

Approved Meeting Minutes
Joint Working Group (WG) and Science Coordination Group (SCG)
South Florida Water Management District
November 19, 2013
West Palm Beach, Florida

Welcome and Introductions

Ernie Marks called meeting to order at 10:03 AM. The agenda (Encl. 1a) was provided and attendees were reminded that the meeting was being webcast. Approval of the minutes (Encl. 1b) deferred until after the break.

In Attendance:

Nov 19

Working Group (WG) Members

Alternates

Ernie Marks – Chair – FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√	
Barry Rosen – Vice Chair - United States Geological Survey	√	
Ernie Barnett - South Florida Water Management District	√	
Billy Causey – NOAA, FL Keys Nat'l Marine Sanctuary	-	
Chuck Collins – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	√	
COL Alan Dodd - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	-	Lt. Col Tom Greco
Rory Feeney - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	√	
Roman Gastesi – Local Government	-	
Vacant - U.S. Dept of Transportation	-	
Veronica Harrell-James – U.S. Attorney's Office	-	
Eric Hughes – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√	
Dan Kimball – NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	√	
Vacant – Office of the Governor of Florida	-	
Keith Neves - Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	
Fred Noble - FL Dept. of Transportation	-	
Bonnie Ponwith – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
W. Ray Scott - FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	
Cherise Maples – Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	
Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Vacant - Palm Beach County	-	
Vacant - Broward County	-	
Vacant – U.S. Department of Agriculture	-	Jeff Schmidt
Shannon Estenoz - Special Advisor	√	
Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members		
Susan Markley – Chair – Miami Dade County	√	
Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – United States Geological Survey	√	
Calvin Arnold - U.S. Department of Agriculture, ARS	√	
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	-	
Lisa Beever – Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program	-	
Ronnie Best - United States Geological Survey	-	

Joan Browder - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Amy Casteneda - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	-	
Susan Gray - South Florida Water Management District	-	Garth Redfield
Bob Johnson - National Park Service	√	
Chris Kelble - NOAA, AOML	√	
Chad Kennedy - FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√	
Cherise Maples - Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	
Gil McRae – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	-	Amber Whittle
Bob Progulske – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Gina Ralph - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Bill Reck - U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	√	
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	

Preliminary announcements included: GEER Conference scheduled for April 21-23, 2015 at the Marriott Coral Springs. Fred Sklar and Barry Rosen were celebrating birthdays and were recognized. Task Force meeting scheduled for Dec 17th at Main Interior in Washington, DC. Secretary Jewell is scheduled to be present for part of that meeting. The RECOVER 2014 System-wide Status Report (SSR) will be available for public review in mid-March. SSR details the status of the system and how close they are to meeting or not meeting the CERP goals.

Decompartmentalization (Decomp) Physical Model Update

Barry Rosen reminded everyone this project goes back eight years with the Grand Opening taking place on Nov 5, 2013. Fred Sklar provided a presentation (Encl. 2) PPT noting this is the second largest adaptive assessment after the Grand Canyon. Total project cost to build and de-construct is \$10.3 million. Fred defined Adaptive Management (AM) and noted this project is an active AM which involves field manipulation. He reviewed the key scientific uncertainties, flow hypothesis, history and location of DECOMP as well as what is being measured. Corps awarded the construction contract to Leno Dredging in May 2012. The equipment will be out there continuously and the sampling will be ongoing with people out there every day, except weekends, between now and Christmas.

Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP)

Kim Taplin provided a presentation (Encl. 3) noting the public comment period on the draft closed on Nov 1st. She reviewed the status of the other required reviews. Some of the topics identified for the independent external peer review included modeling, navigation and cultural resources. Some of the topics identified during the SAD/HQ review included the level of detail, consistency of costs and contingencies and the period of analysis. For the public and agency comments they received 30 formal letters, 214 e-mailed comments as well as comments from five public workshops. They received over 100 comments expressing support for CEPP and the expedited schedule. She reviewed the state clearing house topics which were received. Next steps include preparing responses to public and agency review comments and SAD/HQ reviews and coordinating with the vertical team. The Project Implementation Report (PIR) will be revised and the Biological Opinions and costs have to be incorporated into a final PIR. The final PIR has to go through a series of reviews and approvals before it is released for a 3- day public and agency review. They will then work to address comments received

and prepare a Chief of Engineers Report. There is a large volume of comments and the team is working to address them and get to the final PIR.

Public Comment

Cara Capp (NPCA/ Co-Chair of the Everglades Coalition) congratulated the efforts on Decomp. NPCA and EvCo have been strongly supportive of the CEPP plan and planning process from the very beginning. They are now concerned with the timeframe and the expected release of the Chief's Report. This has been the worst year for polluted discharges in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries and our communities are clamoring for CEPP. This plan has incredible community buy-in from a lot of different stakeholders which is amazing for an effort of this magnitude. NPCA is in support of a plan that is as thorough as possible and urged them to help move CEPP forward.

Freddy Fisikelli (private citizen) said he attended most of the meetings. He referred to HB643 and the good job that was done with making 750,000 acres of land available for agriculture. They know that they can't restore the sheetflow but they can help it by getting the water flowing year round. Instead of holding the water in the lake like they are doing now he urged them to let it flow year round.

John Rozier (Full Track Conservation Club of Dade and Everglades Coordinating Council) said he too has been coming to most of these meetings. The FWC is going to release a paper on their position on this project and it will mirror what he, Freddy and others have been saying all along about water depth and duration. He said he hopes this group takes to heart what they are saying in the paper. High water for long durations is bad for the Everglades. The modelling shows the water is going to be higher in WCA 3A which will lead to habitat destruction. He said he hoped they would take the position paper to heart.

Julie Hill Gabriel (Audubon of Florida) reiterated how much they appreciate the work of everyone in the room both the folks who worked on the DECOMP PM and everyone who has put in so much effort in getting CEPP to where they are today. This close to the finish line they are all waiting and watching to see that they can cross it. It continues to be one of their top goals because of the importance to the environment and all the ecological benefits that CEPP will achieve. She urged everyone to work on the usefulness of adaptive management and thanked them for everything they do.

Dawn Shirreffs (Everglades Foundation) congratulated Fred Sklar and the team. She pointed out that there were no hard dates in the CEPP presentation. This is a pilot project hailed by the Army Corps as to how they are going to do things better. The President of the US put this on a can't wait list. She recognized the stellar teams working on this project. They are going into Congressional conferencing on WRDA this week and they need hard timelines. She urged them to keep their promise to every stakeholder and get this finished adding that the Everglades Foundation is 100% behind this project.

Sara Fain (Everglades Law Center) said it was a great way to celebrate a birthday and congratulated Fred and Barry. She lives in Miami Dade County and spends a lot of time with leaders and decision makers in the county. Since CEPP was announced she has tried to tout how exciting this is because so many of the benefits will come to Miami Dade County. She recognized the leadership shown by the state and federal governments. She has asked Miami Dade leaders to be partners and be thoughtful about development,

water supply issues and land acquisition programs. She congratulated them for getting CEPP to this point.

Katelyn Lynch (private citizen) asked Fred Sklar to comment on any trends and phosphorus concentration across WCAs 3A and 3B and any trends emerging. Fred Sklar said there are trends but it is a big area. When they open up structures and the canals spill over into the Everglades, if the water stays in the canals then they do not see an impact in the marsh. Katelyn clarified it was in relationship to the velocity of the water and the rates at which sediments were re-suspended. Fred explained that sheetflow is what it is all about. When they stop flow and the water levels are low they oxidize the soils and create a phosphorus problem locally. There are higher phosphorus concentrations in the northern part of 3A because it is so dehydrated. The long term trend is for phosphorus to continue to build up and turn into a potential cattail problem.

Ernie Barnett added that in their ambient water quality monitoring throughout the WCAs in the last ten years they have seen a very positive trend throughout the Everglades system. Garth Redfield referred to the appendices in Chapter 3A of the South Florida Environmental Report where DEP summarizes the phosphorus levels for all the sites. They can look back 12 to 13 years. There have been modest declines in surface water phosphorus in WCA 3. The northern sites are problematic because of the hydroperiod problem. So the answer is there are positive downward trends.

Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (CSSS) and Marl Prairies Update

Larry Williams provided a presentation (Encl. 4) reviewing the history of the CSSS which is native to the Marl Prairie habitat. He reviewed the nine subspecies of sparrows currently found as well as their ranges noting they occupy coastal areas from Maine to Mexico. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) protects the sub species because each one of these groups of birds has unique genetics, songs and color and represents the full genetic complement of the species. All of the subspecies need to be protected to ensure their survival into the future. He reviewed the breeding bird survey trends for all seaside sparrows from 1966 – 2011 adding that nationwide seaside sparrows are not doing well. The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow is considered the most endangered bird in North America and their decline has been sharp with the cause unknown. FWS is putting a lot of effort into this bird and will try to start a captive breeding program. The CSSS population trend was reviewed and a large decline was attributed to Hurricane Andrew and the heavy rains that flooded the nests. Unfortunately they have not recovered since then. Threats to CSSS include hydrologic impacts to habitat; fire-related impacts to habitat; small population size; limited distribution; and agricultural and urban development. It is a challenge to manage the Everglades ecosystem in a way that allows these birds to recover because of their short life expectancy (2 -3 years). An entire subpopulation can be taken out if they get 2-3 wet years in a row.

Marl Prairie habitat in general is treeless expansive prairies with structurally diverse vegetation with a relatively short hydro-period. It supports a variety of wildlife including rare and imperiled animal and plant species. The ESA was designed to provide a means to conserve the ecosystems endangered and threatened species depend on. This is about protecting the Marl Prairie habitat for all the things that it embodies. Larry reviewed the location of Marl Prairies and noted that as they try to get the restoration of the water flows through the sloughs there is going to be some impacts to the prairies and they have

to watch them closely. In 2007 the FWS revised the critical habitat for the CSSS and overall they reduced the amount of what was defined as critical habitat and primary constituent elements were identified. In general these sparrows need 60 dry days to nest. If they can give the sparrows 80 – 120 days they can bring off a brood or two in a year. The tentatively selected plan (TSP) for CEPP which is exactly what they should be doing, presents some challenges for sparrow conservation. The birds need dry periods and they are hoping that with flexibility it can be managed. They need better ways to monitor and estimate populations. They also need aggressive habitat improvement and possibly augmentation of subpopulations. A world class restoration should keep all the species.

Chris Kelble asked how often they reviewed critical habitat designation and whether there is a potential to deem habitat critical even if it doesn't currently have any sparrows. Larry said that in general they do not review critical habitat very often. It is typically done when they are petitioned. They do have the option of identifying critical habitat that is unoccupied.

Nick Aumen said the challenge they have with species with low numbers is in getting good estimates of population size. One of the things they are struggling with pythons is that if they see x number of pythons what does that translate into in terms of population size. They have the same challenges with rare species. He asked about the error bars/uncertainty bands to tell when the peaks and valleys are real. Larry stated the error bars would be pretty wide since the technique used to produce these estimates is 15 years old. It uses a multiplier so for every singing male sparrow that they find in a survey they assume there are 16 birds represented by that one singing male. They are working with USGS and other agencies to come up with a better technique that involves replicates so that they can have better confidence bars.

Joan Browder asked if a hydro-period of 2-7 months is enough to maintain Marl Prairies free of brushy vegetation and trees. Bob Progulske said the sweet spot for the hydro-period is 90 – 210 days but it varies. Bob Johnson added that the eastern populations in the park that are stable, like subpopulations B and E, are in that 90 – 210 day cycle which is a good target. Subpopulation A had 50% of the birds up through the early 1990s and they now struggle to get 60 dry days. There is a very expansive Marl Prairie on the western side of Shark Slough that is wet all the time because of the way they designed the water management system. Central Everglades has the opportunity to reverse some of that. In terms of volume they put about 150,000 acre feet a year into NE Shark Slough. Central Everglades can get up to about 700,000 acre feet which is a huge volume of water. They are moving almost a half a million acre feet from western Shark Slough to NE Shark Slough. They would think there would be a benefit to subpopulation A but they do not see it because it does not dry down enough. They have to look at the way they operate the system because of the regulation schedule. When they get up to Zone A they still dump large volumes of water through the western basins. Even though they move half a million acre feet to the east, the way they operate the regulation schedule still impacts the western sparrows. That is an area where a lot of operational improvements are available and they need to look at things they can do in the interim.

Recognition of Ernie Barnett

Ernie Marks recognized Ernie Barnett who will be leaving the SFWMD in January after 30 plus years.

Ernie Barnett noted that he was the first non-federal member of the WG back in 1994. He said he looked forward to staying engaged in environmental issues adding that it had been a pleasure to work with everyone. Shannon Estenoz congratulated Ernie and thanked him for his service.

Report on Large Constrictor Workshops

Carol Mitchell provided a presentation (Encl. 5) on the two consecutive workshops held in November. There is a need to treat the large constrictor as a distinct issue and to move forward with planning and management efforts specifically oriented towards large constrictors. There has been considerable recent science produced and there is evidence the Burmese pythons are having a negative impact on wildlife. Nine species were originally proposed for the Lacey Act and within this group they have species at every stage of the invasion curve. They have species that are not in the system yet and have species that are locally distributed in the wild. First workshop was an Interagency Large Constrictor Workshop and the objectives and participants were reviewed. They held science sessions in four areas of management interest as well as an interagency response framework session where folks were asked to explain how their programs work. The second workshop was a DOI planning meeting using the information from the prior workshop to consider what it means for DOI lands and resources in south Florida. Estimates of Burmese pythons in the environment range from 25,000 to 500,000. The major take home messages from the entire process included the need to do more research to increase the probability of detection for the Burmese pythons which are significantly more difficult to detect than some other snake species. Next steps include producing and disseminating a summary of the current science and priority science outcomes of the workshop. NPS will also convene a meeting of senior managers to discuss implications and options for the agency.

Nick Aumen noted the workshop was attended by people from around the country. Potential impacts from the Burmese Python are severe enough to cause a significant drop in the small mammal population. This is serious in terms of ecological impacts. They need to increase their ability to detect all the large constrictors and develop more reliable population estimates. He is not optimistic they will be able to eliminate the Burmese Python but he is hopeful they can do things to contain it. He recognized Carol Mitchell and Larry Perez for all of the work in putting together the workshops.

Chad Kennedy asked if anyone has approached the pet industry. Carol Mitchell said that she did not know if they have done a lot of that but she knows there has been interaction with the industry via the FWS process to list the species as injurious. The pet industry has been involved in the outreach education efforts. Calvin Arnold asked if there were any research teams in the university systems or federal government conducting research to disrupt feeding or breeding. Carol said if there is, it would be within USDA but there is no program yet developed for this particular species.

Approval of Minutes

Ernie Marks presented the draft minutes from the June 2013 meeting for approval. Barry Rosen made a motion which was seconded and the minutes were approved.

Invasive Species Strategic Action Framework

Shannon Estenoz provided a presentation (Encl. 6) reminding everyone of the Task Force direction given

at the July 9th meeting which included the development of an Invasive Exotic Species Strategic Action Framework. Two meetings have been held to date. Outreach is underway in an effort to find opportunities for increasing their partnerships on invasive species. They invited some new partners such as the law enforcement division of the USFWS, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Zoo Miami and the University of FL/IFAS to their second meeting. The new partners provided presentations on the programs they run and the take home message was how big the problem is. The team identified the Pest Risk Committee meetings as a potential way to increase collaboration. These meetings are an existing effort between CBP, USDA and FDACS that meets periodically to discuss emerging threats. Florida is the most vulnerable mainland state in the US for invasive pest introduction and establishment. On average, Florida receives one new pest every month. With increased trade liberalization, many invasive species now come from Asia. Level of resource expenditure committed to the prevention and control of invasive species will have a direct bearing on the rate of introduction, establishment, spread and the likely impact of the invasive exotic species. The Strategic Action framework will recommend a governance structure that helps decision-makers understand the connections between goals, strategies and tactics. It will define success and provide for accountability; maximize the extent to which the current capacity for partnership is leveraged to meet common goals; and it will help decision-makers make wise and timely investment decisions in the battle against invasive exotics. The ultimate goal is to have a tool that can lead to priority based resource allocation and other types of decision-making. Amber Whittle asked how far into the marine ecosystem they would go into. Shannon explained they would stick to the TF definition which includes Florida Bay, the reef tract and all the estuarine systems throughout the watershed. Rory Feeney said they really need to branch out and talk to other agencies and think outside the box. They need to learn from what others have learned and incorporate new ideas. He added there is no domestic mail screening and CBP and FWS are only checking the international shipments.

Shannon added that the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) does a cross cut budget for federal agencies on invasive species and the lion's share of funding for prevention and control goes to DHS. It makes sense to look at how our resources for prevention and control are currently being spent and look for opportunities to leverage those dollars. Last week a letter was sent from eight members of Congress to OMB requesting that a cross cut budget be developed for invasive species in the 2015 President's Budget request. They have also requested that OMB talk to them about opportunities for legislative actions that can be taken to assist with prevention and control. CISRERP will have something to say in their next report to Congress on invasive species. Calvin Arnold said that it seems like a major component that is missing is research. Shannon said research and outreach are overarching principles for the strategy. Research is not a goal but a mechanism by which they achieve their goals.

Public Comment

None

Next Steps and Closing Comments

Ernie Marks thanked the Task Force staff and reminded everyone of the Dec 17th Task Force meeting. He congratulated Ernie Barnett and Fred Sklar and Barry Rosen.

Meeting adjourned at 1:40PM.

Enclosures:

1. Administrative Items
 - a. Agenda
 - b. Draft Meeting Minutes, June 2013
2. Decomp Physical Model presentation
3. CEPP presentation
4. Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow and Marl Prairie presentation
5. Large Constrictor Workshops presentation
6. Invasive Species Strategic Action Framework presentation