



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva,  
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Grijalva:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020* prepared by the Department's Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI). The Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Public Law 104-303, established the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) as a coordinating body for the intergovernmental effort to restore America's Everglades. The legislation also requires the Task Force to submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration progress. The intergovernmental Task Force is the only forum that provides strategic coordination and a system-wide perspective to guide the separate restoration efforts being planned and implemented in south Florida.

Over the past two years, much progress has been made to restore this unique ecosystem that supports over 8 million residents in a region stretching from Orlando to Key West. As Chair of the Task Force, I am pleased to provide the following examples of restoration success.

The implementation of the Congressionally authorized **Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan** (CERP) continued with multiple projects underway, led by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The following highlights illustrate some of our most significant CERP accomplishments during the July 2018 to June 2020 reporting period:

- The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) and Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Projects include water storage, conveyance, treatment, and decompartmentalization in the heart of the Everglades. The FY 2020 budget increased significantly and resulted in acceleration of several CEPP features. The SFWMD has started construction on two crucial CEPP South components, the removal of Old Tamiami Trail, which is expected to be completed in 2022, and the S-333N water control structure, which is expected to be completed in late 2020. The USACE has been designing the L-67A Culverts and expects to start construction in late 2020. The EAA Project includes the A-2 Reservoir (known as the EAA Reservoir) and the A-2 Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) to divert, store, and treat Lake Okeechobee and watershed regulatory releases. The SFWMD began design of the A-

2 STA in June 2019 and started site preparation activities in April 2020. A Pre-Partnership Credit Agreement was executed in May 2020 allowing the SFWMD to initiate construction on the A-2 STA in June 2020. The USACE initiated design of the A-2 Reservoir and Pump Station in March 2020.

- The Picayune Strand Restoration Project involves restoring flow in western Collier County across an area larger than the District of Columbia that was drained in the early 1960s in anticipation of extensive development that never materialized. The Miller Pump Station, the last of three large pump stations, was completed by the USACE and transferred to the SFWMD during the reporting period. The removal of 65 miles of road and 26 miles of logging trams is complete and design work and construction of flood protection features, road removal, and canal backfill continue. The Manatee Mitigation Feature designed to mitigate for impacts to an existing warm water habitat is complete and fully operational with manatees seen using the site as refuge during the cooler winter months of 2019.
- The Indian River Lagoon-South (IRL-S) Project will help restore the St. Lucie Estuary and the southern portion of the Indian River Lagoon. During the reporting period, the reservoir pump station was completed and construction neared completion on the 6,300-acre C-44 STA. The C-44 Reservoir, which will store up to 50,600 acre-feet of water, is also under construction by the USACE and is expected to be completed in 2021.
- In southwest Florida, the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) Western Basin Storage Reservoir Project will provide 170,000 acre-feet of storage. Capturing excess flows from the basin during the wet season and then releasing the stored water to the estuary during the dry season will improve the timing and quantity of water delivered to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, aiding in meeting the minimum dry season flows. During the reporting period, construction of the S-476 irrigation pump station was completed and construction of the large S-470 pump station began. Construction of 19 miles of earthen embankment, 15 miles of perimeter canal, 14 water control structures, a pump station, 2 bridges, and recreational features, was also initiated in the reporting period.
- The goal of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Project, Phase 1, is to improve the ecology of Biscayne National Park (BNP) and the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves, including the nearshore waters of Biscayne Bay and adjacent wetlands. The project will rehydrate coastal wetlands and reduce freshwater point source discharges by redistributing surface water flows through a spreader canal system. The USACE and the SFWMD have each constructed portions of this project. Further restoration efforts will occur through the recently initiated Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project.
- Major planning efforts for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project and the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project were completed in 2020.

In addition to the above CERP projects, additional restoration efforts are highlighted as follows:

- The Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (ENP) (Mod Waters) project sets the stage for future CERP components and operating plans that have the potential to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water deliveries to ENP. This project will support the recovery of wading bird populations, restoration of naturally occurring ridge and slough formations, restoration of fish and wildlife resources, and overall improvement of 63,000 acres of wetlands. All features of this project are constructed and the Combined Operational Plan (COP) was recently completed.
- The goal of the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project is to reduce seepage losses from ENP and provide increased flows to Florida Bay through Taylor Slough. The SFWMD constructed the recommended plan, which includes an aboveground detention area, associated water management features and operational changes in south Miami-Dade County. The constructed features are already showing positive ecological benefits to the Taylor Slough area, including Cape Sable seaside sparrow habitat, by restoring more natural water conditions and flows.
- The Kissimmee River Restoration Project continues to shine as the keystone Everglades restoration project. After 20-plus years of large-scale construction, the final two construction contracts are underway with completion anticipated in 2021. After construction is completed, implementation of the Headwaters Revitalization Schedule is expected to provide the improved, longer hydroperiods needed for reestablishment of broadleaf marsh communities. However, positive interim ecological responses are already being observed. In the river channel, reestablishment of flow eliminated organic deposits on the river bottom and undesirable floating and mat-forming plants have been replaced by native emergent species. Sandbars have reformed, creating new habitat for shorebirds and invertebrates. Dissolved oxygen, critical for the long-term survival of fish and other aquatic organisms, has increased up to six-fold. Largemouth bass and sunfishes now comprise 63 percent of the fish community; prior to restoration, they represented only 38 percent. Wading bird foraging expectations are being met regularly when floodplain conditions are suitable and snail kites nested in a newly flooded section of the Kissimmee River floodplain in the 2018 wet season with good success rates. Long-legged wading bird populations, including white ibis, great egrets, snowy egrets and little blue herons, have increased significantly. Ducks have returned to the river, including American widgeons, northern pintails, northern shovelers, ring-necked ducks, and black-bellied whistling ducks.
- During the reporting period, the State of Florida made significant progress implementing the Restoration Strategies water quality plan, building on its existing multi-billion-dollar investment in water quality improvements in the Everglades. The Restoration Strategies plan includes more than 6,500 acres of new STAs and 110,000 acre-feet of additional water storage through construction of Flow Equalization Basins (FEBs). To date, 7 projects are complete, 6 others are ongoing, and 52 of the 74 consent order milestones have been achieved, 46 of them ahead of their deadlines. The Restoration Strategies project

works in conjunction with existing STAs to achieve compliance with State of Florida water quality standards. All projects are scheduled to be completed by December 2025.

- Efforts also continued during this period in the battle against the invasion and expansion of exotic plant and animal species. New programs were launched and others expanded to specifically increase the capture and removal of Burmese pythons and Brazilian black and white tegus while educational programs and public outreach continued to assist in the fight against all invasive exotic plant and animal species. The CERP Biological Control Implementation Project continues to rear and release approved biological control agents for several priority invasive plant species in south Florida. During the reporting period, the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), in collaboration with USACE and SFWMD, strategically released agents for the suppression of Old World climbing fern, Brazilian pepper, and water hyacinth.
- The summary of the **System-wide Ecological Indicators Report** (Appendix A) continues to show ecosystem problems and challenges in key areas, many of which were compounded by the weather extremes experienced during the reporting period. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program will help to correct these issues and the results achieved by early individual projects such as Picayune Strand, BBCW Phase 1, and the bridging of Tamiami Trail are encouraging. Within regions of the Everglades, research and restoration projects have already improved the management of hydrologic flows and increased water storage, which are key to achieving the restoration goals of improving wetland hydroperiods and flows of freshwater into coastal areas.

The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.  
Assistant Secretary for Water and Science and presiding  
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Enclosure: The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: *Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020*.

Identical letters and enclosures are being sent to:

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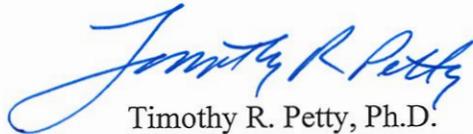
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# United States Department of the Interior

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JAN 14 2021

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United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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Ranking Member,  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
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The Honorable Lisa Murkowski,  
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
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Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water  
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United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Bishop,  
Ranking Member,  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water  
Resources and Environment  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Westerman:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020* prepared by the Department's Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI). The Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Public Law 104-303, established the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) as a coordinating body for the intergovernmental effort to restore America's Everglades. The legislation also requires the Task Force to submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration progress. The intergovernmental Task Force is the only forum that provides strategic coordination and a system-wide perspective to guide the separate restoration efforts being planned and implemented in south Florida.

Over the past two years, much progress has been made to restore this unique ecosystem that supports over 8 million residents in a region stretching from Orlando to Key West. As Chair of the Task Force, I am pleased to provide the following examples of restoration success.

The implementation of the Congressionally authorized **Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan** (CERP) continued with multiple projects underway, led by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The following highlights illustrate some of our most significant CERP accomplishments during the July 2018 to June 2020 reporting period:

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- The Picayune Strand Restoration Project involves restoring flow in western Collier County across an area larger than the District of Columbia that was drained in the early 1960s in anticipation of extensive development that never materialized. The Miller Pump Station, the last of three large pump stations, was completed by the USACE and transferred to the SFWMD during the reporting period. The removal of 65 miles of road and 26 miles of logging trams is complete and design work and construction of flood protection features, road removal, and canal backfill continue. The Manatee Mitigation Feature designed to mitigate for impacts to an existing warm water habitat is complete and fully operational with manatees seen using the site as refuge during the cooler winter months of 2019.
- The Indian River Lagoon-South (IRL-S) Project will help restore the St. Lucie Estuary and the southern portion of the Indian River Lagoon. During the reporting period, the reservoir pump station was completed and construction neared completion on the 6,300-acre C-44 STA. The C-44 Reservoir, which will store up to 50,600 acre-feet of water, is also under construction by the USACE and is expected to be completed in 2021.
- In southwest Florida, the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) Western Basin Storage Reservoir Project will provide 170,000 acre-feet of storage. Capturing excess flows from the basin during the wet season and then releasing the stored water to the estuary during the dry season will improve the timing and quantity of water delivered to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, aiding in meeting the minimum dry season flows. During the reporting period, construction of the S-476 irrigation pump station was completed and construction of the large S-470 pump station began. Construction of 19 miles of earthen embankment, 15 miles of perimeter canal, 14 water control structures, a pump station, 2 bridges, and recreational features, was also initiated in the reporting period.
- The goal of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Project, Phase 1, is to improve the ecology of Biscayne National Park (BNP) and the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves, including the nearshore waters of Biscayne Bay and adjacent wetlands. The project will rehydrate coastal wetlands and reduce freshwater point source discharges by redistributing surface water flows through a spreader canal system. The USACE and the SFWMD have each constructed portions of this project. Further restoration efforts will occur through the recently initiated Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project.
- Major planning efforts for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project and the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project were completed in 2020.

In addition to the above CERP projects, additional restoration efforts are highlighted as follows:

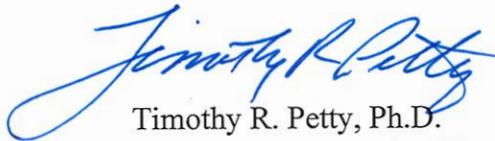
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- The goal of the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project is to reduce seepage losses from ENP and provide increased flows to Florida Bay through Taylor Slough. The SFWMD constructed the recommended plan, which includes an aboveground detention area, associated water management features and operational changes in south Miami-Dade County. The constructed features are already showing positive ecological benefits to the Taylor Slough area, including Cape Sable seaside sparrow habitat, by restoring more natural water conditions and flows.
- The Kissimmee River Restoration Project continues to shine as the keystone Everglades restoration project. After 20-plus years of large-scale construction, the final two construction contracts are underway with completion anticipated in 2021. After construction is completed, implementation of the Headwaters Revitalization Schedule is expected to provide the improved, longer hydroperiods needed for reestablishment of broadleaf marsh communities. However, positive interim ecological responses are already being observed. In the river channel, reestablishment of flow eliminated organic deposits on the river bottom and undesirable floating and mat-forming plants have been replaced by native emergent species. Sandbars have reformed, creating new habitat for shorebirds and invertebrates. Dissolved oxygen, critical for the long-term survival of fish and other aquatic organisms, has increased up to six-fold. Largemouth bass and sunfishes now comprise 63 percent of the fish community; prior to restoration, they represented only 38 percent. Wading bird foraging expectations are being met regularly when floodplain conditions are suitable and snail kites nested in a newly flooded section of the Kissimmee River floodplain in the 2018 wet season with good success rates. Long-legged wading bird populations, including white ibis, great egrets, snowy egrets and little blue herons, have increased significantly. Ducks have returned to the river, including American widgeons, northern pintails, northern shovelers, ring-necked ducks, and black-bellied whistling ducks.
- During the reporting period, the State of Florida made significant progress implementing the Restoration Strategies water quality plan, building on its existing multi-billion-dollar investment in water quality improvements in the Everglades. The Restoration Strategies plan includes more than 6,500 acres of new STAs and 110,000 acre-feet of additional water storage through construction of Flow Equalization Basins (FEBs). To date, 7 projects are complete, 6 others are ongoing, and 52 of the 74 consent order milestones have been achieved, 46 of them ahead of their deadlines. The Restoration Strategies project

works in conjunction with existing STAs to achieve compliance with State of Florida water quality standards. All projects are scheduled to be completed by December 2025.

- Efforts also continued during this period in the battle against the invasion and expansion of exotic plant and animal species. New programs were launched and others expanded to specifically increase the capture and removal of Burmese pythons and Brazilian black and white tegus while educational programs and public outreach continued to assist in the fight against all invasive exotic plant and animal species. The CERP Biological Control Implementation Project continues to rear and release approved biological control agents for several priority invasive plant species in south Florida. During the reporting period, the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), in collaboration with USACE and SFWMD, strategically released agents for the suppression of Old World climbing fern, Brazilian pepper, and water hyacinth.
- The summary of the **System-wide Ecological Indicators Report** (Appendix A) continues to show ecosystem problems and challenges in key areas, many of which were compounded by the weather extremes experienced during the reporting period. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program will help to correct these issues and the results achieved by early individual projects such as Picayune Strand, BBCW Phase 1, and the bridging of Tamiami Trail are encouraging. Within regions of the Everglades, research and restoration projects have already improved the management of hydrologic flows and increased water storage, which are key to achieving the restoration goals of improving wetland hydroperiods and flows of freshwater into coastal areas.

The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.  
Assistant Secretary for Water and Science and presiding  
Chairperson of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

Enclosure: The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: *Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020*.

Identical letters and enclosures are being sent to:

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United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Tom Udall,  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020* prepared by the Department's Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI). The Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Public Law 104-303, established the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) as a coordinating body for the intergovernmental effort to restore America's Everglades. The legislation also requires the Task Force to submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration progress. The intergovernmental Task Force is the only forum that provides strategic coordination and a system-wide perspective to guide the separate restoration efforts being planned and implemented in south Florida.

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# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

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Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.

Assistant Secretary for Water and Science and presiding  
Chairperson of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

Enclosure: The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: *Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020*.

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Washington, DC 20515



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski,  
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020* prepared by the Department's Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI). The Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Public Law 104-303, established the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) as a coordinating body for the intergovernmental effort to restore America's Everglades. The legislation also requires the Task Force to submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration progress. The intergovernmental Task Force is the only forum that provides strategic coordination and a system-wide perspective to guide the separate restoration efforts being planned and implemented in south Florida.

Over the past two years, much progress has been made to restore this unique ecosystem that supports over 8 million residents in a region stretching from Orlando to Key West. As Chair of the Task Force, I am pleased to provide the following examples of restoration success.

The implementation of the Congressionally authorized **Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan** (CERP) continued with multiple projects underway, led by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The following highlights illustrate some of our most significant CERP accomplishments during the July 2018 to June 2020 reporting period:

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- The Picayune Strand Restoration Project involves restoring flow in western Collier County across an area larger than the District of Columbia that was drained in the early 1960s in anticipation of extensive development that never materialized. The Miller Pump Station, the last of three large pump stations, was completed by the USACE and transferred to the SFWMD during the reporting period. The removal of 65 miles of road and 26 miles of logging trams is complete and design work and construction of flood protection features, road removal, and canal backfill continue. The Manatee Mitigation Feature designed to mitigate for impacts to an existing warm water habitat is complete and fully operational with manatees seen using the site as refuge during the cooler winter months of 2019.
- The Indian River Lagoon-South (IRL-S) Project will help restore the St. Lucie Estuary and the southern portion of the Indian River Lagoon. During the reporting period, the reservoir pump station was completed and construction neared completion on the 6,300-acre C-44 STA. The C-44 Reservoir, which will store up to 50,600 acre-feet of water, is also under construction by the USACE and is expected to be completed in 2021.
- In southwest Florida, the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) Western Basin Storage Reservoir Project will provide 170,000 acre-feet of storage. Capturing excess flows from the basin during the wet season and then releasing the stored water to the estuary during the dry season will improve the timing and quantity of water delivered to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, aiding in meeting the minimum dry season flows. During the reporting period, construction of the S-476 irrigation pump station was completed and construction of the large S-470 pump station began. Construction of 19 miles of earthen embankment, 15 miles of perimeter canal, 14 water control structures, a pump station, 2 bridges, and recreational features, was also initiated in the reporting period.
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In addition to the above CERP projects, additional restoration efforts are highlighted as follows:

- The Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (ENP) (Mod Waters) project sets the stage for future CERP components and operating plans that have the potential to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water deliveries to ENP. This project will support the recovery of wading bird populations, restoration of naturally occurring ridge and slough formations, restoration of fish and wildlife resources, and overall improvement of 63,000 acres of wetlands. All features of this project are constructed and the Combined Operational Plan (COP) was recently completed.
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The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.  
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# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Betty McCollum,  
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McCollum:

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The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,

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Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.

Assistant Secretary for Water and Science and presiding  
Chairperson of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

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# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper,  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Environment and Public Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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In addition to the above CERP projects, additional restoration efforts are highlighted as follows:

- The Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (ENP) (Mod Waters) project sets the stage for future CERP components and operating plans that have the potential to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water deliveries to ENP. This project will support the recovery of wading bird populations, restoration of naturally occurring ridge and slough formations, restoration of fish and wildlife resources, and overall improvement of 63,000 acres of wetlands. All features of this project are constructed and the Combined Operational Plan (COP) was recently completed.
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The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.

Assistant Secretary for Water and Science and presiding  
Chairperson of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

Enclosure: The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: *Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020*.

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United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Bishop,  
Ranking Member,  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Rob Bishop,  
Ranking Member, Committee  
on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bishop:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020* prepared by the Department's Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI). The Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Public Law 104-303, established the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) as a coordinating body for the intergovernmental effort to restore America's Everglades. The legislation also requires the Task Force to submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration progress. The intergovernmental Task Force is the only forum that provides strategic coordination and a system-wide perspective to guide the separate restoration efforts being planned and implemented in south Florida.

Over the past two years, much progress has been made to restore this unique ecosystem that supports over 8 million residents in a region stretching from Orlando to Key West. As Chair of the Task Force, I am pleased to provide the following examples of restoration success.

The implementation of the Congressionally authorized **Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan** (CERP) continued with multiple projects underway, led by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The following highlights illustrate some of our most significant CERP accomplishments during the July 2018 to June 2020 reporting period:

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Lake Okeechobee and watershed regulatory releases. The SFWMD began design of the A-2 STA in June 2019 and started site preparation activities in April 2020. A Pre-Partnership Credit Agreement was executed in May 2020 allowing the SFWMD to initiate construction on the A-2 STA in June 2020. The USACE initiated design of the A-2 Reservoir and Pump Station in March 2020.

- The Picayune Strand Restoration Project involves restoring flow in western Collier County across an area larger than the District of Columbia that was drained in the early 1960s in anticipation of extensive development that never materialized. The Miller Pump Station, the last of three large pump stations, was completed by the USACE and transferred to the SFWMD during the reporting period. The removal of 65 miles of road and 26 miles of logging trams is complete and design work and construction of flood protection features, road removal, and canal backfill continue. The Manatee Mitigation Feature designed to mitigate for impacts to an existing warm water habitat is complete and fully operational with manatees seen using the site as refuge during the cooler winter months of 2019.
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In addition to the above CERP projects, additional restoration efforts are highlighted as follows:

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The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.

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# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

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United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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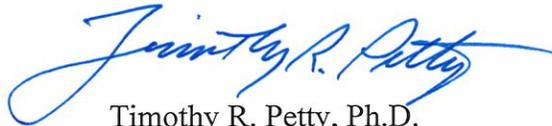
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Washington, DC 20515



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Washington, DC 20240

JAN 14 2021

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski,  
Chair, Committee on Energy  
and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020* prepared by the Department's Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI). The Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Public Law 104-303, established the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) as a coordinating body for the intergovernmental effort to restore America's Everglades. The legislation also requires the Task Force to submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration progress. The intergovernmental Task Force is the only forum that provides strategic coordination and a system-wide perspective to guide the separate restoration efforts being planned and implemented in south Florida.

Over the past two years, much progress has been made to restore this unique ecosystem that supports over 8 million residents in a region stretching from Orlando to Key West. As Chair of the Task Force, I am pleased to provide the following examples of restoration success.

The implementation of the Congressionally authorized **Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan** (CERP) continued with multiple projects underway, led by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The following highlights illustrate some of our most significant CERP accomplishments during the July 2018 to June 2020 reporting period:

- The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) and Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Projects include water storage, conveyance, treatment, and decompartmentalization in the heart of the Everglades. The FY 2020 budget increased significantly and resulted in acceleration of several CEPP features. The SFWMD has started construction on two crucial CEPP South components, the removal of Old Tamiami Trail, which is expected to be completed in 2022, and the S-333N water control structure, which is expected to be completed in late 2020. The USACE has been designing the L-67A Culverts and expects to start construction in late 2020. The EAA Project includes the A-2 Reservoir (known as the EAA Reservoir) and the A-2 Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) to divert, store, and treat

Lake Okeechobee and watershed regulatory releases. The SFWMD began design of the A-2 STA in June 2019 and started site preparation activities in April 2020. A Pre-Partnership Credit Agreement was executed in May 2020 allowing the SFWMD to initiate construction on the A-2 STA in June 2020. The USACE initiated design of the A-2 Reservoir and Pump Station in March 2020.

- The Picayune Strand Restoration Project involves restoring flow in western Collier County across an area larger than the District of Columbia that was drained in the early 1960s in anticipation of extensive development that never materialized. The Miller Pump Station, the last of three large pump stations, was completed by the USACE and transferred to the SFWMD during the reporting period. The removal of 65 miles of road and 26 miles of logging trams is complete and design work and construction of flood protection features, road removal, and canal backfill continue. The Manatee Mitigation Feature designed to mitigate for impacts to an existing warm water habitat is complete and fully operational with manatees seen using the site as refuge during the cooler winter months of 2019.
- The Indian River Lagoon-South (IRL-S) Project will help restore the St. Lucie Estuary and the southern portion of the Indian River Lagoon. During the reporting period, the reservoir pump station was completed and construction neared completion on the 6,300-acre C-44 STA. The C-44 Reservoir, which will store up to 50,600 acre-feet of water, is also under construction by the USACE and is expected to be completed in 2021.
- In southwest Florida, the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) Western Basin Storage Reservoir Project will provide 170,000 acre-feet of storage. Capturing excess flows from the basin during the wet season and then releasing the stored water to the estuary during the dry season will improve the timing and quantity of water delivered to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, aiding in meeting the minimum dry season flows. During the reporting period, construction of the S-476 irrigation pump station was completed and construction of the large S-470 pump station began. Construction of 19 miles of earthen embankment, 15 miles of perimeter canal, 14 water control structures, a pump station, 2 bridges, and recreational features, was also initiated in the reporting period.
- The goal of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Project, Phase 1, is to improve the ecology of Biscayne National Park (BNP) and the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves, including the nearshore waters of Biscayne Bay and adjacent wetlands. The project will rehydrate coastal wetlands and reduce freshwater point source discharges by redistributing surface water flows through a spreader canal system. The USACE and the SFWMD have each constructed portions of this project. Further restoration efforts will occur through the recently initiated Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project.
- Major planning efforts for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project and the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project were completed in 2020.

In addition to the above CERP projects, additional restoration efforts are highlighted as follows:

- The Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (ENP) (Mod Waters) project sets the stage for future CERP components and operating plans that have the potential to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water deliveries to ENP. This project will support the recovery of wading bird populations, restoration of naturally occurring ridge and slough formations, restoration of fish and wildlife resources, and overall improvement of 63,000 acres of wetlands. All features of this project are constructed and the Combined Operational Plan (COP) was recently completed.
- The goal of the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project is to reduce seepage losses from ENP and provide increased flows to Florida Bay through Taylor Slough. The SFWMD constructed the recommended plan, which includes an aboveground detention area, associated water management features and operational changes in south Miami-Dade County. The constructed features are already showing positive ecological benefits to the Taylor Slough area, including Cape Sable seaside sparrow habitat, by restoring more natural water conditions and flows.
- The Kissimmee River Restoration Project continues to shine as the keystone Everglades restoration project. After 20-plus years of large-scale construction, the final two construction contracts are underway with completion anticipated in 2021. After construction is completed, implementation of the Headwaters Revitalization Schedule is expected to provide the improved, longer hydroperiods needed for reestablishment of broadleaf marsh communities. However, positive interim ecological responses are already being observed. In the river channel, reestablishment of flow eliminated organic deposits on the river bottom and undesirable floating and mat-forming plants have been replaced by native emergent species. Sandbars have reformed, creating new habitat for shorebirds and invertebrates. Dissolved oxygen, critical for the long-term survival of fish and other aquatic organisms, has increased up to six-fold. Largemouth bass and sunfishes now comprise 63 percent of the fish community; prior to restoration, they represented only 38 percent. Wading bird foraging expectations are being met regularly when floodplain conditions are suitable and snail kites nested in a newly flooded section of the Kissimmee River floodplain in the 2018 wet season with good success rates. Long-legged wading bird populations, including white ibis, great egrets, snowy egrets and little blue herons, have increased significantly. Ducks have returned to the river, including American widgeons, northern pintails, northern shovelers, ring-necked ducks, and black-bellied whistling ducks.
- During the reporting period, the State of Florida made significant progress implementing the Restoration Strategies water quality plan, building on its existing multi-billion-dollar investment in water quality improvements in the Everglades. The Restoration Strategies plan includes more than 6,500 acres of new STAs and 110,000 acre-feet of additional water storage through construction of Flow Equalization Basins (FEBs). To date, 7 projects are complete, 6 others are ongoing, and 52 of the 74 consent order milestones have been achieved, 46 of them ahead of their deadlines. The Restoration Strategies project

works in conjunction with existing STAs to achieve compliance with State of Florida water quality standards. All projects are scheduled to be completed by December 2025.

- Efforts also continued during this period in the battle against the invasion and expansion of exotic plant and animal species. New programs were launched and others expanded to specifically increase the capture and removal of Burmese pythons and Brazilian black and white tegus while educational programs and public outreach continued to assist in the fight against all invasive exotic plant and animal species. The CERP Biological Control Implementation Project continues to rear and release approved biological control agents for several priority invasive plant species in south Florida. During the reporting period, the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), in collaboration with USACE and SFWMD, strategically released agents for the suppression of Old World climbing fern, Brazilian pepper, and water hyacinth.
- The summary of the **System-wide Ecological Indicators Report** (Appendix A) continues to show ecosystem problems and challenges in key areas, many of which were compounded by the weather extremes experienced during the reporting period. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program will help to correct these issues and the results achieved by early individual projects such as Picayune Strand, BBCW Phase 1, and the bridging of Tamiami Trail are encouraging. Within regions of the Everglades, research and restoration projects have already improved the management of hydrologic flows and increased water storage, which are key to achieving the restoration goals of improving wetland hydroperiods and flows of freshwater into coastal areas.

The Department appreciates the Committee's continuing support and sustained appropriations for the Everglades restoration effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy R. Petty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.  
Assistant Secretary for Water and Science and presiding  
Chairperson of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

Enclosure: The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: *Biennial Report, July 2018-June 2020*.

Identical letters and enclosures are being sent to:

The Honorable Joe Manchin,  
Ranking Member,  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski,  
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall,  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Betty McCollum,  
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce,  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano,  
Chair, Subcommittee on Water Resources  
and Environment  
Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water  
Resources and Environment  
Committee on Transportation and  
Infrastructure  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Chair, Committee on Environment  
and Public Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper,  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Environment and Public Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva,  
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Bishop,  
Ranking Member,  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515