, according to scientists. He suggested that science should guide the Council in their mission.

Councilman Royal said he believes there are a lot of funds being spent on restoration projects that are not working.

Larry Beasley, a private citizen said he believes that millions of taxpayer dollars are being wasted on Lake Apopka and asked; how long does one have to fail before being called a failure?

No further public comments were made.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The workshop was adjourned at 2:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Chairman Dave Davis

Secretary Rick Powers, P.G.