

Meeting Minutes  
**WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PROGRAM CANAL  
RESTORATION ADVISORY SUBCOMMITTEE**  
September 27, 2013

9:00 am – 12:20 pm  
Marathon Government Center, Board Meeting Room  
2798 Overseas Highway, Marathon, FL 33050

**Member and Advisory Attendees:** Gus Rios - FDEP; Mayor George Neugent - Monroe County; Susan Sprunt - Islamorada; Commissioner John DeNeale - Key Colony Beach; Skip Haring - Layton; Bill Causey - FKNMS NOAA; John Hunt - FWC; Steven Blackburn - USEPA (one phone) and Charlie Causey;.

**Members not in Attendance:** George Garrett - Marathon; Alison Higgins - Key West.

**Advisory:** Rhonda Haag – Monroe County and Wendy Blondin – AMEC; Alison Higgins – Key West.

1. **Introduction and Approval of the August 22, 2013 Meeting Minutes.** Gus Rios called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. **George Neugent moved** that the Minutes from the August 22<sup>nd</sup> be approved and Billy Causey seconded, all **approved**.

Gus Rios quickly reviewed the agenda for this meeting and items that would be discussed.

**2. Public Comments #1:**

(A) Larry Cumberland – Tropical Bay, he is on the board with the direction of the committee and supports the application for canal clean up in the community. He pointed out that (1) his community is very interested in the clean up and (2) that the project hopes to see interesting results that are appropriate, however he is concerned about contaminates in the canals. Tropical Bay would like to support this project.

(B) Curtis Brown – Whispering Pines on Big Pine Key, he is a member of the home owners association. He would like to have their canal considered. He had questions regarding the time line of this project so that he can advise the other home owners and ask for their advice. He also wanted to know when the committee will make the decision regarding which canals will be selected. He also wanted to know how long the home owners have to respond, who will have the action items, the time priorities, clean up and how long will it be before the committee will provide an evaluation.

(C) Gus Rios stated that the current priority in the subcommittee is focusing on the canals in unincorporated Monroe County.

(D) Rhonda Haag discussed the a rundown of the current selection process:

- a. Top three in each category will be provided to the BOCC, based on ranking in rank order
- b. On October 16<sup>th</sup> the County Commission will review the ranking order and then vote whether to approve
- c. They are hoping to resolve and work out the details with the home owners in 60-90 days.
- d. The County want to design the projects in about 5 months

- e. The Permitting process may take about 6-8 Months, but that's included in the design process.
- f. April 2014 may be when the first project beings, it all goes well.
- g. They may be able to do the easier canals projects first
- h. If the home owners disagree the County will move on to another canal. The County cannot delay as there are time restrictions on the EPA grant funding for the canal monitoring program.

(E) John Mills – Whispering Pines on Big Pine Key, said there has been degradation in the canal which has occurred in the last few years, weeds, zero oxygen, etc. What is the selection criterion? What does the Master Plan look like?

(F) Eriela MacWilliams – Tropical Bay, Her and her husband bought the property on the canal about 17 years ago and it was really clean with lots of fish. The canal has degraded ever since then. Fish are dying and floating to the top, there is a very offensive odor, alligators are heavy in the canal and evidently they are coming in to eat the dead fish. She sent a letter and John DeNeale had read the letter.

(G) George Neugent asked for a list of all the canal subdivisions present in the room; Eden Pines, Tropical Bay, Hunta Breeze, Islamorada, Key Largo (mm 103 Bermuda Shores, bay side).

### 3. Village of Islamorada Update:

Susan Sprunt handed out a September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013 "Technical Memorandum" from AMEC with the Subject: Criteria for Screening and Ranking Canals for Selection in Village of Islamorada Canal Restoration Demonstration. John Hunt wanted to know what Susan wanted from the committee. Susan said that Islamorada had a #6 canal out of the 15 initially picked as problem canals. Islamorada has spent their own funds to have their canals analyzed by AMEC and that Islamorada paralleled the same criteria and ranking that the committee followed. George Neugent pointed out that they may have \$30 million from RESTORE to expand the projects to all cities eventually.

**Billy Causey made a motion** to accept Islamorada on moving forward with the same criteria and would like to endorse the project from the Village of Islamorada. The committee recognizes and supports this effort. George Neugent seconded the motion and all **approved**.

### 4. CCMP Final Report Review:

Wendy Blondin presented the final Master Plan report to the committee and handed the report over the Rhonda Haag. This plan is posted on the Web page.

**John Hunt made a motion** to approve and adopt the canal master plan. John DeNeale seconded the motion and all **approved**.

Gus Rios thanked Wendy Blondin and Rhonda Haag for their excellent job and the quickness of its completion. He also thanked EPA (Steve Blackburn) for funding the final part. Steve Blackburn commented that Wendy was the most conscientious contractor he had ever worked with, and that she has done an excellent job.

### 5. Selection of Top 5 Canals:

Wendy Blondin presented a PowerPoint slide show entitled "Monroe County Canal Demonstration Projects Update 9-27-13, This is based on the criteria and ranking of 107 poor water quality canals and narrowing that list down to canals in unincorporated Monroe County. Considerations were given to turbidity, oxygen levels, deep stagnant zones, habitat, etc. The worst canals received the highest score numbers, but the lowest rank number (i.e. rank of 1 is the worst water quality canal). Ranking was based on using five different technology groups Weed barriers, Organic Removal Culverts, Pumping, and Backfilling. The criteria and ranking provided narrowed down the 107 to 15 canals.

Wendy provided a condensed draft of the 15 canals broken down by the five technologies. She further provided detailed canal documentation of "Monroe County Selection of Demonstration Canals" for each technology recommended.

Gus Rios cautioned that even though the canals have been ranked as having a high priority two additional items have to be taken into consideration: (1) Ease of Construction and (2) Ease of Permitting. A final critical consideration is that the home owners on the canal accept and support the canal enhancement project. If the home owners do not accept and support the canal enhancement all other considerations become very difficult, and the County will have to move on to the next in line.

Wendy discussed concerns with the culvert on Geiger Key where property ownership may be an issue especially if it is on Federal Land. George Neugent pointed to the concern of Coastal Barrier Resource System (CBRS) with a conflict of funding. Wendy did not think this was an issue.

Wendy continued and explained the technology of pumping to help with the water quality in canals that have stagnation and the inability to flush itself. In the case of backfilling technology it is helpful for the home owners to know that backfilling would be beneficial for the canal.

Wendy explained that if you know the number of the canal from the Master Plan you can search Google Earth and find the canal.

Out of all the canals being considered the committee agreed that Big Pine Key has some of the worst water quality problems in unincorporated Monroe County.

Billy Causey pointed out that Bahia Honda and on down the Keys have a different limestone structure and the easterly and westerly canals and hurricane Wilma brought in a lot of muck into those canals.

Wendy emphasized that even though when a technology has been chosen and the canal enhancement project completed it does not necessarily resolve the problem. A combination approach may be required. The Master Plan shows the best design and the most suited technology. The Master Plan also reflects where the technology would go and discussed access, logistic and the criteria used.

Wendy continued to explain how the criteria was used and reviewed for each canal by using scientific first hand observations. The committee discussed the criteria process for selecting the five canals to be worked on first and found that it was as objective as possible. The hired contractor had no self interest in the ranking score.

Susan Sprunt found that two of the canals (#266 & #288) were tied together regarding Weed Barrier ranking (Table 1), however Wendy pointed out that the #266 canal have very supportive home owners where as #288 has no home owner support yet.

Gus Rios felt that it is very important for the home owners to support the canal enhancement project. If home owners are supportive it makes it easier to work with them.

**George Neugent made a motion** to have Canal #266 as 1<sup>st</sup> priority and canal #288 as the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority. John Hunt objected since canal # 266 has two technology ranking. Gus did not see that as a problem. Wendy felt that it was important to remove the organic matter and have a weed barrier for this canal. That way we will stop the weeds from coming into the canal.

John Hunt felt that the committee should have a holistic approach and that a weed barrier is insufficient to resolve water quality of the canal or organic removal alone is insufficient to resolve the water quality of the canal.

Wendy pointed out that on canal # 290 the home owners purchased their own weed barrier so as part of the canal selection it was felt that removing the organic material is a good demonstration. Gus felt that having a weed barrier without removing the organic matter may not be able to show water quality improvement.

**George Neugent made a motion** to have Canal #266 has number 1<sup>st</sup> priority and canal #288 as the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority. Skip Haring seconded the motion and all **approved**.

**John Hunt made a motion** to rank canals for all five technologies in the numerical rank order that the contractor provided. George Neugent seconded and all **approved**.

John felt that the plan of canal # 266 using both a weed barrier and have organic removal and canal #290 have the organic removal questioned whether there is enough money to accomplish. Wendy noted that canal #290 ranked higher because it has an already existing weed gate.

John Hunt felt that using the current criteria of the rank score process to resolve the County Commission is to go with #2 from #1 position if other issues arise.

Billy Causey pointed out a red flag with canal #459 in which the number of parcels should be a consideration. Seven parcels on a canal vs. 88 parcels on a given canal that provides less benefit to the public. Wendy pointed out that they had to remove home ownership out of the ranking. John Hunt pointed out that it is important to follow the ranking.

Wendy Blondin explained that the Attorney review and DEP documentation point out that (1) the DEP is checking the submerged lands in these canals are owned by the State and (2) roll out of the plan and the home owner evaluation will be known in a day or two. She felt that we should just go with the ranking and move on. John stressed to let the process unfold based on the criteria and the ranking.

George Neugent noted that sticking to the criteria and ranking is important and now it is important to let the County Commission review and flush this out with the public input by looking at the objective criteria. Billy Causey stressed that we need local involvement and getting the home owners involved and have a voice in the process. John agreed that we need the home owners support.

George Neugent discussed canal depths and that canal's should not be greater than 8 feet. John Hunt mentioned that Bill Krucynski wrote a book entitled "Tropical Connections" that stated the canal depth should be no deeper than the silt at the mouth of the canal. Gus Rios felt that canals should be 5' to 8' and that is better than 20' canals because the debris sinks to the bottom and has no ability to flush out.

Bill Causey mentioned that in deep canals there is no growth and no light, no opportunity for clean water. The bottom consolidates sediment, fish die and low oxygen levels. The shallower the canal is the better the water quality.

## 6. DEP WQPP Funding:

Gus Rios noted that DEP WQPP has an appropriation of \$100,000 to provide for water quality improvement projects. The state will need to discuss the appropriation of project(s), however the money will need to be spent by the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2014). Any water quality problems relating to canal improvement would take priority. Gus stressed the importance that the water quality project(s) have a deadline especially if the county can select the canals otherwise other water quality projects will need to move forward. He felt it was important at the next meeting to talk about scope of work proposals and discuss these ideas.

Susan Sprunt would like to see the DEP WQPP funding be able to benefit the Monroe County as a whole not just the unincorporated areas. Gus agreed that it should benefit Monroe County as a whole however there is a time issue because projects need to be completed by the end of June 2014.

Susan Sprunt thought about Monroe County as a whole with ideas of grant writing and other items on the public lists. Rhonda pointed out that prior meeting minutes contained a list of project.

John Hunt and Gus Rios discussed the \$100,000 funding process and Gus felt that it would be allocated every year. John felt that it was not a lot of money but perhaps could be used for engineering expense on the process of bathymetry so that by July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 canal work could begin. Gus felt that whatever project(s) are chosen timing will be the issue. Some ideas (1) a small project that can be completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> 2014; (2) hire a grant contractor to rank the canals County Wide.

John Hunt would like to see a list of multiple projects so that when the funds are available then this subcommittee can present a list for DEP so they can make a decision. This process would be faster and we would know ahead of time when the money becomes available the process would be more effective and we can take advantage of these funds immediately.

**John Hunt made a motion** to do the kind of study to complete the planning of the canal restoration project and move forward on these projects and use the ranking process Monroe County wide. George Neugent seconded the motion and the group **approved**.

Gus Rios expressed that the steering committee gave some latitude to make decisions on any project that is focused on water quality: sediment quality information, or research for opportunities to find clean fill. Wendy Blondin pointed out that the list of projects would be Monroe County wide and Gus agreed. Wendy Blondin and Rhonda Haag will create a list of projects.

**Gus Rios made a motion** to Wendy and Rhonda will bring a list of projects to the subcommittee for their review next meeting Susan Sprunt seconded and all **approved**.

## 7. Outreach Update:

Gus Rios due to time constraints suggested that the Outreach Update be discussed at the next meeting. An attorney will explain the Legislation Outreach to the public at the next meeting.

## **8. Public Comment #2:**

- (A) Curtis Brown, member of the Whispering Pines subdivision, will write a letter to the home owners and the association. He had the following questions:
  - i) If a pump is installed how many cubic feet will be per minute
  - ii) Where is the water going to come from
  - iii) 84 pounds cubic feet is a lot of horse power
  - iv) Who is going to be footing the bill
  - v) What is be the cost to the home owners
  - vi) If the pump is pushing the sediment out of the canal and the tide is pushing water into the canal, where will all this water go
  - vii) What about the muck that is to be removed
  
- (B) Gus Rios stressed that after the project on a canal is complete the home owners will need to maintain the canal
  
- (C) Wendy Blondin pointed out that the subcommittee does not know all the technology issues. The County will need to add the solutions however a canal may have multiple issues and if that is the case those additional issues will need to be completed later.
  
- (D) Robert Duncan, a member of LMB Home Owners Association, recommended that on pumping that when the Tide is coming in the pump will automatically turn off and when the tide is going out the pump will be automatically turned on.
  
- (E) Barry Wray had the following comments:
  - i) Did the Master Plan take into consideration any National Management Plans? Especially treating the water and the other objectives.
  - ii) Regarding the \$100,000 DEP funds, he was hoping to help create an initiative to pitch for a filter system and felt it could be done by June 30, 2013.
  - iii) He felt that this study is important for the fisheries and thought everyone on the subcommittee is doing an excellent job.

## **9. Next meeting date, place, and agenda topics:**

Gus Rios is hoping to make some decisions regarding a scope of work(s) for the DEP funding. It would be nice to have a list of proposed projects that are ready to proceed and focus on how we can escalate them for completion by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

John Hunt reiterated that the selection of five canals with #290 will reflect serious distinction on monitoring including Islamorada and that our next meeting we can have serious discussions regarding when the monitoring will begin and at the appropriate time and we will be able to project a future vision.

John Hunt also suggested and Gus agreed that we should include the water quality monitoring program as a topic in the next meeting agenda.

Next meeting will be Friday October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Monroe County BOCC meeting room from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm.