

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force



To: Task Force Members

From: Rick Smith, Chair, Working Group

Subject: Working Group Recommendations for FY 2005 Coordinated Budget Request

Date: 04/02/2003

The Working Group has worked to develop a coordinated budget request for Federal FY 2005 and State of Florida FY 2004/2005 as required by WRDA 1996. WRDA 1996 and the Working Group's charter requires that the Task Force and its Working Group "prepare an annual integrated financial plan and recommendations for coordinated budget requests for the funds proposed to be expended by agencies and entities represented on the Task Force for the restoration, preservation and protection of the South Florida ecosystem".

There are two components provided in the FY 2005 Working Group recommendation. The first component is this cover memorandum delineating the priority restoration issues identified by the Working Group. The second component is an attachment categorizing specific projects or programs that have been identified in the strategic plan as restoration projects of critical importance toward accomplishing one of the Task Force's restoration goals. The projects included on the attachment are categorized as follows:

Category 1: Interim list of Projects/Programs in the 2002 Edition of the Strategic Plan that are not getting the attention or funding they deserve in light of established restoration objectives.

Category 2: Interim list of Projects/Programs in the 2002 Edition of the Strategic Plan that would have a devastating or negative impact on the established objectives if the support and/or funding for the project is not maintained.

The overarching priority restoration issues recommended by the Working Group for Federal Fiscal Year 2005 and State of Florida fiscal year 2004/2005 are as follows:

Aquifer Storage and Recovery Pilot projects and regional study

Aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) is a significant water resource storage component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The CERP envisions that more than 300 wells will be built to pump and store as much as 1.6 billion gallons of water a day in underground storage zones in the Floridan Aquifer. The pilot projects will address technical and regulatory uncertainties and demonstrate the viability of storing treated surface water or groundwater in the brackish Floridan Aquifer for subsequent recovery. The Regional Study will address regional and technical issues associated with the CERP ASR program beyond the scope and budget of the ASR pilot projects. The overall success of CERP is dependent upon the outcome of the pilot projects and the regional study. A sustained level of funding adequate

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for completion of the pilot projects and the regional study is necessary to insure an adequate technical assessment of the viability of using ASR technology in large scale CERP implementation around Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee Basin and along the east coast. In addition, and considered to be of the highest priority, a new construction start (appropriation of funds to initiate construction) for the ASR pilot projects is critical to timely implementation of these projects as well as the larger ASR program. Without new start funding, these projects will be delayed and, due to the dependency of the restoration plan on the larger ASR program, this will adversely impact the entire restoration effort.

Invasive Exotic Plant Species

Invasive exotic plants have been recognized as a serious threat and obstacle to restoration. Restoration of the south Florida ecosystem will not be successful unless programs to control and manage invasive exotic plants are supported and funded adequately. Current needs include: 1) Annual operations and maintenance costs for the new Davie Exotic Plant Quarantine Facility, 2) Adequate support for invasive species control in Loxahatchee as identified in the new lease agreement, 3) Biological control research funding for the control of the most critical exotic pests including: Brazilian pepper, Lygodium, and lobate lac scale, and, 4) maintain support for current control and management programs including funding in Everglades National Park to match existing cost share programs with the state and county.

Multi-species/Endangered-species recovery plan

The Multi-Species Recovery Plan (MSRP) was developed to put in place ecosystem-level strategies to recover the 68 endangered or threatened species in the South Florida/Everglades ecosystem. Unlike traditional recovery plans for individual species, the Multi-species plan recognizes that recovery of individual fish, wildlife, and plant species is inextricably linked to restoration of the ecosystems upon which they depend. In South Florida, the comprehensive Everglades protection and restoration efforts that are being implemented by the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) will help recover those species that depend on the functions provided by restoring a more natural hydrology and improving water quality in the Everglades. Both the MSRP and CERP take a landscape-level approach toward recovery of species and restoration of ecosystem function, and both are supported by a commitment to sound science and a strong roadmap of clear-cut goals and objectives toward implementation. The MSRP employs a broad-based planning approach through its Multi-Species/Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT), and CERP relies on a multi-agency plan formulation process based on individual Project Delivery Teams and the system-wide REstoration, COordination, and VERification (RECOVER) team. The MSRP and CERP are complementary tools in the ecosystem-wide restoration effort because the MSRP is a blueprint for the comprehensive conservation of species biodiversity in South Florida, while CERP provides the essential mechanism for conservation of the diversity of landscapes and habitats. The application of this conservation approach will depend on a sustained level of funding adequate to continue the commitment to consultation, coordination, and communication among all

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federal, state, local governmental, and tribal partners to meet the goals and objectives of the MSRP through the implementation of adaptive assessment as outlined in the CERP.

Water Monitoring and Research in Support of the Critical Projects (Tribal and State)

The Seminole Tribe of Florida (Tribe) and the State of Florida (State) have developed effective water quality monitoring programs that provide data to create a historic record for better decision-making about restoration projects. While the ongoing monitoring is important for operational purposes, additional monitoring and research are needed to support the design, construction, and operation of the Critical Everglades Restoration Projects, including the Big Cypress Reservation critical project, and water quality priority projects on other tribal lands. Data collection, analyses and reporting are necessary for development and implementation by the Tribe of protective standards for water quality, including periods of baseline conditions and episodes of elevated levels of pollutants. The Seminole Tribe is conducting forested wetland nutrient uptake research on its lands. The interaction of the effectiveness of nutrient removal with hydro-period restoration will be examined, utilizing plant and other bio-indicators. Special attention will be on the development and testing of performance measures based on comparisons with reference sites of low human impact, to judge the success of restoration efforts. The Tribe is focused on the climbing fern because it represents the most significant danger to restoration of forested wetlands on the Big Cypress Reservation. These monitoring and research needs are critical to maximizing the positive benefits for which critical projects, including the Big Cypress critical project, are being constructed, and to ensure optimal water management decisions on tribal lands.

This memorandum and the attached draft table were prepared by the Working Group pursuant to the Working Group Charter. They are provided for Task Force member review and use as agency budget requests for Fiscal Year 2005 are developed and finalized. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at 850-921-2544.

CC: Working Group members

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