

Memorandum

20 July 2001

To: South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Working Group  
From: John Ogden and Ronnie Best, Co-chairs, Science Coordination Team  
Subject: The SCT's recent "sheet flow letter"

This memo summarizes the points of agreement that were reached during the 17 July meeting of the SFER Working Group's Science Coordination Team, pertaining to the "sheet flow" letter recently issued by the SCT (dated 14 June 2001). The sheet flow letter presented the strong majority opinion of the Team as to the importance of restoring marsh sheet flow as a prerequisite for full ecosystem restoration in the Ridge and Slough region of the Everglades. The SCT letter stated that the strong weight of professional scientific opinion supports the view that sheet flow has an ecological role in the Everglades that is essential to the restoration of this system, and that the recovery of more natural hydrological flow volumes alone will not achieve the level of restoration that is desired.

Recognizing that the letter has raised questions among some members of the WG because of procedural issues, the SCT discussed ways of resolving these procedural issues at its 17 July meeting. In part this discussion was prompted by a concern by the SCT that the procedural debate has reduced the effectiveness of the letter in presenting the views of the SCT on an important scientific issue. The two procedural issues that have been brought to the attention of the SCT are, (1) that the letter should have been addressed to the Chair of the SFER Working Group, and (2) that the letter should not have endorsed or referenced any specific plan currently being evaluated for meeting hydrological and ecological restoration objectives in the Everglades.

The SCT acknowledges that procedural errors were made in developing and issuing the sheet flow letter. At the 17 June meeting the SCT considered a recommendation that a new letter be issued addressed to the WG chair, with reference to any specific restoration plan removed. This recommendation was withdrawn in place of the decision to provide this memo to the WG, when it was learned that the Corps has already forwarded the original letter to the WG.

The SCT is committed to providing the best possible science in support of management and policy actions by the members of the SFER Task Force and Working Group. The SCT recognizes that it is important that this scientific information be "packaged" and transmitted in ways that effectively and cleanly communicate the key scientific messages to the members of the WG. The SCT will continue to occasionally issue scientific reports, white papers and letters to the Task Force and Working Group, as the Team identifies issues where a synthesis or clarification of good science can contribute to the policy and management actions of the member agencies and tribal governments. The SCT will inform the Task Force and Working Group as such reports and letters are being prepared. We thank you for your patience and attention to the workings of the Science Coordination Team.