

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)  
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)  
LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING – JULY 28, 2005**

**SFWMD Okeechobee Field Station  
1000 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Okeechobee, FL**

**MEETING REPORT – August 1, 2005**

**INTRODUCTION:**

- **The second WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee** meeting was held at the SFWMD Lake Okeechobee Field Station in Okeechobee, FL. It was well attended by committee members and other interested parties.
- The committee heard presentations about:
  - Florida Sunshine law requirements
  - Status of Lake Levels and System Operations
  - Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan activities
  - Lake Okeechobee Watershed (CERP) projects and activities
  - Outflow Analysis of Upper Kissimmee River Basin
  - Vegetation Management and Control Activities on the Lake
  - Technical Sub-Committee Organization and meeting schedule

**RECOMMENDATION:** The committee had no objection to a proposed recommendation to the WRAC and the SFWMD Governing Board, that “Fast Track” (accelerated) projects, including forward pumps, should move forward through the legislative and implementation processes. The projects and estimated costs are listed in the attachment to a June 23, 2005 letter from Florida Senator Ken Pruitt to committee members.

The committee agreed that more information about the Taylor Creek/Nubbin Slough and Forward Pump projects, and the future operation of those projects, needed to be provided to the committee.

**ISSUES/DISCUSSION BY COMMITTEE:**

- **Member Issues:**
  - Cumulative, adverse impacts on natural systems from several planned Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs) in the Upper Kissimmee Basin.
  - Recommendations for short, mid, and long term funding for Lake restoration projects; and, design/funding of recreational access for the Storage Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area projects. Report next month on legislative budget request for “Fast Track” and related Lake Okeechobee projects.
  - More information on lake inflows, conveyance capacities and distribution of flows into and out of the lake.

- More information about the lake water budget, especially during flood control operations; and about the WSE water level regulation schedule. More information about phosphorous concentrations, loads, etc.
- **Florida Sunshine Law Requirements:** The committee was informed that according to the provisions of the Florida Sunshine law, committee members may not confer about items that may be placed on a meeting agenda, except at a duly noticed and scheduled meeting. The Technical Sub-Committee is a fact-finding group and is not subject to Sunshine Law requirements.
- **Lake Levels and System Operations:** Members asked that more time be scheduled for this item at future meetings, and requested a briefing on the Corps of Engineers' scoping process for revisions to the WSE schedule. Members also discussed normal and wet season flows, backpumping, loss of flood protection, inflows from the C-23 and C-24, increased inflows from the north, etc. The committee requested that more information be provided on these issues.
- **Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan and Water Quality:** members discussed issues regarding:
  - Lake water levels, assumptions used to support decisions to make pulse releases;
  - Need for more water storage;
  - Water quality issues including phosphorous loading, concentration and effectiveness of phosphorous removal projects;
  - Impacts on Everglades snail kites; and:
  - The operation of locks at certain water level elevations (16.5' vs. 15.5').
  - A presentation about the status and effectiveness of dairy Best Management Practices was requested. More information will be provided to the committee at future meetings.
- **Lake Okeechobee Watershed – CERP – Project Update:** Following a presentation about these projects, the committee discussed:
  - cost estimates for various project planning areas, and, cost effectiveness/incremental costs of phosphorous removal methods;
  - the “final 10 watershed project options”, sizing of the water storage reservoirs and STAs; effectiveness and cost of phosphorous removal for the planned STAs; operational costs; recreation facilities/boat ramps
  - the high and increasing cost of land;
  - evapotranspiration rates and resultant loss of water;
  - status of ASR projects;
  - cost and effectiveness of forward pumps;

- status of supply side management protocols for meeting dry season water supply demand;
- **Assessment of Outflow from the Upper Kissimmee Basin:** SFWMD staff were asked to evaluate historic rainfall and runoff data to determine whether: 1). Runoff from the basin has increased over time; 2). Runoff has increased relative to rainfall, and; 3). Any increases could be attributed to land use changes such as increased development.

Following a presentation regarding this assessment, the committee discussed the issues. The conclusion of this session was that:

- Runoff from the Upper Basin has varied over time and does not show an increasing trend.
- The relationship of runoff from the Upper Basin to rainfall has remained constant over the time period 1965 to 2004, so that the same quantity of rainfall in 1965 or 2004 would produce the same runoff.
- This assessment was done on the entire Upper Basin and not on the smaller tributary basins.
- A committee member pointed out that all of the tributary basins would have to be included and smaller studies pinpointing sources of flows and discharges would have to be conducted to answer the question about land use changes.
- **Vegetation Management and Control in Lake Okeechobee:** Committee members suggested:
  - Broad notification of the public before areas are treated;
  - Earlier burn permits for control, when drought conditions exist;
  - Breakdown of expenditures for chemical spraying and amount contracted out;
  - All WMDs, DEP, FWCC and the Corps should cooperate to determine impacts on areas sprayed and to be sprayed
  - Develop a user group to help disseminate public information about control and treatment activities.
- **Technical Sub-Committee:** the technical sub-committee is tentatively scheduled to hold initial meeting Wednesday, August 24, Building B-1, Storch Conference Room, starting at 9 a.m. Several committee members strongly suggested that the sub-committee included estuarine experts and that impacts of Lake Okeechobee discharges on the estuaries be included in the technical report. Members asked whether economics were to be included.