Program Name: **C&SF: CERP PLA/Public Outreach and Assistance**
Program ID: 3502
Lead Agency: SACE / SFWMD
Authority: WRDA 2000; Design Agreement, WRDA *2007 (specific authorized funding)*

Strategic Plan Goal(s) Addressed: 3-A.3

Measurable Output(s): Development and distribution of educational materials through various printed and electronic media including brochures, newsletters, kiosks, CDs, radio, television, and the internet. Conduct and engage public in regular meetings.

April 1999 (Restudy) Program Synopsis: The Restudy listed guidelines for implementing CERP and stated that outreach and public involvement efforts were an integral part of the process and would continue throughout the planning, design, construction, monitoring, and implementation of CERP. The objective of all outreach activities was to ensure that the public is informed about the Plan and that its implementation is reflective of the input received from stakeholders and the public throughout the project's implementation.

Current Program Synopsis: Public outreach is a critical part of CERP. Its two primary components -- involvement and information -- continue to play a key role in the CERP implementation effort. The primary objectives of outreach are to (1) keep the public informed of the status of the program or project and key issues associated with restoration implementation, and (2) provide effective mechanisms for public participation in the restoration plan development. A *CERP Public Outreach Program Management Plan* approved in 2001 describes these outreach goals, objectives, and tasks in more detail.

Since 2001, the USACE and SFWMD have implemented an ongoing multi-faceted public outreach program for the CERP. Outreach strategies seek two-way communication with all public sectors to broaden understanding and to instill a sense of stewardship among all south Floridians and visitors. Two separate and simultaneous levels of public outreach have been employed:

Program-level Outreach - involves long-term, system-wide issues at an overarching program level such as general outreach, RECOVER, environmental equity and other CERP issues that span the life of the 30+ year plan.

Project-level Outreach - involves targeted outreach for the 50+ specific CERP components: the individual reservoirs, underground storage wells, filtering wetlands, and other local project features. A custom outreach plan is developed for each individual CERP project. While program and project outreach activities are considered separate, there is often a great overlap of materials, tools and techniques. The same overarching CERP messages apply to both program and project level outreach activities.

A broad array of outreach involvement and information programs has been developed to include the general public, minority groups, small businesses, and specific stakeholder audiences. The program has included public meetings and workshops; news media relations; creative and unusual information products; environmental education; print, electronic and Internet materials; and many other programs and products to ensure the public is engaged and involved in CERP. The main focus of the outreach efforts is the 16-county central and south Florida region, the area most affected by CERP. However, outreach activities and products also reach people throughout the state of Florida, the nation and the world.

WRDA 2007 amended section 601 (k) of WRDA 2000, to support those requirements with an allowance for the Secretary to expend up to $3,000,000 per fiscal year (beginning after September 30, 2004) for public outreach, education and business assistance.

Highlights of this very diverse outreach program, from the past two years, follow below.

Current Status: The USACE and the SFWMD continued to make much progress during this reporting period to raise awareness of central and south Florida's public-at-large and socio-economically impacted communities about CERP and the restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem. For the federal government, the message began to transition from a decade of planning in the 1990s, to an exciting decade of groundbreakings starting in 2010.

Innovative products, unique delivery methods, and public involvement all helped ensure that CERP and the greater Everglades ecosystem were better understood and that the public had opportunities to participate in decision-making. Between July 2008 and June 2011, the USACE:

- Distributed over 450,000 newspaper inserts, brochures, posters, eco-friendly promotional items, and other materials about CERP.
- Developed culturally-sensitive outreach programs and products to reach African American, Haitian and Spanish-speaking communities.
- Launched a new mobile information van about Lake Okeechobee and CERP, along with a message about the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation project.
- Participated in at least 30 community events each year, with staff, a display and materials.
- Continued with a very successful environmental education program with materials for K through 5th grade and online resources.
- Introduced a new line of products featuring the Florida panther to raise public awareness of this endangered animal in southwestern Florida, where the Picayune Strand Restoration Project is located.
- Introduced a statewide public service billboard campaign focusing on non-native species, and urging residents to "don't let it loose."
- Held two Everglades restoration ground-breaking ceremonies, both of which received national news media attention (Tamiami Trail Modifications and Picayune Strand Restoration Project). More than 200 people attended each.
- Two additional groundbreakings were held in 2011 – one for the Faka Union portion of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project and the other for the first phase of the Indian River Lagoon-South project.
- Organized an Everglades art program for an inner city after-school program in Miami's Little Haiti, which featured art instruction and lessons about the ecosystem.
- Organized an Earth Day event on the shores of Lake Okeechobee, attracting a wide variety of attendees and hundreds of student drawings.
- Distributed a newspaper insert twice a year to African American and Hispanic readers, to raise awareness about opportunities to participate in Everglades restoration *(Community Outreach in Action)*.

- Continued to translate materials into Spanish and Creole, as needed.
- Distributed 14 issues of an electronic newsletter about Everglades' restoration *(Everglades Report)*.
- Launched a newsletter about Lake Okeechobee and the associated dike rehabilitation project *(Big Water Bulletin)*.Held several public meetings each year for CERP or other Everglades restoration projects.
- Distributed news releases for CERP and related topics.
- Created and uploaded videos of Everglades topics on USACE internet sites.
- Updated the official CERP web site with current information, including many of these public information products. Some content is available in Spanish and Creole.
- Began including information on Facebook and other social media sites.

While these efforts were organized by the USACE, they often included the SFWMD as a major state partner in the restoration of the Everglades. Ongoing efforts are summarized below:

General Public Awareness. There are more than 7.5 million residents in the 16-county CERP area, and there will be many more in the decades ahead. It is important to raise awareness of the population-at-large so people can appreciate the benefits of the program and so they can participate in CERP decision-making, if desired. Many successful outreach efforts took place to raise awareness of and encourage involvement in the CERP. These included special events, distribution of materials, updating the web site, and other ways to engage and involve the public and special interest groups. A sample of USACE efforts is listed below.

- **Web site update:** The official CERP web site at www.evergladesplan.org continued to provide an important source of current and archived news and information to the public and stakeholders. New information was uploaded regularly. The web site home page was completely updated during this period, and "behind the scenes" improvements were made to ease use of the web site.
- **Toll-Free line:** A toll-free telephone line continued this reporting period. The line **(1-877-CERP-USA)** is recorded in English and Spanish, is updated periodically, and allows callers to leave a recorded message to receive information in mail in English or Spanish.
- **Everglades Radio Network:** The Everglades Radio Network (ERN) was the first FM version of a highway advisory radio station in Florida designed to educate and inform Florida's residents and visitors about the expansive Everglades ecosystem. The network's original programming highlights the natural wonders and environmental challenges facing the restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, as well as profiles of individuals and organizations associated with the region. Serving as a vital link to more than 18,000 motorists daily, ERN also enhances highway and public safety by airing emergency weather bulletins, travel advisories, and Amber Alerts along Alligator Alley, the reversible hurricane evacuation route linking southwest and southeast Florida. Broadcast from Florida Gulf Coast University, the magazine-style continuous broadcast from WFLP-LP or WFLU-LP (FM 98.7 or 107.9) features details about the Everglades ecosystem, its wildlife and habitat, along with a history of the Everglades and the natural and man-made forces affecting its future. All of ERN's segments are also available over the Internet at www.evergladesradionetwork.org. The website links to the live streaming broadcast or individual segments in MP3 format, which are available to be downloaded for educational purposes.

Network of kiosks: A network of CERP touch-screen kiosks was maintained, with messages in English and Spanish. The USACE maintains eight kiosks, and several other identical kiosks are owned by partner organizations. The kiosks have a detailed message about CERP and Everglades' restoration. A new kiosk was placed at the Loxahatchee River District in Jupiter in late 2008.

- **Print and electronic newsletters:** An electronic newsletter about CERP news and projects, *Everglades Report,* continued to be distributed in print and electronic format six times a year. A print newsletter about Lake Okeechobee, *Big Water Bulletin*, was introduced in 2009.
- **CERP fact sheets, promotional items, and a report.** Fact sheets were produced on CERP projects and engaging promotional items helped keep the CERP fun at community and other events. The 2007-2008 *CERP Report to the Public* was printed, distributed and placed online.
- **Interactive game.** The interactive "*Name that CERP Sound*" game, featuring the sounds of birds and other animals of the Everglades, was updated this reporting period. It continued to be a favorite of the public-at-large.
- **Billboard campaign:** The USACE spearheaded the introduction of a billboard public service campaign to help raise awareness of non-native species. "Don't Let it Loose" billboards were starting to appear around the state in 2009 – on free space donated by the Florida Outdoor Advertising Association – to encourage viewers not to let non-native plants or animals go into the wild. The infestation of the Burmese python in central and south Florida highlighted the problem nationally of non-native species. An associated web site is available (www.dontletitloose.org).
- **Displays and events:** The USACE and its partners participated in many events and conferences to raise awareness about CERP, the Everglades, and related programs. Displays, printed products, educational and informative promotional items, and knowledgeable staff were at these events, reaching tens of thousands of people over the two-year period.

Minority Community Outreach. Special efforts continued to reach south Florida's African American, Haitian, and Hispanic residents with the CERP message. Minorities represent a large and growing segment of south and central Florida's population (perhaps more than 50% collectively), and will be a large part of the CERP in the years ahead. It is important reach all ethnic groups with the CERP message, so the final plan represents the varied interests of all groups. Many minorities receive their news through the mainstream media and the general public awareness programs mentioned above. However, some are more comfortable reading materials in their native language or participating in events in communities with historically large minority populations. The USACE has a number of special efforts under way to reach these minority communities, some of which are listed below.

- **Newspaper insert: *Community Outreach in Action*.** Since 2002, the USACE has produced a popular newspaper insert to reach minority audiences. *Community Outreach in Action* is published twice a year and includes stories about participating in Everglades restoration. Each issue, 100,000 are placed in African American weekly newspapers and 50,000 are placed in Spanish-language newspapers. It is also available online. The rest are distributed at community events and through social service organizations. More than 1 million copies of the colorful newsletter have been distributed since 2002.
- **Mobile information van.** In November 2008, the USACE introduced a new "Community Outreach on the Go" mobile information van. The van includes a video, display boards, print material, promotional items, and a knowledgeable driver. The van is in use throughout the 16-county CERP region, but special emphasis is placed on reaching communities with larger minority populations. The van featured Lake Okeechobee this reporting period.

Earth Day celebrations. Each year, the USACE sponsors an Everglades-related Earth Day celebration in south Florida. In 2009, a celebration was held on the banks of Lake Okeechobee in Pahokee, a historic city with a larger minority population. Many residents have lived in the area for generations. This included a day of fun and display of Everglades artwork by area students.

- **Inner city Haitian after-school program.** Every spring, the USACE sponsors an event for the Haitian community in south Florida. This often coincides with Earth Day in April and Haitian Flag Day in May. In 2009, the USACE organized art classes and lessons about the Everglades for an after-school program in Miami's Little Haiti. The artworks were then displayed in a library in Little Haiti. More than 20 children participated.
- **Spanish-language novellas.** Each year, in observance of Hispanic Heritage Month from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, the USACE releases special information products to raise awareness of the Everglades for Spanish-language speakers in south Florida. In 2008 and 2009, the USACE released original "novellas," which are 60- to 90-second radio public service announcements, mimicking the overly-dramatic Spanish-language soap operas. The novellas feature an Everglades message and are also placed online.
- ***Livin' with the Waters* comic series.** Many efforts are under way to reach Black residents of south Florida with the CERP message. In 2006, approximately, the USACE introduced a fictional family living in south Florida and learning about the Everglades. The Waters is a three-generational family featured in comic strips and other materials. In 2009 and 2010, Waters products included new comic installments, two activity books, and a Kwanzaa screen-saver. New products are highly anticipated each year.
- **Special efforts around Lake Okeechobee.** Special outreach efforts continued around Lake Okeechobee, an area deeply affected by both CERP and the rehabilitation of the Herbert Hoover Dike. The USACE launched the mobile information van, a newsletter, and continued to place a community outreach liaison in the city of Pahokee. In 2009, the USACE participated in emergency management activities sponsored by the five counties bordering the lake, and maintained a year-round outreach program in this area.

Environmental Education. The USACE continued with an environmental education program launched in 2006 called The Journey of Wayne Drop to the Everglades. This includes print and online materials, teacher's guides, and presentations by staff at schools and other educational facilities. More than 200,000 printed storybooks have been distributed since 2006, plus related outreach products and promotional items. Staff from the Corps attended state and national science teachers' conferences to promote the Wayne Drop products in late 2008 and 2009, and continued to promote the materials in other ways. For children, the Corps reprinted 13,000 Wayne Drop coloring books and purchased 1,000 Wayne Drop squeeze figures, both of which were created especially for this program.

Panther materials introduced. In 2009, the USACE introduced a new line of information products to raise awareness about the endangered Florida panther. A poster, mobile, display and booklet are among the components. A magazine was well under way in 2010, expected to be released later in the year. The materials are appropriate for all ages, but special efforts are made to place them in school systems or programs to reach children and young adults. The products will be distributed in southwest Florida, where a CERP project to benefit the Florida panther just broke ground in early 2010 (the Picayune Strand Restoration Project).

Small Business Outreach. Many efforts were made to reach south Florida's small and minority-owned businesses with information on how to participate in CERP. This included holding workshops,

distributing printed materials, updating materials, participating in small business related conferences and fairs, and other efforts to ensure small business owners and representatives understand the separate federal and state contracting processes.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds benefitted both CERP and the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation project, and some small businesses were able to take advantage of these funds in 2009 and 2010 to work on the CERP and dike project.

Project Level Involvement. Many public meetings and workshops were held to inform and include the public in the development of CERP projects. This form of project-specific communication is essential to the success of the CERP. Meetings were announced in advance, held in convenient locations, and often featured an open house session to meet CERP staff prior to the formal meeting or workshop. For those people who could not attend meetings, all meeting documents were posted online. Comments were taken online, in addition to those taken in person at the meetings and workshops. USACE developed fact sheets and poster boards for individual CERP projects, with some translated into Spanish.

In 2014, public meetings were held for the RECOVER System Status report at Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, University of Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University. These webinars were also available to the public. Additionally, the USACE and SFWMD are working with the Task Force on a unified government webpage, www.evergladesrestoration.gov, to bring information about the everglades to the public.

Hyperlinks: http://www.evergladesplan.org/pm/progr_outreach.aspx
En Español:
http://www.evergladesplan.org/get_involved/spanish_home.aspx>
An Kreyòl:
http://www.evergladesplan.org/get_involved/creole_home.aspx

Contacts: April Patterson, Project Manager, Everglades Section, USACE
April.N.Patterson@usace.army.mil

Deena Reppen, Deputy Executive Director, Regulatory and Public Affairs, SFWMD
dreppen@sfwmd.gov

Source: USACE Strategic Communications team.