



# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

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Tallahassee, FL 32399

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Governor

**Jeanette Nuñez**  
Lt. Governor

**Shawn Hamilton**  
Secretary

## Blue-Green Algae Task Force Staff Minutes

**Feb. 1, 2023**

**10 a.m.**

**Florida International University, Wolfe University Center  
and GoTo Webinar**

General subject matter considered: The Blue-Green Algae Task Force (task force) met to receive an update on the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act (HABHRCA) and the recent amendment, the South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act of 2021. The task force also heard presentations on Executive Order (EO) 23-06 (Achieving *Even More* Now for Florida's Environment) and the progress that has been made to date along with possible next steps.

Attendee Name	Title	Status
<b>Dr. Mark Rains</b>	Facilitator	Present
<b>Dr. Evelyn Gaiser</b>	Member	Present
<b>Dr. Wendy Graham</b>	Member	Present (Virtual)
<b>Dr. Michael Parsons</b>	Member	Present
<b>Dr. Valerie Paul</b>	Member	Present
<b>Dr. James Sullivan</b>	Member	Present

1. Dr. Rains provided opening remarks, called roll and facilitated the meeting.
2. Dr. Rains provided introductory comments, emphasizing the main goal of the discussion is to brainstorm ideas for a "road map" that the task force and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can develop to guide discussions moving forward.
3. David Kidwell, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration co-chair of the Interagency Working Group on the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act (IWG-HABHRCA), provided an overview of HABHRCA and IWG-HABHRCA, particularly concerning the South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act. He also highlighted IWG-HABHRCA's coordination with key partners, including the state of Florida.

Meeting minutes are not intended to act as a transcript of the meeting. To watch a recording of the meeting or to see the recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force, please visit [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov/state-action/blue-green-algae-task-force](https://ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov/state-action/blue-green-algae-task-force).

4. Dr. Rains and task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation, including:
  - a. DEP's response to IWG-HABHRCA's initial request for resources to assist with the interim integrated assessment.
  - b. How meetings are planned around the state.
  - c. Specifications of the integrated assessment and the action plan. How the action plan provides a strategy and plan for Congress to make informed appropriations decisions.
  - d. The roles of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in IWG-HABHRCA and the members.
  - e. How the IWG-HABHRCA continues to hold conversations with stakeholders that provide response and that impact activities around harmful algal blooms and hypoxia, and how that plays a key role in prevention, control and mitigation.
  - f. If the IWG-HABHRCA will be involved in the May 15-16, 2023, Blue-Green Algae State of the Science Symposium.
5. The task force encouraged the IWG-HABHRCA to ensure public communication is clear and transparent.
6. DEP Secretary Shawn Hamilton provided an overview of [EO 23-06](#) and DEP's projected scope of work over the next four years. Secretary Hamilton discussed the unprecedented funding commitment since 2019 and how it has been used to support efforts identified by the task force to protect and restore Florida's water resources. Secretary Hamilton also described how EO 23-06 continues the task force's mission and encouraged the members to think about new opportunities to address Florida's environmental challenges and deliberate on strategies to approach key areas.
7. Dr. Rains and task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
  - a. Specific financial allocations toward EO 23-06 items 1F ("For nutrient-impaired waterbodies, strengthen BMAPs [Basin Management Action Plans]") and 1G ("Work with DACS [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services] to improve Agricultural Best Management Practices"), which were previously identified by the task force.
  - b. Engagement of counties, universities and the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) National Estuary Program to expedite water quality restoration in the IRL.
  - c. Suggestion to develop a list of projects that DEP thinks would be most effective to expedite statewide water quality restoration.
  - d. How the task force can help DEP ensure it has a good evaluation method for project benefits.
  - e. The importance of evaluating where a project should be implemented in addition to analyzing a project and its effects.
  - f. Consideration of nutrient "hotspots" and potential challenges currently preventing projects in certain areas.

8. Adam Blalock, DEP Deputy Secretary of Ecosystems Restoration, and Michael Lynch, DEP Director for the Division of Water Resource Management, gave overviews of the progress on addressing the [Blue-Green Algae Task Force Consensus Document](#) (consensus document) recommendations. They summarized what actions are complete, the work underway, and the work still under development or under consideration.
9. Dr. Rains and task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
  - a. Other agency/organization involvement in the toxicity aspect of biosolids and the requirements for biosolids.
  - b. Interest in obtaining the BMAP reports and the data and modeling information, including work done on the five-year reviews.
  - c. The “rejection rate” of water resources rules submitted to the Florida Legislature.
  - d. The rationale behind determining the location of the new and enhanced water quality monitoring stations.
  - e. Recommendation that each task force member reviews the annual South Florida Water Management District’s [South Florida Environmental Report](#) covering monitoring networks and data collected and analyzed.
  - f. Recommendation to implement monitoring stations in the Florida Wildlife Corridor to assess the potential water quality benefits of the land conversion.
10. A broader discussion was held on how the task force will continue to examine both the sources of and solutions for blue-green algal blooms and to provide additional recommendations to limit the duration, frequency and intensity of future blooms in accordance with EO 23-06. Dr. Rains and task force members discussed the following:
  - a. Information that the task force needs to help address the problem and possible approaches for carrying out the EO 23-06 directive in the near term:
    - i. In-depth understanding of broad and area-specific BMAP development and implementation, including the data analyzed for developing or updating BMAPs.
    - ii. Information, data and reports on the state of innovative technologies; harmful algal bloom mitigation, prevention and treatment; advanced wastewater treatment options; and new monitoring/sensors.
    - iii. Data, graphics and key information from annual reports – such as the South Florida Environmental Report and reports from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – should be guiding the task force discussions. The data will determine whether the expectations/assumptions of a project or effort meet the realizations.
    - iv. Information on how enrollment in the DACS’ Best Management Practices (BMP) program is changing.
    - v. Understanding the current strategy for quantification of agricultural BMP effectiveness.
    - vi. Net gain of septic-to-sewer compliance and conversion goals.
    - vii. How biosolids are handled and innovative technologies that can address biosolids.

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- viii. Understanding the current status of projects, water quality data trends, and projected reductions from projects being implemented where “hotspots” are identified.
- ix. Barriers and challenges that exist to implementing projects in “hotspots.”
- x. Evaluating whether the data supports the presumption of compliance that comes with stormwater and agricultural BMPs.
- b. Feedback on task force meeting structure and information gathering:
  - i. Option to hold shorter, item-specific virtual meetings to obtain information and ask questions. These “mini meetings” would then lead up to longer meetings where members could discuss topics after having more time to reflect.
  - ii. Opportunities for task force members to independently take on and research a topic specific to their field of expertise and report back to the other task force members.
  - iii. Opportunities to review expert analyses and compile trend analyses for topics/challenges such as BMAPs that can help guide the task force, and that can be summarized for scientists and the public.
- c. Suggestions for innovative technologies programs:
  - i. Involve the task force members in providing innovative technology funding guidance.
  - ii. Research and focus on advanced technologies that may be beneficial in addressing legacy nutrients and advanced wastewater treatment.
  - iii. Obtain testing locations for biogeochemical processes and other technologies.
- d. Option to revisit the consensus document recommendations:
  - i. Conduct deep-dives on these recommendations and the associated data first, then the task force may have new recommendations.
  - ii. Discuss the agricultural recommendations and obtain available agricultural data.
- e. EO 23-06 includes a focus on the IRL. Whether the task force should take a focused look at the IRL and project prioritization and implementation:
  - i. Suggestion to address the IRL with a case study approach: What is known about the stressors, what is unknown, what approach is currently underway and how the approach can be improved through the resources provided in EO 23-06.
  - ii. Request to have an expert available to assist the task force in any review of the IRL.
  - iii. Recommendation to not only prioritize waterbody restoration in the IRL, as there are other BMAPs that also require increased attention.
- f. EO 23-06 (broad):
  - i. Specific goals for the BMAPs and BMPs mentioned in EO 23-06.
  - ii. Assistance from the task force in determining the difficult but crucial problems to prioritize.
  - iii. Understanding how the non-specific funds noted in EO 23-06 will be used to address their recommendations.

11. The public comment period included the following topics:
  - a. Research on planting certain species of trees or other plants with deep roots that can reach the water table for bioremediation downslope of farms to lower fertilizer runoff.
  - b. Restoration of water quality in the Indian River Lagoon to protect flora and fauna.
  - c. Public notification about blooms and detailed reports to share information with the public.
  - d. Question on whether citrus growers are required to implement BMPs if they are in a BMAP.
  - e. Consideration of a proposed project to clean the water leaving Lake Okeechobee before it reaches downstream to Fort Myers or Stuart.
  - f. Statement of support for septic-to-sewer conversion projects.
  - g. If the use of reclaimed water is an impediment to water quality restoration goals. The need to understand how nutrients from Class AA biosolids, regulated as fertilizer, are potentially contributing nutrients to water quality problems.
  - h. Recommendation that the task force address street runoff, lift station leaks and sanitary sewer overflows.
  
12. Dr. Rains provided closing remarks.