

DRAFT Meeting Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
December 17, 2013
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20240

Welcome, Goals for the Meeting and Administrative Items

Ms. Rachel Jacobson called the meeting to order. Ms. Shannon Estenoz reminded everyone the meeting was being webcast and reviewed some administrative and logistical instructions.

Secretary Sally Jewell thanked everyone for attending and noted this was a great opportunity to continue the work that has been going on for decades. The Department of Interior supports the ongoing restoration of the Everglades because it is so important. She thanked her colleagues from the federal family and the State of Florida. She noted her appreciation to Gov. Scott who committed \$90 million to support the ongoing bridging of Tamiami Trail. She encouraged everyone to think about the landscape more holistically and she thanked all of the partners at the table including the Miccosukee and Seminole Indian Nations. Some of the key things they will be looking to make progress on include moving forward on Tamiami Trail and Central Everglades planning. This TF has been critical in making sure that stakeholders are at the table. They need to make sure they are ready to implement key restoration projects once they get authorization from Congress. They also need an improved framework to address rapid detection and response. She encouraged them to continue working with private landowners and farmers adding that it is important to understand habitat protection, wildlife corridors as well as the economy that depends on the agricultural sector. She looked forward to being in Florida in January for the 29th annual Everglades Coalition Conference.

Ms. Jacobson thanked Secretary Jewell for being present at the meeting and for her steadfast support.

Task Force Member Introductions and Opening Remarks

The following members were in attendance and provided opening remarks:

Rachel Jacobson, Chair, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior

Drew Bartlett, Deputy Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, U.S. Department of the Army

James M. Erskine, Acting Water Resources Director, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

Arvin Ganesan, Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Blake Guillory, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)
Susan Markley for Jose “Pepe” Diaz, Miami Dade County Commission
Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S.
Department of Agriculture
Camille Mittelholtz, Acting Director, Office of Safety, Energy and Environment, U.S.
Department of Transportation
Ethan Shenkman, Acting Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice
Patty Power for Jim Shore, General Counsel, Seminole Tribe of Florida
Herschel Vinyard, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Sally Yozell, Director of Policy and Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary, U.S.
Department of Commerce
Shannon Estenoz, Director, Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives
Tim Sargent, Special Advisor, Water Resources Advisory Commission

Secretary Jewell thanked everyone for their commitment adding that it is pretty unprecedented to have this kind of collaboration and cooperation from the highest levels of government to local and tribal governments. It is a great model for folks to follow and clearly a non-partisan agenda, one that is about restoring an ecosystem. She thanked everyone for their commitment and the tremendous success they have had. She looked forward to seeing many of them in January.

Ms. Jacobson recognized Ms. Susie Perez Quinn and Ms. Lauren Sher from Senator Nelson’s office and Ms. Sara Decker from Senator Marco Rubio’s office. She also welcomed Mr. Drew Bartlett, Mr. Blake Guillory and Mr. Arvin Ganesan who were new TF members. Mr. Vinyard added that Mr. Bartlett is nationally recognized in nutrient reduction and was the author of what he believes was the most comprehensive nutrient reduction program in the country. He recognized Mr. Ernie Barnett who is retiring after three decades of service and Ms. Temperince Morgan who will be his replacement. He also welcomed Mr. Guillory, the new Executive Director of the SFWMD noting he was formerly with the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

Ms. Jacobson recognized Mr. Greg Munson (not present) who served as Vice Chair to the TF since 2011. Mr. Munson was a terrific advocate for the State of Florida and Everglades restoration. They will elect a new Vice Chair at the next meeting. Ms. Jacobson also recognized Mr. Ernie Barnett who has been a leader on both state and federal legislation. Mr. Barnett was presented with a Clyde Butcher as a memento in recognition of his service.

Update on Congressional Perspectives

Ms. Susie Perez Quinn thanked the TF on behalf of Senator Bill Nelson. She said the Senator keeps the Everglades close to his heart. With respect to authorizations, Congress has not passed a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) since 2007

and there is significant bipartisan support for passing a WRDA next year. They will have approximately \$2 billion worth of Everglades projects authorized and ready to go. With respect to appropriations, the House passed a budget and the Senate is getting very close to passing a budget agreement for the rest of the fiscal year. The Sequester and those automatic spending cuts will be scaled back significantly. Ms. Quinn said Kissimmee River restoration has been stuck because of issues between the state and federal partners and she pleaded with those present to figure out a path forward.

Ms. Lauren Sher added they are in the conference process for WRDA. The Senate passed a very broad WRDA bill mostly focused on projects with several regional project authorizations. The House passed a very narrow WRDA bill with 23 projects listed for new authorizations. They are very confident that a WRDA will be passed in 2014. One of Senator Nelson's top priorities is to see a line item request for the second phase of bridging for Tamiami Trail. The state committed to help fund that project and they believe the federal government needs to continue that investment. The delegation is very supportive of any sort of provision or mechanism that would lead to the authorization of the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) as part of a contingency authorization to the WRDA bill.

Farm Bill Update

Ms. Ann Mills reported the Farm Bill conferees are working on what they hope will be a five-year re-authorization of the food, farm and jobs bill. USDA has been extremely proud and excited to be part of Everglades restoration. In the past four years they have invested over \$373 million through the Farm Bill programs. The driver there has been the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) where they have worked with partners and ranchers, particularly in the Northern Everglades to put more than 95,000 acres in easements. This helps maintain a strong ranching sector in Florida which is important not only to the overall agricultural sector but also important to the state and country's heritage. They are protecting vast acres that do a terrific job of keeping ranchers in business, holding and filtering the water and creating wildlife connectivity for all sorts of species including the Florida Panther. This is all fueled by the Farm Bill conservation programs which are the world's largest investment in working land conservation. They have had 23 Farm Bill programs in the past and they are going to consolidate some of those programs and re-authorize the easement programs like the WRPs. They currently have no dollars in the coffers to enroll more WRPs acres and they need to get that program re-authorized. USDA will also be looking into partnerships with the state, NGOs and the private sector as well as creative partnerships to start creating new ecosystem service markets. USDA looks forward to continue working closely with those in the audience and around the table as part of this Task Force.

Ms. Jacobson said she is always encouraged to hear about USDA's continued support. She liked in particular that Ms. Mills mentioned looking at the ecosystem services that

come from improved conservation practices on ranch and farm land. It goes without saying that whatever Everglades restoration is accomplishing can't be done without good conservation practices. She said she would like the Task Force, through its Working Group (WG), to put together some kind of presentation on how they might think about valuing all of the ecosystem services from the broader Everglades restoration.

Mr. Erskine reported that at the Miccosukee Annual Interagency meeting it was pointed out that the Farm Bill covered six broad categories of research which has provided over \$500 million of research to the Laurel Wilt and Ambrosia Beetle programs which are issues they are struggling with in Florida. They have close ties with the cultural aspects and cultural use of Bay Trees. The Farm Bill has provided this valuable research and the Miccosukee Tribe is hopeful it will continue when the Farm Bill is re-authorized.

Invasive Exotic Species in the Everglades

Ms. Shannon Estenoz recognized Ms. Lori Williams, Director of the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) and noted that they want to raise awareness of what the group does in hopes that it will foster some additional higher level coordination and communication. Ms. Estenoz provided a presentation reminding the TF of their direction to the WG in July 2013 to develop a Comprehensive Invasive Species Framework that also includes a Cross Cut Budget tool. TF also acted affirmatively on the WG recommendation that her office provide enhanced coordination support for federal invasive species coordination. The team kicked off the development of the Framework which will recommend a governance structure that takes what is working and makes it work better. It will help decision-makers understand the connection between goals, strategies and tactics for invasive species. It will also maximize the extent to which the current capacity for partnership is leveraged to meet common goals and help decision-makers make wise and timely investment decisions in the battle against invasive exotics. New partners have been engaged from Customs and Border Protection, Zoo Miami and others. They are integrating invasive exotic species more holistically and all of that information will be available on the new website www.evergladesrestoration.gov in the spring of 2014. They will continue with the framework development and bring an update to the next TF meeting.

Ms. Lori Williams provided a presentation on the importance of regional and national coordination. NISC was set up in 1998 by Executive Order 13112 and looks at national coordination of this issue. Actual members of the Council are the Secretaries and Administrators themselves. With trade, travel and tourism, Florida is going to face an onslaught of invasive species and NISC wants to be there to assist. They have a National Invasive Species Management Plan that will be updated in 2014 and the strategic goals mirror what is in the Task Force's Strategic Action Framework. They can look at what efforts at the national level can support what this TF is trying to do. Ms. Williams said she would like this regional initiative to be part of the national plan.

Large Constrictor Workshop Report

Mr. Bob Johnson provided a presentation noting large constrictors are the apex predator in the Everglades. He reviewed the nine species of large constrictors noting that four of those were put forward in the Lacey Act and went through the process of being included as injurious species. The Burmese Python has raised the most public attention but they have 56 species of established amphibians and reptiles, the largest number found anywhere in the world. The workshop was held in early November 2013 and the focus was on science and management. There was a lot of discussion on how constrictors are detected, how their numbers are estimated and ecosystem impacts. Detection is a real problem and estimated numbers for the Burmese Python are between 25 and 500,000.

Several outside groups were brought in from Guam and Hawaii to participate in the workshop. USDA has one of the best programs with a very strong federal-state partnership that operates in an incident command mode with emergency funds available. They spent \$2.6 million on the Giant African Land Snail in the first year. What they learned from all these programs is that they need a formalized, well organized management structure, with high policy involvement and funding. Next steps include summarizing current science and acquiring funding for priority science. Finding ways to bring more skilled researchers and scientists into the process and continue to bring the land and resource managers together and decide where they go from here.

Restoration Strategies Update

Ms. Temperince Morgan said the historical agreement was reached in June 2012 between the State of Florida and EPA. They have been implementing Restoration Strategies for a little over a year and many projects are underway. She provided a presentation reviewing the projects that are underway. The Science Plan was developed collaboratively and in consultation with state and federal parties. Final plan published in June 2013 and project funding spans 10 years from fiscal year 2013 – 2022. They have committed \$55 million over the course of the next 10 years to the implementation of that plan and eight studies are already underway.

Mr. Ganesan said from EPA's perspective the science plan and implementation of the restoration strategies are crucial to address the water quality problem for existing flow. He was particularly pleased that the Science Plan was done in a very collaborative way. Mr. Sargent thanked the Governor and added this is a great example of how the federal family and the state can work together. He hoped they could also come together and work on some of these key projects that they are close to finishing. Mr. Guillory said he recently visited the L-8 and it is an amazing facility with a very unique geological feature that they have been able to incorporate into their water quality plan. He is proud of the folks working out there and he is looking forward to seeing the facility operating and doing what it is intended to do. Ms. Jacobson congratulated the team for such terrific

work adding the Refuge and the Park are beneficiaries of this they are especially grateful.

Ms. Jacobson recognized Ms. Natalie Raps from Representative Garcia's office and Ms. Morgan Cashwell from Representative Murphy's office.

Public Comment

Ms. Sarah Barmeyer (Great Waters Program with the National Parks Conservation Association) said NPCA is thrilled with the completion of the one-mile bridge for Tamiami Trail and very excited about the Governor's \$90 million commitment for additional bridging. NPCA is working to get a line item in the Park Service's construction budget to continue the progress. They also view this as a priority for the Park's Centennial in 2016. Passing WRDA is also huge and they would like to see CEPP a part of that as well.

Mr. Peter Jenkins (Center for Invasive Species Prevention) said he was speaking on behalf of The National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species which is a coalition of several environmental groups that work in this area, such as the Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation, The Wildlife Society, Audubon, and several other groups. He noted the lengthy and very difficult process for listing large constrictor snakes. Despite a proposal to list nine only four were listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and five have not been listed despite strong recommendations by the FWS and USGS. He requested that those groups able to do advocacy to do so. Proposed rule could be finalized in January and he hoped those groups working on it would consider sending a letter to the President and OMB.

Ms. Jane Graham (Audubon Florida) said this has been a great year for progress and pointed to the two ribbon cuttings (Western Component of the C-111 Spreader Canal and the first mile of the Tamiami Trail Bridge) held this year. The innovative planning process in CEPP has set a bar for stakeholder and public involvement in restoration planning and they would like to see that as a model for the future. On Tamiami Trail, the State of Florida has committed \$90 million and this is a key opportunity for Interior. The CEPP PIR is nearing the finish line and support from the state and federal level is crucial. She invited members of the TF to explore the northern marsh of Lake Okeechobee with Dr. Paul Gray. She also recognized Ms. Mills and USDA for their partnerships with landowners. Audubon hopes WRDA will be passed. Audubon also fully supports the actions and initiatives to craft a strategic framework to cope with the invasive issue and looks forward to 2014 with an eye toward continued progress.

Mr. Manley Fuller (Florida Wildlife Federation) said he seconded the comments from the environmental community. They are very hopeful that WRDA can proceed with these critical CEPP projects. He thanked the Governor for his strong support for Tamiami

Trail bridging and hoped they will get federal assistance. He urged everyone to put their heads together and figure out the best thing to do to deal with the Black and White Tegu and the Red Lionfish.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Draft minutes from the July 19, 2013 meeting was provided. Motion made and seconded to approve. Minutes were approved as presented.

Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation Natural Areas and adjacent portions of the Big Cypress

Ms. Patty Power provided a presentation noting the Tribe came to the TF at the December 2012 meeting after reviewing CEPP. The western basins are critical to the ecosystem but there is not a lot of monitoring, data collection and modelling done in that area to be able to analyze the effects of projects. She reviewed the five team meetings held in 2013. They have learned a lot of what they know as well as what they don't know. Next steps include the Tribe conducting a surface water/groundwater interaction study on the Reservation using funding from BIA. The Tribe will continue to work with EPA on developing ecological indicator targets. The Tribe is also looking to start some LIDAR and topo mapping on the Reservation to try and help fill those gaps. The Corps is ready to go on its S-190 study and the Tribe is looking for funding. There has also been a broad effort led by the District and TF office to compile all the data they have and to clearly define the gaps. Next steps also include identifying what to do about those gaps. Finally, the Tribe is working closely with the Corps on the Critical Project to bring it closer to what it was designed for. The Tribe does not see this team as permanent and recommends that the team continue meeting. The next team meeting is scheduled for January 2014.

Ms. Jacobson said she wanted to think about framing up direction to the WG or SCG about how this TF can start to collect the important ecosystem service data they can use to identify gaps and also to value in ecosystem service terms the benefits of restoration and cultural as well. They talk all the time about supplying drinking water to 7 million Floridians and they can be more specific about so many ecosystem service benefits from all of the Everglades restoration work they are doing. This TF would be a good place to collect that information and start to think about good ways to define it.

Ms. Estenoz said the TF could task the SCG to put together a set of presentations on some of the ecosystem services work already being done by many of the agencies. Ms. Markley said it is a good idea and suggested they include the WG. They could create an issue team or prepare a briefing paper, both of which have been done in the past. Ms. Estenoz noted Mr. Ernie Marks, Chair of the WG was also present.

Ms. Yozell said that anytime they start to bring in ecosystem service valuation to this whole project and others and looking at things from an ecosystem approach, bringing in those social, human parts is a positive piece and she is all for having the briefing on what this means even if they don't have all the answers.

Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) Update

Mr. Eric Bush reported the Corps in partnership with the District and other agencies on the TF prepared an ecosystem services evaluation for CEPP that is in draft and being reviewed. He suggested they could bring that back at the next meeting. He provided a presentation reviewing the components of the Tentatively Selected Plan. The public comment period closed on November 1, 2013 and they are working to finish the other required reviews and finalize the report. This was one of five national pilot projects for the Corps to investigate how they could accelerate the completion of these planning studies. He reviewed the project concerns and key risks which included: water levels – effects on other project purposes and wildlife; compliance with water quality standards; phased implementation and implementation timeline – project dependencies and financial capability. Next steps include finalizing the report which includes completing the policy review, incorporating the Biological Opinions, updating cost estimates, getting SFWMD Governing Board and Civil Works Review Board approvals. Once those actions occur they will issue the final report for a subsequent 30-day review.

Ms. Darcy thanked Mr. Bush and in particular thanked the Division Commander and District Commander and their teams. The Jacksonville District has been crucial to Everglades restoration and they have worked to make this collaborative process something they can all be proud of. Mr. Guillory said there is a renewal of their partnership with the Corps he looked forward to finishing what they started. Mr. Sargent echoed those comments as well as his concerns for water quality. They have a lot to do to make sure that when this project does come to fruition they will not have these water quality issues.

Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission

Ms. Jacobson noted the TF received through e-mail a transmittal letter and a position paper from the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission. That document was entered into the record and included in the materials for the meeting. Ms. Estenoz stated that Commissioner Bergeron was unable to attend and sent his regrets. He asked that she reflect the central message of the Commission. The chief objective is bringing long-term restoration to fruition, keeping the system alive in the meantime and dealing with the periodic high water/low water crises that they in the Everglades know are part and parcel of how the Everglades operates. They are either flooded or desecrated and there is no such thing as an average water year in the Everglades. This summer was a difficult summer with record rains in July with three months of hurricane season still remaining. There is a real interest on the part of the Commission in working with all of

the partners on operational flexibility and creativity to manage those crises in a way that minimize harm to the natural and wildlife resources.

National Research Council Update

Ms. Jacobson said the fact that they have an independent review by the National Academies Research Council every two years ensures that all this work and planning is subject to the most critical and independent scientific review. The Committee on the Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CIRERP) had its last public meeting the prior day.

Mr. Bob Johnson reminded everyone that the three sponsors for this Congressional requirement are the Army Corps of Engineers, SFWMD, and Interior. They have three liaisons to the Committee and he represents Interior. In 1999 Secretary Babbitt created the first requirement for a National Research Council Review of Everglades restoration progress. The Committee on Restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem (CROGEE) was established to provide scientific advice to the TF. That effort along with another related project review led to seven different reports. These reports have a lot of good reviews and show the different technologies and science that have gone into the last 20 years of their restoration initiatives.

CISRERP is a requirement in WRDA and the fourth biennial review was completed in 2012. The fifth biennial report will be out in 2014. The pace of restoration has slowed and that will be reflected in the review. The agencies worked with the council to scale back their review saving several hundred thousand dollars. They have reduced the number of meetings and field trips and are having more conference calls. They bring in new members each time so they cover topics such as Everglades hydrology/ecology, CERP 101, water quality, CEPP and Restoration Strategies introduction. There was a big focus on climate change implications which is a new topic. The meeting they had the prior day was on policy level topics to include Congressional perspectives, senior leadership perspective and implications for restoration progress. A draft of the fifth Biennial Report will be completed in June and provided to the sponsoring agencies. They do fact checking and then they do a roll-out to the sponsoring agencies in late June which is when the final report comes out. They immediately start planning for the next CISRERP and the next committee will be established by the fall of 2014. The fifth Biennial Report will cover topics such as: The Restoration Plan in Context; Implementation Progress (CEPP and Restoration Strategies); new topics (climate change, invasive exotics and a new topic (last time it was on trajectories analysis and they provided a report card); and science and decision making. Hottest topics were climate change and invasive exotics and they will give guidance on these really important areas. On science and decision-making they had a lot of conversations on science governance and making sure they had the right science projects particularly the

monitoring projects in place so they could track the benefits of the state and federal partnership in terms of their investment.

Public Comment

Mr. Tom MacVicar (Water Resource Consultant in south Florida) noted he was there 20 years ago when Secretary Babbitt and others announced the Statement of Principles that later became the Everglades Forever Act (EFA). When the Restoration Strategies are done, they will have spent \$2.5 - \$2.8 billion on Phosphorus in the Everglades but that will have done almost nothing for hydrology. Hydrology is the key as is the Modified Water Deliveries (MWD) project. He asked that those at the table, who are able, to bring this project home in terms of operations. He noted that they have modelled thousands of simulations of various projects however there is no simulation of the components that are actually built and on the ground now and he urged they get that going as well.

Ms. Dawn Shirreffs (Everglades Foundation) said they have seen that restoration does work. They have been able to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks because they have strong and engaged leadership. CEPP has proven that they can turn all of their notions about planning on its head. They had stakeholders at the table to wrestle with the issues and come up with solutions. CEPP has gotten overwhelming support and she sees the threat of failure as the biggest threat, if they put this on a shelf for 30 years. She urged everyone to continue working together and not let the Everglades die.

Ms. Estenoz reported the Strategy and Biennial Report that goes to Congress every other year is available. Next meeting date has not yet been set. Everyone was thanked for their continued engagement and meeting was adjourned.

Meeting video, handouts and presentations are available at:
www.Evergladesrestoration.gov

Handouts:

1. Agenda
2. Draft July 9, 2013 meeting minutes
3. Strategic Action Framework presentation
4. National Invasive Species Council presentation
5. Large Constrictor Workshop presentation
6. Restoration Strategies presentation
7. Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation Natural Areas and adjacent portions of the Big Cypress
8. CEPP presentation
9. Florida Wildlife Conservation Cover position paper and cover letter
10. National Research Council presentation