

NORTHWEST FLORIDA UMBRELLA, WATERSHED-BASED, REGIONAL MITIGATION PLAN

IRT QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES

AUGUST 11, 2009

[FDOT Maintenance Office – Midway, FL]

Attendants	8/11/09
Andrew Phillips – USACE	❖
Mary Mittiga – USFWS	❖
David Rydene – NMFS (St. Petersburg)	❖
Terry Gilbert – URS (FWCC Consultant)	❖
Joy Giddens – FDOT	❖
Tracey Ludyjan-Ybarra – FDOT	❖
Robert Lide – NFWFMD	❖
David Clayton – NFWFMD	❖

The IRT quarterly meeting was held Tuesday, August 11, 2009, from 2:30 – 4:30 PM (EDT) in the conference room at the FDOT Midway Maintenance Office. IRT members not in attendance were Cecelia Harper (EPA), Ted Hoehn (FWCC), and Duncan Cairns (NFWFMD).

Mitigation Projects discussed were:

- Shoal River Wetlands (UWRWMP 5.2.3)
- Dutex Property (UWRMP 5.1.5)
- US 98 Wakulla River Bridge Mitigation (Westervelt Mitigation Site / St. Marks Mitigation Bank – UWRMP 5.7.5)
- Yellow River Ranch (UWRMP 5.2.1)
- Perdido River WMA – II (UWRMP 5.1.4)
- Womack Creek (UWRMP 5.6.1)
- Site 39 (UWRMP 5.5.3)

Shoal River

The mitigation plan, including wetland lines and community FLUCCS types, is currently being revised by Entrix (formerly BRA). If acquired from the Haiseal Timber Company, this site would be managed by the NFWFMD, with management extending to the 353± acres of floodplain forest along the Shoal River owned by Okaloosa County. Likely management actions would include prescribed fire, removal of offsite pine, oak reduction in adjacent sandhill buffers, and brush reduction within degraded hydric pine flatwoods (degraded from fire exclusion). There is good coverage of wiregrass onsite and some pond pine. Photos of several state listed vegetation species, observed during a cursory site visit on 8/5/09, were shown to the IRT.

Visited two years ago (9/25/07) by the IRT, determination of UMAM values for this site is tabled until wetlands lines and community FLUCCS types are revised by Entrix (formerly BRA) and the mitigation plan updated. Revisions are ongoing and should be completed within several weeks.

Dutex

The NFWFMD closed on the Dutex property (809.85 acres) on 6/12/09 (purchase price was \$1,930,795.77 or \$2,384.14 per acre). Prior to acquisition, a Phase I and Limited Phase II Environmental Site Assessment was performed by WRS Infrastructure & Environment, Inc., during March and April, 2009. No significant environmental concerns were identified by the site assessments. Entrix (formerly BRA) is currently refining the mapping of community FLUCCS types. NFWFMD staff is conducting a hydrological study. A revised Dutex mitigation plan should be complete within the next several months.

Determination of UMAM values for this site is tabled until a revised site mitigation plan is completed.

Westervelt/SMMB Mitigation Site (US 98 Wakulla River Bridge Mitigation)

The USACE permit for the US 98 Wakulla River Bridge replacement specified mitigation at the Ferrell Property (UWRMP 5.7.3). Unfortunately, acquisition of the Ferrell Property (in cooperation with FDEP) has proven infeasible. As an alternative, the NFWFMD has negotiated purchase of 2.46 mitigation values from Westervelt Ecological Services at a site adjacent to the northern boundary of the proposed St. Marks Mitigation Bank (draft contract currently under legal review). Construction of the US 98 replacement bridge is due to begin within several months. In addition to Westervelt, other mitigation alternatives will be considered. The FDOT will request modification of the USACE permit (SAJ-2007-5337 IP-AWP) upon selection of an approved mitigation plan. The IRT will evaluate the need for a lag-time penalty if the mitigation occurs post construction.

Yellow River Ranch

The dike that severed the Yellow River Ranch pasture from the Yellow River floodplain has been breached and stabilized in multiple locations. Fill material from the dike breaches was used to fill in several ditches, which have now been stabilized with vegetation. Herbicides to eradicate exotics and nuisance species have been applied to the pasture with generally good results. Prescribed fire has been implemented. Chinese tallow trees have been treated with the herbicide garlon. Some areas are exhibiting recruitment of native species, whereas other areas will require additional eradication of non-native and nuisance species. Tree and wiregrass plantings are being scheduled. The NFWFMD will submit an application for the restoration activities which require a discharge of dredged material.

Ward Creek West

This site (719.30 acres) was acquired by the NFWFMD 2/29/08 (\$1,936,700 or \$2,692.48 per acre). A timber survey has been completed, a 3rd row cut implemented on portions of the property, and >120 acres have been Gyro-tracked (i.e., shrub reduction for restoration of hydric pine flatwoods and savanna). Timber harvesting should occur in December or January. Thirty acres will be planted in wiregrass, and 10 acres in toothache grass. A single-drum chop is recommended for Gyro-tracked areas before next prescribed fire to stimulate the seed bank. The IRT will closely watch the development of the West Bay Parkway (CR 388) and any impacts which may occur to the Ward Creek West mitigation site.

Perdido River WMA – II

This 67-acre site, part of the Perdido River WMA, is being enhanced and restored as offsetting mitigation for impacts associated with replacement of the US 90 Perdido Bridge. A double – drum chop has been used to reduce shrub and pine sapling coverage within polygons slated for hydric pine flatwoods and hardwood wetland restoration. It was determined that the rougher chop employed at Perdido River WMA – II yielded better results than the finer chop used at the Sand Hill Lakes Mitigation Bank. Windrows have been removed on the western portion of the site. Site-prep burns will occur in Polygons I, II and IV in September or October. A cool-season burn will be implemented on Polygon V this coming winter (2009).

Womack Creek

The enhancement of wetlands at Womack Creek (a 70-acre mitigation site on the eastern portion of Tate's Hell State Forest along the Ochlockonee River) is offsetting wetland impacts associated with four FDOT projects (total wetland impact is 1.00 acre). Although the original mitigation plan for this site specified planting of 20 acres of wiregrass, after brush reduction and prescribed fire were implemented, it was determined that the site would more appropriately be replanted with bottomland hardwood species. The NFWFMD is implementing contingency plans as described in the original mitigation plan submitted to the USACE. The contingency plan consists of replanting the area with more appropriate species. The IRT concurs with the modified planting plan.

Site 39

Site 39 is a relict spoil pile in the Apalachicola River floodplain created from past USACE dredging for navigation maintenance. Discharge of dredge material, apparently during the 1960s, destroyed ~16 acres of high-quality floodplain. The NFWFMD is proposing restoration of this site via removal of the spoil material to natural grade and revegetation of the footprint. Concerns were raised about the compaction of soil and the risk of successful restoration. Given the remoteness of the site, the fact that it is accessible only by boat, and that it is a relatively small mitigation site, the IRT is concerned about appropriateness and mitigation value of the site.

The IRT will evaluate the appropriateness and mitigation value of the site after the restoration is complete.

Items for Next Quarterly Meeting

The IRT suggested that at our next meeting, the Umbrella Plan website be reviewed. It was emphasized that the website be usable, look at the bigger picture, and be kept up to date. Also, the Umbrella Plan must ensure that all mitigation sites have approved JD's and applicable permits needed to complete restoration activities.