

NGO Water Resources Roundtable Discussion

Moderators:

James Evans, SWFWC

Dr. Don Duke, SWFWC

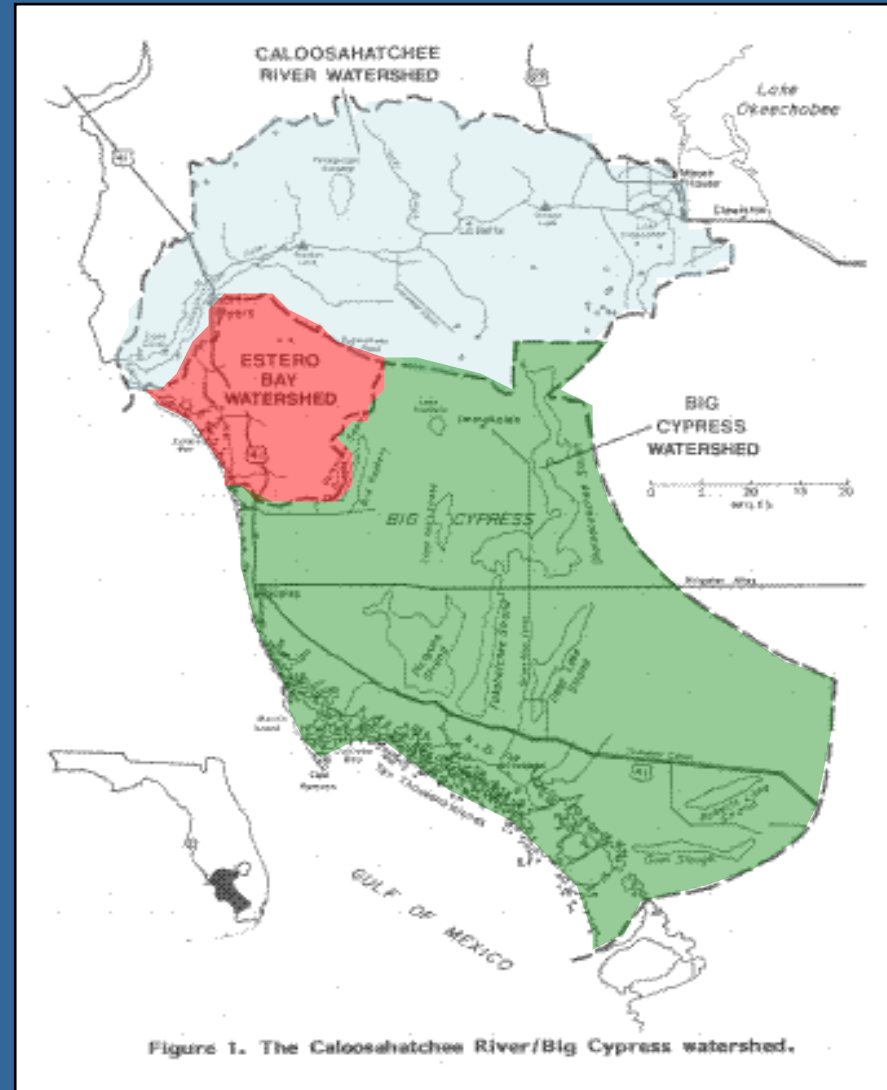
Background

- Mission Statement

The mission of the Southwest Florida Watershed Council is to protect, conserve, manage and/or restore the land and water resources of the Caloosahatchee and Big Cypress Watersheds. Through increased awareness, participation and cooperation among all stakeholders in consensus building, planning and decision making, we are working to meet the economic, natural and cultural needs for this and succeeding generations.

Background

- Study Area
 - Watersheds:
 - Caloosahatchee
 - Estero Bay
 - Big Cypress
 - Area = 4,203 mi²



Roundtable Discussion Goals

- Develop a list of priority watershed issues
- Work to develop consensus on priority issues/projects
 - Where do we agree?
 - Where do we disagree?
 - Is compromise possible?
 - Are there priority projects that we all can support?
- Develop consensus-driven strategies to address priority issues (short and long-term)
- How do we get there from here?

Participants

- Southwest Florida Watershed Council (John Cassani, James Evans, Dr. Don Duke, Dr. Ed Hanlon, Noel Andress,)
- Conservancy of Southwest Florida (Jennifer Hecker, Marisa Polgar, Casey Rogers)
- Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) (Rae Ann Wessel)
- Brooks Concerned Citizens (Roger Strelow)
- Estero Council of Community Leaders (Don Eslick, Beverly McNells, Roger Strelow)
- Collier County Audubon (Brad Cornell)
- Audubon of Florida (Dr. Paul Gray)
- The Snook and Gamefish Foundation (Pete Quasius, John Cassani)
- Gulf Citrus Growers Association (Ron Hamel)
- Florida Farm Bureau Federation (Charles Shinn)
- Responsible Growth Management Coalition (Wayne Daltry)
- “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society (John McCabe)
- Audubon of Southwest Florida
- Estero Bay Buddies (Sarah Larsen)
- Estero River Conservancy (Sarah Larsen)
- Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association (CRCA) (Dr. John Capece)
- Others – Robert Hill, Brian Mitchell, Steve Hayes – Johnson Engineering, Katherine English-Pavese Law Firm, Hugh English

Watershed / Water Resources Priorities Summary*

- 1) Governance and decision making
 - Comprehensive, meaningful policy reform
 - Integrate land and water management
 - Education and public involvement in WR issues (e.g., CERP, ROG)
 - Affordability of water quality / water management decisions
 - Quantifying economic benefits of protecting WR
- 2) Restoring optimal flows and hydroperiods
 - Lake O operation, Caloosahatchee MFL, southern flow way, Estero River tributaries, optimal flows for Caloosahatchee and Estero Bay
- 3) Water Reservations / legal protections and storage
 - Secure a water reservation for the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary
 - Storage within the Caloosahatchee basin, storage in general
- 4) Water quality
 - Source control, dispersed water storage and treatment
 - Adopt a state-wide stormwater rule (or regional stormwater rule)
 - Implementation of IWR, TMDLs, and Numeric Nutrient Criteria
- 5) Habitat and aquatic species protection
 - Integrate habitat protection and restoration decisions
 - Immediate protection of species/habitats at risk (ESA issues)

Watershed / Water Resources Priorities*

- **A. Water Flows and Availability**
- **1. Policy and planning generally**
- Development of a 20 year plan for water resource planning; a comprehensive water policy reform that balances consumptive uses with natural resource needs.
- **2. Managing flows for multiple needs**
- Maintaining optimal flows and hydroperiods to the Caloosahatchee, associated tributaries, the region's natural systems generally; establishing Minimum Flows and Levels for Estero Bay / other natural systems; timing, distribution, and quantity of discharges from Lake Okeechobee; hydrologic restoration of major flow-ways in our basin; using the water supply plans of SFWMD to fill water target gaps for the natural system.

Watershed / Water Resources Priorities Continued*

- **3. Storage and water reservation(s)**
- A plan to restore storage capacity within the basin, including: reservation(s) for the Caloosahatchee River / area rivers; freshwater storage and surficial aquifer protection measures for wetlands and adjacent uplands; develop STAs for our region.
- Storage and flowways in the broader region, including: implementation of CERP, NEEPP, and River of Grass restoration
- Water storage north of Lake Okeechobee
- Re-establish flowways South of Lake O. to Florida Bay
- Retrofitting regional and old platted lands water conveyance drainage systems to retain valuable freshwater instead of draining it to tide as quickly as possible.
- **4. Study / research needs for flows**
- Research upper levels of fresh water flows to river to determine sustainability of estuary resources without harm during dry and wet seasons.
- Completion of a comprehensive study of the flowways that travel through the DR/GR and into Estero Bay – beyond the narrow study of I-75 culverts.

Watershed / Water Resources Priorities Continued*

- B. Water Quality
- **1. Planning and regulation generally**
- A real water quality plan, with needed outcomes, institutional capacities, and action timelines, by drainage basin.
- True source reduction of nutrient and other pollutant loadings.
- Continue to implement TMDL program – develop plans to improve water quality in impaired waterbodies; develop Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs).
- Improve stormwater management; address sewer overflows; install filters on box culverts and other stormwater conveyance infrastructure.
- Protect surface water resources that are meeting standards from degradation (i.e., preventing impairment).
- Legal protection for the C-43 and estuaries resulting in actual shared adversity with areas north and south of the Lake (in drought years and excess water years) reducing number of exceedences.

Watershed / Water Resources Priorities Continued*

- **2. Specific needs**
- Eliminate septic tanks and aging wastewater treatment package plants in coastal areas.
- Develop TMDLs / Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) particularly for nutrients and emerging substances of concern (ESCs).
- Address the errors of the Statewide Stormwater Rule/ Harper Method.
- Establish and implement numeric nutrient criteria in the region / throughout Florida.
- Managing water resources in the face of sea level rise and changing weather patterns; Documentation of climate change impacts on ecosystems.
- **3. Water environment broad issues**
- The continued threat of off-shore and near-shore drilling.
- Mining in the DR/GR and the threat it poses to the adequacy of the future Lee County water supply.
- **4. Study / research needs for water quality**
- How should natural wetlands be used to treat surface water runoff?
- What water quality models are applicable in Southwest Florida?
- Hydrologic influences of mine pits and other artificial lakes in SW Florida

Watershed / Water Resources Priorities Continued*

- **C. Habitat and Species Protection**

- Additional research related to endangered species and implementation of species recovery plans; Documentation of changes and trends in biodiversity and ecosystem integrity.

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- **D. Organizational / Institutional Needs**

- Using the EAR process of the local governments to fill management gaps.
- Mobilizing neighborhood and community groups for action.
- Education on water resource issues - education will build a foundation of support that is necessary to obtain the dollars for construction of ...(needed projects)
- Competing with the rest of the country and world with different water quality standards.
- Design needed to be affordable enough that our plumber and school teacher can live here.
- What should public access look like on public lands?

Priority Issues by Organization

Audubon of Florida

- 1) Water storage throughout the entire system
 - 2) Move Lake O water south
- (Institutional issue – Everglades NP willing/able to accept additional flows?)
- 1) Reduce additional nutrient imports – urban and agricultural sources

The Snook and Gamefish Foundation

- 1) Focus nutrient loading concerns on N rather than P in Caloosahatchee
- 2) Timing of water flow availability
- 3) Science basis for decisions – sustainability including economic factors
- 4) Recreational as well as commercial fisheries
- 5) Access to public waters = quality of life

Conservancy of Southwest Florida

- 1) Nutrient source control – regulatory initiatives on watershed basis
- 2) Reserving flows for natural systems – science based on ecological health
- 3) Adjust policies to equitably allocate existing water resources -pending projects to increase resources

Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation

- 1) Water amounts including drought/"too little" as well as flood/"too much" – storage N of Lake O and in Caloosahatchee River watershed – restoring flow south/rehydration to South
- 2) Equitable distribution of water resources – regulatory framework
- 3) Water quality – urban, agricultural; TMDL regulatory actions (N, P)

SWF Watershed Council

- 1) **Flows** – minimum flow to Caloosahatchee estuary:
 - a) Policy reform
 - b) Infrastructure support - storage
- 2) **Duration and timing of flow** (in addition/rather than annual magnitude)
- 3) **Water quality**
 - a) Infrastructure support – storage
 - b) Quality protection via TMDLs, etc
 1. Economic/societal system does not promote certain options for solutions – options to pay for water resources

(SWFWC – additional.)

- 1) Options for making use of water before going to tide
- 2) Local regulatory level – what policy option promotes watershed-based decisions
- 3) Increase dialog between natural system and agricultural stakeholders

Responsible Growth Management Coalition

- 1) Maintain status of water as a public resource
- 2) Establish the water budget as the basic analytical tool for water resource management
- 3) Get the environment recognized as a legal entity considered as a user of water

Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association

- 1) Institutional structures / actions that will lead to achieving outcomes – public-private partnerships
- 2) Promote enjoyment of the water resources
- 3) Effective storage mechanisms
- 4) Effective WQ improvement – goes hand in hand with effective storage
- 5) How to achieve (above) including on private lands
- 6) Revenue impacts – provide value/income for making changes that meet water resource needs

Collier County Audubon

Short/mid/long term aspects of items discussed today:

- 1) Realistic water shortage policies that will keep farms and ecosystems whole (ST) – water conservation
- 2) Resolution of policies hydrology vs restoration (mid-term)
- 3) Storage and treatment (LT) – monetize value of water resources especially on farms

Estero River Conservancy

- 1) Education - including garnering public will to support water resources resolutions
- 2) Right amount of water at right time
- 3) Quality of life – value to the public of resources including locally important resources

Estero Council of Community Leaders

- 1) Good landuse planning
- 2) Establish urban boundaries – increase density in those areas
- 3) Land conservation and stewardship /management plan – public lands, easements, etc for land used for flood control, WQ, storage
- 4) Wetlands protection as a water supply issue

Mr. Hugh English, citrus grower

- 1) Consider historical conditions when making plans/decisions on desirable current/future conditions
- 2) Lake Okeechobee as the most effective place to store water for use in South FL
- 3) Consider management of public lands as contributor to water resources

Gulf Citrus Growers Association

- 1) Lake O water storage – increasing storage and water supply
- 2) Water supply across the region
- 3) Enhance dispersed water storage – economic benefits to private entities that store water

Florida Farm Bureau Federation

- 1) Lake O as primary storage facility in the short-term needs
 - a) Institutional changes – keep Lake O at sufficient storage (15.6 ft Nov 1) – USACE decision
 - b) USACE repairs on H Hoover Dike should consider adapting plans to increase capacity
- 2) Payment for services – including water quality/storage services
- 3) Expand BMPs – come online in urban community as well as ag. community

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society

- 1) Need for all stakeholders to work together
- 2) Water quality – N, P
- 3) Adequate water availability
- 4) Continue seeking consensus in community to push agencies to move forward

Others from the community

- Ecosystem services evaluations for Caloosahatchee River, estuary, and watershed (R Hill)
- Productive research topics for FGCU graduate students (B Mitchell)

Brooks Concerned Citizens Association

- 1) Concerns similar to those of the Estero Council of Community Leaders (see ECCL slide)

Estero Bay Buddies

- 1) (see Estero River Conservancy priorities)

10 – min Break

Priorities Summary

- 1) Water Storage
- 2) Timing of Water (optimal flows)
- 3) Treatment / Water Quality (infrastructure support)
- 4) Policy Reform (water quality, land use)
 - Science-based policies
- 5) Education
- 6) Economic considerations

De-Emphasize Priorities Summary

1) Distribution of flows (south) ← Defer to Everglades Coalition efforts

Specific Topics Discussed:

How to use/allocate Lake O water during drought conditions. (e.g. current drought?)

Seek consensus statement that could obtain regulatory acceptance

- Impacts / benefits of changing lake levels
 - Lake and coastal estuaries ecology
 - Permitted users
- Damage to littoral zone vs. increased storage to trade for water reservation – considering seasonality
 - **seek commitment from USACE to consider that storage a reservation for the environment**

Discussion to be Continued:

- 1. Discussion regarding priority projects and policies to address priority issues listed by participants.**
- 2. Finish discussion about LOSA and Caloosahatchee water supply.**
- 3. Discussion of tradeoffs of maintaining higher lake levels during drought conditions.**

Can we Develop Consensus?

- Where can compromises be made to address our water resource issues?
 - Short term?
 - Long term?
- Is it equitable for all stakeholders?
- Where do we go from here?

Questions
and
Public Comments