

Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) Meeting Summary

Okeechobee County Board of County Commission Chambers Room 270

304 NW 2nd Street, Okeechobee, FL 34972

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Participants

Ernie Barnett, FLC

Evelyn Becerra, DEP

Anthony Betts, SFWMD

Linda Crane, Citizen

Lisa Diaz, Lewis Longman & Walker

Rebecca Dougherty, SFWMD

Amy Eason, Martin County

Rebecca Elliott, FDACS

Yesenia Escribano, FDACS

Jake Fojtik, Florida Farm Bureau

Marcy Frick, Tetra Tech

Paul Gray, Audubon

Christopher Guth, Federico & Associates

Ray Hodge, United Dairy Farmers

Moiria Homann, DEP

Megan Jacoby, SFWMD

Shiela Kitalf, FDACS

Jacob Landfield, SFWMD

Celeste Lyon, RES

Jonathan Madden, SFWMD

Deborah Manzo, Okeechobee County

Stef Matthes, Okeechobee County

Valentina Miele, FL Oceanographic Society

Nick Muzia, Sea & Shoreline

Steffany Olson, SFWMD

Libby Pigman, SFWMD

Richard Reade, Okeechobee County

Mikayla Rogers, FFVA

Jennifer Thera, FDACS

Raychel Thomas, Pavese Law

Tony Tomalewski, DEP

Diana Turner, DEP

Lori Wenkert, SFWMD

Benita Whalen, FCA

Welcome and Introductions

Marcy Frick welcomed everyone to the Lake Okeechobee BMAP meeting, and the participants introduced themselves and the entity they represent.

Agency Presentations

Diana Turner summarized recent legislative requirements that will be included in the BMAP updates, including five-year milestones. The Lake Okeechobee BMAP does not have entity-specific allocations so the current five-year milestones for the subwatersheds will continue to be used. The Coordinating Agencies have been working on regional projects. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has been conducting water quality analyses to evaluate progress including the targeted restoration area (TRA), hotspot, and trend evaluations. She noted that the Lake Okeechobee BMAP 5-Year Review document was provided for review a few weeks ago and comments are due on Friday. Diana reviewed the BMAP update schedule, which includes technical meetings this week, draft BMAP update in January for review, another round of public meetings to present on the draft BMAP document, public comment period, and then finalization by July 1, 2025. The BMAP project collection portal was opened early for BMAP updates and it will remain open until mid-January for the Statewide Annual Report (STAR). Diana stated that the numbers on the poster for the project reductions are reflective of the last STAR through December 31, 2023, and do not include the new project information that stakeholders recently provided.

Megan Jacoby stated that the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is conducting the five-year update for Lake Okeechobee Watershed Construction Project (LOWCP). They have been

providing updates on the projects annually in the South Florida Environmental Report (SFER) to promote transparency, provide accountability to stakeholders, and help achieve the total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). The LOWCP has 2 projects in planning, 3 in design, and 20 in operations. These are all SFWMD led projects but they also have projects in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers including the Lake Okeechobee Component A Storage Reservoir (LOCAR) and Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP). She noted that the dispersed water management project benefits include reducing runoff and promoting ecological enhancement. Projects to date have provided over 85,000 acre-feet of storage, with an additional 23,000 acre-feet of storage coming online soon. SFWMD is also updating the previous model from 2008–2009, and the updated model shows the estimated storage needed for this watershed from the previous modeling of 900,000 – 1.3 million is correct. The draft 2025 SFER is available for public comment through December 17.

Jennifer Thera reviewed the staff changes at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). She noted that they are working to update all 12 best management practice (BMP) manuals and the FDACS website has a rule development activities webpage with the latest details on the updates. They plan to have the updates completed early next year. FDACS is also updating the cost-share program to create a system to evaluate projects and status to provide transparent information. Producers can apply for different measures and FDACS has a better tool to evaluate effectiveness to determine what projects are most needed. They also increased the cost-share limit including higher amounts if the producer agrees to monitoring. Jennifer showed the BMP enrollment status for each of the Lake Okeechobee BMAP subwatersheds. The FDACS website includes an interactive map showing enrollment, commodity type, and last implementation verification visit.

Poster Session

After the agency presentations, a poster session was held to allow participants to have one-on-one discussions with the agency staff, ask questions, and provide comments. No comment cards were submitted during the meeting.