

*Approved Meeting Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
Sebring, Florida
March 28, 2007*

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Kameran Onley called the meeting to order at 8:39 AM. She thanked COL Grosskruger and Ms. Carol Wehle and their staff for providing an excellent field trip of the Kissimmee River the previous day. Ms. Onley said she wants to focus on success, moving restoration forward and getting people out on the resource. She acknowledged getting out on the resource would add travel challenges and she asked for feedback on trip for planning future meetings. She also wants meetings to be more interactive and timely. Ms. Onley welcomed two new Task Force members, Mr. Mike Sole, Secretary, Department of Environmental Protection and Mr. Gary Mast, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture. The following members were in attendance:

Kameran Onley, Chair, U.S. Department of the Interior

Billy Causey for Timothy Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, U.S. Department of Commerce

Roman Gastesi for Jose "Pepe" Diaz, Commissioner, Miami Dade County

Jay Geldermann for Matt McKeown, Principle Deputy Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice

Jim Giattina for Benjamin Grumbles, Assistant Administrator Office of Water, U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency

COL Grosskruger for J.P. Woodley, U.S. Department of the Army

Gary Mast, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Patty Power for Jim Shore, Seminole Tribe of Florida

Mike Sole, Secretary, Department of Environmental Protection

Carol Wehle, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District

Michael Collins, Water Resources Advisory Commission

Vice Chair Nominations and Elections

Ms. Onley announced that a new Vice Chair needed to be elected with the departure of Ms. Castille. She asked Mr. Greg May to review the Task Force protocol for electing a Vice Chair. Ms. Carol Wehle nominated Mr. Mike Sole which was seconded by Mr. Jay Geldermann and Mr. Jim Giattina. There were no other nominations and there was a unanimous vote for Mr. Sole to serve as the Vice Chair. Mr. Sole stated that information sharing and partnerships are key to success.

Kissimmee River Lessons Learned (see attached summary)

Bob Jones facilitated an interactive discussion based upon the participants' notes garnered from the previous day's field trip and the experience of the members and the public. It addressed key challenges faced in the restoration of the Kissimmee River, keys to success, and lessons learned for ongoing and future restoration projects.

Quarter in Review and Quarter Ahead

Acceler8 Update

Mr. Ken Ammon provided a presentation on the progress of Acceler8 projects in the past quarter and planned activities for the next quarter. He stated that the thirteen Acceler8 projects currently in construction represent \$151.1 million in funding.

Mr. Ammon provided an overview of the benefits to the local economy of the EAA A1 Reservoir Construction project noting that 114 hourly project employees have hired to date. Over \$4.3 million has been spent in Florida on subcontractors and for direct project purchases. Over 71% of total project dollars are for sub-contractors and materials. This includes approximately \$824,900 in the tri-cities area around Lake Okeechobee with \$127,100 in Clewiston alone. All totaled, approximately \$2.1 million has been spent in counties within the SFWMD boundaries.

He reviewed the provisions requested by the SFWMD in the pending federal legislation:

- Authorize the Secretary of the Army to credit the non-Federal sponsor for construction expenditures incurred prior to signing a project cooperation agreement
- Authorize “902 Fixes” for projects conditionally authorized in WRDA 2000
- Authorize the Corps to initiate construction on Site 1 Impoundment and Picayune Strand Restoration projects using funds appropriated in FY 2007 for the Central and Southern Florida Project
- Authorize an increase in the Federal spending cap for Critical Restoration Projects from \$75 million to \$95 million
- Authorize the Secretary to carry-over credits between Agreements with the SFWMD

Corps Update

Mr. Dennis Duke provided a presentation highlighting accomplishments for the last 90 days which included progress on PIRs:

- completing the Final PIR for the Broward WPA and transmitting it to Washington for final review;
- completing the Chief’s Report for the Site 1 Final PIR;
- completing ASA(CW) and OMB review of the Picayune Strand PIR; and
- transmitting the IRL-S PIR to Congress.

Other activities included initiating backfilling of Toe Ditch on Herbert Hoover Dike in Reach 1 and issuing solicitation notices for both the Seepage Berm and Cutoff Wall of Reach 1 on Herbert Hoover Dike and completing the PSTA field test construction at STA1E and initiating operations. Planned activities for the next 90 days include transmitting the PIR for Picayune Strand to Congress for authorization, awarding the Seepage Berm and Cutoff Wall contracts for HHD, awarding the C-111 contract for the detention areas and completing the Interim Goals and Targets Agreements.

Mr. Duke provided a summary of key points of the WRDA 2007 section for the Florida Everglades:

- Authorizes the Indian River Lagoon South, Picayune Strand, and Site 1 Impoundment projects
- Provides for project cost increases for Lake Okeechobee and Hillsboro ASR projects and other pilot projects
- Provides for allowances for inflation in the project and program limits of the Programmatic Authority
- Authorizes construction of the Tamiami Trail modifications as a part of Mod Waters
- Authorizes an increase in the program and individual costs of the Critical Project program
- Authorizes credit for work carries out by sponsor before executing a Project Cooperation Agreement
- Authorizes and directs the completion of a Regional Engineering Model for Environmental Restoration
- Authorizes a maximum of \$3 million for outreach assistance
- De-authorizes certain old un-constructed portions of C&SF project

2007 Avian Ecology Workshop Discussion

Mr. Paul Souza provided an overview of the 2007 Avian Ecology workshop. The workshop will be conducted by an independent body to review the restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem and the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. He reviewed the planning for the workshop and summarized the sparrow background and status. He noted that one of the lessons learned from a similar effort in 2003 is that it focused on the end of restoration and did not focus enough on the incremental steps that are necessary to achieve the full restoration and the effect of those actions on the species.

Ms. Patti Power asked for clarification on the species that will be discussed. Mr. Souza stated that the workshop will primarily focus on sparrows, snail kites and wood storks as the spoonbills seem to be doing pretty well.

Public Comment

Mr. John Adornato (National Parks Conservation Association) addressed the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands PIR meeting the prior week when the Corps stated that the project will be split into two separate PIRs. He felt that the processes that led to this decision were not transparent and caused concern for the stakeholders.

Open Discussion and Regular Task Force Business

The minutes from the December meeting were adopted. Mr. Sole asked if the Task Force should consider a semi-annual schedule for TF meetings. Mike Collins suggested that monthly SFWMD Governing Board meetings and monthly WRAC meetings provides adequate opportunity for public input and stated his support for semi-annual meetings. Some members expressed support for a robust agenda and a field trip. The members also discussed timing; specifically the need for a November-December meeting before Congress meets and a May meeting prior to the federal budget submittals. The issue of

meeting frequency and the consultative role of the Task Force was discussed. The nature of the Quarterly Review Board (QRB) was discussed and its relationship to the Task Force was discussed. Ms. Onley stated that she had received requests from the public for a more transparent process and she wants to be assured that she has a continued opportunity to engage with the public. Vice Chair Sole said that a special meeting could be called to meet emergent needs. Mr. Billy Causey complimented the Chair on the format of the meeting and for engaging the public during each agenda item. Ms. Power asked about public access to the QRB meetings. Mr. Collins reminded everyone that as projects were developed they were presented to the WRAC and Governing Board.

Ms. April Gromnicki (National Audubon) stated that two meetings a year are not enough—the QRB is closed and if there are not enough issues for the TF to engage every three months, then we are not working hard enough.

Ms. Jamie Furgang concurred. She stated that the WRAC and SFWMD were state focused and the Task Force allows for a federal focus. She complimented the Chair on the meeting format and how that has enhanced public participation and provides a forum that is not available anywhere else.

Mr. Ron Whitesides (Highlands County Audubon Society) expressed his appreciation for the meeting and the fact that he saw the notice of the meeting in the local paper. He noted that there are four newspapers in the area and better meeting notification would enhance public participation. He also spoke about the FPL proposal on the Glades County power plant and asked that the Task Force keep this in mind in future deliberations.

Ms. Onley asked that members continue to think about the meeting format and frequency. She proposed that the Working Group examine the subgoals, objects and projects for each strategic goal and, if appropriate recommend changes to the Task Force. Mr. Gastesi supported the Working Group developing recommendations to address the issues discussed today. Mr. Rock Salt stated that there was value in clarifying the nature of the problem and for the implementing agencies to provide recommended solutions for problems in their arenas.

Mr. Collins said he thought there are too many scientific review groups and peer review groups should be brought in to review the existing science and provide a totally objective assessment of what science is needed. He noted the draft Plan to Coordinate Science and he is unsure that the state will be able to accept it as it exists today. Mr. Salt offered some clarifying statements from the SCG vantage point and said he looks forward to the Task Force providing guidance on its role. Mr. Collins said the Plan to Coordinate Science was to identify gaps and he suggested that it may have strayed from the original goal and said the peer review process may help validate the work. Ms. Onley said she would put this discussion on the May agenda.

Closing Comments

Mr. Collins said the Florida Legislature is working rapidly on the northern Everglades restoration projects. Mr. Gary Mast noted his visits to local farms prior to the Kissimmee River field trip. He announced that two land owner workshops were scheduled for the following week and he looked his tour of the SFWMD. Mr. Causey reported the Governor's budget included funds for a research plan for the Oceans Council and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS). HE noted the Council is raising concerns about the FPL power plant. Ms. Power said the Seminole Tribe is also concerned about the FPL plant. She said that the WRDA is moving forward and includes projects that were in the WRDA 2002. She said there is momentum for a WRDA 2008 with new projects. She added she enjoyed seeing progress on the ground and objects to the expression that "nothing has been accomplished" after seven years. She said it would be good to know where they are in the PIR process and asked for a briefing on the ten initially authorized projects in WRDA 2000.

Mr. Gastesi said that Commissioner Diaz is working on adding the alternative water supply projects to the comprehensive plan. Mr. Giattina said that EPA continues to watch water quality issues as these issues affect restoration noting there are now quarterly reports for south Florida. Ms. Wehle reported that the alternative water supply provisions had just been successfully added to the Miami Dade comprehensive plan. She reiterated that many of the A8 projects were selected from the originally authorized projects. She noted that the schedule for the A8 projects will dovetail with the PIR process and that operational issues for the A8 projects will be addressed after construction of the physical projects. Mr. Sole reiterated the Governor's commitment to restoration. He reported there will be a FPL workshop that will be held by the Governor and the Cabinet and he encouraged public participation. COL Grosskruger agreed there is a lot going on in south Florida particularly behind the scenes and the Jacksonville District is one of the busiest Corps districts in the nation. He said he is here to get things done and would welcome the opportunity to brief those actions.

Ms. Onley recognized Mr. Steve Hart from Congressman Diaz-Balart's office. She reported that USFWS was able to reclassify the alligator from endangered to a species of special concern adding it is great to see recovery of a species. She recognized Mr. Mark Musaus for his leadership on the Land Acquisition Task Team and presented him with a certificate of appreciation and congratulated him on his promotion.

Ms. Jamie Furgang (Audubon of Florida) distributed an Audubon report on Lake Okeechobee to the members of the Task Force. It reviews the history, current status and provides recommendations on solutions to the Lake Okeechobee problems. She asked that Dr. Paul Gray have time on the May agenda to discuss the report.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.

Enclosures:

1. Agenda
2. Vice Chair Protocol

3. Task Force Roster
4. Kissimmee River Restoration Fact Sheet
5. Kissimmee River Restoration Facilitator's Summary
5. Acceler8 Update
6. Corps Update
7. Avian Ecology Workshop Power Point
8. 2007 Meeting Calendar
9. December 2006 Meeting Minutes