

23 May 2017, Union County Soil And Water Conservation District

Present:

Laurel Schafftsma - Chairperson; William Schretzmann -- Deputy Chairman; Pete Cameron - Secretary; Duke Emerson - Treasurer; Monica Jones -- NRCS Agent; Barton Wilder -- FDACS/SRWMD Agent

Laurel opened the meeting with a vote to approve the minutes for the April meeting.

Pete Cameron informed the group of two papers that shed light on the proposed phosphate mining. The first was a description of a rail system that is being considered to haul phosphate rock from the mining site to the beneficiation plant. The phosphate (matrix) is dug up by a drag line and put in a pile. Front loaders then pick it up and drop it into cars on the rail system where it is carried to the beneficiation plant. There, the rail tracks rise and circle, forcing the contents of each car to fall out.

The second paper describes a method of eliminating clay settling pools, a normal product of phosphate mining that leaves a blight on the land. HPS II has promised that they will either find a way to mine without these settling pools or they will not mine. The paper describes an experimental setup in which clay paste from an existing settling pool is watered down to 3% solids and then joined with an equal amount of sand. Polymers (one pound per ton of sand/clay) are added to bond the sand and clay and then the slurry goes into a cyclone which causes the water to rise and pass out of the cyclone. What results is about 55% solids. Next, overburden (the soil removed from above the phosphate in the initial stage of mining) is added to the clay/sand mix such that the mixture is equal parts sand, clay, and overburden. The resulting mixture is in the area of 85% solids and it is considered ready to be dumped back into the mining pits as part of reclamation of the land.

Laurel mentioned the Annual Financial Report that is due in Tallahassee the end of June. She said that she is preparing it and will need sign-off by Dave Nistler. She said it looks like it will be submitted on time.

Laurel is serving on a working group that is dealing with issues in creating the Small Farms BMP Manual. Barton pointed out that a small farm must be commercial to some degree or else the proposed BMPs will not apply. Laurel said that her concern,

which is shared by others in the group, is that the BMPs could impose enough time-taking regulation that many small farmers will think they cannot afford the time and expense. If the farms are in a BMAP area, they will have to comply with the BMPs when issued. (A BMAP covers an area that is judged to have excessive nitrogen in the water and Union County is in an existing BMAP.) Laurel suggested issuing a series of pamphlets covering items that will be in the upcoming manual to alert farmers that it is coming (for example, a pamphlet for cover crops and when to apply fertilizer and approved irrigation methods; a pamphlet on cow calf, grass height, number of recommended cattle per acre, etc). William said it is important that the tone be non-adversarial. Others suggested that an early test farm be chosen to "debug" the BMPs and it could be a local farm.

Laurel brought up the issue of feral pigs and the damage they cause and suggested that the board might sponsor a program to deal with it. Apparently, feral pigs do regular damage to peanut fields. Barton mentioned a contact at UF, a Dr. William Guilliano, who has a regular presentation on methods of getting rid of the pigs and the best time to do it. Members suggested a UCSWCD/IFAS coordinated event, possibly at the UC community center. There could be a few signs publicizing the event as well as a newspaper and IFAS newsletter article. Laurel said she would contact Dave Nistler on the feasibility of the event and the contact Dr. Guilliano to see when he is available.

Laurel stated that the annual AFCD meeting will be in Ocala July 20 - 22 at the Ocala Hilton.

Barton reported on FDACS issues. He said that upon the end of the fiscal year in July, there will be a reduction in funds available for cost share programs and there will be increased verification of compliance with requirements. A few programs that are receiving support are filtration systems such as the one at the Holly Factory on CR 241. Water containing leached fertilizer that gravitationally channels off the land moves through an area of sawdust and sand, which filters out much of the nutrients. Another focus will be on slow release fertilizer for crops (slow release has to this point been used largely for ornamentals).

Monica noted that there is one applicant from Union County for the Longleaf Pine initiative.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10. The next meeting will be June 27.