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Progress continues toward Otter Springs Park and Campground switching from septic tanks to sewer service



Attending the Wednesday late afternoon (Feb. 18) Nature Coast Regional Water Authority monthly meeting in Fanning Springs City Hall are (from left) NCRWA Attorney Mark Logan, NCRWA Chairperson Sheila Watson, city clerk of the City of Fanning Springs, Vice Chairman Bobby Crosby, Gilchrist County administrator, NCRWA Board Member Tim Alexander, county manager of Dixie County, and NCRWA Secretary Cheyenne Stemple. NCRWA Board Member Michael Moore of Bell was absent.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Feb. 19, 2020 at 8:10 a.m.

FANNING SPRINGS -- Three of the four-member Nature Coast Regional Water Authority (NCRWA) members late Wednesday afternoon (Feb. 19) helped progress move forward on a plan to switch a park from septic tanks to sewer treatment service.



Seen here are Jeff Littlejohn (standing) and Scott Forrester (sitting in the foreground), both vice presidents of OnSyte Performance Systems of Tallahassee, and Nature Coast Regional Water Authority Attorney Mark Logan at the front of the meeting room. Littlejohn is starting to tell the NCRWA members (who are also at the front of the meeting room, but out of this photo) about the OnSyte Performance machinery for replacing septic tanks with relatively small, remotely monitored wastewater treatment devices.

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Among the people present in the audience are Chiefland City Commission members Norman Weaver and Lewrissa Mainwaring. Chiefland has been invited at least a few times to join the NCRWA over the past decade-plus, however its elected leaders have yet to agree that the benefits from that action are worth making it happen.

One NCRWA Board member was absent.

NCRWA Chairperson Sheila Watson, city clerk of the City of Fanning Springs was joined by Vice Chairman Bobby Crosby, Gilchrist County administrator and NCRWA Board Member Tim Alexander, county manager of Dixie County.

NCRWA Board Member Michael Moore of Bell was absent for the second consecutive meeting. There were no meetings in November or December. The NCRWA is comprised of the City of Bell, the City of Fanning Springs, Dixie County and Gilchrist County.

The NCRWA is in the business of helping to build infrastructure related to water and sewer services. It does not have taxing authority. It does not set water and sewer rates. Those duties are other functions of its municipal and county legislators.

Two Chiefland City Council members -- Lewrissa Mainwaring and Norman Weaver were present in the audience to watch and learn more about the NCRWA. Suwannee River Water Management Executive Director Steve Minnis recently had invited the City of Chiefland to join this water authority.

The main item on the agenda for the February monthly meeting of the NCRWA was approving a draft agreement by the Suwannee River Water Management Authority for the Otter Springs Park and Campground's onsite sewage treatment and disposal system (OSTDS), commonly referred to as a septic system.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection awarded a \$1.85 million grant to the NCRWA, with Gilchrist County contributing \$50,000 worth of in-kind work, for the purpose of helping the park convert from septic tanks to an OSTDS.

Jeff Littlejohn and Scott Forrester, both vice presidents of OnSyte Performance Systems of Tallahassee, were available to speak about this company's new method for switching from septic tanks to OSTDS.

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OnSyte Performance offers a revolutionary new method for relatively small sewer system service. OnSyte has created a revision from conventional sewer systems that used pipes to carry sewage over long distances to a wastewater treatment facility.

Rather than pumping wastewater to a plant in the City of Fanning Springs from the Otter Springs Park and Campground, a satellite treatment system replaces each septic tank. This system uses the existing drainfield, where the outflow has been improved through a high performance nitrogen-removal process before reaching the drainfield.

These systems are monitored and controlled remotely by certified wastewater technicians who assure that all Florida DEP standards are met or exceeded every hour of every day. These systems transmit readings over the airways to a technician who assures the machinery is performing its job properly.

The OnSyte Performance High Flow Distributed Wastewater Treatment Unit, the largest unit size, has a capacity of 15,000 gallons per day. That is equivalent to 150 bedrooms.

The price for one High Flow DWTU is \$275,000.

Another expense of this project is total engineering fees of Mittauer and Associates Inc. The total engineering fees are shown at \$408,275 now.

Gregory D. Lang, vice president of community development with Mittauer and Associates, was present for the meeting late Wednesday afternoon.

The 10,000 gallon-per-day average flow at Otter Springs Park and Campground, Mittauer Vice President Lang said, can double during surges in population. Gilchrist County Administrator Crosby said the Fourth of July population can exceed that even more, depending on weather and when during the week the Fourth of July falls.

As for the probable future project at Otter Springs Park and Campground, some number of units would replace septic tanks and provide for a very significant reduction in nitrogen output, which will help spring water quality, and subsequently the water going into the Suwannee River will have a lower nitrogen level.

As for the NCRWA, former Treasurer Dan Cavanah of ForVets Inc. resigned. No board member accepted the treasurer's duties, however Cheyenne Stemple, the administrative assistant to Dixie County Manager Alexander, is serving as the clerk or secretary of the NCRWA. She said she can handle the treasurer reports, until the start of the big project at Otter Springs Park and Campground.

When it comes time for disbursing funds to contractors and the like, that will require another person, Stemple said. Vice President Lang said that accounting of funds for the almost \$2 million project is one of the duties Mittauer accepts in its contract for services on this project.

Debbie Destin, Otter Springs Park and Campground manager and a leader in the ForVets' Camp Valor project at the park, was in the audience during the meeting. Destin said she is pleased to see this project coming closer to a time of groundbreaking.

When ForVets completes construction of its Camp Valor facility at Otter Springs Park and Campground, it will be a place for American military veterans to use programs that empower and support returning wounded veterans and their families as the veterans transition back to civilian life.

The NCRWA meets the third Wednesday of most months, starting at 4 p.m. in Fanning Springs City Hall.

This project that has now converted to the onsite treatment plan by OnSyte Performance previously had been planned where pipes would be placed in the ground and sewage would flow from the park and campground to the facilities owned by the City of Fanning Springs.

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That plan changed due to projected growth in the City of Fanning Springs, and the city not being able to handle to projected increase in wastewater generated from the park and campground.

The new plan to do away with septic tanks at Otter Springs Park and Campground will not require pipes leaving the site.

OnSyte Performance Vice President Littlejohn gave examples of places where the Florida DEP has monitored the company's new concept for treating sewage, and it has proved to be successful in its first few years of use so far.

After the meeting, Littlejohn conceded to *HardisonInk.com* that the per-gallon cost for sewage treatment by these relatively small systems is higher than a giant sewage plant like in Duval County (Jacksonville), as a result of typical economy of scale business truths.

These systems are perfect for small, rural communities – such as the one at Otter Springs Park and Campground, Littlejohn added.

Among the successful projects completed by the NCRWA is the providing of drinking water to the Town of Old Town by the City of Fanning Springs.

Attorney Mark Logan of Sniffen & Spellman PA of Tallahassee is the NCRWA attorney. He is working with the water management district to finalize documents required to complete necessary aspects before the contracts to start the project are signed.

The next regular meeting of the NCRWA is set for March 18 starting at 4 p.m. in Fanning Springs City Hall. Chairperson Watson is anticipated to be absent due to planned surgery, however Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III is probably going to serve in place of Watson for that meeting.