

*Draft Meeting Minutes*  
*Joint Working Group (WG) and Science Coordination Group (SCG)*  
*West Palm Beach, FL*  
*January 26, 2015*

**Welcome and Introductions**

Ernie Marks called the meeting to order at 10:30AM. He recognized the new Working Group members (Brian Carlstrom, Superintendent Biscayne National Park, Deb Drum, Manager, Ecosystem Restoration and Management Division for Martin County, Rob Robbins Director, Environmental Resources Management for Palm Beach County and Lee Hefty, Assistant Director, Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources for Miami Dade County) appointed at the November 2014 Task Force (TF) meeting. He reminded everyone the meeting was being webcast. Shannon Estenez provided some logistical information regarding the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) workshop scheduled for that afternoon. The IDS workshop will be the first in a series hosted by the WG and the TF. Members were provided with the agenda (Encl. 1a) and the draft minutes (Encl. 1b) from the October 2014 meeting.

Gina Ralph announced the Modified Water Deliveries to ENP increment 1 EA will be out the first week of February and asked everyone to review it and provide comments. It is the first step in changing operations to add more water to NE Shark River Slough. Nick Aumen updated everyone on the GEER Conference scheduled from April 21 – 23, 2015.

<b>In Attendance:</b>	Jan 26	
<b>Working Group (WG) Members</b>		Alternates
Ernie Marks – Chair – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	√	
Barry Rosen – Vice Chair - United States Geological Survey	√	
Brian Carlstrom – Biscayne National Park	√	
Billy Causey – NOAA, FL Keys Nat'l Marine Sanctuary	-	
COL Alan Dodd - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	-	Howie Gonzales
Deb Drum – Martin County	√	
Rory Feeney - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	-	
Veronica Harrell-James – U.S. Attorney's Office	√	
Lee Hefty – Miami Dade County	√	
Eric Hughes – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√	
Cherise Maples – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	
Russell Morgan - U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS	-	
Keith Neves - Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	
Fred Noble - FL Dept. of Transportation	-	
Bonnie Ponwith – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Pedro Ramos – NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	-	
Robert Robbins – Palm Beach County	-	
W. Ray Scott - FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	
Edward Smith – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Tom Teets - South Florida Water Management District	-	Paul Warner
Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	-	

Vacant – Local Government	-	
Vacant – U.S. Department of Transportation	-	
Shannon Estenoz – U.S. Department of the Interior, Special Advisor	√	
<b>Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members</b>		
Nick Aumen – Chair – United States Geological Survey	√	
Susan Gray – Vice Chair - South Florida Water Management District	√	
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	-	
Lisa Beever – Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program	√	
Joan Browder - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Amy Castaneda - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	-	
Bob Johnson – U.S. Department of the Interior, Special Advisor	√	
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.	-	
Bob Progulske – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Gina Ralph - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Bill Reck - U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	-	
Dave Rudnick – Everglades National Park, NPS	√	
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	
Amber Whittle Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	-	
Vacant – Local Government	-	
Vacant - U.S. Department of Agriculture, ARS	-	

**Charlotte Harbor Update**

Lisa Beever provided an updated (Encl. 2) on the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP), one of 28 programs in the nation and one of four in Florida. National Estuary Programs were created by Section 320 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and represent broad local partnerships that include citizens, scientists, industry and government at all levels. They have a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan that implements local solutions to complex water quality, habitat and living resource problems under the CWA. The CHNEP covers a seven county area from Venice to Bonita Springs to Winter Haven. CHNEP along with two other Florida NEPs on the West Coast (Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay) worked together after the RESTORE Act was adopted to look at the Gulf Coast Restoration Council Funding. Together, the three NEPs developed the Southwest Florida Regional Ecosystem Restoration Plan. Lisa reviewed a sampling of significant ongoing projects which included the RESTORE Act, Oyster Habitat Restoration Plan, Alligator Creek Restoration and Mangrove Heart Attack. She also announced that her offices recently moved from Ft. Myers to Punta Gorda.

Bob Progulske noted a lot of entities within the Indian River Lagoon are using the oyster maps and he asked who was funding that and if they were able to measure success with those maps. Lisa replied their first pilot has not been deployed yet so it is hard to determine success at this point and added that the Nature Conservancy has been generous with support of the project.

## **Water Depth Assessment Tool (WDAT) in Comparison to the Everglades Depth Estimation Network (EDEN): An Update**

Susan Gray said they have complimentary and overlapping tools that they use to look at water depths for portions of the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries. They want to do a comparison of the EDEN tool which was developed and maintained by USGS with funding support from RECOVER and WDAT which is a tool internal to the SFWMD. The intent is to see how they both work, whether they are indeed complimentary and whether they can put their resources into one and not support both given funding limitations. No decision has yet been made.

Fred Sklar provided a presentation (Encl. 3) reviewing the process they have developed to do the comparison as a way to deal with continuing budget cuts. RECOVER did not want to do this but they need to do this type of evaluation to keep the science moving forward. USGS has done a tremendous job creating EDEN and the Corps of Engineers has done a tremendous job with Gretchen Ehlinger managing the project. He reviewed the RECOVER supported EDEN tasks which include operating 22 real-time water level gages where no gages exist, supporting the water level surface calculation and data management for approximately 250 water level gages operated by four agencies, generating daily water level surfaces for freshwater Everglades and contributing to the System Status Report to Congress. RECOVER was told that due to changes in funding they needed to drop some of the stations. RECOVER has to decide whether dropping these stations is appropriate or whether some other mechanism could be found to keep the data flowing. They are faced with an EDEN funding shortfall since USGS can no longer cover the RECOVER funding past fiscal year 2015.

RECOVER decided to look at the WDAT tool which is a daily automated series of applications developed by the SFWMD to provide near real time spatial perspectives of water depth and water elevation changes, along with a series of regulatory and ecological indices used to assess project progress. It is currently being used for weekly operations' activities and ecological condition reporting, Governing Board briefings, communication of water conditions to the general public as well as planning and assessment activities. Fred provided a demonstration of how WDAT could be used and reviewed the similarities and differences for WDAT and EDEN. He reviewed the path forward which includes determining if other CERP projects or agencies can cover the cost of gages that are essential for their use, developing EDEN and WDAT functional cost comparisons and determining if WDAT functionalities can meet the needs of RECOVER principal investigators by conducting a proof of concept in FY15. Kick-off meeting held in December 2014 to set the guidelines for comparing the accuracy, precision and utility of the WDAT and EDEN. Four proposals were submitted in January 2015 and evaluations will be completed in mid-March 2015. RECOVER scientists will examine the results of the comparison evaluation and RECOVER Executive Committee will review the cost - benefit analysis. RECOVER recommendations will be provided to the Corps and the SFWMD leadership in May 2015.

Nick Aumen added this is something they have been working through over the last six months. They understand the need to look at the most cost effective tools they can use and EDEN is not inexpensive. He estimates USGS has invested \$5 to \$8 million over the last 15 years including the money spent on the ground elevation survey. He clarified that the Priority Ecosystem Sciences program funds are not dropping and he is trying to avoid expending those funds for routine monitoring and production of

products. PES funding has always been viewed as a way to develop new science and tools. While RECOVER has been critical for funding the cost of the gages and for the production of the water level services on a daily basis, his program has funded the R&D costs for about \$400,000 per year. It is important for RECOVER to look at all of the projects they do in light of shrinking budgets. This comparison process will be very informative.

Deb Drum asked if they would also be identifying other projects in RECOVER that would be given up. Fred Sklar said that would be part of the cost-benefit analysis but they will not have enough time to prioritize which projects will be cut. Susan Gray added the RECOVER budget went through a major reduction in 2011 and they have been working off of that prioritization. Gretchen Ehlinger said RECOVER will need to look at where it is going over the next five years but they won't have any definitive answers in May. Gina Ralph pointed to the multiple users of EDEN and said she was hopeful the SCG and WG members can take it back to their own agencies to see if they can help provide additional funding to EDEN. Bob Johnson added that DOI has been talking about stepping up for the gages on the lands they manage and are committed to doing that. Barry Rosen suggested they may want to run both for a while to see if the analysis is comparable adding that the principal investigators will want data comparability so. Bob Progulske echoed that there are a lot of other users aside from the four super users. EDEN is readily available and interpreted and is used a lot by the public. Susan Gray said they will bring this back to the WG/SCG as well as the TF. They have a contractual deadline they are up against and they want to be able to make some recommendations.

Fred Sklar said that if they agencies can come up with a way to support the gages then that would allow them to create a new contract with USGS that allows them to have a transition period. If WDAT is selected there will be an issue with modelers that are dependent upon EDEN. They will need money for EDEN in the next contract no matter what and the sooner they know if there are gages that can be picked up by the other agencies then the sooner they will know how to design the contract.

Deb Drum asked what the financial shortfall was. Fred Sklar said anywhere from \$211,000 to \$250,000. Nick Aumen added it is up to the RECOVER leadership to decide how to allocate the money. They are only talking about 22 of the 250 gages per year as well as the EDEN tool. For the contract as it currently stands there is a \$250,000 shortfall. WDAT is no cost to anyone, it is a SFWMD cost that could be cost shared but the EDEN interface is not there to meet the needs of the users. Dave Rudnick said there is a reason so much money has been invested in this network and the whole scientific community depends on this being available.

#### **Public Comment**

None

Ernie Marks reminded the members the next meeting will be in March/April and the Task Force will meet in May. The minutes were approved as presented. The IDS Workshop will take place after the break from 1-5PM.

Meeting adjourned at 11:40 AM

Enclosures:

1. Administrative Materials
  - a. Agenda
  - b. Draft meeting minutes, October 2014
2. Charlotte Harbor presentation
3. Water Depth Assessment Tool (WDAT) in Comparison to the Everglades Depth Estimation Network (EDEN): An Update presentation