

August 26 Meeting of the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

Present:

Delbert Smith -- Chair

Pete Cameron -- Deputy Chair, Secretary

Duke Emerson -- Treasurer

Jon Croci -- Computer Systems

Monica Jones -- NRCS Representative

Paul Still -- Bradford Soil and Water Conservation District

Paul Still addressed the board with a proposal that he intends to present to the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD). He has long felt that while the SRWMD does have a focus on the Lower Santa Fe Basin, they do not have a broad enough approach to water issues in the upper Santa Fe area. What follows are excerpts from Mr. Still's proposal:

"The Bradford Soil and Water Conservation District is proposing that the Suwannee River Water Management District pilot a "basin-focused" approach for the Upper Santa Fe Basin. The most efficient approach to water resource planning is to address water issues in a way that allows all the issues to be addressed, not just as flows and levels.

Currently there are 8 lakes in the Upper Santa Fe Basin that are scheduled to have their MFLs established in the next 2 years. Since the lakes in the Upper Santa Fe Basin discharge to the Santa Fe River, the lake MFLs also impact the river MFLs. Water levels in lakes and wetlands have direct impacts on groundwater and aquifer levels. Individuals with both historic and current knowledge of local water resources should be asked to provide information and photographs to supplement other data available. The historical information is important in gaining an understanding about how the natural systems functioned in the past. This historical information could help identify changes in water bodies that may not be apparent when a MFLs or FEMA contractor looks at current water body conditions. These changes may be altering how a water body is functioning.

The accumulation of silt and the presence of aquatic vegetation are examples of these types of changes. Storage capacity, flow, and fish habitat are all impacted by silt accumulation and aquatic vegetation. Individuals who used water bodies 40 or 50 years ago could provide important information about the water bodies. We have had both droughts and floods since 1998 so recent observations are also important and will be collected. This information can help identify changes that have occurred and may help identify changes in management practices to allow water bodies to provide habitat, flood control, and recreation."

Monica Jones (NRCS) said that she attended the Association of Florida Conservation Districts meeting and would pass on anything of relevance to our board. Also, she passed out copies of the cooperative work agreement between NRCS and UCSWCD, which must be signed by Delbert Smith as Chairman and returned to Monica for her records. The agreement requires us to operate under certain legal guidelines when pursuing cooperative projects. Finally, she mentioned a local working group meeting between NRCS and UCSWCD, a yearly meeting to address local concerns, which has not been conducted lately due to a lack of mutual projects.

Jon Croci presented his Train the Trainer slides for this group to possibly present to teachers to inform and motivate them to make water conservation stewards of their students. Jon's slides led to a general discussion on how to reach residents of Union County with water-related materials.

Delbert Smith said that the coloring books for early grade students in Union County netted zero feedback from teachers or parents.

There was some talk about teachers and advisors in FFA who already cover conservation issues with students. These should be considered allies in spreading information on water issues.

Monica Jones said that on the NRCS website there are lesson plans on water conservation for students in all grades.

Delbert reminded the group that we should be putting a few snippets about water conservation in the IFAS newsletter each month.

Land judging was brought up as something the group could sponsor. Paul Still said that he was familiar with it as it functioned in high schools but he said that the terminology can be intimidating and while the activity is rewarding for those who pursue it, participation in the land judging contests is limited.

The meeting closed at 8 with members thinking of ways to spread the word.