

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)
ISSUES WORKSHOP: MIAMI-DADE CANAL DRAWDOWNS
FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, JOHN D. CAMPBELL AGRICULTURAL CENTER
MIAMI-DADE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
18710 SW 288 Street, Homestead, FL 33030
MEETING SUMMARY**

WRAC Members:

James Humble, South Dade Landowner/Farmer
Rachel Kalin, So. Fl. Regional Planning Council, Alternate for Carolyn Dekle
Chad Kennedy, Fl. Dept., Environmental Protection
Jim Reynolds, Fl. Keys Aqueduct Authority
Charles Shinn, Florida Farm Bureau Federation

Workshop Participants:

John Alger, Alger Farms
Richard Alger, Alger Farms
Elsa Alvear, Biscayne National Park
Dennis Duke, U.S. Dept. of Interior
Robert Daniels, So.Fl. Regional Planning Council
Bruce Dunn, Dunn Brothers Farms, East Glades
Katie Edwards, Dade County Farm Bureau
Rebecca Elliott, Fl. Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Gilly Evans, Univ. of Florida
Sara Fain, National Parks and Conservation Assoc'n.
Betty Grizzle, Everglades National Park
Julie Hill, Audubon of Florida
Robert Johnson, Everglades National Park
Charles LaPradd, Miami-Dade County
Mark Lewis, Biscayne National Park
John Lynn, Homestead, FL
Bennie Martens, Goulds, FL
Robbie Martens, Goulds, FL
Sean McCrackine, for Miami-Dade Co. Commissioner Katie Sorenson
Justine Namen, Homestead, FL
Mark Oncavage, Miami, FL
T. Ozgokmen, Rosentiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, U. Miami
Alice Pena, Miami, FL
Patrick Pitts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Vero Beach, FL
Don Pybas, Miami-Dade Agricultural Extension Service
Neal Spencer, Bayside Tree Farms, East Glades
Theresa Woody, South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
Rod Zika, RSMAS, U. Miami

SFWMD:

Michael Collins, Governing Board Member and WRAC Chair
Rick Alleman, Everglades Restoration, SFWMD
Matt Morrison, Everglades Restoration, SFWMD

SFWMD, cont'd:

Sandra Gomez, WRAC Staff, SFWMD

Fred Remen, Dir., South Operations and Maintenance, SFWMD

Rick Smith, WRAC Facilitator, SFWMD

Susan Sylvester, Director, Operations Control, SFWMD

Evan Skornick, Interim Director, Miami-Dade Service Center, SFWMD

Scott Thorp, Director, Homestead Field Station, SFWMD

Dewey Worth, Director, Southern Everglades Restoration, SFWMD

Meeting Purpose – Mike Collins, WRAC Chair:

- Determine where operating schedule requirements came from
- Why the draw downs were put in place
- Determine whether there is any flexibility; and,
- Take a good look at information regarding these issues.

Background/Public Involvement – Evan Skornick, Miami-Dade Service Center, SFWMD:

- Received letters from U.S. Department of Interior, Biscayne National Park;
- Audubon of Florida, Everglades Foundation, National Parks and Conservation Association, and World Wildlife Fund
- Letters asked whether the draw downs could be reduced or eliminated as part of the Drought Contingency Plan and recommended as part of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project.

Canal Operations, 2007 – Susan Sylvester, Operations Control, SFWMD:

- Letters triggered review of Operations Control guidelines and history of operations;
- SFWMD has been operating these canals in this way since th 1980s.

• **Questions/Answers (Q&A):**

- Q: Why not recycle the water? A: Reuse/recycling now a condition of Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Authority 20-year Consumptive Use Permit from the SFWMD
- How long to draw down to the low level? A: from 3-6 days depending on rainfall.
- Has timing of the draw downs ever been changed? A: (Chair Collins) - Any changes would require SFWMD Governing Board approval.
- Could the level of drawdown be reduced (e.g. by a half foot)? A: Need to evaluate that with other alternatives.

• **Discussion:**

- History of agriculture in this area: dates back to 1930s. About 30,000 acres are in agriculture. There has been year-round agriculture in the area since before 1968. If you change the timing it will impact the growing cycle. Agriculture in the area has been

impacted by many things, including a change in water discharge rules, which eliminated potato farming in the “East Glades”.

- SFWMD operations include draw downs in advance of storms. Sometimes those operations are on target, at other times, they are not. When wrong, that impacts agriculture.

Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project (BBCW): Background, Goals and Status – Dewey Worth, Everglades Restoration, SFWMD:

- Need accurate, up to date information on agricultural acreage in the East Glades. Numbers came from Miami-Dade Property Appraiser records.
- Two avenues for assessment of seasonal canal drawdowns have been proposed to Project Delivery Team (PDT):
 - Component of BBCW Project Implementation Report (PIR)
 - Component of Acceler8 Implementation
- Required to determine and verify real estate impacts re: flooding, etc.
- Project Delivery Team has proposed to implement the recommended plan (“Alternative O”) in two phases, each with a separate PIR. The PDT recommended that eliminating drawdowns be included in the PIR for Phase I.
- **Discussion:**
 - Alternative O is a proposal of the PDT and has not yet been approved. A: Yes.
 - Alternative O points to the need to do the entire project but it is not clear that the Corps of Engineers will be able to do the entire project.
 - SFWMD is moving forward with Phase I of this CERP project that includes the Acceler8 program plus some additional restoration features identified in Alternative O.
 - Under CERP, the state cannot decrease existing levels of flood protection or water supply.
 - The SFWMD Governing Board is concerned about putting more requirements on the Acceler8 project.
 - If the water regime is changed, this project could impact land values; and, if drawdown eliminated, could change ag land use.
 - The federal CERP project and the Acceler8 project must show that alternative is economically viable and cost effective. Environmental benefits must be justified.
 - BBCW performance measures include improving groundwater flows to the coastal wetlands and eliminating high volume point source discharges to Biscayne Bay.
 - Need to update groundwater model.
 - The BBCW PIR has calibration issues. Model improvements needed to evaluate effects of modifying or eliminating drawdowns.
 - Are the performance measures in the “Yellow Book” still being used? A: Point of the BBCW project is to reduce high volume point source discharges.

- But cant reduce flood protection to do it.

Miami-Dade Farm Bureau and Grower Presentations:

- Katie Edwards, Miami-Dade Farm Bureau: Ag in this area varies from seasonal to year-round agriculture. Farmers are concerned that with the recommendation to eliminate the seasonal drawdown, Biscayne National Park does not understand their agricultural neighbors and it seems, would rather see development than agriculture in the area.
- Richard Alger, Alger Farms: been seriously farming the area since 1944. There have been many changes in ag and ag water needs in the East Glades; e.g. don't need as much water for corn grown on marl. Water table in East Glades has been gradually changing. Drawdowns help farmers meet early season planting.
- George Sprinkle, High Hope Farms: 250 acre tree farm in the C-103 basin. 60 years. Fields not workable when too wet. There are many seasonal and year-round crops grown in the East Glades. It is not true that tree farms don't benefit from the drawdown.
- Neal Spencer for Bruce Dunn, Dunn Brothers Farms (provided written comments): Farming since 1938 growing potatoes, cabbabe, and other vegetables. Also grow seed potatoes for North Dakota. Test plot certifies all of the seed potatoes for State of North Dakota. Critical that these test plots not be flooded. Production is scheduled around the drawdowns. Employ 30 people and contribute to local economy. Will experience considerable loss if this drawdown is eliminated.
- John Alger, Alger Farms: Farmers began drawing down these areas seasonally in the 1930s with their own pumps. When the C&SF project was built, asked the SFWMD to continue the drawdowns. Without the drawdowns, opportunity to use the land for agriculture would be greatly diminished.
- Mr. Sprinkle: also need to reestablish the intermediate drawdown.
- John Alger: who controls the Coral Gables canals? A: SFWMD, but can't reduce flood protection there either.
- Richard Bateman, area farmer: Drawdowns are important to successful ag operations. Could shut down production without ti.
- Don Pybas, Miami-Dade County Agricultural Extension Agent, UF/IFAS:
 - USDA Farm Services Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service documented following ag losses in Miami-Dade County:
 - Tropical Storm Gordon, 1994: 9.5' rain, \$90 million loss
 - Hurricane Irene, 1999, 15" rain, \$229 mil lose in E. Glades
 - 2000: \$417 million in losses
 - December 2000: 85% of potatoes and 55% of corn lost
 - So agriculture is very much impacted by natural storms that cause severe flooding.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Biscayne National Park – Mark Lewis, Superintendent:

- On record stating that agriculture is a good neighbor to the Park. We'd rather have agriculture next to the Park than development.
- We're talking thought about long term loss of water and thus increased salinities along the coast.
- Impacts the coast to US1.
- Operations: Drawdown from October to December reduce the canals from about 2' to 1.4' which is about 21 billion gallons of water.
- Attempting to restore fish production in nearshore areas of the Park.
- Historically there was much more groundwater flow to the Bay.
- Need a wetter season going into the dry season.
- **Discussion:**
 - Not clear that drawdowns are cause of significant spike in salinities shown on Mr. Lewis' chart.
 - Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority added some new wells
 - Comments that the spike may not be due to drawdowns.
 - Need to see more data on rainfall, drought and do analyses.
 - But Biscayne Bay does have problems – need to help find solutions.
 - 30 years ago, the bay was most productive when on a seasonal basis, the saltwater line moved in and then moved out.
 - But the Park has noted that the line moves much further inland now.
- Chair comments:
 - Years of operating the system to seasonally drawdown the canals resulted in investments in agricultural production.
 - BNPs graphs indicate saltwater intrusion and correlates to rainfall model.
 - An important question is can we do the BBCW restoration without pushing ag out and thereby creating conditions for more development on those lands?
 - We must adhere to the "Savings Clause" incorporated into the CERP legislation.
 - Economic impacts must be assessed.
 - The SFWMD Governing Board opposes any delays or unnecessary cost increases in Acceler8 projects.
 - Suggest doing the canal drawdown assessment after the Acceler8 phase is completed.
 - Disagreement about these issues at this stage would delay benefits that Phase I will create for Biscayne Bay. Prefer getting the water to the Bay as soon as possible.
- Bob Johnson, Everglades National Park:
 - Advise not spending money on culverts; need to rethink this approach.

- 10/15 is also the peak of the wet season and after drawdowns, it is not unusual to have reef fish in nearshore waters.
 - Suggest a control structure that would stagger the discharge and spread along 6-8 miles of canals
 - Would reestablish the intermediate phase and create a hydrologic divide that is much needed.
- Tom MacVicar: would not fight Park on finding constructive solutions to the problem.
- Mike Collins: Are there structures? A: Dewey Worth: Can assess through CERP or as separate project or as part of Acceler8 project.
- Mr. Alger: drawdowns are not the sole cause of loss of 21 billion gallons.
- Sara Fain: support finding solution through exploration of options., but need to see Operation Control manual and 1981 Agreements which reaffirmed operation of the system.
- Jim Reynolds: FCAA: extreme spike in salinities shown on Mark Lewis' chart may have been caused by a developer who may be harvesting water. Dade County Environmental Resources Management Dept. s investigating.
- Chair: it would be good to build a hydrologic divide, but need more information.
 - Need accurate numbers on acreage in production.
 - Evaluate 168th street re: hydrologic impacts to west.
 - Create more water reserves for BNP
 - But cannot delay Acceler8 project in doing additional analysis
- Dennis Duke, USDOI: Not trying to slow down Acceler8.
- Chair: But overreaching on part of the PDTs causes delays.
- Public comment:
 - Mark Oncavage: See contradictory policies. Philosophically opposed to drawdowns especially with increased water restrictions, etc.
 - Alice Pena, C&S Farms, 8.5 Square Mile Area: please explore all avenues before making a decision.
- Mark Lewis, BNP: we will continue to advocate getting more water to Park at appropriate volumes and times.
- Chair: Thanked group for good meeting. WRAC will be provided periodic updates on these issues.

Adjourned at 12:30 p.m.