

Project Name: E&SF: Critical Projects Southern CREW Project Addition/ Imperial River Flowway
Southern CREW (also included as a CERP OPE)
Project ID: 1303
Lead Agency: USACE / SFWMD
Authority: WRDA 1996 (Critical Project), WRDA 2000 (*in CERP Plan; limitation of watershed addition outside of the CERP*), WRDA 2007 (*modified Critical Project cap*)
Funding Source: Federal/State

Strategic Plan Goal(s) Addressed: Primary 1-A.3 Secondary: 2-A.3

Measurable Output(s): 4,090 acres of restored wetlands (*proposed footprint*)

Project History: As noted in the Restudy, WRDA 1996 authorizes the Secretary of the Army to expeditiously implement restoration projects deemed critical to the restoration of the south Florida ecosystem. The SFEER Task Force nominated 35 projects with input from the Governor’s Commission for a Sustainable South Florida and the public. Based on the set of priorities, the USACE conducted an abbreviated study and produced a report transmitted to the Secretary of the Army for approval. This is one of the 12 restoration “Critical Projects” having the Secretary of the Army’s approval (WRDA 1996). However, funding caps under WRDA 1996 and later revised under WRDA 2007 limit spending per project and for the group.

April 1999 (Restudy) Project Synopsis: The *Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study* (Restudy) included an (OPE) under Programmatic Authority for the acquisition and restoration of 4,670 acres of land, replacement of the Imperial Bonita Estates Bridge on the Imperial River, and replacement of the Kehl Canal Weir in southern Lee County, adjacent to Corkscrew Sanctuary; clearing and snagging on Imperial River, Estero River and Halfway Creek, reconnection of Spring Creek and Halfway Creek under U.S. I-75, and replacement of the Imperial Bonita Estates bridge.

WRDA 2000 approved this project as part of the Plan (CERP), but with the limitation that the Southern Corkscrew regional ecosystem “watershed addition should be accomplished outside of the scope of the Plan”.

Current Project Synopsis: This project will re-establish historical sheetflow, hydroperiods and wetland storage on project lands and the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) and Corkscrew Sanctuary wetlands to the east; reduce excessive freshwater discharges to Estero Bay during the rainy season; improve habitat for other wildlife; reduce nutrient loads and pollutants to the Imperial River and Estero Bay, and mitigate flooding of homes and private lands west of the project area. The effort includes the removal of agricultural canals and road berms, house foundational pads and the filling of ditches. It also includes acquisition of 4,670 acres and restoration of the land to a natural state.

Because of escalating land costs in the region, particularly near Bonita Beach Road, and the difficulty in restoring hydrology in areas south of Kehl Canal, a change to the proposed footprint was approved at the March 2009 SFWMD Governing Board meeting. Changes exclude the southern half of Sections 32 and 33 that are south of the Kehl Canal and some areas along the western boundary of the project site that may be impacted by the proposed alignment of County Road 951. Approximately 45 acres in the NW corner of Section 32 and 15 acres in the SW corner of Section 34 were also removed from the project.

Even with a smaller footprint, the SFWMD will be able to maintain a flowway and corridor along the Kehl Canal and Imperial River connecting and restoring lands within Southern CREW and CREW Trust lands.

However, cost estimates for this project, in combination with the other eight Critical Projects, exceeded the USACE appropriation cap of \$95 million (WRDA 2000).

Current Status: This project is currently on hold. Land acquisition has been accomplished with state and federal cost sharing. Exotic species removal has taken place on over 2,560 acres, primarily treatment of Melaleuca trees. In addition, a number of canals have been plugged, berms breached and dirt roads removed enabling sheet flow in areas of the project footprint, restoring hydropatterns on approximately 640 acres of wetlands.

Est. Cost: \$ 40,004,032

Project Schedule:

1999 Start design work
2015 Finish construction.

Detailed Project Budget Information (rounded):

Southern CREW	Obligations Thru FY 2016
USACE	\$301,637
SFWMD	\$1,074,622
Total	\$1,376,259

Hyperlink: <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/EcosystemRestoration.aspx>

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Source: Original project description (OPE) summarized from the *Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study* (1999).