

Big Cypress Watersheds Restoration Coordination Team

Friday, May 6, 2011 – 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Conservancy of SWFL Auditorium, Naples

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome/Call to Order

- ◆ Megan Andresen called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.
- ◆ Minutes from the last meeting were reviewed and accepted.

2. Introduction of Members

Ananta Nath, BCB SFWMD
Bob Sobczak, NPS
Kristoph Kinzli, FGCU
Jennifer Hecker, Conservancy SWFL
Sue Leitholf, RBNERR

Victoria Vazquez, RBNERR
Mike Savarese, FGCU
Mac Hatcher, Collier County
Megan Andresen, BCW-RCT/FGCU

3. Estuaries Report Card – Jennifer Hecker

- ◆ Jennifer discussed the Conservancy report titled the “Estuaries Report Card” which is a policy document produced every 5 years to look at the overall health of Southwest Florida Watersheds by utilizing DEP impairment data.
- ◆ The Report Card encompasses two factors of watershed health, wildlife habitat and water quality. The wildlife habitat grade is based upon extent of remaining wetlands and mangroves compared to pre-development, as well as extent of conservation lands present. The water quality grade is based upon extent of spatial impairment, severity of impairment, and degree of hydrological alteration.
- ◆ Report Card Results for Southwest Florida Watersheds are as follows:
 - Coastal Venice: Wildlife C-, Water Quality C-
 - Lemon Bay: Wildlife B, Water Quality D-
 - Charlotte Harbor: Wildlife B-, Water Quality C
 - Pine Island Sound: Wildlife A+, Water Quality D
 - Caloosahatchee River: Wildlife D-, Water Quality D-
 - Estero Bay: Wildlife B-, Water Quality D
 - Wiggins Pass/Cocohatchee: Wildlife B, Water Quality C-
 - Naples Bay: Wildlife D-, Water Quality D-
 - Rookery Bay: Wildlife B+, Water Quality D
 - Ten Thousand Islands: Wildlife A+, Water Quality D
- ◆ Naples Bay scored higher than it did in 2004 because the WBID has changed significantly since that year, demonstrating that WBID delineation is an important aspect of this project.
- ◆ The Ten Thousand Islands shows a big change in water quality since 2004 because there is more official verified impairment by DEP, demonstrating the need for more consistent, comprehensive sampling efforts within the watersheds.

- ◆ The Conservancy is trying to focus on getting back to the goals of the clean water act. Economic money is at stake with losses in tourism, real estate, and quality of life when watersheds are not meeting water quality standards.
- ◆ The Report Card provides overarching policy recommendations which will be sent to each city and city council member. Recommendations include:
 - Eliminate Over-Drainage
 - Restore Hydrology
 - Restore Swimmable/Fishable Water Quality
 - Re-establish Natural Salinity Levels
 - Adopt Sustainable Agriculture Practices
 - Create On-Site Stormwater Management Systems
 - Enhance Wastewater Treatment and Sewage Sludge Disposal
 - Protect Lands Critical for Water and Wildlife
 - Plan for Sea Level Rise
 - Insist on Comprehensive Scientific Monitoring
- ◆ The full, 291-page report can be found online at www.conservancy.org under the “Publications” tab.
- ◆ The Conservancy is concerned that if sampling efforts are scaled back, accurate impairment listings will be diminished. By lessening the sampling effort, there may be an insufficient sampling size, and when this occurs, the data is not usable for the impairment listings. There needs to be consistent sampling in multiple areas within each watershed, but currently, there is not a minimum sampling requirement.
- ◆ Bob Sobczak asked if the document should be titled the “Watershed Report Card” instead of the “Estuaries Report Card” because it is outlining the entire watershed, as opposed to just the estuary. Victoria Vasquez also noted that the executive summary handout tends to draw attention to the “estuary” by itself, which may be misleading to the general audience.
 - Jennifer agreed, noting that she will put that feedback in to the marketing group and that the full report focuses on the watershed as a whole.

4. Accomplishments and Future of the BCW-RCT – Bob Sobczak

- ◆ Bob outlined three main phases of the BCW-RCT, from inception to the future of the group.
- ◆ Phase 1, or the beginning years of the group, encompassed a restoration focus, where the group was able to develop and prioritize science and restoration needs, present their findings to the working group and co-assemble with the Calusa RCT. Some challenges during this phase were that the science plans were too big and too general, there was no certain payoff with the working group, and there was meeting overload and redundancy.
 - Ananta Nath added that during this time, three big projects came out of the restoration needs list: Picayune, Tamiami and Lake Trafford.
- ◆ During phase 2, there was a shift from the working group restoration focus to a watershed team focus where meetings were held quarterly and each meeting included a hydrologic overview, featured speaker, and field excursion. This phase excluded the working group and focused on enhanced data and information sharing, involving weekly email updates of watershed news and weekly data updates on a website managed by Bob. Some challenges during this phase were that the group lost sight of its goal and role besides information sharing and it was difficult to connect the dots between meetings.

- ◆ Bob proposed a phase 3, or future of the BCW-RCT to the group, utilizing a new vision of the funded BCW-RCT position as a salary provided on a competitive basis to a graduate student who would work on a project which meets a regional science need identified by the BCW-RCT. The student would complete all current job duties of the funded position, but would also need to report to the group on their thesis research.
- ◆ Bob noted that it would be good to pitch this idea to the Big Cypress Basin Board at their next meeting, noting the accomplishments of the group and the new vision for the funded position. This new vision would keep meetings going and the concepts of the group alive.
- ◆ Mike Savarese noted that there are two graduate programs at FGCU which could serve this purpose, the M.S. in Environmental Science and the M.A. in Environmental Science, which focuses upon management and policy. He added that individuals in the group need to commit to using the restoration science needs list to take on projects within their agencies.
 - Victoria agreed, noting that it would be good for the agencies to show some accountability that they supported a topic on the list during the year.
- ◆ Bob noted that he will send out a modified version of the plan to those in attendance, and once he has feedback, will send it along to Clarence. The next step would be to meet with Clarence and then attend the Big Cypress Basin Board Meeting June 17th. The group agreed that this is a good plan of action.

5. Tour of the Conservancy Campus

- ◆ The group had a wonderful tour of the Conservancy campus. Everyone enjoyed taking a look at the Conservancy's filter marsh, as well as its hands-on nature room.
- ◆ The Conservancy is located on a 21-acre preserve, which allows visitors to enjoy many aspects of the Southwest Florida environment. During a day at the Conservancy campus, visitors can walk trails, go on a guided boat or kayak tour along the Gordon River, and participate in educational programs.

6. Other Watershed News

- ◆ The wildfire in the Big Cypress Preserve has burned 25,000 acres, and is approximately sixty percent contained. Workers hope to have it fully contained mid-week.

7. Set Next Meeting Date and Adjourn meeting

- ◆ The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.
- ◆ **Next Meeting: Friday, August 5th, 2011, 1:00 p.m. – Location: TBA**