

FINAL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
of the
HARRIS CHAIN OF LAKES RESTORATION COUNCIL
September 9, 2016**

The regular meeting of the Harris Chain of Lakes Restoration Council (Council) was held at 9:07 a.m. on September 9, 2016 at the Lake County Board of County Commissioner Chambers, 315 West Main Street, Tavares, Florida.

Council Members Present

Robert Johnson, Chairman
Skip Goerner, Vice-Chairman
Sid Grow
Keith Truenow
Stephanie Bishop

Council Members Absent

Don Nicholson, Secretary
Hugh Davis
Dr. Ed Schlein
Vacant, Environmental Science/Regulation

TAG Members Present

Rolland Fulton (St Johns River Water Management District, SJRWMD)
Mike Perry (Lake County Water Authority, LCWA)
Kevin Coyne (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, DEP)
Dennis Renfro (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, FWC)

TAG Members Absent

Mark Hoyer (University of Florida, UF)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m.

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Johnson called for a moment of silence. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

3. COUNCIL ROLL CALL; REMINDER FOR OTHERS TO SIGN IN

Chairman Johnson called the roll. Council members Nicholson, Davis and Schlein were absent.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes for August 12, 2016 were unanimously approved.

5. PRESENTATIONS / ACTION ITEMS

* Action items requested by council members are in bold.

A. Improving Florida's Fisheries: Actions Today that Benefit Tomorrow - Mr. Dennis Renfro, FWC.

Chairman Johnson introduced Dennis Renfro, FWC. Mr. Renfro reported the coverage of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in Lake Griffin from 2015 at 12%, determined electronically. Types of vegetation included eelgrass, hydrilla, naiad, and yellow water lily, noting many changes since 2015. Mr. Renfro noted excessive vegetation was treated as needed and is no longer eradicated. In Lake Harris, the coverage of SAV was 7%, composed of eelgrass, hydrilla, and naiad, occurring mostly along the northern shoreline. The coverage of SAV in Lake Apopka was estimated at 2-3% consisting of spatterdock located primarily along the eastern and northeastern shoreline, with a single planted area on the western shoreline.

Mr. Renfro discussed how FWC is creating new opportunities for reconnecting a number of areas of the Emeralda Marshes on the east side of Lake Griffin. An aerial view of Area 3 showed 10,000 acres of land to be restored at an original cost of \$850,000. Phase I, in partnership with SJRWMD, calls for breaching 200 foot sections of the internal levees at six locations and creating wildlife islands. Four wildlife islands are planned using 30 foot by 15 foot sections of internal levee upon which native trees and emerged vegetation will be planted.

Phase II of the restoration calls for breaching external levees at four locations, including one 600-foot-long section, and one 200-foot-long section. Mr. Renfro reported Areas 2 and 4 had already been reconnected resulting in an 11% return of the drained marsh habitat to the major system. The completion of Area 3 restoration will provide a net gain of 21% of the marsh habitat reconnected. Land elevations in Area 3 will range from 3 to 7 feet to provide a variety of water depths. Mr. Renfro also discussed access improvements noting open habitat will be viewable from the wildlife drive.

The second part of Mr. Renfro's presentation discussed partnerships with the LCWA and local fishing clubs in building and installing fish attractors to enhance angling opportunities. Mr. Renfro discussed aerial images of Lake Griffin and Lake Harris, identifying the location of both woody and artificial fish attractors in the lakes. FWC plans to purchase seven to ten more attractors for installation in either Lake Eustis or Lake Dora.

Vice-Chairman Goerner queried Mr. Renfro about excessive growth of hydrilla in Lake Griffin, requesting information on **when was the last time Lake Griffin was treated for hydrilla, and what is the schedule for future treatment.** Mr. Renfro noted the request and agreed to research the topic. Councilman Truenow questioned Mr. Renfro about using carp for vegetation control. Mr. Renfro noted carp are not being used because they remove both invasive and non-invasive vegetation, and there are strict guidelines regarding barricading areas where carp are introduced.

Chairman Johnson noted one of the benefits to hydrilla was clear water; yet as Vice-Chairman Goerner noted, it is impossible to get through in a boat, and so hydrilla has to be managed. Councilwoman Bishop noted the ongoing project at Emeralda, the costs at \$850,000 plus manpower, and questioned whether additional funding for vegetation management could be added to the project list in the Annual Report. Vice-Chairman Goerner reported hydrilla management was a re-occurring budget item several years ago, but management was transferred from DEP to FWC. Vice-Chairman Goerner requested **Mr. Renfro to find out whether there is a manpower or money issue with expanded vegetation management in the Harris Chain.**

Chairman Johnson reported Council has **requested the technical advisory group to provide any proposed projects from their respective agencies for 2017-2018 to include in the annual report.**

B. Review of First Draft of 2016 Annual Report, Denis Frazel, Harris Council Administrative Support

Denis Frazel, Harris Council Administrative Support, presented the first 2016 draft Annual Report. Councilwoman Bishop noted the names on the cover were incorrect. Mr. Frazel reported names would be corrected in the final draft. Mr. Frazel discussed the Executive Summary noting bulleted recommendations would be updated with comments provided during the meeting and presented in the second draft in October. Chairman Johnson requested the recommendations be presented as a separate sheet attached to the front of the final document.

Mr. Frazel reviewed major comments provided by Council on the initial draft. On Table 2. Technical Presentations, Mr. Frazel noted the September Council meeting presentation by Dennis Renfro would be included in the report.

Under **Section 4.1 Lake Water Level Management**, the statement “Council recommends connecting Lake Apopka to the north shore” was added. Chairman Johnson also requested an aerial photograph (which he would provide) and descriptive text of the marsh flow-way be added to the report.

Under **Section 4.2 Lake Apopka Restoration**, Council added the recommendation “Supports dredging to create areas for vegetation.

Under **Section 4.3 Aquatic Vegetation**, Chairman Johnson requested the addition of aquatic vegetation photographs and explanatory text.

Under Section 4.5 Fishery Research, Chairman Johnson recommended minor text changes and the addition of the sentence “DOH must be the lead agency for pesticide testing and determining safety of fish for human consumption”, in the Council recommendation.

Councilman Grow requested a list of acronyms be included in the document.

Mr. Frazel reported any proposed projects submitted by TAG representatives would be included in Table 4. Proposed Projects for the Harris Chain of Lakes. Mr. Frazel also noted a copy of the final signed Harris Plan letter would be added to the report. The second draft report would be submitted to Council for review by September 27th, with comments due by October 4. There were no further questions.

6. COUNCIL & AGENCY QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Dr. Rolland Fulton, SJRWMD, commented on the Harris Plan letter, noting the request for projects and costs for the Annual Report is different than what was requested in the Plan letter. Dr. Fulton could not commit to providing the requested projects and costs for this new request by next month. Vice-Chairman Goerner noted the Council previously submitted priority projects and the new request is the same thing. The request is for a list of projects to the legislature for possible additional funding, essentially a wish list should funds become available.

Dr. Fulton commented on the presentation by Dr. Canfield, noting his assessment did not consider severe drought over 15 years of the data record. Dr. Fulton's previous presentation showed better reference relative to drought. Dr. Fulton's data showed increases in phosphorus in 2001-2002, 2008-2009, and 2012-2013 during drought periods. Dr. Fulton's data also showed the last peak in phosphorus was 2013 with a decreasing trend since then. This result differs from the data presented by Dr. Canfield, and Dr. Fulton indicated he would review the data to resolve the differences. Dr. Fulton also noted current year data showed phosphorus levels in some months less than target levels.

Dr. Fulton reported a technical report discussing water quality trends and aquatic vegetative habitat has been produced by Dr. Mike Coveney, SJRWMD.

Kevin Coyne, DEP, reported SJRWMD has an NPDES general permit issued by statute for the Lake Harris/Lake Griffin project. Mr. Coyne noted he would provide a copy of the permit to Denis Frazel for distribution to the Council. Mr. Coyne reported he may have some project information on SJRWMD proposals that could be included in the projects section of the Annual Report. Mr. Coyne noted DEP does not generate projects but rather accepts projects for review.

Mr. Mike Perry, LCWA, reported on Harris Chain of Lakes water levels noting no flow through the NuRF since May 2016. Mr. Perry showed a graph of Lake Apopka water levels showing an increase in water level with rainfall from Hurricane Hermine. Mr. Perry noted the middle lakes were approaching regulatory schedule with recent rain, and Lake Griffin stages showed the same water increase with rainfall from Hurricane Hermine. Mr. Perry reported a *Microcystis spp.* algae bloom in Trout Lake but no toxin was identified in lake waters. Mr. Perry also reported his agency was still going through their budget process and funds for the Harris Council were still included.

Councilman Truenow **requested a copy of the report on Lake Apopka by Dr. Coveney, and also requested a presentation if possible, at a later date.** Dr. Fulton noted he had presented very similar phosphorus data in the report at the June Council meeting.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Dr. Dan Canfield discussed algal blooms in Florida noting a major bloom occurring right now in the Indian River Lagoon, similar to the Lake Okeechobee blooms in the 1980s. Dr. Canfield noted in Lake Okeechobee there was no relationship between chlorophyll and phosphorus. There was no change in phosphorus loading. Dr. Canfield then presented a series of graphs (included in meeting documents) showing water chemistry trends in Lake Apopka, for mean total phosphorus, mean chlorophyll, mean Secchi depth, and mean total nitrogen, from 1997 to 2015. Dr. Canfield noted in the phosphorus graph, that while phosphorus appears to have dropped overall, it has gone up since 2010, resulting in a trend of no change. Dr. Canfield suggested there were also no significant trend changes in chlorophyll, secchi depth, and nitrogen. Dr. Canfield speculated the strategy of control on nitrogen or phosphorus is not working now, will not be working 20 years from now, and is not working throughout the state.

Dr. Canfield proposed a better way to control nutrients through aquatic plant management. Dr. Canfield suggested establishing a local area strikeforce and direct the legislature to redirect or re-allocate funds under local control to immediately handle aquatic plant issues. Dr. Canfield described the Polk County strikeforce that has managed hydrilla to the point where lakes are meeting listed nutrient criteria.

Dr. Canfield acknowledged aquatic plant management versus aquatic weed control is a balancing act between user groups. Vice-Chairman Goerner voiced support for the strikeforce concept noting it is possible to provide access for citizens along the edges of lakes while still having aquatic vegetation in the centers of lakes.

Lynda Bystrak reported attending a DEP rulemaking workshop. Mr. Bystrak also noted the Trout Lake NuRF was set to go on line.

8. COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS

Chairman Johnson discussed filling the Council environmental vacancy by Mr. John Stump, and the difficulty they were having in getting the legislative delegation to act. Susan Davis, SJRWMD reported she had discussed the issue with Senator Hukill's and Representative Metz's offices who both noted a quorum is needed for the delegation to meet, and it must be a noticed public meeting for appointments to be made.

Chairman Johnson read elements of a Lake Apopka timeline produced by the City of Oakland Nature Preserve.

Chairman Johnson reviewed the "Requests for Action" list from August, with comments as follows:

Item 13. Historic phosphorus data. Mike Perry reported the data requested by Vice-Chairman Goerner was not available.

Item 12. Status of NPDES permit for SJRWMD. Kevin Coyne reported SJRWMD has a general NPDES permit and provided a copy of the permit.

Item 11. Circular vegetation on Lake Apopka. Dennis Renfro reported the vegetation growing in a circular shape was Mexican water lily growing naturally.

Item 8. SJRWMD use of \$5 million on projects. Item was still pending and information may be presented during the Annual Report process.

Item 7. SJRWMD Executive Director meeting. Meeting was pending until receiving replies from the Harris Plan letter.

All other action items were complete.

9. REQUESTS FOR ACTION

- a. Vice-Chairman Goerner requested information from Dennis Renfro on when hydrilla was treated in Lake Griffin, what the schedule is for future treatment, and whether there is a manpower or money issue with expanded vegetation management in the Harris Chain.
- b. Chairman Johnson requested the technical advisory group to provide any proposed projects from their respective agencies for 2017-2018, to include in the annual report.
- c. Councilman Truenow requested a copy of the report on Lake Apopka by Dr. Coveney, and also requested a presentation if possible, at a later date.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.