



# St. Marys River Management Committee

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## St. Marys River Management Committee 2020 Annual Report

To the County Commissioners:

Please accept this document as the Committee's required Annual Report.

The St. Marys River Management Committee (SMRMC or Committee) is a quasi-governmental advisory panel established by interlocal agreement between Baker and Nassau counties in Florida and Camden and Charlton counties in Georgia. The Committee is composed of five voting representatives from each county: one county commissioner and four appointed members (two riverfront landowners or representatives of corporations with riverfront property, and two at-large members). One representative from the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and one representative from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) Division of Environmental Protection (GEPD) serve as non-voting members. All meetings are open to the public with notice provided on the Committee's website: [www.saintmarysriver.org](http://www.saintmarysriver.org).

### **Land Use (including public access)**

#### **Development**

The committee encourages the counties to remember that as population increases, conversion of forestry and agricultural land to residential development will be one of the greatest challenges to protecting the water quality of the St. Marys River for their citizens. In Baker County, Thomas Rhoden et al are developing a second parcel near the river on Steel Bridge Rd near the boat ramp. The property owners have applied to rezone the property from agricultural to residential and some clearing has begun. The property will be developed in accordance with the new Baker County Comprehensive Plan passed in December 2020. It is almost a mile from the South Prong of the river; however, the western boundary of the property is a creek that runs into the South Prong. Most of the developable upland along the river is owned by Rayonier. They have also begun converting forestry land to residential development in both Baker and Nassau Counties.

In December, Charlton County approved the preliminary plat design for the Osceola Woods subdivision (18 homes) off Hwy 121 between Tracys Ferry and Traders Hill Rds. The closest lot is over a mile from the river and almost a half mile from the nearest tributary, Ben Branch which is in the Spanish Creek watershed. Spanish Creek is one of Charlton County's impaired waters.

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In Camden County, the SpaceX application and a small regional airport are still under discussion. Both were delayed by COVID-19 protocols. The county expects the final Environmental Impact Statement for the spaceport in early 2021. Camden will resume discussion of the regional airport when in person meetings are practical.

### **Public Access**

SMRMC continues to encourage the counties to improve public access to the river. Currently, Baker County has two public boat ramps and one riverside park. Maple Set Canoe Launch, in the John M. Bethea State Forest, is maintained by the state. The county owns and maintains the St. Marys Cove Boat Ramp. In 2019, Baker County was awarded a \$394,130 Florida Boating Improvement Program Grant through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to improve the ramp and provide a stable parking area. North Florida Professional Services is handling the grant administration, engineering, and permitting of this project in the amount of \$119,786. The remaining balance of \$274,344 will go for improvements. During 2020, the county approved a site plan and filed an application for an Environmental Resource Permit with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The county is awaiting approval. Construction should occur in 2021.

The county also owns the 2600-acre St. Marys Shoals Park, which has two miles of river frontage but no boat ramp. The county plans to add a canoe/kayak launch when funds are available. The park currently has a developed area with pavilions, picnic area and restrooms and a natural area with over 20 miles of OHV and equi-ped trails. During 2020, portions of the security fence around the property were replaced. Improvements at the park are partially funded by admission fees. The Rotary Club and County are hosting a fun run/walk/cycle event February 6 and 7, 2021 to raise funds for future capital improvements at the park.

Nassau County has two public access points. Scott's Landing, in the Ralph Simmons State Park, is owned, and maintained by the state. The county owns and maintains the Kings Ferry Boat Ramp. There is also an access point at Prospect Landing which has a ramp but very limited parking. The county considered purchase of a property near Kings Ferry but decided that, for the price, the property did not fulfill their land acquisition objectives for that area of the county. The property is also not designated in the Florida Forever Plan so grant funding for its purchase is limited. Nassau County is in the process of a major revision of their Conservation Land Acquisition Management Plan.

Camden County has three public river access points: Temple Landing and US 17 boat ramps owned by the county and the St. Marys Waterfront Park boat ramp owned by the city of St. Marys. The drainfield for the restrooms at the Temple Creek Landing Boat Ramp continue to have drainfield problems. The restrooms have been closed and the county is looking into replacement/repair options uphill of the 100 ft setback. Camden County is still waiting for the current owners to establish clear title to the property surrounding the US17 boat ramp before the county can purchase three acres on which they plan to build a parking area and restrooms. Funding for the purchase has been secured through Georgia "Go Fish". In 2020, the city of St.

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Marys completed major repairs to their waterfront boat ramp which was destroyed by Hurricane Irma.

Charlton County has four public access points: Traders Hill and Camp Pinckney boat ramps, a dirt path and ramp at 94 bridge, and a canoe launch at Old River. There is also a county park at Traders Hill. The county is awaiting a permit from GEPD for a septic tank for recreational vehicle pump out at Traders Hill. The county is also looking into ways to expand the Camp Pinckney access point where they own the ramp but not surrounding property.

## **Water Quality**

### **Florida**

Nassau County has several impairments mostly in the estuary area. The only mainstem impairment is the Little St. Marys River. The effluent from the Hilliard Water Treatment Facility is released into a creek which flows into the Little St. Marys River. Hilliard was recently awarded a grant to begin repair work on their leaking sewer system.

Baker County has one impairment for fecal coliform, Deep Creek, which flows through both Duval and Nassau Counties in addition to Baker County. Since 2012, no samples have been of concern. The creek could be removed from the Florida List of Impaired Waters in 2022.

FDEP also monitors Turkey Creek regularly. The effluent from the Macclenny water treatment facility is released into Turkey Creek which flows into the South Prong of the St. Marys River. Though readings have occasionally spiked they usually meet the guidelines required by the state for its designated use; the creek is not listed as impaired. Ambient water quality is measured by the SJRWMD in two locations, the Middle Prong and at Steel Bridge Road, north of Macclenny. Ambient water quality at the two sites met state threshold guidelines for total phosphorus (a common nutrient found in residential and agricultural fertilizers) in 2020.

### **Georgia**

Camden County has two impairments- Horsepen/Temple Creek and Lower St. Marys from Catfish Creek to Miller Branch. The county began work on the Horsepen/Temple impairment in 2009 and are now on the third phase of the project. All work has been funded by 319 grants from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through GDNR.

Phase 1- 2009 (Temple and Horsepen Creeks) DNA source tracking, public meetings, and the model system at temple creek landing. Completed. SMRMC participated in all aspects of the grant.

Phase 2- 2017 (Temple and Horsepen Creeks) inspected 32 systems, repaired/ replaced 23, completed. St. Marys Riverkeeper (SMRK) provided educational material and water quality reports to participants.

Phase 3- 2020 (Malletts Creek just west of Horsepen Creek and part of Temple Creek upstream of Horsepen Creek confluence) funding to repair/replace 21 systems. Thus far, the county has identified potential systems in need of inspection.

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Based on the 2017 Lower St. Marys Watershed Management Plan for the dissolved oxygen (DO) impairment for Catfish Creek to Miller Branch, the city of St. Marys obtained a waterfront improvement grant from the EPA 319 program to install vegetative swales and pervious pavement along the waterfront and in front of City Hall. The construction phase was completed in July 2020 and the grant is now in the post-construction dissolved oxygen sampling phase. The final report is due by June 2021. SMRMC has a member on the Technical Advisory Committee for this grant.

Charlton County has one impairment for fecal coliform (FC) and DO - Spanish Creek. In October 2019, Charlton County was awarded a \$29,000 Coastal Incentive Grant (CIG) from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) by way of Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coastal Resources Division (GCRD) to write a nine Point EPA Watershed Management Plan (WMP). The County provided match through community participation in river clean ups, water quality sampling program by Charlton County High School under the oversight of the Adopt- A-Stream program, and a Citizens Advisory Committee. SMRMC has three members on the Citizens Advisory Committee. The first draft of the WMP was delivered to the advisory committee for their review in December 2020. Downstream bacterial sampling confirmed there was no problem with contamination from the Folkston Treatment facility; eDNA source tracking showed high content of pig DNA, either domestic or feral, and medium contamination from human sources, possibly leaking septic tanks or stormwater. There was no eDNA from cattle, chickens, or dogs.

During the grant year, EPA updated the impairments for Georgia waters and added FC and DO impaired segments on Spanish Creek. The DO impairments are pending since the parameters for blackwater systems are still under investigation. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for new impairments could be completed in 2021. If there are new TMDLs, the WMP will need to be revised to include them. The contractor said that because the new impairments are in the same 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC 12), updates would be minimal and could be carried out at the county level.

### **UGA Mapping and Law Practicum Project**

In October 2020, University of Georgia (UGA) law faculty member, Dr. Laurie Fowler, agreed to include an analysis of the current regulations that protect the St. Marys River among the potential projects for her law practicum students in the spring of 2021. Fowler's students will:

- Review existing federal, state, and local laws and regulations,
- Review population and development projections,
- Interview key local government staff,
- Reference available ArcGIS online maps produced by the UGA Geography Department
- Produce a report of their analysis which will include:
  - a description of the measures that jurisdictions have in place to protect water quality

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- an analysis of gaps in existing measures
- a menu of options to fill each gap

SMRMC members spent significant time accumulating the documents and contacts for the students and two UGA geography students spent many hours researching and importing the maps that the law practicum students will need to review. SMRMC will pay UGA Geography Department students to complete the online maps and migrate them to a UGA hosting site. Links to the maps will be on both the SMRMC and SMRK websites so that the mapping portal would be available to the counties, the committee, and the public, in addition to the law students.

### **Water Quantity (Stormwater, Flooding and Water Removal)**

Stormwater runoff from development along the banks of the river and its tributaries can not only cause localized flooding but also transport pollutants to the river. Following a presentation in 2019 on opportunities to address stormwater problems in Georgia counties, the committee scheduled monthly presentations to educate members and visitors about stormwater regulations and activities in the two states, four counties, and several cities in the river basin. All presentations were open to the public via zoom access. Brief reviews of the presentations are below. The PowerPoints and website links are available on the SMRMC website.

#### **Stormwater Regulation in Florida**

Richard Musgrove, P.E. Division of Water Resource Management, FDEP

There are many sources of groundwater contamination including acid rain, septic systems, animal waste, urban runoff and boats and watercraft. Unmanaged stormwater can lead to impacts such as: changes in groundwater infiltration, watershed hydrology, water quality and the aquatic ecosystem.

Stormwater is regulated by Federal and State laws. The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) is overseen by the EPA, though regulated by the state, and the Environmental Resource Permitting (ERP) by state agencies DEP and SJRWMD. The NPDES permit program, created in 1972 by the Clean Water Act, helps address water pollution by regulating point sources that discharge pollutants to waters of the United States. NPDES uses several programs to manage stormwater. The Construction Generic Permit and the Multi-Sector Generic Permit regulate stormwater runoff from construction and industrial sites while the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) regulates discharges from municipal stormwater systems. Permitting requires adherence to Best Management Practices (BMPs), TMDLs, reporting, and pollution prevention plans through inspections and report reviews.

Environmental Resource Permits (ERPs) regulates activities in, on, or over surface waters or wetlands, as well as activity involving the alteration of surface water flows. FDEP manages permitting for single family homes, stand-alone dredging projects, port projects, beach

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projects, mangrove trimming and shoreline work east of the coastal construction line. Water Management Districts manage multi-residential development, roadways, commercial development, and shoreline work west of the coastal construction line. Both agencies look at erosion and sediment control (turbidity), stormwater quantity (volume control and discharge rates) and stormwater quality (annual load reduction) when deciding whether to permit an activity.

Musgrove also showed examples of management methods such as dry retention ponds, wet detention ponds, filtered ponds, underground exfiltration trenches, pervious pavement, and underground vaults.

and examples of green infrastructure BMPs including Low Impact Development (LID), pervious pavement, green roof, and cistern systems, constructed wetlands, marsh systems, gross pollutant separators, and trickling filters.

When asked whether there was anything small counties should do beyond the state regulations to improve stormwater management, Musgrove said Florida has very good regulations and Georgia has good BMPs in place and the only local regulations needed are adequate building codes. He said that Florida will be reviewing their agricultural BMPs soon.

### **SJRWMD permits that protect the water quality of the St. Marys River**

Geoff Sample, Intergovernmental Coordinator, SJRWMD

SJRWMD oversees permitting for 18 counties in Northeast and Central Florida 12,283 square miles. Permitting for SJRWMD is limited to ERPs for surface waters and consumptive use permits for groundwater and surface water withdrawals. The ERP process, which was adopted in the early 1980s and last updated in 2018, has comprehensive rules to address water quality, flooding, and wetland impacts. Water quality rules ensure that any discharges meet state water quality standards. Water quantity rules ensure that any construction cannot adversely impact adjacent property and must reduce post-development run-off rates to less than pre-development rates. Wetland review includes rules that require avoidance of wetland impacts, minimization of impacts and mitigation for unavoidable wetland impacts including creation, restoration, enhancement, preservation and/or purchase of mitigation bank credits.

SJRWMD handles the ERP when:

- 1) there are any impacts to wetlands or surface waters
- 2) excavation of more than 40 acre-ft in volume
- 3) placement of more than 4,000 sq. ft. of pavement
- 4) placement of more than 9,000 sq. ft. of impervious surface
- 5) certain agricultural and silvicultural projects
- 6) recreational projects of more than 5 acres

Delineation of wetlands uses a statewide methodology which evaluates soils, vegetation, and hydrology. Once the extent of the wetlands has been determined and the unavoidable impacts have been identified, a standardized procedure called the Uniform Mitigation Assessment

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Method (adopted in 2004) is utilized to assess the functional value of wetlands and other surface waters, determine the amount of those functions that are reduced by the proposed impacts and the amount of mitigation necessary to offset the functional loss. Other wetland issues such as secondary impacts (e.g. light and sound) can be precluded with a 25-ft average, 15-ft minimum buffer. Another item addressing wetlands is adverse hydrologic impacts such as drawdown from stormwater ponds or ditches.

### **Status of Stormwater Management in Nassau County**

Katie Peay, Stormwater Engineer, Nassau County Public Works

Nassau County hired a stormwater engineer in March 2019. When she arrived, the county had a Roadway and Drainage Standard (Ordinance 99-17) and had completed a two-part Stormwater Master Plan in 2008 and 2012 which detailed the existing structures, evaluated problem areas, and proposed projects to mitigate the problems. In July 2019, Peay set up an Advisory Committee composed of herself, the city of Fernandina Stormwater Manager, four private sector engineers, the Nassau County Director of Planning and Economic Opportunity, and the National Flood Insurance Community Rating System Coordinator to identify and resolve priority stormwater issues. They identified three priority problems that needed to be addressed:

1. Finished Floor Elevation (FFE) recommendations (18" above centerline of road (CL)), no matter the lot size, were encouraged, but not required, for all single-family dwellings and dwellings in non-engineered subdivisions.
2. There were no requirements for new single-family dwellings to plan for stormwater runoff or its effects on neighboring parcels and no responsible party assigned.
3. There were no county regulations regarding illicit discharges into stormwater systems. DEP had encouraged their inclusion in the code.

In January 2020, Nassau County revised Ordinance 99-17 to address these issues. Lots smaller than an acre requires an 18" above CL confirmed by a formboard permit signed by surveyor or other trained professional. Lots 1 acre or greater may be eligible for a formboard at FFE 13" above highest adjacent grade. This is reviewed in house on a case-by-case basis depending on the area and the drainage concerns. There were also zone A and AE elevation certificate requirements added (see attached appendix 1). Other floodplain building requirements are part of section 10.5 of the Land Development Code (Ordinance 97-19). Builders were assigned the responsibility for lot grading for all dwellings without an approved engineered stormwater design. This method, which reduces time cost for county staff, was one that Peay had tried at her previous job in Tennessee. The builder must sign and adhere to a lot grading form (see attached appendix 2) which details drainage requirements. Section 10.9 details and prohibits Illicit connections and discharges to the stormwater system. Discharge infractions are enforced by the County Code Department and FDEP.

### **Status of Stormwater Management in City of Fernandina Beach**

Andre Desilet, Stormwater Manager city of Fernandina Beach

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The city of Fernandina Beach passed a Stormwater Ordinance in 2012 as a proactive approach to dealing with local environmental problems not being solved by current state regulations with a large-scale view. Stormwater regulations are managed by the Streets and Utilities Department. A dedicated stormwater staff was hired in 2016 and in 2017 the city established a stormwater utility to provide direct funding via utility bills. The city has also been awarded grant funding focused on water quality improvement and flood protection by several federal and state sources.

The Stormwater program is guided by the city's Stormwater Masterplan and the newly completed Resiliency Masterplan. The city has instituted a Municipal Conceptual Stormwater Permit that establishes minimum water quality improvement requirements for infrastructure and redevelopment projects. It does not include groundwater or bacterial water quality parameters for stormwater.

The office is working on a LID manual for residential building to satisfy the terms of an ordinance.

### **Current Issues in Riparian Buffer Regulations**

Seth Wenger, Assistant Professor Ecology Department, Science Director River Basin Center UGA and

Katie Hill, Research Professional; Strategic Operations and Planning, Carl Vinson Institute UGA

Riparian buffers were used first in agricultural and forestry to provide filtration for runoff laden with nutrients, metals, and clay particles, however they also serve multiple purposes including:

- Providing shade
- Supplying wood and leaves (important to aquatic ecosystems and food web)
- Stabilizing banks
- Protecting water quality
- Controlling water quantity (flooding), and
- Providing wildlife habitat

The UGA Ecology Department did an international literature review and found that the minimum width for a sustainable buffer was 50 feet. Some jurisdictions in Georgia use a 75-foot buffer but have capabilities for hardship variances. In coastal areas, buffers should be measured from the landward side of wretted vegetation and Sea level rise should be taken into account. Septic tanks may require additional buffering. Georgia has a 25-foot minimum buffer on all state waters and a 100-foot minimum buffer on major waterways (100 cubic feet per second or more).

When developing ordinances for riparian buffers, jurisdictions should consider:

- Whether to use an Overlay zone or a free-standing ordinance (the overlay zone is much less onerous)

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- Width (50-foot minimum for nutrient filtration more required for bacteria ie. septic)
- Prohibited activities/uses (e.g. construction, septic systems, impervious surfaces)
- All aspects of exceptions (agriculture, forestry, grandfathered activities etc.)
- Variances/flexibility (allow for situations such as buffer averaging)
- Incorporation of other programs (USDA programs and incentives)

### **Camden County Community Planning Tool**

Scott Brazell, Camden County CRS and E&S coordinator

Over the past two years Camden County has partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), GCRD, Coastal Regional Commission (CRC), and UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant (MAREX) to create a mapping tool which provides information to the county and the public about the risks and opportunities for development in the county. They layered publicly available data and county data. The layers that can be turned off and on allow the user to simultaneously view numerous categories including: Critical Infrastructure, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood zones and Base Flood Elevations (BFE), Future Land Use, Flood and Sea Level Rise Layers, Ecological Information and Zoning Information.

The tool can be found at [map.coastalresilience.org/Georgia](http://map.coastalresilience.org/Georgia) or through links on Camden County, city of St. Marys, UGA, and TNC.

### **Other Stormwater News**

Camden County- After several years of study, the city of St. Marys determined that they would establish a stormwater utility funded by a user fee as part of the monthly utility bill rather than through an addition to the annual ad valorem taxes. Both residential and non-residential customers will be encouraged to undertake specific activities to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on the city's drainage system and receive credits toward their bills. The city is in the process of developing the procedures for obtaining credits, which will be outlined in the city's Storm Water User Fee Credit Manual.

As counties and cities begin work on green infrastructure guidelines, SMRMC suggests exploring several of the manuals produced by GDNR.

[GREEN GROWTH GUIDELINES](#)

[GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING GUIDELINES](#)

The engineer from GMC working with Charlton County on the Spanish Creek WMP, pointed out that Green Infrastructure/LID strategies work best in areas where water table is deeper than 3 feet allowing for infiltration. He also pointed out that MS4 projects have infiltration requirements.

TNC and NOAA offered a zoom workshop "Cross Boundary River Systems: Working Together to Incorporate Natural Infrastructure into Flood Management". The focus rivers for the conference were the St. Marys River (GA/FL) and the Waccamaw/Lumber River (NC/SC) and emphasized sea level rise in coastal counties. A recording is available online on the TNC website.

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## **Funding Opportunities for Water Quality and Water Quantity Projects**

Florida - Funding for control of water pollution from nonpoint sources is managed by the FDEP Nonpoint Source Management Program. The program administers both the Federal Clean Water Act Section 319(h) Grants (319 Grants) and the State Water-quality Assistance Grants (SWAG). The goal of these grants is to reduce nonpoint source pollution from land use activities. Total funding amounts available each year in these two grant programs depends on Federal and state appropriations but is usually around \$8 - \$9 million.

SJRWMD periodically makes available cost-share funding to Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) counties. Nassau and Baker Counties are designated as REDI, which means the required local matching funds for the project are waived. SJRWMD will be accepting applications for their cost-share projects on water quality, water supply and flood protection in 2021 for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Both Macclenny and Fernandina have used REDI funds in the past. The counties may wish to consider possible projects.

Georgia- GDNR awards USEPA 319 grants to county and municipal governments to implement existing watershed-based and watershed management plans that adequately address USEPA's Nine Elements for Watershed Planning and focus on a HUC-10 or smaller watershed. These funds cannot be used to write WMPs. Currently Camden County has a 319 grant to remediate the fecal coliform impairment on the Horsepen/Temple/Mallett Creek system.

GCRD awards CIGs of up to \$80,000 (with 1:1 matching) for such things as disaster resiliency projects, sustainable community projects, public access, land conservation, and projects to address non-point source pollution. Potential grantees should visit <https://coastalgadnr.org/GrantPrograms> and register to be on the email list for announcements pertaining to application procedures. Currently Camden County and The Nature Conservancy have a CIG for a Coastal Resiliency project and Charlton County has a CIG to produce a WMP for Spanish Creek.

## **Federal, State and Local Regulations and County Comprehensive Plans**

### **No Wake Zones - Nassau County**

With the help of rangers from GDNR, the committee completed an application for No Wake Zones in the Florida half of the river across from the Traders Hill and Camp Pinckney boat ramps, and along a sandbar on the Florida side just down river of Traders Hill that is heavily used by swimmers during the summer. Questions remain about the number of applications required and the fee and advertising costs levied against governmental groups. The work to secure the zones is continuing.

### **No Wake Zones- Baker County**

The committee asked Baker County to consider “no wake zone” signage when renovating the St. Marys Cove Boat Ramp.

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## **Responsibility for Florida Onsite Sewage Program transferred from Department of Health (DOH) to Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)**

As required by Florida SB 712, FDOH reported information regarding the Onsite Sewage Program to Governor DeSantis and the Legislature by July 1, 2020. FDOH and FDEP must submit recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature regarding the transfer of the Onsite Sewage Program by December 31, 2020. The proposed schedule for 2021 and 2022 is:

- 6/30/21, FDOH and FDEP must enter into an interagency agreement that must address all agency cooperation for a period not less than 5 years after the septic transfer.
- 7/1/21, The Onsite Sewage Program in FDOH is transferred by a type two transfer to FDEP. FDOH Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems Technical Advisory Committee (OSTDS TAC) is repealed.
- 8/1/21, FDEP, in consultation with the FDOH, will appoint 10 members to an OSTDS TAC.
- 1/1/22, OSTDS TAC will submit its recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature.
- 7/1/22, Requires that FDEP adopt rules to locate OSTDSs, including establishing setback distances, to prevent groundwater contamination and surface water contamination and to preserve the public health. FDEP must report the effective date of the rules to the Division of Law Revision for incorporation into the statutes. Notice of Rule Development by 11/1/21
- 8/15/22, OSTDS TAC expires.

Also see reports of St. Marys Riverkeeper (SMRK) activities below concerning FDEP assumption of 404 regulatory authority.

The Charlton County Comprehensive Plan was accepted by the Board of Commissioners and approved by the state. Representatives from both SMRMC and SMRK attended workshops on the revisions.

The Baker County Comprehensive Plan was accepted by the Board of Commissioners and has been submitted to the state for approval.

### ***Partner Reports***

**SMRK** - Despite COVID-19, SMRK remained deeply engaged in numerous conversations with local leadership, regulatory agencies, conservation organizations, research scientists, mining industry representatives and a concerned general public regarding mineral sand mining operations in the St. Marys and adjacent Satilla River watersheds in Charlton County. In 2020, most of the work has focused on the Twin Pines Minerals project on Trail Ridge west of St. George. Although federal repeal of the new definition of waters of the United States has changed the regulatory permitting landscape in 2020, SMRK's focus upon science-based evaluation and fair-minded advocacy has not.

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SMRK also continued their monthly bacterial testing at 20 sites throughout the watershed and 14 additional sites in the sound and the East and Amelia Rivers. The results continue to indicate a mostly healthy river, with few sites having counts over 410 cfu/100 ml, the state standard of both Florida and Georgia. Sites with regular results over 410 include Escambia Slough in Fernandina, Spanish Creek in Folkston, Borrell Creek in St Marys, and a NPDES permit holder receiving stream in Harrietts Bluff. Results at Horsepen Creek are no longer above state standard. eDNA samples performed by the SMRK show high levels of human DNA in Escambia Slough, and high or medium levels of both Human and pig DNA in Harrietts Bluff and Spanish Creek. Results were shared with FDEP and GEPD. Both states will add the locations to their sampling sites.

Both Phase 2 of the Living Shorelines Project and the Annual River CleanUp were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SMRK hopes to deploy phase 2 of the Living Shoreline Project in the spring of 2021.

SMRK is watching the results of a reissuance of a NPDES permit in Camden County on the East River. Partially because of SMRKs sampling and concern, GEPD will increase compliance officer visits and sample the East River to determine if a TMDL is needed.

FDEP will assume regulatory authority of discharges of dredge and fill material (Clean Water Act Title IV Section 404) to the following waters in the St. Marys River watershed beginning 2021: Baker County - Cedar Creek, South, Middle, and North Prong St. Marys River and Nassau County- Cabbage, Pigeon, Brush, Deep, Dunn and Little Dunn Creeks.

## **Administrative**

### **Membership**

Camden County appointed Elizabeth King and Rick Frey to replace resigning members Karen Chisholm and Chris Chauncey. Baker County has two vacant citizen positions. Nassau County has two vacant citizen positions. Nassau County also needs to appoint a commissioner to attend SMRMC meetings and provide monthly updates about the above river issues. SMRMC needs engaged participation from the citizen representatives and county commissioners to effectively interact with the county governments on matters of land use, water quality, and water quantity. The committee encourages counties to fill vacant positions.

### **Website**

The website is used to fulfill the requirement of the open information regulations in both states to provide information, notice meetings, and maintain public access to agendas, minutes, and presentation documents. From 2003-2018, SJRWMD provided hosting and maintenance services. In 2018, SJRWMD informed the committee that they would no longer maintain the committee website. Shelley Beville, the SMRMC administrative assistant, redesigned the website using a template available from Doster. Recent minutes, agendas, and presentations are available under the news tab; archived documents are available on request.

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**Meeting Dates 2021**

Jan 4, Feb 1, Mar 1, Apr 12, May 3, Jun 7, Jul 12, Aug 2, Sep 13, Oct 4, Nov 1, Dec 6

Respectfully submitted,



John Myers  
GA Chair



Keith Tindall  
FL Chair

**SMRMC  
2021 Proposed Budget**

Anticipated County Revenue:

Baker	700
Camden	700
Charlton	700
Nassau	700
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Total	2800

Allocated Expenses:

Administrative Assistant	2220
Admin Mileage Reimbursement*	363
Office Expenses (copies, mailing) *	90
Website Hosting	120
<hr/>	
Total	2773

\*Assumes in person meetings resume in April 2021 (mileage reimbursement and copies not required unless meeting in person)

12/31/2020 Cash on Hand                    \$6170.42



John Myers  
GA Chair SMRMC



Earl K. Tindall  
FL Chair SMRMC