



Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources Advisory Board Minutes of the Meeting on November 21, 2024

PARK BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Tex Carter, Mr. Miles Croom,
Mr. Ermal Gigolaj, Ms. Cynthia Grizzle
Mr. Steven Ochsner,
Ms. Julie Vayne, Ms. Heather Vernillo

PARKS & CONSERVATION RESOURCES STAFF:

Mr. Paul Cozzie, Director
Mr. Spencer Curtis, Deputy Director
Dr. Steve Harper, Park Services, Operations Mgr.
Jp Gellermann, UF/IFAS Extension
Greg Milam, Project Management Specialist II
Joseph Morrissey, Assistant County Attorney
Ms. Deann Baker, Administrative Support Specialist II

A regular meeting of the Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources (PCR) Advisory Board was held at the Pinellas County Extension Building, located at 12520 Ulmerton Rd. Largo, FL 33774 on November 21, 2024.

I. Open Meeting/Introductions

- Cynthia Grizzle, PCR Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.
- Introductions were made. Ermal Gigolaj introduced himself as the newly elected Youth Advisory Committee representative.
- Paul: PCR is going through a reorganization. Spencer Curtis has been named Deputy Director, as part of the department's succession plan. He will be attending each board meeting to provide updates.

II. Approval of Minutes – April 18, 2024

- A motion was made by Julie Vayne and was seconded by Tex Carter approving the minutes with no corrections from the meeting held on April 18, 2024.

III. Citizens to be Heard

None

IV. Brooker Creek & Weedon Island Education Centers Remodel Updates

(Jp Gellermann & Greg Milam)

- Jp Gellermann (UF/IFAS Director) and Greg Milam (Project Management Specialist II) presented a slide show with the updated designs for the renovations at the Brooker Creek and Weedon Island Preserves Ed Centers.
- Weedon Island preserve in south county focuses mainly on coastal and marine related issues and topics and Brooker Creek in north county focuses on water quality and quantity issues, and natural resources uplands and forest related topics. Together they've created over 600 programs with 20,000+ attendees.

- Worked with 3 consulting firms. Stakeholder meetings were held with both Friends groups and the Archaeological Society, gathering thoughts and perspectives, and what they would like to see updated and changed. The firms can then put their plans together.
- Some exhibits at Weedon were in good shape and only needed to be cleaned and updated. The flow of the exhibit hall is good. The archaeological section needs to be updated. The idea is to show what Archaeology is, to educate the public on the rich history & to see what the archaeological site has.
- Brooker has exhibits that are broken and had to be removed. The hall will then need to be reconfigured.
- Proposed dates & times. Completed research and stakeholder outreach. The schematic designs for each center are completed. Jp and Greg visited the contractor's facility in Ohio to see their designs. The contract will be reviewed and goes to the BCC for approval on December 10.
- Budget for the project is \$2.7M. Contract is set at \$2.2M, and this is a Penny project included in PCR's projects for Penny 4.
- The design has been accepted and will move forward with minor adjustments.
- Target completion is 4th quarter 2025.
- Contractor is Exhibit Concepts, chosen through the RFP process.

V. Hurricane Response Update (Spencer Curtis)

- **Fred Howard Park** took significant damage, primarily to the causeway and beach. The land side has reopened with a restroom facility closed, providing temporary utilities. This is due to drainage issues & a lift station that will be rebuilt. Potable water issues that have been corrected. Restrooms and shower towers have been serviced. The beach sand is in the parking lot & is currently being worked on. Restrooms may need to be rebuilt. There will be a delay reopening the beach portion. A contractor will be brought in to "clean" the sand.
- **Philippe Park** – flooding, but after the fact the seawall cap running along upper Tampa Bay was damaged and cracked. There's currently a CIP project to repair the wall, so the new scope will be added to it. Larger issue is the mound having some subsidence, down 16" behind shelter #7. It is currently stable. Consultants will investigate and work on the scope of repairs needed.
- **Lake Seminole and War Vets** – don't tend to have a lot of issues during storms, but both had significant damage. Flooding occurred from Helene. The office area at Lake Seminole had 2' of water, carts and trucks were flooded, and there is significant tree damage throughout the park. Crews are removing trees and portions of the park should reopen soon. Fleet's replacing vehicles and once tree removal is complete, some restroom and shelter repairs will be done.
- **Sand Key** – closed and will remain closed until the sand being staged there has been removed. Contaminated sand from all beaches has been shipped to Sand Key to be cleaned and a determination made on whether it can be cleaned and hauled to the beaches. Sand is also stored at our beach access points and those will need to be cleared.
- **Madeira Beach access** – sustained heavy damage and will be a capital project. There was a washout of the parking lot and the sidewalk connected is sitting in the hole.
- **Ft. De Soto** – projects that were underway from Idalia were made worse. The center section of the sea wall blew out messing up the sidewalk with washout behind it. Half of the dune walkover was destroyed and will be rebuilt. The gulf pier is in good shape. The bay pier is in pretty good shape, but the railings on the bay side are loose. Lost the gangways that provide access to the ferry. They're not salvageable. Debris such as rugs, windows, gables, parts of roofs, etc. are covered with sand on the beach. The contractor will remove large debris first. Environmentally sensitive areas have been identified and hand picking will be done in those areas.

The campground was submerged, electrical pedestals needing to be rebuilt. This will be a 3-4 week process and done in phases to allow campers back in. All boat ramp docks and gangways were damaged, some ripped off the walkways. Contractors removed debris from the water. The boat ramp will reopen this weekend because it is serviceable. FWC is tagging submerged debris and these areas will have posted signs to use at your own risk. The estimated cost of rebuilding it is \$900,000+. We will step through these projects in a manner that will allow us to be reimbursed. The seawall damage at the campground is a \$600,000 project. There are no picnic tables in any shelters on north beach. We will need about 400 of them at \$600 each.

- Recovery efforts will continue for some time. All major projects PCR is working on will be with the same Public Works team that does our capital projects, documenting if they're storm related. Most of the damage will not be covered by our insurance. PCR has approximately \$8M in damages. Currently we're at \$2M in lost revenue, since 9/26. State and Federal funds may cover a large portion, offsetting our costs. We may have to dip into our reserves. We're using red tide funds for beach clean-up efforts, eliminating the need to start a new contract.
- Seasonal passes will be extended for an additional 2 months. All passes purchased this year will automatically be extended 2 months.
- No bed taxes are available for these repairs. The legislature is very specific on what bed taxes can be used for. Bed tax money is going to be used for the beach renourishment projects. We're hoping to use the county bed tax grant program for some new projects.
- Updates to the public? We're currently working with Communications, WFLA, and Bay News 9 for Ft. De Soto updates. The Communications department will be putting updates on our web page. We're still getting questions about our closures. The FEMA process slows down progress due to the extra tasks involved. PCR has been in touch with the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), relaying updated information to them as they will then relay the information to the public.
- Parking fees at all beach parks increased to \$6. Increasing revenues is a way to offset some losses, such as reservation money lost due to the hurricanes.
- Living shorelines update – Philippe Park has the first true installation relating to Parks, and it's been done through our Public Works partners. It's too soon and not established enough to provide a significant benefit. There was no significant damage from wave action; it was just an inundation of water. The purpose is to provide the additional treatment to the water in upper Tampa Bay and to provide additional protection for this historical site. The domes, oyster bags, and plantings are all still intact. The full benefit has not been realized yet, as it hasn't been around long enough. Future plans through our grant funding will include Ft. De Soto, serving the same purpose by holding waves back.
- Weedon Island – crossover bridges on the boy scout trail were lifted & destroyed. It will remain closed until a solution has been found. Changes may need to be made. The rest of the preserve has reopened.

VI. Bee City USA Update

- PCR was highlighted in the Xerces Society Bee City newsletter. We're now in our 2nd year and will be going through the recertification process, which should be completed in February, 2026.
- The 2025 Workplan is proposing for the fall, wildflower plantings and pollinator habitat enhancements. We were working with the Florida Wildflower Foundation to evaluate sites, but this has been postponed until spring. This is promising as we look at ways to increase pollinators and use this to reduce the mowing and maintenance requirements in some of our parks.

- We continue to use Integrated Vegetative Management (IVM) practices to reduce the use of pesticides.
- Signage has been completed as required. When entering Pinellas County in the unincorporated areas, there are Bee City USA Pinellas signs on the roadway signs. Signs have also been put in all parks stating we are a Bee City USA County.
- The wildflower festival scheduled for 10/24 was cancelled and will be held in 2025.
- This board acts as the advisory board to Bee City USA.
- Educators at Brooker Creek provide the education. Pollinators and native bees to Florida training videos are provided by Brooker Creeks Natural Resources agent Lara Milligan and her agents and are posted on the UF/IFAS Pinellas Extension website & YouTube.
- Eckerd College interns at Eagle Lake Park have identified numerous native bees and pollinators that we didn't know existed.
- PCR is moving away from wildflower plantings in medians, leaning towards plantings in right of way.

VII. Parks and Conservation Resources Director's Report

a. CIP Program Update

- Ray Neri Park - under construction and is on schedule.
- Dansville Park – fencing and drainage protection going in now. The groundbreaking was done earlier this year. This park is close to us and Ridgecrest Park off of Wilcox Rd.
- High Point Community Park – we're involved only from a construction perspective. Ready to go by the end of this year or early 2025. There are 3 partners, the City of Largo who will operate and maintain it, the Pinellas County School Board will provide the land, and Pinellas County will build the park. This will be an active recreational facility to include basketball courts and multi-purpose fields.
- At the 11/19 BCC meeting the Commission approved the new concessionaire's contract at Ft. De Soto. After 18 years, United Park Services decided not to submit a proposal for the new contract. Ortega Enterprises dba ExplorUS, operating as Ft. De Soto Hospitality LLC, has the contract. Concessions may be limited in early 2025.
- New reservation software for campgrounds and picnic shelters– shortlist of vendors. We won't be working with the current vendor. The top 3 vendors will provide demonstrations.

VIII. Other Business

- Update on youth athletics and ball fields – the BCC established the MSTU district for the Unincorporated Seminole sports district. They organized the Unincorporated Seminole Sports Association (USSA). All properties were transferred through the license to USSA. No longer operating individually, all are now under the USSA umbrella. Cross Bayou will be the first park and will be a design build and goes out to bid in January, 2025. In May or June of 2026, the facility should open. Once completed, the SJWAA facility next to Walsingham Park will be next.
- Succession Management – Paul is currently in DROP and will eventually retire. The CAPRA accreditation process is being led by Spencer Curtis. PCR is looking at how we can become more efficient and more effective. As the Deputy Director, Spencer has taken the lead on public-facing and operational items. He brings great organizational strengths to the team.
- January's meeting agenda will include electing a new Chair and Vice Chair.

With no further business, a motion was made by Miles Croom to adjourn and was seconded by Tex Carter. The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

The next meeting of the PCR Advisory Board is scheduled for January 16, 2025