

RIPARIAN COUNTY STAKEHOLDER COALITION

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RCSC Quarterly Newsletter

January 2017

This is the first quarterly newsletter for the Riparian County Stakeholder Coalition (RCSC). This update is intended to update the six RCSC member counties of Jackson, Gadsden, Calhoun, Liberty, Gulf and Franklin and other interested parties on the activities, issues, and other work by the RCSC on behalf of the Apalachicola River and Bay.

The RCSC was created by resolution by each county in 2007 and later by compact signed by all six in 2012 to represent the needs of the six riparian counties bordering the Apalachicola River.

Upcoming Meeting

The RCSC will hold an in-person meeting on February 3rd at Noon Eastern Time (11:00 AM Central Time) at the Blountstown Library.

Water Dispute

The RCSC was **instrumental in the creation of the Sustainable Water Management Plan**. A document that was partially funded through our member county support is being **heavily referenced in the current Georgia-Florida “Water Wars”** by attorneys from Florida, Georgia, and Ralph Lancaster Jr., the Special Master appointed to the case by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Sustainable Water Management Plan (SWMP) for the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee and Flint River Basin was approved and completed in 2015 by the ACF Stakeholders Inc.

As a refresher from the 2016 RCSC Summary Report: the SWMP was the basis as “we developed RCSC comments on your behalf to the Army Corps of Engineers update process for the Water Control Manuals that is determining future operations and flows on the Apalachicola River. Included in those comments for the record are specific consensus recommendations for management and operations of the ACF system, specific non-consensus recommendations from the Apalachicola Basin stakeholders for our river and bay, and a recommendation for the establishment of a Transboundary Water Management Institution (TWMI).” The SWMP, the TWMI Study and supporting documents at are found at www.acfstakeholders.org.

2016 Environmental Impact Statement for the Update of the ACF Water Control Manual Update

The Water Control Manual’s Environmental Impact statement is available for public comment. **The final version of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Water Control Manual for the ACF Basin was published on December 16, 2016.** The document was open to agency and state review until January 14, 2017. The RCSC reviewed the document and submitted comments on behalf of the six county governments

substantiating the RCSC. To summarize the WCM purpose and process, an excerpt from the USACE website follows:

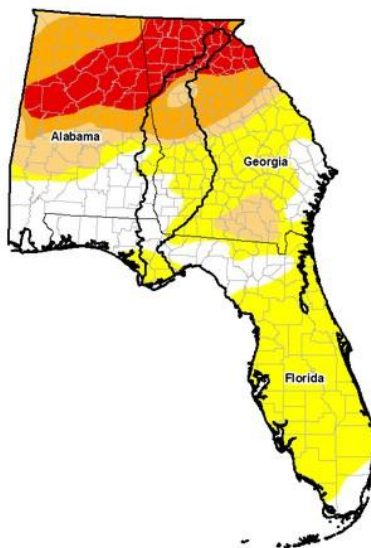
"The USACE is updating the water control plans and manuals for the ACF Basin in order to improve operations for authorized purposes to reflect changed conditions since the manuals were last developed. Updating the Water Control Manuals is needed to determine how the federal projects in the ACF Basin should adjust operations for their authorized purposes in light of current conditions and applicable law. The action will result in updated plans and manuals that comply with existing USACE regulations and reflect operations under existing congressional authorizations, taking into account changes in basin hydrology and demands from years of growth and development, new/rehabilitated structural features, legal developments, and environmental issues.

Water Control Manuals outline the regulation schedules for each project and specifications for storage and releases from each reservoir. Water Control Manuals outline policies and data protocols for flood risk management operations and drought contingency operations. Updated Water Control Manuals are needed to enable managers to strike the best balance possible for the many purposes and demands. A complex set of factors is needed to determine appropriate water management at each lake. In addition to the authorized project purposes, power contract commitments, hydrologic and climatologic factors, downstream lake and basin-wide conditions, potential threats of flood and drought, and lake levels must all be considered. It is a tough balancing act."

[\(http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/Planning-Environmental/ACF-Master-Water-Control-Manual-Update/\)](http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/Planning-Environmental/ACF-Master-Water-Control-Manual-Update/)

It is available at <http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/Planning-Environmental/ACF-Master-Water-Control-Manual-Update/ACF-Document-Library/>

Drought Early Warning System



Intensity:

 D0 - Abnormally Dry	 D3 - Extreme Drought
 D1 - Moderate Drought	 D4 - Exceptional Drought
 D2 - Severe Drought	

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying [text summary](#) for forecast statements.

Drought conditions for the ACF basin are discussed bi-weekly with Drought Assessment Webinars hosted by the Auburn University Water Resources Center and the Nation Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS). These webinars are attended by RCSC staff. The most recent update shared:

"The ACF Basin continued to see relief in the form of precipitation over the past few weeks, and drought conditions have continued to improve significantly. Exceptional drought (D4) no longer persists in the region. Nonetheless, moderate drought (D1)-to-extreme drought (D3) conditions persist through the northern half of Alabama and across a good bit of Georgia according to the most current US Drought Monitor (as of 1/17/2017). The drought map should show marked improvement upon its next release, since the region received significant amounts of precipitation since 1/17.

A long-term plan for drought coordination and preparedness is being developed. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is creating this *Strategic Plan for an Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Drought Early Warning System*. The RCSC submitted comments on behalf of the six member counties under the assumption that as the counties supported the SWMP, the counties would want to continue to work toward a Transboundary Water Management Institution (TWMI).

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Drought Early Warning System Strategic Plan states:

“NOAA’s National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) is continuing the development and implementation of a Drought Early Warning System (DEWS) in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin. NIDIS is comprised of a network of regional DEWS throughout the United States, where, in accordance with Congressionally-authorized Public Laws (P.L. 109-430 and P.L. 113-86), NIDIS is working closely with federal, state and local interagency and intergovernmental partners to improve drought early warning capacity and resilience.

The ACF DEWS is a collaborative federal, state, and local interagency effort to improve early warning capacity and resilience to drought events throughout the region. This is accomplished through local stakeholder-driven activities encompassing data collection and monitoring; research; planning for climate extremes; and communication, education, and outreach activities focus on areas within the ACF Basin. In December of 2009, recurring droughts led NIDIS to select the ACF Basin as a high-priority pilot for developing a DEWS for the Southeast, largely because of the breadth and complexity of the Basin’s ongoing water management challenges. NIDIS held a series of stakeholder meetings and workshops in the Basin. In each of these meetings and workshops, stakeholders expressed the need for better coordination and information sharing before, during and post drought events” (NIDIS, 2016).

(<https://www.drought.gov/drought/regions>)

Other business that may be relevant the Riparian County Stakeholder Coalition interested parties:

Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Stakeholders, Inc.

The following is an update for the Apalachicola Caucus courtesy of Dan Tonsmeire:

“The ACFS has been in a “wait-and-see” mode for some time as the FL vs. GA litigation plays out. In the interim, some members have been working on certain efforts to keep some direction until a clear direction is established. Those efforts include:

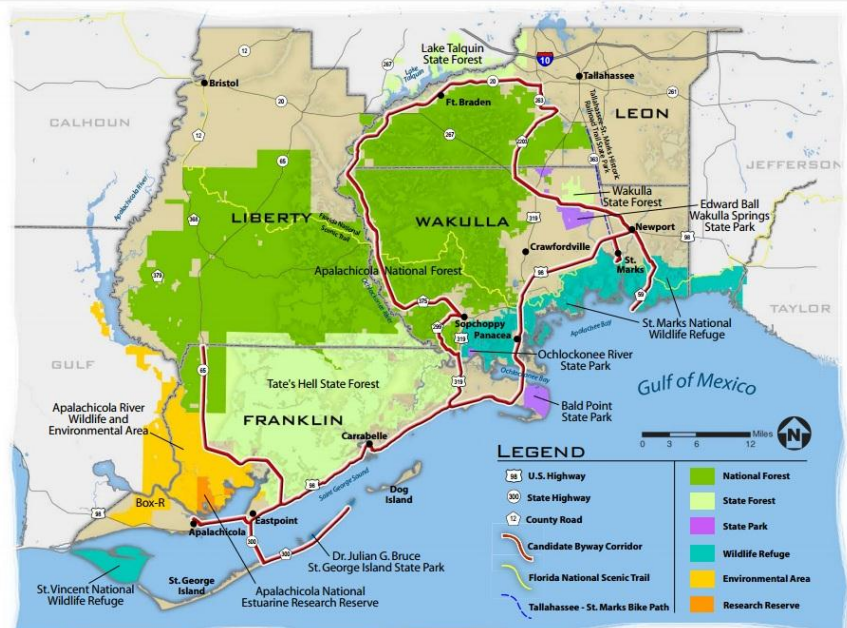
1. Virtual Meeting on January 27th at 10:00 AM concerning a draft letter to the Corps of Engineers from ACFS regarding the recently released Final EIS for the Water Control Manual. You should have received an email with a copy of the proposed letter from Mark Masters in the past few days.
2. Drought Management: Some of the Executive Committee members have been working with NOAA, Corps and other federal agencies and state representative to raise the awareness of

droughts, drought impacts and drought planning. A Scoping Committee has been appointed by the ACFS Chair person. Betty Webb and Joe Crozier were selected as representatives from the Apalachicola Caucus for this committee. This will most likely be the greatest focus of the ACFS over the next year.

3. ACFS – SWMP Video: Chad Taylor has been leading an effort to produce a video that would 6-8 minutes to highlight the SWMP and the ACFS work to produce the SWMP.
4. ACFS Governing Board meeting: This is the next in-person Governing Board meeting tentatively scheduled for March 30-31, 2017 and is planned to be held in the Upper Chattahoochee Basin. Please tentatively mark your calendars and we will confirm this date and specific location when it becomes definite.
5. FL vs GA Litigation: As you probably know, the Special Master has required FL and GA to attempt to settle the conflict one last time and put the results of their negotiation in writing to him by January 26th. I would expect his recommendation to the full court not long after that. The time for the court to make its decision is uncertain.
6. Apalachicola Most Endangered River Conference: The RCSC, ARPC, and a group of conservation organizations are currently planning an Apalachicola Conference for June 1st and 2nd in Tallahassee at the FSU University Center (Stadium). A rough outline of the conference agenda has been drafted and will be circulated to other local governments, organizations, and businesses to help host and/or sponsor the conference. More about this at the meeting.”

Big Bend Scenic Byway

The Big Bend Scenic Byway (BBSB) is making headway through the RCSC area, connecting trails from all over the state. The Panhandle is a major focus area with many multi-use trails that may all become connected soon thanks to Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail (SUNTrail) program funding through the Florida Department of Transportation as well as grants from the Department of Economic Opportunity, among others. The BBSB is working to fiscally stimulate the region with increased traffic of the multi-use trails that are planned currently exist.



CANDIDATE BIG BEND SCENIC BYWAY
Franklin, Leon, and Wakulla Counties



Kimley-Horn
and Associates, Inc.
Produced by the Big Bend Scenic Byway
CAG in conjunction with FDOT and KHA.

<http://www.floridabigbendscenicbyway.org/sites/default/files/media/docs/Big-Bend-Scenic-Byway-map.pdf>

The SUNTrail program has a minimum \$25 million-dollar annual budget through FDOT. It is a statewide network of biking and walking trails.

Chattahoochee-to-Bristol Trail

The Apalachee Regional Planning Council was awarded a Community Planning Technical Assistance Grant to conduct a feasibility study of a trail from Chattahoochee to Bristol. The feasibility study would determine the possibility of the proposed Chattahoochee-to-Bristol (C2B) Trail and linkage of this new trail as an alternative route for the existing Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The trail has been a grassroots effort that came to life after Competitive Florida Asset mapping highlighted many of the assets in the area and the ability of a linkage through extensive public lands. The new trail would hopefully add an economic vigor to a rural and underserved area utilizing the incredible terrain and endemic species found in the distinct Apalachicola River Bluffs and Ravines area.

The C2B trail would hug the eastern bank of the Apalachicola River, running through private and public lands in Gadsden and Liberty counties following the topography of bluffs and ravines of the Apalachicola River. Some of the larger landowners would include The Nature Conservancy, the Northwest Florida Water Management District, City of Chattahoochee, and Torreya State Park.

Associated with the new C2B Trail development will be a proposal of alternative routes for the existing FNST providing one or more potential alternatives to its current route through the Econfinia lands in Bay County eastward to Bristol. This reroute is currently being evaluated by graduate students with Florida State University's Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The proposed route would take a more northern route through Jackson and Gadsden counties passing through or near Marianna, Sneads and Chattahoochee, then turning south following the new C2B Trail to Bristol. This routing of the large-scale reroute would include Florida Caverns, Jackson Blue Springs, Bellamy Bridge, and Three River State Park as well as the previously mentioned sites amongst many others. The current section of FNST for which an alternative route is envisioned runs approximately 26 miles along State Road 20.

The final page of this newsletter contains a map of the C2B project.

