Florida State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
June 14, 2023, 9:00AM - Noon

Attendees (Live): Nathan Fikkert, Hilary Barnhart, Jason Strenth, Denise Liggett, Rochelle Urquhart, Jill Binette, Isabelle Giuliani, Marcus Shorter, Bianca Diaz,

Nathan Fikkert, Acting State Conservationist Opening Remarks

- STAC is great opportunity for feedback from partners

Financial Assistance Programs Update- Diana Avallanet, Acting Assistant State Conservationist-Programs

- Overview of CSP & EQIP (see slides)
- Total FA Programs Full Year Allocation $48,856,660
- EQIP Classic – targeting to local level (80%)
- 20% targeted to state level priorities
- IRA - $3M to EQIP and $4M to CSP
- Organic Transition Initiative

Hurricane Ian Emergency Watershed Protection

- 27 requests, 15 different counties (see slides)
- $89.4M in assistance

Ecological Sciences Updates

- Payment Schedule Timeline & Overview – how NRCS determines financial assistance for completion of conservation practices. List of payment scenarios.
- Built to achieve consistencies within the region utilizing components to build the scenario – examples are equipment, labor, concrete, seed, etc.
- Calendar – Review and change requests in March/April; new scenarios or edits are done in June/July. Final scenarios in July. October, the STC makes the final decision. November they undergo a QA process and exported to NRCS business tools for use.
- Florida Updates – Prescribed Burning and Forest Stand Improvement & Woody Residue Treatment
- Review of how to look at payment schedules. Let NRCS know if you see something we missed.
- Get input to Nathan by June 23.

Partnerships & Initiatives

- CIG – Urban ag, water conservation, soil health & carbon sequestration
- Hilary Barnhart is POC
- Deadline for State Proposals is July 14th.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- $500M for classic & AFA projects vs $200M last year

- Submission deadline is August 18, 2023
- Selection Process Reviewed (see slides)
- STAC provides input on how the evaluation is conducted.
- Denise Liggett, will be serving on a 120 day detail, Mike Ruiz will step in as Acting RCPP Coordinator.

Local Working Groups

- Process is being updated to scheduling FY2025 meetings in Spring/Summer 2024.
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts will need to notify NRCS if they plan to schedule/host the Local Working Group Meetings.
- NRCS District Conservationist will submit final LWG responses.
- Updated Plan will be presented in the January meeting for comments.

Easements- Marcus Shorter, Assistant State Conservationist-Easements

- 2 IRA Easements for $2.2M & 456 acres
- Stewardship - $700k. Major focus.
- GARC @ 80% current market value

Source Water Protection Watersheds – Paul Thorpe Dep Director, RM Division NFWMD

- Northwest Florida – Jackson Co
- Florida Aquifer
- Pensacola and Perdido – Escambia & Santa Rosa Counties
- Nathan commented whole state could be a source water protection area – your input is important. Worked hard to prioritize watersheds.
- Question on which ones were selected, practices, and how decisions were made.
- How often are the areas evaluated? Annually.

Aquaculture/Oyster Restoration Subcommittee Update

AFCD – Mr. Buck Carpenter – President, AFCD

- Partnering, assisting with finding resources, bridge gaps and make connections.
- Matt Griffin, 1st VP & Charlene Meeks, ED

Fish & Wildlife – Aline Morrow

- $430k for watershed restoration and North Florida restoration
- $600k for 9 projects
- Chad is working on plan for 5-yr strategy for coordinating with NRCS

Citrus Update- See Attachment

Kevin Carter called in and commented further on Source Water Protection

General Discussion and Questions

Nathan commented on IRA – Additional sources of funding for a variety of our programs.

Next Meeting tentatively scheduled for January 10, 2024

Potential Additional Source Water Protection Areas in Northwest Florida

Several areas within northwest Florida are described below for consideration as Source Water Protection Areas. The areas below are in addition to drinking water source protection areas delineated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) under the Source Water Assessment and Protection Program. The FDEP program can be found at: https://prodapps.dep.state.fl.us/swapp/. The Florida Geological Survey has prepared a Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (FAVA), which provides information regarding the relative risk of contamination based on local hydrogeologic conditions.

1) **Jackson Blue Spring groundwater contribution area**, primarily within Jackson County, Florida – Jackson Blue Spring is a first magnitude spring within the Dougherty Karst groundwater region. Land use in the region is substantially agricultural. The region is characterized by a strong hydraulic connection between ground and surface waters, high aquifer recharge rates, and karst features. The Floridan aquifer, the primary water supply source, is unconfined in most of the area and therefore susceptible to contamination from surface spills, waste disposal practices, and stormwater-driven nonpoint source pollution.

   The extent of the Jackson Blue Spring groundwater contribution area is delineated within the District's 2011 report, Jackson Blue Spring Water Resources Assessment (references below). The 2016 Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, provides a state-approved plan for achieving the Total Maximum Daily Load for nitrate.

   Selected References:

   Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Geological Survey. 2005. Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (FAVA): Contamination potential of Florida's principal aquifer systems. http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/00/09/91/61/00001/FAVA_REPORT_MASTER_DOC_3-21-05.pdf

   Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 2016. Basin Management Action Plan for the Implementation of the Nutrient Total Maximum Daily Load in the Jackson Blue Spring and Merritts Mill Pond Basin. https://floridadep.gov/dear/water-quality-restoration/documents/jackson-blue-spring-and-merritts-mill-pond-basin-management

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2011a. Jackson Blue Spring Water Resources Assessment. Water Resources Assessment 11-01. https://nwfwater.com/Data-Publications/Reports-Plans/Technical-Reports/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2011b. Nitrate Sources of Springs Discharging to Merritt's Mill Pond, Jackson County, Florida. Technical File Report 11-01. https://nwfwater.com/Data-Publications/Reports-Plans/Technical-Reports/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2017. Apalachicola River and Bay Watershed Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan. https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/surface-water-improvement-and-management/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2018. Water Supply Assessment Update. https://nwfwater.com/Water-Resources/Water-Supply-Planning/Water-Supply-Assessments/

2) **Upper Chipola River watershed** – The upper Chipola River watershed is also within the within the Dougherty Karst groundwater region and land use is substantially agricultural in character. Due to the karst topography and unconfined nature of the Florida aquifer system over much of the area, groundwater resources are susceptible to contamination from surface spills, waste disposal practices, and stormwater-driven nonpoint source pollution.

   Selected References:

   Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Geological Survey. 2005. Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (FAVA): Contamination potential of Florida's principal aquifer systems. http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/00/09/91/61/00001/FAVA_REPORT_MASTER_DOC_3-21-05.pdf

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2017. Apalachicola River and Bay Watershed Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan. https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/surface-water-improvement-and-management/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2018. Water Supply Assessment Update. https://nwfwater.com/Water-Resources/Water-Supply-Planning/Water-Supply-Assessments/

3) **Pensacola Bay System and Perdido River and Bay watersheds**, including the Yellow, Blackwater, Escambia, and Perdido river watersheds – The primary source of water for drinking water, agricultural irrigation, and other uses within the region is the sand-and-gravel aquifer, a surficial aquifer present in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, extending into Okaloosa County to the east. Because this aquifer is substantially unconfined or semi-confined, it is susceptible to contamination from surface spills, waste disposal practices, and nonpoint source pollution.

   Significant agricultural land uses are present within the region, particularly within the central-to-northern portions of Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

   Selected References:

   Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Geological Survey. 2005. Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (FAVA): Contamination potential of Florida's principal aquifer systems. http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/00/09/91/61/00001/FAVA_REPORT_MASTER_DOC_3-21-05.pdf

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 1997. Wellhead Protection area delineation in Southern Escambia County, Florida. https://nwfwater.com/content/download/6338/44979/wrsr97-4.pdf

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2017. Pensacola Bay System Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan. https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/surface-water-improvement-and-management/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2017. Perdido River and Bay Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan. https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/surface-water-improvement-and-management/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2018. Water Supply Assessment Update. https://nwfwater.com/Water-Resources/Water-Supply-Planning/Water-Supply-Assessments/

4) **Wakulla Spring and St. Marks River Rise groundwater contribution areas** – These GWCAs are within the Woodville Karst region, which is characterized by the interaction of surface water and groundwater due to the limestone bedrock and karst hydrogeology. The region has numerous sinkholes and swallets, as well as 47 mapped springs. Given the region's karst topography, groundwater resources can be susceptible to contamination from surface spills, waste disposal practices, and stormwater-driven nonpoint source pollution.

   The area delineated within the 2018 Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, is the focus of restoration and protection efforts for the Upper Wakulla River and Spring. Additionally, the Northwest Florida Water Management District's Technical Assessments for St. Marks River Rise and Wakulla Spring and Sally Ward Spring define surface watersheds, groundwater contribution areas, and other features. Links to these references and others are provided below.

   Selected References:

   Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Geological Survey. 2005. Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment (FAVA): Contamination potential of Florida's principal aquifer systems. http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/00/09/91/61/00001/FAVA_REPORT_MASTER_DOC_3-21-05.pdf

   Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 2018. Upper Wakulla River and Wakulla Spring Basin Management Action Plan. https://publicfiles.dep.state.fl.us/DEAR/DEARweb/BMAP/Upper%20Wakulla%20River%20and%20Wakulla%20Springs/Wakulla%20BMAP.pdf

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2017. St. Marks River and Apalachee Bay Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan. https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/surface-water-improvement-and-management/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2018. Water Supply Assessment Update. https://nwfwater.com/Water-Resources/Water-Supply-Planning/Water-Supply-Assessments/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2019. Minimum Flows for the St. Marks River Rise: Leon County, Florida (Technical Assessment). https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/minimum-flows-minimum-water-levels/

   Northwest Florida Water Management District. 2021. Recommended Minimum Flows for Wakulla and Sally Ward Springs: Wakulla County, Florida (Technical Assessment). https://nwfwater.com/water-resources/minimum-flows-minimum-water-levels/

Florida Citrus Mutual has put together information focused on implementing two strategies, Individual Protection Covers (IPC) and Oxytetracycline Injections (OTC), as effective measures to counteract citrus greening disease (HLB). The goal of this funding project is to mitigate the devastating effects of citrus greening and support the sustainable growth of citrus crops. Below, I outline the benefits of each strategy:

1. Individual Protection Covers (IPC):

We understand that funding for IPC's is an already approved method/practice under EQIP, but just wanted to put an emphasis on how important this practice is, and prioritizing funding moving forward for our growers to continue. By enclosing individual trees with protective covers, we can achieve several advantages:

- Exclusion of Pests: IPC acts as a physical barrier that prevents psyllids from accessing citrus trees. This significantly reduces the chances of transmission of the bacteria associated with citrus greening, thereby minimizing the spread of the disease.
- Controlled Environment: By creating a microclimate within the cover, IPC provides a controlled environment for the tree, protecting it from adverse weather conditions, windborne pathogens, and other external factors that can stress the plant and weaken its defenses.
- Reduced Chemical Dependency: The use of IPC reduces the reliance on chemical pesticides for psyllid control. This aligns with sustainable agricultural practices and contributes to a safer and more eco-friendly approach to disease management.

2. Oxytetracycline Injections (OTC):

We also understand that OTC is not yet an approved practice for funding under EQIIP, but we have had conversations on doing a proposal for this through RCPP. The use of OTC offers the following benefits:

- Disease Suppression: OTC injections have shown effectiveness in suppressing the spread of the bacteria responsible for citrus greening within the tree. By targeting the pathogen directly, OTC helps to slow down the disease progression and reduce its impact on tree health and fruit production.
- Preserving Tree Vitality: OTC treatments can help maintain the vitality of infected citrus trees, allowing them to continue producing healthy fruit for a longer duration. This extends the economic lifespan of affected trees and supports the overall productivity of citrus orchards.
- Integrated Approach: OTC injections can be integrated into a comprehensive disease management plan, combining it with other strategies such as IPC, cultural practices, and biological controls. This integrated approach ensures a more robust and effective defense against citrus greening.

By implementing IPC and OTC strategies, we aim to establish a proactive and sustainable approach to citrus greening management. These techniques provide immediate protection, reduce disease transmission, preserve tree health, and ultimately contribute to the long-term viability of citrus farming.

We kindly request your support with the implementation and funding of these two strategies. Your support will enable us to acquire the necessary materials, gather additional data during field trials, conduct further research, and disseminate the knowledge gained to citrus growers in our communities. The outcome of this project will be a significant step forward in combating citrus greening and ensuring the continued success of our local citrus industry.

Thank you for considering our proposal. We look forward to the opportunity to make a positive impact on citrus farming and the wider agricultural community. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or if additional information is required.

Sincerely,

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