

Meeting Minutes
**WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PROGRAM CANAL
RESTORATION ADVISORY SUBCOMMITTEE**
April 11, 2014

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

Member and Advisory Attendees: Gus Rios - FDEP; Commissioner George Neugent – Monroe County; Commissioner John DeNeale - Key Colony Beach; Billy Causey – NOAA; John Hunt – FWC

Members not in Attendance: Susan Sprunt - Islamorada; George Garrett - Marathon; Skip Haring - Layton; Alison Higgins – Key West; Charlie Causey – WQPP SC Member; Steven Blackburn – USEPA

Advisory: Rhonda Haag – Monroe County; Wendy Blondin – AMEC; Annie McGreenery – FWC (meeting minutes); Nancy Diersing – NOAA.

Permitting Team: Brandon Howard – NOAA Fisheries (On the Phone); Joanne Delaney – NOAA FKNMS (on the phone); Terry Cerullo – DEP Fort Myers (Outreach and external communications) (On the Phone).

FIU Monitoring Program: Henry Briceno – FIU

1. **Introduction and Approval of the February 28, 2013 Meeting Minutes.** Gus Rios called the meeting to order at 9:10 am. **Commissioner George Neugent moved** that the Minutes from the February 28th meeting be approved and **Billy Causey seconded**, all approved.

Gus Rios reviewed the agenda for this meeting and items that would be discussed. He introduced some of the permitting team on the phone. Gus pointed out that during Public Comments item each person from the Public has 3 minutes to speak and encouraged the public to keep to the 3 minute time frame. Gus requested members of the public who wished to speak to sign the Public Comment form.

2. **Public Comments # 1 there were no speakers:**
3. **Update on the May 7th South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Meeting, at West Palm Beach, and Who Should Attend to Represent the WQPP, Monroe County and Other Local Governments – Billy Causey and Group Discussion.**

Billy Causey emphasized that NOAA is a charter member of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. He gave a history about the involvement of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force with (1) waste water; (2) storm water treatment; and (3) with the canal restoration project along with other projects upstream that are important to the Florida Keys. Billy feels it is pertinent to let the Task Force know what is happening down in the Keys regarding the canal restoration projects with an added benefit that if any funding should come forward we may be eligible.

Billy recommends Commissioner George Neugent, Gus Rios, and Mike Foster (Councilman for the Village of Islamorada) as the presenters. The Task Force has given the Subcommittee a 30 minute platform for the presentation. He feels this is an opportunity for the Florida Keys to address the history of accomplishments and what is currently the work being accomplished on the Canal Restoration.

He stressed that in order for the Canal Restoration Demonstration projects to move forward the permit team may need to expand their resources dedicated to meet the deadlines that this subcommittee is faced with.

Gus Rios opened up the discussion to the subcommittee to determine how the presentation package should be presented. He discussed how important these projects are for the economy and tourism. The canal water quality is a big issue down here in the Keys. Also discuss the process and completion of the various work (1) Waste water is about 70% completed; (2) Storm water is underway; and very important is the (3) Canal Restoration projects.

George Neugent feels that it is important to have continuity in the presentation. The message needs to stay on point with the first speaker to the last speaker and with the closing impact. **Wendy Blondin** has offered to put together the presentation for the presenters. **Billy Causey** wanted to be sure to relay how all this work accomplished and being accomplished in the Florida Keys relates back to water quality. **George** pointed out the roads that have been traveled and the contributions that the residents have made and are continuing to make. In just discussing the waste water and hurdles the Keys have jumped through.

John Hunt stressed that Commissioner Neugent needs to speak first and discuss the Water Quality and its history in the Keys. This presentation needs to stay at the 50 thousand foot level. The message that needs to be portrayed is that water quality is very important to the Florida Keys. George provides an antidote and provides information. Sewers are almost completed with a joint partnership with government and the residence. The residence in Monroe County have embraced this effort and paid their fair share. The community is working on Storm Water and we are just getting started on the Canal Restoration. We are not asking for help on Waste Water, not asking for help on Storm Water, but we are just getting started on Canal Restoration a few pictures and one table about the things we are doing and here is where we are. Here it is, all positive and all at the 50 thousand foot level. It ends with we have accomplished a lot and now we need help in this area. **Billy Causey** agrees with John but felt that a little dip down to 30 thousand foot level would not hurt. Billy felt that discussing some of the demonstration technology would be welcomed. **Gus Rios** also agreed with John keep it at a big picture level and Commissioner Neugent gives a brief summary.

The group discussed the best approach and the type of information that they want to present to the task force. Especially talk about a couple point of the Water Quality Protection Program. **Billy Causey** mentioned that if Roman Gastesi could be available and attend the meeting, just to have his presence may help folks remember his connection to local government. **Gus Rios** emphasized the importance of Water Quality in the keys. **Billy Causey** would like to focus on a little about this subcommittee and some of the examples of the demonstration projects being considered. **Gus Rios** mentioned that the permitting team folks are working hard helping with pre-application meetings. However if any additional resources could be available to streamline the endangered species consultations (ESA) it would help expedite the permitting process. **John Hunt** encouraged the presentation to be about 20 minutes with a question and answer period of 10 minutes.

Billy Causey will send everyone directions on where the Task Force meeting will be. The agenda stated May 1st but the date changed to May 7th at West Palm Beach. **Gus Rios** encouraged everyone to attend. He also wanted to have a team effort in crafting the presentation for Commissioner Neugent, Mike Forster, and Gus Rios. He invited Wendy Blondin, Rhonda Haag, George Garrett and Susan Sprunt to help in crafting the presentation. Mayor Neugent wanted to encourage George Garrett to attend the Task Force meeting since he knows a lot of the history even though he is not going to be a presenter.

4. Update on the Progress of the Monroe County Canal Demo Projects

- **Homeowner Approval Process for the Canal Demonstration Projects – Wendy Blondin and Rhonda Haag**

Wendy Blondin reviewed the Homeowner Approval Process with the Subcommittee. AMEC is at a point where they are looking for some recommendations. It was determined that they sent out a letter to all water front homeowners. The letter described that the homeowners canals were selected for the seven different demonstration projects and asked (Yes or No) would they be interested in participating; (Yes or No) would they be willing to contribute to the maintenance of the project after the two year county funding. The initial goal was a 100% approval from the homeowners. The letters went out in December. AMEC has expended a lot of effort trying to contact each homeowner with the letter and made a lot of phone calls.

Wendy reviewed these findings with the subcommittee. Out of the seven canal demonstration projects only one of the canal demonstration projects had 100% homeowner approval. The other canal demonstration projects were all less than the 100% approval that Monroe County recommended. Some homeowners were non-responsive and a very small portion of canal homeowners were a 'No'. An overwhelming majority of canal homeowners support the canal restoration projects with positive feedback.

Wendy wanted the subcommittee to review these results to see how the subcommittee wants to move forward in the future. These results will be presented at the next BOCC meeting and to discuss how they want to move forward.

George Neugent discussed how important these canal demonstration projects are and how critical it is for the projects to continue without 100% participation. The County can create Municipal Service Taxing Units (MSTU) for the canal demonstration projects if necessary. Let's not stop the show when there is not 100% participation. These projects are for the common good of everyone in Monroe County and the State of Florida. I think we need to move forward.

Wendy Blondin further emphasized that the county committed to pay for the maintenance for the first two years so that they could possibly work out how the cost of maintenance in future years would be handled.

John Hunt pointed out that 100% participation does not make sense. In the case of the pumping issues these neighborhoods have a little greater apprehension about possible future costs, etc. However if the demonstration is successful then folks are more inclined to support the change.

Gus Rios stressed that this issue needs to be resolved. If the 100% issue cannot be resolved then the subcommittee will not be able to move forward. Monroe County is not asking for the resident to pay any money up front. This is a two year project where the County will fund the project 100%. We want to be sure that at the end of the two year period a process will be in place to continue funding the successful restoration projects.

George Neugent stressed that Monroe County has been passively told to clean up the canals and that is why this subcommittee was formed. If the canal restoration demonstration project is a success then the maintenance of that canal needs to be supported.

John Hunt made a **motion** to continue with the canal restoration demonstration projects without 100% homeowner approval. **George Neugent seconded**. All approved.

Folks from Eden Pines and Tropical Bay in attendance expressed gratitude for this subcommittee and supported the demonstration projects. They also noted that Eden Pines would be having a neighborhood meeting, with AMEC attending, on April 28th.

George Neugent wanted to stress that education and outreach to the neighbors on each canal restoration project is very important and each canal homeowner is invited to give their input and comments in a constructive nature on the type of restoration demonstration projects on their canal.

The subcommittee discussed the various techniques being used and possible education and outreach with the different restoration demonstration projects. They also emphasized the important of trying to reach out to the community and stress the importance of Water Quality.

The subcommittee also discussed the possibility of creating a formal documentation of the canal restoration demonstration project currently and how it evolves and completion with the gathered lessons learned and the successes. Discussions made by the subcommittee members, Monroe County and the canal neighborhood members focusing on the water quality improvement in the canals. This may help in participation and additional funding along the way. They felt that this needs to be a team effort with everyone involved.

- **Permit Application Process (Who will be the Applicant) – Rhonda Haag**

Gus Rios said that Monroe County could be the applicant and hold the permit for the first phase of the Canal Restoration Demonstration Projects and support the maintenance for two years. The permit may be transferred to the homeowners who may be responsible for long-term maintenance after the completion of the demo projects. Also, if the project is not successful, there should be a contingency plan to remove or properly abandon, any equipment that will no longer be in service after the demo project ends, such as pumps, etc. This should be addressed in the permitting process.

George Neugent asked who will provide the maintenance service for the canal projects. Will Monroe County be the service provider? What will be the most efficient method to provide that service? An example is canal residents have a weed gate that is not working; do they call county works or would they deal with this through the private sector? This should be on a future agenda to discuss. Who is going to address this during the demonstration time frame and after the 2 year maintenance is over.

Gus Rios addressed this question by stating that the permit holder will be responsible to maintain the demonstration project. However after the two year period we need to address who will continue with the maintenance of the project. If the County continues to hold the permit and provide the maintenance a fee system may need to be developed, like a MSTU or something. This should be handled by the County attorney's legal folks and public input will be accepted on how to handle these questions.

Wendy Blondin pointed out that the O&M for two years could be included in the construction bid process so that a private contractor paid by Monroe County maintains the project for the first two years. Then it would be turned over to the next step.

- **Next Steps to Complete and Submit the Applications to the Permitting Agencies – Rhonda Haag and group discussion.**

Wendy Blondin used permitting to give a review on the DEP grant that AMEC is working on. AMEC has completed a 60% design package. They have submitted all of the permit applications for this project. She explained all the permit processes and the agencies they are working with and the goal of permit approval by June 30th, 2014 which is the time constraint with DEP. The Geiger Key culvert is the first project through the process.

The Subcommittee discussed the potential benefits of Monroe County being the applicant for the permits for the demonstration projects. The County of municipality should be the applicant for these demonstration permits. **The subcommittee had a consensus from the attendees.**

5. Update on the Progress of the Islamorada Canal Demo Projects – Wendy Blondin

Wendy Blondin reviewed the Islamorada Canal Demonstration Projects which are two canals. Treasure Harbor will be starting their permitting. She discussed a fairly detailed level of where the permitting process is. The second project is the Lower Matecumbe Key Mate-Lido Beach and Susan Sprunt is working with the canal neighbors for education, outreach and approval.

6. Update from FIU on the Status of the Canal Monitoring Program – Henry Briceno

Henry Briceno presented the updated Water Quality program. Henry discussed that when his team is in a canal neighborhood how his team is conducting outreach. Rhonda Haag requested that Henry send her those dates. Internal communication is beneficial so that if any calls/emails are received to Monroe County Rhonda is informed. Rhonda stated the demo projects are a Monroe County initiative and the County need to stay in the lead on communication and outreach.

7. Public Comment #2: there were no speakers at the end.

8. Next meeting date, place, and agenda topics:

The next meeting has not been scheduled; it is open for consideration as items are presented.

Meeting adjourns at 12:00 pm.