

# **SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM TASK FORCE WORKING GROUP**

## ***LESSONS LEARNED REPORT***

***4/20/00***

This is an important time of transition for the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (SFERTF or Task Force). After six years of operation, the Working Group of the Task Force has reviewed its development, identified lessons from experience, and proposed a series of actions to strengthen performance. This report summarizes the process and substance of this endeavor.

On February 29 and March 1, 2000, the Working Group met at River Ranch, Florida for a Lessons Learned Workshop. The Working Group reviewed and revised a Historical Highlights document (attachment 1) that summarizes important events and accomplishments of the Task Force to date. It then identified over 40 lessons from experience (attachment 2), identified current and anticipated challenges and options for action (attachment 3), and then selected proposals for priority action in relation to five critical challenges. These proposals are described below.

The intent of the Lessons Learned Workshop effort was two-fold. First, it provided an occasion for the Working Group to address critical needs, to clarify directions, and to improve its structure and procedures. Second, the meeting aimed to create a document to encourage dialogue with its parent Task Force about matters of mutual concern.

### **PRIORITY LESSONS**

After identifying a range of lessons drawn from each year of experience, the Working Group identified those lessons deemed to be most important in advancing the mission of the Task Force. Those lessons are as follows:

- Create a common vision, values, and goals
- Create positive personal relationships among those engaged in ecosystem activities.
- Continuously work to maintain trust among the engaged professionals, with public officials, and with the public.
- Identify concrete tasks, projects, and timetables for all groups and institutions that are asked to participate.

- Assure that adequate resources are available to support project plans, otherwise delete plans and reduce expectations.
- Identify the important needs of science and management in ecosystem restoration and explain the links between them.
- Assure that decisions are made according to the best science-based approach.
- Identify and address conflict issues that can be resolved through the efforts of an ecosystem restoration coordinating group and advisory bodies.

## **MAJOR CHALLENGES AND PRIORITY ACTIONS**

Five areas were selected that represent important challenges to the Task Force going forward. Those areas are summarized below, and priority proposals have been developed for each area are summarized.

1. **SCIENCE COORDINATION:** The Science Coordination Team (SCT) of the Task Force has undertaken many successful projects to promote coordination among scientists engaged in ecosystem restoration. The SCT believes it should continue and expand such efforts because of the growing need for cooperation. To do so will require confirmation by and greater support through the Task Force. To this end, the Working Group proposes to:
  - A. **Identify and prioritize the science issues most in need of attention by the Task Force and Working Group.**
  - B. **Clarify the tasks and resources necessary to identify the priority science needs.**
  - C. **Enter into a dialogue with the Task Force to agree upon science priorities and levels of support.**
2. **PUBLIC OUTREACH:** Promoting coordination in regard to public outreach has been a difficult challenge for the Working Group. Among the reasons for this are that: the population of South Florida is highly diverse and lacks a common civic culture; public outreach involves a range of areas including public relations, public education and public participation (reflecting different traditions and purposes); there is unevenness in agencies in regard to their capacity to engage the public; and agency resources for working with the public are modest. These factors have made it difficult to design and obtain support for coordination among agencies. To address this situation, the Working Group proposes to:

- A. Clarify and validate the role, expectations, and priorities of the Working Groups and its Public Outreach committee with the Task Force.**
  - B. Redesign the existing Public Outreach Support and Steering Team to maximize the participation and leadership of public affairs, public education, and public involvement professionals among Task Force agencies.**
  - C. Carry forward plans for a Public Outreach professionals conference in September as well as the preparation of a Directory that identifies public outreach professionals and activities among all agencies engaged in ecosystem restoration activities in South Florida.**
- 3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION:** One of the purposes of the Task Force is to resolve conflicts related to ecosystem restoration in South Florida. The Government Accounting Office (GAO) recently published a report concluding that there are not sufficient procedures to resolve conflict in the region. The Working Group believes it is important to understand that while conflict reduction and consensus building are appropriate and realistic goals for the Task Force and its Working Group, some conflicts will need to be resolved in judicial and legislative arenas when that is the choice of parties who pursue such options. Given this situation, the Working group proposes that it:
  - A. Clarify expectations about the role and limit of the Working Group in regard to conflict resolution and consensus building.**
  - B. Determine the nature and type of conflict issues it should address.**
  - C. Select priority conflict issue to address, current or anticipated, and clarify the situation, parties, disputes, competing goals, and options.**
- 4. COORDINATION AND PLANNING:** Coordination and planning are important ongoing responsibilities of the Task Force and Working Group. In recent years, three important challenges have arisen regarding these areas of responsibility. First is the need to develop a clear strategic plan that provides a credible picture to stakeholders and funding sources of the goals, projects, budgets and timelines for ecosystem restoration. A GAO report, published in 1999, stressed this need. In response, the Working Group has undertaken an initiative to prepare such a plan. Second is the need to provide more decentralization in coordination and planning. To do so, the Working Group has created six sub-regional groups of representatives from government agencies in each area (these groups are called PCTs for Project Coordinating

Teams). To date, the PCTs have had mixed success and are in need of being reviewed and renewed as needed. Third, there is a concern among Working Group members that not all members of the Working Group are engaged at levels of communication, cooperation and coordination that are necessary to be effective. To address these three challenges, the Working Group proposes to do the following:

- A. Review and redesign the PCTs, as necessary, to best serve the coordination and planning needs of the Working Group at decentralized levels.**
- B. Complete an outcome-oriented strategic plan that is clear, credible and timely, and to update the plan regularly.**
- C. Review expectations and needs and to renew commitments among Task Force and Working Group members to assure adequate levels of engagement and support in the future.**

**5. COMMUNICATION WITH POLICY-MAKERS:** An ongoing challenge of the Task Force is to communicate with public officials who approve ecosystem restoration plans, projects, and expenditures. This is a complex challenge because ecosystem restoration is supported by hundreds of government entities – state, county, federal, and local. Consequently, communication strategies are needed that sometimes address all parties, and, at other times, address particular governing entities. To improve communication with policy-makers, the Working Group proposes the following approaches:

- A. The Working Group clearly documents issues and positions for policy-maker in easily readable formats.**
- B. Working Group members assure that adequate communication takes place with their agencies.**
- C. Local sponsors of ecosystem restoration play a greater role in informing their local officials and publics.**
- D. A joint meeting be held between the Task Force and Working Group to identify communication needs.**