



Natural Resources Programs

Bartow Air Base
4177 Ben Durrance Road
Bartow, Florida 33830

PHONE: 863-534-7377
FAX: 863-534-7374
www.polk-county.net

PARKS & NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION

POLK COUNTY LAKES ACCESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Polk County Lakes Access Advisory Committee (LAAC) convened Tuesday, May 10, 2022 at 3:00 p.m. at the Polk County Parks and Natural Resources, 4177 Ben Durrance Road, Bartow.

Members Present: Pablo Sologastoa, Paul Thomas, Bob Sheffield, Larry Johnson, and Cannon Kirby

Members Absent: Tom Palmer (with notice), Adam Bass (with notice), Gregg Watts (with notice), Chad Allison (with notice), and Arlen Ledbetter (with notice)

Guest: N.A.

Parks and Natural Resources: Mike Callender, Tracy Mullins, Brandy Gray

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Paul Thomas called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m.

WELCOMING OF THE COMMITTEE

Paul Thomas welcomed the Committee.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Minutes from September 14, 2021 could not be approved due to not having a quorum present

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER NOMINATIONS

Members that will be terming out in November 2022 are Tom Palmer, Arlen Ledbetter, and Larry Johnson. Gregg Watts and Chad Allison both have one term remaining.

A few of the committee members are going to speak with people that might be interested in serving. Those interested can either contact Brandy directly or members can provide the contact information and Brandy will reach out to them. One individual has already contacted Bill Braswell with interest. The Board will need a brief bio / statement of interest from anyone interested. Meeting schedules are determined by the committee. County Commissioners will approve the new appointees and those seeking a second term.

Brandy encouraged the group to provide names of those interested in serving on the LAAC by October as the terms end on November 16, 2022 and must go before the Board. Some past members may be interested again after being off the committee for a year or two.

LAKE BESS

Bob Sheffield will make a few calls and provide the committee an update.

LAKE BUFFUM / PLANNING COMMISSION

In going through the permitting process for the 5-acre parcel purchased in 2017 for the purpose of constructing a new boat ramp on Lake Buffum, staff discovered that the land development code had changed; limiting the hours a boat ramp facility can be open. Under the new designation, boat ramps must close at 10 p.m. Upon that discovery, staff then started the process of getting that designation waived so that the ramp can be operation 24 hours.

At the Planning Commission meeting, there was a strong contingent there against the new boat ramp; however, the purpose of the meeting was for Planning Commission to vote for or against 24-hour access, not to vote to approve or not approve the ramp itself. Under the land use designation the property was originally purchased under, Recreation Open Space, staff were allowed to put the boat ramp in without going to the Planning Commission for approval. The Planning Commission ended up voting in favor of the 24-hour access with a 5-2 vote. It now has to go before the Board of County Commissioners because it is a Level 4 Review.

LAAC Committee members verbalized their support of 24-hour access; however, no motion or letter of support could be voted on due to there being no quorum present. Committee members asked if they could write letters and attend the meeting as a private citizen at the June 7th Board meeting. The regular meeting starts at 9:00 a.m.; however, this item will take place in the second half of the meeting.

Mike informed the committee members that the Board can not only vote on the hours of operation, but also can cancel the entire project. Additionally, if the Board votes against this measure, the entire policy goes away and all county-owned ramps will close by 10 or 11 p.m.

Mike asked Paul, retired FWC staff member, if there are some facts that would support 24-hour access. Paul will check specifically on the Florida Boating Improvement Program grant. Mike plans to check with the Sheriff's Office regarding crime in the area, specifically at the boat ramp and after hours.

If the construction of the new ramp continues, the old boat ramp will be closed down, surplus, and if not needed, will be sold.

Larry Johnson mentioned that the committee could hold a special meeting in the coming weeks in hopes of getting a quorum to vote in support of the project and to vote to write

a letter of support. The committee decided to have a special meeting on Monday, May 23, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. Brandy will get the announcement placed on the Board agenda taking place on May 17, 2022.

Mike will provide the Commissioners with a history and major talking points, the letter would just need to be a letter of support from the committee. If the committee agrees to write a letter, the Chair can sign the letter at the special meeting on May 23, 2022 and Mike will submit it as part of the staff report.

PROJECT UPDATES

Lake Buffum design is complete. Established permitting process, which has to go to Army Corps. Ironed out elevation changes required for Tedder Boat Ramp. Bidding it so that the contractor will get the bid for actual construction of the site work and civil work. A lot of engineering was needed to make the ramp accessible year-round. Gone through the Development Review Committee. Completed sand skink process through Federal Fish and Wildlife. Hopefully be ready to bid when the Army Corps permitting comes back and be ready to start construction by the end of the year.

Lake Gibson dredged.

Lake Marion – not much of an update. So many moving parts. Earmarking funds to purchase a portion for a boat ramp, but there are a lot of entities involved.

OTHER BUSINESS

Paul asked, in regards to Lake Buffum, if you are speaking with someone as a committee member, you can speak to them in a neutral manner, not swaying them one way or another, but you can tell them about the Board meeting and recommend they come speak either for or against.

Bob asked about the operation of airboats on the Winter Haven Chain of Lakes. Mike said we defer to FWC regulations and noise ordinances. Airboats can not be launched at Lake Rosalie and Lake Pierce. They can be on the lake, but not launched from those two county-owned boat ramps.

MEETING WAS ADJOURNED

Meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m