

Environmental Science Forum (ESF)
Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center
Thursday, April 5, 2007

MEETING MINUTES

Subject to Forum Approval

Attendees:

- | | | |
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| 1. | Holly Greening | Forum Member, Co-Chair |
| 2. | Dr. Gabriel Vargo | Forum Member, Alternate Co-Chair (after Ms. Greenings
4:30 p.m. departure) |
| 3. | Dr. Randy Runnels | Forum Member |
| 4. | Tom Muntz | Forum Member |
| 5. | Joe Maier | Forum Member |
| 6. | Mark Mueller | Forum Member |
| 7. | Walt Hoskins | Alternate for Barbara Hoffman |
| 8. | Cathy Harrelson | Forum Member |
| 9. | Bruce Hasbrouck | Forum Member |
| 10. | Ray Wunderlich | Forum Member |
| 11. | Doug Robison | Forum Member |
| 12. | Elizabeth Warren | Pinellas County Assistant County Administrator |
| 13. | William Davis | Pinellas County Environmental Management |
| 14. | Andy Squires | Pinellas County Environmental Management |
| 15. | Dr. H. Bruce Rinker | Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division |
| 16. | Dr. Steve Harper | Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division |
| 17. | Dr. Catherine Flegel | Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division |
| 18. | Pamela Leasure | Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division |
| 19. | Lynn Smith | Pinellas County Environmental Lands Division |
| 20. | Devesh Nirmul | Pinellas County Extension |
| 21. | Jim Garey | Citizen |
| 22. | Barbara Hoffman | Citizen |
| 23. | Sid Crawford | Citizen |
| 24. | Tom Reese | Citizen |
| 25. | Theresa Blackwell | <i>St. Petersburg Times</i> |

Handouts: Pinellas County ESF Agenda, ESF Meeting Minutes, Shell Key Preserve Management Plan, Suggestions from Stakeholders' Meetings.

I. Welcome and Introductions:

- Co-chair Ms. Holly Greening welcomed Forum members and the public. She reminded the public to address agenda items by filling out the appropriate form.
- Ms. Greening said the Forum had two major issues to address: a comprehensive look at Brooker Creek Preserve and a discussion about Shell Key Preserve.
- Introductions by members followed.

II. **Additional Agenda Items:**

- Ms. Greening invited additional agenda items.
- Mr. Walt Hoskins offered several suggestions: update on the Pinellas County Blending Facility, discussion about the ballfields at the Blending Facility, update on the ballfields at the pine plantation at Brooker Creek Preserve (just off Old Keystone Road), and a preview of the upcoming April 24 and May 5 BOCC workshops. Ms. Greening asked Mr. Will Davis if he would cover these suggestions later in the meeting, and Mr. Davis affirmed.
- Mr. Tom Muntz expressed concern that the Forum does not always maintain a quorum. Ms. Greening requested an update on Forum membership for the next meeting. Mr. Davis replied that 18 members presently constitute the Forum with alternates approved by County Administrator Mr. Steve Spratt. Mr. Davis mentioned the same concerns over light attendance of Forum members or their alternates. He suggested a letter from Mr. Spratt to all members to encourage their regular attendance.
- It was also suggested that a roll call of members be taken at the start of each meeting.

III. **Approval of March 1, 2007 Meeting Minutes:**

- Ms. Greening asked for corrections to the minutes from the last meeting. Without a quorum present, no vote could be taken for approval.
- Mr. Hoskins provided the following corrections: Page 1 (Walt Hoskins should be listed as a citizen and not alternate for Barbara Hoffman, Sharon Philyaw's name should be correctly spelled), Page 4 (Toniwoods should be correctly spelled), Page 5 (the BOCC workshop on Brooker Creek Preserve took place on March 15, 2007, not March 13, again Sharon Philyaw's name should be spelled correctly). An additional correction was noted on Page 5: Shell Key Management Plan Update (Pam Leasure).

IV. **Summary of March 15th BCC Workshop on Brooker Creek Preserve (Mr. Will Davis):**

- Mr. Davis provided a summary of the recent (and lengthy) workshop on issues at Brooker Creek Preserve. His BOCC presentation divided the issues into two major categories: uses and boundaries. Policy questions on land use provided to the Commissioners were reviewed and discussed: (1) Should the County follow the recommendations of the Planning Department to clarify land use and zoning of the Preserve? Forum members requested that this item be deferred until a later BOCC meeting after the Forum's subcommittee reconvenes to review all documents and then present its findings to the full membership and Mr. Spratt. (2) Should the irrigation wells be utilized? This is now a moot point since the permit application was pulled by County Administration. (3) Should Pinellas County or Tampa Bay Water pump water out of the Preserve for any purpose other than to support Preserve ecosystems? The BOCC reserved its right to extract potable water for future needs. Further discussions about this will follow. (4) Should ELYSA be permitted to use property within the Preserve for expansion of its ballfields? The BOCC's consensus was "yes" but with conditions including the provision that all other north County site options be explored. (5) Should the Brooker Creek Preserve Management Plan allow passive recreation (rather than active recreation) and should the Plan clarify the term, passive recreation. The BOCC affirmed resoundingly. Much of this will be resolved in the County's updated Comprehensive Plan and reflected in the Brooker Creek Preserve Management Plan Update. Mr. Davis next moved to policy issues with regard to preserve boundaries: (1) Should Utilities-owned parcels within the Preserve, not anticipated for future Utilities use, be transferred to Pinellas County's general government? If

yes, does the transfer occur via an open-loop or closed-loop policy? (2) Should Utilities-owned property within the Preserve, anticipated for future Utilities use, continue to remain part of the Preserve? (3) Should parcels committed to other facilities uses be removed from the Preserve? There seemed consensus in the BOCC to remove these from the boundaries of the Preserve. (4) Should the County consider an ordinance to require a public referendum for the sale, transfer, or conveyance of regional parks and environmental lands? This, too, seemed to have consensus among BOCC members.

V. **Shell Key Preserve Management Plan Update (Pam Leasure):**

- Ms. Pam Leasure, Shell Key Preserve Land Manager for the County's Environmental Lands Division, provided a brief history of Shell Key Preserve, including information about the 2000 management plan and the County's process to update that plan as required by the State of Florida. Original stakeholders included recreational boaters, Tierra Verde Community Association, local chapters of the National Audubon Society, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation, and other citizens.
- Since the County's Environmental Lands Division assumed management of Shell Key Preserve, several categories of issues have emerged: those issues over which we have full control (e.g., pets, alcohol, exotic vegetation), those over which we have limited control (e.g., predators, intrusions by humans and their pets, trash and human waste), and those over which we have no control (e.g., major storm events). Two stakeholders' meetings have taken place thus far (February 20, 2007 at Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center and March 20, 2007 at Tampa Bay Watch). Though the first two meetings showed low attendance, representatives included recreational boat users, commercial island users, Audubon of Florida, St. Petersburg residents, and Florida Department of Fish and Game.
- Suggestions from the previous stakeholders' meetings for inclusion in the updated management plan:
 1. Pets and other domestic animals, including dogs, should not be allowed within the Preserve boundaries in accordance with Preserve Ordinance 2-6.
 2. Possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages should not be allowed in the Preserve in accordance with Preserve Ordinance 2-6.
 3. Nonnative species of flora and fauna should be removed aggressively from the Preserve in accordance with the BOCC-approved Shell Key Preserve Management Plan and in accordance with standard conservation procedures.
 4. Raccoons should be removed from the Preserve in accordance with the BOCC-approved Shell Key Preserve Management Plan and in accordance with standard conservation procedures.
 5. New or improved means of law enforcement should be pursued to implement existing County regulations.
 6. All signage should be changed or improved in accordance with regulatory requirements, including possible off-shore markers.
 7. The annual carrying capacity of the Preserve should be studied, especially the human impact during Memorial Day, Fathers' Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day.
 8. The overall camping experience at the Preserve should be improved in accordance with current guidelines for sustainability and for public health and safety, or eliminated entirely from the Preserve.

9. Emergent lands within the Preserve should be managed actively with primary emphasis on natural resource protection, including habitats for species of conservation concerns (e.g., red knot).
 10. Staff and volunteers of the County's Environmental Lands Division should improve the quantity and quality of education programs at the Preserve, especially with regard to stewardship issues such as trash, camping practices, bird identification and appreciation, and coastal ecology.
 11. Water quality testing should be conducted regularly in the Preserve, especially for nitrogen and fecal coliform.
 12. Internal combustion engines should be studied for possible negative impacts on Preserve flora and fauna.
 13. Feeding birds and other wildlife in the Preserve should be prohibited at all times.
 14. Sea turtles in the Preserve should be monitored and protected at all times.
 15. As the management authority, the County's Environmental Lands Division should create a scientific advisory committee to review and comment on proposed research and land management projects within the boundaries of its properties, beginning with Shell Key Preserve.
 16. Efforts to monitor and survey birds utilizing the Preserve should be continued.
- Ms. Leasure concluded her presentation by pointing out her working timetable for revising the management plan, including a final review by the Forum in July before BOCC deliberation. Ms. Leasure reminded the Forum about the next stakeholders' meeting on Wednesday, April 25, 2007, at Tampa Bay Watch, Tierra Verde (6 p.m. until 9 p.m.).
 - Dr. Bruce Rinker, Division Director for the Environmental Lands Division, asked the Forum to note three key tenets about the process: Shell Key Preserve is an integral part of a local coastal system but with global connections for some species of conservation concern, Shell Key Preserve includes the island and all its waterways, and Shell Key Preserve is a microcosm of the global conservation picture as exemplified by the multiple human-caused forces historically influencing the Preserve.
 - Dr. Steve Harper, Research Director for the Environmental Lands Division, emphasized some of the key research components to complement Pam's land management perspectives. He made reference to a recent newspaper article in the *St. Petersburg Times* about Shell Key Preserve. Dr. Harper reviewed scientific data discussed in part in a previous Forum meeting about habitat mapping, fall/winter birds, and breeding shorebirds. He presented much of this information to the local newspaper writer, but needed to clarify or correct broad statements in the article or presumptions already in public discussion. Dr. Harper noted that the data do not support the broad statement that bird populations have declined as a direct result of the County's management of the Preserve. He added, however, that he can support enhanced regulations for other reasons including human health and safety, documented impacts of predators (including dogs) on wildlife, the dynamic nature of the island, and the spread of invasive species.
 - Dr. Rinker added that it is incumbent upon us to maintain long-term ecological research throughout our region with cooperation as a very important aspect of that. At Shell Key Preserve, we have anecdotal evidence of dogs alarming birds, of people and pets trespassing into restricted areas, and of the melees during weekends and holidays adversely affecting the

natural resources of the Preserve. The urban pressures on Shell Key Preserve and other environmental lands is bound to increase over time. It needs to be in compliance with all other preserves and management areas in the County. He advocated an aggressive management of the island and its waterways since our options are closing for its management as a natural system. To be sure, it has its successes, each one of which is precious and significant. He concluded by expressing his desire that the Forum help to craft a management plan for that will work for Shell Key Preserve, not for five years, but for 100 years.

VI. **Next Meeting Agenda Topics:**

- Mr. Hoskins suggested an update on the Blending Facility, an update on the ballfields at the Blending Facility, an update on the ballfields in the Pine Plantation, a summary of the April 24, 2007 BOCC workshop, a preview of the May 7, 2007 workshop, and an introduction to the Wall Springs project.
- Mr. Ray Wunderlich reminded the Forum about its need to maintain a quorum.
- Mr. Bruce Hasbrouck requested a report on the proposed ordinance and land-use documents from by the Forum's subcommittee (chaired by Ms. Barbara Hoffman).

VII. **Future Meeting:**

- The next meeting of the Forum will be Thursday, May 3, 2007, at Pinellas County Extension in Largo.
- A suggestion that the July meeting be moved from Thursday, July 5, 2007, to Thursday, July 12, 2007, was accepted. Mr. Davis and Mr. Andy Squires said the date would work so long as we can find a place to meet.
- Mr. Mark Mueller asked that Forum members have a field-trip to Shell Key Preserve, a suggestion that was well-received contingent on resources and calendars.

VIII. **Public Comments:**

- No public comments were offered.

Meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.