

# Workshop Summary

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## South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Working Group Sponsored Public Workshop

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### Western Everglades Restoration Project Public Workshop

John Boy Auditorium  
1200 S W C Owens Ave, Clewiston, FL 33440  
August 23, 2016  
10:00 AM- 4:00 PM

#### Attendees:

James Erskine	Kevin Whittman
Nick Aumen	Jennifer Hecker
Shannon Estenoz	Cecile Piserotloe
Allyn Childress	Kate English
Armando Ramirez	Sandra Hare
Donatto Surratt	Dawn Shirreffs
Yongshan Wan	Aurora Littles
Agnes Ramsey	Bob Sobczak
Tsufit Boyle	Edward Smith
Martha Nungesser	Justin Stockman
Ed Tamson	Jonathan Madden
Jeff Sumner	Virginia King
Nyla Pipes	Natalie Barfield
Inger Hansen	Julia Jennison
Marissa Kruger	Roger Williams
Yogesh Khare	Gary Ritter
Roland Ottolini	Isabelle McDonald
James Evans	Rebecca Elliott
Lacy Alison	Nora Elliott
Frank Danysh	Nora Espinal
Kyle Grandusky	Cara Capp
Shawn Clem	Tom Conboy
Dave Urich	Phillip Roland
Chad Kennedy	Jaime Graulan
Martha Musgrove	Loren Espinal
Gene Duncan	George Jones
Dawn Dodds	Pete Quinasius
Melissa Nasuti	Eric Flaig
Mark Shafer	Veera Karri
Jose "Pepe" Lopez	Tina Moeinian
Butch Wilson	Carrie Beeler
Beth Morfora	Sandy Soto
Patty Power	Kevin Burger
Phil Flood	Jose Cabaleiro
Dianne Hughes	Dennis Duke

**Welcome and introductions 10:00 AM, James Erskine, FWC Vice Chair, Allyn Childress, SFERTF, Shannon Estenoz, SFERTF, Nick Aumen, Chair, Science and Coordination Group**

Shannon Estenoz provided introductory remarks and explained when the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force was created in 1996 by Congress it was endowed with the capability to convene stakeholders, and the public in order to coordinate management and policy. In the past we have seen the workshop process provides tremendous feedback, as such we believe that if you are in the room you have a seat at the table. This process is just as much providing the agencies with dialogue and information as it is about discussing amongst yourselves.

James Erskine explained that this workshop will be a mapping exercise, first there are a couple presentations to provide background and information.

### **Workshop Procedures and Ground Rules, Allyn Childress, SFERTF**

Allyn Childress provided a brief presentation outlining the workshop process and ground rules. She introduced the various meetings where the public is also welcome to attend and engage agencies regarding the planning process. She encouraged participants to visit the Task Force's website to obtain further information or refer back to any presentations or relevant material as well as sign up for the blog updates by signing up via email at:

<http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/>.

[http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp/meetings/082316/welcome\\_and\\_groundrules.pdf](http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp/meetings/082316/welcome_and_groundrules.pdf)

### **Overview, Matt Morrison, SFWMD**

[http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp/meetings/082316/CERP\\_WERP\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp/meetings/082316/CERP_WERP_introduction.pdf)

Matt Morrison provided a brief presentation outlining a system-wide perspective regarding historic, current and anticipated future flow patterns of the Everglades. He touched upon a brief review of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) outlining some of the foundation, as well as first and second generation CERP projects. The goal is to achieve increased system-wide flexibility to improve the quality, quantity and timing of water flow. Currently, there is a national and state-level interest in initiating the Western Basins restoration projects sooner rather than later.

### **Western Everglades Restoration Project Overview, Kelly Keefe, USACE**

Kelly Keefe's presentation focused on the project's study area, draft problems, and draft objectives. The purpose of the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP) is to improve the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of water needed to restore and reconnect the western Everglades system. Kelly defined and outlined the project's preliminary study area, or the part of the state/ system the project is focusing in on to improve the system. The area is approximately 920 square miles, and was historically dominated by wetlands. Currently the land is a mixture of urban, agricultural and wetland land uses.

The findings from the previous week's initial Project Delivery Team (PDT) meeting were presented to the workshop participants as draft problems and objectives as well as the

management measures to achieve the objectives. Kelly presented the following six draft problems and corresponding draft objectives and management measures. She stressed they are draft proposals and are open to changes:

- Draft Problem 1: water quality
  - Current nutrient levels in the western basins skews species composition to those that thrive in high-nutrient environments, thus moving the ecosystem away from its natural structure and function. Therefore, a draft objective is to restore low nutrient levels to the water flowing in the western basins. Potential management measures include, modification of the L-28 canal system, such as potentially degrading some levees and backfilling canals, or restoring wetlands on the Miccosukee lands.
- Draft Problem 2: Altered timing, amount, and flow paths of fresh water.
  - Due to altered seasonal water volumes and distribution across the landscape has led to degraded wetland and upland habitat in the western basins. A draft objective is to restore seasonal freshwater volumes and, flow paths, within the constraints of maintaining existing flood protection and water supply. To achieve this potential objective, possible options include increasing operational flexibility of Lake Okeechobee, storage to capture storm-water runoff and restoring natural flows to Big Cypress National Preserve.
- Draft Problem 3: Disrupted connectivity of the hydrology and landscape
  - Disrupted sheet flow, water depths and connectivity of the landscape is causing a loss of peat soils and more frequent, intense peat soil fires. A draft objective is to restore water flow and ecological connectivity in the western basins as well as between the western basins and the greater everglades. Potential management measures to achieve this objective include, restoring flows between the L-28, Water Conservation Area (WCA)-3A and Big Cypress National Preserve, and improving water flows.
- Draft Problem 4: Loss of water out of the natural system to prevent over-drainage and improve ground- and surface- water depths.
  - The draft objective proposed is to reduce water loss out of the natural system to prevent over-drainage and improve ground and surface water depths. Potential management measures include retaining and recharging surface and ground water to support native wetlands, sloughs and old growth cypress.
- Draft Problem 5: Degradation In the Everglades western basins caused by drainage and water management have decreased the ecosystem's resilience to future threats and uncertainties, such as climate change.
  - The draft objective proposed is to increase resiliency of the ecosystems of the western basins and to achieve this draft objective, potential management measures include those that increase operational flexibility and ecological diversity for greater resilience.

Kelly explained the project opportunities as well as constraints and considerations to be taken into account, such as economic benefits to fishing and recreational industries. She noted that there is also system-wide potential for operational flexibility and additional water supply and flood control benefits. While participating in the workshop she mentioned that it is also

important to consider the constraints of maintaining flood protection and current water supply while also avoiding or minimizing affects to endangered species. Kelly mentioned that workshop participants may choose to utilize or reject the “CERP Yellow Book” conceptual plan.

### **Questions, James Erskine, Vice Chair**

James Erskine asked for any clarifying questions. Questions and comments were raised regarding flows in Big Cypress, how project boundaries were determined, and land available for development as well as flood concerns and sustainability of rural communities. David Ulrich provided a written submission and charts for the record expressing his concern that the Water Conservation Areas are full and the potential danger this poses for residents.

For detailed information please refer to the workshop video, available under the August 23, 2016 workshop tab at: <http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp.html> .

### **Workshop Activity: Participatory Mapping Exercise, Allyn Childress, SFERTF**

Allyn Childress outlined the instructions for the mapping exercise. Participants were provided with two maps, on map #1 participants were asked to share any historic, hydrologic, ecologic or cultural knowledge. Map #2 focused on the preliminary study area, participants were asked to share any existing hydrologic, ecologic or cultural knowledge regarding existing conditions. On Map #2 if participants were inspired to work ahead, participants could label areas in need of restoration, outlining the problem, and suggested restoration actions for the Western Everglades Restoration Project. The participants broke out into groups for the mapping exercise.

### **Presentation of Results**

**Isabelle McDonald** presented her group’s map which depicts possible planning efforts to enlarge canals to better accommodate water and prevent flooding; the map circles depict homes which are currently affected by flooding.

**Donatto Surratt** presented his group’s proposal to connect Lake Okeechobee to the Basins and bring water in through a channel. They located an area of land with a depression and propose to purchase the land in order to store water, as well as add more storage north of the Flow Equalization Basin water reservoir and a Storm-water Treatment Area to treat the North Feeder canal runoff. The group also proposes to add a storm-water treatment area in Seminole Tribal lands to treat West Feeder canal runoff, and remove levees in order to connect Miccosukee Tribal lands to Water Conservation Area 3. They also suggested adding a pump station so water can move east and flow south, remove the tieback to reduce water flow into Water Conservation Area 3A and finally put water into a culvert to prevent impacts to Sparrow populations.

**Gary Ritter** presented for his group, they propose moving water from Lake Okeechobee into the project area utilizing existing facilities. After moving the water into the project area they propose a storm-water treatment area facility positioned south to provide water quality treatment. The green areas on the map represent water reserve preserves. The group also proposes a storm-water treatment area to move water through Big Cypress National Preserve, and degrade some canals to reestablish sheet flow south. They propose placing a pump station south of S190 and possibly move S190 South.

- **Questions:** Questions were posed regarding water quality and quantifying the benefits. Mr. Morrison explained that this concern is to be addressed in the next step of the process, as they will be collecting the information and running the ideas through models to assess the impacts of each proposed plan.

**Gene Duncan** presented his group's proposal to move water from Lake Okeechobee through the west side of the Lake rather than searching for land and moving the water east first. Gene explained how the northern tip of Water Conservation Area 3A is overly dry and proposed routing water through this area as well as pushing the levee back so that 3A would be continuous. There is a cattle pasture they propose to purchase and make into a wetland as well as remove the levee and backfill canals to provide continuous land and water treatment.

**Jose "Pepe" Lopez** co presented with **Shawn Clem**. Pepe is concerned about water quality and quantity, particularly in regards to water coming from the lake into the C-139 or Miami Canal through the Everglades Agricultural Area. He is concerned the C-139 is exceeding the limits regarding water quality. The group identified public lands and suggests for the C-139 annex which will be a flow equalization basin (FEB). There is a land that was formerly citrus which is now being converted into wetlands, however Pepe was concerned that the Corps is not backfilling the canals on the property and he is worried how this will impact the restoration progress. Pepe handed the mic to Shawn who expressed concern about research and performance measures regarding understanding the Western Everglades system as well as its ecology. She hopes the project managers will consider the health of wading birds as a performance measure and stresses the importance of connectivity of the western system for restoration.

- **Question:** A question was raised regarding Shawn's use of the word restoration, the individual explained they were hoping for an analysis to better the system we currently have rather than trying to revert the system to a previous state that existed in another time period.
- **Response:** Shawn responded there seemed to be a difference in semantics, however her suggestion is merely to stress the importance of monitoring the system and gaining a deeper understanding of how the western Everglades system functions. Treating this system uniquely and focusing on the bigger picture is more than restoring water, it's about wildlife and other factors that are affected as well.

**Jaime Graulan** and **Mayor Philip Rowland of Clewiston** co-presented. Jaime explained how the group was passionate about fixing issues upstream in order to address issues facing the system downstream. Mayor Rowland presented a historical perspective to explain this idea. Mayor Rowland's father worked for the Corps, he explained that when the Corps drained the Kissimmee basin his father was concerned how water flow would be affected. Mayor Rowland explained that water previously took about 5 and a half months to flow through the Kissimmee Valley into Lake Okeechobee, today this occurs in about a day and a half. He explained this has led to water degradation, and the group would like to address the treatment capacity of Storm-water Treatment Area 5 and 6 as well.

**Dianne Hughes** explained how her group suggests south of G150 impounding water so avoid purchasing private lands. She worked with Mr. Jackman who explained that there is an injunction to prevent flooding on his land, however with the impoundment of water the injunction would no longer prevent moving water south. Mr. Jackman also suggested to grow

Caribe grass within the storm-water treatment areas to help remove nutrients and improve water quality then sell the grass to farmers.

**Pete Quasius** presented the group's suggestion to expand the study area in order to make a larger connection West of Lake Okeechobee or through the Caloosahatchee River where there are 1,000 acres of land that could be integrated. The idea is to move water south and while this is occurring to build a series of connectors going into water treatment areas, such as traditional Storm-water Treatment Areas perhaps with a Flow Equalization Basin and/ or aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) well. The group suggests utilizing the existing ASR well to move water south. The goal is to achieve good water quality going into STA 5 and 6. The plan ultimately encourages water flow through historic flow paths, embracing the ideas of the yellow book.

- **Question:** Noticed that the plan included Ocala Slough on the west side, would like to hear some of Pete's thoughts regarding that.
- **Response:** Pete explained there is 40,000 acres and if water was moved to the west it would impact this slough and we could perhaps receive some water quality benefits and increase volume of water flowing. Due to the topography of the land and the soil content consisting of sand there will be evaporation as well as greater water storage.
- **Question:** Does it add a point of entrance to the greater Everglades area?
- **Response:** More water in the Big Cypress will flow south through the Everglades and into Florida Bay.

**Bob Sobczak** explained how the group identified some "low hanging fruits" that could be achieved at a low cost and provide great benefits within a short period of time. The group suggests to "close the doors" in the Southern portion of the system to prevent water seepage and remove the tie back to allow the historic drainage flow back into the Big Cypress National Preserve. The group suggests filling in the 8-mile stretch of the S344 to Tamiami then fan out the water flow and add an additional culvert to the 11-mile road. This would result in less water in Water Conservation Area 3A and thus minimize impacts to the Sparrow area. Finally, the group suggests raising the water table as it sets us up for restoration, because surface water cannot be moved without ground water.

- **Question:** It sounds like you are dividing the state into a southern and northern area?
- **Response:** There is a northern and southern area to the system.

**James Evans** presented the group's suggestions to move water from the Caloosahatchee basin by connecting it to the C-43. The group would like to create a Storm-water Treatment Area on the Garcia property and move water south through Mullet Slough.

For more information, or detailed viewing of mapping exercise please visit <http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp.html> .

### **Discussion, Shannon Estenoz, SFERTF**

Shannon explained the information gathered at the meeting as well as the recording would be available in coming weeks on the website, <http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/werp.html>. The materials will be transmitted to the Corps and SFWMD becoming part of the formal record.

There will be further meeting notifications available through our blog, please visit the website for upcoming meeting dates as this will be an agenda item.

**Closing Comments and Adjourn, James Erskine, FWC, Vice Chair, Allyn Childress, SFERTF**

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.