

August 23, 2016 Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

Present:

Laurel Schaffsma -- Chairman

Pete Cameron -- Secretary

Duke Emerson -- Treasurer

William Schretzmann -- Supervisor

Barton Wilder -- FDACS/WMD Representative

The meeting opened with approval of the July minutes.

Laurel reported on the SWCD meeting on July 29 and 30 in Ocala, focusing on Jack Gaskin's presentation about the purpose of and state requirements imposed on the SWCDs. There was, and is, controversy on whether our board is an "dependent" or "independent" district. This is important to us because of additional reporting requirements imposed on independent districts. While the state organization insists that we are independent, our group read the requirements for dependent districts and agreed that that is where we are unquestionably dependent. We are "dependent" on the county commission for funding and in fact any of our projects must be approved by the commission; and this funding issue is a criterion for a dependent district. Laurel said that she has sent a letter to Mr. Gaskins for clarification on this matter.

Laurel explained that her recent immersion into the why and wherefore of soil and water conservation districts left her with the conviction that our role is to educate the public on conservation issues. This led to a suggestion that we participate in the yearly high school land judging competition. Duke Emerson said that he would contact Erin Johnson (high school agriculture teacher) to find out the date of the competition, specific events, and a possible role for us.

Pete provided an update on the phosphate mining issue, specifically the significance of a letter written by HPSII's law firm to the Union County commission, threatening legal action should they adopt stringent land use regulations that would impose a limitation on the mining operation. HPSII's engineering firm, Kleinfelder, had earlier issued a mining operation plan to the Bradford County Commission specifying a 25-foot setback for mining next to a wetland. The Alachua County land use regulation cites a 500-foot setback. If Union County decided to replace its land use regulations with those of Alachua County, the area left for mining would be considerably reduced. The letter from HPSII's law firm cites a legal precedent which the letter claims disallows the practice of manipulating land use regulations to create a de facto obstacle to mining. Our Board had no decided opinion on what, if anything, should be done to influence public opinion on the mining.

Laurel then brought up the issue of the use of "grey water" (laundry and bath water), asking the board why this water could not be shunted into broad coverage of a yard, rather than being confined to the septic system. The water would fertilize the whole yard, not just above the septic system, and keeping it out of the septic system would mean fewer dollars spent on tank clean-out. William ventured that the idea, while appealing, would probably not be feasible on a large scale because all household water whether spread out on a yard or confined in a septic system ends up leaching down to the aquifer.

On the subject of BMPs, Pete pointed out that from a report given to the Santa Fe River Working Group (sponsored by Alachua County DEP), he learned that several of the 20 wells being monitored as part of a DEP Resource Focus Area (RFA) showed an increase in nitrogen even though BMPs were in force in adjacent ranches. This anomaly reflected negatively on the efficacy of the BMPs and caused some apprehension in the RFA sponsors. Barton, as FDACS/WMD representative, said that he was aware of the results and that longer term monitoring should provide more conclusive data.

Laurel said that she had casually approached a few landowners within her acquaintanceship on the subject of BMPs and they unanimously expressed reluctance to sign on to the program. Barton countered by citing some of the

pluses of the BMP program such as the cost share that is available to participants and the freedom from lawsuits when participants are actively involved in the program. Their "presumption of compliance" protects them should a high level of nitrates in adjacent waterways be the cause of a lawsuit directed at them.

Barton reported on a recent WMD meeting in which a rule was adopted that anyone applying for a Consumptive Use Permit (CUP) to pump water from the aquifer is prohibited from using an end gun on their pivot watering system. End gun spray is hard to contain on the growing area and more often ends up being wasted on roadways.

In a similar water-saving move, the WMD ruled that for all new CUP applicants with 8-inch wells, longer permits would be granted for those willing to install a water use monitoring device. In the WMD sphere of influence, a longer term permit is desirable as it allows long term planning. The threat of being limited to a five-year CUP is a definite inducement to keep a permit current (not expired). The water use monitoring devices will allow the WMD more accurate water use data for entry into their planning model.

The meeting closed late at 8:30.