

Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) Meeting Summary
South Florida Water Management District – St. Cloud Field Station
3800 Old Canoe Creek Road, St. Cloud, FL 34769
Thursday, November 21, 2024
10:00 am – 11:45 am

Participants

Lisa Bally, Geosyntec	Emily Lawson, Orange County
Evelyn Becerra, DEP	Celeste Lyon, RES
Anthony Betts, SFWMD	Nicolle Masters, SFWMD
Shalya Bradford, Polk County	Steffany Olson, SFWMD
Sean Dallas, CFTOD	Libby Pigman, SFWMD
Yesenia Escribano, FDACS	Lena Rivera, CDM Smith
Susan Gosselin, Osceola County	Mary Szafraniec, RES
Moira Homann, DEP	Jennifer Thera, FDACS
Danielle Ivey, Audubon	Tony Tomalewski, DEP
Megan Jacoby, SFWMD	Diana Turner, DEP
Greg Knothe, Polk County	Oscar Vera, Liquid Solutions Group
Jacob Landfield, SFWMD	Lori Wenkert, SFWMD
Thomas LaRoue, RES	

Welcome and Introductions

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

Agency Presentations

Moira Homann 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. Moira 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). Moira 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.