

Region Science Plan for Southwest Florida's Big Cypress Basin

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The Region Science Plan for the Big Cypress Basin region of Southwest Florida identifies priority science and information management needs for the region's research and land management community. Developed over a three-year period through the cooperative efforts of public and private interests, the Plan is intended to provide guidance for the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (SFTF), the Southwest Florida Project Coordination Team (SWFPCT), and federal, state, and local agencies and private organizations. The Plan provides specific priority recommendations for science information relevant to restoration and management issues, as identified by over 70 local professionals and a review of over 200 research and monitoring projects within the Basin.

In 1996/97, a Steering Committee was established at the request of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and the SFTF, to develop a region Science Plan. The Committee was comprised of public land managers, region planners, researchers, and agriculture interests. The Committee accomplished the following tasks:

1. Identified a boundary for the Big Cypress Basin Region that encompasses priority coastal estuaries and watersheds representing key land and water resources within the Basin. This boundary was adopted by the SWFPCT.
2. Conducted an inventory of over 200 region research and monitoring projects, and provided summaries on the internet through a web site sponsored by the Florida Gulf Coast University and the South Florida Water Management District.
3. Planned and conducted a series of workshops, targeting professionals involved in environmental research, management, and land use planning. Participants identified priority resource issues of regional significance, reviewed the science inventory database, and developed draft recommendations to address priority science information needs linked to restoration and resource issues.

Three initial recommendations of the draft Plan, with the approval of the SWFPCT, have already been implemented: A multi-agency coalition has been established to review water quality monitoring efforts within the region; the region science database has been updated and is available on the internet; and a science coordination workshop was conducted in June 2000 to review restoration plans and relevant research for the Southern Golden Gate Estates. A region science forum was also conducted in March 2001 to review restoration science within the Basin.

Once peer review is completed, the draft Region Science Plan will be distributed to researchers and managers working in the Basin.