

Springs Education Meeting

March 3, 2021

9:00 am via Teams

Participants

Julie Bortles, Orange County	Jennifer Mitchell, SJRWMD
Alys Brockway, Hernando County	Dorian Morgan, UPPERCASE
Tiffany Busby, Wildwood Consulting	Patricia Nobles, UF IFAS
Marion Chavez, Seminole County	Mary Paulic, DEP
Dennis Davis, Wright-Pierce	Amanda Peck, DEP
Paul Davis, GRU	Marie Lackey, Seminole County
Michon Fabio, Marion County	Tyler Brenfleck, Reese Engineering
Theresa Heiker, Leon County	Zach Roundtree, Marion County
Brian Hutchinson, Ocala	Courtney Schoen, Tallahassee
Lisa Krinsky, UF-IFAS/Sea Grant	Rachel Slocumb, Ocala
Mary Larkin, DEP	Shannon Wetzels, Seminole County
Emily Brown, DEP	Joss Nageon de Lestang, Marion County
Emily Lawson, Orange County	Yilin Zhuang, UF-IFAS
Kristina (Tina) Lyn-Richards McIntyre, UF-IFAS	

Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Activities

Sensitive Groundwater Areas Guidance

Dr. Eban Bean, University of Florida (UF), is working with DEP on guidance for sensitive groundwater areas, particularly the karst areas. They are talking with the Florida Geological Survey (FGS) to have a professional geologist ready to review the report. Dr. Bean is using the Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Study results as a base map. By early April, Mary plans to have the focus group back together. Mary held a focus group back in November 2019 about plans for a low impact development (LID) manual. She will invite again the same folks and possibly add some others. Part of this work is to define karst without limiting the use of the guidance too much. Mary noted that this is intended to be guidance, not rule. Mary intends to provide an update at the next meeting.

Nonpoint Source Tool Development

Emily Brown has been working with Mary and Eban Bean on a LID Manual, and on training tools. There is a Florida Friendly Tools partnership with the Florida Friendly Landscape (FFL) Program. DEP will begin to host materials developed by other institutions than UF. Plant guides and maintaining LID features are part of the effort. The website will probably be ready first with some "coming soon" items. Please make suggestions for other green infrastructure manuals and tools—send them to Emily Brown.

The *Flip My Florida Yard* television episodes will start airing on April 3, 2021. No exact times or channels are available yet, but DEP will send out notices to the email list. Also, they are working on a publication

tool which is under development. It is a tool for producing print materials—social media and jpegs on various topics—FFL, septic systems, water resources, etc. The publication tool will launch in June 2021; feedback on the materials will be welcome and additional materials will be added over time. Emily Brown requested examples of useful materials that you are willing to share, especially graphics that are publicly licensed. Emily is telephoning 319 grant recipients to follow up on gathering these kinds of materials.

Amanda noted they have their grant solicitations active too. There is a Green Infrastructure Grant application out, due by May 1st. The DEP staff are open to pre-proposal discussions.

Presentations

Communications Guidelines for Septic to Sewer Conversion Programs in Florida: A Community-Based Social Marketing Approach (Lisa Krinsky)

Lisa screened her data to be applicable to those who are participating in this meeting. She noted that the residents don't always understand the importance of septic-to-sewer programs. The purpose of the program is to develop social marketing techniques that achieve behavior change (participation in septic-to-sewer programs). They used a six-step process: 1). Choose behaviors (that you want); 2). Conduct formative research (what the barriers and benefits are to the behaviors you want); 3). Develop strategies; 4) Pilot strategy; 5). Implement program; and 6). Evaluate program.

The methods they used included interviews, focus groups, and an online survey. The interviews and focus groups informed the creation of the online survey. The survey data were used for developing the marketing strategy. The tools selected are based on your research. Lisa reviewed the percent of survey participants per county. Lisa reviewed some of the responses to the survey.

Lisa noted that knowledge can be a barrier to behavior change. The graphs she showed represent self-perceived knowledge. The orange bars represent the counties to which she screened the data ("springs counties") and the light grey/blue bar represent the statewide results. They also measured objective knowledge. The population was fairly knowledgeable about septic and sewer—they are more knowledgeable about septic systems. Lisa showed the data that indicated that much of the population knows that septic systems need to be pumped out regularly, but knowledge and behavior are different.

There are educational opportunities in the steps involved with the septic-to-sewer process and the responsibilities related to sewer. The survey tested the respondents' attitude towards septic to sewer conversion topics. Overall, the responses were positive, which is helpful. The concerns were mostly about the cost and ease of conversion.

The perceived benefits and barriers to septic to sewer. The benefits that were most influential were lowering maintenance burdens, freeing up land for other purposes, and improved environmental health. For the external barriers, it is the lack of availability for sewer hook ups and the up-front financial costs. The internal barriers included a lack of desire for sewer, but it was a mild barrier. When they asked about if the costs were dispersed over time, would you be more likely to convert to sewer, the response was 80 % positive.

Communication methods were also covered by the survey. Respondents reported that 59 % looked for septic to sewer information at some point in the past year. They report receiving very little information.

They want to be receiving information from the following organizations: the local wastewater utility, county officials, and environmental organizations.

Lisa reviewed the selected strategies. She stated that the segmented audience don't differ greatly from the statewide sample. No single approach will appeal to everyone, so several methods should be used to reach more of the audience. A single campaign should include several aligned messages and formats. Educational materials should emphasize homeowner priorities, branded with county government or local utility logos.

If benefits are grouped, you take advantage of reducing barriers and emphasizing benefits. At a community meeting that is an opportunity to find out what information resonates with the local community. Mailings and websites are useful.

Citrus County Wastewater Feasibility Study

Dennis Davis gave a presentation on Citrus County's study. Dennis wanted to explain the importance of Citrus County's natural resources. Tourism is an important economic driver in the county. They also explained how septic systems were impacting the environment. They also explained advanced septic systems and septic-to-sewer. They included some information about the total maximum daily loads and basin management action plan requirements—there are regulatory drivers to move the projects forward. Citrus County is in two basin management action plan (BMAP) areas; they are in both the Kings Bay/Crystal River and the Chassahowitzka-Homosassa BMAP areas.

As part of the information provided, they showed the sources of nitrogen and what is being done to address each source. The pie charts were from work done by DEP. They focused on septic systems and what they contributed in each of the springsheds. They also showed the number of reductions that are needed and the magnitude of the need for nitrogen reductions. They also talked about new installations of septic systems within the priority focus area (PFA). They showed dense areas of septic tanks that impacted the springs. People didn't really understand that even if they were not near the springs, their septic system was impacting the springs.

They reviewed their project information and the phased approach. They put subdivision names on the project sites so people could identify with the project areas. A public involvement plan was created, and, prior to the presentation, they presented it to the BOCC. The website is available for review.

Dennis summarized the results of the public survey. The results are not posted on the website yet, but they will be soon. The overall questionnaire had 35 questions; Dennis reviewed the high points. The survey was done via Wright-Pierce and the Valerin Group. The survey was administered from Monday, December 14, 2020 through Friday, January 15, 2021.

The data collection included several steps. First, the goals and objectives were clarified with the county. It was determined that a digital survey was the best choice. The online survey was available via hyperlink and QR code. The county maintains an 8,000-person email list through Constant Contact. They also used two news releases (at the beginning and at the half-way point). The notifications included the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), county staff, and 20 very involved citizens. Facebook was used with different posts used. They received the highest clicks over the holidays.

Overall, 79 % of respondents has some knowledge of the springs. The level of concern about the water quality of the springs indicated 76 % were concerned with 5 % unconcerned. The top two priorities were for "protect our drinking water" or "preserving the environment," with "protecting recreation" third. More respondents thought the springs were very healthy. So, for the second survey, they have questions about what it looks like when you have unhealthy water/springs. They are working on educating the public about this question.

They asked how important it is to you for Citrus County to implement programs to preserve the health of the springs. Over 90 % felt it was important or very important. At the public meeting, there were a lot of people who were against the project, so you would not have expected these results. They also asked how often respondents visited the springs—most answered within the last 12 months. When they asked about the two mandated BMAPs, about 58 % were aware but over 40 % were unaware.

Dennis indicated that they asked about their awareness of the feasibility study; there was not a lot of information about the study previously, so they did not expect high awareness. Now they have public education about the study. They asked questions about whether septic systems impact water quality. They asked if you would upgrade your conventional system if it would be effective in improving water quality. They asked a slightly different question about the county upgrading systems to improve water quality. On the second question, the responses were very positive.

They asked about switching from septic to sewer with good results—63 % saying they would consider it. Dennis noted that Lisa's question about dispersion of costs over time was a good point and they may include that in their next presentation. Generally, the respondents were willing or somewhat willing to pay for sewer services. This information is contrary to a vocal minority who oppose these kinds of projects.

They asked about who you would trust most to provide information and the respondents trusted DEP more than Citrus County. This is a different result than Lisa's survey. Lisa noted in the chat that they did not include DEP as an information provider in her survey, so the results may have been different if they were included. Dennis showed the website with a second questionnaire.

City of Ocala Septic to Sewer Conversion Program

Rachel Slocumb and Brian Hutchinson gave the presentation. The first phase of the project was in 2015 and ran through 2018. They received funds from St. Johns River Water management District (SJRWMD), DEP and legislative funding. The city's cost share portion was \$5 million. Ocala has a sewer availability rate which allows the city to track where the septic systems are located and diminishes the change in costs when they switch to sewer services. The sewer availability rate is the base rate for sewer. So, they could pay more with sewer, but the rate is capped.

Brian explained that they mailed out letters asking if they were interested in hooking up to sewer. Those were submitted to Ocala Engineering. Then they would create a "TCE" that would allow access to the property and the contractor could be engaged. All the information is entered into a database, which also tracks costs. Rachel noted that the database was created in Access, which they are willing to share. Access is part of the Microsoft Office suite, so it is readily available. Rachel showed a map of the connections. Phase 1 connected 913 OSTDS, which was more than were planned. This had an annual reduction of about 11,000 lbs/yr total nitrogen (TN). In 2015, there was not an outreach coordinator.

When Rachel started in 2016, some outreach was done but increased significantly when Rachel was hired.

The original billboards that were done assumed that people cared about water resources. The billboard was not very successful. Rachel did a lot of door knocking and used door hangers. The city staff knocking on doors would help residents fill out the form to ask for hook up. The direct mailers were not very effective. The door knocking was very effective. They spoke to 300 homeowners. The other successful effort was an article in a local magazine. The article provided more space to explain why the efforts are important. There was also a positive domino effect once some projects/sites were completed.

Some issues included neighbors hooked to their neighbor's system. Patios and trees were obstacles. Rachel noted that they learned how to navigate the situations where the situation was unexpected (such as the septic tank being under a patio or under an addition).

Brian explained that during phase 2 they had 106 OSTDS taken offline and hooked up one package plant. Rachel showed the demolition phase of the process and then a picture of "after" two projects. Rachel noted the second phase is for very specific areas and is a more limited effort. Right now, they have billboards up which say, "Go ahead, Abandon Me."

Rachel showed a map where the lime green areas show where the 462 systems that are still within the city. Some are foreclosed properties. It costs about \$5,000 to \$7,000 for abandonment but the restoration process can be very expensive. When there are special situations, those can drive up the costs. Some examples include patios, special pavers, and asphalt that the city promised to restore (and cover the costs). The SJRWMD requires a 50 % buy in (and that has since increased). There is a lot of work to apply for these funds now. The city has funding set aside to continue the program but there is less likelihood to have outside funding.

Discussion

If you are using a survey, how do you make them effective?

Lisa: They can be effective but are certainly not the only method. Recommend if you have time and resources, they can be helpful. You need to figure out who your audience is and how to represent them—so the data are representative. Make sure you identify who you want to reach and can you reach them. Identify what you want out of the survey and prioritize those questions.

Dennis: As an engineer, he started the questionnaire, but he turned it over to the communications professional. The questions changed a lot based on that expertise. Have the right team together and how to ask the questions to get the information you want. They plan to use more surveys in the future.

Rachel: We didn't use surveys but agree with the responses from Lisa and Dennis.

Did you look at the spectrum of economic situations and did those provide differences in responses?

Lisa: They did ask an income question, but they haven't analyzed those data yet. I suspect we will see differences. What wasn't in the survey was added infrastructure investments, like having city water and getting rid of a well for water supply.

Dennis: They also asked about income, but not about property values.

Mary: The length of the survey—where is the point where it gets too long? Also, the survey results gave a generally positive reaction that was contrary to the public meetings. Have you tried to reconcile that?

Dennis: People see the benefits, in general. Also, in a survey you click "No" and that's all you hear from them. In a public meeting, you hear a lot more than "No" you hear complaints and boisterous language. The county is trying to learn how to do better next time and how to get people involved. We have discussed during the prioritization process to focus on the areas in the first phase. There are 11 project areas in total in the first phase. They are getting out doing the presentations and questions directly to those neighborhoods.

Mary: Asked Dennis you're going out in person or electronically to those neighborhoods.

Dennis: There may be an in-person meeting but the main communications will be electronic. It's still too broad of an audience.

What kind of negative comments did you receive?

Rachel: One resident was interested but was very concerned about having city staff on the site because she had structural damage and was concerned about her house be condemned. The other thing they hear is that their septic system works fine. It is true that their rates will likely go up with sewer and "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." There are also concerns about the "government telling me what to do." There are issues on how public agencies are perceived. Often, they think their local municipality is lying to them.

Dennis: His experience is like Rachel's. One neighborhood was fairly affluent, but they are retired and on a "fixed income." Some people just don't want to convert.

Lisa: Everything they included in their survey was as a direct result of concerns they heard. In more affluent communities there were concerns about sewer allowing more development and smaller lots.

Jennifer Mitchell: Before removal did you keep track of the number of tanks that appeared to be failing before removal? It would be interesting to give other programs that information.

Rachel: Not directly, but they prioritized the failing systems. They had a period where they didn't have an active program, there were mad residents that couldn't hook up.

Dennis: I'm not sure if the county is tracking failed systems or not.

Is there anything about your approach that you would do differently or may consider changing as you go forward?

Lisa: I think we reached out to some audiences by mail, but the survey was done online. If you have the time and resources, I recommend using both online and paper. Paper is a lot more expensive and harder to process, but some people really can't use online surveys.

Dennis: For Citrus County, they intended to start their public education process, or they planned to start the process much earlier, but Covid really set that timing back. Start early!

Rachel: I agree. She started at Ocala in 2016. They were three years into the grant period and under 100 OSTDS connected, prior to outreach. The next year they hooked up 800 systems. It would have been a

lot easier if they had a steadier pace and workflow. This would have been better for working with the granting agencies as well.

Lisa: Yes.

Dennis: Outside the priority focus area (PFA), yes. Inside the PFA, they must have an enhanced system.

Rachel: Not so much for areas with sewer availability. Ocala is growing fast.

Michon: Now, Marion County staff are working on this. Held a few community meetings and got public input. You would be surprised at the perception that homeowners have. More communications are needed. There is an environmental aspect to the issue. A survey doesn't work for educating folks. Can forward more information from the utility.

Rachel: In Marion County, there are issues related to water conservation awareness, litter awareness, etc. There can be a need for old concepts to be in front of residents and talked about why they may not be true. We must focus our communications carefully.

Michon: Storm drain picture and Rainbow Springs ("What goes in here comes out here"). This was a hard-to-grasp concept for the public.

General recommendations from speakers to start interaction with stakeholders early and keep positive relation with funding agencies and other intra-agency programs.

Have other communities seen these same barriers?

Tina: She works on the fertilizer workshops. She has been surprised on the start level of education that is needed. You need to step back and realize that it is not second nature that the water resources are connected.

Julie: Orange County held a series of meetings at the end of 2019, and they heard a lot of the same concerns. The district commissioner worked hard and turned it into a competitive process to sign up for sewer. There was a lot of back and forth, but she was able to get 20 subdivisions to join the process.

Moir: She received information from Steven Kintner. The Volusia Alliance was putting together a homeowner's guide to a springshed. It is a short, 4-page PDF.

Michon: I attended the Rivers and Spring Academy through Volusia County. In the class, they talked about the homeowner's guide. Amanda Marek was a good contact. Marion County has considered creating a homeowner's guide too.

Jennifer: I am aware of Steve's work—he is working with the county and with Jennifer.

Moir: I just wanted everyone to be aware of this new resource. Steve mentioned that it was still being finalized.

Update of Agency Activities

DEP Updates

Mary noted that the DEP State Parks folks aren't on the call today. I think we have covered all our key activities. Kevin added that the recommended final order for the five springs challenges has been issued.

The judge recommended that DEP move forward with adopting the five BMAPs with no essential changes. There are still several actions that need to take place, but it is moving forward. Kevin noted that the process can be appealed.

Local Government Updates

Jennifer noted that they offered continuing education units for community association managers. In terms of education about springs and the connection of water resources, to keep them in mind as a key audience. Jennifer is willing to partner to target that audience.

Rachel commented that April is water conservation month, so it is good timing to partner between utilities and county. Ocala is running an art contest and sidewalk stickers. They are working with a local theatre to show resource-related movies (e.g., Soilent Green, Tarzan). In the next two weeks, the education exhibits are being installed at the wetland park. There will be a maze with educational information. They are planning a grand re-opening of the wetland park in April. They are seeing over 300 people per day at the park.

Wrap Up

Tiffany asked if anyone knows of a good summary of the roles of water management agencies in Florida (federal to local). Someone mentioned there is a UF-IFAS water policy document out there—it is an EDIS publication. Check in the water policy series.

Mary thanked the speakers from today. Mary would like to have the DEP State Parks folks reengaged. Mary asked if another meeting in three to four months work for folks (mid-June timeframe). No one objected. Mary noted that we can discuss feasibility studies, fertilizer, or other topics of interest. This will be another virtual meeting. Amanda suggested that everyone please watch the Flip My Florida Yard television shows which will be airing soon.

Mary asked the speakers to please send your presentations to Mary and Tiffany. We will also have meeting notes from today that will be shared. The speakers are okay with being contacted with questions and they provided their contact information: Lisa Krinsky (lkrimsky@ufl.edu), Dennis Davis (dennis.davis@wright-pierce.com or 407.785.5794), and Rachel Slocumb (rslocumb@ocalafl.org).

The meeting ended at 11:55 am.