

## **Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team**

### **2002 BISCAYNE BAY ACTION PLAN**

#### **Introduction**

In 1999, the Florida Legislature created the Biscayne Bay Partnership Initiative (BBPI) to survey the status of Bay resources and management. Its mission was “*the development of an open and inclusive, community-based forum to survey public and private sector activities and programs affecting Biscayne Bay, and to provide recommendations for actions to protect, improve, and enhance the bay’s resources, its social, economic, and natural values, with its ecological health as a priority.*” In January 2001, the BBPI issued a final report to the Florida Legislature which included its findings and recommendations for actions needed to protect, improve, and enhance the Bay’s values.

#### *The Action Plan and Role of the BBRCT*

The BBPI philosophy included a belief that apparent conflict between values – such as access, economic use, and environmental protection - can be managed through stakeholder involvement and collective commitment to a common vision of Biscayne Bay. As a step toward such a common vision, the BBPI final report recommended the development of a Biscayne Bay Action Plan. The general objectives of this plan, as identified by the BBPI include the following:

- Aid in the ability to think holistically about the bay, its needs, and the needs of the community
- Guide efforts to balance environmental protection, increased habitat restoration, appropriate economic use, and improved public access.
- Expand public awareness of Biscayne Bay as a critical resource and maintain adequate funding for its management and protection

The BBPI also recommended the establishment of the Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Team (BBRCT) as part of the Working Group of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. The Working Group chartered the Team in September 2001 to help sound a unified voice for Biscayne Bay, improve coordination, and serve as a public clearinghouse for Biscayne Bay issues. It includes representatives of 23 governmental and non-governmental agencies (please see Appendix A for a full description of the BBRCT charter and list of its members). The BBPI Final Report identified the BBRCT as the group that would lead a consensus process and prepare the Biscayne Bay Action Plan described above.

#### **Background**

Biscayne Bay has been the subject of many studies and management programs over more than two decades. Numerous federal, state, and local government agencies are involved in resource preservation, restoration, planning, monitoring, regulation, and enforcement activities in the Bay and its watershed. Although varying levels of funding have been

provided for Bay restoration and enhancement since the early 1980's, many needed projects and programs remain unfunded. Furthermore, although the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) is bringing a large amount of attention and funding to south Florida generally, strong advocacy for Biscayne Bay's needs is required to maintain its profile with other important resources. The BBPI process therefore emphasized the need to identify Biscayne Bay funding priorities and opportunities to secure additional support through appropriations and grants for the key projects.

The BBPI Final Report identified six overarching themes that were raised by numerous participants in the survey teams. These themes are:

- *Charting the course for ecosystem and water management planning.* Many ongoing regional restoration and management plans that are likely to affect Biscayne Bay are underway. The outcome is dependent on effective coordination and adequate technical and scientific information to support decision making.
- *Reversing habitat loss.* Past development and water management destroyed or degraded the Bay and wetlands, and the natural hydrology was altered. Restoration of these resources is critical for maintaining water quality, as well as supporting fisheries and wildlife resources.
- *Sounding a voice for Biscayne Bay.* Biscayne Bay's needs are most likely to be provided for when those who use, manage, and enjoy the bay speak with a unified voice.
- *Unlocking access to the bay.* The bay should be accessible to all segments of the community in a sustainable manner that protects resources as well as the experience of other users.
- *Promoting education and stewardship.* Multicultural education and outreach for all levels will contribute to a sense of ownership and community pride, as well as help to conserve resources.
- *Dealing with population growth and sea level change.* Anticipated increases in sea level and population will have impacts on the bay, its watershed, and level of resource use and consumption. Long term planning and studies are needed to prepare for these changes.

The BBPI Final Report also identified specific tasks or key activities associated with each of these themes and emphasized throughout the importance of developing critical science information to protect the Bay and support management decisions related to its restoration and use.

### **Related Biscayne Bay Planning and Management Activities**

Past and ongoing environmental planning and management programs have identified many specific actions, including technical tasks, studies, or restoration projects, that are critical for protecting and enhancing the values of Biscayne Bay. Researchers, agency professionals, and community organizations are already working on restoration and enhancement projects, and several project-specific advisory or technical committees have been established to guide regional restoration projects that may affect Biscayne Bay. Table 1 provides a summary of some of the most significant related programs.

**TABLE 1 - RELATED BISCAYNE BAY MANAGEMENT EFFORTS**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
Biscayne Bay Management Plan	Miami-Dade County	Comprehensive plan for the Bay and shoreline, including public access	Completed and adopted 1981
Biscayne Bay SWIM Plan	SFWMD	Focus on water quality and quantity improvement	Completed, updated 1995
South Dade Watershed Plan	Miami-Dade County, SFRPC	Integrated land use and water management for south Miami-Dade	ongoing
Biscayne Bay Restoration and Enhancement Program	Miami-Dade County	Habitat restoration, access improvement, monitoring	Ongoing; 1979 to present
Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan	USACE, SFWMD	South Florida natural system restoration and water supply protection; includes projects which directly and indirectly affect Biscayne Bay	ongoing
Lower East Coast Regional Water Supply Plan	SFWMD	Establish flows and levels necessary to provide water for human needs and natural systems	ongoing
Stormwater Master Plan	Miami-Dade County	Improve drainage and reduce pollutant loads for existing and future land use	ongoing
Biscayne Bay Partnership Initiative	SFWMD, Biscayne Bay Foundation	Inclusive survey of activities affecting the Bay; recommendations for improving and protecting bay values	Completed 2001
Biscayne National Park General Management Plan	National Park Service	Update plan for protection of park resources and visitor experience	ongoing
Biscayne Bay Strategic Science Plan	Florida Bay & Adjoining Waters PMC	Identifies critical research and monitoring needed for management decisions	Completed 2002

## **Future Directions: Transforming Recommendations to Actions**

Past and ongoing planning efforts should not be duplicated or supplanted by the new BBRCT Action Plan, outlined in this report. The work already accomplished or in progress can serve to guide the BBRCT, or in some cases the programs underway can provide a mechanism to implement tasks. Interagency coordination and integration of programs, as well as additional funding for critical projects, is needed to transform recommendations into action. The BBRCT can be a forum for coordination among agencies and with the public, and become an advocate for implementation of tasks already identified in technical and scientific plans. In addition, the BBRCT is situated to update and identify actions needed to address public access and awareness, recreation, use of public lands and resources, and balancing economic uses with environmental values. More detailed “Action Steps” that are needed to move toward implementation or actual improvements are listed below.

### **Key Action Steps**

*Coordination:* A large number of government and non-government programs are underway which affect Biscayne Bay. Although significant efforts are being directed at improving Bay values, unless there is active coordination, it is possible that various groups will duplicate each other’s efforts, or develop approaches that are inconsistent. This could result in inefficient use of limited funding or staff resources, or even create conflict among stakeholders. It is also possible that critical tasks or Biscayne Bay issues will be overlooked, particularly in the context of CERP, if it is assumed that another program or organization is addressing them. There are several levels of coordination that have been identified: 1) CERP related activities that affect Biscayne Bay; 2) interagency coordination among government organizations involved in Bay management; 3) linkages among related advisory and technical committees; 4) communication among government, community, and private stakeholder groups. The following tasks or actions are suggested for improving coordination within each of these four levels.

- CERP-related Coordination
  - Schedule a workshop for BBRCT and the public that includes presentations from the USACE and/or SFWMD to explain
    1. The overall CERP process
    2. Biscayne Bay related CERP projects, such as the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project, C-111 modifications, wastewater reuse
  - Include regular updates on the progress of CERP projects at BBRCT meetings and website
  
- Government Interagency Coordination
  - FWC shall host annual enforcement workshop for on-water law enforcement officers
  - BBRCT shall assist in development of an inventory of on-water enforcement and related enforcement staff resources in the watershed. This shall include

- federal, state, and local marine enforcement and patrol, environmental enforcement units or staff assigned in the watershed, and park rangers.
- BBRCT shall request semi-annual status reports on priority Biscayne Bay projects from member agencies, including but not necessarily limited to:
    1. SFWMD
    2. Miami-Dade County
    3. Biscayne National Park
    4. FDEP
    5. FWC
    6. USFWS
  - BBRCT shall prepare an annual “State of the Bay” status report summarizing major accomplishments, appropriations, or legislative activities. This report should feature specific goals or measures with a “report card” on progress.
  - With SFWMD and its contractors, BBRCT should assist in the development of a GIS data layer showing all government-sponsored Biscayne Bay habitat restoration, shoreline enhancement, and conservation projects
- Linkages Among Related Committees (including but not limited to the South Miami-Dade Watershed Advisory Committee, Florida Bay and Adjoining Waters Program Management Committee (PMC), CERP teams, FKNMS Advisory Committee, Miami River Commission, Virginia Key Advisory Committee)
- BBRCT shall compile information on the scope and objectives of related committees to identify common interests
  - BBRCT shall invite other committees to hold joint meetings on topics of common interest
  - BBRCT shall facilitate exchange of information among scientists and managers through the PMC or other appropriate technical committees
  - BBRCT shall invite topical presentations on projects or activities that affect multiple committees
  - BBRCT shall minutes or meeting summaries from related committees
  - BBRCT shall provide web links to other committee sites
- Communication Among Government, Community, and Private Sector Stakeholders
- BBRCT shall host workshops or other informational public meetings on Bay management issues

*Funding Advocacy.* In its first year, the BBRCT has already provided guidance to the Florida Legislature on Fiscal Year 2002 funding requirements and priorities for Biscayne Bay projects and management activities. This role is expected to continue and be broadened to include longer-term funding needs as well as identifying additional sources of funding through other government or private partnerships.

- BBRCT shall develop a more well-defined procedure for screening funding requests and reviewing or ranking projects to be recommended for funding
- BBRCT should identify approximate project-specific costs for habitat, access, and infrastructure improvements and land acquisition necessary to protect and enhance Bay values

- BRRCT should coordinate with the PMC or other appropriate technical committees to identify approximate costs for scientific, economic and engineering data or modeling need for the development of sound management decisions
- BRRCT should examine additional funding sources and grant opportunities for projects identified above, including but not limited to the following:
  - Biscayne Bay auto specialty tag
  - State grants and funds (Florida Communities Trust, CARL, greenways and trails, etc.)
  - FIND assistance program
  - Federal grants and appropriations

*Public Access and Public Interest.* Biscayne Bay is a public resource and should be accessible to all sectors of the community. Access and use of the Bay, however, must be sustainable and must not be allowed to damage the Bay's natural values or the experience of other users. The BRRCT Action Plan will help to create linkages between major segments of the population and shoreline sites that currently provide or should provide desired uses. The Plan should also promote links among shoreline activities, access sites, and transportation modes. The BRRCT may also consider mechanisms to incorporate elements that benefit the public into private development of the waterfront. A study currently being conducted for the SFWMD by the Trust for Public Land will address several of the tasks listed below.

- Compile information on Bay values
  - Conduct comprehensive economic inventory of commercial, recreational, and aesthetic values of the Bay. This inventory should include other traditional water-dependent activities, such as fishing (commercial and recreational), marine construction (including environmental restoration), swimming, cruising, and watersports. It should also assess values of water-related business and recreation such as restaurants, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, film-making, and advertising.
  - Conduct a survey of the general public to identify their values and visions for the Bay. Determine how those who do not own waterfront land or a boat use or benefit from the Bay.
  - Provide information on maritime transportation and commerce.
- Shoreline Development
  - Assess effectiveness and compliance with Miami-Dade County "Shoreline Development Review" and municipal ordinances relating to waterfront development and public access. Consider both public and private developments. Make specific recommendations to local government regarding effectiveness of these regulations.
  - Evaluate the feasibility of a "public access compensation" fund or fee that could be used when developers receive a variance from waterfront zoning, setbacks, or other access requirements. This fund could be used to implement park improvements, greenways, or public land acquisitions that provide or improve access. Criteria for equitable assessment and distribution of funding would be required.
  - Recommend water-dependent and water-related uses be maintained and/or enhanced during redevelopment of both public and private parcels.

*Public Land Management and Acquisition:* The BBRRCT, using a consensus-building approach, should provide guidance on appropriate use and development of public waterfront and nearshore parcels. This task is related to the *Public Access and Public Interest* task identified above, since various parcels already in public ownership or that are being considered for acquisition may be used for conservation, restoration, recreation, education or other appropriate public purposes.

- ❑ In cooperation with ongoing land acquisition listing processes, identify parcels appropriate for acquisition
  - Preservation/conservation lands
  - Restoration or buffer lands
  - Active recreation or public access
- ❑ Develop GIS database and map identifying all parcels within one block of the shoreline or tidal wetlands that are in public ownership.
  - Identify their designated use (eg. school, utility, transportation, park, conservation, school, lease for private purpose)
  - Identify revenues for lease of public-owned lands for private purpose.
- ❑ Propose specific language or standards relating to appropriate, environmentally sustainable use of public-owned waterfront lands (see BBPI Final Report for general concepts)
  - All parks and rights-of-way should be accessible to the general public
  - Public access should be enhanced on other government-owned lands to the extent possible, considering environmental protection and public safety requirements (*This could include lands owned by utilities, colleges and institutions, road rights-of-way, levees, dredge-spoil islands, etc.*)
  - Sensitive vegetation and wildlife should not be harmed by public use
  - Preserve or enhance water-dependent uses
  - Access should be equitable to all segments of the community
  - Consider whether public waterfront lands should be leased for private or commercial purposes, and if so what kind (only water-dependent or water-related businesses, educational or entertainment, public or private access, etc.)
- ❑ Develop specific lists of improvements to existing parks that would enhance sustainable access (*eg. additional parking at Alice Wainwright, baywalks at Bicentennial, public transportation to Biscayne National Park, canoe or kayak rental at Deering Estate or Oleta River, etc.*)
- ❑ Develop site-specific management plans or proposals for creating or increasing environmentally-sustainable access at under-utilized sites already in public ownership, including but not limited to:
  - Virginia Key
  - Chapman Field
  - Watson Island
- ❑ BBRRCT shall hold community workshops to address concerns with increased access as necessary (eg. security, vagrants, homelessness, noise, traffic, environmental impacts, etc.)

*Outreach and Awareness:* There are many Biscayne Bay-related education and outreach activities being undertaken by government agencies, schools, and non-profit organizations. The BBRRCT can serve as a clearinghouse to collect available information and disseminate it. An existing project aimed at coordinating educational activities and developing a specific, detailed action plan is being undertaken by Citizens for a Better South Florida under a contract with the SFWMD. It is anticipated that the Action Plan will address a broad range of subjects that are interrelated with the Bay environment, such as ecology, culture, history and environmental science. Several of the tasks below are included in this project.

- ❑ Complete the development of the DiscoverBiscayneBay.org website
- ❑ Compile a list of other Biscayne-Bay related web sites and include links
- ❑ Create a comprehensive Biscayne Bay environmental education/outreach information database of existing programs, efforts, resources and materials
- ❑ Develop and establish a coordinated Biscayne Bay environmental education partnership among existing organizations
- ❑ Create an innovative action plan to educate all members of the community including:
  - Primary, secondary, post-secondary students and educators
  - General public with emphasis on minority groups and underserved-communities
  - Public officials and decision makers
  - Direct users
  - Tourists

#### **Prioritize and Identify Biscayne Bay Management Concerns**

- ❑ Identify and provide to and from scientists priority management issues to help them determine research and monitoring needs
- ❑ Identify and provide to agency and elected decision-makers priority management issues and goals to help them establish budgets and to make appropriate legislative decisions
- ❑ Identify issues that impede restoration efforts