

January 28, 2014

Meeting of the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

Present:

Delbert Smith – Board Member (Chair)

Pete Cameron – Board Member (Deputy Chair Secretary)

Duke Emerson – Board Member (Treasurer)

Jon Croci – Board Member

Basil Bactawar -- IFAS Agent, Union County

Hugh Thomas -- FDACS Representative

Scott Tucker -- FDACS Representative

Wiley Feagle -- (for Monica Jones) NRCS Representative

Paul Still -- Representative, Bradford County Soil and Water Conservation District

The meeting opened at 6:30 with recommendations for UCSWCD meeting dates for the rest of 2014 made by Jon Croci: Feb 25, Mar 25, April 22, May 27, June 24, July 22, Aug 26, Sept 23, Oct 28, Nov 25, Dec ???. This was accepted.

Paul Still opened the meeting with the topic of the Minimum Flows and Levels activity by the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), which he said was about to be formalized and sent to the Florida legislature. He pointed out the controversial issue of the five year limit that will be imposed on all applicants for new or revised consumptive use permits (CUPs), and on "water-use caution area" and the five year limit on permits will allow frequent reevaluation of the amount of water being withdrawn from the Floridan aquifer as conservation research and analysis continues.

Hugh Thomas pointed out that allocations will generally be reduced upon reevaluation, based on a new model that takes into account crop and soil type. He said that he favors a 20 year CUP, with reevaluation every five years, which will give farmers a more dependable groundwater pumping allowance. He also stated that applicants for new CUPs, or increases in the allocation of an existing CUP, would have to show an "offset" to mitigate the effects of their proposed additional groundwater pumping. Since the MFLs currently show the lower Suwannee River basin to be in "recovery" (that is, in need of recovery from an existing deficit caused by years of pumping groundwater from the aquifer), no new pumping will be authorized by the SRWMD unless the applicant can show conservation measures resulting in no further deficit in aquifer levels.

Delbert Smith added that his CUP was reevaluated last month by the WMD and his allocation was reduced. However, the reduction was small and did not negatively affect the success of his sod operations.

Hugh Thomas said that given the current focus on the MFLs and the need to create a recovery strategy that will "recover" MFLs to a desired state, it is a highly favorable time to receive SRWMD funding for any recovery efforts proposed by Soil and Water Conservation District boards. He pointed out that one possible area in Union County might be an aquifer recharge project on land owned by S&M Farms in Providence. Delbert Smith, who is a resident and businessman in that area, volunteered to approach S&M Farms and other agricultural operations in Union County with a proposal to study their land for possible aquifer recharge projects funded by SRWMD.

Hugh Thomas said that landowners would have to agree to allow boring operations on their land to get a soil profile. Paul Still pointed out that they could find, as a result of the boring operation, that below the clay layer that is present throughout Union County could be a layer of sand that could filter (that is, clean it) water being recharged into the surficial aquifer, (which is above the Floridan Aquifer). Delbert Smith added that they could possibly find two layers of clay, which would certainly influence said recharge efforts.

Jon Croci then made a motion that Delbert Smith and Duke Emerson be authorized to approach landowners whose land was known to have large amounts of excess water after heavy rains and try to generate interest in groundwater recharge projects. Pete Cameron seconded the motion.

Wiley Feagle gave a report outlining an NRCS agricultural assistance program with applications due Feb 21. Financial assistance is available for those seeking to "install conservation practices on USDA certified organic operations or get help in working towards organic certification"; "install high tunnels designed to extend the growing season"; grow longleaf pine; benefit the habitat of the gopher tortoise; conserve energy in general.

Scott Tucker reported on an FDACS cost share program available now through June promoting weather stations on farms (one station roughly each 300 acres) and soil moisture probes. The cost share is 75 % paid by FDACS. Further, FDACS pays the cost of participation in the area weather station network for the first year. He pointed out the use of a weather station network in south Florida that helps citrus growers with frost/freeze information.

Pete Cameron noted that the MFL recovery strategy document proposed by the SRWMD is a valuable tutorial on the water situation in the Suwannee River basin, and he offered to make a presentation on the document at the next meeting. This was accepted.

The meeting closed at around 8 PM.