

**Babcock Ranch Advisory Group
Public Meeting, November 24, 2015**

Minutes of the Public Meeting

Babcock Ranch Advisory Group (BRAG) Members in Attendance:

Eric Hoyer, Consulting Forester
Walt Bethel, Re/Max Harbor Realty
Lisa Carlton, Mabry Carlton Ranch
Kenny Harrison, Land Owner / Cattle Operation / Arcadia
Gene Lollis, Buck Island Ranch
Temperince Morgan, The Nature Conservancy
Franklin B. Mann, Lee County Commissioner
Nigel Morris, designated by Charlotte County

BRAG Members Not in Attendance:

Mike Kemmerer, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area

Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Personnel Present:

Jim Karels, Florida Forest Service Director
Jeff Vowell, FFS Assistant Director
John Browne, FFS Land Programs Administrator
Sherman Wilhelm, DACS Office of the General Counsel
Duane Weis, FFS Myakka River District Manager
Carl Conrath, FFS Ranch Manager
Bill Korn, FFS Environmental Manager
Catherine Ingram, FFS Land Planning Coordinator
Jennifer Reed, FFS Land Programs Coordinator

The meeting was opened at 9:00 am by Director Karels.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Assistant Director Vowell.

Welcome by J. Karels, explanation of meetings today and process for the meeting.

Introductions by BRAG members present.

Introductions by DACS personnel in attendance.

Introductions by members of the general public who were present.

Remarks by J. Karels concerning appointment of members and the introduction of S. Wilhelm.

Explanation of Sunshine Law by S. Wilhelm. Mr. Hoyer requested FFS contact information. Everything generated in the BRAG meetings are public records. Personal notes are personal,

unless shared with another party. Notes and items to be shared should be sent to FFS personnel to share with the entire BRAG. Noticing is the responsibility of FFS. FFS will be the custodian of the records and will be responsible for the taking of minutes at meetings.

Mr. Morris asked about reporting to an outside group. S. Wilhelm responded that is acceptable.

S. Wilhelm explained the noticing guidelines in Florida Administrative Code.

J. Karels discussed the Statute governing Babcock Ranch, the acquisition of the property, and the management agreement with Kitson and Partners.

J. Karels discussed the 2013 Legislation: Appointment and term of members; reimbursement of expenses; FFS tasked with operating Babcock Ranch as a working ranch; FFS will work with FWC. In September 2015, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Governor and Cabinet) appointed the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) as lead managing agency. The Florida Forest Service (FFS) is acting on behalf of DACS.

D. Weis presented a powerpoint on the history of Babcock Ranch.

E. Hoyer inquired about the 17,000 acres adjacent to Babcock Ranch Preserve (BRP). The property is owned by Kitson and Partners. Group discussion about future development plans regarding the planned community.

J. Karels discussed the next steps for the BRAG and FFS. Provide more access and recreation as the BRP is operated as a working ranch. FFS goal is to manage as well as the Babcock Family did under their ownership.

J. Karels discussed the transition of management to FFS. Issues to work out include: cattle ownership, facilities, equipment, bifurcation, eco-tour management, water, and incorporating Charlotte County and Lee County as partners.

F. Mann asked about the feasibility of the working ranch. Is the BRP subsidized by the State? What is the financial status of Babcock Ranch? J. Karels responded with explanation of budget dollars requested from the Legislature for transition issues. BRP will not have management dollars as other FFS-managed lands do. Kitson and Partners managed without State dollars. F. Mann asked if Kitson was subsidizing operations at Babcock Ranch. J. Karels responded the only information FFS has is that Kitson did not request funds for management from the State.

J. Karels discussed the leases on BRP. FFS is exploring the possibilities of a super-lease or multiple operational leases. The Management Plan (MP) is a critical need for FFS going forward with the lease process. If the property is leased out, FFS staff will be minimal, FFS will continue burning, and FWC will administer hunting.

F. Mann asked about successful financial operation of Kitson. FFS can provide financial reports submitted to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Group discussion ensued

concerning Kitson report and Kitson operations. Discussion continued with focus on: past cypress harvesting; Babcock Ranch Incorporated (BRI) and operations; BRI sources of revenue.

J. Karels: Part of mission of BRAG is to set next meeting. Possible tour of Babcock Ranch discussed. The Ten Year Land Management Plan is overarching conceptual plan for what is planned by FFS for next ten years. Explanation of leasing process and FFS plans for leasing and bifurcation. FFS is in the process of planning management strategies.

K. Harrison responded to group discussion concerning management by asking about Kitson operations, and resources for FFS. J. Karels recently spoke to BRI chair, FFS stayed involved as much as possible with Kitson operations. F. Mann discussed need for several more meetings and more information prior to the August 1, 2016 transition. J. Karels supported need for additional meetings in order for BRAG to help with transition.

J. Browne stated FFS has financial reports from Kitson. FFS will provide what has been provided by Kitson to DEP to BRAG members. FFS is requesting BRAG assistance with management objectives. Legislature has made accommodations for budget dollars, if needed. F. Mann made comments concerning Legislature and funding.

J. Karels stated FFS will not possess all the requested information needed immediately but as further information is received from Kitson and others regards the transition, that information will be shared with BRAG.

J. Karels requested the election of a BRAG Chair and Vice Chair and the setting of the next meeting date.

F. Mann nominated L. Carlton, seconded by N. Morris. All voted in favor.

L. Carlton nominated E. Hoyer as Vice Chair, F. Mann seconded. All voted in favor.

J. Karels asked if the BRAG wanted to set future meetings. L. Carlton supported an on-site meeting with a tour of Babcock Ranch and an opportunity for the BRAG to see the operations of the Ranch with time for a discussion of the finances of the Ranch. BRAG requested later in January, FFS staff will propose dates. W. Bethel asked for financials in the interim, L. Carlton supported.

F. Mann asked for half of the next meeting to be devoted to discussion of the financials and information provided in the interim by FFS, then half the day devoted to a tour of the property. K. Harrison asked for tour to include key areas, transition issues, and management issues. Group discussion continued concerning tour of BRP.

L. Carlton asked about current ranch manager, Steve Smith, with Kitson and his participation in the transition process. Carl Conrath will be FFS Ranch Manager. N. Morris asked for S. Smith to be invited to attend BRAG meeting and tour. Group supported invitation.

At this point L. Carlton asked if any of the general public attending had any questions or comments. The following individuals were acknowledged and given time to speak:

Greg Carlton, Lee County resident. Interested in maintaining the integrity of Babcock Ranch. Discussed cattle leases, super lease, or multiple leases. Supported a super lease with an entity who will be financially responsible, protect the integrity of the property, and be a long term partner. FFS needs a partner who will evolve with operations. Super lease should support all agricultural operations.

Jo Harder: Expressed concern about the logistics of postings for this and future meetings. Will financial data be available to the public? L. Carlton: Yes, FFS will make those available. If the meeting is on Babcock Ranch, will the public be allowed to attend? L. Carlton: Yes, accommodations will be made. Are funds from recreational fees to be used on BRP? J. Karels: By Florida Statute, any Ranch revenues are deposited into FFS accounts for FFS use.

With no further member of the public wishing to speak, T. Morgan requested a copy of the history powerpoint and list of BRI board members.

F. Mann described two letters received from environmental groups regarding FFS management and added that the Lee County tract should be labeled the Bob Janes Preserve.

J. Karels explained of the meetings for the rest of the day.

L. Carlton moved for adjournment.

BRAG meeting adjourned at 10:35 am.