



South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Working Group

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January 9, 2002

Ann R. Klee, Chair
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW, Room 6130
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Klee:

This letter transmits the 2001 Annual Report of the Working Group to the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. This report details the achievements, ongoing activities, and projected accomplishments of the Working Group and its member agencies.

The implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) continued during 2001, including efforts of the Restoration Coordination and Verification Team (RECOVER). Other activities include the ongoing development of programmatic regulations and public meetings held to broaden awareness of CERP in various regions of South Florida.

The Working Group's strategic planning efforts continued, with a focus on fostering compatibility between the built and natural systems in South Florida (Goal 3). A task team was formed to develop sub-goals and measurable objectives for this goal area. This information will be included in the updated strategic plan to be finalized in July 2002.

During 2001, the Working Group's issue teams were active on several fronts. The ASR Team conducted report reviews and revised its Charter providing an ongoing conduit to the Working Group. The Sustainable Agriculture Task Team provided an intensive summary report on the status of agriculture in South Florida and the Noxious Exotic Weed Task Team (NEWTT) finalized assessment and strategic documents during 2001. Several new teams were also formed during 2001. Regional forums were conducted and provided the impetus for developing Regional Restoration Coordination Teams in the Kissimmee Valley and Southwest Florida. A Land Acquisition Task Team was formed to develop a strategy for federally and jointly funded acquisition programs relative to ecosystem restoration. The Outreach, Environmental, and Economic Equity Coordination Team (OEEECT) was formed to develop a strategy for a system-wide approach for outreach and environmental justice that supports the achievement of economic and environmental equity as it relates to restoration efforts.

During the upcoming year, the Working Group anticipates continued efforts on these and other issues pertinent to ecosystem restoration. Specific items that will be addressed during 2002 include completion of the next iteration of the strategic plan, the development of a Noxious Exotic Animal Task Team (NEATT), development of a draft implementation strategy for the Multi-Species Recovery Plan, and finalization of the programmatic regulations for CERP. These and other activities will be further delineated in the 2002 Work Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wayne E. Daltry".

Wayne E. Daltry
Working Group Chairman

Enclosure

cc: Task Force members
Working Group members

2001 Annual Report

INTRODUCTION

The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (task force) was created in 1993 as a federal interagency partnership, with informal participation by the State of Florida, the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. The Water Resources Development Act of 1996 authorized the operation of the task force and provided for specific membership and duties. Pursuant to its statutory duties, the task force working group of agency and tribal representatives (the working group) works to resolve conflicts among participants, coordinate research, assist participants, prepare an integrated financial plan, and report to Congress.

This document is intended to update the task force members as to the achievements, ongoing activities, and projected accomplishments of the working group and its member agencies. In July 2000, the task force produced a strategic plan entitled *Coordinating Success: Strategy for Restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem*. The plan set forth three major ecosystem restoration goals: Get the water right; Restore, preserve, and protect natural habitats and species; and Foster compatibility of the built and natural systems. This document is organized according to these goals. A final section discusses restoration coordination and other overarching activities.

GOAL 1: GET THE WATER RIGHT

Getting the water right must address four interrelated factors: the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water. The main activities addressing the quantity, timing, and distribution of water are the projects and components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). CERP related activities during 2001 included the RECOVER team, database management, and development of programmatic regulations.

The Restoration Coordination and Verification Team (RECOVER)

The Restoration Coordination and Verification (RECOVER) Team addresses adaptive assessment and monitoring, peer review, development and refinement of system level analytical tools, and continuing review and refinement of the comprehensive plan. The RECOVER Management Plan was approved in May 2001. Six task teams and one overall leadership group have been established in order to implement CERP. This organizational structure is designed to promote technical consensus across multi-agency lines, provide direct links between RECOVER and the participating agencies, and establish an open process that promotes scientific contributions to the CERP.

The RECOVER Team is responsible for the development of performance measures for CERP. An annual report card will utilize key indicators selected from a large set of technical performance measures contained within the draft Monitoring and Assessment Plan. Additional RECOVER activities during 2001 included development of protocol papers and a conceptual ecological model for the total system.

CERPzone

During 2001, extensive efforts were made in regards to the establishment of a centralized database for CERP related activities. This database will enable agency scientists and staff to access data more easily and quickly, linking the efforts of multiple agencies and entities working on restoration projects.

Working Group Workshops

The working group collaborated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in providing regional workshops on CERP related projects and efforts. During 2001, several workshops were held in conjunction with the regular working group meetings. These included southwest Florida (February 2001) and the Kissimmee River basin (July 2001). These events provided information to the public on the local and regional aspects of CERP.

Program and Project Management

The approval of the Master Program Management Plan by the SFWMD and the USACE in August 2000 triggered the start of detailed program-level and project-level planning. A major effort is currently under way to develop detailed management plans for program-level activities such as public outreach, socio-economics and environmental justice, and the adaptive assessment and monitoring activities included in RECOVER. The USACE and SFWMD are also developing a joint management plan to cover program controls such as scheduling, joint cost tracking, and document management. In addition, project management plans will be prepared for each project in CERP, and will detail all the necessary analyses needed to bring the projects to construction. For each project, the SFWMD and the USACE will assign project managers to direct activities at the project level. Project-level activities include planning, engineering, design, construction, monitoring, and management activities specific to the project. Project management plans and other work products will be developed by interagency, interdisciplinary, project delivery teams, and will provide opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement. The Program Management Team (PMT) meets in conjunction with the regular working group meetings.

During 2001, project management plans for several of the six authorized CERP pilot projects were completed. These include the Western Hillsboro (Site 1) Impoundment and Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR), Lake Okeechobee ASR, and the Caloosahatchee River Basin ASR. Project management plans have also been completed for the Southwest Florida and Florida Bay and Florida Keys feasibility studies. Several other plans are nearing completion and will be finalized in early 2002.

Programmatic Regulations

Section 601 (h) of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 requires that the Secretary of the Army promulgate programmatic regulations to ensure that the goals and purposes of the Comprehensive Plan are achieved. The law requires that these programmatic regulations be developed within two years of the date of enactment; after notice and opportunity for public comment; with the concurrence of the Governor and the Secretary of the Interior; and in consultation with the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Secretary of Commerce, and other Federal, State, and local agencies.

This process, which began in May 2001, will include multiple meetings with agencies and stakeholders. Draft results are anticipated in Spring 2002 with final programmatic regulations being issued by December 2002.

ASR Team

During Spring 2001, the ASR Team conducted a comparative review of the CERP Program Management Plans, the Issue Team report, and the CROGEE report recommendations in regards to the utilization of ASR. These findings were presented to the working group in May 2001.

In July 2001, the working group approved a revised charter for the ASR Team. The purpose of the team is to periodically review and monitor the progress and the direction of the CERP ASR Project Delivery Team looking at the pilot projects, regional study, and the resolution of those issues raised in the Issue Team and CROGEE reports. The Team will provide status reports to the working group.

GOAL 2: RESTORE, PRESERVE, AND PROTECT NATURAL HABITATS AND SPECIES

Land Acquisition Task Team (LATT)

A Land Acquisition Task Team (LATT) was formed in 2001. The purpose of the LATT is to develop a strategy for land acquisition needed for ecosystem restoration projects that are either federally funded or jointly funded by federal and non-federal agencies. When completed, this plan and its appendices should provide a broad picture of all current land acquisition initiatives that contribute to the restoration.

The LATT is currently developing an updated map and database of land acquisition activities relative to south Florida ecosystem restoration. The report will have three main sections: acquired lands; needed lands (active programs); and potential lands (those identified by the various agencies that have not gone through an official process). An appendix with project sheets will also be developed with a summary matrix and map. A secondary appendix will reflect those lands under acquisition programs without a federal interest (financially). The final report is anticipated early 2002.

Noxious Exotic Weed Task Team (NEWTT)

The Noxious Exotic Weed Task Team has completed the Assessment of Invasive Exotic Plants in Florida and the Strategy for Managing Invasive Exotic Plants in Florida. Both documents are scheduled for final printing and release in November or December 2001. NEWTT is now working on the implementation planning for the strategic document and is preparing the action items and tasks working on developing the implementation tasks in project management software for tracking and integration. A revised directive pertaining to the implementation plan was approved by the working group in February 2001 so that the team can further their efforts. NEWTT is also working with the Science Coordination Team to initiate a similar assessment and strategy for invasive exotic animals. NEWTT has been working with FDEP to assist the state with an integrated state agency plan for invasive exotic species that will be integrated with the NEWTT plan for plants and the National Invasive Species Task Force plan nationally. NEWTT is also continuing to remain involved in other local and state planning efforts for invasive plants,

and the national invasive species program. NEWTT is providing a valuable South Florida restoration link to the state and national planning efforts.

The Multi-Species Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT)

A Multi-Species/Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT) has been established to develop an implementation schedule and overarching implementation strategy for South Florida as guidance for community restoration and species recovery needs as identified in the Multi-Species Recovery Plan. This strategy will assist with project planning needs for CERP and other restoration efforts. Additional goals of MERIT are to coordinate government, non-government and private efforts to recover species and restore habitats in South Florida, exchange information among the various working group efforts to recover species and restore the ecosystem, promote outreach to involve the public in species recovery and community restoration, and evaluate restoration success through species and ecological community monitoring and adaptive management.

To date, MERIT has focused on developing components of the implementation strategy. One outcome of the meetings was the formation of three subteams: a Landscape subteam with expertise on GIS mapping and analysis, land conservation needs, land use planning and regulation, and on integrating MERIT with other South Florida restoration activities; a Community and Species subteam to prioritize the restoration and recovery tasks from the Recovery Plan and provide expertise on species and community issues; and a Conservation Incentives subteam to work on issues such as funding sources for accomplishing implementation, incentives for landowners and the private sector, involving the public and non-governmental organizations, intra-and interagency coordination, and the roles of agencies in the implementation process.

The work of the subteams will be shared on an ongoing basis with the overarching MERIT team to ensure that the issues are compatible with the goals and objectives of the team. Information and products resulting from the subteam efforts will be the basis for the implementation strategy. A first draft of the implementation strategy will be completed by December 2002, and the final strategy is expected to be completed by December 2003.

In addition, during 2000 and 2001, MERIT formed a Florida Panther Subteam to produce a landscape conservation strategy for the Florida Panther in South Florida. The modeling efforts for that strategy are completed and the document is currently being drafted.

GOAL 3: FOSTER COMPATIBILITY OF THE BUILT AND NATURAL SYSTEMS

Goal 3 Team

An issue team was established in order to tackle issues regarding the compatibility of the built and natural systems. During 2001, this team worked on the development of sub-goals and measurable objectives for Goal 3. These sub-goals and objectives will be included within the updated strategic plan due out in July 2002. Issues such as development patterns, agriculture, water supply, flood control, and environmental justice are included under Goal 3.

Sustainable Agriculture Task Team (SATT)

The Sustainable Agriculture Task Team concluded its primary efforts with the submission of a summary report to the working group in March 2001. The report, entitled *A New Look at Agriculture*, included statistics, concerns, and future steps in regards to agriculture and restoration in South Florida.

RESTORATION COORDINATION

Strategic Plan

In July 2000, the task force produced a strategic plan entitled *Coordinating Success: Strategy for Restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem*. The plan set forth three major ecosystem restoration goals: Get the water right; Restore, preserve, and protect natural habitats and species; and Foster compatibility of the built and natural systems. This plan is currently being updated and will be completed by July 2002. The 2002 document will include updated information as well as address the GAO March 2001 report entitled *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration: Substantial Progress Made in Developing a Strategic Plan, but Actions Still Needed*.

Regional Restoration Coordination Forums and Teams

The working group approved implementation of a Regional Assessment Process at the September 2000 meeting. This process consisted of regional forums conducted during 2001 in order to inform the working group as to the status and needs for regional coordination. The first two regional meetings were held in the Kissimmee Valley (April 10th) and Southwest Florida (March 29th).

The forums provided briefings on the major projects and programs affecting each region. Moderated sessions were then held so participants could provide information and recommendations regarding regional coordination. Participants included representatives from state, federal, regional, and local governments, tribal entities, and the general public. Future steps and goals were outlined for each region.

These events also provided an opportunity to revisit the structure and purpose of the existing Project Coordination Teams. Both the Kissimmee Valley and Southwest Florida groups decided to form as Regional Restoration Coordination Teams with broader membership and tasks. Events and meetings are being planned for each region, with feedback to the working group on a regular basis. A Regional Restoration Coordination Team was also formed for Biscayne Bay. This team and its efforts will build on the findings of the Biscayne Bay Partnership Initiative, a stakeholder group formed by the Florida Legislature that issued a final report in January 2001.

Dispute Resolution Protocol Team

In February of 2001 the Dispute Resolution Protocol Team directive was approved by the working group. In accordance with its Team Directive, the Team developed procedures to facilitate the resolution of interagency and intergovernmental conflicts associated with the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem among agencies and entities represented on the task force. The working group gave interim approval to the procedures and forwarded them to the task force for approval.

Science Coordination Team (SCT)

The Science Coordination Team (SCT) met at six regular bimonthly meetings and one call meeting during 2001. At the request of the working group, the SCT invited presenters and heard discussion regarding coastal restoration science issues for Biscayne Bay and southwest Florida coastal systems. A summary of key science information relevant to Biscayne Bay was presented by several Biscayne Bay partners to the working group. In addition, an overview of the Big Cypress Basin Science Plan was presented to and discussed by the SCT, a brief summary of which was presented to the working group. In addition to the above special activities, the SCT continues to focus on several major tasks – flows/decompartmentalization, water quality, science support of the CERP, interaction and liaison with the Committee on Restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem (CROGEE), and planning for the next Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (GEER) Science Conference. The SCT is currently drafting a white paper dealing with the relevance of marsh flows to greater Everglades restoration with the final draft release expected in early 2002.

The Museum of Discovery and Science and the Task Force Collaboration Committee

The working group made significant progress in the implementation of the public-private partnership between the task force and the Museum of Discovery and Science. The first of three phases has been successfully initiated and several projects are being implemented. The Museum's existing environmental education efforts are being updated and the foundation is being built for implementing phases II and III of the Outreach Plan. The success of this collaborative effort will result in enhanced outdoor exhibitry and the creation of an informative kiosk about the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration effort which will provide information to the half million people who visit the Museum annually.

In 2001, the partnership efforts focused on a full range of programmatic offerings. Significant progress has been made on the following components: information dissemination, electronic outreach, school-based education, museum-based education, retrofit of displays and exhibits, and outdoor exhibitry. Maximum use was made of in-kind contributions for information dissemination, electronic outreach, school and museum-based education initiatives. Funding for partnership projects was provided through the collaboration of several partners: Task Force Office of the Executive Director, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, United States Geological Survey, Everglades National Park, South Florida Water Management District, Broward County Department of Planning and Environmental Protection, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Outreach, Environmental, and Economic Equity Coordination Team (OEEECT)

The Outreach, Environmental, and Economic Equity Coordination Team (OEEECT) charter was adopted November 1, 2001. The purpose of the OEEECT is to develop for working group consideration a comprehensive interagency strategy for a system-wide approach for outreach and environmental justice that supports the achievement of economic and environmental equity related to restoration efforts as encouraged in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000 and the President's Executive Order 12898. The strategy should seek to optimize interagency collaboration and coordination, discourage duplication of efforts, and encourage cost sharing without infringing on existing missions, authorities or jurisdictions of the participating agencies. The first phase of this strategy development will include an inventory of government and non-government programs. This should build on the work being done by member agencies and the prior work of the working group related to these issues.