

Springs Public Campaigns

Collaboration Workshop

November 29, 2018

Participants

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Michon Fabio, Marion County
Stacie Greco, Alachua County EPD
Moir Homann, DEP
Marie Lackey, Seminole County
Emily Lawson, Orange County EPD

Dorian Morgan, UPPERCASE, Inc.
Gail Mowry, Marion County
Mary Paulic, DEP
Zach Rountree, Marion County
Lisa Saupp, Aqua Pure
Rachel Slocumb, City of Ocala
YiLin Zhuang, UF-IFAS Marion County
Craig Littauer, Silver Springs State Park

Summaries of Current Efforts

UPPERCASE, Inc. contract support for Volusia County and Alachua County

Volusia County new efforts focus on septic systems. Alachua County's efforts focus on fertilizer.

Marion County

Michon reported that they have a conservation program, a fertilizer program, and an onsite sewage treatment and disposal system (OSTDS) program. Their water conservation efforts are directed at both agriculture and sports turf land uses/property managers.

Gail and Zach added that Marion County has three specialized University of Florida (UF) Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) agents: a horse farm agent; a large animal agent; and a small animal agent.

A suggestion was made regarding a statewide fertilizer initiative with companies producing fertilizer to identify what are correct products available for Florida residents and when to use them.

Alachua County

Stacie described their water conservation program. The county is split between the Suwannee River Water Management District and the St. Johns River Water Management District that can make funding and program implementation convoluted. They have a turf swap program but have to ensure that the funding is spent in the correct water management district (WMD). Also, there have been issues with the WMDs accepting the homeowner's investments in their landscaping as match.

Alachua County currently has a \$319 grant to promote a no fertilizer use campaign. For OSTDS, they are researching the possibility of an ordinance to require advanced nitrogen treatment. The county currently enforces their irrigation restrictions, not just has the policy in place.

Orange County

Julie explained that they are working on the issues of urban turf and OSTDS. Their initial findings are that people don't connect their backyard activities to the springs. They are also reviewing the possibility of strengthening their fertilizer ordinance to something more similar to Seminole County's recent ordinance. If adopted, a revised ordinance could provide more consistency for vendors and more protection.

Emily added that she is managing the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) grant. They plan to hire a public relations firm to assist with their programs on fertilizer and OSTDS. There does seem to be a lack of public knowledge and a disconnect between the public and government.

Seminole County

Kim reported that the county adopted a new fertilizer ordinance in 2017. Now, they have a \$319 grant directed at fertilizer education that Marie is managing. Their geographic focus is on the Wekiwa springshed even though the ordinance applies countywide.

Seminole County also has an online calculator that provides utility-specific information on the nutrient content of reuse water by location. They plan for a detailed study on groundwater and nitrogen isotopes that will compare the profile before and after the fertilizer ordinance was adopted. The study is expected to take three to five years to allow time for the effects of changes in fertilizer use to be measurable. The county has requested funding for septic-to-sewer conversions.

Marie added that she is working on a fertilizer campaign in concert with their cities—five of the seven cities have fertilizer ordinances in place. They have already placed billboards about the slow release fertilizer requirements and information about the restricted summer season. They have been providing fertilizer workshops to homeowners associations (HOAs). The county also funds Florida-friendly landscaping positions for education in the cities and in the unincorporated county. They have a grant that funds a part-time fertilizer educator who performs many of the HOA presentations. These presentations focus on impacts to waterbodies.

In the next phase underway, they are working to get information in retail establishments that sell residential fertilizers. A fertilizer manufacturer has supplied free bags of both slow release and summer blend fertilizers to be given to consumers as part of the education process.

Stacie noted that Alachua County's code requires 11" x 17" signage at the point of sale. Julie added that Orange County also requires signage. When checked, Orange County has had 100% compliance so far.

Silver Springs State Park

Craig described the park's Springs Fest event. The park does not have any campaigns but they have ongoing education programs. DEP also has their "My Home, My Springs" campaign. The main purpose of this campaign is to promote park visits and to build personal connections to the springs. Craig suggested that the boat captains could be trained to talk about water quality in their scripts. There is a need to explain that the park only protects the "hole" and not the "springshed"—springshed protection needs everyone's help and the job is not done by having a state park around the spring vents.

Aqua Pure

Lisa concurred that there is a need for some consistent messaging. There are issues with educating a transient/seasonal population who may not feel connected to the place where they are living. A lot of new residents have no idea where their water comes from.

When she gets questions about what residents can do to improve their septic systems, she only knows one installer that will install the systems right now. She suggested that perhaps University of Florida Training, Research and Education for Environmental Occupations (UF TREEO) TREEO could provide some training to installers, so there are more providers. She hears that contractors are worried about being associated with some of the engineered systems. Some homeowners say that the systems don't work. She added that she hears that Florida Department of Health (FDOH) permitted can be an issue for some installers. Lisa suggested that part of the message to the public should be that fixing the springs will be a long term endeavor and overnight fixes are not possible.

City of Ocala

Rachel described the city's campaign for their septic-to-sewer program. The city has sewerred 913 residences and that program was completed in June 2018. A new program is starting in a new neighborhood to sewer about 100 residences. This project requires a sewer line extension while the completed project did not.

Rachel described the city's monthly sewer availability fee.

Some of the techniques the city used to address issues/concerns were the following:

- Sod was provided to the resident that increased satisfaction with the finished appearance.
- Particularly where their city is in the Southwest Florida Water management District, there were issues with funding. The districts were concerned that their funding only be used in their district, respectively.
- A wetlands park is being added to the wastewater facility to add capacity to handle the additional volume. The wetlands park will accept the effluent when the reuse system is at capacity.

Rachel noted that it is hard to find funding for point source education. It is okay to use \$319 funds for stormwater education but not for wastewater education, which makes it complicated when their efforts are related to their utility. The city also has a water conservation program that is targeted at youth education. The city has established a Florida-friendly landscaping garden at the wastewater facility that they use for public education.

Rachel shared their new poster entitled, "What Not to Flush—Your Toilet is Not a Trash Can." She described a YouTube channel that shows someone flushing different materials down the toilet such as ping pong balls and glitterized slime; this type of information that the public is viewing is not helpful.

In the discussion time, Rachel described the city's sewer utility fee that has been charged for some time, so that when a site is sewerred the bill may stay the same or go up, but not by much. She described how they got the word out about the sewer program which included writing articles in local magazines and using billboards. For residents, all the costs were covered. The funding came from Ocala's utility, the WMD, and DEP springs funding. Rachel described how they had door hangers and a door knocking program to promote participation.

Rachel explained that they found that some residents were reluctant to have city staff on their property because they had other code violations. They now have a waiting list for additional residents that want sewer.

Marion County UF Extension

YiLin explained that she is a water agent; there is a separate horticultural agent on staff. YiLin works on OSTDS awareness and information about how to manage new technology. She found that if she offered to provide presentations on water quality and/or septic systems that interest was low. But if she referred to presentations about drinking water wells, there was much more interest. She still covers the same material, but it helps to get people engaged by starting out with their interest in drinking water. As part of her presentations, YiLin offers free water testing for fecal indicator bacteria and she would like to add nitrate testing. These programs are sponsored through a grant from FDOH which ends in June 2019. New funding is needed for continued programming. Marion County Extensions sponsors an annual water school workshop.

Discussion Time

For discussion about the City of Ocala's program, see the notes added to the Ocala description above.

Forums for Future Discussion

There were several suggestions for possible forums for future discussion and information sharing that included:

- Florida Stormwater Association Conferences/Events (although this could limit DEP staff involvement);
- Reviving the Stormwater Educators Task Force (formerly organized by UCF);
- DEP hosting a quarterly call, separate from the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) program calls; and
- SWFWMD Springs Coast Meetings.

It was noted that there is a meeting scheduled in January with the DEP grants group. There was discussion about FDOH and how to promote the education of their local staff.

Additional Meetings

Overall, it was recommended that additional meetings occur periodically. Mary mentioned that they would like to involve Leon County, Wakulla County, and the Springs Coast area but they were unable to attend this meeting.

Homeowners Associations

It was noted that it helps to emphasize property values when talking to property managers or HOAs. Most programs have focused on presenting to the HOA Boards and not necessarily the entire community. There was discussion about how recent algal blooms have helped to raise public awareness of water quality issues.

YiLin noted that IFAS Extension has been working on newcomer education to teach residents how to be responsible Floridians—a lot of times, they just don't know. Generally, it is harder to reach residents who do not live in a community with an HOA, but newcomer education can reach non-HOA residents. It has been found that realtors are hard to reach also. New resident contact information is available from the property appraiser. However, the list can be long so reaching all of them has been a budget issue.

Key Audiences

There was discussion about the high value of reaching out to the following groups:

- Newcomers (new residents);
- Property managers; and
- Fertilizer retailers.

There was discussion about whether some issues could be addressed through the state plumbing code which would add some regulatory control and force building officials to conduct inspections.

Florida-friendly Landscaping

There was discussion about the possible value of having different levels of FFL, so you could have “silver,” “gold,” or “platinum” levels and not just one category. A platinum plus level may even go further and advocate lawn care management without inorganic fertilizer.

For fertilizer use, is there any interest in consistent or model signage language regarding the timing, application, and type of fertilizer?

Information Sharing

There was discussion about the value of having an information clearinghouse on education and water quality information. It was noted that Mark Hoyer has been talking about starting a groundwater data atlas.

Next Meeting

There was discussion about another meeting of this group in the May 2019 timeframe. There was also a request to share the contact information among the participants.