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Improving Effectiveness of Scientific Support to South Florida Ecosystem Restoration – Recommendations by the Science Coordination Team to the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

The coordination of science in support of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration by the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and Working Group has been facilitated by the Science Sub-Group/Science Coordination Team since 1993. Through the WRDA of 1996 the restructured South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force was established and charged as one of the *"Duties of Task Force. – The Task Force—(G) shall coordinate scientific and other research associated with the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem."* To assist and facilitate the Task Force in coordinating science, the Science Coordination Team was formalized through the approval on September 30, 1997 of the Team's charter.

Since its inception, the SCT has worked directly with the Task Force and the Working Group to identify and conduct specific "science coordination-related" activities. In direct response to request from the Task Force and Working Group and with the approval of the Task Force/Working Group, the SCT has conducted numerous topical workshops all of which produced an independent-panel report submitted to the Task Force/Working Group, sponsored the biennial Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Science Conferences, produced a White Paper on Flows, peer-reviewed science plans submitted by sub-regions of the Greater Everglades, and responded to State and Federal request regarding specific science-related information needs, projects, activities and budgets. Much of the previous contributions of the SCT are presented in the crosscut budget reports and biennial reports.

However, with the authorization of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) in 2000, restoration is shifting from planning to design, implementation and monitoring. CERP also created a group called RECOVER which specifically addresses the science associated with CERP (Note: CERP is primarily dedicated to "getting the water right" while the requirements of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration have additional major objectives … please see [1]GAO Report, Figure 2, Page 12 (attached)). In addition, the GAO Report included several specific recommendations to more effectively facilitate science coordination. In light of these and other factors, the SCT reassessed its role so that it can more effectively assist and facilitate the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force in "coordinating science". Below the SCT identifies some shortcomings in the current system, asks some questions, and presents some recommendations for consideration by the Task Force.

1. Under the 1997 charter, the responsibilities and tasks assigned to the SCT are quite extensive. Is the charge too broad? If YES, then how can the SCT charge be narrowed in order to assist with focus and, thus, effectiveness?
2. Effectively providing science to decision-makers: Is there a more effective structure for providing science information/advice at the Task Force (policy) level on a routine

[1] GAO Report entitled "South Florida Ecosystem Restoration – Task Force Needs to Improve Science Coordination to Increase the Likelihood of Success." March 2003. 59 Pages.

basis? Presently, there is limited or no direct input at the Policy Level – the SCT currently reports through the Working Group, which in turn reports to the Task Force. Historically, the SCT reported to the Task Force and coordinated its activities with the Working Group.

3. Presently, the interaction between "science coordination" and management is ineffective. The SCT has limited interface with managers, and no formal mechanism for identifying management scientific needs. How can the management-science relationship be institutionalized in a way that supports ecosystem restoration by facilitating effective scientific support of management needs?
4. Is there a way to make the SCT more responsive to and accountable for the specific needs of the Task Force and management? Presently, the SCT has no specific requirements to produce certain plans and/or reports on a specified frequency.
5. Limited Resources: The SCT has no dedicated resources to carry out its responsibilities, i.e. all work is done by members either as part of their regular jobs or during off-duty hours. How can sufficient dedicated resources (and/or agency personnel support) be provided so that science more effectively supports the needs of the Task Force, Working Group, and ecosystem restoration goals?

In order to help overcome these shortcomings, the SCT respectfully submits the following recommendations:

Structure:

1. The SCT reports to the Task Force and Working Group and coordinates with the Working Group. Or, should the SCT report directly to the Task Force and, perhaps, change the name to Science Coordination Group (SCG) to reflect its move to a level equal to but separate from the Working Group? Historically, the SCT did report to the Task Force through coordination with the Working Group.
2. Permanent scientific staff to support ecosystem restoration is created, i.e. Office of the Executive Director for Science (OED-Science).
3. The Executive Director for Science (EDS) coordinates directly with the Task Force on a regular basis … possibly, collocated with the Task Force Office of the Executive Director (OED) to promote better scientific response to policy and management needs … administrative support provided by OED.
4. The EDS responds to the SCT and serves as the Executive Director of the SCT.

Function: The Science Coordination Group will focus on coordinating science activities in support of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration by performing the following functions:

1. Tracking, Coordination and Communication … compile and monitor who is doing what, when, where, how, why, and for what purpose, and disseminate as appropriate
2. Synthesis … analyze, integrate, and/or translate scientific works in support of policy and management decisions
3. Peer Review … facilitate review of scientific documents
4. Needs Identification … work with management to identify and prioritize science needs, to include producing a Science Plan and Biannual Science Reports

Support for Science Coordination Team:

1. Executive Director for Science (EDS) – A permanent full time position working with the Office of the Executive Director of the Task Force and Working Group. This position would serve as an executive officer for the SCT and provide an important interactive position with the Working Group and Task Force and provide key science support and guidance.
2. Office support – This function could be provided through staff positions or contracted positions to support workshops, meetings, work and product development of the SCT and its members. For example, several agencies could provide staff dedicated to the SCT.
3. Science Tracking – This is the first function that the SCT would begin with sufficient new funding. This element includes the long held need to identify the science (research and monitoring) that is currently occurring with all agencies (federal, state and local) and to develop a broad and extremely flexible system to track, monitor, report, and provide a basis for synthesis of science products, results and information to the many different types and layers of users. This effort would begin with a series of meetings or workshops to examine existing tracking systems and databases and their function. Secondly, the SCT will define the target audience for this effort and then conduct a needs assessment of the target audience to determine the type and format of information desired, to examine the costs associated with such a database, and to better refine the ability of the database to satisfy user needs.
4. Special Tasks – Additional personnel will be provided on an as-needed/as-available basis by various agencies to support specific assignments/initiatives.

Membership: The SCT will consist of Working Group members or their designated representative.

In summary, these recommendations:

1. Focus the Task Force's science activities on the global priorities for ecosystem restoration success.
2. Institutionalizes both direct scientific input at the policy level and a management-science interface that supports ecosystem restoration.
3. Specifically address GAO recommendations* by –
   - Institutionalizing accountability by requiring a Science Plan that is responsive to management needs, along with Biannual Reports on progress.
   - Providing structure and function that focus on management of scientific needs; to include a dedicated Executive Director for Science.
   - Ensuring the necessary resources to effectively assist the Task Force and serve the policy/management needs for ecosystem restoration.

* The 3rd GAO recommendation is not addressed as it refers to the Task Force establishing an external review body to ensure science is being effectively integrated into the entire Task Force process. The Task Force may ask the SCT for a recommendation for such a process at some point in the future.