

Project Name: E&SF: Critical Projects - Lake Okeechobee Water Retention / Phosphorous Removal
Project ID: 1506
Lead Agency: USACE / SFWMD
Authority: WRDA 1996
Funding Source: Federal/State

Strategic Plan Goal(s) Addressed: 1-B.1

Measurable Output(s): Two stormwater treatment areas with 940 acres

Project History: 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 of, 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 and authorized to be appropriated by Congress (WRDA 1996) for the Department of the Army to pay the federal share up to \$75 million (no more than \$25 million for any single project) for fiscal years 1997-1999. WRDA 2007 amended the sum to up to \$95 million.

Current Project Synopsis: Four key basins for the Lake Okeechobee watershed include the lower Kissimmee River basins (S-65D, S-65E, and S-154), and the Taylor Creek-Nubbin Slough basin (S-191). Wetlands account for between 18 and 25 percent of the land classification in the basins (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1990 National Wetlands Inventory); however, approximately 37 percent of these wetlands have been ditched to drain the land for agriculture (i.e., improved pasture). Many of these wetlands were isolated depressions that once functioned as small water retention areas in the landscape. Others were more expansive and experienced drying from the regional built drainage system.

The resulting system causes an accelerated loss of water from the watershed as surface water runoff, which is rapidly transported to the tributary system draining into Lake Okeechobee. Loss of isolated wetlands has contributed to rapid rises in the stage of Lake Okeechobee -- resulting in damaging freshwater discharges to the estuaries. There has been a loss of the water quality treatment function that used to result from retaining water for short periods in those wetlands, and a loss of wetland habitat for migratory birds and waterfowl.

As part of the USACE planning process, alternative plans were reviewed and the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) was identified in 1998 with a two-pronged approach. The first is to restore the hydrology of isolated wetlands by plugging the connection to drainage ditches; and the second is diversion of the collector canal flows to adjacent wetlands to attenuate peak flows and retain phosphorus in Reservoir-Assisted Stormwater Treatment Areas (RSTAs). The plan includes construction of two stormwater treatment areas, acquiring conservation easements and removing improvements, which will also reduce phosphorous loads going to Lake Okeechobee as well as reestablishing wetlands previously drained for agriculture. At the sub-basin scale, land parcels that were once part of the tributary system's historic flood plain will be re-flooded to add adjacent and/or isolated wetlands back to the landscape. The result will be increased regional water storage north of Lake Okeechobee and restoration of wetland functions in the process.

Current Status: Taylor Creek portion was completed April 2011. Nubbin Slough STA transferred to SFWMD for OMR&R in March 2015.

Est. Cost: \$ 28,550,000

Project Schedule:

1997 Start
2006 Construction complete
2013 Construction repair and testing
2015 Transfer to SFWMD

Detailed Project Budget Information (rounded):

LOW	Obligations Thru FY 2016
USACE	\$13,731,603
SFWMD	\$14,775,576
Total	\$28,507,179

Contact: Jeff Couch, Ecosystem Projects Section Chief, Programs and Project Management Division, USACE, Jeffery.D.Couch@usace.army.mil

Lisa Krieger, Project Manager, SFWMD
Lkriege@sfwmd.gov

Source: Current status information was provided by the Project Manager. Project description is from the Tentatively Selected Plan (1998), and other planning documents.

Additional Information:

