



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

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Blue-Green Algae Task Force Staff Minutes

Aug. 4, 2022
9:30 a.m.

Florida Atlantic University, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute
and GoTo Webinar

General subject matter considered: The Blue-Green Algae Task Force met to hear presentations on Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs), other water quality restoration plans, and existing policy framework for the prioritization of restoration projects. The task force discussed options to enhance prioritization opportunities.

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Dr. Mark Rains	Facilitator	Present
Dr. Evelyn Gaiser	Member	Absent
Dr. Wendy Graham	Member	Present
Dr. Michael Parsons	Member	Present
Dr. Valerie Paul	Member	Present
Dr. James Sullivan	Member	Present

1. Dr. Rains provided opening remarks, called roll, and facilitated the meeting.
2. Dr. Rains provided introductory comments, emphasizing the challenge of land-use land-cover change and the resultant water quality degradation in the State of Florida. The task force recognized the challenge of determining the best way to build some of the original functionality of the land back into Florida's modern landscape with water quality restoration plans, BMAPs in particular, in their [Consensus Document](#). Dr. Rains highlighted many changes have been implemented based on the task force's recommendations, but more remains to be done. Dr. Rains detailed some of the challenges the state continues to face, giving the task force the opportunity to provide additional guidance.
3. Ken Weaver, Deputy Director of the Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration (DEAR) at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) gave an overview of the Clean Water Act implementation in Florida, especially the processes by which impaired waters are designated and Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) are

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.

established. He also gave an overview of pathways to restoration, including stakeholder-driven alternatives to restoration. He discussed the priority setting process for TMDL development of waterbodies depending on waterbody type and impairment.

4. Dr. Rains and task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
 - a. DEP's Watershed Information Network (WIN) database.
 - b. Waterbody categorization. Waterbodies that were impaired that are now meeting their TMDLs are categorized as Category 2t. Waterbodies that are impaired and have a TMDL are categorized as Category 4a. There are currently 453 established TMDLs in Florida, and 105 of these are categorized as Category 2t.
 - c. How and when to determine if a TMDL is working.
 - d. Springs with TMDLs.
 - e. A TMDL cannot be initiated without a waterbody being verified as impaired.
 - f. A community can establish a Reasonable Assurance Plan if a waterbody is trending towards impairment.
 - g. There is a possibility of establishing proactive Protection Plans for waterbodies trending towards impairment, but this is something that has not been done in Florida yet.

5. Kevin Coyne, Program Administrator of the Water Quality Restoration Program in DEAR, gave an overview of BMAPs, especially the process by which projects are prioritized. He described how restoration projects and management strategies are reported in the Statewide Annual Report (STAR). He explained the Targeted Restoration Areas (TRA) approach and how it assists DEP in determining priority areas to focus projects. He summarized some improvements that have been implemented as a result of the recommendations in the Consensus Document, including the TRA approach in the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program BMAPs, increasing surface and ground water quality monitoring, ongoing updates to water quality monitoring plans for the purpose of assessing progress, and increased funding. He emphasized the need to increase the level and amount of water quality monitoring, especially in the springs BMAPs, and the challenges that come with this. He pointed out the challenge of locating available land and funding for large regional projects.

6. Dr. Rains and task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
 - a. The process of prioritizing projects once a TRA is identified.
 - b. How adjustments or modifications to restoration plans are made if nutrient criteria are not being met.
 - c. Hindrances to water quality restoration plans.
 - d. BMAPs often cover multiple TMDLs. Some TMDLs are not appropriate for BMAPs.
 - e. For individual project reporting, the STAR lists the nutrient reduction after a project is considered completed (or ongoing if a reoccurring effort) versus expected or estimated reduction.

- f. DEP's efforts to push for projects that have been shown to work better, and efforts to work with entities in high-priority areas to direct funding and establish projects.
 - g. The importance of concentrating on projects in high-priority areas.
 - h. If and how implementation of restoration projects and improvements to water treatment can keep up with the continued development in Florida.
7. Adam Blalock, Deputy Secretary of Ecosystem Restoration at DEP, gave a presentation on statewide funding streams and priorities, focusing on the funding dedicated towards protecting Florida's water resources. He detailed the gains the state has made to tackle water quality restoration within the following five areas: leading with scientific solutions, targeting water quality improvement, springs restoration, alternative water supply, and Everglades restoration. A summary of the Resilient Florida program funding and achievements were also highlighted.
8. Dr. Rains and task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
 - a. The legislative process for setting the budget and funds disbursement.
 - b. The [grants portal](#) can help entities find funding. DEP does outreach to ensure local governments are aware of funding assistance.
 - c. Federal funds allocated to Florida for grants, loans, and water quality restoration projects.
 - d. State water quality monitoring has been funded out of the "Leading with Scientific Solutions" funding area.
9. The public comment period included the following topics:
 - a. Private organizations' assessment of progress made in implementing task force recommendations in the Consensus Document through legislation and other authorities.
 - b. The recent Lake Okeechobee cyanobacteria bloom.
 - c. The Lake Okeechobee BMAP and hindrances to achieving its TMDL.
 - d. Private enterprises that may be partners to the state.
 - e. The challenges that development brings to restoration and future land use planning, and the importance of incorporating demographic data into the BMAP process.
 - f. The Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)-implemented water levels and its impacts.
 - g. The need for the political will to implement the science-based recommendations to prevent the issues rather than relying on costly and time-consuming remediation projects.
 - h. Some springs BMAPs are not meeting the necessary reductions, and there is a need to enact task force recommendations related to BMPs and to prioritize cost-effective projects.
 - i. Using monitoring data to determine nutrient loads and needed reductions.
 - j. Constraints to the BMAP process, and the suggestion that the task force to develop a more specific consensus document for BMAPs and MS4 compliance.

- k. Timing and frequency of loading to impaired waterbodies. Implementation of projects that work in watersheds with highly altered hydrology.
 - l. Additional resources for Florida's west coast to address water quality degradation.
 - m. Harvesting algae from lakes.
 - n. Projects that have utilized harvesting aquatic plants as a means to remove nutrients from Lake Okeechobee and for repurposing as a soil amendment to improve agriculture production.
10. Dr. Rains and task force members discussed the following:
- a. Prioritization of BMAP projects:
 - i. Revisiting the Consensus Document recommendation of a more strategic approach to BMAP project selection, implementation, and monitoring. This approach needs to include developing a list of the priority target areas for program and projects, and prioritizing implementation of projects focused amongst the major contributor(s) of the water quality impairment.
 - ii. The need for improved cooperation and participation to meet BMAP deadlines. DEP could offer better, larger incentives to these entities in BMAP areas, and/or implement a strategy to push cooperation. The state may need to rethink the voluntary aspect of these plans.
 - iii. The cost-share programs may often be utilized by communities with more funding availability. Considered ways to implement large, high-priority projects in priority areas with a lack of funding.
 - iv. Where regional projects, like regional storage and treatment, might work the best. The need for groundwater protections in order to have springs protection. Examined ways the state can ensure groundwater protection.
 - b. How federal and state funding are integrated.
 - c. Monitoring and modeling:
 - i. Improving water quality monitoring to determine whether the best projects are being implemented in the best locations. Systematic and strategic modeling and monitoring of BMAP projects will inform agencies what is working and when it is working, as well as what is not working.
 - ii. Modeling and monitoring go hand-in-hand. Good, quality data is necessary for a model to work effectively.
 - iii. Recommendation that DEP analyze what made the waterbodies categorized in Category 2t successful, compared to the others that are categorized as Category 4a, for the purpose of informing other water quality restoration efforts.
 - d. Legacy nutrients:
 - i. Ways to differentiate nutrient loads from legacy sources or new sources.
 - ii. Projects that could be done that focus on legacy nutrients.
 - iii. Formation of a separate group to discuss legacy nutrients.
 - e. Innovative technologies:
 - i. Nutrient-reduction efforts and innovative technologies projects. Would like to hear about the progress the state is making on these innovative technologies projects and assessing the successful projects.

- f. Venues for further discussion. Experts in Florida and around the country have knowledge and experience that Florida can benefit from. Getting a synthesis group together to review what's been done, what's known, and what should be done to tackle the nutrient problem would be an excellent venue for thoughtfully coming up with solutions.

11. Dr. Rains provided closing remarks.