

**FINAL - MINUTES OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP
of the
HARRIS CHAIN OF LAKES RESTORATION COUNCIL
July 24, 2014**

A meeting of the Technical Advisory Group of the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council was held at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, July 24, 2014 in the FWC Northeast Regional Office, 1239 SW 10th Street, Ocala, FL 34471.

TAG Members Present

Michael Perry, LCWA, Chairman
Dennis Renfro, FWC
Dr. Rolly Fulton, SJRWMD
Dr. Mike Allen, UF
Chris Ferraro, FDEP

Others Present

Skip Goerner – Chairman, Harris Council
Kraig McLane - SJRWMD
Jessica Crawford - Sen. Alan Hays' Office
Russ Melling – Oklawaha Valley Audubon Soc.
Loretta Satterthwaite - Orange Audubon Soc.
Bob Stamps - Audubon Florida
Bob Johnson – Vice Chairman, Harris Council
Linda Bystrak - Oklawaha Valley Audubon Soc.
Bill Caton – FWC (video conference)
Jeff Schardt – FWC (video conference)
Dave Eggeman – FWC (video conference)
Sid Grow – Harris Council

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL AND REMINDER FOR OTHERS TO SIGN IN

All in attendance introduced themselves and their affiliation and were reminded to sign in on the attendance sheet.

3. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Interim-Chairman Perry opened the floor for nominations. Mike Allen nominated Mike Perry. Mike Perry nominated Mike Allen. Dr. Fulton seconded the nomination for Mike Perry. The nomination for Mike Allen was not seconded. Mike Perry became the Chairman.

4. REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS - DRAFT GOAL AND OBJECTIVE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT THAT COUNCIL MEMBER L. WOOSLEY PREPARED TO SUMMARIZE THE WORKSHOP DISCUSSION BY THE COUNCIL ON JUNE 6, 2014

Objective 1 – Control nutrient and sediment inputs

- a. Continued long-term support for the Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) Nutrient Removal Facility (NuRF) for treating non-flood discharges from Lake Apopka to the lakes downstream.

The discussion was generally supportive of the LCWA Nutrient Removal Facility (NuRF). It was noted that the NuRF has not operated since April 27, 2012 due to no flow coming from Lake Apopka or through any of the other structures in the Harris Chain of Lakes. When the NuRF was operating there was significant improvement to water clarity and nutrient reduction downstream of Lake Apopka.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

CONTINUE LONG-TERM SUPPORT FOR THE LAKE COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY (LCWA) NUTRIENT REMOVAL FACILITY (NURF) FOR TREATING NON-FLOOD DISCHARGES FROM LAKE APOPKA TO THE LAKES DOWNSTREAM.

- b. Minimize direct releases from Harris Bayou into Lake Griffin with the construction of by-pass infrastructure.

Dr. Fulton provided a presentation on the Harris Bayou. He presented information about chlorophyll levels and the efforts to reduce total phosphorous (TP) concentrations in the Harris Bayou via alum treatments. He stated that TP concentrations would need to be further reduced for chlorophyll levels to respond in Harris Bayou. Dr. Fulton then presented information about the “washout” model. He described higher concentrations of TP would occur during the initial flow from Harris Bayou but decrease rapidly as flow continues from Harris Bayou. He discussed TP loading from Harris Bayou related to the TP loading coming to Lake Griffin. Dr. Fulton discussed how the Harris Bayou structure would be operated in conjunction with the Burrell structure during flood conditions.

Mr. Goerner stated his concerns that initially the concept was to create a by-pass around Harris Bayou rather than through it to provide flood relief to Lake Harris and he expressed concerns for the significantly large TP concentrations associated with the discharge from Harris Bayou. Dr. Fulton responded that total TP contributions to the lake, since the Harris Bayou structure has been in place, have been below the TMDL established for the lake with the exception of one year. In the year that the TMDL was exceeded, most of the TP came from the up-stream tributaries and the contribution from the Harris Bayou was a small fraction. He further stated that the Harris Bayou

is only operated during flood conditions and the contribution of TP from the Harris Bayou is small compared to the contribution from upstream sources. Dr. Fulton stated that during flooding conditions most of the loading occurs at the initial discharge and rapidly decreases.

Related to by-pass infrastructure, Dr. Fulton referred to a geotechnical report that was provided to the TAG members and noted that different evaluations found the soils not to be suitable to support a by-pass canal without a substantial physical structure.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

NO RECOMMENDATION REGARDING THE CONSTRUCTION OF BY-PASS INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND THE HARRIS BAYOU TO LAKE GRIFFIN.

- c. Continued long-term support for agricultural, urban, and other categories of structural and non-structural best management practices (BMPs) as part of the total maximum daily load (TMDL) program, which the key implementation strategy under the Upper Ocklawaha Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP).

The discussion revolved around the current Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) prepared by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) in association with a large local review and advisory committee. The TAG members voiced support for the objectives and recommendations of the BMAP and felt that the Council would benefit from a presentation regarding the current BMAP.

Ms. Bystrak noted her concern that there is no TMDL established for fecal coliforms and feels that this is missing in the BMAP. TAG members felt that this issue should be touched on during the FDEP presentation to the Council.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

SUPPORT THE BMAP OBJECTIVES AND REQUEST A PRESENTATION TO THE COUNCIL REGARDING THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE BMAP INCLUDING ESTABLISHING A TMDL FOR COLIFORMS CURRENTLY NOT INCLUDED IN THE BMAP.

Objective 2 – Continue to improve aquatic habitat and water quality

- a. Directly connect marshlands within the North Shore Restoration Area (NSRA) to Lake Apopka in those areas where the St. Johns Water Management District is not subject to land/water use restrictions as part of the agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dr. Fulton expressed a concern about pesticide residuals during reconnection. Mr. Renfro stated that the long term goal remains to connect the NSRA to the lake and that there may be some areas

that could be reconnected more near-term (within 5 years). Dr. Allen asked about the reasons of concern for not connecting and what is the risk or opening these areas up to the lake now.

There was discussion about the effect of opening the NSRA on the lake itself, pesticide bioaccumulation and about the type of habitat that would be most desirable (shallow water marsh vs. deeper open water habitats) with respect to ecotourism. Mr. Johnson stated that there is evidence that it was not pesticides killing the birds but rather other causes such as botulism.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

THE LONG TERM GOAL REMAINS CONNECTING THE MARSHLANDS WITHIN THE NORTH SHORE RESTORATION AREA (NSRA) TO LAKE APOPKA. THE NEAR TERM (WITHIN FIVE YEARS) OBJECTIVE WOULD BE TO IDENTIFY AND CONNECT THOSE PORTIONS OF THE NORTH SHORE THAT EXHIBITS THE LEAST CONCERN FOR PESTICIDE RESIDUALS, PROVIDES THE MOST DESIRABLE HABITAT VALUE, WHILE CREATING MINIMUM IMPACT TO LAKE APOPKA.

- b. Support a pilot program to allow hydrilla to grow naturally in selected areas of Lake Apopka in an attempt to stabilize lake bottom sediments, improve water clarity, and provide important fisheries habitat. Hydrilla would be controlled to prevent encroachment into areas of the lake with public access and navigation opportunities, private docks, and habitat supporting the crappie fishery.

Dr. Allen stated that he felt this issue was included as a result of his comments to the Council that herbicide resistance is limiting the ability to control hydrilla as it was in the past. He referred to the way the FWC is managing hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga to maintain navigation rather than to eradicate it from the lake and a more integrated approach to hydrilla in the Harris Chain, particularly Lake Apopka should be considered. He further stated that in his opinion, hydrilla does not replace native vegetation. Dr. Fulton stated that the FWC has the responsibility for hydrilla management and that the SJRWMD supports the current FWC policy related to hydrilla. He noted that if it gets out of control the lakes downstream would be affected.

Mr. Renfro stated that the FWC is working to plant native vegetation in the Harris Chain and would not want to affect that effort. He noted the FWC held public meetings on the issue and 96% of the stakeholders have said no to allowing hydrilla to become established. The current FWC approach is to maintain hydrilla at the minimal amount possible. Mr. Perry noted that the LCWA has discussed this issue several times and the LCWA Board supports the current FWC position.

There was additional discussion about planting success and alternative plant species that may be of benefit. Mr. Renfro stated that the FWC goal is 10% of the lakes vegetated with desirable native vegetation and currently it is less than 5%. There was further discussion about floating islands or benthic barriers to shade out vegetation and it was noted that those types of techniques would only work well on a very small scale application.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

DO NOT SUPPORT A PILOT PROGRAM TO ALLOW HYDRILLA TO GROW NATURALLY IN SELECTED AREAS OF LAKE APOPKA IN AN ATTEMPT TO STABILIZE LAKE BOTTOM SEDIMENTS, IMPROVE WATER CLARITY, AND PROVIDE IMPORTANT FISHERIES HABITAT.

Objective 3 – Continue to improve aquatic habitat and water quality

- a. Gain the support of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for designating the Harris Chain of Lakes as Trophy Bass Resource by implementing a catch-and-release only regulation for largemouth bass of 16 inches or greater in length.

Mr. Renfro discussed a new statewide regulation change currently being worked on to support the population of larger bass. The new regulation would allow an angler to keep one (1) bass over 16 inches in a five (5) fish bag limit.

There was discussion regarding the value of smaller sized fish and should there only be a catch-and-release regulation for bass of any size. Dr. Allen stated that the modeling supported the effort to have larger bass by allowing the removal of smaller sized fish and that most bass anglers are releasing bass currently.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

SUPPORT THE PROPOSED FWC NEW STATEWIDE REGULATION AND THE PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS NOW UNDERWAY.

- b. Improve public access to Lake Apopka, particularly in the deeper sections of the lake along the western shore.

Mr. Renfro informed the TAG that the City of Montverde has applied for a grant from the FWC for a 2-lane boat ramp with a 40ft. dock in the Montverde area. The other associated facilities such as parking areas will be constructed using other funds. Mr. Renfro also noted that the Oakland area is being investigated for a ramp and that The SJRWMD is considering opening the McDonald ramp to the public.

Of the three ramps discussed, the Montverde ramp on the west side of Lake Apopka is the most near term.

TAG RECOMMENDATION:

REPORT THE STATUS OF THE BOAT RAMP PROPOSALS TO THE COUNCIL.

5. **OTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

6. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

7. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.