

SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION TASK FORCE **PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROCEDURES**

BACKGROUND: The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1996 codified the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and Florida-based Working Group and provided guidance related to public participation. In general, the Task Force shall implement procedures to facilitate public participation in the advisory process, including providing advance notice of meetings, providing adequate opportunity for public input and comment, maintaining appropriate records, and making a record of proceedings of meetings available for public inspection. Also, the Task Force or the Working Group may seek advice and input from any interested, knowledgeable, or affected party as the Task Force or Working Group determines necessary to perform the duties as described in the Act. Also, the Task Force and Working Group shall not be considered advisory committees under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), and seeking advice and input shall not be subject to FACA.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this document is to establish standard public affairs operating procedures for the Working Group, any subgroup of the Working Group and any advisory groups designated by the Task Force or Working Group.

GUIDANCE:

A. General

The Working Group and each of its subordinate teams and advisory groups will designate public affairs representatives. The representatives will consult with the Office of the Executive Director (OED), Public Affairs Officer, who can provide advice and support. Each public affairs representative will provide advice and ongoing support to the team chairperson to provide advance notification of meetings, etc., as detailed below. These actions serve as the minimum requirement and additional steps may be taken as deemed appropriate by the team chairperson. For the Project Coordination Teams (PCT's), the Science Team, and the Public Outreach Steering and Support Team (POSST), the team's public affairs member will also serve as the public affairs advisor for team actions involving public information, public relations, public participation and public education. Issue Teams will generally follow the same guidelines as determined for each team as the situation warrants. For some Issue Teams with significant sensitivity, the Office of the Executive Director may augment resources, within its capability. The team chairperson is responsible for making assignments to the appropriate team member(s) or staff and ensuring that the requirements of these guidelines are completed.

B. Advance Notification

1. The goal is to provide maximum possible opportunity for the public to be informed and involved. The following procedures provide the norm.
2. Internet: As soon as it is determined that a meeting will be held, the information will be provided to the Office of the Executive Director (Executive Secretary) in the format provided for publishing on the Internet in the Task Force calendar of events.

3. News Release: In general, a news release will be disseminated two weeks prior to the date of the meeting to all appropriate print and broadcast media sharing the same market area within the affected and/or interested geographic area. Timing will also ensure that local weekly newspapers receive it in time to be published no later than the week prior to the event, with a request that it be published in both news format and in community calendars. At a minimum, the news releases should be prepared using a standard format provided by OED that contains the meeting date(s), times, location, purpose of the meeting, why it is important to the reader, agenda, and contact person for further information.

4. Media Contacts: The team's public affairs representative will confer with the team chairperson and the Task Force's Public Affairs Officer (305/348-1662) to develop a list of media contacts. Once this list is developed, the team's public affairs representative will initiate media contacts as determined necessary, and serve as the media liaison for response to inquiries received from the media.

5. Notification to a list of interested parties: Generally, all teams will keep a current list of those persons that have asked to be kept informed, and parties that the team chairperson determines need to be on the list. This list will systematically identify affected and interested target audiences who will routinely receive a notice by fax or Internet List Service or in the mail as a last resort. In general, these notices will be prepared using a standard format (mentioned in B.2 above) and contain the meeting date(s), time, location, purpose of the meeting, agenda, contact person, and map to the location with directions.

6. Member Notification: The team chairperson with appropriate assistance from OED is responsible for coordinating with team members and providing advance notification of meetings and materials.

C. During Meetings

1. The goal is to allow the public to participate in a meaningful manner through the facilitation of two-way communication. The appropriate information will be provided so that the public can in turn provide informed input. To accomplish this goal, the following procedures are the norms.

2. Registration: A registration table or other suitable arrangement (e.g. meeting attendee's sign-in sheet) will be used to insure all attendee's receive the meeting agenda and to maintain a record of all participants. This process will also allow for the opportunity to be added to the mailing list, and to receive future copies of information provided to team members in advance of upcoming meetings. If information is excessively bulky or out of print, a review copy will be made available.

3. Handouts: All attendees will receive a copy of meeting handouts.

4. Public Comment: (The following applies for Working Group subordinate teams whose membership is limited to governmental representatives. See item "E" below for advisory groups.) Non-government attendees will participate in meetings during a public comment period that will be provided at an appropriate time on the agenda, prior to decisions being made. Additional opportunities for public comment may be provided as deemed appropriate by the team chairperson. Feedback will be provided to all parties who provide public comment that thanks them for their interest and involvement. As deemed appropriate by the team chairperson, the

feedback will also indicate how their comments were used in the decision making process, and provide information about further opportunities for involvement. If public comment is formally solicited by the Working Group regarding a draft proposal, anyone who provided comment may receive a written response.

D. Following Meetings

1. Meeting Summaries: Draft meeting summaries will be disseminated to team members, Working Group members, and the Office of the Executive Director (Executive Secretary) for review within one week of the meeting. All meeting summaries will be reviewed, finalized and approved during a standard period at the beginning of the agenda for the subsequent team meeting.

2. Records: The team chairperson will maintain the comprehensive file copy of all team meetings. It will include records of each meeting's notification actions, advance information, meeting handouts, and the approved meeting summary. These records will be available for public inspection and review during normal business hours by contacting the team chairperson. If the team is disbanded, these records will be forwarded to the Office of the Executive Director for archiving with Task Force records.

3. Internet: The final meeting summary will be provided within one week of approval to the Office of the Executive Director (Executive Secretary) for publishing on the Internet in the Task Force digital library. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force digital library may be located on the Internet at: <http://everglades.fiu.edu/taskforce/> Interested parties who do not have Internet access are advised to visit their local library to obtain free access on the Southeast Florida Library Information Network, Inc. (SEFLIN) Free-net (contact 954-357-7318).

4. Mailing List: Each team, with appropriate assistance from OED, will develop a mailing list for use in notifying interested parties of team meetings and projects. The meeting registration sheets should be reviewed after each meeting and new addresses added to the Team's mailing list. Each team will maintain a mailing list that includes those persons that have asked to be kept informed, and parties that the team chairperson determines need to be on the list. The mailing list will be used for noticing meetings by Internet List Service, fax or regular mail. The ultimate goal is for any interested party on any team's mailing list to be given the opportunity to be kept informed about other teams. To reach this goal, additional guidelines will be developed that maximize the effective use of electronic communication.

E. Advisory Teams

1. The Task Force or Working Group must appoint advisory teams in accordance with WRDA and Task Force guidance on advisory groups. These advisory teams will follow the protocols as specified in the Task Force Guidance.