

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
Office of the Executive Director

MEMORANDUM FOR TASK FORCE

FROM: Rock Salt



DATE: 14 July 2003

SUBJECT: Options paper regarding the Working Group and Science Coordination

1. **Purpose:** Following the discussion of the March 2003 GAO Report on science coordination during its April, the Task Force asked the Executive Director to develop an options paper for improving its science coordination efforts. After the subsequent discussion with the Working Group on its role, the task was expanded to concurrently develop options for improving the organization and function of the Working Group. This paper responds to that request and is intended as a catalyst for additional Task Force guidance on these issues.

2. **References.** WRDA 1996 established the Task Force to expand and replace an earlier Task Force of federal agencies that had been created in September 1993. The "Duties of the Task Force" portion of WRDA 96 specifies that the Task Force:

B. shall coordinate the development of consistent policies, strategies, plans, programs, projects, activities, and priorities for addressing the restoration, preservation, and protection of the South Florida ecosystem;

D. shall establish a Florida-based working group which shall include representatives of the agencies and entities represented on the Task Force as well other governmental entities as appropriate for the purpose of formulating, recommending, coordinating, and implementing the policies, strategies, plans, programs, projects, activities, and priorities of the Task Force;

G. shall coordinate scientific and other research associated with the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem

In December 1997, the Task Force approved the Working Group charter to assist it in carrying out its duties and to specifically fulfill duty "D" listed above to establish a Working Group. With respect to Task Force duty "G" regarding science coordination, the charter included a duty of the Working Group:

To assist the Task Force in its duty to "coordinate scientific and other research associated with the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem" pursuant to section 528(f)(2)(G) of the Act, the Working Group will promote science based restoration programs by preparing and recommending a prioritized, independently-reviewed science plan for the South Florida ecosystem to the Task Force which includes development of a baseline scientific assessment and indicator monitoring program, special process-

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oriented and socio-economic studies, and appropriate biological and hydrological modeling to evaluate ecosystem restoration objectives and programs.

The Working Group Charter authorized it to create subgroups of its members. The Working Group created the Science Coordination Team and approved its charter, (attached), in September 1997.

3. Background.

Beginning in 1993, both the Working Group and the then-named "Science Sub-group" performed their work by using the voluntary participation of the group's members. The Task Force was closely linked to both groups and individual Task Force members provided policy priority to the participating agencies to support the work effort of both groups. The work in the early years centered on providing planning guidance to the Army Corps of Engineers on its "Restudy" and science coordination. In August 1994, the Task Force appointed an Executive Director to assist it in the administrative responsibilities of the Task Force and Working Group, but the substantive work of the Working Group and Science Sub-group was accomplished by the members of those groups, often meeting in week-long "retreats" to develop the various work products. The Working Group and Science Sub-group were particularly successful in reviewing lists of choices for land acquisition, small restoration projects or research and providing consensus advice on the relative priority of the options.

With the passage of WRDA 96, the Working Group met off-site for a week to discuss possible organizational and operational changes that would improve its effectiveness and address the expanded duty list for the Task Force. The key recommendations from that workshop emphasized an expanded support system to assist the Working Group. That system called for the staff of the Executive Director, working with smaller sub-teams of Working Group agency staff, to prepare draft reports for Working Group consideration, comment and action (e.g. annual and biennial reports, strategic plan, etc.). The Science sub-group was reconfigured into the Science Coordination Team as described above but no support system was provided and its work continued to be performed by the voluntary effort of its members. From 1997-1999, the Working Group and Task Force worked closely with the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida and relied on the Corps and Water Management District to provide the main staff support during the development of the Restudy. From 1999-2001, the Working Group and Task Force took a lower profile as the emphasis shifted to Washington and the drafting of the WRDA 2000 and then to the transition to the new federal administration.

4. Coordination—light versus heavy:

During the past ten years, the Task Force and Working Group have assigned various tasks to groups to assist them in meeting their respective responsibilities to coordinate the restoration effort. Several of the tasks fit a "coordination light" model, including tasks to identify gaps, monitor or report progress. These tasks consist primarily of reviewing information and providing consensus commentary on that information.

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Other tasks involve a deeper involvement in the topic. These tasks fit a “coordination heavy” model, and include tasks to recommend, synthesize, facilitate, or assist. These coordination tasks necessarily require a more active role by the coordination group and the process must be carefully managed to avoid controversy.

5. Options for the Working Group:

A. Observations: In developing options for the Working Group, three observations from its first ten years are relevant:

- 1) The permanent support staff for the Working Group has gradually increased;
- 2) Guidance from the Task Force to the Working Group decreased and the linkage between the Task Force and the Working Group became weaker, and;
- c) The primary coordination needs in the restoration effort shifted from planning to implementation tasks.

B. Options: The key question is how to best use senior Florida managers, (Working Group), and permanent staff, (Office of the Executive Director), to meet the projected needs of the Task Force during the next ten years.

OPTION 1--ENHANCE TASK FORCE/WOKING GROUP COORDINATION: This option would maintain the existing organization, duties, and protocols as described in the Working Group charter while seeking to improve connections between the Task Force (TF) and Working Group (WG). Among the approaches associated with this option are: having Working Group members attend Task Force meetings, conducting an annual TF/WG retreat, establishing joint priorities and work plans, and evaluating coordination activities annually. Under this option, the OED would continue its current level of logistic and administrative support for TF and WG meetings and for preparing initial drafts of required reports.

OPTION 2--IMPROVE THE ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKING GROUP: The purpose of this option is to strengthen the organizational capacity of the WG while keeping its basic organizational design intact. Activities related to this option would include revising the WG charter and membership requirements, improving the quality of meetings, developing priorities and plans, and evaluating TF and WG performance. This option could include the exploration of other possible organizational changes such as having the Executive Director of the Task Force serve as Standing Chair of the WG. The features of the previous option could also be included within this option.

OPTION 3--RECREATE THE WORKING GROUP TO BE AN ADVISORY BODY: This option would convert the WG from a functional implementation group to an advisory group. Under this option, draft documents would be prepared for the Task Force by OED staff rather than by the WG. Nonetheless, the WG would review and provide input regarding documents. This option could increase the time and capacity that the WG could provide to the TF in

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identifying and helping to review policy issues. The option implies a stronger staff role and capacity in preparing materials and in conducting other coordination activities.

OPTION 4--REPLACE THE WORKING GROUP WITH TASK FORCE SUB-GROUPS: This option would eliminate the existing WG in favor of a series of sub-groups that would address important TF coordination areas such as science, public outreach, funding, and CERP. The intent of this option is to reduce a layer of bureaucracy and increase connections between the TF and those who directly assist with coordination. This option would use OED permanent staff to support the sub-groups in ways similar to how they now assist the WG. A variation of this option would be to designate the sub-groups as advisory groups which would allow the appointment of non-government experts to augment the expertise of members appointed from Task Force agencies.

6. Options for coordinating scientific and other research:

A. Background. The evolution of science coordination to support the Task Force and Working Group has not been satisfactory to either group. After some initial successes, the linkage between the Science Coordination Team and the Working Group declined and both groups became somewhat detached from each other. Several factors have complicated the issue, such as: the emergence of RECOVER and the extensive science coordination that it provides for the CERP; the creation of the CROGEE and the new requirement in WRDA 2000 for Independent Science Review; and expectation “disconnects” between scientists and managers concerning the priorities for the science coordination effort. A key issue for the scientists has been the lack of permanent support staff for the Science Coordination Team, akin to the OED staff support to the Working Group. The March, 2003, GAO Report on Science Coordination concluded that improvement is needed and recommended several specific corrective actions. In general the GAO recommendations urged more and stronger management, with better guidance from managers, a more pro-active role for scientists and increased productivity from the science coordination group.

Key to any options paper is the decision on the scope the effort. While there are many opinions on the appropriate scope of the Task Force scientific coordination duties, there is some consensus that the science coordination role of the Task Force should include:

- Providing a gap analysis of priority science needs to the Task Force;
- Developing science coordination plan and updates;
- Sharing scientific and technical information among the members and working to avoid costly duplication, if possible;
- Helping to facilitate the resolution of scientific conflicts;
- Reviewing RECOVER reports and provide advice to the Task Force, and;
- Assisting “peer review” of CERP projects, as requested.

B. Options: As is the case in developing options for the Working Group, the key question is how to best use senior managers and scientists, supported as necessary by permanent staff, to meet the projected science coordination needs of the Task Force during the next ten years.

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OPTION 1--ENHANCE SCT PERFORMANCE: This option would maintain the current organization, duties and protocols of the SCT; however, it seeks to improve SCT productivity and linkages with the Task Force and Working Group as recommended by the GAO. Changes suggested in this option include improved management guidance from the Task Force, greater SCT accountability, and designation of permanent OED staff to assist the SCT in ways similar to support being provided to the Working Group today.

OPTION 2--REORGANIZE THE SCT: The aim of this option is to maintain the SCT as a sub-group of the Working Group, but to substantially reform its organization. Organizational reforms would include revision of the SCT charter, updating duties and membership, creating a SCT strategic plan, and developing evaluation practices. This option would most likely incorporate the changes identified in the previous option.

OPTION 3--CREATE A TASK FORCE SCIENCE SUB-GROUP: This option would create a new Science Coordination Group to replace the SCT. The new group would report directly to the Task Force in implementing science coordination tasks, including the six roles identified earlier. Members of the sub-group would be appointed by Task Force agencies. This option implies that OED staff would be available to support and assist the Science Coordinating Team in ways similar to how assistance is presently provided to the Working Group.

OPTION 4--CREATE A SCIENCE ADVISORY GROUP: This option would create a Science Advisory Group of key scientists from member agencies to provide counsel to the Task Force on scientific issues and to review draft science coordination documents prepared by Task Force staff. Under this option, the production burden for developing drafts of science coordination documents would be assigned to the OED. This option envisions enhanced support staff within the OED. An alternative within this option is to also appoint some non-government scientists to the advisory group.

OPTION 5--APPOINT A SENIOR SCIENCE COORDINATOR: In addition to or independently of any of the previous options, a science coordinator could be appointed to provide leadership in science coordination activities. This role suggests a senior professional with experience in managing and evaluating science programs and projects. The science coordinator could assume a number of roles including science advisor to or permanent chairman of the SCT or its successor.

7. Recommendation.

At its next meeting, July 29-30, 2003, recommend the Task Force review and discuss these options and provide additional guidance for expanding and refining the preferred approach. Staff will develop draft documents to implement the preferred approach for consideration by the Task Force at its following meeting.