



# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

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Secretary

## Blue-Green Algae Task Force Staff Minutes

**Jan. 24, 2024**

**9 a.m.**

**GoTo Webinar**

General subject matter considered: The Blue-Green Algae Task Force (task force) met virtually to engage in discussion of the task force's recommendation to establish research synthesis groups. The task force also heard presentations on updates to Florida's Clean Waterways Act stormwater rule and rulemaking and the Innovative Technology Grants Program.

Attendee Name	Title	Status
<b>Dr. Mark Rains</b>	Facilitator	Present
<b>Dr. Evelyn Gaiser</b>	Member	Present
<b>Dr. Michael Parsons</b>	Member	Present
<b>Dr. Valerie Paul</b>	Member	Present
<b>Dr. James Sullivan</b>	Member	Present

1. Dr. Rains, Chief Science Officer for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) provided opening remarks, called roll and facilitated the meeting.
2. Dr. Rains provided an overview of the agenda. He explained that the two presentations (Stormwater Rule Updates and Innovative Technology Grants Program Update) serve as follow-up on the information mentioned in the task force [Consensus Document](#). He introduced the discussion topic, the idea of how the task force can better help the state prioritize research, which has come up in recent task force deliberations.
3. John Coates, Director of the Division of Water Resource Management, thanked the task force for their science-driven recommendations that protect our water resources. These guidelines were the driving force behind the Consensus Document which was embraced by Governor DeSantis and drove the [Clean Waterways Act](#). This Act governs priority-based goals to protect Florida's waterbodies. Following a brief outline of Senate Bill 712, Coates presented updates on stormwater rulemaking and the new stormwater rule (Ch. 62-330, Florida Administrative Code [F.A.C]). He also provided updates to rulemaking for wastewater collection systems, biosolids, and onsite sewage treatment and disposal

Meeting minutes are not intended to act as a transcript of the meeting. To watch a recording of the meeting or to see the recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force, please visit [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov/state-action/blue-green-algae-task-force](https://ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov/state-action/blue-green-algae-task-force).

systems. Coates provided an overview of funds that have been appropriated for water quality improvements.

4. Task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
  - a. The possibility of achieving no change in nutrient loading when the landscape is altered for development.
  - b. Clarification on using off-site compensation to meet stormwater treatment performance standards.
  - c. Clarification on whether the new rule has a means to go back to remediate the existing stormwater treatment systems that are failing or not meeting the standards they should.
  - d. Suggestions to establish a general fund to bring these older stormwater treatment areas up to modern requirements.
  - e. The pre- vs. post-development nutrient loading evaluation.
  - f. Comment on the importance of ensuring best management practices are doing what they're anticipated to do at all concentrations of nutrients.
  - g. Whether adaptive management strategies for increased water quantity are part of the rule discussion.
  - h. The discussions and deliberations between DEP staff, leadership and the stormwater technical advisory committee throughout this rulemaking process.
  - i. Dr. Rains briefly covered the DEP-proposed [Senate Bill 1386](#) and encouraged the task force members to review the bill.
  
5. Edward Smith, Director of the Office of Water Policy and Ecosystems Restoration, presented a brief overview of the Innovative Technology for Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Grants Program to consider the prevention, detection and treatments of HABs in Florida. His overview included the application process, the types of projects considered, project categories, the recently awarded projects and the state-term contracts.
  
6. Task force members asked questions to clarify points of the presentation and participated in points of discussion, including:
  - a. Time frames of the projects and how effectiveness is assessed at the end of the project.
  - b. The quickest way to get updates on new grant funding cycles.
  - c. Whether there are similar steps for nutrient reduction projects as there are for the Environmental Protection Agency and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services permitting process for algicides.
  - d. Emphasis that the program would benefit from external peer-review by nationally known experts in these areas. Explanation of the state-term contracts and the services they can provide.
  - e. External peer review would allow for these projects and initiatives in Florida to be more widely known outside the state. Consider ways to encourage exchanges of information.

- f. Question on where the biomass that is harvested ends up. Currently, the only readily available option is a hazardous landfill, but the program is working with a couple of grantees on alternative solutions.
  - g. One limitation is that funding can go to universities, but they have to be State of Florida universities. Smith presented the task force with the question of how the program can get collaboration with state universities so DEP can pursue these joint efforts to evaluate new ideas and the task force discussed.
  - h. Suggestion for an intermediate or early development stage program or grants in which the state could test some innovative ideas. Suggestion for pilot studies on these types of unproven and novel technologies.
  - i. The final reports for innovative technologies projects will be made available to the public on the website this year.
7. Dr. Rains gave a brief summary of the 2023 Florida Blue-Green Algae State of the Science Symposium II, the reasonings behind why it was held and major takeaways. The task force has previously discussed establishing a broader scale research program to assist the task force as they endeavor to make recommendations. An idea to implement this is research synthesis groups comprised of subject-matter experts and overseen by a task force member or the Chief Science Officer. These groups could synthesize information to better articulate what the scientific community knows and identify gaps in our knowledge so the task force may develop priorities for the state. A broader discussion was held by the task force examining what the state should be focused on, the structure of the research groups and what we expect to learn from them. Dr. Rains and task force members discussed the following:
- a. Considerations before beginning:
    - i. Consider, beyond Florida, what other states are doing. Innovative technologies are where the state can start to test some advanced techniques.
    - ii. Some of this research exists and needs to be synthesized better. The task force will need to prioritize what is critical to the state.
    - iii. Determine existing research and identify needs for additional research with a focus on immediate next steps the state should be taking.
    - iv. Identify knowledge gaps through dedicated working groups with the consideration that there are also complex roadblocks to navigate.
    - v. The “[State of the Science for Cyanobacterial Blooms in Florida](#)” report may be a good place to start. This document may also be used to identify topics the task force should move forward with and to see if there were any other knowledge gaps not mentioned in the document.
  - b. Group makeup and logistics:
    - i. The makeup of these groups is critical.
    - ii. Define what the task force and DEP are looking for, especially the beginning and end of the task.
    - iii. Working groups must include a mix of stakeholders.
    - iv. Start with a clear statement of the intent and the product being sought. Consider ways to approach this global issue in order for the state to learn

- from other places that have navigated complexities, stakeholders, and roadblocks.
- v. Learn from success stories. Suggestion to reach outside of the state and have a series of virtual talks to learn from others. Consider that Florida has less bloom seasonality than many other places.
  - vi. A lot of multi-state teams are beginning to work together. However, some issues are local and unique, and not all of what is learned from other states or countries is going to apply.
  - vii. Discussion on the right amount of people involved and the most productive model.
  - viii. The task force has discussed that each member takes a topic they're passionate about and has expertise in, and lead the coordination of a knowledgeable work group.
- c. Ideas for topics:
- i. Dr. Rains and DEP presented a list of potential ideas but would like the task force's input and other ideas.
  - ii. The list of potential topics sent to the task force members is based on robust DEP internal discussion and include the biology of cyanobacteria, decision-support tools, HABs in freshwater-saltwater interfaces, innovative technology, legacy nutrients, nonpoint source pollution, predictive modeling and springs. Comments from the task force include:
    - 1. Some of these topics could be combined.
    - 2. Suggestion to add stormwater treatment.
    - 3. One topic could be synthesizing information that has been learned outside of our state.
    - 4. Everything on the list is important, but some of the topics might be addressed in different ways.
    - 5. Some topics could be outputs. Part of the discussion could be suggestions that could help those action items or outputs.
    - 6. Toxins could be a topic as part of the biology of cyanobacteria topic. Partnering with the Florida Department of Health would be useful.
- d. Consulting with others:
- i. It would be helpful to consult with DEP, water management districts and/or local entities.
  - ii. Question on whether the task force members should identify topics or if it should be a broader discussion.
  - iii. Stakeholders need to be part of the conversation developing the topics and subtopics.
- e. Mechanisms for choosing the best topics:
- i. Suggest that DEP and the task force identify a list of topics that are important to people. A fact-finding or boundary-setting step may be needed before action steps or solutions can be offered.
  - ii. Would be helpful to have a mechanism for showing the linkages between topics to identify major challenges and gaps.

- iii. Suggestion to put together a conceptual model to inform prioritizations and linkages.
  - iv. May be beneficial to look at other models and to set the boundaries, and to make a conceptual diagram of challenges.
  - v. Necessary to consider steps to be proactive and plan.
  - vi. Consider lessons learned or solutions to start. Consider what might be working on a large scale elsewhere.
  - vii. Suggestion for a mechanism to create a framework under which these groups collaborate, and consider the possibility of creating a small grants program for synthesis in order to clearly communicate the current knowledge in an effort that leads to next steps. Time constraints for many members in a group may be a roadblock.
  - viii. Discussed deciding topics, putting out a call for proposals and beginning synthesis groups.
  - ix. There must be some overall guidance on topics.
  - x. Look at the “State of the Science for Cyanobacterial Blooms in Florida” report to start, build a conceptual model, have a conversation on the topics and goals and then create a request for proposals.
- f. Report back:
- i. Homework for each task force member: Take the list of topics presented, pull it apart and list what’s potentially best to help the state and scientists. The scope of the conceptual model will build from that.
8. The public comment period included the following topics:
- a. Explanation of a system developed for placement in a sediment-laden bottom area of a waterbody for colonization of ecosystem components in the area, creating new hard-bottom habitat. The commenter submitted a paper to the task force members via email.
  - b. Agronomic rates and soil phosphorus indices in relation to biosolids. There is a need for more focus on source control. Encouraged the approval of the draft DEP stormwater rule as quickly as possible.
  - c. Suggestion to continue the state-term contracts and communicate the state grant dollars that are being spent on each company to the public. Encouraged peer review for innovative technologies. The current Lake Okeechobee level is higher than average and that is concerning. Encouraged the task force to think about water management and stormwater treatment area capacity south of the lake in the context of their issues.
9. Dr. Rains provided closing remarks. Sara Davis, Director of DEP’s Office of Environmental Accountability and Transparency, emphasized the vast amount of information available on [ProtectingFloridaTogether.gov](https://www.protectingfloridatogether.gov) and provided an announcement that text message notifications will be available soon.