South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Strategy

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES FROM LAST YEAR'S REPORT ARE IN RED TEXT

September 15, 2005
DRAFT

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
Land Acquisition Task Team

This strategy document is for planning purposes only, is subject to modification, and is not legally binding on any of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) members. Each Task Force member and the interest they represent retain all of their sovereign rights, authorities, and jurisdictions for implementation of the projects contained in this document.

Acceptance of the report by the Task Force does not imply that the Task Force or the individual Task Force members endorse each land acquisition project described in the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Strategy (Strategy).

Moreover, the land cost estimates contained in the body of this report are preliminary planning estimates that are not intended as, and do not reflect, fair market valuations of any individual parcel of land. Acceptance of this report, therefore, does not constitute an endorsement by any Task Force member as to any parcel or land valuation.

The reporting period for this information is July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005 unless otherwise noted.

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APPENDICES

The Land Acquisition Strategy describes the lands identified jointly by federal and state agencies for ecosystem restoration, and with its appendices, provides a broad picture of all land acquisition initiatives that contribute to the restoration. The following is a list of the Appendices:

Appendix A: South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Goals and Objectives

Appendix B: South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Strategy Federal Projects and Joint Federal/State Projects Map

Appendix C: Project Profile Sheets and Summary Table

Appendix D: South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Updated Map and the State/Federal/Local Cost Share Table

Appendix E: County Land Acquisition and Florida's Greenways and Trails Programs

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Appendix H: Tools Available to Identify Strategic Acquisitions

Appendix I: Land Acquisition Task Team Directive

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASR Aquifer Storage and Recovery

CARL Conservation and Recreation Lands

C&SF Project Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project

CERP Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan

CREW Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed

EAA Everglades Agricultural Area

EEL Environmentally Endangered Lands

FDACS Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

FDCA Florida Department of Community Affairs

FDEP Florida Department of Environmental Protection

FNAI Florida Natural Areas Inventory

FRPP Farm and Ranch Land Protection Act

FWC Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

FY Fiscal Year

GAO Government Accountability Office (formerly the General Accounting Office)

IRL Indian River Lagoon

LAPS Land Acquisition Priority System

LATT Land Acquisition Task Team

LWCF Land and Water Conservation Fund

MERIT Multi-Species Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team

MISP Master Implementation Sequencing Plan

MSRP Multi-Species Recovery Plan

NEPA National Environmental Protection Act

NPS National Park Service

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

NWR National Wildlife Refuge

OGT Office of Greenways and Trails

OPE Other Project Element

P-2000 Preservation 2000

PIR Project Implementation Report

PILT Payment in Lieu of Taxes

Restudy C&SF Project Comprehensive Review Study

SFWMD South Florida Water Management District (District)

SHCA Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas

SOETF Save Our Everglades Trust Fund

SOR Save Our Rivers

STA Stormwater Treatment Area

USACE United States Army Corps of Engineers

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

USDOI United States Department of the Interior

USFWS United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)

WCA Water Conservation Area

WRDA Water Resources Development Act

WRP Wetlands Reserve Program

Executive Summary

Land acquisition is critical to South Florida Ecosystem Restoration efforts. Land is needed to preserve habitat for native plants and animals, to act as a buffer to existing natural areas, and provide opportunities for passive and active recreational pursuits. Land is also needed for water quality treatment areas, water storage reservoirs, and aquifer recharge areas that will help restore the natural hydrology.

The purpose of this South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Strategy (Strategy) is to describe the strategy for land acquisition needed for ecosystem restoration projects that are either wholly federally funded or jointly funded by federal and non-federal agencies. The Strategy sets forth estimates of the lands needed for restoration and the cost of land acquisition for the restoration initiative. The Strategy also measures progress in acquiring lands for the restoration. With its appendices, the Strategy provides a broad picture of all land acquisition initiatives that contribute to ecosystem restoration.

Considerable progress continues to be made on land acquisition in support of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration. Perhaps the most encouraging aspect is the continued strong partnerships at the federal, state, and local levels to achieve the restoration goals. It is difficult to point to the success of any one agency because the land acquisition accomplishments often are the result of funding and activities by multiple agencies.

As a result of innovative partnerships and creative approaches several major acquisitions have been accomplished during this reporting period.

Examples of fee simple acquisitions:

- 54 acres for the WCA 3A/3B Levee Seepage Management Project
- 2,491 for the Indian River Lagoon-South C-23/24 Reservoir and STA, along with 1,233 acres for the Cypress Creek complex
- 1,220 acres representing 44,800 acre/feet of storage capacity for the C-51/L-8 Reservoir
- 160 acres for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project
-

Examples of less than fee simple acquisitions:

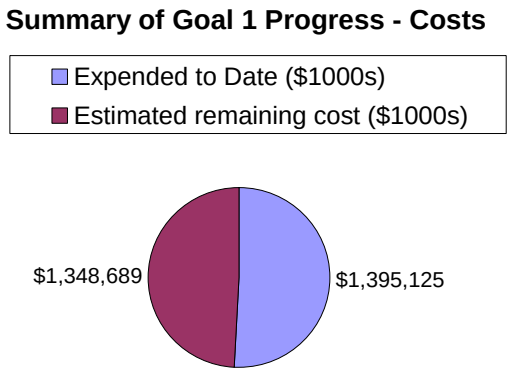
- 260 acres for the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project as part of Florida Power and Light's mitigation for expansion of the Turkey Point power plant
- The State of Florida recently purchased 562 acres in the Panther Glades Florida Forever Project using a perpetual conservation easement which allows the property owner to stay on the land while securing it from development in perpetuity and preserving important habitat for the endangered Florida Panther.
- The SFWMD has completed 83% of land acquisition needed to complete the Kissimmee River Restoration project. These 87,000 acres now under public ownership will help achieve revitalization of 40 square miles of river and floodplain habitat.
- The State of Florida has acquired1,063 acres known as the Bombing Range/Brahma Island through the Florida Forever acquisition program. This land not only buffers the

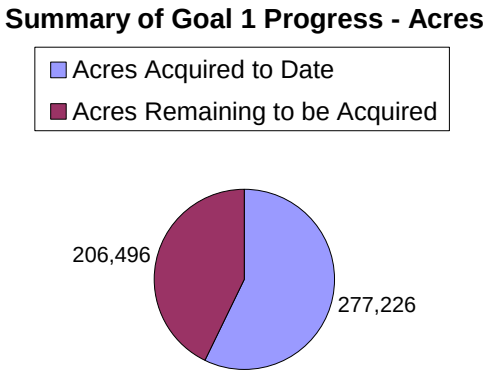
Kissimmee River but also safeguards one of the largest populations of bald eagles in the state. Like Panther Glades, this property is preserved through a perpetual conservation easement.

The Strategy addresses the land acquisition needed for the three strategic goals adopted by the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force: Goal 1: Get the Water Right; Goal 2: Restore, Preserve and Protect Habitats and Species; and, Goal 3: Foster Compatibility of the Built and Natural Systems. This edition of the Strategy reflects data from July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005.

Goal 1: Get the Water Right

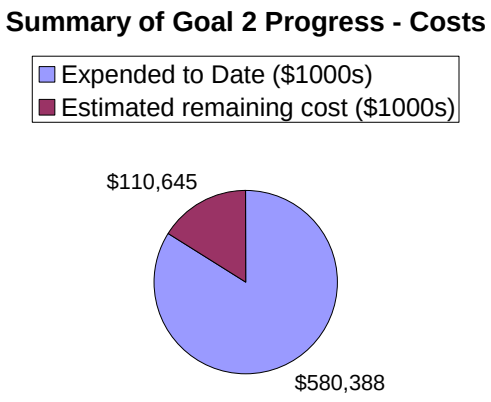
There are forty-seven projects with federal and joint federal/state land acquisition funds identified for acquisition to achieve *Goal 1: Get the Water Right*, which includes lands needed for CERP projects. Land acquisition estimates for these projects total ~~now~~ 483,722 acres with 277,226 acres (57 %) acquired to date. The total estimated cost of these lands is $2,743,814,000 with an estimated $1,349,689,000 needed to complete acquisition of these parcels.

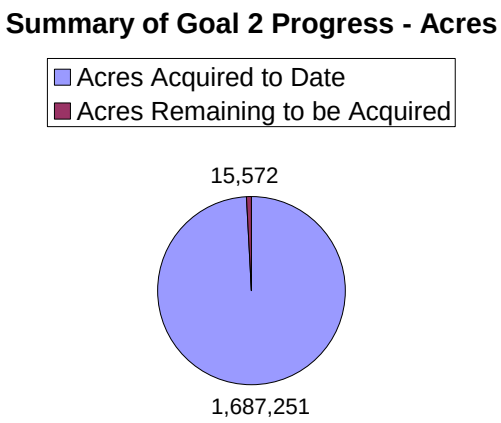




Goal 2: Restore, Preserve, and Protect Natural Habitats and Species

There are thirteen projects with federal and joint federal/state land acquisition dollars identified for *Goal 2: Restore Preserve and Protect Habitat and Species*, which includes lands needed for CERP Projects. To date, 1,702,823 acres are estimated to be needed to achieve the targets established for this goal with 1,687,251 (99%) acquired. The total estimated cost of these lands is approximately $691,033,000 with an estimated $110,645,000 needed to complete acquisition of these parcels.





Goal 3: Foster Compatibility of the Built and Natural System

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized several programs to provide financial incentives to private landowners to restore or enhance wetlands and improve wildlife habitat while protecting working farms or retiring marginal land from agricultural production. Two of the six programs in the 2002 Farm Bill supported efforts to achieve Goal 3 land acquisition objectives through permanent conservation easements. These acquisitions include lands needed for CERP Projects. Since passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, 19,066 acres have been acquired through the Wetlands Reserve (WRP) and the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Programs (FRPP) at a cost of $22.7 million.

Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP)

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000 authorized CERP. Implementation of the CERP is one of the highest priorities for the Task Force because of it significant contribution to the restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem.

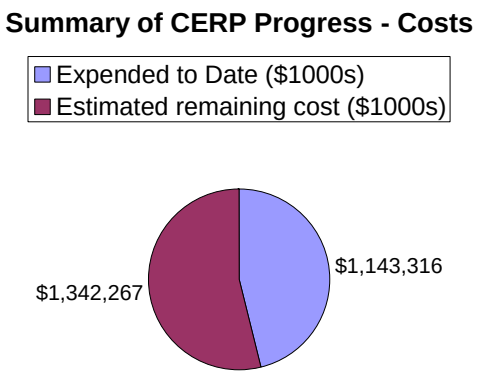
The schedule contained in the 1999 C&SF Comprehensive Review Study was updated in March 2005, along with a reconfiguration of the sixty-eight CERP components into fifty CERP projects. This Strategy tracks the thirty-one projects that have a land acquisition requirement; several geographically large CERP projects have more than one project profile in this Strategy due to multiple project components. Examples of a project having multiple project profiles are: the Indian River Lagoon-South, the Water Preserve Areas, and the Lake Okeechobee Watershed. Forty (40) of the sixty two (62) project profiles in Appendix C are components of CERP projects.

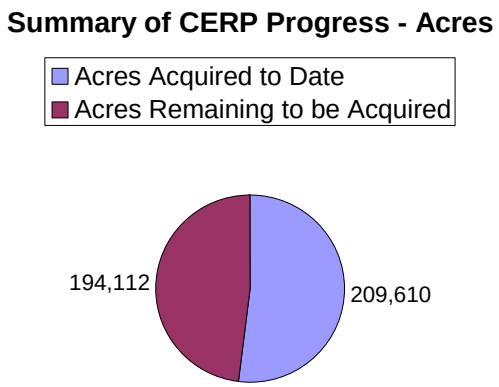
Land acquisition estimates for CERP projects now total 403,722 acres with 209,610 acres (52%) acquired to date. The total estimated cost of these lands is $2,485,583,000 with an estimated $1,342,267,000 needed to complete acquisition of these parcels.

For those projects with either a final Feasibility Study or final Project Implementation Report (PIR) the 1999 C&SF Comprehensive Review Study estimates have been adjusted from 1999

dollars and acres. For those projects that are not yet authorized estimates for land acquisition remain in 1999 dollars as estimated in the 1999 C&SF Comprehensive Review Study.

The State of Florida has purchased project lands in advance of the PIR process. This approach has resulted in the state acquiring acreage at the earliest possible time and prevented these lands needed for restoration from being developed.





PROGRESS TOWARDS LAND ACQUISITION GOALS

The Task Force recognizes that there are a number of significant acquisitions made by local governments in the Everglades Watershed that augment federal and state restoration efforts. These contributions are included as part of the land acquisitions that contribute to Goal 2, regardless of federal participation in acquisition, and are reported in Appendix C, D, and E.

Strategy Purpose and Background

Introduction

The South Florida ecosystem is an 18,000 square mile region that includes all or part of sixteen counties with more than six million human inhabitants. The watershed stretches from the Kissimmee River Basin-Lake Okeechobee system to the coral reefs in the Atlantic Ocean and from the Caloosahatchee to the St. Lucie estuaries. This water-dominated system encompasses a myriad of interconnected freshwater rivers, lakes, marshes, prairies, forests, and estuaries, and includes the natural systems of the Kissimmee River Basin, Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, Big Cypress Swamp, Florida Bay, Biscayne Bay, the Florida Keys reef tract, Charlotte Harbor, the Caloosahatchee River, the Lake Worth Lagoon, the Loxahatchee River and the Indian River Lagoon.

In 1948, the ongoing efforts to drain the Everglades, protect the region from hurricanes, and make the region habitable culminated in the Congressional authorizations of the Central & Southern Florida (C&SF) Project, a flood control project jointly built and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The primary project goal was to provide water and flood control for urban and agricultural lands. Other goals were to improve the habitat for fish and wildlife, ensure a water supply for Everglades National Park and provide for agricultural, industrial and recreational uses.

The C&SF Project significantly altered the region's hydrology (quantity, timing and distribution of water). Whereas historically most rainwater had soaked into the region's wetlands, the C&SF canal system, comprised of over 1,800 miles of canals and levees and 200 water control structures, drained an average of 1.7 billion gallons of water per day (5,217 acre-feet per day) into the ocean and the gulf. As a result, not enough water was available for the natural functioning of the Everglades or for the growing human communities in the region. Water quality was also degraded.

Today, the Everglades is only about half of its original size, and the natural and man-made water systems providing life to the Everglades that remain are inadequate for the survival of this international treasure. The desirability of South Florida's climate, geographic location, cultural and social setting and thriving economic opportunities have contributed to significant population growth since the C&SF Project was built. The current population in the region is predicted to double in the region by the year 2050. The sustainability of the South Florida ecosystem is in jeopardy. In response to this situation, the federal, state, regional, and local governments and two American Indian Tribes have committed to support the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem, which includes the Everglades.

Land acquisition is critical to South Florida Ecosystem Restoration efforts. Land is needed to preserve habitat for native plants and animals, to act as a buffer to existing natural areas and to provide opportunities for passive and active recreational pursuits. Land is also needed for water

quality treatment areas, water storage reservoirs and aquifer recharge areas that will help restore the natural hydrology.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to describe the strategy for land acquisition needed for ecosystem restoration projects that are either wholly federally funded or jointly funded by federal and non-federal agencies. The Strategy sets forth estimates of the lands needed for restoration, estimates of the cost of land acquisition for the restoration initiative and measures progress in acquiring lands for the restoration.

The Strategy builds on the information in the July 2000 Task Force Strategy for Ecosystem Restoration, the 1999 Everglades Ecosystem Land Acquisition State-Federal Cost Share map, the CERP, and the Florida Forever work plan. The initial Strategy addressed two of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration goals: *Goal 1: Get the Water Right and Goal 2: Restore Preserve and Protect Habitats and Species* reflected data through September 30, 2002. The second edition of the Strategy reflected data through June 30, 2004 and included acquisition that supported *Goal 3: Foster Compatibility of the Built and Natural Systems*. This edition updates data for the 3 goals which include the CERP projects through June 30, 2005.

As restoration proceeds, estimated land requirements are adjusted. For CERP, the land acquisition estimates for each component in the Comprehensive Review Study (the "Yellow Book" or the Restudy) are further refined through the Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement required under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

Expectations Should Be Reasonable

The anticipated major ecological improvements will take many years to realize. The large-scale hydrological improvements that will be necessary to stimulate major ecological improvements will depend upon and follow the implementation of the CERP and other ecosystem restoration projects. The Strategy does not propose to acquire the amount of land necessary to restore or recreate the historic Everglades—some of the historic Everglades is irretrievably lost. The Everglades resulting from the CERP and other ecosystem restoration projects will be smaller and of a different configuration than the original Everglades, but will mimic the historic functions of the Everglades.

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

Six federal departments twelve agencies, seven State of Florida agencies or commissions, two American Indian Tribes, sixteen counties, scores of municipal governments, and interested groups and businesses from throughout South Florida participate in the restoration effort. Given the large geographic area, the diverse missions of these agencies, and the need to maximize the resources available for this effort, coordination among these entities is essential to the restoration effort.

The Task Force coordinates and tracks the work of all partners in the restoration. The Water Resources Development Act of 1996 (WRDA 96) authorized the operation of the Task Force and provided for specific membership and duties. WRDA 96 directed the Task Force to establish a Florida-based working group. The Task Force and its Working Group facilitate resolution of conflicts among participants; coordinate scientific or other research; provide assistance and support to member agencies in their restoration activities; coordinate the development of consistent policies, strategic plans, programs, projects, activities and priorities for addressing the restoration; exchange information among participants; prepare an integrated financial plan and recommendations for coordinated budget requests; and submit a biennial report to Congress summarizing restoration activities.

The Task Force does not have any oversight or project authority, and participating agencies are responsible for meeting their own targeted accomplishments. The Task Force serves as a forum in which ideas are shared and consensus is sought.

Task Force members share a vision of a healthy South Florida ecosystem that supports diverse and sustainable communities of plants, animals, and people. Three goals have been set to achieve this vision: Goal 1: Get the Water Right; Goal 2: Restore, Preserve, and Protect Natural Habitats and Species; and Goal 3: Foster Compatibility of the Built and Natural Systems. Land acquisition is an essential part of achieving these goals.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report

In its April 2000 review of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, the General Accounting Office, now the Government Accountability Office recognized that the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Initiative is a complex, long-term effort that covers over 18,000 square miles, and that will take more than twenty years and require the continuous effort and commitment of all agencies involved. The GAO report stated that the development of a land acquisition plan would be valuable in coordinating the member agencies' land acquisition activities. Such a plan would ensure that the lands needed to accomplish the goals of the Task Force are identified and acquired. The GAO report asserted that without such a plan, the Task Force cannot: (1) determine how much land will be needed to accomplish its goals; (2) estimate the full cost of acquiring these lands; (3) measure progress in acquiring lands for the restoration; and (4) increase the chance that the lands acquired are those most needed.

While the federal, state, and local land acquisition programs prepare annual and multi-year plans and coordinate acquisition efforts on a day-to-day and annual basis to ensure effective use of staff time and fiscal resources, the GAO believed that the coordination needs of the Task Force would be better served if this information were assembled into one document.

The GAO recommended that the members of the Task Force develop a land acquisition plan for restoring the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration that would include:

1. an assessment of the lands needed to accomplish each of the goals of the restoration;
2. a description of the purpose for which the lands will be acquired and how they will be managed;
3. an estimate of the cost of these lands;

4. an estimate of when the lands will be needed for related restoration projects; and
5. the agencies responsible for acquiring the lands

The GAO stated that the land acquisition plan should supplement the Task Force's July 2000 Strategic Plan and build on the land acquisition information and assessments already compiled by the tribal, federal, state, and local jurisdictions. It was suggested that the document would be useful to funding entities, such as the U.S. Congress and the State of Florida. The GAO envisioned the land acquisition plan as a dynamic document updated to reflect changes and additions to the restoration initiative's land acquisition needs.

Brief History of Restoration Partners Land Acquisition

The Task Force member agencies have been engaged in the protection and restoration of the South Florida ecosystem for many years prior to the formation of the Task Force. The Task Force tracks these projects and builds on the progress made to date. Acquisition of land to provide water for South Florida's human population and to protect the remaining natural ecosystems has been an ongoing priority in ecosystem restoration.

As reported in Appendix D, state and federal agencies currently manage 4.9 million acres of land important for protection of natural habitat and species in South Florida acquired at a cost of approximately $3 billion. The State of Florida (including the SFWMD) spent $2.1 billion for these acquisitions. Local government provided $191 million of this funding, and the federal government contributed $674 million to this total. Notwithstanding these significant efforts to acquire important natural areas, the condition of the natural system continues to deteriorate due to past water management decisions and infrastructure, prompting several actions to address this issue.

By the mid-1980s, a consensus was developing that water management in the region needed to be improved for natural habitats to respond. In 1989 and 1992 respectively, Congress authorized Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park and the Kissimmee River Restoration. These projects added new land acquisition requirements as part of the improved water management system.

In 1992, Congress also authorized the C&SF Comprehensive Review Study, commonly called the Restudy, to take a system-wide look at the water management system and recommend changes to benefit the remaining Everglades while meeting the other water related needs of the region.

WRDA 2000 authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), perhaps the most ambitious ecological restoration program ever undertaken. CERP provides a framework for modifications and operational changes that are needed to restore, preserve and protect the South Florida ecosystem while providing for other water- related needs of the region, including water supply and flood protection. The goal is that the right quantity of water, of the right quality, gets delivered to the right places at the right times. CERP builds on restoration projects already underway.

The authorization of CERP added new land acquisition requirements for the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem. The 1999 Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (also know as the "Yellow Book") estimated that 402,479 acres would be required for the proposed projects. Of this estimate, 182,338 acres were already in public ownership. As of June 30, 2005, total land acquisition requirements for CERP have been further refined through the draft PIR for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project (formerly Southern Golden Gate Estates Ecosystem Restoration) and the final PIR and EIS for the Indian River Lagoon – South as well as the Water Preserve Area Feasibility Study and are now estimated to be 403,722 acres, with approximately 52% or 209,610 acres currently in SFWMD, State or local government ownership.

South Florida Ecosystem Land Acquisition Strategy Development

Several planning efforts related to land acquisition were accomplished prior to the development of the first Land Acquisition Strategy. In December 1999, an ecosystem-wide acquisition map (the "Graham Map") was developed. In April 2000, the U.S. GAO issued a report entitled, "South Florida Ecosystem Restoration: A Land Acquisition Plan Would Help Identify Land That Need To Be Acquired." Subsequently, the Task Force strategy document, "Coordinating Success: Strategy for Restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem," was delivered to Congress. This strategy document provided information on numerous land acquisition projects undertaken for ecosystem restoration. In August 2002, the Task Force strategy document was updated and submitted to Congress.

In February 2003, the Task Force accepted the first edition of the Land Acquisition Strategy prepared by the Working Group Land Acquisition Task Team. This strategy built on the information in "Coordinating Success" and the "Graham Map", updating and adding information as necessary. The initial strategy reflected data as of September 30, 2002.

This initial Land Acquisition Strategy addressed the recommendations made by the GAO. As part of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration effort, agencies identified lands needed to accomplish each of the goals of the restoration. A project profile was prepared for each project that involved federal funds. The profile of each project included a description of the lands and how they would be managed, an estimated cost of the lands, an estimate of when the lands would be needed for restoration projects, and identified the agencies responsible for acquiring the lands. A summary table of land acquisition projects involving federal funds was included. Strategy appendices provided information on state projects supporting the restoration that did not include federal funds, and also provided comprehensive maps of land acquisition projects and existing conservation lands.

The Task Force decided to produce the second edition of the Land Acquisition Strategy, using information through June 30, 2004, and provided direction on additional items to be addressed in the revised Strategy. The Land Acquisition Task Team was instructed to include county level information in the updated Strategy as well as information on less than fee acquisitions, mitigation and payment in lieu of taxes. This third edition reports on progress through June 30, 2005.

The Land Acquisition Task Team Directive requires that the Land Acquisition Strategy describe the lands identified jointly by federal and state agencies for ecosystem restoration, and with its appendices, provide a broad picture of all land acquisition initiatives that contribute to the restoration. Appendix B is the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Strategy Federal Projects and Joint Federal/State Projects map. This map graphically illustrates the data in the Project Profiles in Appendix C. The Project ID on the Project Profile is the Map Label. It is important to note that some CERP projects do not have a boundary labeled on the map because the boundary is not yet defined through the NEPA process.

Appendix D Natural Habitat and Species Land Acquisition Update table from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Division of State Lands. Also in Appendix D is the Florida Natural Areas Inventory update of the 1999 Everglades Ecosystem Land Acquisition State-Federal Cost Share map known as the "Graham Map". This map reflects all the habitat lands acquired or are planned to be acquired that contribute to Goal 2, including those lands with no federal funding. The map also illustrates CERP project conceptual boundaries to provide a full picture of all the lands presently identified for ecosystem restoration. The Florida Greenways and Trails program and County level land acquisition programs that address Goal 3 are discussed in Appendix E. Appendix G is a list of potential funding sources that could be used in support of the restoration and Appendix F provides information on FNAI and FWC tools to identify strategic conservation land acquisitions for habitat and species protection.

History of Coordinating Land Acquisition Funding

There is an extensive history of coordination between the federal and state restoration partners on land acquisition projects. In 1947, the federal government acquired the lands necessary to establish Everglades National Park with the substantial contribution of 908,931 acres of land by the State of Florida. According to the April 2000 GAO report, the State of Florida had already acquired 3.1 million acres of habitat lands—many of which were conveyed between 1947 and 1995 to the federal government to be managed as national parks and preserves. The federal government acquired another 1 million acres during the same period. Now, federal and state holdings include three additional national parks or preserves, thirty-six state parks, three state forests, thirteen wildlife refuges, eleven state wildlife management areas, six wildlife and environmental areas, one fish management area, fifteen aquatic preserves and one marine sanctuary dedicated to protecting the South Florida ecosystem.

The FDEP Division of State Lands continues to coordinate park and refuge land acquisitions with the federal government. Seventy percent (70%) of the acres remaining to be acquired for the National Key Deer Refuge are also on the state's Florida Forever acquisition list. The Division of State Lands is also cooperating with the National Park Service on the Big Cypress National Preserve Addition and recently completed the donation of over 43,000 acres for the Everglades National Park Expansion.

The SFWMD, the FDEP, and the USDOI have a history of funding partnerships for land acquisition. Substantial federal funding for land acquisition is dependent on specific congressional action. The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (Farm Bill) of 1996 in Section 390 provided $200,000,000 to the Secretary of the Interior to fund or conduct

restoration activities in the Everglades ecosystem. To carry out the aforementioned activities, these Farm Bill monies, along with state monies, were utilized to purchase lands for CERP projects in the East Coast Buffer/Water Preserve Area, the Everglades Agricultural Area/Talisman property and Southern Golden Gate Estates. For CERP alone, the SFWMD has acquired 52% of the necessary lands at an estimated cost of $1.1 billion, of which $259 million was provided by the federal government (USDOI and USDA), $800 million from the state and $32 million by local governments. In addition, the SFMWD has received about $222 million in grant funds from the USDOI's Land and Water Conservation Fund through Fiscal Year 2004-2005. USDOI also provided $46 million to the USACE to acquire lands for Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) 1-East and $38 million to the State of Florida for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project (formerly Southern Golden Gate Estates Ecosystem Restoration).

Florida's strong commitment to funding acquisition of environmental lands is the foundation of these partnerships. Florida is recognized as the national leader in conservation land acquisition. With the passage of the landmark Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever Acts, the State of Florida has one of the most aggressive conservation and recreation land acquisition program in the United States. Florida spent $3 billion during the ten (10) years of Preservation 2000 and renewed that commitment by the passage of Florida Forever, an additional $3 billion investment through 2010. In the past thirty years, Florida has spent over $3.7 billion to conserve approximately 3.8 million acres of land for environmental, recreational and related purposes. This has been accomplished through several programs, including Environmentally Endangered Lands, Outdoor Recreation, Save Our Coasts, Save Our Rivers (SOR), Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL), and Preservation 2000.

Partnerships with local governments have increased in recent years. With the passage of S.A.V.E. Osceola in November 2004, twelve of the sixteen counties involved in the South Florida restoration effort have passed bond referenda or sales tax initiatives programs to fund the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands. Highlands County funds these acquisitions through the county planning office. The Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Department administers that county's conservation lands program.

Local governments have contributed more than $626 million for ecosystem restoration land acquisitions in support of all three restoration goals. With the inclusion of county staff on the Land Acquisition Task Team and a greater understanding of county land acquisition programs, it is expected that there will be increased opportunities for future partnerships with these entities. Please see Appendix E for more detailed information on county land acquisition programs.

This long history of cooperation and coordination between state, local and federal partners in restoration has maximized the resources available for land acquisition. Although the level of this combined effort is unprecedented in a regional conservation project, the impacts of the escalating real estate values throughout this project region have resulted in acquiring less acreage over time with the same funds. Partners at all levels of government recognize the need to both prioritize strategic acquisitions and create additional funding capacity through more coordinated and efficient use of existing programs.

Alternative Tools to Meet Restoration Land Use Needs

As more people move to South Florida—the region's population is expected to double by 2050—land prices throughout the Everglades watershed are skyrocketing. The 13,186-acre Allapattah Ranch land purchased in 2001, for the Indian River Lagoon-South CERP project, cost the SFWMD $2,500 per acre. Today, some of the adjacent land is being advertised for sale at almost $20,000 an acre. In the Lake Okeechobee Watershed, land that was $3,000 per acre two years ago is now $30,000. There are insufficient financial resources to secure all the estimated restoration land requirements through the purchase of fee-simple estate, nor is it always desirable. The Task Force supports the use of creative approaches and the partnerships with private landowners needed to achieve restoration through less than fee acquisitions or the use of other tools.

Easements are one approach for securing lands for restoration. For some ecosystem restoration projects, an easement may provide enough control over the land to achieve project objectives. Conservation easements involve purchasing a portion of the rights associated with the land to provide some degree of protection to natural resources on the land. There are several advantages of this approach as the land stays on the tax rolls and the private landowner maintains responsibility for managing the property while still allowing some level of continued use. Although the cost could be reduced to 25% of the cost of fee simple, the price depends on many factors, such as the number of rights purchased, how much the landowners use of the land is curtailed, and the development pressure on the land. The SFWMD, NRCS and FDEP all use this tool to protect lands. Currently, conservation easements are contributing to the protection of an additional 101,016 acres for ecosystem restoration in South Florida.

In addition, the SFWMD has established an Automated Staff Report to monitor deliverables due to the District by permittees, including the status of conservation easements. Approximately 2,349 conservation easements covering 37,844 acres have been received and digitized for the GIS data base. This information, along with the information on mitigation and conservation easements tracked by FNAI, is available to the agencies involved in land acquisition and permitting so that lands protected through this tool are not inadvertently permitted for some other use.

The 2002 Farm Bill provides two permanent conservation easement programs which promise to play an increasingly important role in securing lands for restoration. The nation's largest Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) project, the Allapattah Ranch, protected 15,370 acres of agricultural lands that will be part of the Indian River Lagoon-South CERP project. Coupled with the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), these new tools have protected 19,066 acres in the South Florida Ecosystem. Recently the USDA reallocated an additional $991,896 to the FRPP in Florida to ensure that the states with the greatest need for this program get additional financial and technical assistance to meet their goals. Other Farm Bill programs, used in conjunction with WRP and FFRP, could expand the total acreage that is protected and restored to maximize South Florida Ecosystem Restoration goals by providing property owners with assistance to restore wetland function.

For restoration projects that require only temporary water storage, the SFWMD has developed temporary lease agreements with private landowners to allow water storage on their lands. In FY 2004, the SFWMD used these agreements to store water released from the Upper Chain of Lakes to allow the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to lower lake levels and conduct an environmental restoration project on Lake Tohopokeliga, commonly known as Lake Toho. To reduce the impacts on Lake Okeechobee and the coastal estuaries, the District successfully diverted approximately 55,000 acre-feet of water and stored this water on alternative storage sites surrounding Lake Okeechobee on private/agricultural, Seminole Tribe and public land during the lake level drawdown process. This year, the SFWMD wants to implement this program again in areas north of Lake Okeechobee. Additionally, the World Wildlife Fund is exploring a three year NRCS pilot project to establish a market-based program for environmental service on South Florida ranch lands to implement agreements with large landowners north of Lake Okeechobee.

Another alternative to the traditional fee simple purchase contract is the Multi-Year Option Agreements used by the SFWMD. These agreements allow properties to be secured today and taken off of the development market. At the same time, these options provide ample due diligence review time for the District, and allow purchase of property over multiple years which provide cash flow advantages and often provide tax advantages for the seller as well. In the past year, this tool was used to acquire the 1,800-acre Lee property acquisition for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed CERP Project.

The strategic use of mitigation banks also contributes to the environmental restoration effort in South Florida. If a proposed project will result in negative impacts to wetlands, those impacts must be mitigated by the creation or enhancement of wetlands either on-site or off-site. Mitigation can be required as a condition of a federal, state or local permit. The SFWMD has two mitigation banks where developers can buy credits to restore wetlands. The District also accepts mitigation funds from developers and has acquired over 5,820 acres for four key acquisition projects that contribute to CERP or Save Our River habitat protection projects.

Creative approaches to the land use planning process by local governments can also contribute to the land acquisition needed for ecosystem restoration and further rural sustainability. In 2001, Florida created the Rural Land Stewardship Program. First created as a pilot program, legislation in 2004 expanded the program to all counties statewide. Local governments designate Stewardship areas through comprehensive plan amendments. The intent is to direct development in rural lands to the right places to preserve agriculture and protect the environment. Once designated, credits are allocated to individual parcels based on environmental and other values of the property. The credits are recorded as a covenant or restrictive easement in favor of the county and the FDEP, FDACS, or statewide land trust. To date, 5,300 acres of Priority One panther habitat and adjacent lands in Collier County have been protected at an average cost of $150 an acre through the Florida Rural Land Stewardship Program. The 18,000 acres Adams Ranch in St. Lucie County is another area that will be preserved under this stewardship program.

Partnering with local governments in innovative land development programs may also lead to benefits. It has been well documented in urban and urbanizing communities that lands in

preserve effectively transfer value to adjacent developable lands. Lands with permanent scenic vistas, particularly natural views, command much higher prices. It is possible that with technical assistance provided by regional partners such as Regional Planning Councils, land owners may willingly set aside the lands of most concern to Everglades restoration or protection, in return for assistance in developing appropriate density site plans and approvals for the remaining lands.

Concerns about escalating land costs and development pressure have led to several related efforts to apply these alternative acquisition and conservation tools. The SFWMD took the lead recently in assembling an interagency team to develop alternative funding strategies for acquisition and restoration of high priority wetlands and natural areas identified in the Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Watershed CERP Projects. Other team members included The Nature Conservancy with their "FLOW" (Florida Lands and Outstanding Waters) program and the proposed Conservation Partnership Initiative for the Kissimmee-Okeechobee Watershed. Although not selected for funding, this acquisition grant application to USDA proposed collaboration among NRCS, the State of Florida, USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, and others, to acquire conservation easements and conduct wetland restoration on private ranches close to other land already in public ownership.

In addition, the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee has requested that the Secretary of the Interior, as Chair of the Task Force, provide a more detailed report to the Committee to identify funding strategies involving innovative partnerships to acquire priority lands for natural system restoration. The report is to be provided no later than December 31, 2005. A sub group of the Task Force LATT is coordinating both planning efforts.

Mitigating the Loss of Tax Revenue

Land acquisition for ecosystem restoration removes lands from the tax rolls. Both the federal and state governments make "Payments in Lieu of Taxes" (PILT) to offset the loss of tax revenues to counties that contain federal or state tax-exempt lands.

In South Florida, USDOI compensates jurisdictions with tax-exempt federal lands administered by the FDEP. In FY 2005, USDOI paid $2,046,442 to eight counties to compensate for the loss of tax revenue for 1,514,975 acres of federal holdings through its PILT Program.

Florida's PILT Program is limited to counties with a population of 150,000 or less with conservation lands removed from the tax rolls through the Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever acquisition programs. Once eligibility has been established, the governmental entity shall receive ten (10) consecutive annual payments for each tax loss. For FY 2004, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection paid $398,418 to school boards, counties and other units of government in four counties to compensate for the loss of tax revenue on 78,425 acres. During the same period, the SFWMD made the seventh payment of $6,786.92 in PILT to Hendry County for 21,702 acres the District purchased for the Okaloacoochee Slough Project.

In a separate program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service helps offset the loss to the local tax base through its Refuge Revenue Sharing program. Annual payments are made to counties or

other units of local government for lands administered by the Service, primarily National Wildlife Refuges. The payments are calculated based on a percentage of fair market value of the holdings, 25% of the net receipts or 75 cents per acre. The Service re-appraises the market value of their lands every 5 years and makes payments for those lands owned in fee title. In FY 2005, the FWS paid $281,059 to compensate for the loss of tax revenue on 642,934 acres that the Service administers.

Tools to Identify Strategic Acquisitions

In order to better target limited resources of land acquisition agencies and avoid duplication, the LATT will continue to communicate to all stakeholders in the ecosystem and coordinate land acquisitions to support restoration goals. Several tools have been developed to identify strategic land acquisitions. The following is a discussion of some of those tools. Appendix H provides more information and websites for these tools.

The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) has produced maps of the entire state of Florida that illustrate what lands are needed to meet desired conservation measures in the Florida Forever conservation land acquisition program. Currently FNAI is working on overlaying this information with data from other land acquisition agencies programs and boundaries that will reveal natural partnerships and opportunities.

The DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails and the Florida Greenways and Trails Council have updated the Trail Network Opportunity Maps in 2004, known as the Recreational Prioritization Maps. These Recreational Prioritization Maps assist local governments in identifying opportunities to partner with the state to establish more trails and greenways in South Florida.

In December 2002, the Panther Subteam of the USFWS Multi-Species Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT) completed the "Landscape Conservation Strategy for Florida Panther in South Florida" and provided it to the USFWS. This document provides updated information on panther habitat use and population viability, as well as providing recommendations related to Florida Panther conservation.

The draft implementation schedule for the USFWS's South Florida Multi-Species Recovery Plan (MSRP) was completed in the spring of 2004. Public comment has been received and the final implementation schedule is expected to be noticed in the Federal Register in 2005. These actions are being carried out through more that sixty individual projects. Many of these projects will result in full or partial completion of recovery actions identified in the MSRP.

In its 1994 report, *Closing the Gaps in Florida's Wildlife Habitat Conservation System*, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) identified Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCA) needed to meet the minimum conservation goals for 40 declining wildlife species, four rare plant and animal communities, and 105 globally rare plants throughout the state of Florida. The FWC document *Habitat Conservation Needs of Rare and Imperiled Wildlife in Florida* (2000 edition) evaluated the ability of the SHCA identified in the 1994 report to meet the conservation needs of a much larger suite of 124 focal species.

In 2006, FWC expects to release an update to its 1994 *Closing the Gaps* report. The 2006 report will revisit the conservation needs for fifty-six of the species studied in the 1994 and 2000 report. In addition to including updated species potential habitat models for the fifty-six species, the new report will recommend inclusion of several plant communities that are under-represented on the state's conservation land system.

The FWC is also in the process of developing a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in collaboration with conservation partners from across the State of Florida. The FWC Strategy is designed to encompass all of Florida's wildlife and promote cooperation among local, state, and federal governments, tribal, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders for actions to conserve those species. This document will provide a habitat-based approach to focus actions for conservation. The FWC Strategy will be available after October 2005.

Acquisition Strategy

The goals and objectives of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration are listed in Appendix A. The following is a discussion of the land acquisitions necessary to accomplish the water, habitat, and compatibility of the built and natural environment goals.

Goal 1: Get the Water Right

Goal 1 is to “Get the Water Right” with the subgoals of “Get the Hydrology Right” and “Get the Water Quality Right”. Goal 1 projects include implementation of the CERP and other authorized modifications to the C&SF System including the Kissimmee River Restoration and Headwaters Revitalization Project, the C-111 Project, the Critical Projects authorized in WRDA 96 and Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park as well as other water quality improvement projects such as the federally funded STA 1-E component of the SFWMD’s Everglades Construction Project (ECP).

Identification of Lands to be Acquired

The acreage estimates on the project profile sheets in this Strategy reflect the best available information as of June 30, 2005. Non-CERP project land requirements are determined through the USACE General Design Memorandum. CERP land requirements evolve from estimates in the Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study (commonly called the “Yellow Book” or Restudy). The estimates contained in the Restudy are based on preliminary conceptual project designs and are further refined through the Integrated Project Implementation Reports (PIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The following is an example of the processes used by the USACE and SFWMD to determine lands needed for Goal 1 CERP projects. General characteristics of the needs are considered, such as the basin in which the project needs to be located and acre-feet of water storage capacity needed. The lands within the basin that conceptually meet the established criteria are identified for each alternative design identified in the PIR, and a gross appraisal is conducted for the alternatives. A real estate plan for the selected alternative is then completed. This real estate plan provides updated land acquisition requirements and associated cost estimates.

The updated estimated land requirements were completed in 2001 for the Water Preserve Areas and the Indian River Lagoon-South projects through the feasibility studies for those areas. The land acquisition requirements for Indian River Lagoon-South were further refined through the March 2004 final Integrated Project Implementation Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The draft real estate estimate for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project (formerly Southern Golden Gate Estates Ecosystem Restoration) was completed in April 2004.

The 1999 Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study analysis for each CERP project reflected not only total project land needs but included calculations of any lands that were already in public ownership. Using this analysis, the 1999 estimation of the land needed for CERP was 402,479 acres with 182,338 acres already owned by a unit of government, leaving 220,141 acres to be acquired. The acres required and the costs have been updated only for the projects that have been through the NEPA process. CERP projects that do not have a PIR or a Feasibility Study must use Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study (1999) estimates of both acres and costs until better data is available and updated estimates have been approved through a document that has gone through the NEPA process. The current estimated CERP acreage needed for CERP is now 403,722 acres, with 209,641 acres remaining to be acquired.

Strategic Acquisitions

The timing of land acquisition is critical, as project construction cannot begin until project lands are acquired. Failure to obtain critical parcels in a timely manner can result in delays and reconfiguration not just for one project, but for other related projects as well. The GAO report noted that much of the undeveloped land in South Florida is under development pressure, and that a land acquisition plan increases the likelihood of the restoration's success. Delays in acquiring project lands lessen the possibility that the necessary lands will be acquired and may also increase the cost of land.

The success of many of the CERP projects depends on the successful implementation of other restoration projects, such as the C-111 Canal and Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park projects. In addition, WRDA 2000 conditions that no appropriations shall be made to construct the WCA 3 Decompartmentalizataion and Sheetflow Enhancement Project, North New River Improvements for the Central Lakebelt Storage CERP Projects until the completion of the Modified Waters Project. The Corps has embarked on an aggressive land acquisition schedule to have all lands available for the Modified Waters Project by 2006.

In October 2004, Florida stepped up Everglades restoration with a commitment to provide $1.5 billion to accelerate the design and construction of projects identified by the SFWMD as crucial to restoration. The effort is know as Acceler8. The projects were selected because of the benefits they will provide to the Everglades and the South Florida Ecosystem. Most of the lands for these projects are already in public ownership—acquired with both federal and state funds. While acquisition of these lands has been led by the State of Florida, the federal government participated through a series of grants administered by the USDOI to the state.

In addition, SFWMD has pursued a strategy of early land acquisition in support of future CERP projects where there is development pressure to acquire property; when the real estate is part of other acquisition programs; or, when there is a cost effective "opportunity purchase" with sellers that the SFWMD may wish to pursue. The USACE and SFWMD are working closely with each other through these types of acquisitions in anticipation of lands being suitable for future CERP projects. The land acquisition dates contained in the Project Profiles in Appendix C are those contained in the CERP Master Implementation Sequencing Plan Version 1.0 and do not contain the actual acquisition dates for already acquired property.

The District is using the conceptual information in the CERP as well as updated information to make decisions about what lands to purchase. Acquiring this land now, rather than waiting, reduces the overall program costs and preserves land for use in restoration that may otherwise be developed. During the interim period between land acquisition and project implementation, the land is often leased back to the original owner or interim restoration work is done to prepare the land for its end use. The revenue generated in the lease backperiod provides additional funds for acquisition.

The SFWMD has identified strategic land acquisitions needed to keep the CERP, Acceler8, the remaining Master Implementation Sequencing Plan (MISP) Band One Projects and the Kissimmee River Restoration Project on schedule. The SFWMD FY 2005 Priority Work Plan is Appendix F.

Cost Estimates of Real Estate

Land cost estimates are based on preliminary planning estimates of land acquisition costs for the project acreage as a whole. These cost estimates are not intended to, and do not, reflect an estimate for the value of any individual tract of land.

Cost estimates for CERP lands as contained on the Project Profile Sheets are the estimated value in 1999 dollars as described in the C&SF Restudy Appendix F. Corps policy is to report costs in constant dollars until a project is authorized. Estimates are based on the conceptual footprint and are subject to refinement through the PIR process and subsequent congressional authorization of the CERP Project. The estimated land acquisition costs include all other associated costs, including but not limited to condemnation costs, legal fees, appraisal fees and administrative fees, and also include a significant contingency factor for conservative budget planning. If some land has been acquired for a project, actual costs are known and are reflected on the project sheets.

Real estate plans with updated cost estimates have been completed for three CERP projects. The cost estimates for projects within the Draft Water Preserve Area Feasibility Study reflect land cost estimates in October 2001dollars. For projects within the Indian River Lagoon-South project, land cost were originally defined in the August 2002 Feasibility Study and were further refined through the March 2004 final Integrated Project Implementation Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The draft real estate plan for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project (formerly Southern Golden Gate Estates Ecosystem Restoration Project) was completed in April 2004.

Real estate cost estimates for USACE/SFWMD non-CERP projects such as the C-111 Canal Project and Kissimmee River Restoration are based on actual costs and estimated land acquisition costs. The estimated land acquisition costs include all other associated acquisition costs, including but not limited to condemnation costs, legal fees, appraisal fees and administrative fees, and also include a significant contingency factor for conservative budget planning.

The USACE land cost estimates include the cost of the land plus other costs incurred in the land acquisition process. This includes staff time for land acquisition, federal review of the acquisition process, relocation costs, etc. USACE land cost estimates are contained in various real estate plans developed as part of the overall project planning process. As such, USACE real estate plans are tentative in nature for planning purposes only and both the final real property acquisition lines and the real estate cost estimates provided in these plans are subject to change even after approval of project reports and feasibility studies.

The land cost estimates presented in the Project Profile Sheets are based on a fee simple purchase, meaning the purchase of the project lands and all rights associated with the land. Another type of land acquisition, less-than-fee, may be more cost-effective for some projects. The land acquisition agencies are committed to acquiring only that interest in land needed to complete a project and make it successful and will utilize less-than-fee purchases where appropriate. The Allapattah Ranch conservation easement is an example where a less than full fee estate acquisition was sufficient to achieve the goals of a CERP project.

Available Funding Sources

USACE projects require a 50/50 cost share, with the local sponsor responsible for land acquisition. CERP has significantly increased the land acquisition requirements for ecosystem restoration and creative approaches to funding land acquisitions are required. As discussed earlier in the section on the history of coordination on land acquisition funding, there are several land acquisition funding mechanisms available to secure Goal 1 lands. The following is a discussion of the variety of prospective funding sources for Goal 1 lands.

The State of Florida is a full partner in CERP implementation, having adopted the Everglades Restoration Investment Act in 2000 that provides $100 million per year for ten years. In 2003 the Florida Legislature adopted legislation that bonds the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund (SOETF). This reaffirms the state's commitment to funding Everglades restoration and ensures a dedicated source of funding for the state's cost share of CERP implementation. The amount will be matched with local sponsor funds (which may include SFWMD *ad valorem* tax revenue) and credits for a total of $200 million of non-federal funds per year for ten years.

Pursuant to The Everglades Restoration Bond Act passed by the 2002 Florida Legislature, $25 million of the annual Florida Forever allocation to the SFWMD is to be used exclusively for the acquisition of land needed to implement the CERP. Land acquired with these monies must be included in the SFWMD's five-year work plan. The SFWMD receives 35% of the annual Florida Forever funding that goes to Florida's five water management districts; this amounts to $36.75 million per year.

The P-2000 land acquisition program was replaced by the Florida Forever program, which allocates 35% of bond proceeds to the Division of State Lands to acquire lands for the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund and another 35% to the water management districts for acquiring and improving lands. The annual $300 million acquisition fund is divided between FDEP, the water management districts, FDCA, and various smaller state land

acquisition programs. Lands acquired through Florida Forever and the state's previous land acquisition programs must provide for natural resource-based conservation and other outdoor recreation on any part of any site if the activity is compatible with conservation purposes.

It is the general policy of the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to acquire property from willing sellers at or below appraised value. The state does not acquire improvements unless they are a minor component of a large acquisition or meet an identified need for the management agency. Any change to these requirements must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

Special state legislative appropriations may also be available to fund specified CERP projects. In the 2001 Legislative Session, the Miami-Dade delegation sponsored a state legislative appropriation for funds to be used by the SFWMD in support of the Biscayne Bay initiatives. Six million dollars were appropriated, of which $3.5 million was to be used to acquire approximately 188 acres of CERP land in the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project. The SFWMD unsuccessfully sought an appropriation to be used for the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project in the 2005 Legislative Session. The SFWMD and its partners will continue to seek future opportunities for special legislative appropriations.

Local governments have contributed to the purchase of lands anticipated to be necessary for CERP Projects. Broward County, through its Land Preservation Bond Program, has contributed funds to acquire lands located within a Water Preserve Area Basin Project. Martin County has contributed money through its one percent (1%) Sales Tax Referendum Fund toward the purchase of lands within the Indian River Lagoon -South Project (IRL-S) component and is anticipated to partner for several components of the IRL-S. Palm Beach County has contributed toward the purchase of property in the Palm Beach County Agricultural Reserve Reservoir. Miami-Dade County, through its Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) Trust, has purchased lands in the C-111 North Spreader Canal and Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project. St. Lucie County has contributed funds toward the purchase of lands in an Indian River Lagoon-South Project component. St. Lucie Counties has contributed funds for Critical Project lands. As of June 30, 2004, local governments have contributed over $32 million for land acquisition for CERP and other related Goal 1 projects. These partnerships are anticipated to continue.

As discussed earlier, the U.S. Department of the Interior has a history of grants to the SFWMD and the state for land acquisition. These monies were earmarked specifically for land acquisition in the State of Florida under the USDOI's Annual Appropriations Bill and through the USDA Farm Bill. The Department of the Interior also manages the Land and Water Conservation Fund with the ability to transfer funds to the SFWMD or state for land purchases. To date, the Department of Interior has provided $303.9 million to acquire 108,331 acres for Goal 1 projects. These partnerships are expected to continue through the implementation of CERP with varying amounts available to leverage state funds.

Other federal partnerships will continue to be used as funding sources, including those programs authorized by the "Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002" (Farm Bill) and administered by USDA, such as the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranch Land

Protection Land Protection Program. A more detailed discussion of the 2002 Farm Bill programs is in the Goal 3 section of this report.

Goal 2: Restore, Preserve, and Protect Natural Habitats and Species

The second goal is "Restore, Preserve, and Protect Natural Habitats and Species" with the subgoals of "Restore, Preserve, and Protect Natural Habitats" and "Control Invasive Exotic Plants." The acquisition of lands that provide habitat for native plants and animals and act as a buffer for existing natural areas is an important component of the Task Force's strategy to achieve Goal 2.

Some Goal 1 projects that provide water quality treatment areas, water storage reservoirs, and aquifer recharge with a primary goal of restoring the natural hydrology will also provide habitat for native flora and fauna. In order to maximize the habitat contribution of CERP projects, the USFWS has created a team for the dual purposes of evaluating the wildlife values of the lands where CERP will be constructed and recommending site plans that minimize the loss of habitat.

In order to provide a full picture of the lands acquired for habitat and species, all the lands that contribute to this goal, regardless of funding source, are in Appendix D: South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Land Acquisition Update.

Identification of Lands to be Acquired

The habitat and species protection goals are met primarily through large public holdings such as parks and wildlife refuges. The federal government has been a major landowner in South Florida through its National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges since 1947 with the establishment of Everglades National Park. There are three national parks or preserves and 16 wildlife refuges within the boundaries of the South Florida ecosystem. In addition, the CERP wetland restoration projects of Southern Golden Gate Estates (Picayune Strand) and Strazulla Wetlands Water Preserve Area contribute to this goal.

The expansions of the national park system in South Florida have undergone a rigorous review process and Congress has deemed that the authorized expansion areas possess nationally significant natural, cultural, or recreational resources; are suitable and feasible additions to the system; and requires direct National Park Service (NPS) management instead of protection by some other government agency or by the private sector. Any major boundary revisions to existing units of the national park system must be established by an act of Congress and land acquisition expenditures must be consistent with the existing congressional authorization. The NPS projects in the Strategy are nearly complete, with 5% or less of the land remaining to be acquired.

The NPS primarily acquires lands from willing sellers for the South Florida units. However, the U.S. Congress has authorized condemnation authority for the East Everglades Addition to Everglades National Park. In addition, the authorizing legislation for the Big Cypress Preserve

and Addition provides condemnation authority to acquire lands except for properties improved prior to November 23, 1971 and January 1, 1986 respectively. The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to acquire these properties if they fail to comply with applicable laws and ordinances or are detrimental to purposes for which the Preserve/Addition was established.

For the National Wildlife Refuge system, numerous federal laws, including refuge-specific legislation, give the USFWS authority for acquisition of land and water to conserve fish, plant, and wildlife habitat. Land acquisition expenditures must be consistent with the existing Congressional authorization. All land acquisition projects in the Service's Southeast Region are developed from a total landscape perspective.

The USFWS reports its projects not as expansions of existing refuges, but as acres of land within refuge boundaries remaining to be acquired. When national wildlife refuges are expanded, the USFWS acquires only those lands that lie within the approved acquisition boundaries of the refuge. Like the NPS, the USFWS primarily acquires lands from willing sellers only. Less than ten percent (10%) of refuge acres remain to be acquired when compared to currently authorized refuge boundaries for the USFWS projects in the Strategy.

Land acquisitions needed for the other Goal 2 projects are defined through several USACE reports. Building on over twenty (20) years of non-Corps reports on the restoration of Golden Gate Estates, the land acquisition requirements for Southern Golden Gate Estates were initially defined through the Golden Gates Estates Final Feasibility Study, completed in 1986. Real estate requirements were further refined through the 1998 Critical Project Letter Report. The April 2004 Draft Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement still identifies the 55,247 acres originally listed in 1985 on the state of Florida's Conservation and Land Acquisition Land (CARL) list. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the land identified for acquisition for the Southern Golden Gate Estates CERP project (now the Picayune Strand Restoration Project) has been acquired as of June 30, 2004.

The lands needed for the Strazzulla Wetlands component evolved from estimates in the Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study (1999) with the project authorized to proceed as an Other Project Element (OPE) in WRDA 2000. This land acquisition project is part of the Water Preserve Area. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the lands identified in the October 2001 Water Preserve Area Feasibility Study for the Strazulla Wetlands Water Preserve Area CERP project has been acquired.

The Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study (1999) also identified Henderson Creek/Belle Meade as an Other Project Element (OPE) with an initial land acquisition estimate of 125 acres. The USACE and the FDEP are working to execute a Design Agreement on this project.

Strategic Acquisitions

Land acquisition to complete park and refuge boundaries is a multi-year process and can span decades. The goal is to acquire the lands before the on-site resources are destroyed. For Goal

2 purchases, the funding may be timed to specific appropriations, or as a project is positioned on an acquisition funding list.

While there is no immediate development pressure on either the Southern Golden Gate Estates (Picayune Strand) or the Strazulla Wetlands properties as is the case for many other CERP projects, these acquisitions are strategic due to their juxtaposition to important publicly held habitat lands. The Southern Golden Gate Estates (Picayune Strand) is centrally located among several nature preserves, wildlife refuges and other wildlife areas in Collier County, one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. The Southern Golden Gate Estates Project Area, with the surrounding affected public uplands make up the largest restoration opportunity in southwest Florida. The acquisition of this last piece of the regional connectivity puzzle will protect over 2.3 million contiguous acres of wildlife habitat.

The acquisition of the Strazulla Wetlands, immediately adjacent to the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, will increase the spatial extent of wetlands and will provide vital habitat connectivity for species that require large unfragmented tracts of land for survival. This unique and endangered habitat contains the only remaining cypress habitat in the Eastern Everglades and one of the few remaining sawgrass marshes adjacent to the coastal ridge.

Cost of Real Estate

Different processes are used to estimate the cost of real estate by the federal, state or regional governmental unit. The NPS and FWS cost estimates for land acquisitions for national parks and national wildlife refuges are based on fair market value and appraisals that meet state and federal standards. The FDEP, as the acquisition agent for Southern Golden Gate Estates and the Henderson Creek/Belle Meade projects, uses tax assessed value to estimate costs of lands for this project.

The SFWMD's Strazulla Wetlands land cost estimate was refined from the original Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study (1999) estimate through the October 2001 Draft Water Preserve Area Feasibility Study. The land cost estimate is based on preliminary planning estimates of land acquisition costs for the project acreage as a whole. The cost estimate is not intended to, and does not, reflect an estimate for the fair market value of any individual tract of land. The estimated land acquisition cost includes all other associated acquisition costs, including but not limited to condemnation costs, legal fees, appraisal fees, and also includes a significant contingency factor for conservative budget planning.

The land cost estimates presented in the Project Profile Sheets are based on a fee simple purchase, meaning the purchase of the project lands and all rights associated with the land. Another type of land acquisition, less-than-fee, may be more cost-effective for some projects. The land acquisition agencies are committed to acquiring only that interest in land needed to complete a project and make it successful and will utilize less-than-fee purchases where appropriate.

<u>Available Funding Sources</u>

Appropriations of funds for the acquisition of lands for an addition to the National Park and Wildlife Refuge System may be provided in the authorizing act and may be supplemented or provide directly through passage of a subsequent law. The funds are typically generated and drawn from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a congressionally established funding mechanism earmarked for certain activities including land acquisition by federal agencies. The authorizing act may also require contributions for the acquisition of lands from the state, local government or other entities.

Partnerships to leverage land acquisition funding are an important tool to acquire the lands identified for Goal 2. For Biscayne National Park and Everglades National Park, the State (including the SFWMD) is a land acquisition partner for at least part of the project. The state is also a partner in some of the USFWS projects as well, such as Florida Panther NWR and National Key Deer Refuge.

As stated earlier, FDEP coordinates park and refuge acquisitions with the federal government. Seventy percent (70%) of the acres remaining to be acquired for the National Key Deer Refuges are also on the state's Florida Forever acquisition list. The FDEP Division of State Lands is cooperating with the NPS on the Big Cypress National Preserve Addition and recently completed the donation of over 43,000 acres for the Everglades National Park Expansion.

In 1998, the State of Florida and the USDOI partnered to cost share acquisition of Southern Golden Gate Estates. Through an agreement with USDOI, FDEP was provided $38,000,000 through the 1996 Farm Bill to accelerate acquisition for this project.

Goal 3: Foster Compatibility of the Built and Natural Systems

The third goal is "Foster Compatibility of the Built and Natural Systems with subgoal 3-A.1 "Use and manage land in a manner that is compatible with ecosystem restoration." A discussion of the three objectives of this subgoal that require land acquisition follows.

Objective 3-A.1 is "Designate an additional 480,000 acres as part of the Florida Greenways and Trails System by 2008". Objective 3-A.2 is "Increase participation in the Voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs by 230,000 acres by 2014" and Objective 3-A.3 is "Acquire an additional 2,500 acres of park, recreation and open space lands by 2014" in south Florida.

While the Task Force tracks progress towards achieving all three objectives of subgoal 3-A.1, only a subset of the federal Farm Bill programs tracked in Objective 3.A-2 falls within the purpose of the Land Acquisition Strategy, the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, and are discussed below. The other two objectives are discussed in Appendix E as directed by the Land Acquisition Task Team Charter (the Task Team Charter is Appendix G).

The Farm Bill conservation programs are administered by the USDA. Agriculture is Florida's second leading industry, producing $18 billion in economic value each year. A large portion of

agricultural land can be viewed as open space that benefits the natural system through buffering, augmentation of natural habitats, water storage and filtration, and aquifer recharge. It is of great concern that Florida is losing its farms and ranches. Statewide, almost 150,000 acres of productive agricultural lands are converted to other land uses each year. The federal Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill) included several programs to protect farmland.

The Task Force tracks the progress of six 2002 Farm Bill programs. The Land Acquisition Strategy will track the two programs in the 2002 Farm Bill that contribute towards land acquisition goals through permanent conservation easements.

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program to assist landowners to restore wetlands that have had wetlands functions reduced or eliminated by agricultural production practices. Priority is given to those lands that will maximize wildlife habitat. Landowners receive financial incentives to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal lands from agriculture.

Since 2002, $20 million have been obligated to protect south Florida wetlands through the purchase of wetland conservation easements and to provide financial assistance to restore those wetlands. Recently enrolled, the Allapattah Ranch is one of the largest WRP projects in the nation. Part of the Indian River Lagoon South CERP project, the Allapattah Ranch Project will restore and preserve approximately 15,370 acres of agriculturally impacted wetlands and associated upland buffer habitat. This property provides natural storage and treatment benefits for the CERP project; however the purpose of the WRP and the reason for choosing this site is for the wildlife habitat restoration potential.

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection (FRPP) Program is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program provides matching funds to the state, tribal, or local governments and non-profit organizations with existing farm and ranch land protection programs to purchase conservation easements. Since 2002, $2.7 million have been obligated within this program on 4,265 acres of land in the south Florida ecosystem.

The USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service administers these programs and reports that there are 19,066 acres enrolled in these two programs in the sixteen-county South Florida Ecosystem Restoration region as of June 30, 2005. An additional 1,572 acres were enrolled during this reporting period. The FWC has contracted with the NRCS through a contribution agreement to assist NRCS with administration of the fish and wildlife aspects of these programs.