

St. Marys River Management Committee

2017 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 comprised 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) serve as non-voting members. All meetings are open to the public with notice provided on the Committee's website: www.saintmarysriver.org.

River Clean-Up & Celebration

The newly formed St. Marys Riverkeeper assumed leadership of the St. Marys River Clean-Up & Celebration starting in 2017. The date was moved to coincide with Earth Day clean ups by other local organizations.

Land Use

In February, Mike Bell, VP Public Affairs and Charles Adams, VP Community Development from Rayonier spoke to the committee about Wildlight Village, the first phase of the East Nassau Stewardship District (ENSD). Under Florida law, the formation of Stewardship Districts and Community Development Districts allow owners to spread some costs of development to the residents through annual fees. The ENSD is a 24,000-acre area in Yulee with 6.5 miles of St. Mary River frontage. The master plan for the development shows a series of "villages" with parks, hiking paths, bike trails and a 12,000-acre conservation easement roughly surrounding Loftin Creek. It will include roughly 3,300 residential units and 6.9 million ft.² of commercial space, including shopping, restaurants, and schools.

Specific impacts on the St. Marys River are not clear. While Rayonier has no plans to develop the riverbank along the St. Marys River for several years, it is not part of the conservation easement. At a

2012 presentation, Rayonier representatives had shown a retail district along the riverbank and had said they were required to adhere to a 25 ft setback. At the time, SMRMC had voiced concern over narrow vegetative buffers along the riverbank and lack of requirements to adhere to future environmental regulations. Most of the stormwater will not drain into the St. Marys River but instead south through the Loftin Creek watershed into the Nassau River. JEA will provide water and sewer. Our understanding, from the February presentation, was that Rayonier would improve existing public boat ramps but had no plans for additional access. **The committee was told that permitted withdrawal of water from the aquifer would be closely monitored to be sure there was no decrease in the water level of existing area wells. The committee sent a letter with additional questions about phasing, stormwater runoff, water quality and ENSD operations in March, but received no reply.**

The ENSD was established by House Bill 1075, passed by the Florida Legislature and approved by the Governor of Florida on June 6, 2017. The ENSD will be governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors which will be responsible for operating and maintaining improvements, infrastructure and facilities.

Baker County held their final workshop for the sandmining ordinance in June 2017 and has begun updating the ordinance, which should be passed in 2018. Baker County continues to struggle with the administration of the Shoals Park. In the absence of funding to staff the park, there are ongoing problems with misuse and vandalism. There were plans to do a selective thinning but they are waiting for prices to rebound following the West Mims fire. The harvest delay will postpone planned work at the park. Baker County also plans to hire a part-time law enforcement officer in early 2018 to patrol the park at random times.

In December 2016, Camden Board of Commissioners heard a request to subdivide an 80-acre private property on Cumberland Island into 10 sub parcels. There is no development proposed as part of the subdividing action and no current impact on the river is anticipated. After several months of discussion, the problem was returned to the National Park Service and the landowners to design a workable solution.

Camden- Camden County is trying to acquire the roundhouse property just east of the 17 bridge to improve the boat ramp and provide additional parking for river access.

Water Quality-

In July 2016 the Georgia General Assembly approved a moratorium on permits for pipelines for one year while a citizen's commission studied the state's eminent domain laws and made recommendations for improvements. Based on current regulations, it is unclear whether private companies qualify for use of eminent domain. The pipeline would cross under the St. Marys River near US301 in Charlton County. The results of the study were reflected in HB 413. All property owners within 1000 feet of proposed pipeline route must be notified. A new appeal process for use of eminent domain was also instituted. Georgia Environmental Protection Division is designing rules based on HB 413. They will be available for public comment in the Spring or Summer of 2018.

Stream impairments continue to be a problem in both Georgia counties. Work is underway to remediate several of the river and tributary segments listed on the 2012 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Integrated 305(b) and 303(d) List as waters not supporting the designated use of fishing

and swimming. The most common impairments in the main stem of the river are mercury, dissolved oxygen and fecal coliform. Dissolved oxygen levels in coastal blackwater systems are under review and mercury is more a regional than a local issue. The committee is currently concentrating on fecal coliform impairments. The Committee partnered with University of Georgia River Basin Center in 2010-2011 on a 319 grant to pinpoint and begin remediation work on Horsepen Creek in Camden County. In 2017, Camden County received a 319 grant to continue remediation. The Riverkeeper is providing water quality testing equipment and volunteers; the committee is providing organizational assistance. The grant year began in November 2017.

Charlton County was invited to apply for a Coastal Incentive Grant based on preliminary application in December 2017. There was a great deal of concern about the lack of recent data so intensive sampling played a central role in the grant application. Because the county was not able to secure commitment from volunteers to do the desired water quality testing, the county decided in late January, not to apply for the grant. In February, the committee approached EPD and they agreed to do intensive sampling of Spanish Creek in 2017 at five sites on all three branches. A final report showing that the creek is still impaired was shared with the committee in December 2017. In 2018, the committee will continue to work with Charlton County and the cities of Folkston and Homeland to remediate the problem.

Though several St. Marys tributaries in Florida were categorized as impaired for fecal coliform on the initial list in 1998, because of changes in contamination parameters, all have been delisted.

Geoff Sample, St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) representative to the committee, informed Florida counties of the availability of Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) cost-share grants for Nassau and Baker counties. SJRWMD accepts applications for their Cost Share Projects on water quality, water supply and flood protection in January of each year. Projects of any size are considered. SJRWMD also sent Information directly to Baker and Nassau counties. Both counties are considering possible projects.

Geoff also provided the committee with the "Assessment of the St. Marys River Biological Water Quality, Primary Productivity, and Pollutant Load – Phase I Monitoring" from 10/2006- 3/2008 by University of Georgia Marine Extension Service. **This report will be added as additional documents from the April 2017 meeting on the website.**

Baker County informed the committee about a class B permit for biosolids at Cedar Creek area. They are applying to accept dried solid waste sludge from Gainesville. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) inspection was scheduled for January 11th. Also on January 17th, the commission will hear from the EPA regarding the permit. The committee sent a letter of concern about detrimental effects this project may have on the river.

The West Mims Fire ignited in the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge in early April and burned over 151,515 acres before being contained by the efforts of over 1000 firefighters. It was finally extinguished by heavy rains in June. Burns near the river provide periodic infusions of potash which help to slightly increase the pH. During extreme droughts, pH has been as low as 3.5.

SMRMC members attended several meetings of the Natural Resources Committee of the Regional Community Institute of Northeast Florida, Inc. (RCI). RCI is a non-profit created by Northeast Florida Regional Council in 2011 to complete a 50-year visioning plan for the First Coast. The group's study area

extended past the Florida to the Satilla River; and the action plan included Charlton, Camden and Ware counties in Georgia. As of September, RCI had completed the second draft of their report on the natural resources visioning. It is available online at:
http://www.rcinef.org/Water_Beyond_Borders_8_28_17.pdf.

Water Quantity

Water shortage in the early part of the year resulted in water restrictions in Florida. They remained in effect until the aquifer recharged, which was well after the heavy summer rains began. **Need dates from Geoff.**

The St. Marys River gage installed in 2016 at Traders Hill provided valuable information to emergency management personnel in Charlton, Camden and Nassau counties during the heavy rains brought by Hurricane Irma in September. The gage showed that water rose to 22.32 ft above normal mean water level. The data for the gage can be viewed at
http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ga/nwis/uv/?site_no=02231175&PARAMeter_cd=00065,00060,00062.

Geoff Sample, committee representative from SJRWMD, reported that a storm modeler noted that water from Irma was the highest recorded since 1846. The gage readings from SJRWMD showed on 9/1/2017 there were 580 mil gallons flowing past the gage, on 10/1/2017 there was 659 mil gallons and the peak flow during the storm was 1462 mil gallons (1.4billion gallons).

Hurricane Irma highlighted weak points in each of the counties' infrastructures. The committee encourages counties to use local option taxes (e.g. SPLOT in Georgia) to assist with improvements. There were numerous road wash outs throughout the four-county area and storm debris pick up was a challenge especially in rural parts of counties and small underfunded cities. In Camden County, power went out in the City of Kingsland which led to lift stations without power and allowed sewage to flow directly into neighborhoods at Catfish Creek. Approximately 50 houses were affected. Fecal coliform readings at Catfish Creek were very high post hurricane. The committee plans to follow up with the City of Kingsland about this problem. Browntown also flooded and Horsepen/Temple Creek water quality was poor the weekend following the storm. Storm surge caused 37 vessels to capsize, the city docks were badly damaged and original Cumberland Queen lost.

In Charlton County, several roads were washed out and 30 homes flooded. The county was seeking DOT money for help with road repair. Storm debris had still not been picked up in Homeland in December.

Nassau County had numerous road washouts especially in the western part of the county and flooding lasted for almost a month. At Lake Hampton, the valve for the dam overflow was not entirely opened and the dam washed out. Debris collection was a challenge, especially in the rural area of the county.

Baker County mostly had tree damage; debris pick up was slow.

Nassau County residents have been affected by excessive flooding even after relatively small rains. Hurricane Faye, in 2008 produced massive flooding. With a variety of funding sources, the county undertook a long-term restoration project, which consisted of desnagging and removal of riparian vegetation. In 2017, Nassau County received a \$500,000 REDI grant to share the cost of phase 8 of the project. Recently, Nassau County Commissioners with help from City Council of City of Jacksonville and

Representatives Bird, Bean, Nelson and Rutherford were able to do a waterflow study. Based on the study, the USACE will lead the project to dredge and widen almost 50 of the waterway. Commissioner Spicer plans to find a speaker to describe the project to the committee in 2018.

Other

Due to budget cuts, Florida and Georgia are no longer stocking game fish in the St. Marys River.

National Marine Fisheries Service stopped the sturgeon sampling in the St. Marys River because of concern about the stress on the threatened population.

During early 2017 clean-up of debris from Hurricane Matthew (2016) along the nearby Nassau River between Scott's Landing and Orange Bluff, Tetratex, the contractor hired by FDEP, apparently cut live standing trees in the process of removing approximately 700 tons of vegetation. Through combined efforts of the Riverkeeper and Nassau Commissioner George Spicer the attention of state and federal representatives was brought to bear on the issue. In late July, the Riverkeeper toured the site with representatives from FDEP and the contractor and sub-contractor. Ultimately, FDEP concluded there was no evidence present of wrong doing by Tetra Tech or their sub-contractor. However, Austin Nicklas (a representative from Senator Bean's office, invited by Commissioner Spicer) expressed to the committee that the outcry from residents, the Committee's fast action, and the involvement of the St. Marys Riverkeeper were noticed by the Senator's office and will hopefully bring more awareness to hiring of sub-contractors for future projects. Commissioner Spicer also mentioned that he reached out the Senator Rutherford's office and Representative Burt's office and both were interested and very helpful.

Residents in Kings Ferry area Florida side are interested establishing a No Wake Zone. Commissioner Spicer has been in contact with the county attorney to see if it is possible. The Georgia side of the river has existing no wake zones 100 ft on either side of any dock, boat, house etc.

Additional Advocacy and Protection for the St. Marys River

SMRMC has long recognized that its status as a quasi-governmental entity formed under an interlocal agreement between Georgia and Florida counties not only makes it impossible to supplement counties' dues to support work such as annual St. Marys River Clean-Up & Celebration but also impedes quick action and subcommittee work because of the obligation to work within the parameters of sunshine laws of the two states. In 2016, after several years of discussion by SMRMC and with the advice and support of individual past and present committee members, Camden County SMRMC appointee Rick Frey was licensed by the International Waterkeepers Alliance as the St. Marys Riverkeeper. He resigned from the Committee to avoid conflicts of interest.

SMRMC and St. Marys Riverkeeper are cooperating and collaborating on several projects. As a USC 501 (c)(3) non-profit, St. Marys Riverkeeper, Inc. will assume leadership of the St. Marys River Clean-Up & Celebration starting in 2017.

Admin

Camden County named Chris Chauncey as new member of the committee.

Without the revenue from the river clean-up, the committee will not be able to continue to employ the part-time administrative assistant required by sunshine regulations of the two states. The committee approved an increase in annual dues from \$500 to \$700 effective 2018.

Respectfully submitted,

John Myers

GA Chair SMRMC

Chris Gazes

FL Chair SMRMC

JAN

FEB

New Business Baker County Commissioner James Croft introduced new county manager Kennie Downing and the new Community Development Manager, Chris Milton, for Baker County. John Myer introduced Ben Casey, the new Camden County Commissioner, from District 5 which has the most river frontage. Commissioner Spicer also mentioned there is a new Nassau County Manager Shanea Jones.

MAR

Ed Barber wanted to discuss the Rayonier presentation last month and whether they addressed all of the committee's questions. The committee went through the questions they had submitted to Rayonier beforehand. It was decided the committee would resend the questions for more clarification on several of the questions regarding Phases of the project, stormwater runoff, water quality, and how a stewardship district operates.

New Business Shelley Beville brought up a grant opportunity from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for projects regarding improvement of water quality and quantity.

APR

John Myers informed the committee that Georgia House will revisit the Coastal Protection Act next year once they redefine boundaries of sand dunes.

MAY

Ed Barber informed the committee that at the Nassau County Commissioner meeting there was talk about the domestic wastewater treatment plant. He said DEP was asked to attend the LPA meeting in Baker County by Greg Sheppard, the Chairman, to discuss wastewater sludge deposition and DEP permitting. the District Manager respectfully declined attending.

Rick Frey reported that Charlton County high school students began water quality testing in May and will continue next school year.

JUN

John Myers mentioned that HB 271 was not passed by GA legislature. That is Marine Shoreline Protection Act.

JUL

AUG

SEP- NO MTG BC HURRICANE

OCT

NOV

Merrill reviewed the NPDES permit reissuance, saying that in her conversations with Anna Truszczynski, EPD Stormwater Unit Manager, the September 15, 2017 concerning renewal of phase 2 MS4 stormwater permits in public notice no 2017-16ML, Truszczynski said that no counties in the St. Marys River Basin are currently covered by NPDES phase 2 MS4 permits. Neither Camden nor Charlton had high enough populations in the 2010 census. Camden may qualify in 2022 once 2020 census data works its way through the regulatory system. In short, currently, bacteria from LAS and other sewage treatment facilities is regulated by permit but stormwater discharge is only indirectly regulated if it is determined to have caused an impairment. Merrill also mentioned that rule 391.34 for solid waste facilities was revised, but the edits did not make an substantial changes to the rule. Merrill brought in the Coal Combustion Residue section of the rule for attendees to review.

DEC